

American Athena
A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers

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Abstract

American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers

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In classical mythology the goddess Athena is the embodiment of strategic intelligence and prowess in war. She inherited these gifts from her mother, Metis, who carried her to full maturity within the body of her father, Zeus, from whose forehead she was delivered, armed for battle. In this guise she serves as representation for the identities created and conveyed in the discourses of American women servicemembers. This study presents a grounded theory analysis of 99 narratives collected from personal interviews and culled from published sources in which women describe and interpret their experiences as enlisted personnel in the U.S. military. This method, discovered in the 1960's by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, studies narrative content to discern an emergent theory from that data. Recent renovation of this method by Kathy Charmaz, Adele E. Clarke, and others allows for this theory to align with existing ideas, if relevant and not imposed on the data *a priori* – which led to the feminist sophistic design of this Athena study, the terms derived from the work of classicist Susan Jarratt and defined by values within the narratives themselves. This study presents the sophistic through an original model, “the Athena,” which analyzes the women’s complicated, but promising, relationship to power.

The mission for this study and its future potential is its deceptively simple process: to ask each woman to tell her story her own way, and to listen.

Ultimately the study shows that women's imagining and shaping a new military identity, while problematic in terms of traditionalist ideologies, represents to them a standpoint of their own on grounds to which they stake a claim. This empowering standpoint is composed of their commitment to mission, unquestioned sense of equality, and strategic intelligence (or metis) to see it through. The narratives portend transformation for the women themselves; they also offer opportunity for systemic changes in both military and civilian worlds. The poet and classical scholar Robert Graves makes a critical point about the mythological female warrior that has resonance with the resolutions of the women in this study: Athena, he notes, does not lose.

(As required by ProQuest, the compendium of nine supplemental files in various media is presented and described as part of the abstract on the following two pages. In the text of the dissertation they are referred to as "Appendix 3 Supplemental Files.")

Appendix 3 Supplemental Files

Appendix 3 is a compilation of supplemental material that either cannot be embedded in the dissertation file (video; audio; etc.) or serves to add color, detail, depth, or development to incidents in the story the study tells. Included in this collection are the following various textforms:

- 1) A video, “Serve Each Other,” from Jordyn Bohon (pictured here from opening of film),

-Jordyn



my student in Spring 2019 at UWF, who created this documentary profile for a class project. Jordyn explained to the class that the profile “is my story of how 9/11 affected me and how I think we can achieve all of our Dream Americas” (Foxnote: “Dream America” was the theme of the class).

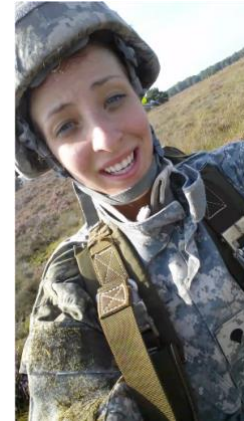
In the discussion forum about her video, Jordyn wrote this: “The American dream has always been about

the ability we all have to actually chase our dreams, if we choose to do so. We, as Americans, can support each other in every aspect and possibly even be able to compromise (one day) instead of (recently, on all sides of the spectrum) throwing temper tantrums and manifesting hate for one another. We all, deep down, want what is best for every American. Our views, morals, and values might be different but if we root each of our ideas with the question of “How can this help or serve someone? How can this make someone happy? How can we support each other? Will this hurt someone?”, our ideals would be rooted in a spectrum of good instead of inflicting pain onto others. The fact that every American has a RIGHT to their opinion is truly something that should be cherished and not taken advantage of. Serving each other leads to caring for each other. Imagine if Americans started caring for each other??? Oh the places we could go, if that happened.”

- 2) Audio .wav file of Tabitha Nichols’ interview, 11 May 2017 (59 minutes). Tabitha has been, as noted in the dissertation, an active participant in the veterans’ reading group at UWF and veteran advocate in Pensacola. She is part of the “Telling” Project that travels nationwide and offers testimony to the experience of war. Tabitha (pictured here in a photo she contributed) had been open in the reading group about the wounds she sustained and her suffering later, expressed in her poem “Living with PTSD” that opens Chapter Five; however, there were always hints in Tabitha’s comments of an acutely sensitive awareness of the landscape and people, especially the women and children, in Iraq, and I wanted her to feel there was room in our interview for those stories. Also, I’d noticed that Tabitha has a wicked sense of humor, and I hoped her wit would find free



play. The poetry and other writings she sent subsequent to our meeting, which are part of the Athena story here, show the perceptions and understandings that women bring to, and beyond, American military culture. Tabitha joined with she was 17.



- 3) A short video clip of Amber Nadeau (pictured here in the first frame of the film) describing the parachute jump she had just completed. Her reflection on her decision to serve in this capacity accompanies the film reference in the Athena text, Chapter Five, Playing the Game.
- 4) A written interview from Nancy Bullock-Prevot, who established the HER foundation in Pensacola, Florida which creates shelters for homeless women veterans and helps them set up a new life. Nancy was also a member of the UWF veterans reading group, where I met her; serendipitously, I was at the same time teaching her daughter, Kourtney, who assisted with this interview. It was Nancy who introduced the issue of “double discrimination” that Black women in the military – and in American culture – endure
- 5) A summer 2019 letter from Judy Young, writing professor at UWF, who wrote to me extensively about her experience in the Navy. Judy’s acute perception and insight about women in military professions informed my understanding. I was grateful to meet her for coffee and to receive her writings, such as the letter attached here.



- 6) The poster, “I traded in my stilettos for boots’: Storylines of women service members,” from the Veterans in Society Conference at Virginia Tech, March 26-27 2018.
- 7) A PowerPoint presentation, “Dissertation Travelogue,” which traces the process and progress of this project, “idea to data to idea,” as both the story of a research experience and the evolution of this particular analysis.



- 8) Lindsay's Collage, "Homeless Vets."
- 9) Brandy's Collage, "Freedom Don't Come Free"

American Athena
A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers



Figure 1 American Athena LaRayne Hurd. Photo courtesy of LaRayne Hurd

The decision to enlist for me was a decision to take the lifeline in front of me and do something, anything with my life that would give it meaning. I seriously had no doubts about being able to reach my goals. I wanted to be a leader. – La Rayne Hurd

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Figure 2 Kylie Pugh (right), deploying. Photo courtesy of Kylie Pugh.

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¹ As part of her visual profile Donisha Lindsey writes: “All week we heard rumblings about a war. We knew it was coming but didn’t know when. I even went to Catholic Mass and received a rosary and a medallion with Mary, the Queen of the Peace, on it. I am not Catholic but I was worried. ... No matter what I do in life I will always remember that the soldiers, sailors, and airmen are my brothers and sisters in arms; they are my family no matter where they serve or what uniform they wear. And like all kin, I will always be scared for them, and like all siblings I will always be proud of them.

“Oorah brothers and sisters. Mary is watching.”

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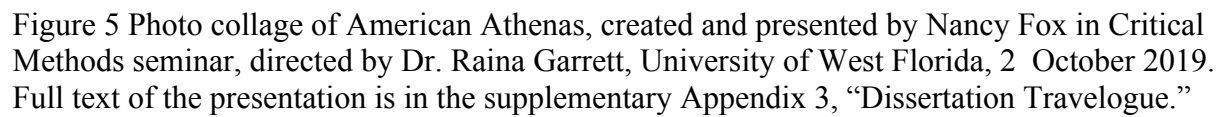
Figure 4 Athena. Inspirational figurine in Fox house. Photo by Chloe Fox-Edele.

Prior Presentation & Publication of Athena Material

“‘I traded in my stilettos for boots’: Storylines of women service members.” Presented at Veterans in Society Conference, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Roanoke, VA, 26-27 March 2018. Poster in Appendix 3 (Copyright Fox)

Fox, Nancy. “*Aretē*: “We As Black Women.”” *Journal of Veterans Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 58–77. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v4i1.75>. (Copyright Fox)

“Dissertation Travelogue: Moving from Idea to Data to Idea: American Athena Project.” PowerPoint Presentation & Lecture to Dr. Raina Garrett’s Critical Methods seminar at the University of West Florida, 2 October 2019. PowerPoint in Appendix 3 (Copyright Fox)



Acknowledgements

A “communion of unmerged souls” is the way that Mikhail Bakhtin, one of my favorite language theorists, describes our coming together to create something – a sentence, a story, a conversation, a world. This Athena project is one such composition, lucky in the folks who have brought diversity, harmony, knowledge, and critique within the borders of its pages. I acknowledge, first, the voices of women who offered their stories either to paper or screen, or me. They thank anyone who asks or listens; I start my acknowledgements with the word “No” – our thanks are due to you for speaking and writing courageously, honestly, and with a cool and a wit that you’ve earned – but I’d guess you were always blessed with it. You don’t suffer foolish stereotypes gladly, and this Athena study is all the more steely and true for that edge.

My teachers at San Diego State University (SDSU) and the University of Washington (UW) took a high school writing teacher with an inconvenient and innate love of argument and theory, and introduced that questing mind to rhetoric and writing studies: “I know what the text says,” you taught me to ask, “but what does it do?” I understand how to hear the Athena stories because of you: the lenses of rhetoric acquired with Ann Johns, Glen McClish, Candice Rai, and Christine Harold; the methods of inquiry with Cezar Ornatowski and Anis Bawarshi; the clarity of argument with Chris Werry, and generous collaboration with Suzanne Bordelon. That singular focus on surprises and certainties, or searches for certainty, in language – the questions at midnight when I didn’t know what to make of stories that argue with one another and within themselves – was what I learned to appreciate in classes with Ellen Quandahl (Aristotle; Cicero); Gail Stygall (discourse); Katherine Cummings (fiction and Foucault). The two chairs of my research endeavors – Glen McClish (SDSU) and Gail Stygall (UW) -- offered me challenge, scholarship, and the sort of respect that leaves a student alone to discern, or stumble upon, her

discoveries. Glen, who chaired my M.A., impressed upon me two words – “agency” and “rhetoricity” – that I found had informed everything I’d done before, and seek in everything now. Gail, who never doubted the integrity of the Athena project or my capacity to pursue it, reminded me when I needed to hear it: “I want to see some data.” It is above all the questions that both teachers have asked, and Gail’s pointed questions now, that help me steer this craft.

As do my colleagues here at the University of West Florida, where veteran Goldie Ann Johnson walked into my General Education Public Writing class in Spring 2015, offered her sentences, told us a story – and changed the world of scholarship for me. All the research and thinking, writing and rewriting, was running apace with teaching, research, and collaboration at UWF, and I appreciate and learned from the affirmation of my colleagues Bre Garrett, Greg Tomso, Scott Satterwhite, and Kevin Scott. What I needed most of all, and what they gave, was time – and the recognition of how important this project was to me.

I have found generosity that made this project possible and real from Kathy Mork; Claire Holderman; Emily Sammons; and Jennifer Russell.

The Athena project has called upon the work of all my teachers listed here, and many more, to open the space for Goldie and her own “communion of unmerged souls” to “tell their story their own way” (a phrase and a powerful idea for which I have Glen McClish and the rhetoric scholar Jacqueline Bacon to thank). I would not be writing this particular page, the endnote of what sometimes seemed an endless project, without any of you.

And I can’t imagine this project without my BFF, tireless researcher, artist of figures, photographer, patient audience for all my doubts and revisions and ruminations; the one who’d brew oceans of Peets and create her “wisdom points” for me, calling it “fun”: thank you, Chloe.

(And to Chloe, Steve Edele, and Nick Fox-Edele: we did it!)

Special thanks to the Andrew R. Hillen Endowment Summer Dissertation Fellowship 2018

Dedicated to Quiet Creek

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness. When I say, then, that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name that location from which I come to voice – that space of my theorizing.

- bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness”

Women’s experience is a fiction and a fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility.

- Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: “The Story Starts with Redemption”

Whereas, arguably, the tradition of Western literature may have claimed its foundations in the heroes of antiquity – with plots of conquest and physical overcoming that mark temporalities, intrigues, and formal structures – the combat woman reorganizes the building blocks: she remixes the relation between public display and private sentiment, between hero and victim, between individualistic survival and social reproduction, between adventure and drudgery, between action and repetition, between violence and care.

– Robin Truth Goodman, *Gender for the Warfare State*

Proving Ground: Kylie Pugh

I joined the Air Force a month and a half after my 22nd birthday, definitely one of the older people in my flight. I had a moment, having a very fun time and living a very fulfilling life but not moving toward any of my academic goals or my life goals, and I had a very big moment of ‘I’m never going to finish school, what am I going to do now, how am I going to do this, what are my options?’ I came from a very hippie background, I had no one that’s prior military, my grandfather was in the Marines for maybe four years, and he doesn’t talk about it, ever. We weren’t raised in a military family. I’d never shot more than a b-b gun before, I had pink and purple highlights in my hair, very much a hippie love child against the war and violence.



Figure 6 Kylie Pugh deployed in Iceland.
Photo courtesy of Kylie Pugh

I was a very typical-looking sorority girl and behaved very much in a – not anybody you would ever imagine to do anything like that.

(The recruiter) was very good about putting me in contact with other women. He didn’t come across as ‘let me hook you with women so I don’t have to talk to you.’ It was, ‘Hey, there are women that are in these kinds of male-dominated career fields but if it’s something you’re interested in, it’s doable.

– Kylie Pugh, Personal interview

Introduction: “Who Are You? What Do You Do?”

The “combat woman” who recounts her story here is the “hippie love child,” Kylie Pugh, mother of two children under the age of two, who holds a B.A. in Philosophy, an M.A. in English, and is pursuing a career in teaching.

Kayla Williams is “combat woman,” formerly a self-described “punk-kid rebel” who discovered, in Iraq, that “the mind is incredibly powerful. I could do it,” she says. “I could do almost anything. I could keep going in situations that would have broken me. In Iraq I figured out there was no option for me to do anything else but push myself and keep pushing. Which I did. Which I’ve done” (*Rifle* 279). Kayla, author of *Love of My Rifle More Than You* and other pioneering studies and former Director of the Center for Women Veterans at the VA, is currently the Director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security.

“Combat woman” is also Tabitha Nichols, taking her star turn on stage in “The Telling Project: She Went to War”: “I had to have mom and dad sign, at 17. Looking back on it, I’m like ‘what were you guys thinking?’ It was two years after 9/11, and everybody was so scared, but I wanted to be a soldier.” (Personal interview)

An ITT specialist named Goldie Ann Johnson is “combat woman,” setting up her own apartment, setting her sails for life after graduation in summer 2018: “I am one of the women that has had the honor and privilege of serving our country. I faced many challenges and found myself in many difficult situations that should not have existed but nonetheless, I fought to meet any challenge that was thrown my way as many women did before me.” (Personal interview)

“Combat woman” studies a handbook whose code, the language of the drill sergeant, is indecipherable to an outsider: “Maybe I can have an impact on people’s lives,” she discloses to me (Personal interview). Her name is Amber Nadeau.

“Now, I have to tell you,” confides “combat woman” Michele M. Spencer. “I am comforted by this oxymoron ... this paradox of fighting for peace. The Army lulled me because of sincere art-ivist service and for God, duty, honor, and country. It was as though the Army called me to it. ... If I acted with the intention to make a positive impact on the lives of others, I could not lose” (30-31).

“Combat woman” laughs as she tells me: “I traded in my stilettos for combat boots,” then gives me a look that is very much Dulcinea Burrow, playing the “girly girl” and subverting that stereotype at the same time: “And I do not regret it because those boots are soooo comfy.” (Personal interview)

“Combat woman” juggles a houseful of daughters, a new baby, and full-time study of Avionics at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University where she maintains a 4.0 GPA. She is the veteran who answers my questions unequivocally. I taught this “combat woman,” Lindsay Allen. I watched her climb every morning at 9:00 up the unforgivingly steep stairwell of the Engineering Building to our 3rd floor lecture room. She was pregnant, laden with books, and never missed a step, a class, and never issued one word of complaint. I know better than to challenge her when she argues her point about service in the Marines:

’Invisible?’ ‘Underserved?’ I don’t ever recall feeling invisible or underserved. I did my job to the best of my abilities and was recognized for a job well done. I was proud of what I did and felt great satisfaction when I heard, and felt, a jet take off. (Written interview)

The “combat woman” Mackenzie Reiselt declares, “It never occurred to me that I couldn’t. Women are stronger. Women have to put up with more – more physical stuff. We have to be stronger. Women are not just victims. That angers me.” (Personal interview)

Her colleague in my public writing class, the “combat woman” Ally Osborne, Marine, reads a narrative about her physical tests to her civilian audience:

As soon as I heard the word ‘go,’ I used every ounce of strength in all five feet of me to pull myself up as many times as I could. I reached 11 pull-ups before (the Captain) motioned me to stop. I had done four pull-ups more than the max score for women. I don’t remember a time I had more confidence in myself than when I dropped down from that bar. (“Narrative”)

Finally, in her memoir, *Home Through Baghdad*, “combat woman” Dawn M. Works-Dennis tells us bluntly: “I know there would be plenty of people out there who take a look at my book and say, ‘What the hell does she know about combat?’ That’s fine. I really don’t give a shit what you think. The military gives me the ‘inner fortitude’ to tell you that. This story starts with redemption and I think it ends that way too” (3).

In this brief passage I have provided a glimpse of 11 disparate lives devoted to service: at least 88 more will contribute their voices to this dissertation study, “American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers.” Beyond the MacBook Airs and PCs through which we communicate, the quiet rooms wherein we meet, the classes some of us share, the books that 50% of us have written and the books that more will pen, are the individual stories of 214,098 women on active duty and 470,851 women in the reserves

as of 27 July 2017,¹ not to mention the 2,000,000 veterans, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Each woman frames her story of enlistment and engagement in her chosen career in a cultural setting: a rural town where the teenagers smoke weed behind the Walmart; a city of highways that make a young woman's life, at 22, seem rootless and expendable. But the narratives are not only uniform matters of demographics and sociological group analysis, as sociologist Shulamit Reinharz, quoting her colleague Pamela Sexton, reminds us in her study of feminist research methodologies:

Abundance of statistics and generalizations (can give) us little real understanding of how women lived their daily work lives, experience their jobs, or perceive work-relationship issues. Personal documents are needed, individual and group portraits ... slices of real working life, statements by women themselves – the handwoven fabric of their daily work lives ... I ask, 'Who are you? What do you do? What issues trouble you? What do you want?' (18).

To these queries, intrinsic to feminist sophistic research, I append, "from the military." And, most of all, I want these women to address directly the question: "What do you want from us?"

Demographics & Differences: "Yes, I Was Aware"

Their differences can be veiled by the deceptively identical uniforms these women have worn. Paige Whaley Eager, in her study *Waging Gendered Wars: U.S. Military Women in Afghanistan and Iraq*, succinctly calls this phenomenon "a lack of uniformity in military

¹ According to Statistic Brain. Web. Accessed 27 April 2018 and 14 April 2019, www.statisticbrain.com/women-in-the-military-statistics/

uniform” (44), and the uniforms themselves are in fact as highly individualized as a personal wardrobe. Where civilians perceive anonymity and standardization, the women know their regulation gear down to the most minute stitch. The women speak in myriad ways of shirts, vests, socks, and boots in which they have lived their lives and to which they have formed an intensely private relationship. In terms of language theory proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, a conjoined story that resists a unity, but rather presents a “multivocality” – a story “constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness ... but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses” (*Problems* 18), is described in his stringently accurate phrase: “a communion of unmerged souls” (26). The stories may converge in themes that seem to be accordances, but the strands of their experiences and ideas disaggregate. Pioneer theorist of standpoint theory, Nancy Hartsock, late of the University of Washington, agrees and speaks to the specificity of women’s stories which, throughout her standpoint writings, are not unitary (“Rethinking” 201). Indeed, standpoint theory attempts to define a position from which women speak with knowledge and insight about their marked status (Harding; Hartsock; Hekman; Hill Collins; McClish and Bacon; and many others). Awareness of “diversity within a collectivity” is one function of analyzing both communities and the individuals who compose them (McClish and Bacon 29). Moreover, Reinharz notes that “dual attention to women as a single category and as differentiated is, I believe, a hallmark of feminist research” (161). Therein we find the restive truth of women’s creating their military identity.

That transformative moment – club kid to Military Police; San Diego to Iceland; student to combat photographer; model to munitions and Special Ops; Pensacola to Iraq – can be traced, in multiple ways, in each woman’s testimony. The story each woman relates, like a process of freeing the younger restless self from a constraining chrysalis, begins with the questions,

sometimes desperate, sometimes reflective: “What am I going to do with my life? What are my choices?” The quandary the women present and solve reflects the complexity of their lives in America. The path to an answer for each of these women is enlistment in a predominantly male culture, a physical and sexual imbalance that was no secret to them. One after the other, the women I interviewed repeat Navy veteran Nancy Bullock-Prevot’s words, almost verbatim: “Yes, I was aware of the demographics of data in terms of gender in the military” (Written interview). But awareness does not and should not imply intimidation. The fascinating and thus far unresearched feature of their decision is the fact that their younger questioning selves are impervious and often indifferent to the demographics of the U.S. military.² Nor are they daunted by stories of women’s lives within that culture.

Their awareness of life as women in a professional territory marked as male will evolve as encounters and events, both affirmative and disheartening, impact their tours of duty. The data is clear on this point, as Army veteran LaRayne Hurd explains: “When it came to the big picture, I feel like the Army tried to make it seem like ‘they’ did not see gender. We were addressed as Warriors, Soldiers, Troops, etc., and none of that has a gender. But it is inherently considered to be a ‘he’” (Personal interview). Certainly male culture and male comrades provide reference points for much of women’s experience in a system mired in traditional *ethos*, defined by the scholar of military rhetoric and editor of *Journal of Veterans Studies*, Marianna Grohowski, as the norms of a military culture that “salutes the marginalization and inequality of women” (*Moving* 122). However, women have defined a military discourse of their own. In terms of

² One determining factor in this indifference is equality of pay within the military that is not available to women in civilian careers, which pay women an average of 80% of men’s salaries, according to McKay, citing Hammons, Megan. “Is There a Gender Gap in the Military,” VeteranAid.org. 25 January 2017.

narrative analysis, the feminist theorist Nancy Miller's notion of "gender as a genre itself" from *The Poetics of Gender* is critical here: "The difference of gender as genre is there to be read only if one accepts the terms of another sort of 'pact'; the pact of commitment to decipher what women have said ... about the pattern of their lives over and above what any (man) might say about his" (Marcus 231). Clarissa Threat, professor and scholar of gender studies at Spelman College, locates this "pact" in military precincts in her study "Patriotism Is Neither Masculine Nor Feminine: Gender and the Work of War": "Gender, the socially constructed masculine and feminine traits that are associated with the biological sex of males and females, has determined the roles and responsibilities of men and women in relation to war" (233).

Genre, then, offers a context or "framework" for "an interaction between reader and text" that "implies understanding of the conditions under which the text operates and should be received" (Marcus 231). The words of scholar and teacher bell hooks are directly relevant to this gender-genre contention: "It is not just *what* we speak about, but *how* and *why* we speak" (emphasis mine, *Yearning* 151). The stories indeed indicate that the entire discursive process is grounded in, and shaped by, gender – i.e., "situated doing," notes Eager, referencing a "Hauser 2011:632," "not a property of individuals but rather a feature of social situations and interactions" (11).³ For these women, gender is not always or necessarily confined within the marked sphere of the "subaltern,"⁴ but also, indeed primarily, from a position of authority and responsibility, which is an avowed purpose of feminist rhetorical inquiry (Desnoyers-Colas; Ede;

³ Investigation shows that Eager's reference is Gerard Hauser's *The Public Work of Rhetoric*.

⁴ The "subaltern" is described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she writes: "Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context" – a point of view particularly apt in the context of the American Athena study. (Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. 66-111.

Glenn; Grohowski; Hart; hooks; Jarratt; Lazar; Marcus; Reinhartz) such as this sophistic. It is also, these women contend, an entirely new concept and identity, purpose and role, for women in the U.S. Military.

“Our Right To Be Soldiers If We Choose”

Classical scholar Debra Hawhee notes in *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* that “the *agon*, the frenetic battle, can be read upon the body like marks that attest to what a man is and what he is worth (which) constituted a corporeal code of *aretē*” (20 *passim*).⁵ Hawhee defines *aretē* as a state of body, character, spirit, and mind:

Aretē was a condition the ancients tried to achieve, a condition not unrelated to art and skill *Aretē* was an ethical concept, and as such was associated with bodily appearance, action, and performance ... *Aretē* was tightly bound with *agathos* (goodness), *kleos* (glory), *time* (honor) and *philotimia* (love of honor). ... One attains virtuosity by performing and hence embodying virtuous actions in public. (17-18 *passim*)

What happens, though, when that “body” is not a man, but a woman? Hawhee emphasizes that “identities are thus inseparable from potential movements,” and in that context “one is what one does” (21). Bodies are not binary to thought, but purposeful and rhetorical in action – and this embodied expression can be usefully applied to the discourses of women servicemembers. The relevance of this research approach is proposed as a feminist methodology by Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, authors of the eponymous article who explain that “the body has come to be seen as the site of culturally inscribed and disputed meanings, experiences, and feelings that can, like emotion, be mined as sources of insight and subjects of analysis” (2216).

⁵ The term *aretē* in classical Greek is written with various diacritical markings. I have adopted Hawhee’s use of the macron, or stress mark, over the final e: *aretē*.

As noted throughout the nascent literature of women who have enlisted in the U.S. Military, their bodies as soldiers are bound to their situations and tools: they are, if deployed in the field of war, the “sounds of anti-mortar rounds going off all night,” as Air Force veteran Brandy Lockhart depicts her identity in Iraq (Lockhart, “Re: Far From Home”).

Yet women warriors have entered and experience a military context dominated by a trope of the soldier that is, with few exceptions, male: “Many men resent women for usurping the masculine role of warrior. And the military is still permeated with stereotypes of women as weak, passive sex objects who have no business fighting and cannot be relied upon in battle,” notes Helen Benedict, whose researches have delved deeply into women’s experience of military culture (*Lonely Soldier* 5). Former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis argued only last year that a move as “drastic” as women in combat could lead to a weakening of the fighting force, given that sexuality enters the field of battle when women do (Sisk), a lens that eclipses women’s actual combat experience, which this study will more clearly describe, and reduces them existentially to sex. Benedict stresses this salient point: “The view of women as sexual prey rather than responsible adults has always been part of military culture, making it hard for female soldiers to win acceptance, let alone respect” (*Lonely Soldier* 4).

Ethnographers Shirley Bryce Heath and Brian V. Street quote their colleague Molly Mills as they interpret the stubborn persistence of such views as one of the ways that “human beings coordinate with the regularities in the patterns of symbolic structures” (2), to be discerned from responses to the central question of their research: “What really happens here?” (55). In this instance, the structures may be identified as a military system that reifies male entitlement in American culture. Within this context, then, women embody a sense of estrangement as well as a tactical challenge to that egregious positioning, as Benedict argues: “We have all the qualities a

soldier needs, they would argue – loyalty, willingness to sacrifice for the common good, readiness to obey, courage, military skills, fitness, an ability to command, stamina, strength, intelligence – and it is our right to be soldiers if we choose” (*The Lonely Soldier* 223). It seems both crucial and instructive to study and theorize the ways in which the bodies of women servicemembers are “bound up with power, identity practices, and learning” (Hawhee *Bodily Arts* 10) that the women know, articulate, and seek to resist and alter through the act of storytelling. In fact, this cohort of military women expresses determination to persuade others – particularly their fellow veterans and active-duty military, female and male, who “have the same story or even worse ones” (Goldie Ann Johnson “Narrative”) -- that “embodied difference is power” (Dolmage 221).

The American Athena Study: A Literature of One’s Own

My dissertation presents a study of the narratives of these military women. The title, “American Athena,” is derived from the mythological figure of the female warrior born in full kit, armor and aegis, from the forehead of her father, Zeus. However, as the deeper story shows, Athena has been created secretly by her mother, Metis, the Oceanid⁶ swallowed whole by Zeus who feared her potentially regicidal power. In language study, Metis has become a significant mode of rhetorical analysis, one that identifies the use of strategy and intellect to achieve a goal in challenging and perhaps precarious conditions, as Metis succeeds in creating Athena with stealth and steely intent. The Metis–Athena story serves as both analogy and analysis of the discourse of these women, an emerging genre to which I propose to add a new chapter. No one

⁶ In Greek mythology, Metis is the daughter of the titans Tethys, who rules the moon, and Oceanus, who controls all the water on earth. Metis rejects Zeus as a suiter and changes shape as a disguise, which remains one of her talents. When Zeus catches her, she does become his first wife (Bakula).

has yet written in depth about the kind of ambition and independence that women service members show in returning to school, telling their stories, insisting on having their voices included in a national story which deems them “invisible,” a word they repeat. No one has yet studied the kind of productive and emancipatory change their experience represents in our national life. They speak of their commitment to military culture and its customs, values, practices – the *nomos* of that community.⁷ Yet they also “(affirm) an inequality of power that situates women in a powerless position and, by implication, men in a more powerful one,” in a context defined by gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler (*Notes* 141) -- even as they feel “pride,” a word they also repeat, and a sense of “belonging to something bigger than myself.” So Lisa Bradley defines her commitment to the U.S. Air Force (Written interview).

The Athena study emphasizes the discourses of women as a diverse group whose voices have “integrity,” a word that Lila Holley, Army veteran and author of *Camouflaged Sisters*, emphasizes in our interview. “What one must do” in order for those voices to be heard, the Virginia Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo notes in the collection *Between Women*, “is write a literature of one’s own” (qtd. in Ascher 52), because, as her disciplinary colleague Carolyn Heilbrun argues in *Writing a Woman’s Life*, “Power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s input matter” (18). In *Beyond the Call* Eileen Rivers writes at length about what she calls “the biggest problem,” i.e., the fact that stories of military service are not told by those engaged in it (xxiv). Each woman’s story offers a first-hand critique not only of patterns of indifference, intolerance, and misogyny in a culture to which they have committed, but also to the ways they are presented in our national discourse

⁷ In *Rereading the Sophists* Susan Jarratt defines *nomos* as cultural values and posits *nomos* as the most pervasive and useful rhetorical strategy. This classical term is reinterpreted in current critical idiom as “structure theory” (from Anthony Giddons); “cultural capital” and *habitus* (Pierre Bourdieu); “lifeworlds” (Jürgen Habermas); “discourses” (early Foucault, as well as Lazar and many others).

about female service members. They thus align with the advocacy of Teus van Dijk in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), that “we may be expected to contribute our share to the struggles of resistance and change ... and (formulate) effective counter-discourses and the persuasive development of counter-ideologies (“Discourse with a Cause”).

In a challenge to the assumptions of civilians and my own as I embarked on this study, the Athena women do not express a need to resist an honored service and assert their equality with their male “brothers in arms” because they themselves have never doubted it: “I didn’t think about gender at all,” notes Lisa Bradley as part of this study. “I didn’t notice a male warrior trope, only a shared strong sense of duty with both genders.” (Written interview)

The U.S. Military Through Their Eyes: “On the Outside Looking In”

I came to this research and these realizations from teaching women service members at the University of West Florida in Pensacola. The stories they told our classes of their experiences spoke of endurance, certainly -- the insight, strategy, and smarts that typify Metis -- and also a fierce determination to assert their identities as military women, i.e., “American Athena.” My work with these women allowed me to see that the discourses they create in their texts are different in content and purpose, history and idea, from the work of their male counterparts. Marine battalion commander Kate Germano, in her recently published memoir, *Fight Like a Girl: The Truth Behind How Female Marines Are Trained*, is only one source for this study who puts the issue in stark terms; “I was different. Female” (45). Their experiences as well as their post-service aspirations are situated in their identities as women in ways both troubling and, in the sense of the Greek warrior described by Hawhee in *Bodily Arts*, valorous and thus possessed of *aretē*. They speak of assault within the barracks in Iraq as well as acts of healing – enduring

the pain and not being defined by the pain – through the power of storytelling. This pattern accords with discoveries by sociologist Ken Plummer in *Telling Sexual Stories* that such accounts can create a new genre of material formerly hidden from view and “can have an emancipatory function transforming individual lives and the wider culture” (qtd. in Elliott 50).

But their literature, with few exceptions, is invisible in research beyond trauma and victim study.⁸ As hooks has observed, “Sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim ... making shared victimization the basis for women bonding ... Bonding as victims created a situation in which assertive, self-affirming women were often seen as having no place in feminist movements” (*Feminist Theory* 45).⁹ The discourse is nearly always problematized, and the women in this study are acutely aware of this bias: “It’s not that those things aren’t important or that rape culture isn’t a real thing in the military, but ... this is really cliché ... (It’s) never ‘(she) went and did really heroic things,’ (which) are always from a man’s perspective,” notes Kylie Pugh (Personal interview). Rivers comments in *Beyond the Call* that “there were plenty of heroic efforts that the public wasn’t hearing about” (xxiv).

Indeed, in the twelve chapters of Sue Doe and Lisa Langstraat’s *Generation Vet* (2014), the only long-form text so far that approaches the topics of veterans’ composing practices and projects, the authors cite only three brief examples of women veterans, all in passing. Certainly, the fact that over one million students, both female and male, within the veteran community are currently enrolled in higher education has increased the urgency of appeals for further study of veterans’ discourse as a whole (Grohowski; Hart). This call to attention is even more important

⁸ For example, the collection of studies, *Women at War*, edited by Elspeth Cameron Ritchie and Anne L. Naclerio, sounded promising as a secondary source for this study – but is primarily focused on mental health issues, PTSD, and suicidal ideation.

⁹ N.B. Mary Talbot’s “Choosing to Refuse To Be a Victim” in Lazar 167.

now than when “warrior writers” were first introduced by Marilyn J. Valentino in her keynote address for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 2012, “Serving Those Who Have Served: Preparing for Student Veterans in Our Writing Programs, Classes, and Writing Centers.” The numbers of military-affiliated students are expected to double within the next ten years, and a quarter of this population is female (Department of Veterans Affairs).

Yet few researchers note that veterans’ stories in wide circulation are, with few exceptions, male. Valentino in her highly influential speech identifies veteran students as mostly male, and while she refers to an incident with a female veteran in *The Lonely Soldier* by Helen Benedict, she fails to mention that the soldier in question is lonely because, as a female, she is marked in that context. The same gender equivalency was clear at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2016 when a prominent military scholar emphasized the communal nature of military experience which thus, she claimed in a lecture I witnessed, transfers as a common language and unitary narrative style and content to our academic discourse when veterans return to university and civilian life. However, as feminist critical theorist Michelle M. Lazar notes, “speaking of ‘women’ and ‘men’ in universal, totalizing terms is problematic, (no) longer tenable” (1). The discourses of women veterans, in both the private and public spheres, tell another story, one that differs dramatically from the accounts of their male counterparts: “The male is the universal,” Kylie Pugh tells us. “I absolutely did not have the same experience. The female experience in the military and the male experience in the military (are) 100% different from the lowest rank to the highest.” (Personal interview) Army veteran Mackenzie Rieselt offers further insight to this particular form of misrepresentation:

If they're speaking of women as just being victims in the military, then it's a bit ridiculous, but if they're talking about how they were sexually abused or some other form of that, then it angers me a bit... the fact that it happened. It's also kind of crappy that people associate it with the military. It's not the military. It's men. It happens outside the military more often than it does in the military. (Personal interview)

Mackenzie adds: "Men can be pigs." Jessica Scott in her blog, *To Iraq and Back: On War and Writing*, informs us that "as a female soldier, I've always been on the outside looking in. The males in every unit I've been a part of have seen a female first, a soldier second." She offers us a verbal shrug: "I've accepted that is simply part of being a woman in the military" (225).

"Veteran" vs. "Female Veteran"

Indeed, in military language itself a male hegemony seems intractable. Any discussion of this literature requires the glosses *female* or *woman* since the nouns *soldier* and *veteran* by definition are infused with testosterone: hence, the title of this dissertation itself: "*Women Servicemembers*" (emphasis mine). As Kylie Pugh remarks in her personal interview: "The vast majority are males. There's no need to identify them." A Google search of the word "veteran" reveals three images of women among many hundreds. In one image whose site is a windowless women's restroom, a female soldier in combat gear is standing in front of a mirror that reflects her body posed provocatively in a tight leopard-print mini-dress, styled as a sex worker. This startling image reveals the struggle of women in military culture: they embody their purpose and the work they are trained to do, as Brandy Lockhart noted in the previous section – "the sounds of anti-mortar rounds"; the gaze they encounter, however, too often defines them as sexual objects.

Unlike the soldier in this photograph, however, women composing stories of their experiences do not remain locked in the gaze that seeks to demean and erase them as military colleagues. They do not accept an essentialist view of themselves as women that they are powerless to escape, even as they embody the notion “one is what one does,” as Hawhee reminds us (*Bodily Arts* 21), that identities are thus inseparable from potential movements” (20). The bodies of military women are too often discursively underestimated, if not in actual *agon* of battle. Despite their myriad approaches, media, and themes, some of which complicate the work of this project, their stories reflect a teleology that unifies them, a fierce communal “No” in the face of masculine privilege in military discourse. In *Fight Like a Girl*, Germano emphasizes the effect of deployment on this sense of themselves: “I finally felt like a Marine,” she writes. “Not a female Marine. I felt like a Marine” (39).

These women are in the process of creating a rich and complex genre of literature, i.e., the private and published narratives, in print and online. I argue here that the stories designed and delivered by women veterans in writing class, which sparked this project for me, are of a piece with the memoirs, poems, videotexts, visuals, and works in creative non-fiction that form a new genre in the public sphere. And I think it is timely and important to notice in particular these acts of storytelling and see the worlds they have inhabited, military and civilian, through their eyes.

The “Terrible Obscenity (That) Is Not an Obscenity”

It is eminently clear to this interviewer and bears repeating, often, that the women are not intimidated by demographic disparities that could and often do create a condition of “marked inclusion,” a term introduced by Lazar in her collection of critical articles, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, in 2005 (19). Nor are these women loathe to describe their experiences or

express their opinions. While the literature is replete with these first-person accounts, the research and analyses, as noted, have focused on sexual assault, PTSD, and homelessness. Those disturbing situations and statistics are true; however, they are not the only story. The discourse does attest to discrimination and harassment; in some cases, even among the women in this limited study, the bigotry or pathology causes sexual assault.¹⁰ An attack, verbal or physical, can occur with astonishing speed when least expected. Women of color define a “double discrimination,” wherein they are marked in ethnic and sexual terms. Kylie Pugh recounts how women were called to attention in her squad, “Female!” -- the “terrible obscenity (that) is not an obscenity,” she declares, the calling out of who one is as fundamentally wrong and out of place.

However, the stories reveal the ways that women in these settings, still works in progress in light of gender accommodation, devise the means to save their own lives. Some women thrive; others leave; most, as Brandy Lockhart informs us, “Get through this” (Personal interview), designing, strategizing, refusing to accept and sometimes even acknowledge conditions that could sustain a renitent hierarchy, incapable of change. If that were the case, however, we would not be hearing these voices. Teun von Dijk of CDA speaks of a process he calls “analytical resistance” against “forms of inequality” that “aims at the formulation of effective counter-discourses and the persuasive development of counter-ideologies,” i.e., resilience, resistance, and change (“Discourse With a Cause”). I contend in this study that women servicemembers move beyond that kind of “analytical resistance” and respond imaginatively and productively in a system formerly closed to them. As they tell these stories, the genre their gender creates reveals to us the new identity they forge in the process.

¹⁰ Kieran reports that “90% of victims never report assaults within the military because its culture is so hostile to them ... (documentation is) just as traumatic as the original rape or harassment” (273).

The complication and interest in their position, and one that has never been sufficiently limned, let alone discussed, is that creating the female military identity as they themselves choose is not about intentionally becoming the negative, as charge or image, to an other's positive. It may seem both counterhegemonic and counterintuitive, but the issue of women's entering a male culture is not the primary story, however obvious and enthusiastic its male narratives and images. Tabitha Nichols suggests this mistaken focus as she discusses her desire to prove herself: "Probably I didn't have to," she considers in our interview. "Maybe. But I just felt like I needed to. It wasn't so much negativity to where I was like, 'Alright, guys, I'm going to prove myself.' It was an internal thing" (Personal interview). The history and ideology, the *ethos* of "combat zone (as) a military man's work and play ground, where their rules often prevail," as veteran Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Savannah professor of communication and advocate for Black women servicemembers, tells us (*Marching* 84), cannot be denied. But as a central focus, the maleness of this culture skews the story and makes it all about men: how they do or do not accept and adjust to women as colleagues and peers. It is important to note, although many male servicemembers and perhaps civilians might be surprised to hear it, that male issues are not the central concern in the female precincts of this shared world.

Frequently, women such as Nancy Bullock-Prevot emphasize that "they (men) constructed the community and they still do, they are in charge" (Written interview). More frequently the Athena women describe their needing to "work twice as hard" (Bullock-Prevot; Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas; Lila Holley; Brandy Lockhart; Tabitha Nichols; Kylie Pugh; multiple others) to prove their ability to their *confreres* and superiors: "I had to prove myself," Goldie Ann Johnson tells us. "When you show up and they look at you, you can see by their face, 'Oh, there's a female on the range'" (Personal interview). It should not in fact be so

astonishing that “a female,” like Goldie in this case, shows an expert-level facility in this task which Army veteran Tammy Duckworth, senator of Illinois, tells us she thoroughly enjoyed as a “zen” experience (Nelson). This is not to say that males do not create and engage in contests of bravery and strength, the *agon*, to determine their rightful position in finely-calibrated hierarchies and teams. As has been noted and will continue to be emphasized, the military serves to define “masculinity as a gender” (Beard 17). Jean Pierre Vernant, in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, explains that young men experienced “rites of passage” directed toward warfare as counterparts to the rituals that cultivated young women for marriage: they marked a young man’s “accession to the condition of warrior” (33-34), still a tenet in military culture. But the male challenge is homosocial; it does not drill down to the level of chromosomes, i.e., “You shoot like a girl.” It is, rather, a question of competitive skill.

Women also express their desire to prove their mettle to themselves, as we hear from Brandy Lockhart, abjuring herself through a particularly rough patch in her basic training: “You can get through this, you’ll be fine, you can do this,” a determination that often seems stronger than comparison or competition with male colleagues. However, Athena women note and reiterate that women can be and were harder than any outside force, colleague or enemy, on one another. Germano, in *Fight Like a Girl*, explains this phenomenon:

There are so few of us (in the Marines, for example)¹¹ that it’s dog-eat-dog. We’re all trying so hard to fit in that we’re not about to group together. We’re trying to be one of the guys. Our buddies are guys. *Is someone having a hard time? That sounds like drama – I’m going to stay away from her.* But that’s just it – we should have to fit in, and we

¹¹ A mere 7% of military women are Marines, according to Patten and Parker of Pew Research (7), compared with 37% Army, 31% Air Force, and 25% Navy.

shouldn't think twice about checking in with each other and supporting each other when there is drama. (41-42)

Belgian feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray posits that “the problem of women-amongst-themselves (*l'entre-femmes*) ... has not yet been resolved” (192). She theorizes that “two or more women who meet therefore look for the secret of their identity in one another. If they merge with one another or become rivals, it is often because the mysteries of their personal status remains imperceptible to them.” In the practical terms of daily life in the U.S. Military, Brandy Lockhart delineates the truth of Irigaray's insights:

I specifically mentioned for a job, ‘I don't want to work with a lot of females,’ and that's very funny I would say that, but because I worked as a model (and) I had seen so much backstabbing. I couldn't understand as a female trying to help out another female and then they turn around and stab you in the back. I just don't get why we can't all get along, I just didn't want to deal with it. I was quite honestly fed up with it. (Personal interview)

Nonetheless, the quest that led them here, as consistently noted throughout the stories and further supported in Irigaray's theory, has nothing to do with men: the ambition was either participatory, “What can I do to help?” as Brandy asks (Personal interview) or personal, in the haunting words of LaRayne Hurd: “Anything to give my life meaning” (Personal interview).

The discourse created out of the challenge and discovery in these often unreported processes shows a new way of apprehending and discussing the female military identity in action, as women themselves determine and define the most efficacious way to perform it.

Aretē: Women Who Have “Specialized in War”

What women are claiming for themselves is the valance and virtuosity of *aretē*, and

it is the *ethos* of this Athena project that the women's purpose and prowess here enact precisely the transformational "maiden clad in goat skin who specialized in war" (Graves 99). While the mythological Athena is portrayed by her biographer Susan Deacy as "at home in the world of men" (*Athena* 72), her American progeny emphatically do not want to be treated as singular or visitant in a world that is classified as "other" to them. Indeed, they stake a claim on that self-styled masculine turf for themselves. Their ambitions, capacities, and increasing numbers in that world may constitute, for traditionalists, a female insurgency: Oxford classics scholar and don Mary Beard, author of *Women and Power*, a foundational source for this study, argues that women are historically "perceived outside power" (56 *passim*), that, indeed, the "exclusion of women from power is culturally embedded" (79). The efforts of women in this project to be recognized and accepted within the profession of their choice align with Beard's proposal, delivered with the urgency of a woman who shares their dilemma in her own academic culture, that women "resituate themselves within power."

They would, when viewed in this light, pursue their quest to give their lives meaning, make something of themselves, help others, to its forceful and realizable conclusion, i.e., discover how a female performs a military job in ways that affirm not only her passionate intent, but her physical presence in a culture that requires her service and simultaneously, often violently, pushes her away. Indeed, the women do express, to the contrary, a sense of superiority to the males with whom they serve, a neat trick of table-turning that reverses as well the misguided notion of male saturation of the psyches of women servicemembers whose choice of profession is submissive to its core. I argue here that as women discover and confront this dismissive resistance, respond in ways authentic and most useful to them, they not only redefine the culture they are entering, but the ancient concept of *aretē* itself.

Feminist Sophistic: “My Military Life Journey”

The focused and grounded approach I pursue in this project arises from feminist critical analysis, specifically, a feminist sophistic. One of the purposes of this study is to help define and expand the new genre of the literature of military women. As noted, most existing research is medical and sociological in nature, with only three scholars – Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Mariana Grohowski, and Alexis Hart, all primary-source participants in the Athena project – applying rhetorical and pedagogical analysis to the writing of women servicemembers. What has not yet been attempted is the “feminist sophistic” of this project’s title. The outline of a feminist sophistic can be derived from Susan Jarratt’s analysis of these two stances and practices in her diachronic study, *Rereading the Sophists*, the forerunners of contemporary theory and practice. In my view the feminist sophistic is truly transformative to rhetorical theory: through the construction of the “other” by self-interested cultures, the philosophical and the masculine, Jarratt traces similarity between sophist and feminist discourses and approaches to learned experience and its analysis. Against a worldview that seeks absolute and universal truth, she places the adaptive and contingent argument that sophists and feminists share, a sure knowledge of human life that is situated, kairotic, and discursively grounded, and therefore rhetorical: “sophistic rhetoric, then, as an institution of social action in the *polis* was bound to the flux” (11). The feminist sophistic posited by Jarratt is, in brief, a rhetorical methodology that situates the discourses of women within specific contexts “to locate personal experience in historical and social contexts” and “advance them in a public voice” (115-116) – in this study, their lived experience within the traditionally white male culture of American military. This methodology seems useful in defining the complementary and conjoining fields that form the foundation of this project.

More than mere tool of interpretation, a discourse created by the teachings of the itinerant sophists who, in Jarratt's account, established the practice of rhetoric itself, has as its key elements a desire and intent for action and change. Feminism as a method of critique shares this sense of muscular purpose. To this end Jarratt notes that "though the sophists may not be 'feminists,' current feminists are becoming sophists in the best sense of the word by describing rhetorical solutions to the crucial problem of defining a theory with the most power of changing women's lives" (*Rereading* 78; also, "The First Sophists" 39). Attaching this oppositional and gendered stance of feminist inquiry to a sophistic discourse, as Jarratt inspires and this study will show, can only serve to emphasize and energize the potential for change, for transformation, that defines and drives each critical approach. Indeed, Jarratt argues the efficacy of a feminist sophistic for "breaking into the 'received histories' of the discourse of man," one of the purposes of this Athena study. Indeed, in a personal email to me, Jarratt notes that "rejecting givens – the doxa attached to women in the service – certainly seems related to sophistic practice," and sees "a compatibility between sophistic thinking/rhetorical practice and a qualitative project that sets aside given categories and works from the language of the informants themselves to build new categories" ("Re: Question about Feminist Sophistic"). She agrees that "working in this way seems especially important for women, around whom stereotypes and fixed perceptions seem to congeal in restricting ways." Emphasis on the empowerment of women is a canonical feature of feminist social science research, argue the authors of "Feminist Methodology," Fonow and Cook (qtd. by Schell in Schell and Rawson 7 - 8). As Liz Stanley famously observes in her 1990 *Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology*, "Succinctly, the point is to change the world, not only to study it" (15).

It must be said that the fit is not, on first meeting, a perfect one: a feminist stance has been assessed negatively as an essentialist “I Am Woman” approach that in its binary and inflexible nature might contradict its application here. Jarratt notes that contradiction and attempts to resolve it are themselves an integral part of a sophistic point of view. Her argument aligns with the concept of “social knowledge” in rhetorical studies that holds rhetoric to be a way of resolving contingencies and producing action, as Thomas Farrell contends in ‘Knowledge, Consensus, and Rhetorical Theory’ (144). Jarratt emphasizes and tracks the ways these practices, however querulously, inform her own study: “Like the sophists, given two choices, I take both, weighing the one against the other” (*Rereading* ix). In this same way they have helped me imagine and shape this Athena project.

Discovery of the Athena Theory

For my purposes here, I will argue that this intense and unresolved conflict at the heart of critical feminist inquiry, between an essentialist and constructivist view of the female as “other,” is not reconciled in the discourses of military women, and the binary itself is the source of a deep tension within the complex identity they share, both absolute and fluid, as object/agent, victim/soldier. Indeed, one resolution to this problem has been advanced by Maureen Patricia Phillips in her 2006 dissertation, “Birthing a Third Gender: The Discourse of Women in the American Military”: Phillips proposes that women soldiers constitute a “third gender,” much like an identity pondered by the poet Adrienne Rich in “Diving into the Wreck”: “I am she. I am he” (ll. 30). Phillips argues that women can validate themselves as soldiers only by vacating their identity as female and “birthing a third gender”: thus, their “heroism and patriotism” can be acknowledged and praised (23). Although this provocative theory is an important and promising

contribution to a field notable for its paucity of research and absence of scholarly interest, my own study will approach the question of gender identity as an open one to be defined or revised by the study participants themselves.

I am interested in the kind of discovery process in which “research subjects assert themselves as actors or agents via their own voices” and “position themselves as agents capable of asserting a standpoint that challenges ...ultimately the conclusions drawn by the researcher” (Joanne Addison in Schell and Rawson 142), and trust their own “knowledge and insights” (Schell in Schell and Rawson 18). The most relevant method for analysis of these stories is Grounded Theory (GTM) as typified by the recent work of Kathy Charmaz whose approach to data allows the narratives to speak without an *a priori* theoretical stance. In my view GTM is indeed a rhetorical and “sophistic” approach – i.e., situated, grounded, spatial, local, temporal, kairotic, and utterly responsive to and constitutive of the human moment – although that direct grounding in classical theory is merely implicit in the critical literature, and in *Constructing Grounded Theory* Charmaz uses the word “rhetoric” only once in that foundational text of 388 pages (232), arguing that theories are rhetorical because the theorist attempts to convince readers that certain conclusions flow from a set of premises. I argue here that its rhetoricity is more pervasive than that comment allows. Indeed, the point of grounded theory research is that it “produces non-standardized information that allows full use of differences among people” in order to “hear the unheard and unimagined” (Belenky in Reinharz 19). Clearly, this theory is grounded in and emerges from data in a rhetorical process: each story is analyzed through stages of coding for function and intent, creating its own theoretical design. My study, too, has therefore led to its own original frame, the Athena Theory, adaptable to future scholarship in this

literature and grounded in the women's experience of military culture, as Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas has described it, her "military life journey" (*Marching* iii).

"You Can Get Through This"

The words "experience," "military experience," "journey," and other descriptors of the narratives investigated here may seem as generalized and sweeping as the act of speaking of "combat woman" to cover all women. Just as each woman comes to her decision, enlistment, and tenure in service from her own response to often common circumstances – a dead-end job, minimum wage, legacy, stasis, yearning for adventure beyond their sleepy town and boring routine – so her actions, encounters, relationships, and tasks within the military syllabus and system are specific to her and the ways she perceives, answers, and remembers them. These women are deeply sure of themselves, even in pain or regret about outcomes of their service. As they themselves articulate their own experience, a value reiterated by philosopher Irigaray¹² and a privileged standpoint here, it is clear to their listener and reader that they know who they are. They do not equivocate; they speak with authority; and if they do not know an answer or have not reflected on a topic, they say so, e.g., "I don't know how [the gender discrimination I faced] has affected me," writes Nancy Bullock-Prevot. "I feel I have become an advocate for women veterans who have lost their voice along the way" (Written interview). Their decisions were clearly practical; they committed themselves to a culture and cause they believed in, still ascribe to that belief, and even as they confronted effects and some resistant strains of virulent dislike of women entering a self-styled "world of men," nevertheless, they persisted.

¹² Irigaray argues that women must extricate their discourse from language that has evolved to encompass male experience, which is based as well on women's exclusion, and articulate their own existence and identity "as different" (Whitford *Reader* 190). In an "Ethics of Sexual Difference," Irigaray proposes that "sexual difference is probably the issue of our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through" (5).

Of course, by virtue of their very bodies they are oppositional. Their standpoint as women seems to map them in this setting, and the “hero’s journey” story of mythologist Joseph Campbell is relevant here: “In the face of resistance and indifference, risk, certainty of invisibility and physical death – they go anyway” (*Joseph Campbell*), a phrase, to the letter, these women repeat throughout the interviews and *corpus* of their published works. Their stories design and define a culture from their point of view that does include them and their struggle unequivocally. And their stories further reveal a process of giving clarity and structure to critical and, for some, traumatic experiences. Their stories show us the complexity of this culture from the women’s perspective, as we hear from Brandy Lockhart, gazing steadily at me across an over-sized conference table in the library of a large public university on a morning in early spring, her rapid-fire delivery belying her composed demeanor as she replays the struggles of her early Air Force days and how she overcame them, to become a munitions expert in Special Ops:

Whenever they’d tell us there’s certain things, like your t-shirts had to be one way, this had to be one way, that had to be one way, I just remember going through it and if it was hard for me, or if it was difficult or something I couldn’t handle at that moment, or challenging to me, I’d just think, ‘You can get through this, you’ll be fine, you can do this, just keep doing it, take one day at a time, one day at a time,’ and that’s how I got through it. (Personal interview)

Civilians can have a superficial understanding of this “journey,” the why and the how of the ways they “get through this,” not knowing if and where and for how long they could or would be deployed. The dubious ones underestimate the power of these women to “tell their own stories in their own way,”¹³ our grounded theory process meeting feminist theory -- “women’s experiences

¹³ This statement of purpose is traceable to Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, but is also present in ethnographic and rhetorical studies of present times, such as McClish and Bacon’s study of Jane Austen and Harriet Jacobs.

told in women's words" (Smith 265)¹⁴ -- which conjoins with descriptions of women's stories in popular culture, i.e., "by turns smart, snarky, hard-hitting, witty, sly, and serious" (Salvatore). In such a multivalent way the Athena women extend their oppositional stance to a productive one as well in the zones they occupy "between literature and history" (Marcus 229), which we might consider the site from which both discourse and rhetoric emerge -- our "language (as) experience" (Gee Personal email), and the ways we design that material to achieve a purpose or effect. It is, as Virginia Woolf reminds us in "Sketch of the Past," "folly (to think) a mere account of events can reveal anything of the person to whom they happened" (Marcus 222). The point, for me, aligns with human development scholar Mary Field Belenky's concept of "women's way of knowing" delivered in her text of that title, wanting "to hear what the women say in their own terms rather than test (my) own pre-conceived hypothesis" (Belenky in Reinharz 19).

To begin with, they do not call themselves "heroes." Nonetheless, I think they must be aware of the heroic fortitude they display in their challenge to a culture that is built to serve a male *ethos* and identity, as Beard reminds us (17), and the way they show extraordinary "cool" in assuming agency for women there. "The military may be mainly males but our collective *ethos* isn't just about the male warrior trope of being a hardass, but one of working hard and becoming the best we can," explains Marine veteran Emily Satterfield (Written interview). Her Army colleague Goldie Ann Johnson offers further perspective:

¹⁴ Smith's colleague in standpoint theory argumentation, Susan Hekman, much of whose argument informs the conclusions of this Athena study, argues vehemently, and, it seems, personally, against Smith's statement. However, I see much similarity between these two theorists -- and I also like Smith's phrasing, here and elsewhere.

Despite our gender being different there's nothing special about serving as a woman in the sense of some special mission or interpretation. We do the job, we do it well, we get it done, and we move on. Just like the men. (Personal interview)

It can be argued, and we deliver that argument here, that asserting one's equality with Goldie in this context, "Just like the men," should not be a function of *aretē*, the ancient concept of valor. But for women choosing to enlist and engage with commitment in this male culture, it is.

American Athena Thesis: "We Are the Women Who Ask the Questions"

The universe these texts compose is thus replete with conflict, accord, provocation, and raw feeling and fact. There are stories and studies that tend toward a theme of abuse and victimization, as noted. There is a chilling account of rape in the Athena letters, and although the author gives blanket permission to use her material, I have obscured her identity here:

I was raped and because the person had more rank than I did, my complaint was dismissed and I was targeted for any and every mistake that I made. I was demoted for disrespect when I told the commander that he was just as wrong as my attacker for covering it up. I couldn't understand how I could be blamed when the man entered my room while I was sleeping, and I was neither drunk or in any situation that would reasonably be interpreted as 'asking for it.'

The published material is replete with these stories and repeats this account almost verbatim. These stories, while not the focus of this specific study, only serve to reinforce the powerful resolve and tensile strength that run through all the Athena discourses, like a live wire that shows no sign of breaking. It is this theme that sparked the interest that led me to explore this part of the military world in the first place, and this mission informs the work of the dissertation study that

follows. While I resist the notion that the powerful discourses of these women are intended solely for the renovation and salvation of military culture, they do serve as contrapuntal to its traditional politic and agents of change. I contend as well that this new genre they are creating has significance for American culture itself. If these authors and speakers are not “birthing” an actual “third gender,” they are nonetheless signaling a definition of female warrior that is new – “servicemember” and “veteran” without the marker; a significant move toward erasure of that marker completely in all contexts.

The Athena Chapters

My reading here is guided by the deeply nuanced texts and voices that introduced me to this research topic – those of my university students – and I trace this process of learning how to approach and understand these stories in **Chapter Two Storytelling As Epistemology: Goldie’s Voice**. Through the work of one veteran, Goldie Ann Johnson, the first to share her story with me, her public writing teacher, I attempt to show that an unrelenting sense of melancholy and pain is not the one and only message of these projects and stories. Rather, the narratives convey accomplishment, spunk, endurance, and sureness in looking ahead to a future that matters – this, despite experiences described by veteran Manda V. Hicks in her 2011 dissertation study, “Negotiating Gendered Expectations” as “marked by – made real by – my difference” (52) during their military years.

Accordingly, my own analysis seeks to move beyond a monolithic view of these veterans’ experience and approach these multifaceted accounts with the open mind and unbiased ethic that GTM allows. In **Chapter Three Method: “Going in at Ground Zero,”** I describe in detail the development and conduct of interviews, and present the questions designed by both the

women and me. I introduce the women whose published and private stories constitute the content and point of this study, and delineate the grounded research approach to classifying the material I have collected. Therefore, I employ a semi-structured interview format to elicit material about women's discrete experience within that culture, particularly how they claim and exercise their agency. I amend the interview format with the request, in the live settings, that the women contribute questions they themselves would like to be asked, an approach suggested by Marilyn Jacoby Boxer's instructive work, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America*. Boxer notes that "by posing new questions and seeking answers that place women at the center, it allows altogether new ways of viewing women and the world to emerge" (225). Her study, in turn, derives its theme from feminist poet Adrienne Rich in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*: "We are no longer the woman question asked by someone else; we are the women who ask the questions" (216).

I further investigate published materials, in digital, filmic, and print media, where women create communities of storytelling for themselves alone. As Navy veteran D. Alexis Hart has noted, such communities "(need and desire and create) a 'safe' space ... to inquire together into personal and public issues and to consider ways in which they might attempt to affect (sic) change" ("Inquiring" 84). This discourse, as demonstrated in the data of this study, devolves on two specific processes, phrased here in the grammatical form preferred by Charmaz, the gerund, for expressing the categories of GTM: (1) *imagining* and (2) *shaping* a female military identity that did not exist until they embodied it. The gerund, according to Charmaz, is intrinsic to the process of the researcher's interaction with her community of participants: "We gain a strong sense of action and sequence with gerunds," she states. "The nouns turn these actions (author's note: *imagining* and *shaping*) into topics. Staying close to the data and, when possible, starting

from the words and actions of your respondents, preserves the fluidity of their experience (and) encourage you to begin analysis from their perspective. That is the point” (*Constructing* 120-121).

From the beginning my interest has focused on that discourse, rather than a study of military culture itself as a central theme. Nor is my project a history of women in military service or history of American engagement in the Middle East.¹⁵ I hope to introduce this approach and achieve clarity in analyzing women soldiers’ discourses as ways of “doing” military culture without being dominated by it: I have in this introduction noted that Athena, who provides the image and model of this dissertation project, is not only the daughter of Zeus, but also Metis, who represents design, intelligence, and a manifested “point.” In **Chapter Four Methodology: Athena, From Myth to Model**, I present the Feminist Sophistic, adapted for this project from the work of Jarratt, as the context for my reading and analysis of this material. Based on the sophistic stance of situated experience as a source of knowledge, meaning, and response, I have identified an Athena Theory and its attendant model to conduct a close reading of these stories and study, through a combination of discursive and rhetorical analysis, the ways they function and reflect their authors. The Athena Theory clarifies a standpoint for those women that enables them to characterize their experience in their own voices and through their eyes, specifically, *how* they imagined and shaped a female military identity. The standpoint that emerges clearly from this data indicates a commitment to a military culture that resists the women’s embodied difference, an alterity that in itself is a signal of fundamental change: “For images, words, stories to have transformative power,” the late Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldua writes in her

¹⁵ For these chronicles see Desnoyers-Colas, Elizabeth, *Marching As to War: Personal Narratives of African American Women’s Experiences in the Gulf Wars*; Rivers, Eileen, *Beyond the Call: Three Women on the Front Lines in Afghanistan*; and others.

signature text *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “they must arise from the human body” (97; also, qtd. in Dolmage 221: “I want to write from the body; that’s why we’re in a body”). It is clear in the women’s discourse that they proceed with the confidence of unshaken belief in their own equality, indeed, an oft-reiterated superiority, in the male culture they inhabit. Clearly they deploy a metistic patience and strategy to sustain themselves in their precarious position; indeed, as Dolmage reminds us, “*metis* is the rhetorical art of cunning, the use of embodied strategies ... to transform rhetorical situations. In a world of chance and change, *metis* is what allows us to craft available means for persuasion. ... I argue that *metis* is a way to recognize that all rhetoric is embodied” (*Disability* 5).

The existence of these women in a culture of combat, now fully vested as members, and the emergent genre that details their experiences, are documented in **Chapter Five Analysis of the Female Military Identity**. Judicious selection of material that seems most salient in addressing my research questions will create nonetheless a multifaceted array of texts for close reading and analysis. Texts chosen for qualitative analysis reflect an intersection between cultures, i.e., military and economic, ethnic, and educational, as well as representative samples of both print and digital material. The texts present technical expertise, field experience, and insight into their authors’ positions in Aviation, Intelligence, Military Police, Photography, Special Ops, Warehouse, and on the front lines. The power in simply “being there” is parallel to the idea of “showing up” in Judith Butler’s *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*: Butler persuasively argues for the power of the body, “exhibiting its value and its freedom” (18), which seems the theoretical twin of Hawhee’s notion of embodied expression that opens this dissertation and sets the stage for a study of women’s embodied difference, their inescapable femaleness, in a culture that is normalized as male. Butler contends that “showing up, standing,

breathing, moving, standing still, speech and silence” all “signify,” in themselves, apart from whatever demands may ensue. In line with this idea of the self-evident fact, the analysis of the American Athena stories emphasizes the sufficiency of the physical presence, which translates into a power position, of purposeful, skilled, and decisive women in military culture. Through a close reading of interviews and selected texts in the limited field of women’s military literature, I demonstrate how these women view themselves and how they create the discourses of endurance, intelligence, and in many cases, change.

Finally, in **Chapter Six Conclusion: Boots**, I discuss the implications of this American Athena study, most significantly for Athenas in the military and in their lives as civilians, “who I am NOW,” as Lila Holley, author the *Camouflaged Sisters* series, writes to me in a personal email. Certainly, from the evidence of the discussions in this new genre literature, a new direction in conversation about veterans is already beginning in university and civilian life. Notes Army veteran Williams, “We’ve seen policy changes, so now we’ll see how those are implemented and what it means” (Personal interview). Navy veteran D. Alexis Hart, who has committed her energies and experience to higher education, explains that “there are still places where we have a lot of room to improve, and I would like to continue to be a conduit for women’s voices. I think there’s work to be done within the military and ...civilian populations” (Personal interview). These authors and their sisters in arms rely on the power of who they are and choose to be in the discourse they create within the military culture, where they refuse the shadow-title of “outsider,” however fiercely they are faced with that characterization and marked, as Hicks has noted in these pages, by difference (52). In this study we will see multiple women describe this marked status as “other” (for example, Hartsock in Harding *Reading* 8, Hawkesworth 92, and Jarratt *Rereading* 67). An eloquent title in gender studies contends, “She

Who Speaks Shadow Speaks Truth,” and I propose that “indeterminacy and discomfort can be understood as places of possibility,” as Vivian M. May argues in the instructive 2005 *Women’s Studies for the Future* (qtd. by Katherine Side in the Methods section of Orr et al. 61). The Athena women have a clear idea of the kinds of changes women carry with them into an obdurate culture that is beginning to recast itself as community of women and men.

A study of the discourses created by the community of women veterans will add a significant dimension to the fields of women’s rhetoric and veterans’ rhetoric. Equally promising, however, is the potential of this study for designing and testing a model tailored and repaired for analysis of material in this emerging genre. A critical faction in feminist studies has questioned the fitness of traditional research methods for meaningful work with women’s texts.¹⁶ This problem could be exacerbated by the complex negotiations required of these particular authors as they identify themselves as women and servicemembers within a system that marks and marginalizes them: Grohowski notes that this “assault ... begin(s) at the level of words” and is endemic in a “hyper-masculine military culture” (121-122). A dedicated mode of analysis seems particularly useful to study a textual version of *agon*, i.e., an often physical conflict between an essentialist view of what a woman is and should be in an aggressively male culture, and these women’s own capacity and desire to define their military identity in their own words. Their stories are replete with strategies they have devised to “cut through the layers,” as Lila Holley describes it (Personal interview), achieve their various goals, and transform themselves into “American Athena,” ultimately – women warriors in both the military and in life.

¹⁶ While not the mission of this dissertation, the question of appropriate methodologies in feminist research is explored in Catherine M. Orr et al., *Rethinking Women’s and Gender Studies*, designed to question approaches and terms in this discipline, *passim* [“Introduction”].

“The story starts with redemption,” Army veteran Works-Dennis tells us on the opening page of this Athena study. “I think it ends that way too” (3).

CHAPTER TWO

Storytelling As Epistemology: Goldie's Voice

Power – the ability to be effective, to make a difference in the world, and the right to be taken seriously, ... power in that sense that many women feel they don't have – and that they want. – Mary Beard, *Women and Power*

Proving Ground: Goldie Ann Johnson



Figure 7 Goldie Ann Johnson. Photo courtesy of Goldie Ann Johnson

I am one of the women that has had the honor and privilege of serving our country. I faced challenges and found myself in difficult situations that should not have existed but nonetheless, I fought to meet any challenge that was thrown my way as women did before me.

That being said, the U.S. Military is still a male dominated force with only about 14 percent being female. The military is continuously adjusting its care and environment to accommodate women. However, these same women are transitioning from the military becoming a growing percentage of the Veteran population.

Unfortunately, the programs designed to service Veterans has failed to meet the requirements of the women who have served this country. Women face different medical needs than men which require specialized care that should be available at any VA medical center regardless of location. Females react differently to the physical demands of war and require different treatment approaches than males.

Additionally, the differences in societal views on men and women put additional stresses on female Veterans that are transitioning from the military lifestyle back into civilian life. All of these challenges are unique to female Veterans and should be addressed in a manner that is beneficial to those Veterans not judged and dismissed by a system designed for men.

– Goldie Ann Johnson, “Fight for Veterans”

Introduction: “I Had Been a Soldier”

The topic that I would come to know as the heart of my dissertation study entered my class in public rhetoric at the University of West Florida in the form of Goldie Ann Johnson, although I did not suspect it at the time. From the seat she claimed, third from the podium, clear-eyed and attentive, Goldie wielded a formidable discursive style that was, to a teacher of 25 student writers required to be there, noted and bookmarked for later. A typical Goldie query

could be a loud “What????? You’re not taking points off for that, right?” or an urgently posed but thoughtful email:

I think I like the philosophical side of the things...Literature isn't my thing (there is never a solid meaning as different people interpret things differently.) I mean if there was a sentence of 'There is a Dog.' I would say the author wanted us to know there was a dog... but then out of left field someone would say the author is using the backward spelling of God to symbolize something... LOL! I can't do it! (Personal communication)

Goldie had introduced herself as a US Army veteran, and certainly veterans, male by default, are a common and expected demographic at this university campus in Pensacola, a town that put the Blue Angels and Grits a YaYa on the map of Florida. The lines of license plates from Virginia to Texas in the parking lots in Pensacola Beach attest to its cosmopolitan military nature. My own experience teaching veterans had shown me their determination and ethic to succeed. They did and do enact the argument of *Washington Post* reporter Alex Horton in his essay “On Getting By” from his blog *Army of Dude* in which he decries the immaturity of students younger than he who have not shared his experience of war, certainly, but also, in a larger sense, defines his history of making a life-changing decision and seeing it done. Now he writes as a means of studying that resolve and dealing with the astute person he has become:

There's a huge disparity between what you have been asked to do in the service and what you will be asked to do in school... Many of you were tasked with watching the back of your fellow soldiers while in imminent danger or operate complex machinery and vehicle. ... Once you transition to civilian life and take a few classes, you'll be astounded at the lack of discipline and drive in some of your classmates. It's a big joke, but try to maintain composure. I'm not saying it's easy the whole way through, but I guarantee

you've done something harder than a five -page essay. As they say, the rest is downhill.

(Army of Dude)

Horton's seeming dismissal of academic work is betrayed by his prowess in the rhetoric of public writing. I saw the same fierce ambition in the eyes of the veterans I met every day. It was, to me, their signature, their solitude, their way of claiming or reclaiming a life that mattered and used their experience as the means of moving forward deliberately in their chosen post-service career, be it law, marine biology, politics, teaching, or, in Goldie's case, technology. I interpreted her confrontational style as a re-enactment of military training or a transfer of battlefield to campus. I saw her persistent questioning as an imperfect adjustment from lockstep formations and concrete orders to the open-ended structures and creativity of the university writing class.

I was wrong – not only in my assumptions about Goldie's method of appraising course material and my practices both personally and pedagogically, but in my civilian suppositions about the tenor and intent of the veteran student's experience of university culture and discourse. Nor will I comment here on how embarrassingly far afield my image and knowledge of the female veteran in particular were from the panoply of stories I encountered later. Suffice it to say that my family, like most others, had its share of military men: my uncle, "The General," so-called by my irreverent Irish clan, in World War II; an artist turned medic, same war, among the troops that liberated Auschwitz which, quite literally, broke his 19-year-old heart; a guerilla fighter in Vietnam. But in my blue-collar family women had no military aspirations and commitments. The closest we came to military culture were annual treks to Fort Dix and Maguire Air Force Base for the 4th of July fireworks. Enter: Goldie Ann Johnson.



Figure 8 "Fight for Veterans." Goldie Ann Johnson's visual study in Public Writing 2015. Reprinted by permission of Goldie Ann Johnson.

I see now that my overall impersonal approach was built of a friendly but firm distance, and ignorance. Our trending practice of the automatic “Thank you for your service” typifies for me this odd blend of the well-meaning and the banal that serves as both welcome and dismissal by a world that “just didn’t understand the culture shock of leaving the military behind and being dumped head first into the civilian world” -- so Goldie wrote for us shortly after our class began (“Read All About It Pt. III”). Her story, supplemented by a collage entitled “Fight for Veterans” (see fig. 8), was and remains a remarkable document, the true response, perhaps, to memes of appreciation that circulate offers of support but stay safely on the outskirts of the terrain these veterans have traversed. The tone of her “Fight for Veterans” collage, which she presented to her younger civilian classmates, provided somber counterpoint to its neon yellow peals: “Ignored – Forgotten – Lost – Helpless.” Goldie read those words aloud and reinforced their *pathos* with the statement she positioned in the upper left from veteran Kevin Fistick, who brought his own message of abandonment to national media attention the year before Goldie found it: “They don’t know we exist. It’s very, very clear. It’s clear that we don’t exist.”

“Who Is Speaking?”

Her audience was transfixed. They support one another in these diverse exchanges, as together they learn how to transform deeply personal and often painful experience¹ into public language, or discourses. These discourses, in historian Michel Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge* which is useful here, are not “a mere intersection of things and words, (but) the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practices ... that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (48-49). In this respect Goldie’s collage and talk are both reflective and constitutive of veterans’ isolation and erasure in a self-conscious American culture whose military discourse is suffused with gratitude and recognition, “Thank you for your service.” Goldie’s classmates, aware of Horton’s “huge disparity” of military service mainly from high school textbooks, films like “Saving Private Ryan,” and games called “Battlefield,” listened intently. Citizens of Pensacola all, and some who came of age on military bases on a global stage, they no doubt knew something of issues that veterans face. Yet here was a former service member sitting in their ranks, a peer in that setting, opening the classroom door and unlocking a truth of post-tour duty. Whose truth Goldie revealed – its meaning and its implications – remained to be discovered. I did not know enough to know the kind of inquiry that her story portended. But in this context, Goldie’s written narrative explains the complicated way that a rhetoric, or conscious design, of encouragement and support could be experienced as extreme disconnection, “everyone saying I was strong and I could make it work after all, I had been a Soldier and had weathered many other more challenging situations” (“Read All About It Pt. III”).

¹ Their topics range from family violence, depression, incarceration, deaths of loved ones, to important discoveries in friendship, partnership, and their own spirit.

The capital letter “S” in Goldie’s statement demonstrates the expectations she faced now, post-service, representative and iconic rather than real, the *simulacrum* rather than human, avatar of a past that civilians cannot imagine or know. With a deft stroke of the shift key, Goldie created textually the duty American discourse imposes on veterans while precluding the distance or potential infliction of pain those words belie:

My world was crashing at my feet, and this made me feel like I was a failure. I held all this in as I didn’t think there was anyone who would understand or that would not label me as weak. I feared the judgment that others would pass on me (“Read All About It Pt. III”).

She wonders, at the same time, why no one is able to see “how downtrodden” she is, and offer “a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen” to the strains in her “melancholy soul” (“Read All About It Pt. III”). This admission, which Goldie acknowledges in this wake-up call of an early statement, could be applied to many veteran students who, she notes, “were in the same position I was” and needed not to be seen as standardized “Soldier” or icon or warrior trope that our culture imposes on those who feel erased by it. Goldie was not the only “melancholy soul” who walked the halls of academe, I realized – or indeed our city streets, suburban cul-de-sacs, and country roads. How much, I wondered, does our strident call to worship “the red white and blue” serve as the perfect foil for a lack of comprehension or human contact similar to an ignorance I was discovering with every word that Goldie offered us.

There was a more dramatic difference in this presentation, however, that startled the students listening, as well as their teacher – a difference that aligns with the first question Foucault posits, soon after offering his definition of discourse, for apprehending it: “Who is speaking?”

Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (*langage*)? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who – alone – have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? (*Archeology* 50)

The voice that day requiring that the class, without question, consider it “qualified,” accorded with the “prestige” and “status” that is “sanctioned” by tradition and “spontaneously accepted” was not a “he” – like the speaker Foucault pictures in his theoretical query – but *she*. And, remarkably, this particular “she” was creating before our eyes a discourse truly in the Foucauldian sense of the term – “not a mere intersection of words and things,” but more² – that contradicted and confounded what we thought we knew about the military field. Even the rhetorical convenience, “Thank you for your service,” however impersonal such memes may become or seem, reifies a culture’s lurking gender bias. In a recent *Washington Post* article, “Female Veterans Say It’s Their Time to Write the Memory of War,” veteran Jenny Pacanowski connects a gesture of erasure she identifies as “that crossover handshake” to that commonplace of gratitude:

‘You know the one, right?’ she said. ‘When some guy reaches right over me to shake hands with a nearby guy: ‘Thank you for your service,’ they say to the man next to me. Even though I’m an Iraq war veteran!’ she said, her voice rising almost like a preacher’s. ‘I’m the one who drove a military ambulance through the Sunni Triangle.’ She grew so

² “Of course discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is the ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe.” Foucault, Michel. “The Formation of Objects,” *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 49.

frustrated that she had ‘Combat Veteran’ tattooed on her right forearm. ‘I shoulda got it tattooed on my forehead.’ (Wax-Thibodeaux)

Her comrade Denyse Gordon, the first Ms. Veteran America, expresses the same frustration in the film, “Served Like a Girl”: “A lot of people don’t look at us as veterans. They look at us as nothing.” Likewise, Scott in her published blog, *To Iraq and Back*, tells us, at first philosophically, “People can’t help what they see. When they see a female, the mental association is not with being a soldier in our society” (226). As she continues to write, however, she becomes more succinct:

I feel like I’m doing a ‘me, too’ thing when I correct people if they leave me out. Invariably, they are surprised that I’m in the Army because ‘I don’t look like I’m in the Army.’ I’m not sure exactly what that means, but it’s irrelevant. I am in the Army. I am a combat veteran. And when they shake my husband’s hand and say ‘welcome home,’ I feel the lack of recognition. Maybe I shouldn’t. Maybe I should just accept it as what it is. But it still hurts. And it still feels wrong, for me and the thousands of women who’ve served with distinction just like our brothers. (226)

We, the class and I, were soon to learn that a female voice delivering a such a counterpunch was part of Goldie’s own strategic design:

‘What am I going to do? How much longer can I just sit around and wait for something to be done? Why won’t someone do something to help me? How do other Veterans deal with this nonsense?’ All of these thoughts were racing through my mind as I stared through the windshield of my car vacantly. I fight back tears of frustration and resign myself to sitting in my car for the last 38 minutes of the posted lunch hours of the VA clinic. (“Read All About It Pt. III” 2)

From this desolate moment Goldie defined a new mission, a crucial extension of her military commitment that answered her anguished questions, “What am I going to do? How do other Veterans deal with this this nonsense?” She determined to advocate for female veterans whose invisibility and silences she knew too well, even if she had to invent a new language – indeed, a new paradigm for storytelling -- to do it.

As we listened to Goldie’s story, the class and I were confronting our own questions: how to hear and understand the depth of the warrior story told in a woman’s voice. Our duty as audience was kairoitic in its most urgent sense: Goldie’s experience and the pain she shared as a woman veteran had no context that was known and available to us. The military was the kind of “knowledge structure, i.e., an episteme [Foucault, *Order*, xx-xvii) or noetic field [Berlin, *Writing*, 2],” described by Jarratt as the foundation or grounding for specific kinds of discourses (xvii), and in this circumstance the structure and the discourse had been since the time of the Greek *agon* entirely ruled by men. In her pioneering “Feminism and Methodology” Patricia A. Sullivan defines a position like Goldie’s within that reified and regimented masculine world: “Hers is an untold story – a story we’re not permitted to hear, an ‘other’ perspective we’re not allowed to share” (47). Sullivan’s argument, that “women’s experiences and ways of knowing have been suppressed” (51), applies to our deliberative attention to Goldie’s appeal: “I never thought that after serving ten years in the United States Army that I would be in a battle literally for my life. Yet there I was depressed, frustrated, and totally at the mercy of a system that didn’t seem to care about me” (“Read All About It Pt. III”). Directly relevant is Sullivan’s central query, What are women’s “distinctive modes of thinking and expression” (50) in this context”? At least for ourselves in that setting, we seemed to be inventing both question and answer at the same time as we apprehended Goldie’s story: How do we allow Goldie’s “experiences and perceptions and

meanings as the starting point of inquiry or as the key datum for analysis” (Sullivan 40-41) to become the discourse we recognize and accept as a valid one? How do we understand what Goldie shared with us as, in terms defined by Robert L. Scott in “On Viewing Rhetoric As Epistemic,” a valid “way of knowing; it is epistemic” (R. Scott 138; qtd. in Jarratt 8)? How, in the end, do we apprehend this story as an epistemology we can accept and value, even as the storyteller herself was aware, that “we simply do not know” (Sullivan 47)? Recall Goldie’s sense of abandonment as she confronts an unknown -- “What am I going to do?” – but needs to act decisively and quickly anyway, if only to save to her own life.

Epistemic Authority: “What Really Happened?”

The nature of knowing, of knowledge, is the focus of investigation in epistemology, explains Rutgers University professor of gender and women’s studies Mary Hawkesworth In *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*: “As developed over the past two thousand five hundred years in the Western tradition,” she notes, “epistemology has been concerned with complex questions: what is knowledge? What is the source of knowledge? Do the senses supply or does reason provide reliable knowledge of the world?” (18-19). This Athena study, from its inception in Goldie’s stories, serves a feminist purpose as well as a challenge to understand and address these “complex questions” about reliable knowledges and their source. In its insistence on “learning what (a woman) deems important to know, how (a woman) organizes and expresses knowledge, how (a woman) makes meaning in a world in which (she is) differentially situated as (a subject)” (Sullivan 40), the epistemology we were inventing together in that class was clearly feminist to its core. Hawkesworth, it must be noted, places a feminist epistemology firmly within the precincts of philosophy. Her inquiry is designed

to elicit a form of “objective” truth, which she defines as a “feminist conception of objectivity” (96). However, in its refusal of the notion of “universal truth” and objectivity in male-identified terms, and her delimited, indeed, contingent, idea of objectivity, her inquiry becomes, perhaps to her disciplinary displeasure or indifference, rhetorical. The standpoint theorist Donna Haraway remarks on this connection: “Feminist objectivity,” she notes, “means quite simply situated knowledges” (qtd. in Harding *Reader* 127). Akin to the discourse of scholars of rhetoric and epistemology, Hawkesworth considers this framing of objectivity to be in process and open to formerly excluded groups, whose experience of truth and in fact entire “knowledge structure” was considered “other” and either suppressed or marginalized (97; also Belenky; hooks; Jarratt; Lazar; Nayana; Spivak; many others who speak to this point in this study). Indeed, Hawkesworth’s analysis, despite its roots in the field of rhetoric’s ancient rival, philosophy, is identical to Robert L. Scott’s definition of a rhetorical epistemology, to wit: “a mode of reasoning and decision-making which allows humans to act in the absence of certainty or *a priori* truth” (qtd. in Jarratt 8), so that rhetoric becomes a way of knowing.

Further, the “alternate discourse” of Goldie’s narrative is precisely defined by Jarratt as a sophistic, since this particular “mode of reasoning and decision-making” has its source in the sophists for whom rhetorical thinking “permeated every topic” (13).³ From this perspective Goldie has been enabled to know “by acting and in action,” according to Robert L. Scott, a frequent reference for Jarratt, also in his essay “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic,” (Lucaites et al. 137). She states, “I am one of the women that has had the honor and privilege of serving our country. I faced many challenges and found myself in many difficult situations that should not have existed but none the less, I fought to meet any challenge that was thrown my way as many

³ Jarratt refers specifically to Protagoras and Gorgias as sophists in this passage (*Rereading* 13).

women did before me” (“Women Veterans: The Never Ending Battle”). The truth about the world she describes was not “fixed or final,” in Scott’s terms, but “created moment by moment in the circumstances in which she (found herself) and with which (she) must cope” (R. Scott 138). More than this: an epistemology defined as feminist and rhetorical defies the idealized and unitary belief in Truth (Goldie’s “Soldier” with the capital “S,” perhaps). Rather, it posits truth as one lived by different people with vastly different backgrounds, duties, interests, and values. It would be a mistake, as Uma Nayana reminds us in “The Project of a Feminist Epistemology,” to think that women’s ways of knowing, or what we’ve worked to define here as a feminist epistemology, is a “homogenous and cohesive enterprise” (213).

How To Hear a Woman’s Voice

This proposition is extended by rhetorician Barry Brummett, who notes that “production of knowledge is collective and intersubjective” (qtd. in Lucaites et al. 129) – a key insight in Goldie’s analysis when she speaks of her desire to communicate with others in their own diaspora who she suspects are enduring the same trauma, “and not lock it away” out of fear or shame (“Read All About It Pt. III”). Viewed in this light, rhetoric itself is an epistemology, a way of knowing through our contingent experiences, and in our sessions with Goldie, a way of learning how to discern her singular voice within centuries of male discourses of war and how to hear and read her particular stories. If, as Nayana has posited, women are excluded from areas of human activity seen as male, then “mainstream theories about human knowledge (are) one-dimensional and deeply flawed because of the exclusion of women” (in Harding *Reader* 213).

Women servicemembers, Goldie informs us in terms reminiscent of Germano (45), are different. An excerpt from Goldie’s class paper, “Women Veterans: The Never-Ending Battle,”

articulates this point and its crucial importance in the armed services (and by extension, the American) context:

There was a commentary featured in the New York Times in which the author stated ‘but stories (stet) about female veterans are nearly absent from our culture. It's not that their stories are poorly told. It's that their stories are simply not told in our literature, film and popular culture’ (H, 2014). This writer perfectly captured the common challenge faced by most women Veterans in that single statement. The role of women in war is often depicted as that of nurses or support personnel. It is very rare to see a woman portrayed on the front lines of the battlefield, involved in fire fights and defending her comrades. This lack of acknowledgement further complicates life for female Veterans when they return home, struggling to fit into the caring and supportive roles that society has carved out for them. Women Veterans should not have to hide the wounds of war, invisible or not, in order to fit into what society wants. (2)

Goldie’s presentation and her ensuing projects and communications on the complex situation of her sisters in arms called me to enlist in this particular study as the subject of my dissertation. As noted, I knew nothing about their lives, from their decision to become that “Soldier” – still a figure in my mind, as Goldie’s use of the capital “S” had signified – to their story of service and beyond, to a seat in my Florida classroom and other civilian settings which, I was learning, might not be able discursively to accommodate them: “Females react differently to the physical demands of war and require different treatment approaches than males,” Goldie told us. As I pondered the information I was receiving, I observed Goldie assert her authority and create in front of us her sense of urgency and mission to challenge what seemed to be deliberate

ignorance, I found myself repeating the same word that she herself repeats more than any other in her early story: “Why?”

This manifestly needed act of learning how to hear and heed and talk about the stories I suspected were, if told, unread and perhaps unrecognized as valid even by their tellers, led to the invention of this chapter as transition from "Introduction" to "Method." I wanted to look first at the study of women veterans' texts as an epistemology. It seemed and seems a crucial step in studying the discourses of women service members to examine the ways that knowledge of this topic, these stories, was kindled in these authors. And I was aware of a similar process of learning to recognize the authority of Goldie's voice and trust my own perceptions – in Hawkesworth's terms, adjudicate the truth they told me (76 *passim*): how do I come to know the discourses and rhetorics of a world I have not experienced as an eye-witness or participant? How do I justify my methods of approach and apprehension? How do I posit my conclusions and present informed beliefs and possible discoveries?

In short: how do I know that I know what I am talking about? No doubt in prior theses, prior years, I had assumed entitlement to topics plucked too easily, perhaps, from texts and lectures and marathon hours of reading student work. I had not questioned my ability or authority to understand and speak of histories and theories that appealed to me, from Dorothy Wordsworth and the standpoint paradigm that allowed me to argue her agency in my master's thesis, to critical discourse analyses of my students' multimodal texts, the political commitment I believed their work delineated, which had been my stated “dissertational” goal for at least ten years and the focus of published tracts and conference presentations.

“The Right to Her Own Story”

The question of “what counts as knowing” and who has validity as “knower” first confronted me head-on in a graduate class in pedagogy when I presented, as evidence of rhetorical argument, a selection of my students’ visual compilations on the topic of the “Dream America,” a course and a project I considered my signatures -- perhaps with too much hubris, relying on my prior 30 years as a writing teacher for an *ethos* I assumed confidently. A small but vocal group of younger colleagues (who had, it must be noted, never taught writing in any mode) challenged the validity of those visual texts – “How do you know they say what you think?” – and laughed at the texts they were holding. My students had written rhetorical analyses of their visuals, so I was able to quote their own description of design and intent, which then led another student to question the decision to allow students to design their own visual work without imposing a uniform structure, a more prescriptive writing pedagogy that does not happen to be mine. I learned in those disconcerting discussions to interrogate my own presuppositions and be prepared to defend them: how indeed do I know a particular kind of story? How do I justify the information in a story like Goldie’s? How does a student become a legitimate subject?⁴ At what point and through what agency does a speaker or writer become a “knower”? How do I show the ways those stories might work? How do I replicate the kind of listening and reading others’ stories that were and are an integral part of my pedagogy, one that does not impose an *a priori* point of view or uniform standard and respects the voice of its author, in this particular inquiry? I came to this decisive place unsure about the basic, not to mention theoretical, ways to read

⁴ See Brodkey *passim*.

discourses like Goldie's that I knew, on some level, however as yet unresearched, were "out there, somewhere."

Where I started, as indeed I begin this exploration of this project's epistemology, was with the fact of the narrative itself, in this instance, Goldie's visual and written texts, her "epistemic authority" in telling us "what really happened" to her, to use the discourse analyst Ken Hyland's framing (15). The *New York Times* reporter Wil S. Hylton describes this endeavor succinctly in a study of his own that seems fitting to me as central to my own project: "This is a story about storytelling – about the stories we choose to tell and the way we tell them."⁵ What I cared about – what I have always believed distinguished me as a teacher of writing in high schools and universities and my own independent seminars -- has been and is the right to invent and deliver one's story for oneself. This ideology, despite its seeming relevance in a culture founded on the principles of "liberty and the pursuit of happiness" and first-amendment rights, can be uneasily translated into practice: stories can be and, in this project, are unsettling. Stories can be disbelieved. We often much prefer our own *mythos*, such as the Soldier iconography, the stereotype that serves to keep us comfortable and distant, rather than the factual account that disturbs an equilibrium we are accustomed to. Goldie realized that telling her story "would open the door to criticism," which is why she feared to reveal her feelings to others ("Read All About It Pt. III").

However, just as pertinent to my investigation here is the focal point defined by Smith (in "Chapter One Introduction") as "women's experiences told in women's words" (Harding *Reader* 265): I carried with me an ideology that I defined as "feminist" and aligned, by Heilbrun among

⁵ With this sentence Hylton introduces his article, "Down the Brietbart Hole," in the 16 August 2017 edition of the *New York Times*.

others, “a woman’s selfhood” with the “right to her own story” (17). This standpoint has also been considered counter-intuitive even in research in rhetoric and composition studies. For example, as Sullivan notes, the researcher typically diagnoses an object of inquiry, and “nowhere ... is the woman herself allowed to speak” (47). I believed that the manifesto of Belenky and her co-authors⁶ of *Women’s Ways of Knowing* in 1986 was still relevant as both impetus and warning for researchers into women’s discourses today: “Along with academic feminists, we believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by the male-dominated majority culture” (5).

The Voices of “Equal, But Marginalized Partners”

Thus, this introduction on epistemology traces my own often meandering path, through theoretical assumptions that informed my prospectus of Autumn 2016 and forays into ethnographic field work, both of which seemed pat, too quickly decided, and not exactly my intent or interest. I was not interested in the story written by military culture, but in the collage of narratives – like my students’ visual compilations of “Dream America” in that long-ago pedagogy class. This process offered the potential to enact a tenet I had always found intriguing, as a scholar and teacher of writing, in Bakhtin’s dialogic theory of language, i.e., how our discourses are multivocal, multivalent, comprised of ideas, values, and words that have come to us from multiple sources both unknown and known, past and present, in both discord and harmony. It may be, as Hawkesworth notes, that they do not “offer an authoritative technique that can guarantee the production of truth” (96). I needed to find a way of learning how to read these narratives correctly, with respect to their potentiality as a genre, their own type of

⁶ Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule

storytelling, and not impose my biases beyond the convictions I could not shake, essential to my own identity as the writer here. The research needed to proceed on two parallel paths that often seemed convergent, with neither previously mapped and both of equal significance: the discourses that women create in the male domain of the U.S. military as equal but marginalized partners (Hawkesworth 96); and how we come to know how to hear their voices.

“Go Out on a Public Platform and Announce to the World What I Felt”

“Power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter”: these words I have taped in my workspaces, be they rooms or screens, and quoted in my writing since I first encountered them as a high school writing teacher fighting for the integrity of a class I had created and designed, and others were determined to control.⁷ Perhaps, if I am honest, they serve as my own manifesto, the impetus behind my pursuit of this subject and my commitment to it. These words sustained my sense of balance as I countered the amusement of my colleagues in pedagogy class many years later. They come from Heilbrun in her classic, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (18). These ideas became a rudimentary map, and I the cautious but alert cartographer, as I began to look out from Goldie’s introduction, look again at stories women veterans had imparted in my classes, design a series of salient questions to ask them, trace the memoirs and biographies in publication, the films in public and independent production, the multiplicity of articles and opinions, and find what seemed to me the most precise and salient method and methodology to work with these essential

⁷ This class, the Pennington Writing Seminar, won numerous awards for scholastic publications as did its students, whose work was both published and staged. The process of inventing and designing this radically distinctive class – which students often attended from grade 6 to 12, several classes each day, in multi-grade and multi-age configurations – is described in the article, “Hello, Writers” in the NAIS publication, *Independent School*.

texts. They were, I suspected from the plaintive appeals in Goldie's introduction, hidden in "all the murky and scary shadows" that novelist and scholar Alix Kates Shulman has noted as the state of women's storytelling (qtd. in Cowley). Ironically, though, these feminist scholars, Heilbrun and Shulman, were drawing a portrait of an era that had seemed long past, before the word "feminist" was common in both critical and public discourses, and women spoke of "raising consciousness" and "liberation" in ways we have come to view as archaic (Cowley). Yet their arguments seemed not only urgent but kairotic once again, when once again, in the words of another early activist, Kathie Sarachild (who recast her last name to denote lineage from her mother), we need "the realization that women, not male scientific authorities or political leaders, (are) the true experts on their own lives" (Cowley).

Indeed, pioneering standpoint theorist, the late Nancy Hartsock of the University of Washington, argues in *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited* that "the position of women is structurally different from that of men (with) epistemological consequences" (106-107). By using the word "different," Goldie is articulating for us not only the story of her experience, the way she came to understand herself and her world through her military service, but also the way that the discourses of such discrete and reified worlds can shift as we question who is, in fact, a legitimate subject; who has the agency to speak; who can be a "knower." In Jarratt's terms, our understanding of the world from which Goldie delivers her messages was drawn as a patriarchal discourse with "clear generic distinctions, a hierarchy of logical systems" and "tight control" over the kinds of practices and responses demanded and allowed (*Rereading* 72). By lifting her voice beyond a structure closed to its sound and substance, Goldie is opening for us, and for herself, a new epistemic field, one that demonstrates her "way of knowing" as valid, albeit a story that defied and possibly threatened a culture she valued. Through verbal, visual, and

performative rhetorics, Goldie reclaims for herself the value of her own experience (Nayana 214), certainly. But she also enacts the kind of alternative discourse that augers change in an epistemic field formerly dominated by male valences and voices only. She introduces “generic diversity ... reliance on narrative ... a holistic psychology of communication” and an emphasis on the relation between the storyteller and audience (Jarratt 72).

With Goldie’s presentation I think we witnessed the first stirring of something we in the world of language theory call “agency,” i.e., the power to act with volition and purpose. In Kenneth Burke’s “dramatistic pentad,” which consists of the five elements essential to a story of human endeavor, agency denotes the way the actor, or agent, performs her act with specific intent under certain compelling circumstances (*Grammar* xv-xvi). Agency might, in classical terms, be considered intrinsic to *kairos*, i.e., how someone responds to the “fierce urgency of now ... the urgency of the moment,” as Martin Luther King, Jr., schooled in the power of rhetoric, has called the act of seizing the right opportunity to speak, in “I Have a Dream.” This moment of Goldie’s awareness of having “the gumption to go out on a public platform and announce to the world what I felt” is infused with agency, telling us a story we had never heard, astonishing us. Thus, she claims her space in multiple discourses: academic, certainly, given our circumstances, but also feminist, military, and an American *nomos* that, in Goldie’s words, empowers “the person that speaks out and allows others to know what I think and feel ... the only true way to learn from those around me and expose others to the knowledge that I have obtained” (“Read All About It Pt. III”). We see enacted on an open stage in that classroom her response to conditions that in her view were untenable:

I never thought that after serving ten years in the U.S. Army that I would be in a battle literally for my life.... Thoughts of freedom from pain and misery flooded my mind I

looked at myself (and) am shocked, how had I let myself sink so low? Why couldn't anyone see how downtrodden I was and offer a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen? ("Read All About It Pt. III").

Awareness of the ways these accounts were marginalized in our culture was a point, I now realize, Goldie is reaching. It was only by determining to speak with "this new courage" that she "discovered something amazing": "I was not the only one fighting the battles within myself" ("Read All About It Pt. III").

Not a Victim's Tale

Having emerged to public view, Goldie focused the rest of that semester on her central concern – veterans who were women – and delineated the absence of these stories in particular from our cultural discourses. She built her case and substantiated her claim with critiques that documented this enforced silence, in particular commentary by C. Hoffman in the *New York Times* entitled "The Things They Carried": "It's not that their stories are poorly told. It's that their stories are simply not told in our literature, film, and popular culture" ("Women Veterans: The Never-Ending Battle"). Goldie decries "the complete and utter disregard for the unique needs of women who have served" and developed the ideas she expressed to our class in a major position paper, "Women Veterans: The Never-Ending Battle," referenced throughout this chapter. This text still serves as a clarion call for recognition of women in all areas and aspects of military service:

Women are a significant part of our military forces and serve with the same distinction as men. It is time that we stop reveling in the past ideologies that women are not in combat and face the reality that women fill many roles in the military and deserve recognition

and care that is catered to their specific need. Society must stop sweeping women under the rug and allow their service and sacrifice to be honored” (“Women Veterans” 3).

However, Goldie’s narratives, replete with heart-rending accounts of loneliness and pain, are not simply a victim’s tale. They are more than stories of endurance and survival. From the moment I first heard them, I was sure of it. I agreed with scholar of this discourse, Mariana Grohowski, who argues compassionately and compellingly that “writing and sharing their stories might challenge these disparaging statistics and illustrate a less victimized understanding of servicewomen and female veterans’ experiences” (“Reconciliation” 197).

“’Cause We All Matter, Too”

My topic is discovery, a word that would gain more traction than I at first imagined before I sorted through the methods available to analyze this discourse and realized I had known it all along. My story is how I learned to recognize what Goldie calls “the knowledge I had obtained,” and, consequently, how I learned effective methods to identify the information and attempt to establish its validity as data to be analyzed and theorized. I found similar knowledge and, indeed, a distinctive brand of military knowledge in the storytelling of Goldie’s contemporaries, both students and published authors, who discuss their service. What I knew, or thought I knew, was overturned and subverted by the ways these stories seem to read not only the thoughts and feelings of their authors, but also their cultural contexts, both military and more broadly American. The writer Eudora Welty has entitled an exegesis on the process of writing *The Eye of the Story*: to me these narratives present a specific way of seeing and knowing that subverted, too, the larger cultural assumptions that problematize the veteran who seems to be guilty of “serving while female,” if she is recognized at all. Certainly, as this study must include

in its discussion, women veterans experience crisis and trauma that shape their knowledge of military culture. Narratives of assault, PTSD, and homelessness become as well our public awareness of the lives of women service members, which enables many of us to justify resistance to women's enlisting in the first place. However, Goldie's presentation, "Fight for Veterans," and her research project that labels women veterans' experience as the "Never-ending Battlefield" are not, nor do I think they were intended to be, stories of pain and struggle only. Conflict is not the focal point of her accounts, the place where all the energies of her accounts are directed. And this complexity was and remains a revelation to me.

Rather, she centers her narratives on a decisive strength, a determination not to heed the dictates of others. Her public and unvarnished stories are the evidence of her refusal to become invisible in Shulman's "murky shadows," Sarachild's overweening male interpretations. Goldie identifies a song by the artist Emele Sande, "Read All About It Part III," as the catalyst for changing what she calls "her view of life," and it seems instructive to present the song lyrics in full because of the power of their epistemological role as teacher, for Goldie, who in turn showed us how hear a warrior woman's voice:

I wanna sing, I wanna shout
 I wanna scream 'til the words dry out
 So put it in all of the papers,
 I'm not afraid
 They can read all about it
 Read all about it, oh
 At night we're waking up the neighbors
 While we sing away the blues

Making sure that we're remembered, yeah

'Cause we all matter too

It could be argued that the song serves to anneal a will and desire to communicate her discoveries and experiences that Goldie is ready to recognize in herself – how she learns to discern the knowledge in herself and affirm its rhetorical power to evoke action and change:

I had adopted the mentality of not speaking my mind for fear of criticism, disappointing others or judgement. This was mainly due to my military time, doing what I was told and not creating friction that could possibly damage my career. Transitioning out the military had not changed that within me and thus I found myself alone and unable to communicate what I thought or felt. This song made me realize that if I expected a change to occur or expected others to know what I was experiencing then I had to share it with others and not lock it away. (“Read All About It Pt. III”)

With this brief but powerful text Goldie shows me the error of my own glib assumptions as a teacher of military students regardless of gender: the tough exteriors I encountered were not all or even necessarily the battlefield transferred to class, as I had supposed. Rather, I needed to appreciate that they might be, as Goldie explains, the enactment of a decision made in moments of post-service isolation: she found her fellow sojourners, she notes, as she herself determined to speak out, “to share pieces of myself with others,” to “(allow) others to know what I think and feel,” and tellingly, “to get through my rough times and make forward progress in my life, ... no longer sit back and let others dictate my future” (“Read All About It Pt. III”). That is, she forms the capacity to tell her story “her own way.”

Perhaps it was my over-sensitivity to the issue of “who is speaking here” – the way one relates every word one reads and every picture one sees to the topic at hand: how everything

devolves on that one subject, every Sunday paper headline, every song, every interview you hear or book you read or film you see. But I noticed immediately and warily that the author of the *Washington Post* article noted earlier, Wax-Thibodeaux, announcing that the time had arrived for women veterans to speak their truths, has used as proof of her hypothesis the declaration of a retired male soldier, Peter Molin, who decries the “toxic male world of the American military.” He then remarks that “(war) is definitely an entrenched male tradition in the country’s popular mind. And it’s just wrong because it hides (women’s) outstanding contributions” (Wax-Thibodeaux). Of course, Peter Molin’s words are true, and he is a noted scholar of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: perhaps it would not do to quote only women who experience this suppression that he speaks of. I will, however, note the article’s title – “Female Veterans Say It’s Their Time” – which seems to focus this particular story on women’s commentary and the *kairos* of their right to speak up on their own behalf. I do wonder, as the text shifts from anecdotal and colorful (i.e., the tattooed arm) to serious cultural critique (“entrenched male tradition”), why the voice that weighs in first – indeed, is foregrounded – is male.

“Making Sure That We’re Remembered”

I myself, in depicting the context in which I first heard Goldie’s voice, the discourse to which I ascribed, unthinkingly, began my own process of learning with the one and only veteran’s story on my academic reading list, Alex Horton’s “Army of Dude.” The progression Goldie recounted that semester, from moments sitting directionless in her car to speaking out for herself and the veterans she feared were as lost as she had been, was for me an interior journey. What I learned and needed to learn was that women had made the same decisions and served with equal commitment and fervor as their male comrades – and were beginning to tell their

stories. I learned that the women knew their stories were unacknowledged and underreported, that they knew the truth of the insight offered by Belenky et al: “Silent women have little awareness of their intellectual capabilities. They live – selfless and voiceless – at the behest of those around them. External authorities know the truth and are all powerful” (134). For the women in the Athena study, those “external authorities” that endanger their power of speech are paradoxically part of a structure these woman esteem. Paradoxically, too, their discourse shows that they occupy a position of equal, but marginalized, as noted previously from Hawkesworth. But, in a phrase I would come to hear often so that it became a mantra infusing all stories with the complexity and nuance of their existence as women who entered a male domain deliberately – they “did it anyway.”⁸ Germano, in *Fight Like a Girl*, offers the facts behind that recurring statement:

In February 2012 The Defense Department decided women could be on the ground with combat units that were likely to engage in direct combat. They were already filling 315 or 337 available job specialties. They were obviously serving in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and they had done so years before, during Desert Storm in 1991. But the Defense Department had not looked specifically at women in combat since 1992, during the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces. (27)

⁸ Kirsten Holmstedt argues, in *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq*, that “there have always been women in combat, but not in the United States” (xviii). It should be noted that Athena women contest this claim, and some, like Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Germano, and Eileen Rivers, offer empirical evidence that women “did it anyway.” What is clear is that women servicemembers themselves present a discourse of active engagement of women in battle that often contrasts with official accounts. Notable here in this study is the belief that American culture does not easily accept the idea of women in combat, which could influence the data. Indeed, Germano argues in *Fight Like a Girl* that her success in training female Marine recruits for battle caused her to be fired from her command on Parris Island. “As a woman,” she writes, “you’re damned if you do, and you’re damned if you don’t” (45).

Paradoxically, in Germano's account, the Marines were unable to tolerate the success of her recruits on tests where women were expected to fail, and thus she lost her command of a battalion of female recruits on Parris Island.

As a scholar-in-progress of this emergent field of study I balk at the transition Wax-Thibodeaux constructs between Molin's claim and the comments of Kayla Williams, former head of the VA Center for Women Veterans, who is quoted here in support of Molin's insight: "How can anyone know we even existed when our history is hidden?" Her words are introduced by the author's statement that "female veterans have also written about (male military culture)" – and I react fiercely at the word "also" when applied to Kayla, who writes in the prologue of her 2005 memoir, *Love My Rifle More Than You*: "I wanted to write a book to let people know what it *feels* like to be a woman soldier in peace and in war":

I wanted to capture the terror, the mind-numbing tedium; and the joy and the honor. Not overlooking the suicidal periods, the anorexic impulses, the promiscuity; and the comradeship and the bravery. The times we were scared out of our minds. The times we were bored out of our minds, too. No one has ever written that book – about what life is like for the 15 percent. (15)

Thus, this apparently liberatory article, women service members at last recounting their lives "in peace and in war," seemed to me to reify the issue it seeks to publicize and reverse. I have no objection to males contributing expertise or observation to this emergent field of study – and from a certain point of view males in the military might offer useful insight to women's experience. But are his comments here positioned to add *gravitas*; are his comments presented as the central claim? Alert to nuances, currently called "microaggressions," that covertly diminish the signal importance of a person, I keenly felt that Kayla Williams is not an "also." Her 2005

text can be credited with creating the distinctive and nascent genre of the military woman claiming “the right to her own story,” and “in her own voice.” It was Kayla Williams’ storytelling that established these women as “knowers” whose experiences were on a different field of battle altogether than those of their male comrades; and yet, they served the same mission, committed to the same cause, slept on the same ground, spoke – at times of severe constraint or complete freedom – the same language.

It was from that vantage point that I embarked on my study of how women experience the U.S. military -- and it was through Goldie’s voice that I learned how to understand the stories these women are telling: “*At night we're waking up the neighbors / While we sing away the blues / Making sure that we're remembered, yeah / 'Cause we all matter too.*”

CHAPTER THREE

Method: “Going In at Ground Zero”

Fuck you, Douglas. – Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You*

Proving Ground: Kayla Williams

When I wrote my first book, Love my Rifle, I had no real sense of what I was doing. I'm still active duty, and I was thinking of it partly in just very personal terms. I wrote really terrible poetry in high school, and writing and journaling and writing poetry was something that I did to process what I was feeling. Doing that with my military experience, and in particular my wartime experience, seemed fairly natural to me. I journaled the entire time I was in Iraq. I wrote extensive paper letters home because I was part of the initial invasion, so we didn't have computer access in the same way that a lot of folks did later. I was sending multi-page paper letters home to family and friends.

One of the folks I had been in touch with had been one of my professors in undergrad, and he said, 'If you ever thought about publishing a book, this is a story that hasn't been told.' He said, 'Look, everybody knows what it's like for a man to go to war, but this story, the one you're sharing with me in letters, is one that I haven't seen published.' He knew an agent, and that's the path that I took towards the book becoming a published book.

It wasn't until later that I was really able to put it in a bigger context. It wasn't until later that I was telling my publisher that I put it in a bigger context, and they said they want my book to be 'the female Jarhead.' I had never read Jarhead, and after they said that, I consciously didn't read it until I was done with mine because I didn't want it to influence what I was doing. But that was kind of an early hint that they didn't even conceive of a way to frame my experience that wasn't just the female version of a man's experience.

– Kayla Williams, Personal interview



Figure 9 Kayla Williams. Photo courtesy of Kayla Williams.

Introduction: “I Want to Be Able to Push Myself”

A young woman in a dusty town in rural Alabama, raised by a single mother who admits, “It hurts, but you’re going to need to do something.”

A student at loose ends in the port city of San Diego, assured by a roommate that the Army provides the answer to questions that keep her awake at night: “What am I going to do, how am I going to do this, what are my options?”

A Florida teenager looking to be “badass,” a word she delivers ten years later with a half-smile, and “cool enough” to evoke the admiration of her friends in high school.

A trained athlete working the counter at Arby’s, dreaming of how she can “find adventure and travel the world.”

A gifted scholar whose English teacher tells her she will never amount to anything because of a disagreement about *Moby Dick* – whereupon this south Georgia junior dumps her books on the teacher’s desk, and says, “I quit.”

A girl in Salt Lake City who calls herself “small, weak” and “average” and wonders how she can “beat all the boys who had a bigger bicep than both my scrawny arms together,” spending “endless hours” in the gym and on trail runs.

A daughter of a Navy captain and professor in Oregon, committed to a legacy of service.

A child with a legacy of a more pernicious American kind, “born poor and Black in the South,” who yearns “to find meaning” in her life.

A server at Applebee’s enraged at the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York: “Who does that? Who kills families?”

A Catholic high school student in Rhode Island enraged by the death, on a weekend beach vacation, of a beloved parent, hoping to “make my dad proud.”

A graduate student intending to enter the Foreign Service, who did not expect to “fall in love” with the camaraderie of military teams.

These snapshots mark the beginnings of the powerful stories, each one distinct, each precisely rendered down to the time of day, the clean slices of dialogue, in which these women and their “camouflaged sisters” in arms (a term coined by Lila Holley, *Camouflaged* series) recount their decisions to enlist in the U.S. military and enter their statements into this American Athena project.

The women I interviewed in personal meetings, each in her turn, seem to combine attention and ease as they sit across an academic conference table from me, permission forms and a digital recorder on its tripod between us, surrounded by signs of my trade as a writing teacher – their teacher, in most cases: walls of wooden shelves, stacks of journals, booksets, shaded lamps, a podium, and, in 2017, technical props in the form of a media system on which several have shown video stories of their military lives. These women feel at home in academic settings, having parleyed their service into careers as students and social activists in this university town. Those at a distance – from D.C., Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Carolina -- prove themselves adept with academic technology that allows them instantly to share responses to my questions about their veteran origin story: “The decision to join the U.S. Marine Corps was the biggest, and best, decision I ever made in my life,” notes Lindsay Allen (Written interview). Or, like D. Alexis Hart, they become voices on my speakerphone as I devise sentences from memories: “At one point in my young life I had the idea that I wanted to be an astronaut, and I knew that you could be chosen if you were a navy pilot,” she tells me (Personal interview). I had designed what seemed to me a logical series of initial questions as a teacher sets up her fact questions at the start of a course: to relax the women I was interviewing by

routine and rote recitations: “Tell me about enlisting. Describe your uniform,” I say. These questions are tactical throwaways: “ice breakers,” in teacher parlance, to which we nod and smile, while internally we compose the first assured line of our first lecture, our first move toward control of the class. The basic set of questions I devise to pose to them are these:

1. Define the branch of the armed services that you joined, your position, your uniform, and how you felt wearing it. Please describe your decision to enter the military.
2. Describe your experience as woman service member. How would you describe yourself at that time?
3. The U.S. military has been described, by scholars in the field of women veterans’ studies, as “a culture that salutes the marginalization and inequality of women.” What is your response to this statement?
4. After their deployment, female veterans have described themselves, in both public and private writings, as “invisible” and “underserved” – is that description true in your view?¹

But I am not “first” in this setting; nor am I in control. I ask the questions, check the red light on the recorder, and immediately the storystorms begin -- “I quit school ..” -- “Yeah, I enlisted in high school” -- with a tidal wave of aspirations, admissions, mistakes, decisions, determinations, dreams, duties, and hard-earned resolutions that could and often did overpower and overrun our allotted hour together. How does an interviewer not become immersed in stories like Tabitha Nichols’ account of returning to high school after a summer of basic training:

I felt like another person. Stepping into my classes that first day I felt like I don’t belong here anymore. I don’t know -- I felt like I grew up 10 years over the summer. I’m a soldier now, I’ve been through a lot, they’ve trained us, I’m an adult, even though I’m not an adult yet, and y’all are kids, y’all are arguing and talking about silly stuff and do y’all

¹ The complete interview protocol, including the prepared follow-up questions and later additions, is attached as Appendix 1. How I presented this material in the interview setting is described in the process section of this chapter.

know what I've just been through? Kinda felt a little bit out of place. But all the kids thought that was cool. It was part of your identity? Yeah. (Personal interview)

I learn that the words "Tell me about your decision" are not neutral ground.

"Thank you for sitting for this interview," I say.

"I couldn't wait to start," Amber Nadeau tells me: "It was honestly always the desire to feed myself. I love my mother very, very much but she's always dependent on men. I love my dad very, very much, but he's given everything he's had for women. I want to be able to push myself and have whatever I need." (Personal interview)

Grounded Theory Process: "Telling the Story Their Own Way"

This study presents a Grounded Theory (GTM) analysis of narratives collected from these 29 personal interviews and conversations as well as consultations of 70 published sources in which women describe and interpret their experiences as enlisted personnel in the U.S. military. This method, developed in the 1960's by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss for use in medical sociology, focuses on the ways that "social actors in real situations produce their meanings" (Glaser "Choosing Grounded Theory"), in the words of the Athena study, "telling the story their own way." Its purpose, as Charmaz elucidates, is "to learn about research participant concerns from their perspectives rather than impose a preconceived structure on them" ("Constructivist" 172). Charmaz, whose extensive work informs my project, explains that this method analyzes a process in which the "grounded theorists cannot ascertain in advance where our analysis will take us" (172; also, *Constructing Grounded Theory* 216). Through specific stages of inquiry, the researcher develops a "theoretical analysis of (data) from intensive interviews, personal narratives, case studies, and field observations" ("Constructivist" 167).

Indeed, the precept that “all is data” is identified by Glaser himself as a “basic tenant (sic) of grounded theory ... that particularly grabs its devotees” (qtd. in Goldberg 6) and I admire and believe it fundamentally, too. “Data,” Glaser instructs, consists of “the briefest comment, to the lengthiest interview, written words in magazines, books and newspapers, documents, observations, biases of self and others, spurious variables, or whatever else may come the researcher’s way in (her) substantive area of research.” In “Chapter Three Method: ‘Going in at Ground Zero’” I describe my process of discovery: how I decided that the Grounded Theory method (GTM) offers the most relevant and revelatory reading of the material proffered by these women, and how I designed the protocols of my research to render the theory most salient to the understanding and utility of that data.

In pursuit of this discovery my analysis accords with Sandra Harding’s distinction between method and methodology in her collection, *Feminism and Methodology*. Harding stipulates that method is a technique or tool for gathering information and material, and methodology is “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (“Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?” 3). I admire the precision of this distinction, particularly in light of the Grounded Theory method that was most efficacious for the Athena project. In serendipitous agreement with Harding’s idea is a comment by Adele E. Clarke, a GTM scholar as well, who argues that this process is not in fact a methodology, but a mode of inquiry, “a way of having ideas on the basis of empirical research” (346, quoting Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, and Sara Delamont²). After engaging in this process these insights seem true to me. Therefore, the method I will describe in Chapter Three is spatially separate from the ensuing “Chapter Four Methodology,” but the two chapters align and define the ways I conceptualize and proceed in this

² *Key Themes in Qualitative Research: Continuities and Changes*. Lanham: Altamira Press, 2003.

study. I apply these ideas to my own order of work as I describe the collection of data and, within the context of grounded method, identify the ideas within the stories that lift them to a theoretical level. GTM both promises and requires this protocol. I intend to show how this rigorous process leads to the specific epithet that becomes the title of this study, “American Athena,” and further supports its framing as a “Feminist Sophistic” analysis of discourses that carry more critical and cultural weight than has been previously acknowledged in the literature of this cohort of women.

Reflexivity, The Athena Women, & Me: "Going In at 'Ground Zero'"

“I don’t take prior successes for granted,” Lila Holley, author of the *Camouflaged Sisters* anthologies, tells me. “I go in at Ground Zero with a clean slate knowing that I have to come in proving myself, so I can’t come in taking anything for granted. That comes with sacrificing, it comes with long hours, that these are the standards you placed on yourself, that (the U.S. Military) is the work you dedicated yourself to, this is the extra stuff I have to do to just be on the same playing field with my peers, my counterparts” (Personal interview). Lila is one of 29 servicewomen who have volunteered to participate, either as formal respondents or commentators, in my dissertation study, “American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers.” This project is sanctioned by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of the University of Washington (UW) and the University of West Florida (UWF), where the research is situated, and supported by the 2018 Andrew Hilen Fellowship for research in the Social Sciences. The study is comprised of 99 narratives – the 29 personal interviews and / or conversations, augmented and / or contextualized by 70 published accounts -- in which servicewomen describe their decision to enlist and their experience of military culture.

Like Lila, I too entered this field “at Ground Zero,” needing to “come in proving myself,” and this section, known formally as a statement of Reflexivity, will consider “the implications of the identity of the researcher for data collection and analysis,” as Stephanie Taylor, scholar of research methodology at the Open University in the UK, explains in “Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research?” (in Wetherell et al. 16).

The principle of Reflexivity requires the researcher to examine the ways that her biography and theoretical positions have the capacity to affect her investigations and, in turn, her data.³ It is based on the conviction that research cannot be detached from the person conducting it. Feminist scholar Gloria T Hull commends the researcher to remember that her work is not an academic/intellectual “game, but a pursuit with social meanings rooted in the ‘real world’ (qtd. in Ascher 109). Indeed, feminist rhetorician Patricia Bizzell sounds a note of appreciation for “bringing the person of the researcher, her body, her emotions, and dare one say, her soul into the work” (Schell in Schell and Rawson 4). Less poetically, perhaps, but equally willing to acknowledge the humanity of the researcher, Lea Tufford and Peter Newman, in their work with qualitative research, contend that “inevitably transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions and theories (hereafter referred to collectively as preconceptions) (occur) within and across the research projects” (81). This argument challenges the stance of researchers, like Barney Glaser himself, who argue that a position of neutrality is possible and required toward respondents and their stories (Charmaz; Glaser; *passim*). Qualitative researchers like Tufford and Newman reject that more astringent approach and argue for a process known as “bracketing,”

³ In standpoint theory, as discussed by Sandra Harding in “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology,” the function of reflexivity is akin to the work of “strong objectivity”: “All thought by humans starts off from socially determinate lives,” she remarks, and quotes Dorothy Smith whose words are relevant here: “Women’s perspective ... discredits sociology’s claim to constitute an objective knowledge independent of the sociologist’s situation. Its conceptual procedures, methods, and relevances are seen to organize its subject matter from a determinate position in society” (emphasis mine *Reader* 129).

intended to protect the research from the inquisitor and “the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process” (80). “Bracketing” essentially requires that the researcher engage in “deep reflection” and “acknowledge (her) beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand (her) positions, and then ‘bracket’ or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds” (83). I can meet Tufford and Newman halfway in this analysis: no doubt, as they maintain, our preconceptions affect “all stages of qualitative research: selecting a topic and population; designing the interview; collecting and interpreting data; and reporting findings” (82). However, as this chapter will show, I was not able or willing to suspend the most significant influences in my intellectual and personal lives. Nor, in the practice of Grounded Theory as advocated by Strauss, Charmaz, and Clarke, did I need to.⁴ The method of Grounded Theory espoused by these scholars acknowledges the active presence of a researchers’ preconceptions, and allows their use in theory development as long as they serve the analysis appropriately. It seems to me that this acceptance of an interested scholar conducting her study accords with the notion of “strong objectivity” in the standpoint theories. “Strong objectivity,” in part, redounds on the researcher’s awareness of her own “conceptual biases” (Schell and Rawson 142) so that, in fact, her analysis of data is more objectively true than the work of traditional scientism with its mistaken belief in human neutrality (Harding “Feminist Standpoints” 56; also in Alcoff and Potter 49 *passim*). Charmaz in this respect speaks of “data as mutually constructed by researcher and researched” (“Constructivist” 169). Clarke goes so far as to argue that some ideologies and identifications cannot be suspended:

⁴ In this respect I disagree with Kiersten Downs, whose 2017 dissertation, “Beautifully Awful: A Feminist Ethnography of Women Veterans’ Experiences with Transition from the Military,” asserts that bracketing is a function of Grounded Theory Method. It is more precise to say that bracketing relates to an earlier version of GTM in which researchers, led by Barney Glaser, believed it was possible to listen to stories in a neutral frame of mind. More recent practice of GTM by Kathy Charmaz allows the use of one’s ideas if they serve analytical purposes. Susan E. Clarke goes far enough to argue that some preconceptions, such as feminism, are too formative and significant to be suspended.

Both Strauss and Glaser (who developed Grounded Theory) refused to take gender or race or any identity politics into account unless they ‘earned their way into the analysis.’ I felt that was an abdication of understanding what was going on in the fullest sense possible. (Morse et al. 237)

Clarke further contends that feminism is implicitly part of Grounded Theory because they both “disrupt the representational hegemony that usually privileges some and erases others” (*“Feminisms”* 125), a point of view that should not, and cannot, in her view, be suspended. I myself, as I will show, was unable to do it. In many ways, I discovered, a research study is also a personal narrative.

Room of Their Own

It is true that Reflexivity as a type of formal *praxis* is endemic to Grounded Theory research because there remains the crucial need to relieve the project of the pressure of *a priori* ideas that blur the researcher’s vision and bias her judgement. In the context of Grounded Theory, Charmaz insists on Reflexivity because the entire edifice of research is built solely on a bedrock of data that needs to be heard by a researcher who is, as far as possible, consciously tracking her preconceptions. It is, in this respect, empirical.⁵ I can attest that the researcher comes not only with her preferred theoretical applications and devices, but her history. For me, there is a psychological alliance I feel for women whose inquisitive mind and independence of spirit have come as both treasure and cost. Although this personal connection has often guided, if not decreed, my choices as scholar and teacher, it is not a topic I often discuss, nor is it germane

⁵ This idea of acknowledging one’s assumptions and biases is also considered an aspect of “strong objectivity” by Hartsock and espoused as “empirical” by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, and Sara Delamont, scholars of qualitative research, cited earlier in Chapter Three.

to the purposes of this dissertation. It is, however, the reason for my sensitivity to these women whose stories I understood immediately, the reason their stories haunted me, and its potency as motive is not lessened by my reluctance to mention it here and discuss it further. Suffice it to say that I keenly aspired to advocate for a forum in which they could freely be heard, without interference from others' distorting ideas and judgements. Kayla Williams, in the Proving Ground epigraph for this chapter, expresses this idea most astutely and concisely: "They didn't even conceive of a way to frame my experience that wasn't just the female version of a man's experience" (Personal interview). In this Grounded Theory context, I had to ascertain that vestiges of this version of military or civilian prejudice found no purchase in me.

Beyond (albeit because of) my own identification with such stories, I have a documented history of teaching and writing about the integrity of one's individual narrative and one's right to compose it freely, without the sly edits of others who alter the story to suit their own purpose or myth. The literature of servicewomen, I was daily discovering, was and is replete with authorities, both recognized and self-assigned, who characterize their service with impunity. It is my nature, whether inborn or acquired, to push back against attempted dominance. The words, "Fuck you, Douglas" (41), is the way Kayla Williams, in *Love My Rifle More Than You* and a series of military memoirs, responds to such hegemony. Kayla pushes the boundaries of permissible public writing from women and in the process creates, out of her raw experience on the battlefield, another discourse – indeed, another genre – entirely. This is a language I believed it is time we listened to.

As noted in "Chapter Two Storytelling As Epistemology: Goldie's Voice," I came to this research while teaching women servicemembers, both active duty and veteran, in my courses in public and professional rhetorics at UWF in Pensacola, Florida, from 2015-2016. The stories my

students told in response to class assignments in documentary and narrative spoke of endurance and also a fierce determination to assert their identities as military women. These elements became my central concerns for my dissertation inquiry, and inspired the title of “American Athena” for such a project. A cursory glance at the literature of those years revealed that most research and analysis focused on quantitative reports of sexual assault, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and homelessness.⁶ Those disturbing situations and statistics are true. However, my students’ presentations and writings showed that trauma is not the only story: if such crisis occurs, these women embody and, indeed, teach the means of living with and possibly resolving it. It seemed crucial to me that these women be heard “in their own words ... on their own terms” (Reinharz 19), that we give their voices room to speak, and see their service, their lived experience within the traditionally White male culture of American military, through their eyes. How do they, as Lila Holley explains, “go in at Ground Zero” and what do they need to do in order to “prove” themselves, and to whom, while taking “nothing for granted”? How do they create that “even playing field”? Although I had not yet articulated those specific questions, Lila defines here the sense of exploration I brought to the project, my interest encompassed in the simple statement, “Tell me about it.”

A Unique Standpoint

Aside from my instinct as a writing teacher, which compels that kind of attention, perhaps one cause of my desire for open-ended inquiry is my awareness that I did not share their military experience. While it is true that my family played a pivotal role in 20th century warfare –

⁶ Hoppen, Jane, “Women in the Military: Who’s Got Your Back?”; Morris, Monique, “The Sexual Trauma of Black Women Veterans”; Nayback-Beebe, Ann Marie, “Post-Deployment Social Support and Social Conflict in Female Military Veterans”; to name only three.

(as cited in "Chapter Two," a General in World War II; a young medic who helped liberate the camps; a teenage recruit in the jungles of Vietnam) – the women in my world accepted the strict division of labor where the military was concerned and considered their duty fulfilled by home-front jobs in businesses and factories. Nor did the men who fought discuss their war experience, although each of them contended with its effects for the rest of their lives. I did major in History as an undergraduate with an emphasis on warfare, mainly because I was and remain fascinated by factual stories (History) and the practical imagination enacted in strategy and struggle (War). But other than these glancing relationships to the stories I heard, I had no military connection to the narratives and topics I keenly wanted to explore.

I will note, however, that I do have an equally strong history in studying the discourse of the marginalized. Before I had the words to describe my interest, or even the kind of work I was doing, as a high school teacher for 17 years I had founded and run a writing workshop class that was multi-grade and based entirely on the students' stated purposes (i.e., article; autobiography; play; poetry; story; Science paper; writings in their first languages, from Thai to Basque, translated for an English audience). My one intent was to create a space, known affectionately to my classes as "The Writing Room," where students who had no other avenue of exploration of their languages could do so, in the media and subjects they themselves chose, with an appreciative audience. It was not uncommon to hear these students called "idiot savant" because the faculty saw them as failures generally, and yet one of them had won a drama competition, another had edited an award-winning newspaper despite his public identity as learning disabled, yet another had composed the poem that gave thematic coherence to the school magazine and became the informal valedictory for that senior class. Nor did parents always know, or hope, their kids were capable of such work. All I had to guide me in those years was a remark in an

interview with Robert Frost, himself a marginalized child whose writings were a revelation to those who thought they knew him, that it is astonishing to a community when “the village idiot” is not only competent, but eloquent (*Voices and Visions* Tape 1 PBS). This statement, which he offers with wry Yankee humor, is realized, I have always believed, in his poem “Acquainted with the Night”; the lines I have committed to memory, “I have walked out in rain, and back in rain. I have outwalked the furthest city light,” express the lonely silencing of those whose stories we fail to hear.

Later, as a graduate student, I continued my exploration of such marginalized voices, this time with the theoretical frames and vocabulary to identify their narratives and practices as discourses. The focal point of my interest was the work of Dorothy Wordsworth – not William, although I did have background in Romantic Studies, and Dorothy is most definitely not included in that “Visionary Company,” the title of Harold Bloom’s scholarly analysis of that group. She is more reporter of the sublime than poet. She writes not only of the natural world she much prefers to housekeeping, as inveterate walker and traveler, but also of the position of a uniquely talented woman who inspires and supports a cohort of men who do not count her as equal. Formal study of natural sciences was nascent in her era: her writings reveal that she practiced a professional field that did not yet exist. In my Dorothy Project I studied her *Grasmere Journal* as evidence and expression of the discourses she composes in that series of writings to define, with her discerning pen, her status and standpoint as the “outsider within” the literary crowd who both excludes and simultaneously needs her. The figure of the “outsider within,” devised by Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins to define the position of women enslaved “within” the house and the culture of their ostensible owners (“Learning” 103 *passim*), served as my theoretical entry into the stories of these servicewomen now.

I would alter my thinking as I conducted the interviews and delved more deeply into the narratives themselves. Guided by Grounded Theory, I came to perceive what seemed to me a unique standpoint not yet defined in the scholarly literature about the stories of these women, either as memoir or military biography. This standpoint, to be delineated in full in "Chapter Four Methodology," became my Athena Model for analysis and research into the discourse of women servicemembers.

"Voices Begging to be Heard"

Revisiting the prospectus I composed in Autumn 2016, the period between my first encounter with students' stories in spring 2015 and an expansion of that narrative field through personal interviews and further reading in 2017, I realize that my "Methods of Inquiry," as I titled them then, were poorly conceived. The process of "Reflexivity" does not necessarily "edit out problems and false starts: the aim is not to 'smooth' or idealize the research process," notes discourse scholar Taylor (41), and indeed my fumbling process in finding a stable ground for my dissertation proves the truth of that statement. I believed that my project was, at heart, a critical discourse analysis that would use the theoretical tools of James Paul Gee in *How To Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* for devising the fundamental questions of this inquiry. At the time I believed my opening questions would be:

1. What identity is this woman "trying to enact or get others to recognize" (110) and how is the speaker positioning herself and others?
2. What aspects of her cultural context do we want to question because they may affect her "in terms of things like equity, fairness, and humane treatment of people"? (8)

My aim at that point was to study the public texts in this relatively small field and supplement them with interviews and posts on social media and websites. As the project developed,

however, and I listened to the women's narratives and became more involved with personal interviews, I found that the first question, the nature of each woman's identity in the military context, to be the more compelling. Further, as I learned how GTM actually works as it moves from data collection to theory creation, its purposes and practices appeared to conflict with the second question, which as a guideline for inquiry conveys a cultural critique that was not my primary interest or goal. Certainly reference to military culture is embedded in the project itself, focused on women's experience as servicemembers and their stories thereof, but an inquiry into that culture is its own genre of military literature and not the purview of my Athena study, which appeared to present a new genre in the bud. I wanted to listen to the women without giving equal time to cultural discourse that had already, in my view, effectively silenced them, thus enacting the critique of Gesa Kirsch and Sullivan in *Methods and Methodologies in Composition Research* (47-54) whose argument accords with my own inclination in this study: what would the woman herself say if she could tell the story herself (Sullivan 47)?

My interest in the stories themselves became clearer to me after first looking into ethnographic methods of data collection described in Terry Prewitt's unpublished *Uninvited Guest* and the aforementioned *On Ethnography* by Heath and Smith (consulted among others, including Bateson; Charmaz, *Five Ways*; Emerson et al.; B. Marshall and M. Marshall; McKinnon et al.; Van Maanen). What gave me pause initially was the impossibility of studying women within their cultural context: I could only be present in their creation of discourse, not in their actual deployment as servicemembers. I temporarily toyed with the idea of repairing a model for discursive ethnography, considering my observation of their texts as "fieldwork" of a kind, and I appreciated a passage in Robert Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, which refers to Clifford Geertz's idea of "thick description," to wit: "The ethnographer

‘inscribes’ social discourse; *(s)he writes it down*. In so doing, (s)he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted” (12). I could not imagine a better description of invention in the process of producing the discourse of this dissertation.

Clearly the notion of cultural study applies, or could apply, to women’s military experience: looking at one random example, my student Jordyn Bohon has written in one of our class forums, “I was fighting for the freedom of our country (in joining the Air Force), and by being a woman in the military I was challenging the status quo, because even though women have been in the military for a long time there still isn’t equality” (Student Post). Further, as Taylor notes in “Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research,” analysis of culture is indeed within the purview of discourse analysis, “to identify patterns of language and related practices and to show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it (as well as [t]he social nature and historical origins of the world ‘out there’” (9).

One such argument for the powerful impact of 21st century military contexts on women is Robin Truth Goodman’s foundational study of women in combat, *Gender and the Warfare State*, as cited in "Chapter One Introduction." In a personal email to me, Goodman explains that she did not pursue ethnographic work, but “read and analyzed the literary works that soldiers were writing on their return from active service, particularly in terms of how they were taking positions within an ongoing debate (at the time) of whether or not women should serve in combat roles” (“Re: Question about Gender, the Warfare State”). I was less certain at the start of my study, and contacted several researchers engaged in ethnographic work, notably Cassandra Branham and Kaia Simon who presented papers at CCCC 2016, but realized from their communications about their projects that the difference between our goals and interests is

considerable. I am not conducting a study of American military culture *qua* culture, despite the relevance and research potential of Heath and Street's description of "symbolic structures," i.e., the symbols by which we understand our world and act upon it, and the ways that we produce and reproduce them for one another (3). One of the ways I distinguished my own interest from the work thus far in this particular area is a desire to learn about the women's military experience from *their* perspective (Charmaz "Constructivist" 172, emphasis mine, *passim*), through their words, as a unique discourse, not the other way around, which has been catalogued intensely and extensively. Indeed, Emerson et al. are clear on the topic of what they call "ethnographic participation":

Ethnographers are committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people. 'Getting close' minimally requires physical and social proximity to the daily rounds of people's lives and activities; the field researcher must be able to take up positions in the midst of the key sites and scenes of others' lives in order to observe and understand them. ... The ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so. In this way, immersion gives the fieldworker access to the fluidity of others' lives and enhances (her) sensitivity to interaction and process. (2-3)

The guiding light of my work with Grounded Theory Method, Charmaz, speaks directly to the difference between ethnography and GTM, since the researcher is not engaged in "direct observations" ("Constructivist" 171). Further, I wanted to focus on language more than a sociological study of cultural life. In "Telling the Story Her Own Way: The Role of Feminist

Standpoint Theory in Rhetorical Studies,” scholars Glen McClish and Jacqueline Bacon emphasize “the centrality of language to expressions of experience,” particularly the act of “taking seriously the belief that marginalized voices have revelatory qualities that can effect significant social change” (31-32). The women create “a rhetorical product,” recalled and published, either post-deployment or, if current, on leave.

I am less drawn in this inquiry to the question of systemic change in military terms, and more compelled by the women’s discourses themselves, in both creation and effect. They are, in my view, “voices begging to be heard” (Glaser and Strauss 163; Charmaz *Method* 46). Discourse, notes British linguist and literary theorist Sara Mills, “is something that you *do* (sic), (rather than something to which you are subjected)” (79), and I was eager to hear directly from these women: how do their stories work together in enacting a discourse? what might that discourse be? If my study were to analyze culture, it would be the culture and discourse, thus far unreported, that the women are creating themselves.

Grounded Theory: “What Really Works As a Relevant Explanation”

The Grounded Theory Method (GTM) seemed most appropriate for my inquiry because the analysis is entirely situated, i.e., “grounded,” in speakers’ narratives. On this basis, through a rigorous and recursive process of coding and comparing data, raising analytic questions, and interacting thoughtfully, creatively, with the data, the researcher articulates the theory that emerges from this formula. As noted earlier from Charmaz, “Grounded Theory provides tools for developing theoretical analyses of (data) from intensive interviews, personal narratives, case studies, field observations” (167). As also mentioned earlier, GTM was invented and delivered by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their foundational *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*:

Strategies of Qualitative Research of 1967; they propose this method as the antithesis of quantitative analysis of human experience and perception. Their 1968 *A Time for Dying* demonstrates the attentiveness of Grounded Theory in listening to the stories of dying patients without interference from other sources and voices, such as existing theoretical frames. Such frames, in the view of Glaser and Strauss, place the narratives at risk of distortion or misrepresentation: “To preconceive relevance,” they write, “is to *force* data, not to *discover from* data what really works as a relevant explanation (emphasis mine)” (*Discovery* 143). As these pioneers describe it, GTM is specifically designed to resist the imposition of bias: To wit:

Potential theoretical sensitivity is lost when the (researcher) commits (herself) exclusively to one specific preconceived theory (e.g., formal organization) for then (she) becomes doctrinaire and can no longer “see around” either (her) pet theory or any other. (She) becomes insensitive, or even defensive, toward the kinds of questions that cast doubt on (her) theory; (she) is preoccupied with testing, modifying and seeing everything from this one angle. For this person, *theory will seldom truly emerge from data*. (emphasis mine; Glaser and Strauss *Discovery* 47)

To realize this “theoretical sensitivity,” GTM consists of a sequential and simultaneous process as described in Charmaz et al., *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry*: listening, coding, comparing, and interpreting narratives, while holding one’s personal and theoretical biases at bay. Thus, the data becomes the basis of emergent and original theory.

Here are the shoals on which my original “Method of Inquiry” foundered, and I failed to achieve a clear understanding of Grounded Theory as a means of gathering data for this study. I assumed I could use GTM as a heuristic to sort and classify the data collected from interviews

and close readings of texts. The appeal of this protocol, as I understood its purpose, lay in its commitment to “let the text speak,” a tenet of my education in rhetoric. However, I neglected to pay sufficient attention to the second part of the precept, i.e., that the researcher should listen without an *a priori* imposition of her values and conclusions, and if she persists in her commitment to a favored theory, her research process becomes a matter of testing her fixed idea. My prospectus of 2016 reveals my reliance on theoretical frames I had already decided as the means of analyzing my data – theories and models on which I was probably “doctrinaire.” What I failed to note was the word repeated in the foundational writings of Glaser and Strauss that holds the key to Grounded Theory as a method of inquiry: Grounded Theory is a method of *discovery*. The basic question asked in GTM is always, “What is most significant in these data?” (Charmaz “Constructivist” 170). In characterizing her research in chronically ill patients, Charmaz articulates my own purposes: “I aim to learn about research participants’ concerns from their perspectives,” she tells us, “rather than impose a preconceived structure on them” (“Constructivist” 172). While it is true that the process has evolved since its first application as a sensitive way of apprehending the stories of the dying, the act of *discovery* is the one factor that has not changed and is not questioned.

The first element I interrogated as part of a “preconceived structure” from which I needed to shake my method loose was the first part of its title, “American Athena.” Since the beginning of this project, as noted, my interest had focused on the stories of the women, rather than a study of military culture itself. I hoped to introduce this approach and achieve clarity in analyzing women’s discourses as ways of “doing” military culture without being dominated or silenced by it. Hence, my positioning of Athena as the image and model of this dissertation project. As noted heretofore, Athena is not only the daughter of Zeus, the patriarchal god, but also the Oceanid

Titan Metis who represents design, intelligence, and watchful patience. Indeed, the rhetorical strategy that enacts those qualities in discourse is named for her (*metis*, Μῆτις; adj. *metic*, described in D. Hoffman 98-99). Through examination of these women's stories and close reading of selected texts considered influential in the field, I hoped to demonstrate how they view themselves and how they create discourses of endurance and, in many cases, transformation, the culminating point in my first attempt at an abstract. By articulating that specific purpose for them and doctrine for my research, I had in fact imposed a rhetoric of resilience and survival on these texts that could aggressively counter a rhetoric of victimization I saw and eschewed in the literature. I had potentially closed my mind, and therefore my investigation, to narratives that do not fit that transformative paradigm. Indeed, these categories of resilience, survival, and transformation became the first draft of my outline. As the process of GTM unfolded, however, the data contradicted this triad of categories as definitely as it reinforced the Athena trope, and I was constrained to forget them, as appealing a story as they might have told.

Further, I had established a "feminist sophistic" as this project's title and theoretical frame, the term derived from classicist Jarratt's *Rereading the Sophists* in which she proposes the invention of a critical method for work with women's language. I made this decision because this particular theoretical model appealed to me. A "feminist sophistic" is, as Jarratt defines it, a rhetorical methodology that studies the discourses of women within specific situations "to locate personal experience in historical and social contexts" and "advance them in a public voice" (115-116), such as discourses in the U.S. Military. The sense of resistance within this particular methodology – that as women these servicemembers require advocacy because of a challenged and marked experience -- articulated my own enduring biases. As a student and teacher of

rhetorical studies I view all discourse as situated, grounded, spatial, local, temporal, kairotic, and utterly responsive to and constitutive of the human moment. As a feminist, particularly in “the halls of academe,” I am committed to every woman’s “telling the whole story her own way” (McClish and Bacon, after Jane Austen; also, my own chapter in *Staging Women’s Lives*, “A Discourse of Aspiration”), the statement and tenet of my particular ideology that has shaped my critical thinking.

Bringing the two parts of the dissertation title together, I called this sophistic “the Athena Model” and bundled into its function the kinds of critical research processes I had accomplished in earlier projects and publications that might explore and explain the women’s narratives. Creating a triangle from critical approaches that had become the “sword and shield” of my intellectual life, I focused on three basic ideas:

1. the “outsider within” standpoint I’d used in my Dorothy Project;
2. the *metic* strategy I had come to believe was endemic to women’s discourses;
3. the “analytical resistance” that I used as model in my discourse analysis of student work, both in my Ph.D. examinations and in subsequent publications.

I was looking for information that might relate to the research perspectives of that Athena Model and address sequentially the following questions:

1. What knowledge does this woman possess from her standpoint as “outsider within” a culture by virtue of her gender?
2. In what ways does this text reflect the creative intelligence of a *metic* strategy?
3. Applying a feature of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), how does this text present an “analytical resistance” to the culture that seeks to dominate and silence its author?

What Charmaz has called “the experienced self” (“Constructivist” 170) in Grounded Theory process seemed to align seamlessly with these ideas. But this research illusion, that I could remix and “mash up” methods and theories that are essentially incompatible with Grounded Theory and

call the result “repairs,” dissolved after the first interviews. I listened to those stories, from Dulcinea Burrows, Kristin Hall, Tabitha Nichols, and found myself looking more closely at the strategy, the designing intelligence, and, perhaps, the *metis*, of the Grounded Theory process itself, and tried to put my familiar methodologies aside. I tried to quiet the quickening interest of both feminist and sophist who inhabit and constantly refurbish the way I understand and speak about the world.

I soon discovered that GTM can be replete with surprises.

The Process of Grounded Theory Method: “Between Rigour and Creativity”

The practices of GTM are topics of discussion and contumely in terms of their faithfulness to the rigors of Glaser’s approach, which permits no connections to established theory.⁷ I describe my own struggles in close detail to demonstrate how easily misunderstood and misapplied a Grounded Theory process can be. It is possible to believe, as I once did, that the researcher can outwit her method, particularly one that appears to be as spontaneously free as Grounded Theory, since “it is not the descriptive detail that concerns the grounded theorist but the abstract concepts that lie within the data” (Holton 76). Much exists in the literature of research method and theoretical inquiry that shows how fiercely contested Grounded Theory is among its practitioners, and between its current analysts and its founder, Glaser, still going strong in his website, “The Grounded Theory Institute,” over 50 years after his role as co-inventor. His colleague Judith Holton, writing in his *Grounded Theory Review*, notes that the

⁷ Throughout her work with Grounded Theory Method, Kathy Charmaz notes that Barney Glaser recognized from the get-go that researchers, especially those with deep experience in and knowledge of their field, will be informed by their inner library of theory. Those influences were allowed in the analysis as the researcher moved from selecting moments in the data and moved to defining their theoretical categories. However, imposing those theoretical constructs *a priori* was *verboden* – and remains so, even with revisionists such as Charmaz herself.

method has achieved “canonical status in the research world” (67) but is nonetheless beset by disagreement and dispute as “various scholars (try) to set out the boundaries and distinctions between and among the espoused research paradigms and associated issues of ontology, epistemology, and methodology” (70). Indeed, Glaser and his partner Strauss parted ways over a question of basic research procedure: Glaser refuses, at any point, to acknowledge the intertextuality between his discoveries and the work of others; Strauss is a revisionist who allows them in, if they “earn their way” into the analysis (Charmaz “Constructivist” 170): “they should not be applied to it.” Along with the conflict of the Glaser-Strauss camps, other scholars apply Grounded Theory in creative, albeit disputed, ways. A casual search for texts in Grounded Theory on JSTOR summons over 362,000 texts, with titles such as “Demystifying Grounded Theory” and “An Exploration of Key Issues in the Debate Between Classic and Constructivist Grounded Theory.” A challenge for researchers to whom this method appeals is the proprietary invention of terms for processes that are, in practice, similar, and only result in causing a complicated and tough process to appear not only confusing, but confused. The fractious relationships among the GTM researchers, which are apparent in just about every text on this topic, are not helpful in attempting to discern how the method actually works.

I can attest to the rigor of a method that appears at first glance to be as open-ended as its approach to its participants, i.e., “Tell me about it.”⁸ The most difficult moment was the realization that my own ideologies, the ones I taught every day and practiced throughout my private and professional lives for decades, had to be quelled, if not erased, in order to proceed as Grounded Theory requires, i.e., to listen and discover. It was not, for example, at all clear that the

⁸ Charmaz writes of her own determination to “listen to their stories and use more ‘Tell me about’ and ‘How’ questions to foster open-ended responses” (“Constructivist” 172). 7

women resist their role in a patriarchal system; nor was it clear that they perceive the military culture as patriarchal in the first place, and it was their discourse, and not the social system that could keep them in its sights and confine them in its frame, that I cared about. Much in the literature speaks of resilience and survival, two of my keywords going into this project; yet the stories I was hearing avoid and often subvert, or disdain, those words. Not only does the discourse not cohere for the women as a group, but internally the accounts are not consistent. One participant, for example, speaks of experiencing discrimination – then later in her account, notes that she worked as one among equals in her squad. Nor do these women view themselves as “outsiders,” which does not mean that they are unaware of strenuous and often violent attempts to marginalize them.

It was increasingly clear, as the interview process progressed, that working with Grounded Theory in ways the method was never intended to function, i.e., to force its processes to conform to ideas I had committed an academic lifetime to studying, was stressing the data to say what I thought it should say, and thereby allowing me as “researcher” to sit in judgement of the women speaking to me. I was, despite an awareness of “Reflexivity,” influencing the data in ways that allowed my opinion to skew the results, a circumstance thoroughly vetted by Kiersten Downs in the chapter, “What Does It Mean to Conduct Social Science Research As a Feminist”? in her dissertation, “Beautifully Awful.” She describes the danger inherent in this process by noting that “feminist researchers draw from the personal, lived experience of the research participants, which includes analysis of the personal, lived experience of the researcher” (18). The error was also causing me to abandon aspects of the actual data that most accurately depict these women’s identities and sense of themselves in the U.S. Military, which was my research interest. Indeed, participants in the Athena study were asked to address a series of questions

about their military experience using the basic GTM strategy of inviting narrative with an open-minded “Tell me about it,” a process that should preclude a ready-made theory that tailors their stories neatly, seamlessly, with no loose ends to trouble the way they look and fit within embedded ideas.

While the use of GTM in discourse analysis beyond the fields of medicine, psychology, and sociology is nascent, the tenet that has remained consistent across all disciplines since its inception is that *discovery* must occur through specific ways of encountering data: indeed, *Discovery* is the title of the landmark text by Glaser and Strauss that established the field. Even revisions to Glaser’s procedures insist on the researcher’s need to break through conventional thinking and listen to what the speakers say and do (Corbin and Strauss 88): that tenet of GTM has not changed in over 50 years. Throughout her myriad writings on Grounded Theory,⁹ Charmaz repeats the dictum that theory must always emerge from the data and *earn* its place in analysis.

“What Would You Like To Be Asked?”

From the time of my first encounters with women veterans’ stories in 2015 – unable to assess them as writing instructor, so moved was I by their pleas for attention and care -- I augmented those presentations and readings with published texts that I had thought, at first, would be the primary texts for my investigation. A line from a classroom post by LaRayne Hurd resonated with me: “the men and women who have sacrificed everything” (Public Writing Class Wiki Autumn 2016). I wanted to hear from the women themselves. It was a direct result of that experience, sitting across a seminar table from a woman who told the story of risks and stakes in

⁹ Most useful in my investigations were *The Grounded Theory Handbook*, *Five Ways of Doing Quantitative Analysis*, and *Good Days Bad Days*.

the act of enlistment in a culture previously alien to her, that led me to adjust the lens of my research and focus more closely on interviews than published sources. I realized that this reliance on data obtained first-hand without disturbance from outsiders is the essential *fiat* of Grounded Theory process for good reason. So, aside from the deepening of my reading about the rubrics of this form of qualitative analysis, I came to this method as a matter of course.

I knew it was not my brief to analyze these texts linguistically or conduct a line-by-line reading akin to conversation analysis. Therefore, I decided to borrow, but amend, an ethnographic approach to information gathering, e.g., the semi-structured interview to elicit material about women's discrete experience within that culture and how they claimed and exercised their agency. The semi-structured interview protocol allows for the interviewer and respondents to engage beyond a setlist of questions and "stray from the interview guide" when further exploration is warranted.¹⁰ Along with the four questions presented earlier in this chapter, I extended the interview format in the live setting with Question #5, a request that the women contribute questions they themselves would like to be asked – "What questions should we be asking you? What do you want folks to know?" -- an approach inspired by Boxer's text, *When Women Ask the Questions*, and Rich: "We are the women who ask the questions," cited earlier. I used these questions as I interviewed women veterans, including a cohort of current university students, and investigated published materials and internet sites where women create communities of storytelling for themselves alone. As D. Alexis Hart has noted, such communities "'voice the landscape' of female military service and (women who participate) have discovered a space in which they can and do use 'a discourse of their own,'" significant discourse in itself from Paula Gillespie et al. in *Feminist Cyberscapes* (qtd. in "Inquiring" 83)

¹⁰ Cohen, D., and Crabtree, B. "Qualitative Research Guideline Project." July 2006. Web.

and directly relevant to this project. I also contacted authors of these narratives, and posed that question as well: “What would you like to be asked?”

“What Is Explicit in the Data?”

The point of GTM is to identify ideas emerging from one’s data and work them through a process of increasing abstraction that leads to a theory in which stories cohere. The *theory* is always and only *grounded* in data obtained and interpreted by the researcher who works with the sort of Reflexivity I show in my own admissions of *a priori* bias here: I admit I was not able to re-educate myself on the two most essential parts of my own intellectual life, i.e., the rhetoricity of discourse and the privileging of women’s voices. Within that context, then, I followed the Grounded Theory process that has, despite its disciplinary *agon*, remained unchanged in its basic sequencing since first “discovered” by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960’s. I designed questions to be as open-ended as possible and allow for participants to speak freely, to set the terms of their own discourses with all their contradictions and inconsistencies. As noted previously, the rejection of existing attitudes that serve to bias this reading of data is the most important tenet of Grounded Theory. The method asks the question, first and last: “What is explicit in the data?” Charmaz, Clarke, and others who practice Grounded Theory as its “second generation” have tempered a purist view by admitting their references to theory already in play as they interpret the data. This revision to the original process was the cause of the break between Glaser and Strauss: Glaser remains adamant that all theory discovered must be original and unique, whereas Strauss allows the entry of existing paradigms – such as the CDA I mentioned earlier as a preoccupation of mine – if it “earns its way into the data,” in the words of his student Charmaz, as previously cited.

But my theoretical problem seemed to me more nuanced than the serendipitous discovery that a thesis in use aligns with ideas emerging from one's dataset. In particular the questions governing feminist inquiry are so deeply embedded in my personal and professional thought that I could not remove it as a first principle from my research as I began to pursue it. I found a similar issue, and its resolution, in the work of Clarke, a GTM analyst who elucidates this view in the symposium presented in *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*, of which she is one of six speakers and editors:

The first generation was not feminist, and that is key for me. Both Strauss and Glaser (who developed Grounded Theory) refused to take gender or race or any identity politics into account unless they 'earned their way into the analysis.' I felt that was an abdication of understanding what was going on in the fullest sense possible. (Morse et al. 237)

Clarke's emendation to Grounded Theory in practice is particularly salient to the data analysis of this Athena study, which is entirely based on the women's stories. It seemed inaccurate to me, indeed, absurd, to conduct a study of women's discourse without taking their gender into account from the start. Thus, the question that constitutes, represents, and reveals the work of this sophistic and triangulates its design and potential discoveries is deceptively simple: "How do the women themselves talk about their experiences (i.e., what does the research show)?"

Selection: "Don't Call Us All Soldiers"

I invited women servicemembers, both veteran and active-duty, whom I encountered through my faculty position as rhetoric and writing teacher at UWF in Pensacola, Florida. Whether deployed in war or service on bases overseas or stateside, whether veteran or active duty, all were welcome to participate. With the exception of published authors I interviewed, all

participants are members of the Pensacola, Florida military community, past or present, as students at UWF or permanent residents. Pensacola is a city with nine military installations and large populations of active duty personnel (41,827) as well as veterans (330,000), including the second largest number of retirees (35,000) in the United States.¹¹ Therefore, as faculty at UWF I teach members of the armed services in all my classes (or their spouses and children) and belong to a veterans' reading group on campus. I issued an open call to all women servicemembers in my vicinities, explaining what I called "the Athena Project" briefly, and sent a formal invitation to those who expressed interest. Although initially I had conceived the study as limited to veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I quickly realized, through my contacts and conversations, that this stipulation could stifle discussion. While I needed to work within a defined datafield that I could manage reasonably within the scope of this study, I included veterans within my sphere whose service was pre 9/11 (Nancy Bullock-Prevot, Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, and Judy Young) and a future aspiration ("Ani," Jordyn Bohon, "Hanna," "Monet," "Stephens," "West," and Ally Osborne, all undergraduates) whose stories could only serve to expand our understanding of content and context.

Participants associated with this site therefore include my current and former students as well as my fellow members of the veteran reading group, "Standing Down," facilitated in 2016-2018 by Christopher "Scott" Satterwhite and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to this collegiate cohort, I contacted seven authors in print at the time of my research process (2016-present): six have published first-person accounts, two of which include rhetorical analyses, and one is a professor of writing who specializes in studies of women veterans. All seven authors accepted and five completed the interview.

¹¹ Military Connection. FloridaWest, www.floridawesteda.com/workforce/military-connection

As a demographic all women have a connection to storytelling and communities of literacy. Seventeen are university students; five are published authors; four are known as public advocates for the veterans' point of view; three are university teachers; two are members of veterans' reading groups. One directs a veterans' research agency on the national level; one has created a local foundation to shelter and support homeless women veterans. All participants are committed, through these particular channels, to achievement and the value of making a difference with one's life. They represent the fields of Education; Healthcare; Social Work; Veterans' Policy; Technology; Writing; Military; Veterans' Theater Production; Veterans' Advocacy and Recovery; the Peace Corps.

Ages, therefore, are various, as are economic backgrounds, ethnicities, family composition, preference in marital status, partner, religion, vocation. Nor were the women invited specifically because of their chosen branch of service, length of service, and, as noted, view of their service experience and subsequent pursuits. The group is multicultural, multiage, and in their private lives are variously single, engaged, married, divorced, hetero or LGBT. As of this writing, 11 are mothers; one is currently pregnant; several live in college dorms; five women are currently on active duty or engaged in basic training.

The following table introduces the 29 women I interviewed or consulted for the Athena Project and whose stories contextualize and inform this piece:

1. Lindsay Allen	Marines	NCO/ Aviation Electrical Technician	Graduate Student, Aeronautics
2. "Ani"	Army		Undergraduate
3. Elizabeth Avila	Army	Transportation Coordinator	Undergraduate
4. Jordyn Bohon	Army		Undergraduate
5. Lisa Bradley	Air Force	Air Force Technical Sergeant	Environmental Activist

6. Nancy Bullock-Prevot	Navy	Cryptologist; Chief Petty Officer	Founder, HER Foundation Homeless Shelter for Women Veterans in Pensacola, Florida
7. Dulcie Burrow	Army	Transportation	Graduate Student
8. Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas	Air Force	Public Affairs Officer	Author, <i>Marching As to War: Personal Narratives of African American Women's Experiences in the Gulf Wars</i>
9. Kristin Hall	Air Force	Crew Chief, Maintenance Operation Control	Undergraduate
10. "Hanna"	Army		Undergraduate
11. D. Alexis Hart	Navy	Officer	Professor and Writing Center Director
12. Mary Hegar	Army	Maintenance Officer	Author, <i>Shoot Like a Girl</i>
13. Lila Holley	Army	Military Intelligence Analyst	Author, <i>Camouflaged Sisters</i> series; Veterans Transition Coach
14. LaRayne Hurd	Army	Combat Photographer	Graduate Student, Social Work
15. Goldie Ann Johnson	Army	IT Specialist	Computer Engineering, IT
16. Brandy Lockhart	Air Force	Special Ops	Graduate Student, Health Policy
17. "Monet"	Air Force		Undergraduate
18. Amber Nadeau	Army	Parachute Rigger	Reserve
19. Chrystal Nguessan	Army	Medical Laboratory Specialist	Active Duty, Korea; Student
20. Tabitha Nichols	Army National Guard	Base Commander's Assistant and Driver	Performer and Script Writer, "Talking Service," "The Telling Project"
21. Ally Osborne	Army National Guard	MI Unit	Correctional Officer, Utah
22. Kylie Pugh	Air Force	MP Security Forces	Graduate Student, English
23. Mackenzie Rieselt	Army	Helicopter / Car Mechanics	Ninja Warrior Course Builder
24. Emily Satterfield	Army	Warehouse Clerk	Graduate student
25. "Stephens"	Marine Corps	Special Ops	Undergraduate

26. “Maggie White” (name withheld)	Air Force	Air Force Dental Technician	Graduate Student
27. Kayla Williams	Army	Sergeant	Author, <i>Love My Rifle More Than You</i> and other memoirs
28. “West”	Navy		Undergraduate
29. Judy Young	Navy	Aircrew Survivor Equipmentman	Professor, Writing Studies

All women in the Athena cohort were contacted by me personally, and communicated directly with me in pursuance of this project. Former students in my Public Rhetoric and Writing classes at UWF who spoke to me in face-to-face interviews are Dulcie Burrow, Kristin Hall, Goldie Ann Johnson, Brandy Lockhart, Amber Nadeau, Kylie Pugh, and Mackenzie Rieselt. Those who responded in writing by email are Lindsay Allen, Lisa Bradley, Emily Satterfield, and “Maggie White.” LaRayne Hurd, also a former student, participated in writing and personal interview. Current students are Elizabeth Avila and Chrystal Nguessan who participate both formally in writing and informally in conversation. Nancy Bullock-Prevot, Tabitha Nichols, and Judy Young are my colleagues in the veterans’ reading group, “Standing Down”: Nancy completed a written interview in collaboration with her daughter, Kourtney Prevot, a former student in my Public and Professional class at UWF; Tabitha met with me for a formal interview on the UWF campus; and Judy communicated with me multiple times and met for coffee and conversation. The works of Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Alexis Hart, Mary Jennings Hegar, Lila Holley, and Kayla Williams comprise much of the current literature in women’s military experience: I conducted telephone interviews with these authors. Speakers and writers who were not interviewed, but whose comments and stories are included in this study, are “Ani,” “Hanna,” Jordyn Bohon, “Monet,” “Stephens,” “West,” and Ally Osborne.

The study was initially subtitled “[T]he Discourses of Women *Soldiers*” – and Brandy Lockhart (Air Force) informed me at once that “soldiers” refers to Army women, and the

heading needed to be revised. I disliked the phrase, “women warrior,” confided my quandary to Amber Nadeau, who suggested “women servicemembers.”

Research Process: From Data to Idea

The process of preparing to interview participants began with the Spring 2017 application to the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at both UWF, where the interviews would take place, and the University of Washington, Seattle (UW), under whose auspices I was conducting them as research for my Ph.D. dissertation. The IRB for UWF required the completion of a sequence of short courses in Social and Behavioral Research, in addition to the prescribed documents for working with human “research subjects” (see "Appendix 1: Approved IRB Material." Pursuant to these applications, I composed a thorough description of the project as outlined in my prospectus; a detailed letter of invitation that describes the project, its purpose as a dissertation study of the stories of women servicemembers; and the steps the interview would follow; an Informed Consent that explains the legal protection for participants and the ways the study will safeguard their data and identity; a Media Addendum that allows the use of photographs and recorded material; and a list of local counseling resources in the event the interview evokes uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. Additionally, all photos are contributed to the study by the women themselves and included with their permission, as are quotes and statements from servicemembers who were interviewed informally.

The materials collected from this group and examined in the course of this research include transcripts of interviews; academic essays, discussion forum posts, and proposals; PowerPoint presentations; wiki posts; poems; letters; emails; published memoirs; published analyses; field notes from observations and informal conversations, both in person and online.

I attempted to contact the women veterans in office at the time for personal interviews – i.e., Tammy Duckworth; Joni Ernst; Tulsi Gabbard; Martha McSally – to no avail. Therefore, their interviews and statements were gathered from sources available online, including their congressional websites.

Also included as primary source material, but not processed by line-by-line coding, are an additional 70 narratives, both first- and third-person. These texts were, at the time of this research process, the entirety of the literature of military women's stories.

Augmenting these stories of direct experience are analyses that focus on the impact and significance of this growing demographic. I sought and collected texts that analyze, critique, reduce, and support women in military culture. This library encompasses journal and newspaper articles; documentary films; dissertations and theses; and book-length texts. For context I consulted similar works on the history of women and warfare, as well as women and leadership. While these secondary texts are not directly involved with the highly specific Grounded Theory method, they do enable deeper understanding of the topics women raise in their discourses. For example, in the section dedicated to Black women veterans, "Aretē: 'We As Black Women,'" these sources offered context and explanation for issues such as hair and uniform fit, and this community's documented and superior endurance of discrimination that no other women face.

The written interviews differed in format and in range of topic from the ones conducted in person or by phone. Upon the women's acceptance of the invitation, I emailed the interview questions and usually the women answered them in order – but each woman designs her statement, tells her story "her own way." Some women answer each question succinctly, yet are able to convey important moments of their lives in that sentence or two; others respond more

copiously, with follow-up letters and other writings. Examples of two representative written interviews – the concise Maggie White and the literary Judy Young – are quoted below:

1. From “Maggie White”

I knew the military would guide me as a young adult and that there was no way I could fail in life with the military’s leadership and guidance.

My great grandfather who had a huge impact in my life was a, PROUD WWII, Korean and Vietnam vet so part of my decision was to serve as my grandfather did and make him proud.

I chose the Air Force, due to the broadcasted knowledge that that branch took better care of its people.

My expectations of who I would or could be as a woman in the military were the same as what a young man’s expectations could also be.

I knew that it was going to be a whole lot of, “do what I tell you to do and don’t ask questions” and with that I knew that I could continue to become a strong, loyal follower and leader.

I wasn’t a girly girl and I remember my aunt telling me how my Dad would tell her that he was raising strong, not weak kids.

2. From Judy Young

I was in the U. S. Navy, from 1974-1994, spanning the closing years of the Viet Nam conflict to the beginnings of armed U. S. conflicts in the Middle East, but for most of my active duty, it was a peacetime force. Both my father and my twin brother had been in the Navy, my dad for 20 years starting during World War II and my brother for only two years after being snagged by the Viet Nam-era draft. Both, in their own ways and for their own reasons, questioned my decision, but I stuck to it.

I had finished two years of college, and though I’d done well, frankly, I was tired of being in school. Also my scholarship had ended. So I wanted to do something different, and I wanted to make some money to finish school eventually. I knew about the G. I. Bill, which was an excellent program in those days (I’m not sure what it offers now), so I thought, “Why not?”

I would be able to get away from New Jersey where I was raised and started college, I would be able to do something different from anything else I’d done in my life (I assumed), and after a few years, I would emerge with some new experiences and some money to go back to school. When the recruiter saw that my test scores were strong, he

put the whole catalog of possible rates (what the Navy calls job specialties) in front me and said, in effect, “Pick one.”

I was raised with an odd enough combination of southern matriarchal tradition (my grandparents, with whom we had lived since I was four, were from rural Georgia) and a progressive northeastern education that I assumed I could do anything I wanted to, whether in military service or not. (Truly—it was an absolute shock to me when I began to learn that my gender was in any way limiting to me—how naïve I was.)

When I first went to see the recruiter, I had no idea what I wanted do in the Navy—I just thought I would take a look and see what the possibilities were and decide from there whether I wanted to give it a try and, if so, how.

Questions also evolved during the course of asking them, from obviously directive to non-prejudicial. What most often happens, with personal or phone interviews, is this: I open the topic; the women talk. My role as interviewer becomes a matter of offering encouragement and introducing two basic topics to shape the information: how would you describe your experience in the military and what does it mean? What are the stakes? If the woman has already written about her own tenure of service, I ask for her observations of women’s situation in that culture, as typified by my interview, excerpted below, with Mary Jennings “MJ” Hegar, author of *Shoot Like a Girl: One Woman’s Dramatic Fight in Afghanistan and on the Home Front*, and erstwhile candidate for the Senate in Texas:

Interviewer: Your contribution is really important. So I’m really happy to ask you a few questions. What your thoughts are about the experience of women in the military and how you might see changes that are occurring. Your experience is catalogued in detail in your text. Where I’d like to start is something that you say that resonates with every woman that I’ve talked to. And that is when you say, “Battle readiness had nothing to do with gender and everything to do with capabilities.” So, given that thought, could you just talk for a little bit about how you interpret the experience of women in that male culture where that idea has to be asserted, where you have to assert the fact that it has nothing to do with gender. It has everything to do with my commitment and my strength.

Mary: Sure. Let me first say thank you for your thoughts on the book because it was not an easy book to write.

Interviewer: No.

Mary: I started off writing a more academic book about rescue history in Afghanistan and the history of women in combat, and I just-you're right, there isn't much out there.

Interviewer: No.

Mary: So that's part of why I ended up writing the book because it's just a vacuum of that type of thing. I'm excited that we have a dramatic shoot (editor's note: Hollywood movie) that adds an entertainment value that gets the book in front of more people because I think it informs a national conversation, and that was kind of the goal from the get-go.

Interviewer: Right.

Mary: There are stereotypes that you could, if you took an individual one at a time, do apply to this person or that person to include capabilities and that includes gender. For some reason, gender is the only one that is still acceptable in professional and in the military circles to use in making decisions. So, you might be able to say this group of people is good at this thing, and this group of people is bad at that thing. So, but the idea of saying that we should only allow this type of people to apply for this job and we should bar that type of people from applying for that job. It sounds archaic and it should be,

Interviewer: Mm hm.

Mary: So it just would never fly. So, for some reason, I don't understand why we haven't accepted that people should be taken as individuals based on their merit, for gender as well, and it kind of boggles my mind.

Also, as noted earlier in the discussion of Reflexivity, my own thinking changed and understanding of GTM sharpened as I conducted these sessions and listened to the women's stories. They simply did not conform to clear lines of resistance I believed I would find. For example, the first and full iteration of Question #3, copied below, set up conflict as the given context for women in military culture:

The U.S. military has been described, by scholars in the field of women veterans' studies, (such as D. Alexis Hart, Mariana Grohowski, and others), as 'a culture that salutes the marginalization and inequality of women.' What is your response to this statement and

can you illustrate your answer with examples? Did you experience gender discrimination – if so, how did that experience affect your life within and beyond the military?”

However, that question was the one women most often challenged. In altering the script, I acquired a better comprehension of GTM and a clearer sense of my own responsibility as researcher to hear and read the data without bias, as far as possible.

The Grounded Theory Method: Coding

The Grounded Theory method begins with the technique known as initial coding in which sequential lines of the narrative are chunked according to topic. This process is demonstrated by an example of my handwritten coding (see fig. 10) of interviews with Nancy Bullock-Prevot (by email) and Tabitha Nichols (in person):

all proud, even in pain (PISD)
 all have ready being advocates - mentors - etc.
 advise ♀ leaders - all coming up young -

4

Nancy pride and professionalism
 decisive career potential
 challenged gender normal (no did others)
 be best, work harder, get promoted
 Tichavich AVOID LOOKING WEAK + INCOMPETENT - "typical female"

also
Kristin
METRO

experiences dep on situation - had to adapt
 took away fear of being female +
 reminded you also that you weren't equal
 very vocal
 advocate for women
 gender division
 work hard - sacrifice - cost to fam -
 service troops perseverance
 ♀ not seen as vets
 + gender biggest factor

DOUBLE MINORITY

Talisha
 Army Rot & Guard
 driven proud
 athletic - didn't feel bad being female
 being ♀ - no effort - but didn't expect gender-biasing
 (learned after service - not in)
 tough chick + leader - admiration for
 * no need to protect myself
 prove myself, yes
 can hold own
 loved job
 * coming w/ group
 only female
 didn't hear "just a girl" - neither did cartoonists
 → keep up, prove myself, be on their level
 can do anything -
 ♀ being valentine better than group
 felt invisible when out
 stereotyped as cute little girl
 telling stories E4.12 D-C

Carol

Figure 10 Example of Initial Coding: Bullock-Prevot and Nichols, in Fox Cursive

Reproduced herein (see fig. 11) is the next stage in the process of initial coding in which the data is chunked (or broken or fractured or segmented or sliced, depending on the preferred vocabulary of the researcher) according to topic, and then formalized as Level 1 Codes. This

example of a chunked and coded text is the first section of Nancy Bullock-Prevot's written interview, and therefore it adheres faithfully to the list of questions that were emailed to her:

Text	Initial Coding
Nancy	
I was a <u>Cryptological Technician, CT,</u> Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy.	Navy
When I wore, my uniform I felt a sense of pride and professionalism.	Feeling pro in uniform
The uniforms were ill-fitting, one size fits all,	Feeling loss of body
and I lost my sense of being a female.	Losing sense of female

Figure 11 Chunked and Coded of Nancy Bullock-Prevot's Written Interview, Level 1

The point of GTM, as noted, is to work the data through increasingly abstract descriptions of the experiences therein until the theory that explains the stories as a whole emerges; as Kathy Charmaz emphasized, the goal is to achieve an "abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience" (*Constructing* 4). A second series of codes begins to lift the analysis to that abstract level, and I will adopt what seems to me the clearest term – theoretical coding – in the variety of proprietary titles in the GTM literature (e.g., axial codes; code clusters; code families; etc.) An example of this move from data to idea is demonstrated in the second tier of coding in LaRayne Hurd's interview (see fig. 12; a more specific example of the progression from Level 1 to Level 2 Coding is in "Appendix 2: Grounded Theory Process"):

I seriously had no doubts about being able to reach my goals. I wanted to be a leader and I had spent so much of my life dealing with discrimination that came from my skin color that it never occurred to me that my sex/gender would ever be a hindrance to anything. <i>Describe your experience as woman service member. Were you aware of the demographic data, in terms of gender, in the U.S. military? What was your work? What were your living conditions? How were you told, shown, or instructed about your particular identity in the military – who you were, what you could and could not say and do? Did the male warrior trope construct the military community and sense of collective ethos? How did you respond to these messages?</i> My recruiter was a great first example of who I could be in the military, she looked like me, spoke like me and had reached a point that I so desperately wanted for me. I know that all my initial expectations came from her. Once I got to boot camp, I met other female leaders, the most impactful was my Drill Sergeant. She was a real, world class bull dog. She rode all the females in the platoon twice as hard as the males and meaner than any of her male counterparts. She used to constantly punish us for our posture during pushups, the way we stood when talking to males, the way we walked, spoke or broke down after an extremely draining or challenging day. I used to constantly draw her ire, I have always been curvy and not even the oversized physical training uniforms could hide my hips.	Aspiring to be lifer & leader Dealing with racial bigotry Not expending gender discrimination Aspiring to be like recruiter Desperately wanting success Meeting female leaders Comparing female leader to male Identifying her as aggressive animal Defining female leader as harder and meaner Seeing women pressured and punished because women Being a target Uniform not hiding gender Being sexualized	Seeing Army as pathway to success Feeling confident Defining leadership goal Introducing racial experience Unaware of gender bias (Did recruiter address being female in male culture?) Expressing desperation and anxiety abt future success Identifying recruiter as source of expectation of military benefit Identifying with female leaders Noting women work 2x as hard as males Focusing on ways to be female in military Challenging authority
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Figure 12 Level 1 to Level 2 Coding, Initial to Theoretical: LaRayne Hurd's Written Interview

As each dataset is analyzed in these levels, the researcher begins to see comparisons and contrasts, and sometimes outright contradiction, among and within the narratives. It is important to note that although the data in GTM can appear in tidy diagrams (see figs. 11 and 12 above) as

cleanly sorted and classified, in fact the procedure is recursive as segments of data provide insight, one to the other. For example, on 13 January 2018, I made a note that I could not “tuck data in neatly” and cited a comment in Charmaz that the data can remain unresolved (*Constructing* 195; *Good Days* 280). What I called “my own piece of unresolved” was a rumination from Kayla Williams that women do not want to address the idea of “resilience” – yet the word also appears in my data as a positive attribute (Desnoyers-Colas, Personal interview). A moment later, a thought occurred to me that pushed into areas I had not yet covered in my coding: “Why do women vets feel service in male-dominated organizations a good thing? What function does it serve for them?” This thought was followed by a note of frustration: “Interview comments can be problematic, even though women vets don’t think they are.”

Grounded Theory Method: Memos

However, these moments of pondering are productive and, in fact, an integral part of the GTM protocols. As the numbers of stories increase, those segments of data reveal patterns and disjunctions that lead to the step of writing *memos* about these phenomena. The process of composing these memos, presented in Figure 13 can, and did in my own project, begin to build topics for the first draft and often actual draft material. Although I began to write the memos by hand for discovery in individual narratives and compile what I labeled “Memo Central,” it was more useful to me to craft these memos in outline form and push toward the formulations of diagrams and drafts. Even the strict formula of Glaser allows for variation among researchers who make their own adaptations within the process (Bryant and Charmaz *Handbook of Grounded Theory* 10). The following memo (see fig. 13) addresses the connection in Levels 1

and 2 coding between the data retrieved from written interviews with Emily Satterfield (herein called “Maryland,” my nickname for her), Nancy Bullock-Prevot, and LaRayne Hurd:

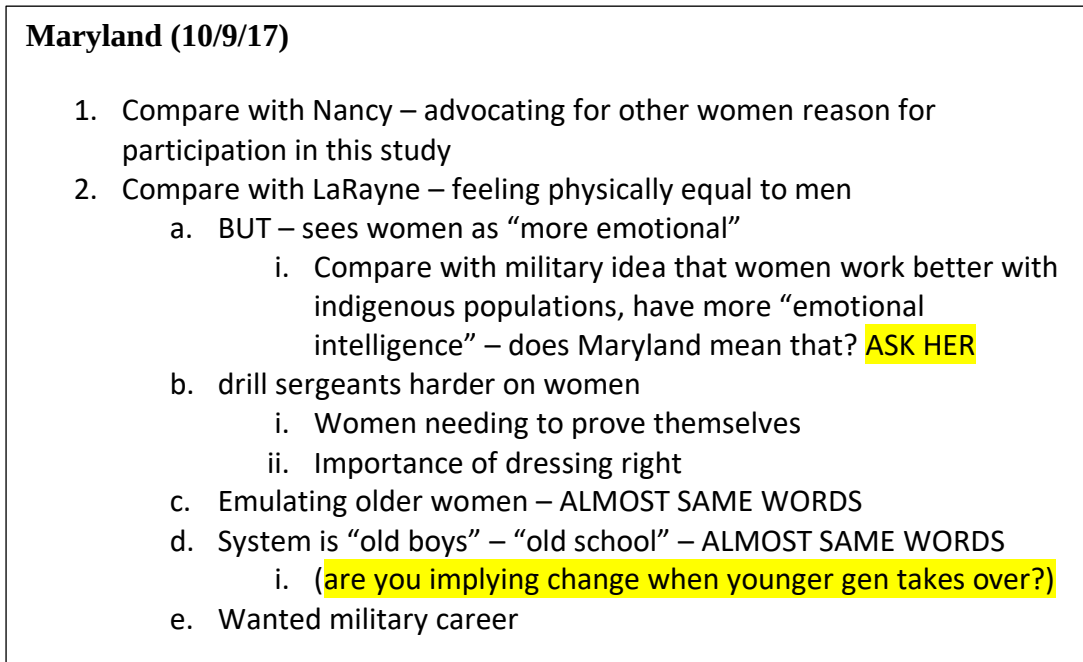


Figure 13 Memo Outline of Satterfield, Bullock-Prevot, and Hurd Texts

The events and themes in the stories, which created a process of discovery for me, were complex, unexpected, and often felt unwieldy. Outlines such as the one presented here (see fig. 13) enabled me to keep the stories straight – both the narrative they relate and the story I wanted to tell.

Again, the process is not as linear and fixed as it seems in printed form, which does not represent the ways that data can flex as it is read and offer unexpected insight and development of an idea. As Charmaz notes, ideas occur to the analyst as she proceeds and finds that she makes “cognitive leaps of discovery” (*Constructing* 200-201). Since the process is more asynchronous than graphs and outlines might indicate, the researcher has moments of perception in which the codes cohere. Indeed, Downs in her GTM dissertation referenced earlier in this chapter, has

discussed the “epistemological importance of women’s perspectives” in researching these stories (71); the same process of learning how to think about and theorize this discourse is true about the researcher, and I can attest to the truth of this experience. In contending with narrative material that does not necessarily fit neatly into tidily tagged “clusters” or “families” or “axial” groupings of codes, what happens is that the composing mind of the researcher, perhaps with the theoretical knowledge she already possesses or the kinship she feels with ideas that clearly emerge from the

10/1/17

The great paradox: they see joining the military as freedom – the military is seen and spoken about as authoritarian - the last bastion of male hegemony – male-dominant

Question: Define freedom .. from? To do? To be?

10/3/17

Q: Are we viewing military as essentially masculine? Are dominant and essentialized the same thing?

Q: Has anyone made a connection between “moral waiver” for guys convicted of felonies and abuse of woman in the military?

Q: Does the push of military women align with culture? (Look at songs)

Q: Is awareness of the condition of women in Iraq and Afghanistan part of the push for equality?

Q: How did you feel seeing women in that subordinate condition, and did you relate in any way?

Q: Why do men fear equality? Is women’s power terrifying?

Q: Are military values entirely constituted as male? Again – essentialized as male?

Figure 14 Questions for Abductive Reasoning

data in front of her, discovers that she is engaged in a process that is known as “abductive reasoning.” This phenomenon occurs when the researcher seeks explanation for incomplete or unresolved issues in the data as it manifestly is (“Why do women find freedom in such a constrained and male-dominated system? Why do they answer Yes and No to the quality of resilience?”) and makes the kind of “cognitive leap” that Charmaz describes. Abductive reasoning is an integral part of analysis in Grounded Theory, as the researcher moves from data codes to whatever the underlying ideas might be. I can attest that this part of the protocol is the most creative and fun activity in GTM – when it is not the most vexing. The question Charmaz

repeatedly poses, “What is evident in the data?” does not yield immediate results, which occurred in my lengthy process of attempting to define the theoretical categories that best, in

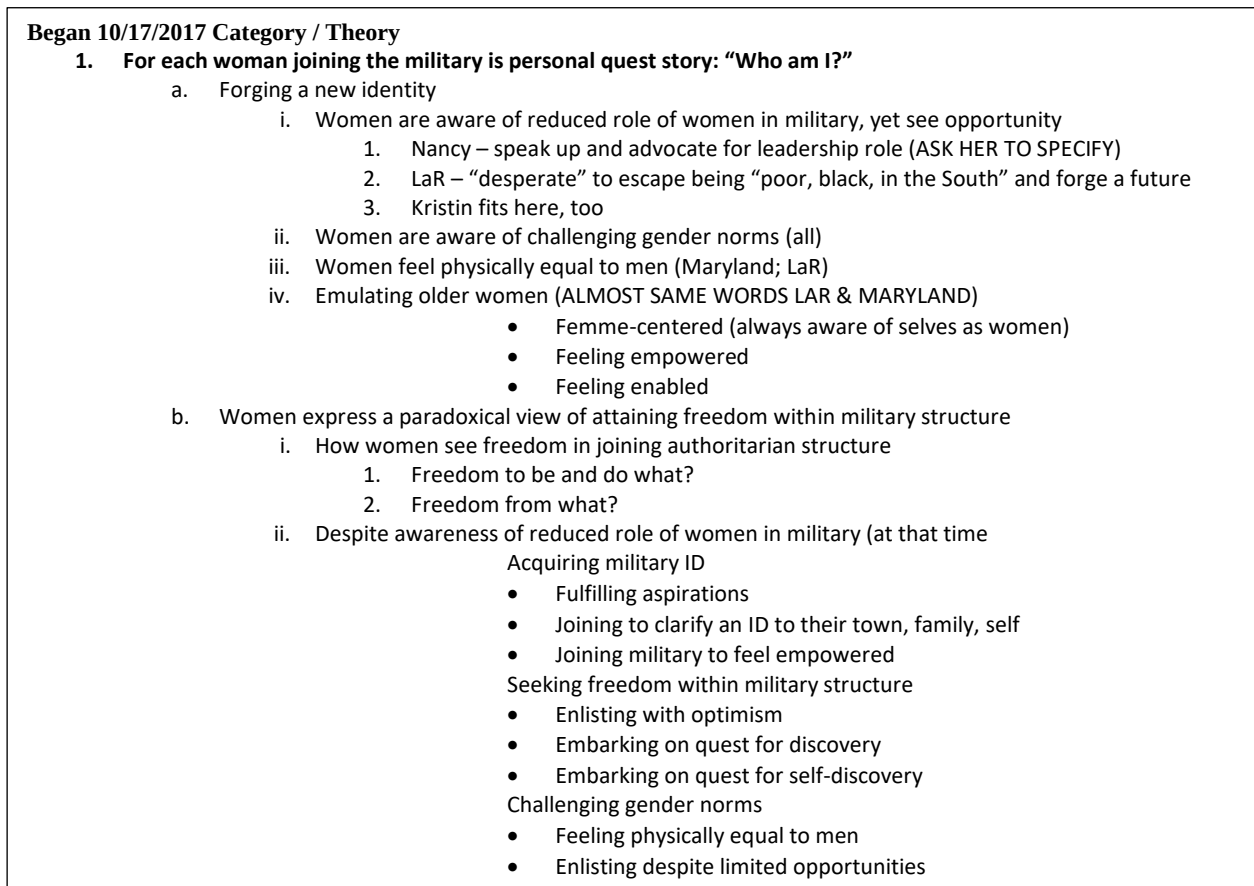


Figure 15 Movement of Codes, through Categories, to Theory: Increasing Abstraction

turn, defined the data I was studying. It is, as Charmaz tells us, a process of moving the implicit to the visual, first, and identifying the theory that emerges from that specific material (*Constructing Grounded Theory; Five Ways; Good Days*; with Bryant, *Handbook*). Figures 14 and 15 show my first fledgling attempts to articulate the process of moving from data codes to those underlying ideas. Figure 14 demonstrates that the process began with inquiry, a series of questions that, for me, initiated abductive reasoning and moved the project forward. Its partner,

Figure 15, is an example of how these questions combine with discoveries in Coding Levels 1 & 2 and comparisons among and within data to move to the level of abstraction that leads to theoretical framing. It is through recursively reading and describing the material at hand in all its similarities and contradictions that the formulation of *theoretical categories*, occurs. A complete set of memos, queries, outlines, and graphs I devised that served to generate the *theoretical categories* of this dissertation is presented in "Appendix 2: Grounded Theory Process: Coding to Category."

Grounded Theory Method: Categories to Theory

I discovered, as I continued the process of interviewing and adding that new information to the codes, memos, and outlines I had on the screen in front of me, that the narratives coalesced in their most salient points. There were “outlier” experiences and certainly crucial disagreements, but – as noted previously and will be explored more expansively as the analysis develops – the feminist sophistic of this dissertation is based on the existence, indeed, the power, of multiple accounts and the tension that arises in the discourse from its diversity. But the categories that “jumped out” at me from the data (as Charmaz also described her own moment of discovery in her dissertation) were grounded in military identity, and how the women claimed it, but also how they enacted it. My initial attempt to synthesize the material and identify categories that might be further distilled and articulate the kind of identity formation I saw in the data I called “*Acquiring a Female Military Identity*” and “*Performing a Female Military Identity*.” I first pushed that idea to a further category I called a “*Personal Quest*,” but that interpretation seemed, on further reflection, both limiting and inaccurate. The reality check came in Lila Holley’s interview when

she says, “I would absolutely do it again because I felt like I went in, when I look at myself and

The Points

1. Nothing in the discourse states or suggests that these women see themselves as “weak,” “incompetent,” “obedient,” “submissive,” or any other humiliating epithet. Everything in the discourse indicates that these women see themselves as full equal and engaged service members.
2. They carry their own emotional and analytical weight.
3. You can’t marginalize them by saying they’re marginalized. Their refusal to accept it is part of their power. (Quote: not colluding with their own marginalization.)
4. They validate themselves. They don’t get their validation from others. Seek their own forms of validation by creating stories. Stories of transformation – capability – “Fuck you, Douglas” – that’s the story they want told. It’s important not to judge or suppress it before they tell it.
5. Feelings aren’t facts. They don’t define us. (Idea in Psych).
6. Articles and attitudes from other perspectives make it seem they have to call or beg for attention, for affirmation and validity.
7. The experience makes them conscious.
8. They didn’t enlist for money or men.
9. Entering a culture whose identity demands the effacing of yr own – but they can’t collaborate with it.
10. The words experience – military experience – journey – also seem as generalized and sweeping as speaking of “woman” to cover all women, and standpoint to cover all situated positions. Just as each woman comes to her decision, enlistment, and work from her own response to often common circumstances – minimum wage, stasis, etc. – so her actions, relationships, encounters, and tasks within the military syllabus and system are specific to her and how she perceived, answered, and remembered them.
11. START CONFRONTING MALE CULTURE WITH THIS POINT:
12. Rhetoric of the Recruitment Site
status – belonging – danger/risk – hero – value – what is your life worth? Problem-solving – fitness – we’re in control – (the women don’t speak of heroics) – “come be something better than what you are right now – answer to higher call – resonant of religious ideals – nation’s call – idea of service – importance of meaning – winning (and they make winning look easy and achievable by saying it) – hits genderless tone – not targeted to men – takes out the gender factor – that has appeal to both –
13. Freedom comes within routine – order brings clarity – and look for shape out of chaos and confusion. – Sartre: “what I need are clarity and structure.” – Lisa: the military can guide me to success.
14. Bold nonconformists – irony to some – going into major conformist system

There’s an independence of spirit

Figure 16 Memo / Outline / Decisions Informing Final Categories

the progress over the years that I've made, the things that I've been able to do with my life in that 22 years of service. I entered a shy, young lady, and I came out a mighty fighting woman, you know?" (Personal interview). I reversed course and examined more closely the creation of that identity, as the women depict it. The ideas that shaped and guided my thinking are presented in memo/outline/decision form in Figure 16.

Revision thus occurred, as Charmaz warns us to expect. A practice known as *theoretical sampling* in which the researcher returns to the participants with specific questions derived from the ongoing analysis enabled me to see, for example, that the verb "performing" was inaccurate. The female military identity, which these women acquire "in their own words ... on their own terms" (Reinharz 19), is not "performed" in the sense of theatrics, a series of actions to which they are not essentially connected. I discovered that the entire process their discourse enacts is one of identity composition. First, they see themselves in the pictures and job descriptions in the armed services, most male, and through that power of imagination they posit an entirely new female identity in the U.S. Military. They then, in practice, shape the contours of that particular "combat woman" into a new form of service that each woman fills according to her own lights.

The process of constantly visiting the data and revising the ideas I discovered, moving ever more closely to the identity quest and resolution I perceived therein, continued throughout the interview, coding, memo, and sampling process. I worked what I was seeing in the data through several iterations of potential categories after "acquiring" and "performing" seemed inaccurate, a process of attempting to find the most precise gerund, as the Charmaz method of Grounded Theory prefers because of its connotation of living and continuously acting. At first I articulated the actions in their discourse as "*re-imagining* and *re-shaping*" the female military identity. However, I realized, through midnight scribbling in the reporters' notebooks that

recorded my ruminations about these ideas, that one theory which certainly did *not* emerge from the data was that these women effected a *re*-anything in their enlistment and deployment as servicemembers. Their convictions and commitment, and the identities thus formulated, were undefined as yet and unprecedented.

The theoretical categories thus achieved through GTM became the two parts of the Data Analysis in Chapter Five of “American Athena,” to wit:

1 – Imagining the Female Military Identity

2 – Shaping the Female Military Identity.

It was through this process that a particular discourse, created by women of varied experience under the aegis of the U.S. Military, has emerged as resonant. The standpoint of these women as a group seemed to me unique and, as I discovered, uniquely unreported, and one that required its own analysis. This dissertation is that dedicated study: a GTM analysis of the stories of military women who consider themselves unacknowledged and unheard as the singular cohort they are. Its members speak to dispel this silencing and achieve recognition, standing, and voice as servicewomen.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology: Athena, from Myth to Model

The words are purposes. The words are maps. – Adrienne Rich

Proving Ground: Brandy Lockhart



Figure 17 Brandy Lockhart on deployment in Iraq. Photo courtesy of Brandy Lockhart.

Every night I would sit there and people would be crying around me, because it is difficult, it is hard.

And I would think in my head, 'Okay, this much is taken care of, this much is done, I need to get up a few minutes before everybody else, I need to do my hair' ... You just plan. My body started waking up five minutes before, then seven minutes before, then ten minutes before. So I'd wake up before reveille, and I'd sneak into the bathroom because you weren't supposed to get up and into the bathroom, and they could hear you, they could listen on the intercoms so if they heard people walking around talking, you'd get yelled at. So I'd sneak into the bathroom, get ready for the day. And then come back out.

And that was my five minutes of peace before the chaos. And I try to ... whenever they'd tell us there's certain things, like your t-shirts had to be one way, this had to be one way, that had to be one way, I just remember going through it and if it was hard for me, or if it was difficult or something I couldn't handle at that moment, or challenging to me, I'd just think, 'You can get through this, you'll be fine, you can do this, just keep doing it, take one day at a time, one day at a time.' And that's how I got through it.

I would work out, we have a little gym there. I'd take all the opp, we were loading them in our trailer, I'd take the time to load some more, do a couple presses with them, just kind of build up my muscles so I wouldn't be behind.

(Iraq was hard) physically, mentally. I'm a really deep sleeper and I like to sleep. So after the first couple nights of me being woken up – and this might not even be the right way to think of this – I was like, you know, if something hits me, it's going to hit me. I'm not going to wake up every five seconds trying to figure out if I'm about to die or no., I'm just going to go to sleep, and if I get killed in my sleep, at least it will be better than sitting there being awake. That's how I dealt with it.

Brandy Lockhart, Personal – interview (see Brandy's collage, "Freedom don't come free," in "Appendix 3 Supplemental Files")

Introduction: “Women Have Transformed the Military”

Chrystal Nguessan, veteran of six years as an Army medical specialist and headed to medical school, tells us, “Women provide a different gender perspective to the daily situations and problems of the military and diplomatic events, so their increasing presence has captured a sense of feminine resilience and reaction to hardship (Written interview). The “different gender perspectives” that Chrystal mentions here inscribe the stories I absorbed through months of interviews and readings. The women’s voices align and diverge in a shared experience, one that could overtly and visually standardize them and thus deprive them of their power and the changes they might portend. The voices are discrete, haunting, particular: they speak of their shared history in utterly personal terms. More than mere transaction, their tenure in the U.S. Military has been, for each of them, a deep and abiding relationship: “I loved my job,” Michelle Loftus Fisher, who served in a medical unit in Iraq, tells us in *Women at War: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Conflicts*, one of the first revelatory collections of women’s narratives and reflections, selected by military historians James E. Wise Jr. and Scott Baron. “And we helped a lot of people,” Fisher notes. “Once, an old woman came up and kissed my hand. There was no fear, only appreciation. That was my greatest reward” (26). My process of eliciting these stories is recounted in “Chapter Three Method,” where I elucidate the ways that Grounded Theory (GTM) serves the purposes of this Athena study. In line with this method, the question that constitutes, represents, and reveals the work of this analysis and its design and discoveries is deceptively simple: “How do the women themselves talk about their experiences?” In GTM the question becomes, “What emerges from the data?” In “Chapter Four Methodology: Athena, From Myth to Model” I posit the Athena theory and model that serve to frame these stories, many untold until

this rendering, and clarify our understanding of Chrystal's credo: "I think women have transformed the military," she says.

I was, as noted previously, interested in the discourse they create which is, as discourse analyst Gee reminds us, the very stuff of life – grounded in culture, history, the ever-mutable genres of social life, our individual DNA, our "language-in-use," and silences (*Introduction* 26). The latter point is emphasized by Nancy Miller, author of the *Poetics of Gender*, who considers what women leave "unsaid" to be "more important than their stories in a male context (in Marcus 231). Miller posits the idea of "gender as genre," and in this context we might consider gender as discourse, as well, and analyze the women's difference from that perspective. Scholar of Critical Discourse Analysis Ruth Wodak describes the process of discourse analysis as starting from theory, so that "the topic is further refined so as to construct the objects of research (pinpointing specific foci and research questions)" (40). Wodak does recognize, however, a diversity of approaches in discourse research (40-41), and my project seems to adhere most closely to her notion of intertextuality, interdiscursivity, and recontextualization of narratives. Indeed, the Grounded Theory I pursue reverses a traditional route and does not accept existing theory as orthodoxy. This more adventurous inquiry suited my purpose because I wanted to listen to women's narratives as they chose to compose them in a field of analysis that has too often "rendered" women's voices "inaudible," to borrow Sullivan's description. Sullivan refers us to feminist poet Adrienne Rich who emphasizes that women are "taught early" that "tones of confidence, challenge, anger, or assertiveness are strident and unfeminine" (48). My hope was to impose neither a cultural ideograph nor an ideology wherein "the woman herself is (not) allowed to speak ... a story we're not permitted, an 'other' perspective we're not allowed to share" (Sullivan 47). I realized, as I worked the data from interview to coding to theorizing on the basis

of situation and story, that grounded theory was itself a rhetorical process – as research is (borrowing from Robert J. Connors in “Dreams and Play”) “always written from probabilistic, and therefore rhetorical, points of view” (31) -- although not identified or perhaps recognized in that classical way.

The answers to that one question – “What emerges from the data?” -- composed as they are of women’s diverse contexts and experiences, resist an essentialized treatment of “the woman fighter” or a fixed and determinative definition of her as female, “taking something to which (she is) not quite entitled ... still perceived as belonging outside power” (Beard 56-57). Wodak is helpful in this regard when speaking in “Gender Mainstreaming” of the “*habitus* of female gender role constructions,” a concept relevant here.¹ Pierre Bourdieu, author of the *habitus* theory, has spoken of this set of deeply internalized customs of daily life as both “differentiated” and “differentiating” (*Physical Space* 15).² As Charmaz notes by her one use of the word “rhetoric” in her prodigious *Constructing Grounded Theory*, the participants’ stories are “always rhetorical” (232) – always, in the view of this study, a sophistic. Indeed, procedures of analyzing data have a rhetoricity of their own: Sullivan contends in “Feminism and Methodology” that our perspectives on reality are always situated (56). Sullivan cites Susan Bordo’s oft-repeated and pertinent observation: “There is no view from ‘nowhere,’ no ‘God’s eye’ view from which ‘one can see reality as it is, undistorted by human perspective’” (56). Such is the challenge and surprise of qualitative research, in which researchers of discourse or writing “generate descriptions of composing from the point of view and in the language of the writers they are

¹ In Lazar, Michelle M., ed.

² Bourdieu offers a more comprehensive definition of his *habitus* theory in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*: “The *habitus* is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g., of language, economics, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms (...individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence” (85 *passim*).

studying” (57), exactly my intent in this enterprise. Describing his forays into the study of stories in his essay “Dreams and Play,” Connors notes that “all received wisdom is partial, incomplete. It must be examined again and again, not merely accepted” (34). For this reason he argues for “multiple” stories: “No one narrative can ever, or should ever, shut down the narrative enterprise” (34). It was not my interest or purpose to standardize the stories I was hearing and reading into one interpretation, one theoretical experience that attempted or pretended to speak for all women in the military situation. This quest, and the scholarship that informed it, led to a methodology that served to guide my reading of these stories and reveal, in the words of journalist Sandra Felgueiras, “the beneath truth,”³ i.e., the truth that lies under the anecdotes, the contradictions, and details of public accounts.

“Knowledge of Women’s Reality by Those Who Live It”

In this chapter I will demonstrate how my initial ideas for this study -- a sophistic framed by the figure of a warrior goddess whose identity is complex, unique, and contested -- emerged again “full blown,” like Athena herself, from the process of discovery. So I was not so far off-track as I had feared in my first impressions of this study. These suppositions were able to “earn” their way back into the study and inform our understanding of discourses born of both the patriarchal culture of the U.S. Military and the strategic intelligence of the women who choose to join it. These discoveries, as noted, consist of two specific categories in women’s experience in the U.S. Military: (1) they do not as servicemembers inhabit a prior military identity, be it female or male, but engage in a process of *imagining* an identity in that context on their own terms; (2) thus, their tenure of service is a process of *shaping* a female military identity in ways that

³ In the documentary by filmmakers Emma Cooper and Chris Smith, “The Disappearance of Madeleine McCann,” which premiered on Netflix 15 March 2019.

recognize their agency and respect their individual sovereignty. As noted, however, this Athena study accords with Harding's distinction between method and methodology in her foundational 1987 *Feminism and Methodology*. Method, Harding informs us, consists of techniques and tools the researcher uses in conducting her study – here, the protocols of GTM that discovered categories of imagined and shaped identity in the women's stories. How methods are actually put into practice, "how research does or should proceed," Harding advises, is the concern of methodology ("Feminist Methodology" 3).

In the Athena study, based on GTM principles, my conviction has been that methodology should be suited to the women's circumstances, alert to human content in the data. In this way the "feminist sophistic" methodology earned its place, as noted, in the analysis (Charmaz *passim*). The appeal of this procedure to me is its truth: as feminist scholar Hill Collins has emphasized in studying Black women's discourses, we are talking about women who have a unique and "different view of material reality" ("Social Construction" 747) and, because of an imposed status within their American and military cultures, have created "alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge itself" ("Social Construction" 746). What I was hunting with my tape recorder on, my pen at work on the page, was the women's description, however nuanced, of "things they carried" with them as they reached their decision to enlist in the U.S. Military. I wanted to discover how they discussed their situated knowledge – their background, experience, and in the words of early feminist inquiry, their "sense of themselves"⁴ -- to survive or thrive within its precincts. What, I wondered, was their motivation – a question existing literature does not ask. I wanted to know what factors, in their eyes, enabled them to enter a community closed to them traditionally, and work to conserve a culture whose transformation

⁴ The fundamental question in Judith Newton's Feminist Literature class, La Salle College, 1975. I was a member of those first classes in Women's Studies..

they embody by virtue of their sex. How, indeed, would they define and interpret their reality as they lived it? Recall the words of veteran Michelle Loftus Fisher in Wise and Baron's *Women at War*: "We helped a lot of people" (26). I wanted to understand the conviction and values within such statements that popular discourse about these women may overlook, but which characterize their own accounts.

The Standpoint

Unexpectedly, the answers that emerged from the data revealed a complicated and productive relationship with the U.S. Military that challenged the current discourses of victimhood among this population and, in fact, my own suppositions of resistance as the Athena study began. These false leads are detailed in the first three chapters of this dissertation. I was able to see, as each story unspooled, the identity these women, "a communion of unmerged souls," both imagined and shaped in their tenure as servicemembers. This identity seemed to me to compose a unique standpoint, i.e., the position that establishes who they are and how they are able to realize their power and act as women in a male-determined culture. It may be recalled that standpoint, as defined by Hartsock, is intended to "valorize difference" so that "previously marginalized groups can name themselves and participate in defining the terms that structure their world" (qtd. in Hekman "Truth and Method" 228), a description particularly apt when studying the discourses of women service members. While composed of actions and attitudes they share as an identified group and the biopolitics that mark them as physically "different" in their chosen sphere, this standpoint also has a distinctive place and voice that belong to each woman as she enacts it. Further, as the model that closes this chapter attempts to represent, that

standpoint is not a fixed condition or point: it changes throughout the story each woman relates, and changes even as she tells it – changes since the interview; remains an open question now.

The fundamental contours of this standpoint emerge from the data, the stories, themselves. It is the women's own creation, and for each woman it consists of three qualities that each story contains, regardless of the woman's individual articulation and the personal elements she embodies through economics, education, ethnicity, and other social facts. The standpoint, presented here as the Athena Model, consists of the following three theoretical elements:

1. a commitment to a structure previously closed to them;
2. the conviction of their equality, despite the resistance they encounter;
3. the reliance on strategic patience, identified here in the rhetorical strategy *metis*, to see it through.

The ways these women imagine and shape a new female identity in this fiercely defended system – a system subverted by their very bodies – are detailed in their narratives, described in a particularly salient phrase from Jarratt as “controlled discourse” of a “degraded ‘other’ in favor of a polar opposite ” (*Rereading* 64-5). These narratives are replete with information, both articulated clearly or implied, that demonstrate these three specific elements. Figure 18 shows my attempt to diagram the move from GTM to standpoint as they structure that analysis.

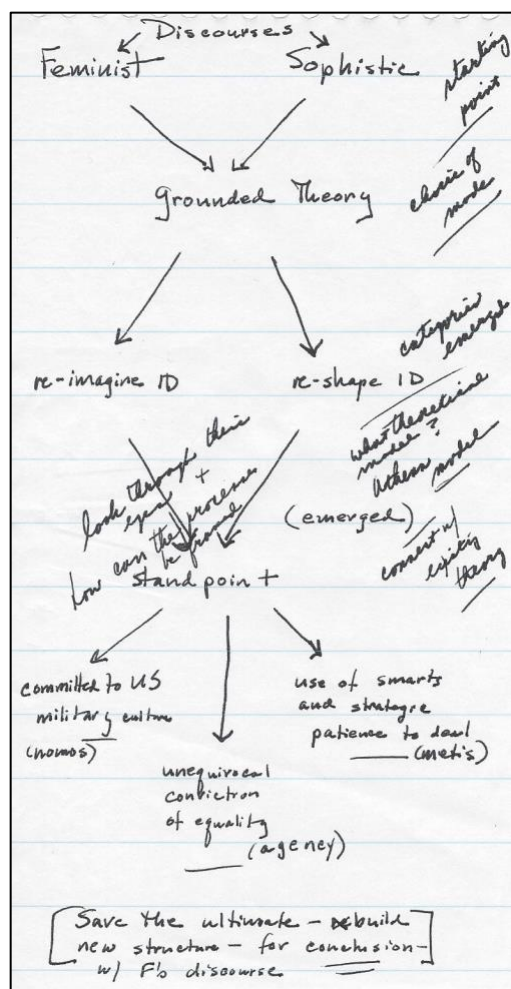


Figure 18 Emergence of Categories and Standpoint from Data

Methodology: The Feminist Sophistic

“I grew up poor, Black, and in the South,” LaRayne Hurd begins (Personal interview). I recognize, as a teacher of rhetoric, the ways our stories are situated in contexts – e.g., cultural, economic, historical, political, social -- and still I veer from a study of the myriad ways these forces might prescribe LaRayne’s life and future prospects, how “varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship categories differently position each individual” (Hill Collins and Bilge “Intersectionality” 8). The scholar of autobiographical discourse, Laura Marcus, contends that women’s narrative is hybrid and fluid: “it moves between the binaries of

self and world, literature and history, fact and fiction, subject and object” (7). This depiction of agency, authority, and sheer creative chance was clear to me immediately as I listened to narratives like LaRayne’s. She tells us she longed for “meaning” in her life; she describes in detail a series of strategic choices that cause her to travel far from an origin story that might, in other critical takes, be considered her formative context: poverty; race; geography – each element infused with gender issues.

While such an analysis of power and its effects on women’s lives has merit and significance, stories like LaRayne Hurd’s are replete with acts of agency that appear to show that power is “everywhere,” as Foucault posits, diffused across the borders of cultural and personal acts and values: it is not fixed or hierarchical (*History* 93). In order to address a discourse of agency that resists the identity of the women in this study, such as the life of LaRayne Hurd, as “culturally determined” (Marcus 222), I propose a feminist sophistic as its analytical frame, i.e., Jarratt’s discourses of “the other” (*Rereading* 67). A sophistic, Jarratt explains, is a rhetorical situation that embodies the discoveries of “the well-traveled, charismatic teachers” – the sophists – in their journeys to various centers of learning, from Italy to Africa to Greece: “(T)hey believed and taught that notions of ‘truth’ had to be adjusted to fit the ways of a particular audience in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs or laws” (xv). Their worldview was and is typified by the practice and teaching of argument, but Jarratt disputes an understanding of a sophistic in “merely pragmatic terms,” without recognizing the “seriousness of (its) project” (xvi). A sophistic is an environment that privileges the “radical standpoint, perspective, position,” as delineated by hooks in *Choosing the Margin* (15). It is the work of hooks that Jarratt references in her discussion of “speech that compels listeners, one that is heard” (*Rereading* 114).

That “radical position,” or “discourses of the other,” in this study is occupied by women in the U.S. Military who “tell the story their own way” and subvert the voices that seek to speak for them. Jarratt identifies this particular sophistic as “feminist”: “The discursive method driving both feminist and sophistic ways of negotiating change through discourse is argument” (116). A feminist sophistic “recognizes the need to confront the different truths” in the stories we hear (116), and the feminist sophistic I present in this project is both constitutive and reflective of each story herein, a complicated, realistic, and dynamic flux of material circumstances and ambitious intent. The anthropologist and linguist Charlotte Linde’s definition of a “life story” accords with these differences and constant revisions: “A life story is a temporally discontinuous unit told over many occasions and altered to fit the specific occasions of speaking ... to reflect changes in the speaker’s long-term situations, values, understanding, and therefore discursive practices” (51). Such elements as “interests and talents,” “adventure,” and “spunk” can be added to sociological categories of “ethnicity” and “gender” in La Rayne Hurd’s origin story: “The decision to enlist for me was a decision to take the lifeline in front of me,” she says, “and do something, ANYTHING, with my life that would give it meaning” (Personal interview). Chrystal Nguessan adds the perspective of the student with a clear career trajectory, who sought “meaning” for other reasons:

I was irritated with my academic lifestyle. I felt I had no interesting attributes which defined me. I could not sing, I could not draw, I did not play sports or a musical instrument, I was not a member of the school band (very popular in my city), and I was socially ignorant and anxious. I felt like I would forever be known as the nice girl who loves reading.

I thought about what the Army could do for me: Get me out of Tallahassee and bad memories as quickly as possible, force me to be adaptive and resilient to situations I would likely not experience otherwise. (Written interview)

LaRayne, Chrystal, and their partners in this study and the military system share stances and values that define them as a community and collective force. Their convergence is clear – it is not assumed or coerced – in the narratives on which this study is based, and in the governing theme of this data analysis, from Goldie Ann Johnson’s interview: “You are trying to get through, you are trying to prove yourself” (Personal interview). The powerful confluence of factors that leads to that determination is clear in an interview with Jas Boothe, whose story is featured in the documentary film *Served Like a Girl* and shows the will to succeed that both infuses and forms the feminist sophistic analysis that follows in "Chapter Five Analysis of the Female Military Identity":

Yeah. I was born and raised in the projects of Chicago, and there wasn't many opportunities or many role models in that area. And so I knew that I always wanted to have a, you know, a career that my children could be proud of and also do something to show people that, you know, come from poverty or like circumstances that whatever you set your mind to and whatever you work hard for, you know, you can accomplish.

(Transcript, in *Served*)

“The Beneath Truth”: Stories That Tell Us How To Read Them

To counteract biases, be they embedded in American *nomos* and unconsciously practiced, or done deliberately, a feminist sophistic analysis derives its rationale and theory directly from the stories and is conjoined with that data. My research demonstrates that the product, the data, is

simultaneously the process of analyzing that data – the methodology. The stories themselves show us how to “read” them. Figure 19 depicts that relationship, a mode of analysis described by Rosalind Edwards and Jane Ribbens as a “liminal position” in which private lives are translated into public knowledge (2-4). I found the same phenomenon in this data. While double triangles are pictured – the women’s stories, or product, and the analysis, or process -- each may be superimposed on its twin to indicate that the act of working with the stories shows us how to hear them: they create their own model of analysis. The information that *constitutes* the stories, the experience they *represent* and the truth they *reveal*, also constitutes the kind of analysis that helps us understand the work they do. Thus, by listening closely to the stories, we are able also to hear, again in the words of journalist Felgueiras, “the beneath truth.”

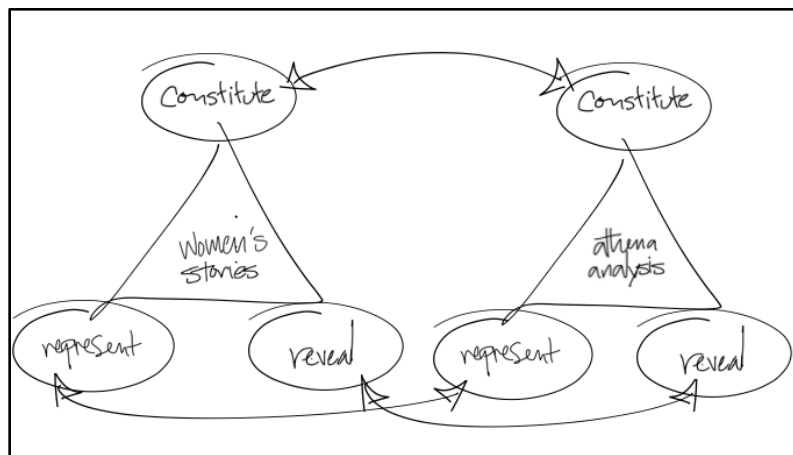


Figure 19 Process and Product Conjoined. How the Data Creates Its Own Model. Graphic by Chloe Fox Edele

In this manner grounded theory, as it moves to its purpose in theory discovery, stands in stark contrast to the research methods of the myriad discourses about military women in social criticism and popular culture that often do not analyze or include these accounts. This methodology seems entirely fitting as an approach to analyzing stories that exist outside of a literature, albeit limited, that ostensibly speaks for them but seems instead to overdetermine or

patronize them -- or, as I discovered in the course of this study, the propensity of others to restate the women's avowed positions and thus distort them. As a way of attending to the data first, without imposing *a priori* attitudes or biased thinking based on ideological assumptions, grounded theory seeks to erase the static that interferes with our ability to hear the stories of LaRayne, Chrystal, Goldie, and their partners-in-arms, that might both constitute and reveal "a truth" uncomfortable to both civilian and military worlds. This methodology seeks to become a way to analyze "language (as) a form of social action," one of those crucial and "invaluable critiques of official history" that feminist scholar and teacher of rhetorical pedagogy, Linda Brodkey, mentions in *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only* (2). The productive discourse thus created in this feminist sophistic serves to represent these women in ways they themselves construct with a strong vocality, and not to present an image that conversely (and perhaps conveniently) erases and silences them.

This problem recurs throughout a literature that characterizes women's lives within a masculinized culture without listening to women whose stories will, necessarily and significantly, complicate one another. Like Chrystal Nguessan quoted above, "Maggie White" describes her decision to enlist as an escape: "I was apprehensive about facing the real world on my own and the potential failures that would occur" (Written interview). We hear a competing account from Brandy Lockhart: "I was like, 'What if I could do something to make a change?' Did you ever feel this profound, overwhelming -- you get chills almost. 'This is something I need to do. What if something I'm about to do can help people?'" (Personal interview). The feminist sophistic of this study not only acknowledges and affirms these divergent voices of women service members: it is those voices themselves who created it, as noted, and constitute its framework and form of analysis now. All contention and opinion to the contrary

notwithstanding, women have since earliest mythological times partaken of the warrior *ethos*, *agon*, with its attendant *aretē*, virtuosity, as readily as men. Gender, in story and in strife, has not been the determining factor.

“I Am Not a Dove”

Because this study privileges the voices of women in depicting military culture, it resists the reductive assumption, articulated by Cynthia Enloe, that “men *are* the military; women are *in* the military” (qtd. by Eager 69), a phraseology that eerily calls to mind a similar misreading of Athena herself, mythologized as the motherless daughter of a father who engendered and bore her himself: he is the godly body; she is in the godly body. And thus Athena “earns” her re-entry into this study and becomes the embodiment of its theoretical framework and the visual analog of the “abstract theoretical scheme” that is the aim of Grounded Theory analysis (Charmaz “Time and Identity” 335).

The mythological warrior Athena herself has been depicted and described in guises and *miens* that typify varying purposes since her emergence from the forehead of her father, Zeus, and the *Theogony* of Hesiod. Athena, “the bright-eyed goddess,” comes down to us as patron of arts, crafts, intelligence, heroism, war, wisdom; compassionate counselor and vicious rival (Deacy *passim*). Her one unequivocal “truth” is that she was born an adult woman in full armor, complete with aegis and sword, from the forehead of her father, the god of the universe and war. Athena is indeed a child of a particular and peculiar context; she is often called the daughter of one colossal parent, i.e. a father, and therefore a patriarchal replicant, “obedient and submissive” like “the combat woman” that Goodman hypothesizes as “non-gendered” and “the technologized degendered body” (53) in *Gender for the Warfare State*. For this reason, as noted previously, she

is often considered masculinized and dismissed as nothing more than her father's "familiar" or "unfemale female," not a woman in her own right, an accusation or, at best, interpretation that burdens women service members over 2500 years later.

Nevertheless, they also represent an unequivocal truth, voiced here by Ladda Tammy Duckworth, member of Congress from Illinois, who tells us, "We will serve and serve proudly. We will go wherever the country needs us. I am not a dove. I believe strongly that if the country's national security interests dictate that we put boots on the ground, then let's do it and be aware of the true costs, both economic and human" (Duckworth "What I Learned at War").

The American Athena

There is, of course, another way of reading this story endemic to this project. Athena has a tenaciously cunning and strategic mother, Metis, who embodies women's refusal to be suppressed. The story of Metis, like that of many women allied with the jealous and ruthless Olympians, might seem a tragic one. Threatened by her intellectual prowess and warned that her child would unseat him, Zeus swallows Metis, a murder that is not a murder at the same time (and in one interpretation, Zeus becomes *Metioeis*, translated as "fully Metis," i.e., possessed by her [Vernant *The Universe* 27]). Metis, within the body of Zeus, carries secretly within her own body the daughter who emerges, shockingly, as the story goes, "full blown from the forehead of Zeus" (i.e., "You gave her birth from your own head" [Homer *Iliad* 1017-1018]). Athena is born fully armed, with helmet, spear, aegis, and a bronze breastplate marked with the head of Medusa, "a dazzling display of warrior magic" (Deacy *Athena* 9). Their paradigmatic story helps to form, in turn, the theoretical model of this study. Those acts and the characteristics they portend – engagement with and through a patriarchal system that her very physicality defies, enlivened by

an equally powerful intelligence and will to achieve her own goals – inform the stories of the women in what I have come to call “the Athena Project.”

As noted in “The Birth of Athena” by twentieth century social philosopher Norman O. Brown, “Myth is like an organism which undergoes incessant transformation and renovation” (130). I suggest the multiplicity of stories that comprise the discourse of American military women is an example of this kind of “transformation and renovation,” as is the position they occupy in this engagement, discourses of the other. Indeed, we have both renovated and transformed the classical myth once again by adding that dimension of choice for this *American Athena*, whose culture was itself born of the impulse for choice and self-determination. Unlike the armed daughter of myth, these women *elect* their military life: they exercise a freedom of choice that no mythological figure can do, locked as she is within a parlous and prescribed fate. These women are deeply sure of themselves, even in states of precarity or uncertainty about the experience itself. Allied with metistic acuity, they exert the ability to act with strength, energy, and force (Hartsock *Standpoint Revisited* 50), and thus imagine a female military identity that they shape for themselves. Like Athena herself, they may be described in other discourses as “manly women” and “aligned with patriarchy” (Deacy 32). They may experience attempts to marginalize them or render them invisible. Not only do the American Athenas not speak of themselves in that reductive or dismissive way, but their awareness of their situation – described by Anzaldua as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meanings of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (60) – enables the possibility of cultural change, just as Athena herself “was capable of bringing about surprising, and seeming impossible, outcomes to various situations” (Deacy *Athena* 68). Recall Chrystal Nguessan’s assured contention: “(W)omen have transformed the military” (Written interview).

Thus, the American Athena, warrior with a thousand and more voices, serves her military context on her own terms, the decisive act at the heart of the feminist sophistic. No one immutable and marbleized entity stands as a figure or symbol from the stories of these women – as Connors has noted previously, “no one narrative,” to which he adds, “There can never be any history so magisterial that it precludes other histories” (34). Further, these histories may themselves be internally inconsistent, as each of us is. In this respect Butler asserts the validity and value of “risking the incoherence of identity” (*Bodies* 113): what I find most compelling in her argument relates directly to my own discoveries and interpretations here. Butler avows that incoherence, rather than conformity, “makes connection possible.” It is, she notes, through our contradictions and differences that we discern, acknowledge, and affirm one another.

From these disparate accounts, accorded to this American Athena project through the aspiration and activism of the women who speak in association here, the Athena Theory emerges as a way these stories create their own analytical frame. As noted, the process and product are superimposed on each other in this study, and Grounded Theory is itself designed to illuminate contradictions and variations in the data collected therein. In the view of Charmaz, the process relies on the researchers’ “grappling with the data” (“Constructivist” 172) in order to discern significant meaning in discordances.

Methodology: The Athena Standpoint

I discovered the Athena Standpoint by listening to their stories, their eyewitness accounts, their ideas and interpretations. It was important for me to learn how to listen and what to listen for (Brodkey 121 *passim*). The country music artist Mary Gauthier, who composed the songs on her recent work, “Rifles and Rosary Beads,” with veterans wounded in battle, describes an

identical approach: "Our job ... is to listen," she notes. "And here's the thing: When you share with someone, when you look them in the eye and really listen, you sit in non- judgment ... When you're in that situation, what happens is human connection. What happens is empathy" (Lewis 2).

Much of the material in the literature of military women is still comprised of patriarchal scolding – and one might add, suppression -- that portrays women as “too emotionally fragile” and “too physically weak for the battlefield” (Blair “Five Myths”). Nor is feminist disdain, depicting women as objects or victims within a military machine, any more true. The Woolf scholar Jane Marcus advises in “Invisible Mending,” “I believe that we should write as truthfully as we can” (qtd. in Ascher 393), which is the “beneath truth” of this study: to listen, and attend to the stories accurately. As noted, and as will be demonstrated throughout this study, dismissive attitudes express societal prejudices and stereotypes that are replicated and exaggerated in U.S. military culture, and sometimes in the women themselves before they face and pass the tests that challenge and, in the end, empower them. Ally Osborne, former Marine and now Army National Guard from Salt Lake City, speaks of herself as “small” – “weak” – “average” – “scrawny”; she nonetheless “maxed out” the women’s fitness test for entry in the Marines and surpassed a cadre of males in theirs (“Narrative for Public Writing Class”).

These biases’ pernicious influence has so far succeeded in repressing stories that resist and subvert them, as the recognition of these women’s own voices as valid would inevitably do. The stories in the Athena study, from Ally, Brandy, Chrystal, Goldie, “Jordy,” Germano, LaRayne, to name only a few introduced so far, speak of an individual and shared experience within a chosen profession whose purpose they espouse. Indeed, together they constitute a standpoint that enables our analysis to cohere. However, they do not create a unitary collection

or even cohesive view; a uniformity of physical image serves to frame the complicated stories that set these women apart, define them as individual people. Feminist rhetoric scholars Brodkey and her colleague Michelle Fine note that “the idea that a single feminist standpoint could account for all women is not plausible (and) obscures the complexity and diminishes the importance of difference such as race and class in women’s lives” (119). I would say yes to this assertion – and to the factors listed by Fine and Brodkey I would add individual talents, tempers, needs, dispositions, dreams, aspirations – and the uncommon ways these particular women chose to act upon their purposes. Chrystal Nguessan explains the complexity of her own decision:

Overall, I wanted to be a part of an organization to which very few could say they were integral. It was not my intent to be defined by the Army. I just wanted to go beyond my comfort zone and discover the definition of ‘me.’ Even if I did not complete 20 years in the Army, I was confident that I would be a different person when I left. I only hoped that I would be stronger and proud of the final product. (Written interview)

A popular figure of an American flag composed of the faces of countless women service members denotes the paradoxical way that diversity can both create and subvert a uniform pattern. They thus themselves push back against a literary and social portrayal in which they are, at best, accessories to an ideology of gender, war, feminism, military tradition, American culture, whatever the critical meme might be, that uses them rhetorically to prove its point. The standpoint their stories enact is entirely their own.

As theorist Susan Hekman maintains, feminist standpoint works to “challenge ... the masculinist definition of truth and method embodied in modern Western science and epistemology” (in Harding *Reader* 233), and my intent certainly is to extricate the particular narratives of women servicemembers from the image of masculinity that the military projects.

But Hekman adds a dimension of female *brio* to this classical view, and contends that women's fight for recognition, sovereignty, and voice has ramifications beyond a localized, categorical struggle – i.e., women effecting their agency in military quarters – and gives their discourses significance in a more global sense.⁵ In this respect her revision of feminist standpoint accords precisely with the work of grounded theory, which also moves from data to the “beneath truth,” or abstract theoretical scheme that moves beyond the experienced self in a particular moment.

Not only is it clear that the women in the Athena project construct their standpoint in just this way, but also they convey this knowledge with a sense of agency and strong vocality that is evident in every story. Their approach to the act of enlistment, developed in depth in "Chapter Five Analysis of the Female Military Identity," provides an example of the change they constitute, reveal, and represent in a process that has a “pattern of inculcating the inferiority of women into all recruits,” as recorded and analyzed by Marine veteran and independent scholar Joshua Ibell in his article “Real Men: Countering a Century of Military Masculinity” (also, Germano *passim*). Indeed, “the American military establishment continues to produce numerous asymmetrical power relationships where any perceived lack of maleness invites suspicion; hypocritically, women may also be penalized if perceived as too masculine” (Ibell).

⁵ Standpoint is a contested term, as is clear in the contentious and often granular arguments in Harding's *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. For the purposes of this analysis, Hekman's focus on concerted action is a key point, as is Harding's own discussion of multiple standpoints. These theorists are, in fact, yet another example of Bakhtin's “communion of unmerged souls” that, in this case, attempts to address the rhetoricity of the situated knowledges that are the essence of standpoint (Harding *Reader* 127). Alison Wylie, author of “Why Standpoint Matters,” addresses this point specifically: “Standpoint theory may rank as one of the most contentious theories to have been proposed and debated in the twenty-five to thirty year history of second-wave feminist thinking about knowledge and science. Its advocates, as much as its critics, disagree vehemently about its parentage, its status as a theory, and crucially, its relevance to current thinking about knowledge” (Harding *Reader* 339-340). Harding, in the “Feminist Standpoints” section of *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, notes that a possible cause of the contumely among these scholars is the diversity of approaches that result from their various disciplinary practices (60).

In the data analysis of "Chapter Five" we will see the women in this study compare their ambition, aspiration, and work ethic to those of the men with whom they served. Those comparisons persist throughout their narratives, both overtly in descriptors of the men as "lazy" and indirectly in claims of "working twice as hard" to have their achievements and capacities recognized. Dulcie Burrow, an Athena in this study, argues that such acknowledgement occurs as matter of course, to female and male; others dispute that claim. It is an important component of the argument here that "women speak from multiple standpoints, multiple knowledges," notes Hekman, and they need not and will not agree unanimously on every point: "But this does not prevent women from coming together to work for specific political goals," she advises (239). The Athena women and their "band of sisters" (a term devised by Kirsten Holmstedt; similar to Holley's "camouflaged sisters") do represent a way of viewing power differently, did come together to achieve a specific goal, and are changing "the structure" as surely as they changed the approach and basic argument of this section of this project.

From the beginning of listening to their stories, not imposing *a priori* a viewpoint that seems agreeable to me and looking only at the data that confirms it, it was clear that these women imagined and shaped their military identity as they themselves desired and intended. As noted, the project itself is entitled "American Athena" because of the way their decisive actions and powerful sense of agency alter a crucial point in the plot of what Beard calls the "madness of Greek myth":

She herself wasn't even born of a mother but directly from the head of her father, Zeus. It was almost as if Athena, woman or not, offered a glimpse of an ideal male world in which women could not only be kept in their place but dispensed with altogether. (Beard 70-72)

Of course, Athena does have a mother, the ingenious and strategic Metis, whose rhetorical power is clear and immediate here. Mackenzie Rieselt makes a compelling case for metistic tenacity: “It never occurred to me that I couldn’t,” she declares. “Women are stronger. Women have to put up with more. (W)e have to be stronger. Women are not just victims. That angers me” (Personal interview). This outright challenge to a cultural meme, the walking wounded warrior woman, is solidly supported by the evidence of the narratives themselves, defining the ways I intend to conceptualize and proceed in this project, beginning with the way this methodology is realized in the Athena Standpoint.

The key factor in this particular theoretical frame is the women’s ability to perceive the freedom within their commitment to the military contract, and the confidence to see it through, patiently, strategically. I will elucidate briefly each component of the Athena Standpoint, and close this section on Method/Methodology (cf Chapter Three) with an original graphic that presents the ideas distilled in a model, titled for the Goddess of War as well, that provides this study’s theoretical frame.

Commitment: “It’s Challenging – And I Like the Challenge”⁶

The Athena women value discipline, whether they knew it ahead of time, or indeed articulate it now. Subtending the question of how women talk about their experiences are two contested social facts that we, their fellow citizens in the American project, often ignore, and their audience needs to confront at the outset of their investigations. First, reiterated here by

⁶ It should be noted that commitment to military culture and mission does not presuppose agreement with its policies without question: Eager cites a Pew Research discovery that 63% of women servicemembers opposed the Iraq war and 54% opposed the war in Afghanistan (42).

Kayla Williams,⁷ women are no strangers to war: “Women have survived war. Women have lived in war settings. Women have been deeply affected by war. Women can do it. Women can endure. I came out of the military feeling that the combat experience showed me how strong I was but didn’t know it” (Personal interview). Williams’ point goes well beyond the argument that only a “Ferocious Few” engaged historically in war, as Jean Elshtain refers to women fighters (qtd. in Jennifer K Lobasz 310) such as Queen Boudica and pirate Granuaile in Great Britain; the African and Scythian Amazons; the Samarai warrior queens (Miles and Cross 5-12). Jarratt, in her email to me, noted her own discovery of the narrative of a woman warrior, Rhodogoune, as she researched her most recent book, *Chain of Gold: Greek Rhetoric in the Roman Empire*: “I was taken with the description,” she writes, “but thought it was probably fanciful until I tracked down a translation of a first-century CE work, *Warrior Women*” (“Re: Question about Feminist Sophistic”).⁸

Recognition of this fact illuminates the second point: these women do not perceive the military itself as enemy territory ready for a revolutionary coup. They did not enlist as rebel forces and they did not join this profession to subvert it. Lisa Bradley reminds us that service members – without marking women as an exception here – have made decisive commitments to this profession:

The public (needs) to know ... Service members work long shifts with no compensation, sometimes in horrible conditions, for little pay. Furthermore, most who stay in the military do it because they believe in service before self. There are service members who

⁷ Kayla Williams is a former sergeant and linguist in a military intelligence company of the US army. She is the author of *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2006) and *Plenty of Time When We Get Home* and she serves as a Truman National Security Project fellow and on the Army Education Advisory Committee

⁸ The contemporary delivery of this text is in Gera, Deborah Levine. *Warrior Woman: The Anonymous Tractatus De Mulieribus*. Brill, 1997.

are terrible people, some are average, and some are the cream of the crop. The U.S. military is not perfect but it is always striving to be better and to raise the standards and performance. I hope people remember service member's sacrifices. (Personal interview)

Women like Lisa and her colleagues herein chose these precincts and prescriptions with purpose and ascribed to its mission. Veteran Erin Solaro reinforces this point in the introduction to *Women in the Line of Fire: What You Should Know about Women in the Military*, her extensive study of the benefits of women entering this profession:

The last great barrier to women's full equality of citizenship, equal participation in the common defense at all levels and in all ways, is ending. It is ending because the U.S. Army can no longer fight without women. And it is ending because women are fighting well. ... I admire those who cultivate the martial virtues, and believe those virtues to be not only the common human heritage of both men and women, but part of civilization itself. (8)

"For once in my life," Marine Corps veteran "Natasha" tells us in the film, "Soldier On," "I could possibly be more."

In the same film, "Amanda" speaks of a "tremendous sense of purpose, doing my job in the military, nothing compares ... the military defined my life."

I am not persuaded that scholars of these stories have acknowledged or resolved this fact, and I am certain that American civilians have not. "Outsiders can't understand the demands of combat," the Athena women repeat (Ziegler and Gunderson 11; also, Lisa Bradley and Nancy Bullock-Prevot Personal interviews). "It's challenging, and I like the challenge," Holly R. Harrison of the Coast Guard states. "So I am going to stick with it until the very end, and they're going to have to drag me away kicking and screaming" (qtd. in Wise and Baron 18). Many

reasons, not merely ignorance but also recalcitrance and not a little aggression, lurk in the staunch refusal of “outsiders” to recognize and salute the veteran who stands right in front of us, sits beside us at the Eagles game, orders her latte bold without sweetener, parks her jeep in the lot at Publix, fights now for her appointment at the VA.

Confidence: “I Wanted to Discover the Definition of ‘Me’”

No account in this study suggests that the woman was not in complete ownership of her decision to enlist. As will be noted in the Chapter Five data analysis, the word “equality” does not come up in the interviews. The women never question it; nor do they express doubt about their right to enter a culture closed to them previously, that is designed to “constitute, reveal, and represent” an identity most assuredly not their own. The message subtending all their stories is their assurance and confidence that their service will allow them to be themselves. Even LaRayne Hurd, who hid from the recruiter beneath her high school adviser’s desk, responded ultimately because her desire to be persuaded and the confidence to go were already clenched tightly within her: “Anything to give my life meaning,” she says (Personal interview).

While it may seem puzzling that these women seek a new direction in their lives and believe that the U.S. military – a system with entrenched traditions that expects unquestioned acquiescence to orders – offers them the freedom to explore new avenues in their lives, they view this conundrum differently. “I wanted to be the best,” reports “Stephens” about her reaction to her interview, surrounded by motivational posters, with the Marine recruiters. “I wanted to challenge myself harder than I ever had, and I wanted to show everyone that I could do it” (Public Writing). The data shows these women approaching their enlistment as a confident move to exert control, “on their own terms” (Reinharz 19), over a period in their lives that, for reasons

particular to each woman, felt in some way wrong. “I just didn’t know how to move forward,” Brandy Lockhart explains – along with her anger at the attacks of 9/11:

And just coming from my love of adventure I wanted to go places, I wanted to see things. So I went home that night, maybe I want to go in the military, maybe that’s what I want to do, so I called up the recruiter the next day, I didn’t even talk to my family about it, I just called them up and went down there and talked to him, and I explained to him that I, listen, I’ve got family that’s been in the military. I think this is what I want to do. I said I wanted to leave quickly. I just -- at that point I was fed up. I was done. I needed to go somewhere. (Personal interview)

It is helpful here to recall Chrystal Nguessan’s description of her enlistment decision, with the additional sense of assurance that gives rise to this aspect of the Athena Standpoint, i.e., her confidence in entering the service and fulfilling her aspirations:

I just wanted to go beyond my comfort zone and discover the definition of “me.” Even if I did not complete 20 years in the Army, I was confident that I would be a different person when I left. I only hoped that I would be stronger and proud of the final product. (Written interview)

Certainly there are exceptions to this enlistment-as-solution story: Alexis Hart and Tabitha Nichols are offspring of military fathers – Hart in the Navy; Nichols, Marines – for whom enlistment was a matter of course and intrinsic to career and/or college plans. Whether they considered the possibility and promise of military life as way to achieve their aspirations or forge a new and valued identity when they needed one, these women were immediately receptive to this uncommon – indeed, controversial – choice of career, and confident in their attempt to

pursue it. To Nancy Bullock-Prevot, the Navy was a path to learning what her interest and talent might be, as well as ultimately her destination:

I joined the military because I was not ready to go to college. When I first joined the military, I did not have any expectations. It took a couple of years for it to truly sink in, that being in the military could be a career and that there were women doing great things for and in the military. (Written interview)

Army veteran Kristin Hall found herself stalled at a crossroads, going to community college, with no specific direction – and emulated her sister’s enlistment, to a point:

My sister went into the army. I’m 24; she’s 26. She went into the army and she loved it, but she said don’t go army. I would highly recommend the Air Force. I went to college for a year, community college for a year, and then I was just thinking about it. From the minute I walked into the air force recruiter, it just felt perfect. He signed me up -- I think it was that day. I didn’t really know (what to expect). I knew I signed up for four years. (Personal interview)

What is clear is that this troupe of women made the decision to sign up themselves, as Chrystal Nguessan recalls with pride in the independence of her choice:

I conducted some research about the Army ... and the next day, I went to the Army recruiting office and, when I saw the health specialty jobs available, I told (the recruiter) SFC Joe that I would love to be a 68K – medical laboratory specialist. It merged my two career passions - medicine and science - perfectly. That day, 08 June 2012, was my 18th birthday, meaning that I was able to enlist without the consent of a parent or guardian. I was able to make a decision that would change my life, and I did just that. (Written interview)

Once they learned of the opportunities offered to them as members of military culture, the constraints of that system seemed insubstantial beside their vivid dreams of escaping small towns, sleepless nights, minimum wage, deadbeat roommates, piles of bills, and feelings of being stuck. They still knew little of a military world to which they committed themselves: Elizabeth Avila admits, “I was a bit ignorant at the moment about the service.” Nonetheless, Kristin Hall planned to escape the confines of rural Alabama. Elizabeth intended to include her mother on her benefits. The prospect of this enstructured life represented freedom to them, a life within their capable grasp, and they do not express equivocation about achieving their goals through their own agency. Goodman also, in her study of *Gender and the Warfare State*, discovered the women’s association of service with freedom, as she explains in an email to me, i.e., “‘freedom from small towns, or ‘freedom’ to travel” (“Re: Question about Gender, Warfare”). The acceptance of that paradox is a mindset that distinguishes these women. Military historian Andrea Peterson argues in her study, “The Female Subject and the First World War: The Case of Vera M. Brittan,” that women in these circumstances can “occupy two positions” (113). They can, as another American idealist, the author F. Scott Fitzgerald, once opined, hold two contradictory ideas in their minds at the same time, and still function. To this we might add as well: flourish.

Metis: “We Fought in the Field Anyway. We Did It Anyway”

As noted, the trope for this study is the goddess Athena, the female warrior born in full armor from the forehead of her father, Zeus. Athena, however portrayed as the warrior daughter of Zeus and therefore a female historically male-identified, is also the child of Metis, the Titan “known as a shapeshifter,” who is “equipped with an attunement to contingency, an inherent

preparation for unexpected situations” (Hawhee *Bodily Arts* 49). That Athena becomes an invincible goddess of war is often viewed as her one singular truth, essentially masculine, a “manly woman” (Vernant *Myth and Thought* 136), and the one instance of male child-bearing: “Her birth is a triumph of patriarchy and suppression of Metis” (Deacy 9). However, Athena is also the goddess of resourcefulness and wisdom, formed in subterfuge by her mother: her “crafty and feminine (sic) knowledge is more powerful than his brute force” (Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson in Schell and Rawson 27). Athena herself does not acknowledge the existence of Metis -- “Nobody is the mother that gave birth to me,” she says (Aeschylus 736:8 in Deacy *Athena* 17). She is indeed declared motherless by Apollo (“She was not nursed” [Aeschylus in Vernant *Myth and Thought* 148]). I posit here that the gift of invisibility and subterfuge is a function of Metis, “goddess of cunning intelligence, of hidden plans realized at the right moment” (D. Hoffman 99).⁹ Whatever is said, or left unsaid, in this story and strategy, Athena is nonetheless the creation of patience, purpose, and strategic intelligence, which also characterize the discourses of the women in this study.

In language study, *metis* has become a powerful mode of rhetorical analysis, particularly in discovery of agency. This strategy seeks to identify the use of agile intellect to achieve a goal in challenging and perhaps precarious conditions, as Metis succeeds in creating Athena with stealth and steely intent. The Metis – Athena story serves as both analogy and analysis of the discourse of American military women:

Metis knows how to wait patiently for the calculated moment to arrive. Metis is swift, as prompt as the opportunity it must seize on the wing, not allowing it to pass. But it does

⁹ A point I discovered in my reading that would be interesting to pursue is the connection between *metis* – specifically the element of timing – and Bourdieu’s move in his own theorizing from “detemporalized” rules to the study of strategies that exist in time, i.e., a link between habitus and *metis* (Hoffman 105-108).

not act lightly. With all the weight of acquired experience that it carries, it involves thought that is dense, rich, and compressed. (Hoffman 101)

In carrying Athena to term and keeping their lives secret until she delivers the warrior goddess, fully armored, fully formed, through the forehead of the unsuspecting father, Metis delivers as well the powerful and enduring image of the woman who fights, who fights back, who fights against her own erasure, outwits her own death, the death of her spirit and capacities, and creates out of her refusal to be silenced an entirely new female in physical form and idea: the woman warrior, so radical a figure that Beard considers her “a decidedly un-female female deity” who “wasn’t even born of a mother” (70-71). That she, Athena, is locked in a hierarchy led by the patriarch Zeus is inarguably her context, but not her only truth. Indeed, Athena is described as the “incarnation of *metis*, of a *metis* that permeates all aspects of life” (Deacy and Villing 288). Through her mother, Metis, classicists Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant explain, Athena is infused with *metis*, an interpretation shared by Athena’s biographer, Deacy, who introduces the goddess as “polymetis,” i.e., “cunning in many ways” (3). Detienne and Vernant explain that “it (is) because she is the fruit of Metis’ womb that she herself is sometimes called Metis, just as her mother was. ... She is a warrior Athena (179).¹⁰ We see *metis* in Brandy Lockhart’s succinct description of negotiating her life on active duty in Iraq, in the headnote to this chapter: “And I would think in my head, ‘Okay, this much is taken care of, this much is done’ ... You just plan” (Personal interview).

¹⁰ In a personal email to me, Beard notes that Detienne and Vernant “have plenty of references to useful stuff that they treat differently! Certainly alerted me years ago to importance of *metis*.. m” (Re: Question about Women and Power).

A Standpoint of Determination

“I knew the military would guide me as a young adult and that there was no way I could fail in life with the military’s leadership and guidance,” notes “Maggie White,” Air Force (Personal interview). Discursively they create the conditions that enable success through a strictly disciplined practice – to earn a college degree; land a well-paying job; travel the world, as the published lists of enlistment reasons inform us. They may not believe that the success they seek is possible without a disciplined structure to achieve it, nor do they express undue worry that this system of controls would impede their pursuits of other interests. Indeed, the structure itself opened new possibilities, and not only in terms of the American work ethic, as Dulcie Burrow explains:

You get to go meet so many different people, go to different islands, try the different cultures, and it’s all paid for by the military. You just got to do your daily duty, get to the port, go hang out for a couple of days, then come back. As long as you stayed out of trouble, you got to do a whole lot of fun, cool things. (Personal interview)

Even the veterans who, with hindsight now, are aware of the stakes of this potentially parlous decision because of their ultimate deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq, still convey excitement about the potential they found within their experiences. Tabitha Nichols, despite the severity of her experiences in Iraq, still exclaims, “I loved what I was doing!” about her travels through a country far removed from Pensacola, Florida:

Iraq is so gorgeous, people look at me like I’m crazy when I tell them that, like, if it wasn’t a war, I might go on vacation, like it’s so pretty. The beautiful part – I remember palm trees, and these beautiful lakes and huge palaces, parts of it were just like an oasis, just gorgeous and then of course you have the dirty parts, trash all over, I was amazed to

see cities, and highways, that's probably only in Baghdad, specific to Baghdad. Oh, seeing the country! That's why I volunteered to be (the commander's) driver, like I want to go out, I don't want to be stuck at this camp for a year, and only see sand 100 miles in every direction. I want to go out and see what it looks like. (Personal interview)

Further, it seems as if the idea of pursuing new directions in their lives within strictly imposed boundaries allowed them to attain, or hope to attain, a sorely-needed sense of balance. The rhetorical impulse in that notion is relevant to the whole question of their recruitment, and brings up what is perhaps the most powerful element in the process of persuasion, i.e., when identification with a message or messenger is so complete and intense that we convince ourselves: "My recruiter was a great first example of who I could be in the military," LaRayne emphasizes. "She looked like me, spoke like me and had reached a point that I so desperately wanted for me. I know that all my initial expectations came from her" (Personal interview). I suggest that with little or no effort – simply by offering a viable alternative to activities and scenes that the succinct Lindsay Allen describes as "dead end" and the Hall daughter and mother define as "nothing" – the military served as a local employment office for a determined group of women who essentially, and with designs on a better future, recruited themselves. Their standpoint indicates the determination of women who knew what they were looking for, on some level, before they chanced upon it: "Once I heard all the things the military could do for me such as paying for college, health insurance, ability to travel, and just the overall experience, I was ready to commit," notes Emily Satterfield. (Written interview)

In this study I will argue that their standpoint of commitment, confidence, and *metis* empowers the discourses of women service members – i.e., the American Athenas – from the period prior to their enlistment and throughout their subsequent career, and notably beyond the

time of standing down. Drawing from the women's own narratives, I will further show how their very particular kind of standpoint enables them to understand their position in military culture and identify the constraints and possibilities of their identity as women in a context both defined and designed as traditionally male. Harding channels Hartsock as she describes a standpoint as an "achievement" (*Reader* 8, 17) and indeed, from the women's point of view, "American Athena" is their achievement, the result of their navigating these unknown and sometimes treacherous terrains, applying conviction and strategy to find their way through, as Metis the mother figure does within the body of the male warrior. In the headnote to this chapter Brandy Lockhart creates an unforgettable picture of this standpoint in action:

I just remember going through it and if it was hard for me, or if it was difficult or something I couldn't handle at that moment, or challenging to me, I'd just think, 'You can get through this, you'll be fine, you can do this, just keep doing it, take one day at a time, one day at a time.' And that's how I got through it. (Personal interview)

The Athena Model

The Athena Model depicts the methodology of this study. It illustrates the feminist sophistic and the standpoint that informs and infuses analysis of the female military identity identified in this study. As applied to the learned experiences of women warriors – for this study, the 99 sources collected from personal interviews and published accounts – the Athena Model will address discourses in narrative texts, both print and multimodal, by these authors specifically. The model emphasizes the most promising research approaches to these texts, and posits a triangular scheme – commitment, confidence, and metistic strategy -- to guide and inform investigation so that analysis of these texts in particular represents, in Smith's directive, a

“commitment to the privileges of women to speak from experience ... the knowledge of the local practices of our everyday/everynight worlds” (qtd. in Harding *Reader* 265).¹¹ At the same time, this triangulation offers a useful frame of inquiry for the reading of women’s stories within a military context commonly defined as “a homogenous group of white males” (Hart “Presentation”) – an endeavor that is under-researched and therefore an open and promising site for the proposal of new interpretive frames. The point, as Hekman characterizes Hartsock’s sense of purpose, is that “unless we provide a systematic understanding of the world, we will be unable to change it” (qtd. in *Reader* 228). The first discovery of this study was the covert power of the first questions I asked, as noted previously, an accidental and casual offer of words across a conference table: “Tell me about your decision. Tell me about your uniform.” Critical studies often fail to achieve an honest and comprehensive view of women in this military world – which does not seem, in any case, to be the purpose of their inquiry.

The Athena Standpoint thus enacted in these narratives arises from the two categories, or acts, that undergird the discourse as a whole – however divergent, fractious, individual and multivocal. As delineated in "Chapter Three Method: 'Going in at Ground Zero,'" these women possess a powerful ability and sense of purpose to *imagine* themselves in graphics and illustrations, be they delivered in figure or story or cultural myth, that define the U.S. Military as a male provenance. Once enlisted, they embody a female military *persona* that did not exist before they presented themselves as equals in that male province and *shape* not only a new identify for themselves, but – the data will show, as Hekman has theorized and Chrystal Nguessan has witnessed and defines for us now – a radical new composition of the military itself. Along the way they also provide a way of viewing the entry of the excluded, indeed, the

¹¹ As noted previously, Smith’s critic Hekman in the world of standpoint theory is no fan of this idea in general, and this sentence in particular. I am.

silenced, into a system of power inequities they not only change, but transform. As I was thinking about the ultimate import of these stories, I chanced upon a statement by Buckminster Fuller, American architect and builder, which seems particularly apt: “You never change things by fighting against the existing reality,” he writes. “To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete.”¹²

The Athena Model, discovered in the course of this study, enacts the contradictions that subtend its title: Athena, however portrayed as the warrior daughter of Zeus and therefore a figure historically male-identified, is also a child of Metis, the Titan characterized by creative intelligence and strategy – i.e., rhetoric, which both arises from and responds to the flux of its circumstances. This dynamic informs the structure and information in the Athena Model itself, whose open and untraveled passages are depicted in the following visual theory for this study (see fig. 20)

¹² Quoted on the Buckminster Fuller “Inhabit” website, inhabitat.com/2010-buckminster-fuller-challenge-finalists-announced/buckminster-2010-5/.

Athena Standpoint and Theoretical Model

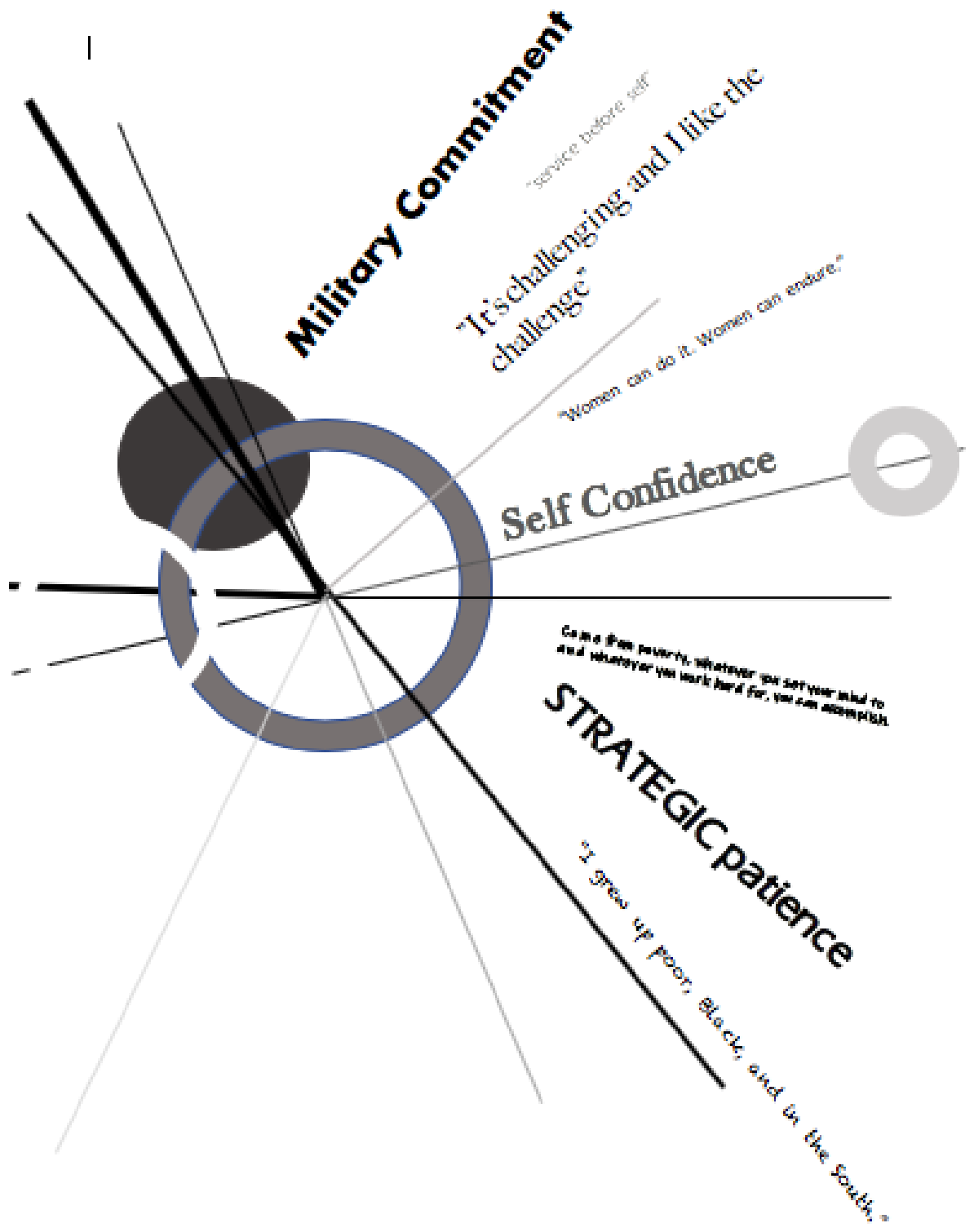


Figure 20 Athena Model (after Museum of Fine Arts Advertisement, St. Petersburg, Florida). Athena design by Chloe Fox-Edele and Nancy Fox.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of the Female Military Identity: An Introduction

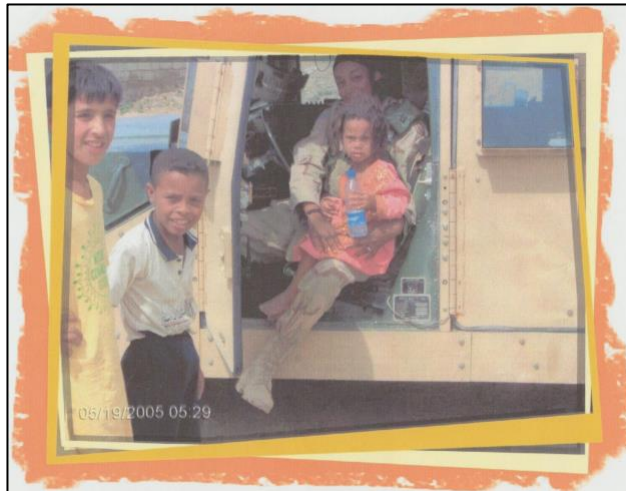
Proving Ground: Tabitha Nichols

*Sleepless dreams awaiting peace to come to me Coping with this thing called ptsd
Reviewing my daily life Thinking Flashes show me things I do not want to see*

*Firing my voice at others as my m16 I feel smothered
So I unload the clip Verbally It's unpredictable
With no one watching my six I grab another magazine They run and take cover
Some never to return to me It's hard to understand a combat soldier's mentality*

*Every day is a battle Without your battle buddy
Feeling guilty for coming home When they did not Not wanting to
remember anything anymore Wanting life to stop
Because only the dead have seen the end of war*

*Stay alert, stay alive i remember Still now As I'm Checking every door,
every window, every sound Remembering every person,
Dog, cat and car That goes up and down The street
You can't eat You didn't get to very much over there
So why over here
Same goes for sleep Another thing I didn't get Nor now do I need*



*I want to be left the hell alone
Somewhere on a beach
Without the noise
Without the awful memories
Without any people
Who just don't understand me
The world, life
Sometimes I just want out! Not caring
about what's next*

Figure 21 Tabitha Nichols on deployment in Iraq. Photo courtesy of from Tabitha Nichols

Because I've seen what it's about

- Tabitha Nichols, Email, *Living with PTSD*

Introduction: “I’ve Seen What It’s About.”

In moving toward the analysis of this data, it is useful to revisit the Athena model, a standpoint defined by three areas of investigation that I discovered in the discourses of women servicemembers. First, the women impart a profound commitment to the U.S. Military and its mission. Equally, their stories are replete with confidence, a clear sense of their own capability in performing their duties and so challenging the male hegemony of that culture. They address the constraint and contumely they experience with strategic use of brains, patience, and tenacity, the key components of the rhetorical concept *metis*, arguably their birthright as descendants of the warrior Athena.

The Athena model stands in bold contrast to studies that efface their subjects or view them through cultural or ideological lenses, thus distorting their true features. The data gathered for this Athena model tracks the discursive lives of these particular women beginning with the conditions that led to their enlistment and beyond the time of “standing down” or choosing to remain active. As noted in "Chapter Three Method" and "Chapter Four Methodology," the categories that identify patterns and contrasts in the women’s stories are created by coding the information, the data, discovered in their stories, and not imposed from *a priori* assumptions or beliefs. From this collective of singular voices two major categories emerge:

1. *imagining* a female military identity;
2. *shaping* that female identity materially.

These categories, or themes, offer the analyst a useful frame of inquiry for the reading of women’s stories within a military context defined repeatedly as “a homogenous group of white males” (Hart “Presentation”) for which women require the shibboleths. This chapter, "The Female Military Identity," challenges a unitary view of women servicemembers by showing how each

woman attempts to rise to the challenge that Goldie Ann Johnson contributes as the defiant coda to her own account, “I made it. I passed through it” (Personal interview). The purpose of this analysis is to present as precisely as possible the way these 99 stories both engender and enliven these thematic categories, viewed through the lens of the Athena model: commitment, capability, and a classic case of metistic smarts.

The theory and themes of this study are formed by the stories of women who wove them out of the warp and weft of their own lives. In line with the advice of Dorothy Smith in *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*,¹ I am not merely discussing a tactical bias against women or sexism as an institutional practice. As individual people they speak of experiences in a culture whose body politic and voice are not theirs. In so doing, they reveal the structural flaw in that discourse and represent a depth and certainty of epistemic change:

Let us be clear ... we are talking about the consequences of women’s exclusion from a full share in the making of what becomes treated as our culture (e.g., the U.S. military – clarification mine). We are talking about the consequences of a silence, an absence, a nonpresence. What is there ... and treated as general, universal, unrelated to a particular position or a particular sex as its *source and standpoint*, is in fact partial, limited, located in a particular position, and permeated by special interests and concerns. (20, emphasis mine)

The women themselves do not question their right to enter this culture or the equality of their membership in this community. The position of *women* as a “source and standpoint” in military contexts remains under-researched and therefore an open and promising site for the proposal of new interpretive frames such as the Athena model in this project. It, too, is “partial, limited,

¹ In a chapter called “A Peculiar Eclipsing.”

located in a particular position,” thus, the feminist sophistic revealed by the narratives here. As noted, the analysis does not attempt an ethnographic study of military culture or a “warfare state” as other worthy analyses offer. Rather, its purpose is to elucidate issues and incidents that women seek to change by sharing their stories with this project or social activism. It views that culture through the eyes of the women who could too easily become discursively “a silence, an absence, a nonpresence,” and along the way, takes a look at American culture as well with the same perspective. The end result is a way of seeing these stories that is distinctive and unique to them, as noted from Jarratt, a “rhetorical (solution) to the crucial problem of defining a theory with the most power for changing women’s lives” (*Rereading* 78; also “The First Sophists” 39). Emily Satterfield reminds us on this front: “I fought for what was right and I still do to this day. I still do all I can to stand up and make a change where I work because there is always room for improvement and I want to help facilitate it” (Written interview).

This small sample of 99 accounts, collected through interviews and conversations with students or culled from published documents, cannot be comprehensive. The women’s commitment, equality, and strategic advance are not identical, despite the position they share defined by these specific traits which can be traced in every story they impart. They are “partial, limited,” and located in precise and varying standpoints. They do nonetheless demonstrate the complexity of the discourses they create to represent, reflect, and shape the military experience of these speakers and writers. They come together in their decision to enlist in the U.S. military in the first place, to shift their identity from student, wait staff, model, to service member, and to share an experience that I have called “American Athena.”

“I Wanted To Be a Badass”

“I was 17 when I decided,” Goldie Ann Johnson begins. “So I grew up in a little town in south Georgia, there’s nothing there. Your career prospects are McDonald’s or Walmart, that’s pretty much it. So I’d always made good grades in school, but once I hit high school and the rebellious teenage years, I kind of said, ‘I don’t care about school.’ It wasn’t because I didn’t do the work. It was because I didn’t do the homework. I found it to be boring and redundant.”

(Personal interview)

“Relentless,” LaRayne Hurd asserts about her recruitment officer: “She came by at least once a week for months and I used to hide until she was gone, literally I hid under the guidance counselor’s desk once.” (Personal interview)

“It was cool to me, I wanted to be a soldier, I wanted to be a badass, I wanted to protect my country,” Tabitha Nichols explains. (Personal interview)

And Emily Satterfield, veteran and former student, writes back to me immediately: “I joined the United States Marine Corps, active duty, straight out of high school. I was not sure what I wanted to do with my life at that point in time.” (Written interview)

Mackenzie Rieselt repeats Emily’s words – “straight out of high school” – and defines the open-ended approach to her career prospects that typifies many Athena stories: “I was just hoping to figure out and take some college classes while I was in and figure out where I wanted to go from there. ... As a future, I still wanted to get my college done, I realized that I always wanted to have an education, I just wanted to make sure I knew what it was I wanted to do.”

(Personal interview)

“I had finished two years of college,” Judy Young says, “and though I’d done well, frankly, I was tired of being in school. So I wanted to do something different, and I wanted to make some money.” (Written interview)

“I was modeling,” Brandy Lockhart recalls – then pauses. “Did you ever feel you’re not moving forward, you’re not moving back, you don’t know where you’re going, whatnot, I was kind of at that moment myself, I wouldn’t say stuck. I just didn’t know how to move forward.” (Personal interview)

I see now that asking a simple question acknowledged a period of transformative acts in each of these lives: “Tell me about your decision to join the military.” Their answers have too often remained unexpressed, and certainly “underreported,” as Wise and Baron argue in the opening of their collection of interviews and stories, *Women at War*, introduced in "Chapter Four Methodology." Their chronicle is one of the published accounts that combine with my own interviews to form the narrative basis for this study, and one of the few researched accounts that moves beyond the victim story, which these women summarily reject. Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas notes the phenomenon in her study *Marching As to War* as an urgent need for women servicemembers to finally “receive the recognition and the voice they deserve” (17). This Georgia scholar who documents the impact of war on African-American women reminds us of hooks’ admonition: “Speak up and out about yourselves,” and defines the stakes involved in suppression of these stories: “(Speak) to avoid having histories and life experiences deemed unspecified or rendered invisible” (*Marching* 15). We find that sense of *kairos* throughout the studies of women’s discourses: “The very telling of our stories helps us onward,” insists New York feminist literary critic Jane Marcus in *Between Women*, edited by New York essayist and novelist Carol Ascher et al. (392). “I believe that we should write as truthfully as we can, singly

and collectively for the sake of the future” (393). Ascher et al., in the preface to their collection, identify their value in women’s lives:

The project of discovering and making available the lives and work of women (is) the creation of a tradition can sustain women personally and give them a rich and lively social world. Setting down a record with energy and love is the primary work. But to be strong the record must be accurate. (xxii)

Their colleague in feminist studies, the scholar Sidonie Smith, reinforces this point by reminding us that we cannot assume that the experiences of women and men would be the same (qtd. in Marcus 230). Lazar emphasizes that women experience the world differently (10 *passim*), and we have heard the contention of both Goldie Ann Johnson and Kylie Pugh that women’s military lives should not be conflated with those of their male comrades. The stories indeed are not “general, universal, unrelated to a particular position or particular sex” (Smith 20).

In substance and effect, as writing teacher and theorist Brodkey notes (cf. "Chapter Four Methodology: Athena, from Myth to Model") and I repeat again here, “The writing and recovery of women’s texts (offer) invaluable critiques of official history” (*Writing* 2), particularly if that official discourse is normalized as male in orientation and origin. Recall the comments of Miller, author of the *Poetics of Gender*, arguing this point; Miller further asserts that for men, “the fact of their gender is given and received literarily as a mere *donnée* of personhood” (qtd. Marcus 231). While “personhood” in the U.S. Military has been identified as male in the universal sense, the culture is nonetheless too easily reduced and simplified. In asking these women to “speak up and out” about the military era of their lives, I discover a complex story composed of tenors and textures from multiple sources, histories, and voices, narratives of events, feelings, and effects that carry the names Alexis, Amber, Brandy, Elizabeth, Emily, Goldie, Judy, Kristen, Kylie,

LaRayne, Lindsay, Lisa, Maggie, Nancy, “Stephens,” Tabitha, and over 70 of their sisters-in-arms who come together in the company called “American Athena.” In my experience researching this study published accounts can be devoid of women’s actual voices, offering only analyses or opinions derived from other analyses or reportage. I find, in the personal interviews, that no one has asked them these questions in this way before, a comment on what has constituted “official history” in itself.

“It Never Occurred to Me That I Couldn’t”

As each woman imparts her personal story and so creates this feminist sophistic study that brings them all together, their discourses are contextualized in a military culture they share, whether their insignia be Air Force, Army, Marine, or Navy. But the stories, and that culture, enact as well an American discourse with its often renitent gender suppositions. Noted by the feminist literary theorist Jane Marcus, traditionally “the measure of woman’s skill is the degree to which she can’t be seen” (qtd. in Ascher 388). Indeed this social practice of erasure is evident discursively when male pronouns “(render) women invisible” (Lazar 7), a serious issue in military culture, recorded and critiqued by Williams and Grohowski specifically. A recent study by Pew Research has discovered, alarmingly in 2017, that gender discrimination is rife in workplaces predominantly male like the U.S. military:

The survey – conducted in 2017, prior to the recent outcry about sexual harassment by men in prominent positions – found that women employed in majority-male workplaces are more likely to say their gender has made it harder for them to get ahead at work, they are less likely to say women are treated fairly in personnel matters, and they report

experiencing gender discrimination at significantly higher rates. (K. Parker *Pew Research*)

It seems crucial to note and emphasize the way that military custom and *nomos* can reinforce gender inequity:

The military plays a critical role in the creation and maintenance of a particular pattern of gender relations in the wider society...The military's privileged position makes it not just a *mirror of gender relations in society* but a fundamental site for the construction of gender, that is, the *defining of the boundaries of behavior*—indeed, *of life possibilities*—for people we call men and women (emphasis mine). (Francine D'Amico and Laurie Weinstein qtd. in Lobasz 311)

Nor is this *nexis* of cultures lost on the women under discussion in these analyses themselves:

“What people don't seem to understand about the U.S. military,” argues Lisa Bradley, “is that it is a snapshot of the current public. It is no worse or no better than the civilian population of its time” (Written interview). The political scientist Enloe extends this argument with the charge that the military only allows “the reproduction of traditional cultural norms” in which “women (are) nurturers, men (are) warriors, and the gender hierarchy remains unchanged despite the challenges (Eager 12). Of import is the codicil that Lisa Bradley includes with her assessment: “(The military), however, is held to higher standards. I occasionally experienced the same discriminations as I did outside the military but it was a product of the times or the product of an individual's culture—I never took it personally” (Written interview).

Indeed, from the literature available to analyze the phenomenon of women committing themselves to the military mission – not only as nurses or support personnel, but active duty warriors in special ops or combat situations – the argument seems weighted against a normalized

entry of women “inside the wire” of American military culture. In fact, the major theme and message of Germano’s *Fight Like a Girl: The Truth Behind How Female Marines Are Trained* is the refusal of the Marine Corps to train the battalions of women adequately. Germano documents the stress, costly and intense, of serving with the commitment and skill of an Athena in a culture that questions the female identity of the warrior. This heart-rending account of losing her command of the female battalion on Parris Island argues that, paradoxically, the Marines were unable to tolerate the success of her recruits on tests and trials where women were expected to fail:

I shoved my curvier peg into the Marines’ extraordinarily square hole. I cursed. I yelled. I was extremely strict. Even though we were able to reach our goals and life got better, a lot of the Marines didn’t like me much. I constantly fought not to be ‘other’ by acting the way the male Marines acted; but because I was the only female commanding officer, I was never part of that group. And the things I did to fit in? The yelling and cursing? They only made me stand out more. Even in the Marine Corps, those are not the traits expected of a woman – unless that woman is ‘mean’ or ‘a bitch.’ Worse, none of those attributes matched my personal leadership style. (10-11)

The military has been classified as a male-dominated society in which “male resistance is the greatest barrier to full participation” for women (Ziegler 13). In another context Lazar critiques the “power asymmetry” evident in “blatant exclusionary gatekeeping” in such overt forms as “misogynistic verbal harassment and denigration” (9). Such phrases are deeply rhetorical in the sense that language itself conveys a problematic reality for women who choose to enter this domain.

Further, numerous studies characterize these women as masculinized and assert that they “presented a subversive gender identity but adopted masculine norms” (Eager 13) or embody a “third gender” that is a hybrid of female and male in order to be legitimized as warriors: “Women veterans must continually enact what I term a ‘third gender,’ Phillips posits in her dissertation noted previously, “Birthing a Third Gender” (8). “In choosing to perform displays of both genders, the women render this third gender category increasingly normative as time progresses, more women do it and civilian audiences read it as accepted.” Indeed, Phillips contends that “in the historical narrative told in the public sphere ... maleness and national security are intrinsically related.” She notes that “from a Foucaultian perspective, the military reproduces gender in narrowly defined ways in order to protect its power over individuals who subscribe to patriotic rhetoric and through whom it perpetuates itself” (19). This resistance to a standpoint in which women define themselves in this context, and the resultant distortions in U.S. military history, persists despite their own strongly worded assertions of full and complete membership in that valued community. Lisa Bradley’s description of her engagement in this culture is eloquent in this respect and speaks for the company of Athena women:

I loved to deploy, even in horrible conditions because I got to really know and care about the people I was with, this was especially true when we were stationed in undesirable places. I never felt invisible or underserved, instead I felt like a part of a team. My experience was not one of gender but one of who was a good worker and who wasn’t.

(Written interview)

Her sister in arms Goldie Ann Johnson asserts, twice, at the close of our meeting, “I would never change my decision to join” (Personal interview).

Indeed, in both interviews for this research study and published accounts, the women themselves never lose clarity about their contribution and engagement as women. It is in that context that they consistently repeat the words of Kylie Pugh, “We fought in the field anyway. We did that anyway” (Personal interview). They refuse to be marked in gender terms – “I didn’t think about gender at all,” emphasizes Lisa Bradley (Written interview) – or forced to perform a gendered role: “Despite our gender being different, there’s nothing special about serving as a woman in the sense of some special mission or interpretation. There’s no special accolade that’s needed because I’m a female veteran,” notes Goldie. Germano’s continued efforts on behalf of a military to which she committed 20 years of her life attest to the depth of that conviction of belonging. Mackenzie Rieselt concurs: “I guess it never really occurred to me that I couldn’t ... People will be like, ‘Oh. You were in the military.’ I am like, ‘No big deal,’ though. It really never seemed like a big deal” (Personal interview).

“Women Have Always Fought”

But hitting the mute button on gender as a noisy fact presents a different issue than denial or rejection of one’s own sex, whether it be a matter of birth or self-assignment. Goldie Ann Johnson, in her proposal “Women Veterans: The Never-Ending Battles,” speaks emphatically on this point:

Women are a significant part of our military forces and serve with the same distinction as men. It is time that we stop reveling in the past ideologies that women are not in combat and face the reality that women fill many roles in the military and deserve recognition Society must stop sweeping women under the rug and allow their service and sacrifice to be honored. (3)

Although Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas notes that women have been hired in support capacity and not for combat situations, and Wise and Baron emphasize that “women were classified as combat support” (1), fought they always did. Again, “We did it anyway” (*Marching* 55). Chronicler of women’s military experience, Kirsten Holmstedt, repeats the assertion, based on her copious interviews for *Band of Sisters*: “There have always been women in combat” (xviii), supported by Williams: “Women have always fought” (Personal interview). Eager, who specializes in women’s issues globally, brings this assertion into our current military context and argues that “the Iraq war had a woman’s face on it” (55). She then extends the point, citing a 2009 Department of Defense study: “The majority (of women) said they were physically in a combat theater of operations and had been exposed to the possibility of hostile action constituting a threat to self or unit” (65). The formation in 2010 of female engagement teams, or FET’s, well before the official act that opened combat duty to women in 2013, is the focus of Rivers in *Beyond the Call: Three Women on the Front Lines of Iraq and Afghanistan*, and she notes that “although women had been putting their lives on the line in previous wars, ...for FET women, combat was much more gruesome” (xviii). Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and surprise assaults created a frontline “everywhere,” she notes.

“Are women in combat?” asks veteran Kellie McCoy. “They most definitely are. Roadside bombs aren’t discriminatory” (Wise And Baron 36).

“Allowed in combat? What do you think I was doing over there?” challenges Marisia in the film “Served Like a Girl.” “I lost my legs. I didn’t get hungry and chew them off... I was in a war zone ... This is not new.”

However, Rivers notes, “there are men who still deny that women can and do fulfill combat missions,” which she compares to “a punch in the gut.” This denial, she asserts,

“attempts to erase the work and the smarts and the perseverance that sometimes made female contributions harder fought than those of their male colleagues” (xviii). By noting these specific elements – the work, the smarts, the perseverance, and sure knowledge of women’s contributions – Rivers succinctly defines the standpoint that holds these stories together even as their individual voices speak uniquely.

“A Sense of Superiority and Gender-cy”

In terms of women in combat, “one of the most radical, controversial, and public experiments in American military history” (Holmstedt *Band* xvii), their actions do not constitute the discourse of active duty (what Maureen Patricia Phillips has earlier called “the narrative told in the public sphere” [8]), and it seems we need not acknowledge them as facts. However, the women themselves tell a different story, such as the argument, offered with some asperity, by Air Force veteran Mary Jennings Hegar, author of *Shoot Like a Girl*, in our December 2017 recorded interview, in which she addresses the misconceptions about military identity. Her thoughts are presented at necessary length here:

So, I think when people hear our stories, they do the same thing that people are doing when they’re trying to paint women into a box that says women wouldn’t be good at combat jobs. You can’t hear one or two stories and take a broad brush and apply it to our military. ... There are a handful of people who are trying to ruin it out of some misguided sense of well-intentioned, you know, ‘let’s keep the military strong,’ and I want to keep the military strong too. They just won’t let go of their sense of who belongs in what role or what the culture looks like because they have a very myopic view of what just that is.

So, the sky is falling ... you know, when they allowed women to come into cockpits or women into the military, or when we integrated racially, or every time we take a step forward, there's this, 'Oh, the sky is falling into the free world,' and it just never materializes. ... 'If they keep their standards high, it seems like anyone should be able to apply' is a concept even my three-year-old would understand, but for some reason, some people, they want to hold onto a sense of superiority and gender-cy, and the military is the last bastion where that's allowed. It's such a small minority, but they're such a vocal minority. (Personal interview)

Indeed, Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas opens her study, *Marching As To War*, with a comment from historian and journalist Anne Applebaum in the *Washington Post* that seems propitious here – for the future of women in the American military, but more salient to the study at hand, as acknowledgement of the discourses that document and signify the meaning of that experience: “The argument about women in combat is over. Women are engaging the enemy in Iraq, and American civilization has not collapsed as a result” (4).

“It was never the men and women who would have to be together that said it wouldn't work,” argues veteran Rosemarie Weber. “It was the politicians and the public. I think we've proven again that our young men and women in uniform do put the mission first. It's when folks are 'in the rear' that trouble starts ... 'Women will break under pressure, the men wouldn't respond accordingly.' Well, we proved them wrong. We were there! We're doing it alongside the men ... So to all the managers, we're doing it and doing it with courage and dedication!” (Wise and Baron 62-65).

Michelle Zarembo, in *Wheels on Fire: My Year of Driving ... and Surviving ... in Iraq*, reinforces the fact of such camaraderie: “Sometimes the girls worked harder to prove themselves

and some of the lazy guys took advantage of that fact, but they were stupid to think no one noticed. Everyone's true colors came out during deployment. But females-versus-males really wasn't an issue among our platoon. We played sports together and everyone was treated equally. It wasn't about guys and girls to us; we did our best to remain equal.² But," she notes, "the people above us constantly tried to remind us we were different" (33).

A recurring theme in the Athena project and indeed fundamental to its feminist sophistic argument is that the women's own convictions of equality belie and challenge the strictures of others and the structures of military culture itself. In *Moving Beyond G.I. Jane: Women and the U.S. Military* Zeigler and Gunderson argue that men's preferences should not decide women's rights, and cites studies that find no evidence of lower competency on women's part. Indeed, women could and do measurably equal or surpass their male compadres: "The perception of incompetence prevails," they note, "despite reality of competence" (14). As cited, Germano argues this very point *Fight Like a Girl*. Hegar, who filed and won the 2012 lawsuit against the Secretary of Defense that contended the combat exclusion policy was unconstitutional, places this problem within a sociological context in order to trace the prejudice to its source:

The interesting thing to me is there are stereotypes that apply to different groups, whether it's religion, ethnicity, nationality, things like that. There are stereotypes that you could, if you took an individual one at a time, do apply to this person or that person, including capabilities. And that includes gender. For some reason, gender is the only one that's still acceptable in professional and in military circles to use in making decisions.

So, you might be able to say, 'This group of people is good at this thing, and this group of people is bad at that thing.' But the idea of saying that we should only allow this

² Tabitha Nichols imparts a similar experience in the section of "Chapter Five, Part Two, 'We Did It Anyway,'" reserved for her story.

group of people to apply for this job, and we should bar that group of people from applying for that job – it sounds archaic and it should be, so it just would never fly. So, for some reason, I don't understand why we haven't accepted that people should be taken as individuals based on their merit, for gender as well, and it kind of boggles my mind.

(Personal interview)

Veteran Rosemarie Weber admonishes those who persist in asserting such views – for Jennings Hegar, the 2% who are “trying to ruin” a culture of gender equality in the American military out of a “misguided sense” of keeping it strong by keeping it male: “It’s very important for the American public to know and understand that there’s no going back, women are now an integrated part of our country’s armed forces” (in Wise and Baron 65).

Certainly the experience or at least awareness of gender-incited harassment, hectoring, insult, and, in the most extreme cases, assault provides a prominent theme to female enlistment stories. It may be that military culture encourages “harassment and hostility” as a means of building cohesion among the men (Ziegler 16; also, Beard). But the actions and discourse of the dominant male group are not unanimous either, and both Rosemarie Weber in Wise and Baron, and those co-authors themselves as noted above, are clear about male and female alliances and collaboration.. The women in the Athena project align with these complex realities, and accounts of strong friendship and support across the lines of gender are part of every woman’s story, as the data analysis in this chapter will show. Nonetheless, they also attest to the power of male contempt and hostility to the physical presence of women in this profession. Emily Satterfield conveys the effect of discriminatory conduct vividly:

While I was serving I was never thought of as good enough to do my job because I was a woman and so when it came to doing the more physical work the guys would be like,

‘Oh, you aren’t going to be able to do this, I’ll do it instead,’ not even giving me a chance to try and prove myself.

Many times just a simple phrase from the male Marines of ‘I don’t think women should be in the military’ was enough discrimination to make me hate working with them and counting down the days until I can get out. (Written interview) ³

Satterfield’s words show the depressing effect that the daily pressure of discrimination in the form of rude remarks and disparaging comments, and far worse, can have on women’s military aspirations, careers, and chances for success.

“I See That Women Are Stronger Than Men”

For many women such treatment has caused them to wonder “who (their) real enemy was” (Holmstedt *Band 5*), a doubt, astonishing to hear, articulated by Jessica Lee Clements, awarded a Bronze Star and Purple Heart, and called a “Miracle Girl” because of her recovery from severe injury in Baghdad, and who now counsels wounded veterans: “I felt like the Army was trying to get rid of me, pass me on” (qtd. in Wise and Baron 32). Emily Satterfield was enraged by the entrenched arrogance that she witnessed; in retrospect, however, she tells us that “these experiences, even though stressful and difficult to deal with, only strengthened me” (Personal interview). She speaks here on behalf of most women interviewed who do not express defeat from the exclusion they faced on a daily basis. Their status as equal but marginalized, in

³ The Marines have been particularly slow to accept the evidence of prowess in women comrades, given the fact that the first all-women Marine Corps team was deployed on its first mission in Afghanistan in 2009 – aside from the mantra, “We did it anyway.” Jennifer Silva, “Women in the Military: Through the Decades” in *Huffington Post* 15 March 2017.

gender theorist Hawkesworth's argument, seemed to strengthen their resolve to stay in the service and, as Amber Nadeau emphasizes, "try to be the top of my class" (Personal interview).

"I ignored it," says veteran Holly R. Harrison. "Thankfully the Coast Guard recognized that I was a commanding officer first and foremost, who as an afterthought just happened to be female" (qtd. in Wise and Baron 11).

"(They think) women are more fragile, but I still don't see that," explains Mackenzie Rieselt. "I see that women are stronger than men. Most of the women I know are much stronger than the men I know" (Personal interview).

Emily Satterfield herself notes, "I showed them that even though they were trying to break me, that I was stronger. I fought for what I felt was right and I still do to this day" (Written interview).

Recall Goldie Ann Johnson's story of male comrades recoiling, "Oh!" as she attempted her target test, "a female on the range": "You know you can tell body language, 'Oh, we're just going to let her shoot and that will be the end of it.' And it wasn't – 'cause I was always an expert shooter, of everything, grenades, expert. I loved it. I can shoot target. No problem" (Personal interview).

Most women who participated in the Athena project assert that they would re-enlist, "in a second," notes Dulcie Burrow (Personal interview) if not already in the process of being deployed. Nor do they apologize for their chosen profession or their commitment to the military brief: "Any woman can be just as triumphant as a man at anything," writes Holmstedt of a veteran she interviewed for her groundbreaking *Band of Sisters* (93). Lila Holley, author of the *Camouflaged Sisters* series and the public voice of advocacy for African American women

veterans, is undaunted by public opinion and / or ignorance of women creating their identity in this profession:

I fell in love with being able to serve through the military. I had a child as a teenager, though, and I thought that was going to derail my opportunity to serve. It never went away, the desire to go into the military, so when the opportunity opened itself up, my family supported me and I joined and never looked back. ... I really pushed myself in there: physically, mentally, and I learned so much. I served with some amazing people that I'm still close to, to this day. (Personal interview)

"I loved it," Amber Nadeau says, describing her desire to become a drill sergeant until her injuries as a parachute jumper decree an administrative desk job in her military future (Personal interview).

"It's amazing," Goldie Ann Johnson reflects. "It's not just – a lot of females I met said, 'Yeah, I joined for college, but I stayed because I loved it'" (Personal interview).

"I truly, truly believe in what we are doing over here, and I feel like, as Americans, it's our obligation," notes 1st Lt. Rebecca Moore, interviewed during her deployment. "Being part of a Marine Corps team in the global war on terror is just one of the best things I can imagine doing in my life" (qtd. in Wise and Baron 96).

Finally, when shackles of others' resistant opinions are shaken off, stories that emerge are complicated, diffuse. They often defy convenient and easy classification. Indeed, they serve to expand our understanding of women's *ethos* and experience as they themselves choose to relate and create as their own genre of military literature – and beyond this specialized discourse, women's studies as a fertile field of discovery and imagination. The rhetorical grounded theory, which enables discovery of these women's discourse as they themselves have decided to shape it

and share it, may well be the only existing mode of analysis that privileges their disparity as proof of the data's essential truth. The stories recounted in Chapter Five devolve on the two basic categories that emerge from this data: (1) imagining the female military identity that allows them to pursue their purpose, what they "want," as veteran Chrystal Nguessan avows, as they negotiate their enlistment, navigate their new employment, and contend with uniforms not designed for them; and (2) shaping the female military identity in fields of battle both personal and professional, as the encounter resistance to "females" and nonetheless need to complete their mission. What results is an achievement of valor akin to the honored concept of *aretē*, embodied by the experience of Black women in the military, but can be seen as the inception of a new female military identity – the American Athena.

Category One: Imagining a Female Military Identity

We are mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. As a woman veteran, I'm sometimes ignored on American soil. We are not second-class veterans, we are not damsels in distress. We are warriors. -- Jaspen "Jas" Boothe, *Served Like a Girl*

Proving Ground: Chrystal Nguessan

Now, to more concisely explain WHY I chose to. Throughout my formative school years, I could best be described as academically inclined. I hated the school scene vehemently, but I loved learning and, consequently, dutifully, I completed my required and extra credit assignments with the utmost respect for erudition. For years, I participated in extracurricular activities such as environmental science clubs, a science and robotics club, Latin certamen, mini mu alpha theta, mu alpha theta, National Honor Society, and all associated academic individual and group competitions. I attended a magnet science middle school and proceeded to an International Baccalaureate (IB) high school, where I participated in college-level courses and a curriculum intended to foster critical thinking, service-oriented activism, and cultural inclusivity.

However, I was irritated with the IB students with whom I attended school. They often seemed arrogant about their intellect and immature. Even more so, I was irritated with my academic lifestyle. I felt I had no interesting attributes which defined me. I thought about what the Army could do for me: Get me out of Tallahassee and bad memories as quickly as possible,



force me to be adaptive and resilient to situations I would likely not experience otherwise, provide a stable source of income, improve my physicality, connect me with individuals from across the country and across the world, provide me with a means to obtain U.S. citizenship, provide me with free medical and dental care, free housing in barracks, and offer me numerous paths to education whether I chose to stay in the Army or return to "civilization."

Overall, I wanted to be a part of an organization to which very few could say they were integral. I was not my intent to be defined by the Army. I just wanted to go beyond my comfort zone and discover the definition of "me". Even if I did not complete 20 years in the Army, I was confident that I would be a different person when I left. I only hoped that I would be stronger and proud of the final product.

Figure 22 Chrystal Nguessan on active duty. Photo courtesy of Chrystal Nguessan

– Chrystal Nguessan, Written interview

Introduction: “It’s a Very Deep Passionate Sense”

The first category of this data analysis, entitled “Imagining a Female Military Identity,” explores the process of becoming American Athena through the act of composing an identity that has not existed beyond an imposed and often humiliating stereotype. In this context gender is a trait, however, not a limitation to the women themselves: it is important to emphasize that point. Nor do they question the multiplicity of ways that one can “be” a female without acceding to cultural norms or effacing that identity because of personal bias or animus. They have no qualms about their equality in this setting because they have never doubted it. Service in uniform is “pride in what I could do,” as Brandy Lockhart says. “It’s a very deep passionate sense” (Personal interview). The self revealed in that statement is invented and arranged in response to those haunting questions introduced previously: “What am I going to do with my life? What are my choices?”

The unfolding of this nascent and keenly desired self is traceable through three decisive themes that I will analyze in Part One. The first theme, “Moving Out,” consists of the women’s shared sense of seeking direction, believing in their ability to reach their goals, and aspiring to positions of leadership and status to “make my life matter” (Hurd Written interview). Decisive aspiration is followed by the second theme, “Playing the Game,” which studies the women’s unique process of self recruitment and, in the absence of models useful to them, the ways women design their own strategic moves to enter this unknown terrain. Finally, the third theme, “Revamping the Uniform,” explores, in the context of women’s valued culture of clothing and fashion, the relationship between the new identity of women servicemembers and their military kit. The stories are real – the situated truth of text and talk, or “language-in-use,” (Gee

Introduction 26) of our utterances, as well as the social practice of an identified group. GTM allows the women themselves to speak be heard on their own terms.

The feminist sophistic analysis that follows is the result of their imperative and intent. The women do not conceive of themselves as social problems or victims, confronted by Mackenzie Rieselt head-on. They resist classification as “combat woman” in the abstract. Rather, their stories move them, and us, “inside the wire,” and beyond the confines of our preconceptions.

Imagining the Female Military Identity

Pt. 1: Moving Out

I could stay here / Become someone / Different /
 I could stay here / Become someone / Better.
 - Cat Power, "Colors and The Kids"

Proving Ground: LaRayne Hurd

I enlisted in the United States Army in 2005, four months before I graduated from high school. Initially I had no intention of joining the military. I filled out a card somewhere and a recruiter showed up at my school, with my name. That woman was relentless! She came by at least once a week for months, and I used to hide until she was gone, literally, I hid under the guidance counselor's desk once.



Figure 23 LaRayne Hurd. Photograph courtesy of LaRayne Hurd

I'll never forget the day I actually sat down and talked with her. Before we separated that day, I had completely changed my mind. She did not give me a speech about patriotism, or being a hero, fighting for my country or flag. She explained to me that the Army could be a way out.

I grew up poor, Black, and in the South. The decision to enlist for me was a decision to take the lifeline in front of me and do something, ANYTHING, with my life that would give it meaning.

– LaRayne Hurd, Written interview

Introduction: "The Army Could Be a Way Out"

In this section, "Moving Out," the women speak of aspiration and longing and that led to their decision to commit their lives to military service in three topics: "My Eager Youthful Dreams"; "There's Nothing in My Town"; and "Aspiring to Leadership." Kayla Williams wants us to understand that women enlist for many reasons (Personal interview), and their stories here,

in “My Eager Youthful Dreams,” attest to the truth of that claim. Whatever the hope or need that allowed them to imagine themselves in the military picture, heretofore entirely male, no woman questions the meaning or value of military service and its mission. More precisely, as “There’s Nothing in My Town” explores, these women impart a certainty that the fortitude and *ethos* of achievement that typify the armed service will fulfill their goals, however inchoate they might be as the recruits step off the bus at boot camp in Georgia or Texas. Some women enact a lifelong desire to commit themselves to a service they esteem. Despite the sense of facing the unknown that many women admit, they clearly rely on a certainty of competence. Moreover, their discourse arises from a wellspring of ambition, not only to succeed in a job and way of life that matters, but attain a position of responsibility, as shown in “Aspiring to Leadership.” The women speak of these plans in language that is concise and economical, American as the anthem, “home of the brave,” and just as idealized. The rhetoric they offer can veil the tough-minded women who choose to fight instead of settling into an easy conformity, and the following analysis offers the complicated and often contradictory truths of these American Athenas as they imagine who they can be in the U.S. Military.

“My Eager, Youthful Dreams”

Every woman’s decision to enter military service enacts a personal story of movement and change: this much they have in common, whether they hail from a one-horse town in Alabama or a university district in Oregon, or grew up as “military brats” on bases from Kodiak Island to Seoul. While the appeals and arguments of others, be they counselors, family, friends, or recruiters, might cajole or reject, the decision to join emerges from a personal, interior place. It sounds, in storyform, both quick and random, devil-may-care, like an impulse buy, as shown in

Spencer's spirited narrative, *B.A.G.H.D.A.D. Yoga: A Shift in Consciousness: Fear to Love, War to Peace*:

So, here we are, my eager, youthful dreams of being a dancing, rapping beauty queen and novice acupressure massage therapist couldn't keep up with mounting financial obligations. You see, I was sucking: I was in a dead-end romantic relationship and I was desperately seeking a J-O-B. I had an overdue college student loan bill lurking in the mail, my tail was between my legs, and though my head was high I really didn't know what to do. (30)

However, LaRayne Hurd's description, in the headnote to this chapter, of her "courtship" by the Army recruiter suggests that women experience the process of reaching that point as the culmination of a prolonged and often tortuous time in their lives. We hear the call of a seeker, looking to fulfill something lost or missing in her prospects, looking to prove something essential to herself in material terms, looking to escape a life that seems to be leading nowhere, or locked in a *stasis* without change that leads to her "military life journey" (Desnoyers-Colas *Marching* 3). Eager cites a 2009 study of Jennifer Silva wherein Silva contends that women see the military as the "opportunity to be strong, assertive, and skillful"⁴ – an escape from a hegemonic female figure who is perceived as "weak and incompetent" (13). Their hope, according to Holmstedt, is to do something "not many women got to do, or wanted to do" (*Band* 8). And it is, perhaps, this discourse of opportunity that leads Holmstedt to conclude that most women had precise reasons for joining the enlisting, her argument in *Band of Sisters passim*. But women in the Athena project offer a more nuanced and variant reading than this interpretation of a female's decision to enlist in a historically male profession.

⁴ Her string of adjectives here is reminiscent of Hartsock's feminist standpoint of strength, energy, and force (*Standpoint Revisited* 50).

We listen to the plaintive words of Goldie Ann Johnson, now bemused by the temper that caused her to quit high school in a dispute with a teacher who insulted her over a *Moby Dick* assignment:

So I grew up in a little town, in south Georgia, there's nothing there, your career prospects are McDonalds, or Walmart, that's pretty much it. What got me was I couldn't do anything, ... and I really knew that it was over when I quit, over an English teacher told me I would never amount to anything because I had a different opinion of Moby Dick than she did, and I don't even remember what it was, so I got up and I, I dumped my books on her desk and I quit. (Personal interview)

We hear Tabitha Nichols on a summer morning as her daughter in a room nearby creates a painting of a mother and child, the child a flower nestled in the mother's hand: "It was cool to me, I wanted to be a soldier, I wanted to be a badass, I wanted to protect the country" (Personal interview). When Tabitha recalls her tour of duty in Iraq, it is the pictures of kids she is unable to shake. Amber Nadeau reveals the sense of adventure in leaving the discontents of the past behind and exploring a totally new and unknown terrain – a motivation that could be interpreted as quintessentially American: "I was kind of like, 'Okay, what's the worst that can happen?' I didn't have anyone around me who I knew who had done it, so why not give it a chance. It can't be too hard" (Personal interview). "Lyndsey," in the film "Soldier On," describes herself as adventurous: "I always wanted to go explore." And then we encounter Dulcinea Burrow, who found her combat boots to be "soooo comfy": "Yeah, I knew (about the male culture). I took autoshop in high school. I was the oddball. I liked doing all the manly stuff. I'll do it. I don't care" (Personal interview).

The method of Grounded Theory looks exclusively for information and messages revealed and concealed within such data: why, for example, was the Army Goldie's sole alternative to dead-end jobs in fast food and cheap retail? How did Tabitha connect so compassionately with Iraqi children? Notice that Dulcinea classifies certain kinds of work as "manly" and herself as "oddball" for her preferences. Connect to that "sense of herself" the women who make the point that they were not "girlie-girls" ("Maggie White," among others). This process allows us access to the differences, the shades of differences, and similarities among these stories. It allows us to focus on the precarious position these women present as the pivotal point in their lives, whether they articulate that vulnerability or describe the look of that place, and move on: "I joined the Guard when I was a seventeen-year-old kid looking for direction. It became pretty clear we were going to be sent to Iraq after September 11, 2001" (Zaremba ix) – an example of how their journeys would take them miles from who they used to be: Airman 1st Class Sarah Bonner offers the key question: "If I can do this, what else can I do?" (qtd. in Holmstedt *Survivors* 76).

Common Themes & Variations: "A Humming"

Common or "recurring themes," noted as well by Whaley Eager (44) who studies published accounts of enlisted women, emerge which serve as songlines for our listening here. All women, even the most assured in their career prospects in military professions, are seeking direction in their lives (see Chrystal Nguessan's story at the start of "Chapter Five Part One, Imagining a Female Military Identity," and LaRayne Hurd's story as this section opens). To a woman they believe in their capability to achieve the goals they define for themselves: they never betray doubt that a better deal is possible as service members than anything available to

them in the civilian world. They know the new territory they are about to cross is male, and those who aspire to leadership are not deterred by this demographic.⁵ But we can hear variations within these themes, and therein once again we discern the feminist sophistic of our Athena project, how a storyline is formed by places, times, names, values: a post-industrial town in pastoral Connecticut, for example; “hippy dippy” parents; a refusal to cut one’s hair; a choice to be obediently shorn; a bad transcript and GPA in Santa Fe; a comprehensive high school in rural Georgia; an officer’s family; the week after 9/11; before the taut muscles of field training tighten up. A GTM analysis regards these facts as more than incidental and material to be discarded or ignored. They are, rather, deeply rhetorical and situate the women in distinctive worlds whose characters and values brought them here, to this uncommon and transformative decision. Each woman begins her enlistment history with the words, “I entered ... I joined.” It is her personal point of embarkation. She may, as Kylie Pugh mentions, know exactly the date and time of her enlistment and end of duty. But each woman in the Athena Project also draws with hyper-realistic detail the moment she herself made the decision to sign up.

The process of GTM has its variations, too, as posited and practiced by analyst Charmaz and her “second generation” cohort who apply existing thought to their reading and coding of data and subsequent theory invention. In this light our sophistic analysis forms a powerful alliance with feminist standpoint theory, which endows those words, “I joined,” with agency, and privileges what these women know and how they know it, “sort out who we really are – dissolve the false ‘we’ into its real multiplicity and variety,” as Hartsock argues in “Rethinking

⁵ Patten and Parker in the Pew Research report note that “in the armed forces as a whole, a slightly greater proportion of women than men are commissioned officers (17% vs. 15%, respectively). This advantage largely plays out in the Army, where 18% of women are commissioned officers, compared with 13% of men. The proportions of commissioned officers among men and women are equal in the Air Force and Navy, and nearly equal in the Marine Corps (9% vs. 10% of men)” (7).

Modernism” (204). My analysis here will cultivate the bonds that standpoint can establish within these texts and the meanings these connections might extract. Further, a standpoint has its own demand – a better word is “need.” While analyses of this critical perspective precisely describe the speaker’s position in terms of economics, gender, *habitus*, ideology, among other social inscriptions, an equally imperative element is the audience. Standpoint, it can be argued, attains its power from the situation that elicits it, and those who see, hear, understand, and therefore can be changed – a call to act (Hartsock *Feminist Standpoint* 241). It is a profoundly rhetorical process, here akin to Lloyd Bitzer’s classic rhetorical situation:

There are three constituents of any rhetorical situation: the first is the exigence; the second and third are elements of the complex, namely *the audience* to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon *the audience* (emphasis mine). (220)

This attention and receptivity, I think, are what we are called to do in apprehension of these stories, given willingly by those who offer them as true, as far as they desire to tell it: first of all, to appreciate the urgency that evokes these narratives at this kairotic moment; and then to allow ourselves to identify with them, able to be persuaded by the experiences they impart. Recall the question I posed at the start of this project in "Chapter One Introduction": “What do you want from us?”

The first move toward understanding, from their perspective, the reasons that these women made their own move, in many ways counter-cultural, to enter military service is to establish that standpoint from which each woman conceived her plan to enlist. A survey of the literature that addresses this decision is replete with listed reasons presented as a kind of directional *topoi*, and the reasons recited are typically the same topics as those that might

describe the dreams of any young person scuffling along the streets of closed businesses and shops in Anytown, USA, where the costs of college equal a lifetime of paychecks (Patten and Parker *Pew Research* 10):

- service to country
- education
- travel
- job

I had in mind a specific heuristic for attempting to determine the standpoint of these women as they conceived of the notion that a military career was a good idea.

What were they thinking?

What was their background and current conditions of life?

How do they describe themselves?

How did they do it?

What did they hope to gain?

The final point, the gain or intent – is usually the place where inquiry into women’s enlistment factors starts and stops. But the new directions that women in the Athena study sought move well beyond a *stasis* that seems to, but does not, tell a complete story, and herein we find the women themselves constructing their own standpoint. In the process they also reveal the sophistic that allows us to enter their discourse and understand their motivations.

But GTM, it may be recalled, enables discovery and discussion of the unspoken, i.e., a half-formed or wholly hidden intent that speakers may not be aware of themselves, a phenomenon that Charmaz explains as abductive reasoning as part of the GTM process. If there is a theme subtending these stories, it may be akin to what Michele Spencer calls “a humming” (30) that led her to hear the Army’s call. Less definitive than a tenet of standpoint such as economic class or personal temper, these stories conjure *metis*, too, in this analysis of their process of moving out. Beard, (as noted, author of *Women and Power*, a foundational source for this study), writes in a personal email to me that she discovered “years ago the importance of

metis” (“Question about Women and Power and Athena”). *Metis* is resonant with watchfulness, an awareness of a need for imminent change and persistence and resolution in seeking it.

“There’s Nothing in My Town”

Accordingly, the creation of clarity out of confusion and uncertainty is the metistic purpose that undergirds the new directions these women seek and decide to take without qualms. Although they are as clear as the bulleted lists that seem to quantify their purposes as change and escape, and clear about the advantages of job, school, travel, their stories create a discourse of seeking that reveals both the realities of young women’s precarious position in our cultural context as well as the act of conviction that gives the Athena speakers their agency.⁶

In *Soldier Girls: The Battles of Three Women at Home and in War*, historian Helen Thorpe shows that a dearth of opportunities for young women has led them to seek a new direction for their lives. She discusses in an interview “the challenges of trying to find opportunity in American society if you start off nearer the bottom” (Moody). In the presence of alternatives such as those posed by Goldie Ann Johnson – “McDonald’s. Or Walmart” – the direction that opens up to these women and seems the most promising is the U.S. military. With her steady, no-nonsense delivery – the tone of the teacher and drill instructor she aspires to be, Amber Nadeau confesses, “I was a crazy mess.”

⁶ According to Dawn Balance McKay in “Careers for Women in the Military,” women do not enlist in the service for the same reasons as men. According to a 2016 survey of recruits by the DOD’s Joint Advertising, Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) Office, 73 percent of women recruits versus 58 percent of male recruits cited travel as their reason for signing up. Fifty-two percent of female recruits joined in order to pay for future education while only 39 percent of males did so for that reason. Women sought out careers in the armed forces as a way of helping others. Only 39 percent of men gave that reason. Forty-five percent of female recruits saw the educational opportunities within the service as a good reason for joining, but only 34 percent of male recruits did. More females (39 percent) than males (27 percent) chose to become members of the armed forces to make a positive difference in their communities (2017 Annual Report. DACOWITS. February 28, 2018).”

I had my one side which is sporty and professional, a hard-worker, I'd worked since I was 16. And then my party animal side ...I was starting to lean more towards that party side where, if I would have stayed there, I knew I was going to be in a lot of trouble. I was working in an Arby's fast-food restaurant and I didn't want to continue to do that..

(Personal interview)

Much of the data in the Athena Project accords with that assessment.

Kristin Hall, in the patient and quiet voice that belies the steely determination of the A-level student who, in team projects, suffers no slackers gladly, has already explained in these pages the painful advice of her mother who raised two daughters on her own, and had already experienced the enlistment of Kristin's older sister: "I was nineteen when I went in. My mom was all for it, because she was all for my sister. ... She's a single mom, she raised us by herself for 20-some years, so she said, 'Go.' She said. 'It hurts, but you need to go do something'"

(Personal interview).

Hall articulates the search for clarity about a future that her situation, in her reckoning, did not provide for her. Furthermore, she discursively draws a portrait of a young woman who knows her choices are limited, or nil, and does not – will not – settle for a future defined by vulnerability.

"I went to community college for a year," she says, "and then I was just thinking about it. There's nothing in my town ... My intention, which is what I did, was to go in, do my four years, kinda feel it out, and then decide whether I wanted to get out. To go to school was a part of it. ... And just to get away, just do something new. That was a big thing too. I'm from Alabama. Very small (town), nothing there" (Personal interview).

LaRayne Hurd expands Hall's sentiments from a standpoint that she defines in this chapter as "poor, Black and in the South." Hurd has described herein as well the "Yes Repeat No" response she gave to the Army recruiter, from whom she hid under her adviser's desk. But nevertheless the recruiter persisted, and finally LaRayne relented and listened:

She did not give me a speech about patriotism, or being a hero, fighting for my country or a flag. She explained to me that the Army could be a way out. The decision to enlist for me was a decision to take the lifeline in front of me and do something, anything with my life that would give it meaning. (Written interview)

LaRayne enlisted four months before she graduated from high school.

The "lifeline" LaRayne delineates is tied tightly to opportunities and prospects – economic, certainly, but also a less quantifiable "meaning" for which these women yearn and resolve to achieve. Lindsay Allen writes about the emptiness of her "dead-end jobs":

I grew up in New York and Connecticut. I had already worked as a civilian for five years, and was living on my own, when I had made the decision to join the USMC. (I was) making just over minimum wage, and barely surviving. ...I couldn't afford to go to college, so, the Corps seemed to be the best choice for me. (Written interview)

Similarly, "Maggie White" admits that she felt more confidence in the military than in college to assuage her uncertainty about the future, and lead her toward a clarity and the future security she sought: "I started the process my senior year and was placed in the delayed entry program (DEP) ... I don't know exactly when I decided, but for my whole high school career I always talked about joining the military. I felt that was the best route for me," she explains, before her perhaps surprising comparison between the academic and military spheres: "I feared the application and denial process of college and I was apprehensive about facing the real world on my own and the

potential failures that would likely occur. I knew the military would guide me as a young adult and that there was no way I could fail in life with the military's leadership and guidance"

(Written interview).

The need for change in the face of lost or missing opportunities is reinforced by Dulcinea Burrow: "I wanted a new change, I was at the time going to school, with a full load of credits, doing 20 credits a semester, working three jobs, and got kinda tired of it, and said I need a different change in my life." Dulcinea is explicit and honest, traits apparent in her academic writing as well, about the scene of her life at the time that was the catalyst for this strategic decision:

I worked two retail jobs, I was at Famous Footwear and Under Armor, and then I was working my clinical area, a phlebotomist at a plasma center. I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico at the time, and minimum wage was highest there because the cost of living was high. But even then it was not affordable. I had a roommate at the time who was shady, she wouldn't show up half the time, so I was paying the rent, \$1024, by myself, and trying to do that with 3 jobs, going to school. I screwed up on my grades. I was too busy focusing on surviving. (Personal interview)

"I wanted a new change," we hear repeated in tones I can only describe as decisive. Rhonda Seward, profiled in the 2020 "Woman in the War Zone," joined the army as an escape when her mother died: "I took it really really hard," she tells us. "(Enlisting) was kind of a getaway type decision. So, I ended up going off to Ft. Jackson North Carolina, May 15th of 1996. And I just kind of joined the army abruptly" (Jones). The refusal to compromise their ambition or optimism or "pluck" is an important characteristic of the Athena women and their "camouflaged sisters," and one that moves them, in my view and in their own telling, beyond the typical

constraints of standpoint creation, i.e., economic situation; ethnicity; gender; and other sociological categories that could be used to analyze both stories that open “There’s Nothing in My Town” here. Where those forces intersect, however, these women move the needle from the point of origin, in their stories, and add the power of agency.

“Experience”

The quest to move beyond their present circumstances in this sense is personal, derived from personal exigencies. However, that self-direction also includes the sense of herself as an adventurer,⁷ explorer. Something in these women, a sense of their own capability, moves them to choose this career and confront the lack of direction in their lives with uncompromising determination to succeed. I would say succeed “at all costs,” and that truism may indeed be accurate here, but it would not sufficiently impart the excitement and sense of purpose they express. Lindsay Allen, as is her wont, states the position succinctly: “I wanted to travel and experience the things I never would have if I had stayed at home” (Written interview).

Dulcinea Burrow agrees, and explains the “scene” from which she desired an exit both compellingly and explicitly, a characteristic of her classroom discourse:

It was more of like an accomplishment, like ‘Wow! I’m going to get to do all this stuff and get to share my experience with everyone vs. working three jobs, being stressed out, figuring out when I’m going to get my next paycheck, if I’m going to have enough to buy regular groceries, and this was new. You get to go meet so many different people, go to different islands, try the different culture, and it’s all paid for by the military. You just got to do your daily duty, get to the port, go hang out for a couple of days, then come back.

⁷ “Women in the U.S. Military: Growing Share, Distinctive Profile” in *Pew Social and Demographic Trends* reveals that 70% of all women servicemembers joined for adventure,” to see more of the world” (Patten and Parker 10)

As long as you stayed out of trouble, you got to do a whole lot of fun, cool things”

(Personal interview).

A sense of adventure enlivens Amber Nadeau’s story as well. “I had no intention to join the military,” Amber Nadeau explains. “I was a junior in high school.... I accidentally took the test (to test into the military). My mother 100% wanted me to go, travel the world, get out, do anything. ... I wanted to be very independent and never need anybody to have to support me. I wanted to move out of my family’s house, I wanted to make my own money, and I wanted to travel” (Personal interview).

The point, as the stories of all women who speak in these pages demonstrate, is to outwit the *stasis*, the sense of being stalled, and move out of a neutral zone in their lives. Brandy Lockhart describes the experience earlier in this study, but her words are worthwhile to repeat: “Did you ever feel you’re not moving forward, you’re not moving back, you don’t know where you’re going, whatnot, I was kind of at that moment myself, I wouldn’t say stuck. I just didn’t know how to move forward” (Personal interview). Kylie Pugh also expresses her similar sense of no direction, no options or movement in her current scene – and no idea of the kind of agency that would resolve her quandary, answer her questions: “I’m never going to finish school, what am I going to do, how am I going to do this, what are my options” (Personal interview). A crisis precipitated each woman’s decision to seek a new direction in her life, one that can be interpreted as a result and sign of her precarious position in American life.⁸

A study of young women’s precarious situation in American professional life is worth both commentary here and further research.⁹ As noted previously, Thorpe, the author of *Soldier*

⁸ Patten and Parker of Pew Research report that 42% of women recruits enlist “because jobs were hard to find” (10).

⁹ From Pew Research: As Millennial women come of age in the “lean in” era they share many of the same views and values about work as their male counterparts. They want a job they enjoy that provides security and flexibility, and

Girls, speaks in an interview about “all these women (who) started off with fewer advantages and were trying to figure out how to live the American Dream.” She notes that “they’re different faces of the same story about social inequity” (Moody). But as Jennings Hegar, author of *Shoot Like a Girl*, insists and repeats in a personal interview, “we can’t paint with too broad a brush.” For example, Brandy Lockhart complicates this image with the successful modeling career she left behind upon her enlistment: “As a matter of fact for two years after I went into the military they still were trying to get hold of me. They wanted me to come back and model, the company I had worked for. It wasn’t like I didn’t have anywhere to go” (Personal interview). Senator Tammy Duckworth, who was deployed as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot in Iraq, enlisted as a successful student drawn to the mission and *nomos* of the U.S. Military:

While in graduate school at George Washington University I found that my peers and those whose values I most respected in class were all Veterans or active members of the military. They recommended I enroll in ROTC courses to learn more about the military. I fell in love with the military at basic training. I fell in love with the challenges and the camaraderie. I even liked the drill sergeants yelling at us, challenging us to do better. I knew that I’d serve as long as the Army needed me. (Stone)

But in some cases a veneer of success can cover desperation. “Natasha,” in the film “Soldier On,” tells us that she “wanted more”: “I had no other options.” Kylie Pugh articulates the

they place relatively little importance on high pay. At the same time, however, young working women are less likely than men to aspire to top management jobs: 34% say they are not interested in becoming a boss or top manager; only 24% of young men say the same. The gender gap on this question is even wider among working adults in their 30s and 40s, the age at which many women face the trade-offs that go with work and motherhood.

These findings are based on a new Pew Research Center survey of 2,002 adults, including 810 Millennials (adults ages 18 to 32), conducted Oct. 7-27, 2013. The survey finds that, in spite of the dramatic gains women have made in educational attainment and labor force participation in recent decades, young women view this as a man’s world—just as middle-aged and older women do. Roughly half of Millennial women (51%) and their older counterparts (55%) say society favors men over women; just 6% of both groups say it favors women over men.

vulnerability and worry that can plague even a young woman in college whose prospects appear, on the surface, on the level of statistics, as that “American Dream” achievement story:

I joined out of San Diego CA. I had moved my junior year, it was my last year at Portland State University, and I had moved to San Diego with the intention of transferring, financial hardships had led me not be able to enroll. So my enrollment got pulled. .. I had a moment four months after living there, having a very fun time and living a very fulfilling life but not moving toward any of my academic goals or my life goals, and I had a very big moment of I’m never going to finish school, what am I going to do, how am I going to do this, what are my options.

I think I felt like I didn’t have any options. (I had) the desperate feeling of drowning in me that I’m never going to reach these goals. I was really feeling it big time.
(Personal interview)

If the women in the Athena project are certain of anything, looking back, it is their own initial uncertainty, a crucial element in their particular feminist standpoint: “the desperate feeling of drowning ... I’m never going to reach my goals,” and the equal force of refusal to suffer that stultifying result, with the confidence to change it.

9/11

Indeed, Brandy Lockhart recounts her experience of working several jobs that offered zero security, from modeling to serving on the wait staff at Applebee’s, until the attacks of 9/11, and it is worthwhile to pause the action of critical analysis at this point and hear her thoughts in their fullness:

I'll never forget. It was after September 11. I was in Applebee's and basically I remember standing there and the restaurant had closed and the news report was going on about it and I had this overwhelming sense. I saw what was happening overseas and I was like, what if I could do something to make a change, and I just felt like -- did you ever feel this like profound overwhelming -- you get chills almost, 'This is something I need to do.' So that's literally what I felt. I had whole-body chills. What if something I'm about to do can help people, what kind of sick people do this stuff, who kills innocent families. I was very, very upset and enraged.

And you think back over all these years -- read anything, read the Bible, read whatever you want to read -- there's always some sort of war, and I mean who does that? who sleeps at night knowing that they're doing this? that they're harming other people? That's what initiated it, that overwhelming, that whole sense, that moment, I'll never forget. I was standing in Applebee's the restaurant had closed, the little lounge area they had the TVs playing and it was very quiet and I stopped and watched that for a second and that's where I decided that I was going to go, right then and there.

I decided I was going into the military. (Personal interview)

Like Brandy's, these particular enlistments are often subsumed in larger studies of the post-9/11 period and considered, by philosopher and gender theorist Butler among others, as part of a militarization that followed the sudden precarity of a valued country and culture (the theme and argument in *Precarious Life*, although Butler argues against an aggressive response and proposes "patient political reflection" [xi]). Political philosophy is outside the scope of this Athena inquiry; it should be noted, however, that Tabitha Nichols describes the effect of 9/11 somewhat differently: "I wanted to join. Everybody was so scared, but I wanted to join" (Personal

interview). Tabitha captures precisely the vulnerability that pervaded the U.S. at that point – “Everybody was so scared” – and notes that a young woman’s enlisting was counter-intuitive at that point, i.e., “...but I wanted to join” (emphasis mine). The sense of an anxious resistance to a

-Jordyn



Figure 24 Jordyn Bohon. Opening shot in video, “Serve Each Other,” created and posted by Jordyn in Public Writing at UWF, Spring 2019. The complete video is in the supplemental compendium of texts in “Appendix 3.”

young woman’s enlistment – particularly one with a military heritage like Tabitha’s, whose father is a Marine – is worth further exploration in light of the increase of women in military careers nonetheless. Was this particular group of young Americans inspired to join a traditionally male profession out of an insurgent patriotism?

Was 9/11 their purpose? Were these young women indeed a symptom of militarization? Their stories, however, do not define their quest in these terms (see fig. 24). Recall LaRayne Hurd’s account of her recruiter’s appeals: “She did not give me a speech about patriotism, or being a hero, fighting for my country or flag. She explained to me that the Army could be a way out” (Personal interview). The stories reveal another sort of precarity: a lack of career prospects that offer the same sense of direction and security – as well as the metistic chance to develop a

skill, discover a talent, encounter a new community and expand their experience of the world – as the U.S. military.

“Because I Can”

Thus, these women move from profound uncertainty about their future prospects, and indeed their own viability, in the civilian world to profiles in confidence when speaking about their strategic decision to join the military. Lindsay Allen notes, “I worked as a civilian for five years before I joined the USMC, and I can honestly say, I felt more comfortable in my military work environment” (Personal interview). Like Lindsay, the Athena women betray no qualms about the validity of that choice, once the process and the turmoil some experience are resolved. Dulcinea Burrow expresses her conviction that her confident spirit and tenacity were instilled in her by family philosophy and practice:

I grew up around men, that’s the difference. I didn’t grow up, like ... back in the 1950’s, women were cooks, cleaners. My grandma was more of like, ‘you gotta do it, do it yourself, don’t depend on no one, don’t you expect any handouts, you better do it your own self.’ (Personal interview)

Her colleague in my public writing class, “Maggie White,” shares that origin story: “I wasn’t a girly girl and I remember my aunt telling me how my Dad would tell her that he was raising strong, not weak kids. I feel my upbringing prepared me to have the mentality that I could compete with the men” (Personal interview). Whether they experienced a period of questioning or came to this pivotal moment seeking the kind of work about which they had dreamed their entire lives, that cool metistic persistence is the basis of their standpoint, expressed by this powerful in Holmstedt’s *Band of Sisters*: “Because I can” (96).

Without exception, going in, the Athena women demonstrate an unequivocal belief in their ability to reach their goals. For example, Lynn K. Hall, author of the memoir *Caged Eyes*, knew from a very early age that the military was her route to fulfill her “destiny”:

I was fourteen the day I decided I wanted to become an astronaut. As a math and science nerd, space dominated my life. ...I would become a pilot first, I decided. The higher the plane flew, the better. Then I would become an astronaut, a dream no doubt shared by many kids. Those of us who didn't outgrow it turned to the Air Force and Naval Academies. Both institutions combined four-year undergraduate degrees with training to become commissioned military officers ...Thirty-eight (Air Force) Academy graduates, including one woman, had managed it. So why couldn't I? Unlike some of the girls in my high school who dreamed of weddings and babies, I looked to the stars. (6-7)

One of those “kids” who shared Hall's aspiration, D. Alexis Hart, professor at Allegheny College and Navy veteran, was no stranger to the rigors of military life. The daughter of a Navy captain, she spent her summers with him, on active duty, in San Diego, which she calls her “early exposure.” As noted earlier, Hart also dreamed of the experience that Hall has called her “space odyssey” (7): “At one point in my young life I had the idea that I wanted to be an astronaut,” Hart recalls, “and I knew that you could be chosen if you were a navy pilot” (Personal interview).

Indeed, seeking the sort of career that is self-defining as well informs most stories in the Athena project and, it is important to repeat, signals confidence within these women about their competency to compete on military terms and determine the most efficacious way to achieve that goal. Nor should this form of assurance lead to a conflation of women with their jobs, a problem that seems endemic to many biographies, longform or anecdotal, of women in the military. It

must be noted that Holmstedt's trilogy (*Band of Sisters*, *The Girls Came Marching Home*, and *Soul Survivors*), while based on copious, meticulous research, nonetheless suffers from the lack of the women's actual voices, and their stories erased, like a palimpsest, behind minute descriptions of the machines they operate and technologies they ply.

In a more personal light to which this study offers validity, D. Alexis describes the determination that led to her graduation as the only woman in her ROTC program at Rochester University, commissioned at the top of her class. "I'm going to make sure I'm a success. That's true for me or any female. I plan to do a good job" (Personal interview).

Desnoyers-Colas shares the experience of being the only woman in her ROTC class: "It was me and the guys," she notes in an interview. This third-generation service member had no hesitation about entering the "alpha male culture" of the Air Force: "I wanted to experience it" (Personal interview).

"I mentally repeated to myself that I was going to succeed," Ally Osborne reported to our writing class: the line in her story, the epigraph that frames this chapter and defines again the standpoint of the Athena women, bears repeating: "I can do this. I am strong and I can do this" ("Narrative 3").

This focus on the quality Ally calls "the confidence ... I carried through" is no small point. She is one of several women in this study who have joined the U.S. Marine Corps, notoriously unwelcoming to women in both military and popular discourse. An article by veteran Shelly Goode-Burgoyne in *The Havok Journal*, which describes itself as "the Voice of the Veteran Community," advises young women to "do yourself a favor: do an about face out of the Marine Corps recruiting office this very instant, go next door to the Army Recruiting Office and join the Army. In the army your gender is infinitely more welcome." Within this context of

potentially hostile ground, Osborne's satisfaction after passing the "max score" for women her field trials, and finishing just 5 points shy of the max score for males, is notable¹⁰: "I, a strong and determined young woman, could truly have the strength to become a Marine Corps officer one day" ("Narrative" 3).

Marine veteran Lindsay Allen expresses her own clear-eyed assessment of serving in the Corps, "the biggest, and best, decision I had ever made for myself." I would like to underscore the ownership Allen shows with the words, "...I made for myself." Lindsay goes on: "I had already gained a sense of responsibility, which made it easier for me to transition myself into the military way of life" (Written interview). And, in the next topic, "Aspiring to Leadership," we will witness how easily Lindsay assumes that mantle as well.

"Women enter the military for many reasons," Kayla Williams notes (Personal interview). Wise and Baron describe women's motivation as a desire to prove themselves; in their chronicle, Captain Jaden J. Kim tells us, "I wasn't willing to quit," after severely injuring her leg at Quantico." I refused to go home" (38). Eager agrees with that interpretation, citing Kayla Williams' enlistment (48). Kayla herself explains how, prior to enlisting, "I was feeling as if I never really challenged myself" (*Rifle* 32). Of her decision to join, she notes "without a doubt it's a great way—leaving aside the whole prospect of getting maimed or killed – to better your career prospects," and in response to a boyfriend who taunted her that she "could never make it in the military," she would think, "Fuck you, Douglas" (41).

A two-word salute, I would like to add, that is central to this standpoint: "I have a strong personality," Hegar, author of *Shoot Like a Girl* and current candidate for the House in Texas,

¹⁰ Lindsay Allen, a fellow Marine, reports that "both males and females were required to perform a minimum of 50 crunches and a maximum of 100. There was a three-minute difference in the time allowed for males and females to run a distance of three miles.

informs me. We are discussing resistance to women in the military, on the basis of an assumption of incompetence and emotional indecision. “Never suggest I don’t know who I am” (Personal interview). Kylie Pugh establishes the grounds for her enlistment from the moment she entered the recruiting office in San Diego, a statement that complicates the advice, offered by Goode-Burgoyne in *Havok Journal*, for women to choose the Army for its opportunities:

I knew immediately that I wasn’t Army because when I walked in and sat down, they took one look at me and were like, “You know, we have a lot of desk jobs that are available for women. Don’t feel like you have to go out and do this. That’s not going to be expected of you.’ And I said, ‘Okay! Thank you so much for your time! I won’t be back.’ (Personal interview)

Kylie, without undue emphasis, describes herself as militarily fit, both intellectually and physically:

When I took my Air Force (test), I got a 96. And (the recruiter) was very excited for me, and said this is a list of every job you qualify for. What interests you and what do you have questions on? That included jobs like EOD explosive ordinance device because physically I qualified for that as well, very in shape. (Personal interview)

It is Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas who contributes the coup de grâce to a dying notion that women themselves feel ill-equipped for military life, and are not aware on a deep level of the evidence that their “performance equals men” (Ziegler 15). She nails the significance of feminist standpoint in this sophistic, and raises the stakes for future argument within and beyond these pages: “We’re not honorary men,” she states. “We’re confident enough to be women” (Personal interview).

*Aspiring to Leadership*¹¹

In her recent essay, *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, Beard identifies her “basic premise” as the problem “that our mental, cultural template for a powerful person remains resolutely male” (53). To explicate this issue she presents a list of troubling questions, which open this account of the ways that women aspire to leadership in military service:

How (do we) recognize female power ... and indeed have told ourselves about it, in the West at least, for thousands of years. How have we learned to look at those women who exercise power, or who try to? What are the cultural underpinnings of misogyny in politics or the workplace, ... How and why do the conventional definitions of ‘power’ (or for that matter of ‘knowledge,’ ‘expertise,’ and ‘authority’) that we carry round in our heads exclude women? (52)

Any examination of women and leadership, a subject that will be revisited throughout this study, needs for the sake of its *ethos* to take this historical scene into account, and recognize the kinds of acts and purposes that have allowed the dominance of males play out, over time and geographical space, so that the most significant cultures in our societies, such as military culture in the U.S., have developed an ideal of leadership in which women are either, like Metis, forcibly suppressed or, according to some observers, including Beard, masculinized: “We have no template for what a powerful woman looks like, except that she looks rather like a man” (54). Germano, in *Fight Like a Girl*, agrees and tailors her information to the specific scene of the U.S. Marine Corps, quoting a friend on the subject of female leader as “bitch”:

For most men serving in the Corps ... the thought of a woman as a peer, competitor, or boss is a complete paradigm breaker. They understand women as moms, teachers, sisters,

¹¹ According to Reynolds and Shendruk in “Demographics of the U.S. Military,” women represent 18% of the officer corps, up from 8% at the end of the draft in 1973.

girlfriends, girlfriends, that dumped them, and girls they couldn't get, but that's pretty much the extent of it. (43)

Notice how the Marine, quoted above, still ascribes to the notion that historian Enloe articulated earlier in this study, i.e., that men are the military, and women are in the military (qtd. in Eager 69) – here, perhaps not even that sliver of a presence. Women in this Athena project address this issue in myriad ways: they know it, they live it, they recognize it in others and navigate it intelligently, and the data they present to us is clear in their intention to resist, subvert, and ultimately transform the calculus of power in the military. Metis, it will be recalled, carried to term and full maturity the first female warrior, Athena with steely purpose and stealth.

Indeed, their aspiration to leadership can manifest itself in multiple ways that reflect the intelligence of the classical strategy, *metis*. For example, Emily Satterfield defines her agency in this ambition as a desire to work hard and with eventual beneficial effect:

I was expecting to work my butt off and to make a difference in the military, do something that would make the military a better place or help change how the job was done and to be treated like an adult who could take care of herself. I expected to go in to work, workout, do my job and be rewarded/promoted if I did my job well. (Personal interview)

The idea that promotion would come as a matter of course and design is shared by LaRayne Hurd, pictured in uniform earlier, whose aspiration for leadership is more explicitly stated, as is its connection to the Army's "gendered expectations" (Ziegler and Gunderson phrase, 15) that Hurd had yet to discover:

I seriously had no doubts about being able to reach my goals. I wanted to be a leader and

I had spent so much of my life dealing with discrimination that came from my skin color that it never occurred to me that my sex/gender would ever be a hindrance to anything.

(Personal interview)

To Lindsay Allen, leadership roles came naturally because of her age, a position she describes in comfortable, cool tones and compassionate understanding of the young women around her:

Most of the recruits I was in Boot Camp with, and the students I went to school with for my military occupation, were younger than me. Most of them were fresh out of high school, with no sense of responsibility. During these times, I realized my role as a leader, and took charge with ease. (Personal interview)

Lindsey's experience in her division notwithstanding, the impact not only of gender, but skin color, is pinpointed with a laser focus by Nancy Bullock-Prevot, Navy veteran and advocate for homeless women veterans in Pensacola, who "didn't see many women in positions of authority," and aimed "to be the best, work harder, to get promoted, and to make myself stand out. I didn't want to seem like a 'typical female' in the military, that men looked at as being weak and incompetent."¹² Nancy offers her motto of "see something, do something, don't just talk about it." This aspiration sounds very much like the dual purpose described by Emily

¹² This perception persists despite empirical evidence to the contrary, even in tests of physical stamina and strength. In "Five Myths About Women in Combat," Janet Blair presents the following data: "While it is indisputable that the average man has more upper-body strength than the average woman, women have different physical abilities that enable them to offer unique capabilities in combat. Distance running is one such arena, and it's relevant because combat can be as much about physical endurance (sustaining activity over time) as physical strength. According to a study analyzing track-and-field records and published in the journal *Nature* in 1992, the gaps between male and female performance narrow as the distance is extended, and some studies show that at ultramarathon distances (100 miles or more), women with equal training as their male counterparts outperform men. Researchers theorize that women's ability to metabolize fat more efficiently contributes to their endurance and success in longer runs. Women also tolerate hot and humid racing conditions better than men because of their smaller body size, according to a 1999 article in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology*. Foot patrols involve carrying 50 to 100 pounds of equipment for miles at a time, and I've seen male Marines who can bench-press 300 pounds but struggle to walk two miles with 50 pounds of gear. And you don't have to bench-press 300 pounds to pull a trigger."

Satterfield and LaRayne Hurd, above: no apparent difference there. However, Nancy notes in the keen detail that enacts her standpoint as aspiring leader how the Navy overplayed its hand in promoting an African American women, thus betraying its attitude of accommodation, rather than the accepted membership of the officer so decorated:

Yes, they showed inequality and marginalization in promotions. When the Navy got its first four-star admiral, an African American female, they made a big to-do about it. If a male was promoted to a four-star admiral, they wouldn't have done the same thing.

(Written interview)

It is interesting and instructive to imagine the ingenuity and sustained effort of the “African American female” who achieved this result. Relating her own aspirations to this example, Nancy adds: “It made me work harder. I had to sacrifice some things for a promotion. I had to take the hard assignments to be promoted, at the cost of my family.” This statement expresses the three elements of the Athena theory and model that arise from the women’s stories and show us how to read them: we see the commitment to military demand, the confidence to attempt it, and the metistic sense of “intelligence, an informed prudence” (Detienne and Vernant 10) that can, in the long run, prove to be “more precious than strength” (12). As an extension of Miller’s theory of gender as genre, we might also consider how women are creating, out of resistance to an embedded assumption of their inferiority and limitation – their identification with sex which effectively dehumanizes them – a new genre of leadership.

Imagining the Female Military Identity

Pt. 2: Playing the Game

Choices (make) it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games. – Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*

Proving Ground: Judy Young

I was raised with an odd enough combination of southern matriarchal tradition and a progressive northeastern education that I assumed I could do anything I wanted to, whether in military service or not. (Truly – it was an absolute shock to me when I began to learn that my gender was in any way limiting to me – how naïve I was.) When I first went to the recruiter, I had no idea what I wanted to do in the Navy – I just thought I would take a look and see what the possibilities were and decide from there whether I wanted to give it a try and, if so, how.

So when the recruiter saw that my test scores were strong, and he put the whole catalogue of possible rates (what the Navy calls job specialties) in front of me and said, in effect, ‘Pick one,’ I had some thinking to do. I didn’t want to stick with my already-known strengths – my language skills. I wanted to go into something completely different. Otherwise, I reasoned, it would be more of the same things I’d been doing in school, which, after all, I wanted to escape for a while.

So I settled on something much more physical than anything I had ever done: I wanted to be a Navy parachute rigger, officially called an Aircrew Survival Equipmentman (Equipmentman, notice), abbreviated as ‘PR.’ The work would involve packing and maintaining parachutes, but also working on things like aviators’ personal survival equipment (oxygen masks, helmets, survival vests, g-force suits, and survival equipment associated with airplane systems and ejection seats. The training for this rate included making a parachute jump with a chute that you packed yourself, and that attracted me beyond belief. I was so excited to begin!

I was only the fourth woman to enter the rate since the late 1940’s. I felt pretty proud and excited about that, as if I were helping to drag the Navy into the new world of liberated woman.

Like I said – incredibly naïve.



Figure 25 Judy Young. Photo contributed by Judy Young

– Judy Young, “Note about Jobs and Uniforms”

Introduction: “All You Gotta Do Is Play the Game”

This section, *Playing the Game*, examines the ways women seek to engage in military culture and, in this act of engagement, imagine their role on a field where their legitimacy as players is challenged. Lila Holley, author of the *Camouflaged Sisters* series, describes as a series of “layers” the complicated process of claiming that desired place “at the table” as a woman, a Black woman, and a Black woman who must be regarded and addressed as leader:¹³

I always explain to people that my process walking into, say, the meeting room. The first thing they see is a woman, right, so they have to get past that layer. The second thing they see is a black woman, and they have to get past that layer, and then they will eventually, see, ‘Oh, that chief. Chief has entered the room.’ You know what I mean? There’s a couple of layers I have to go through to get to the table, but there’s definitely a seat at the table ... For them to even hear my voice, I felt like I had to be better, so much better than my male counterparts, so much more proficient in my job than my male counterparts, just even going into the job. (Personal interview)

Goldie Ann Johnson recounts, in this respect, the advice her first and most influential mentor proffered as she prepared for her new career: “It’s a mind game,” she recalls his telling her. “You’re smart. All you gotta do is to play the game. Once you play the game, and you figure out the rules, it’s easy” (Personal interview). In that decisive act, Lila Holley, Goldie Ann Johnson, and their sister Athenas are following a *dictum* of Heilbrun: “Women need to learn how publicly to declare their right to public power” (18). – in this context, their rightful membership in the U.S. Military.

¹³ According to Patten and Parker in the Pew report, Black women comprise 31% of women servicemembers (5).

Accordingly, "Playing the Game" will explore in three topics the ways these Athenas-to-be are able to transpose themselves on the male military *persona* and strategically move to make a place for themselves at the table and play a winning hand. In "The Game, 'A Structure Already Coded As Male,'" I examine the women's stories of recruiting themselves for a profession designed to validate a male identity and alter that particular call to arms. That women can and do not only aspire to perform, but prepare to direct and lead in military spheres formerly male-identified is examined in "Perception So Far Behind Reality." Finally, I show how the discourse of these women evinces no connection or reference to the military male template, but rather depicts and enacts their desire to replace it with one of their own making, in "A Seat at the Table." Their discourse shows a determination to imagine their identity and role as they deem fitting and indeed compose their own story of service. Conversely, despite restraints that most women recognize and describe, the military means freedom of choice, the exercise of control over their lives, perhaps for the first time. They speak of the way they hope to claim an equal place "at the table" (Holly Personal interview), and outwit the expectation of defeat they meet at seemingly every turn.

The Game, "A Structure Already Coded As Male"

In her critical article, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," Hekman proposes "defining the feminist standpoint as situated and engaged knowledge" (239), which seems to this researcher no different from Hartsock, Harding, Hill Collins, and Smith *passim*. Not only has it been clear that the women servicemembers in the Athena project construct their standpoint in just this classic way, but also they convey this knowledge with a strong vocality that is evident in Judy Young's enlistment narrative, excerpted above, and

typifies the narrative *corpus* as a whole. I cannot overstate the authority that the Athena women assert throughout their stories, both in the content and in the telling. They embody a standpoint that is decisive and precisely rendered in their interviews and texts, situated as each of them is in the circumstances of a given moment and thus the basis of this feminist sophistic designed uniquely for them.

It would be remiss of me, therefore, in a study defined as wholly derived from the discourses they themselves design and build, to fall back on our cultural languages' easy conveniences, such as the first topic I had planned for this category, the act of "Being Recruited," reconsidered now as "Playing the Game," which more precisely indicates their agency and intelligence. The process of formally entering the U.S. military is depicted in popular discourse passively, "Being Recruited," which suggests a process of being approached and acted upon, a neutral position devoid of agency, let alone authority, where the act and the purpose are all on the other side of the deal, even if the enlistee is eager to join up and bounds up the steps of the local recruiting office, full of zeal and zest and, as Young emphasizes, naivete.

I argue that these particular servicemembers set about recruiting themselves. Their enlistment has never been cast as intrinsic to their identity as women or citizens. For them the contrary is potently true: they have had to fight hard for their dignity and indeed recognition of their physical presence and prowess in this professional field. An example of the kind of strategy a recruiting office might use to approach and persuade a young person seeking direction and opportunity to sign up is shown in a popular recruiting website,¹⁴ where the appeals of a warrior *nomos* that validates *esprit de corps* on the battlefield are clear and compelling. The actors in this

¹⁴ This recruiting station can be accessed at mcrc.marines.mil/1stmcd/Unit-Home/RecruitingStationHarrisburg/

scene, Recruiting Station New York: 1st Marine Corps District on Steward Avenue in Garden City, are male, and the website is replete with the discourse that historically has constituted and reflected the “masculine idealization” within military culture (Ibell). I selected this particular website because I was looking for a potentially large and diversified demographic in both ethnicity and gender identity; and I chose the Marines because few women in the Athena project who have served in that sect, whose mantra is “Semper Fidelis,” enact that message without compromise and express, or admit, no struggle in uniform and no regrets. Lindsay Allen, Marine to her core, is an exception to this caution: “As far as challenging the sex gender norms, we may be ‘the fewer of the few,’ but it wasn’t seen as ‘out of the norm,’” Lindsay emphasizes. “Our generation is different than it was years ago. Women are accepted in the service and are treated as equals” (Written interview). There is no doubt, however, confronting this published material, that the rhetorics are carefully and precisely planned to appeal to a young man whose questions mirror those of the Athena women: “What am I going to do with my life? What are my options?” – with one codicil, whose significance was not apparent to me until I began to consider the connection between stories like Young’s and the notion of “being recruited.” The young men who are the targets here are “being recruited” to fulfill, as Mary Beard has phrased it, “a manly purpose” (60), which embeds a message of identity formation as well: “On those terms,” she argues, “women as a gender – not as some individuals – are by definition excluded from it. You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is *already coded as male*” (emphasis mine, 86-87). Marine veteran Germano in *Fight Like a Girl* depicts this conflict vividly:

If I’m a big, strong dude, and I can wrestle an alligator, or, you know, make it through the Infantry Officer’s Course, but then a woman comes along and does it, then somehow that

makes me less of a real dude. If a woman can do it, then it's probably not as manly a thing to do as I thought. (31)

Mirrors of Desires and Needs

Yet young women like Lindsay Allen study sites such as Recruiting Station New York: 1st Marine Corps District on Stewart Street in Garden City and, in an act of identification or imagination that explorers in any brave new world must experience on first looking into it, are able to transpose those *simulacra* for their own often unsatisfactory ones – in Allen's case, the “dead-end job” she longs to escape. They see themselves in situations indeed “already coded as male” and alter persuasion at its root. This phenomenon of unintended audience adds a new dimension and interesting twist to Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation, examined earlier. Intrinsic to that element of audience is the discursive trick practiced by every brand and influencer since Plato and Isocrates battled to corner the market on elite male children for their respective academies: the most effective persuasion is one which leads the targets to persuade themselves. There is little to no attempt to recruit young women with the same urgent appeals to join an unapologetically male culture that gives not an inch to a female point of view or sensibility, viewed in this context as constitutionally weak. For the essentialist who may lurk in the ideological crevices in each of our philosophies, whatever is felt or identified or thought to be “female” by virtue of *nomos* or genes is ineluctably absent from this cultural swagger, and if one becomes a Marine, one becomes male. Beard is rhetorically clear that the subject “ceases to be a woman ... (in a situation that) repeatedly uses male terms and the language of masculinity to refer to her” (60).

Through an act of invention replete with adventure, ambition, despair, energy, frustration, confidence – the components of their desire to move examined earlier – these young women were somehow able to view the arguments and images that worked aggressively against the fact of female existence as mirrors of their own desires and needs. That same powerful act of imagination allows them to see, perhaps, those faces and figures in uniform as their own in a field of battle officially barred to them at the time of enlistment before the period of dissolving that barrier, 2013-2015. “Maggie White” has asserted, “I was not aware of the demographic data, in terms of gender, in the U.S. military; mainly because I did not care” (Written interview), and although most Athena women knew about the gender disparity in terms of numbers, they have repeated in one way or another the point of “Maggie’s” assertion that should not be overlooked in our close reading of their sophistic – i.e., they do not consider gender a factor at all. Their ability to see past a gendered difference that many of us consider an essential one is their first strategic move that will come powerfully into play as they encounter the opposite standpoint their male compadres occupy and consider the essential military culture itself.

The Game: “Equipmentman”

Where Hekman’s revision of feminist standpoint is most effective here is its enabling women to use that “situated knowledge” to “articulate a counterhegemonic discourse” (239) and act on the basis of that position. In this respect her proposal accords with Fonow and Cook’s *credo* in “Feminist Methodology,” that “feminist approaches to research have always emphasized action and social change” and is in fact an “action orientation” that responds realistically to women’s relationship with power: “We know,” they write, “that women consent to, resist, and reshape the social relations of power within a complex matrix of domination and

subordination” (2223-2224 *passim*). Such “action orientations” offer productive response to a persistent male hegemony that has served to erase the vital fact of women’s service. Certainly, given the masculine *ethos* apparent in this recruiting station and identified throughout the literature as the dominant values in military culture *in toto*, any discourse that presents the equality of women in these precincts would be “counterhegemonic.” One immediate sign of this counter-move is Judy Young’s marking her job title as “Equipmentman,” which Beard considers an act of power in which women lose their gender when male terminology is constantly used to depict them and their experience (60). Both Grohowski and Kayla Williams have documented the virulence of language that erases, compromises, and too often humiliates women in this setting. Hekman posits that a discourse created to push back to a domineering group who seeks its silence “argues for a less repressive society” on a larger stage (239). Beard sees the problem and raises the stakes of both action and scene, articulating a significant change in my own perception of the Athena women’s standpoint: “You cannot easily fit women into a structure already coded as male,” we have heard her say – then she goes on: “You have to change the structure. That means thinking about power differently” (87), which accords with Hekman’s more muscular take on standpoint.

We have seen the women in this study compare their ambition, aspiration, and work ethic to those of the men with whom they shared this playing field. Those comparisons will persist throughout their narratives, both overtly in descriptors such as “lazy” and indirectly in claims of “working twice as hard” to have their achievements and capacities recognized. Dulcinea Burrow argues that such acknowledgement of effort and prowess occurs as a matter of course, to female and male alike (Personal Interview); others dispute that claim. It is an important component of the argument here that “women speak from multiple standpoints, multiple knowledges,” noted

previously from Hekman (239), and they need not and will not agree unanimously on every point: “But this does not prevent women from coming together to work for specific political goals,” she maintains, a position that carries weight as our study of these stories proceeds.

Although their opening the glass doors of offices such as Recruiting Station New York: 1st Marine Corps District on Stewart Avenue in Garden City happened in disparate places, different times, the Athena women and their “band of sisters” (from Holmstedt) do represent a way of viewing power differently, did come together to achieve a specific goal, and are changing “the structure” as surely as they changed the approach and basic argument of this section of this project.

From the beginning of listening to their stories, not imposing *a priori* a viewpoint that seems agreeable to me and looking only at the data that confirms it, it has been clear that these women acquire and create their military identity “on their own terms” (Reinharz 19). As noted, the project itself is entitled “*American Athena*” because of the way their decisive actions and powerful sense of agency alter a crucial point in the plot of what Beard calls the “madness of Greek myth”: “(Athena) herself wasn’t even born of a mother but directly from the head of her father, Zeus. It was almost as if Athena, woman or not, offered a glimpse of an ideal male world in which women could not only be kept in their place but dispensed with altogether” (Beard 70-72). Of course, as Beard further discussed in a personal email to me, Athena does have a mother, the ingenious and strategic Metis who figures heavily in this analysis. An emphasis on the role of Metis in the creation of Athena offers, in her words, “a more nuanced reading” of the classical text (“Question about Women and Power, and Athena”). The women’s discursive integrity is one result of this strategic design: writing their own story and showing us how to hear and interpret what they choose to say, so that the product and process are the same (see “Chapter Four

Methodology: Athena, from Myth to Model"). Mackenzie Rieselt refuses, as if she speaks on behalf of the other Athena women, to serve herself up as a victim for the rest of us to pity and slough off: "If they're speaking of women as just being victims in the military, then it's a bit ridiculous" (Personal interview). This outright challenge to a cultural meme, the walking wounded warrior woman, is solidly supported by the evidence of the narratives themselves, which reframe the trope of the victim, even in harsh and hostile situations, to that of "contender."

What is clear is that this troupe of women speak for themselves and make the decision to sign up themselves. Tammy Duckworth was a graduate student in political science aiming for a career as a Foreign Service officer:

I figured I should know the difference between a battalion and a platoon if I were to represent my country overseas someday. What I didn't expect was to fall in love with the camaraderie and sense of purpose that the military instills in you and even with the misery of training. (Duckworth "What I Learned at War")

They plan and carry out the process of enlisting even in the face of resistance or skepticism on the part of their families. Tabitha Nichols, as we have already discovered, persuades parents who are anxious in post-9/11 America, despite their Marine legacy; Amber Nadeau confronts outright resistance:

It almost broke up my relationship with my father. Joining, period. He refused to sign, and I was 17. So, I was like, 'This is my life and my decision, and I know that where I'm at currently, and where this could bring me, is so much better, that it's worth the risk.' He was afraid of me going overseas and something happening to me, like getting harassed or raped. He had the whole idea that it's a military of men and here his little daughter is going in to be the baby of the military, so he refused to sign...He really tried to push the

idea in my head that being a young female in the military was going to be very dangerous. I was like the world is dangerous and I could get hurt anywhere. Let's just do it. (Personal interview)

It is therefore within the logic of this narrative that these women were not and are not recruited as passive objects of a persuasive or coercive sales crew in uniform. Rather, their stories demonstrate how efficaciously they recruit themselves – choose, in most cases, their jobs as deliberately as Young details above – and refuse to allow their standard-issue uniforms to efface them.

Recruiting Themselves: “Women Doing Great Things”

While it may seem puzzling that these women seek a new direction in their lives and believe that the U.S. military, a system with entrenched traditions that expects unquestioned obedience to orders, offers them the freedom to explore new avenues in their lives, they view this conundrum differently. It is certainly counterintuitive, but true nonetheless: many women, and most of the Athenas, believe they can be who they want to be within this structure. I pursued this issue with them: how does the regimentation of this job represent freedom to you? “I don’t know, but it does,” responds Goldie Ann Johnson.¹⁵ “Monet” extends this argument : “(Whether) officers or enlisted, both provide great opportunities for education (as well as some things like ensured insurance, discounts and great prices at the Commissary or Navy Exchange. I feel this is one of the most pragmatic yet empowering positions” (Written comment). The data shows them

¹⁵ A similar sense of freedom within constraint is the theme of a visual essay by Kiana Hayeri and May Jeong in *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 March 2020, “Where Prison Is a Kind of Freedom” 34-33. Hayeri and Jeong profile women in Afghanistan who escape abusive marriages by murdering their husbands – yet, together in prison, they achieve a freedom they never enjoyed previously. Their seemingly counterintuitive experience, while more extreme, reminded me of the freedom the Athena women and their sisters in arms express about their military enlistment.

approaching their enlistment as a positive move to exert control, on their own terms, over a period in their lives that, for reasons particular to each woman, felt in some way wrong. “I just didn’t know how to move forward,” Brandy Lockhart explained earlier – along with her anger at the attacks of 9/11:

And just coming from my love of adventure I wanted to go places, I wanted to see things, So I went home that night, maybe I want to go in the military, maybe that’s what I want to do, so I called up the recruiter the next day ... I said I wanted to leave quickly. I just -- at that point I was fed up. I was done. I needed to go somewhere. (Personal interview)

Certainly there are exceptions to this enlistment-as-solution story: D. Alexis Hart and Tabitha Nichols, it will be recalled, are offspring of military fathers – Hart in the Navy; Nichols, Marines – for whom enlistment was a matter of course and intrinsic to career and/or college plans.

Whether they consider the possibility and promise of military life as way to achieve their aspirations or forge a new and aspirational identity when they need one, these women are immediately receptive to this uncommon, indeed, controversial, choice of career.

To Nancy Bullock-Prevot, the Navy is a path to learning what her interest and talent might be, as well as ultimately her destination: “When I first joined the military, I did not have any expectations. It took a couple of years for it to truly sink in, that being in the military could be a career and that there were women doing great things for and in the military” (Personal interview).

Her stance is shared by Mackenzie Rieselt: “I didn’t want to waste my money in college and go through business or something like that I realized that I actually liked being in and wanted to do the 20 years after that. As a future, I still wanted to get my college done, I realized

that I always wanted to have an education, I just wanted to make sure I knew what it was I wanted to do” (Personal interview).

Kristin Hall finds herself stalled at a crossroads, going to community college, with no specific direction, and emulates her sister’s enlistment, to a point: “My sister went into the army. I’m 24; she’s 26. She went into the army and she loved it, but she said don’t go army. From the minute I walked into the air force recruiter, it just felt perfect” (Personal interview).

The military’s ability to redress the grievances and resolve the questions in the lives of these women is delivered to them through various conduits: concerned family and friends; trusted advisers; legacies. But the key factor in this particular act is the women’s ability to perceive the freedom and potential for personal success within the confines of that contract. Perhaps their astonishing act of imagination that allows them to look through and beyond the male configuration of the military’s public image can be understood by listening to, accepting, and perceiving a truth about this generation and its effect on a formerly masculinized culture in the words of “Maggie White”: “I didn’t care” (Written interview).

“Perception So Far From Reality”

LaRayne Hurd, who served as Combat Photographer in Iraq, makes the point in our meeting that hers is one of the only occupations for women with the word “combat” attached in the MOS (Military Occupational Specialty):

I was a female in a male-dominated field. Not only was I in the Army, but I was Combat Photographer. In a time when technically women were not allowed in combat, I was in a position that had ‘combat’ in the title. Technical job title: Combat Documentation Production Specialist 25V. I worked just as hard as the guys, did the same training and

carried the same equipment. During my deployment in 2007 I worked alone and would have to prove myself every day when a mission came up. (Written interview)

Initially, I interpret LaRayne's insistence on this designation as a matter both of pride and panache. But I come to see this statement as fact that defiantly flies in the face of its erasure, a signal and an emblem of the "true grit" of battle experience that has been denied women officially, despite the open secret repeated throughout these stories and the literature they represent: "We did it anyway" is the clear message of "Sistahs of Defense" in Desnoyers-Colas *Marching*: "They did have an integral role in serving with military forces during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (55). As far back as 2007 Kayla Williams spoke directly to this point:

People conclude that girls don't do combat zones. That we're somewhere else from where the action is. But that's bullshit. We are Marines. We are Military Police. We are there as support to the infantry in almost every way you might imagine. We even act in support roles for the Special Forces. We carry weapons – and we use them. We may kick down doors when an Iraqi village gets cleared. We do crowd control. We are also often the soldiers who negotiate with the locals – nearly one third of Military Intelligence (MI), where I work, is female. (*Rifle 16*)

The false positive that women have had no active duty in combat is typified by a *People Magazine* article of 4 May 2015, two years after combat exclusion was repealed. Entitled "Real-Life GI Janes," by Sandra Sobieraj Westfall and Elizabeth McNeil, the article presents this headnote as fact: "As the nation debates combat roles for women, a *select few* have *quietly served alongside* the special forces, taking enemy fire in war zones and risking their lives for their country" (emphasis mine, 78). In truth, national "debate" was a moot point by then, since women had official access to all military occupations, and, of course, far more than "a select

few” were engaged with far more squads than “special forces.” Nor were they serving “quietly alongside” their male comrades. Such qualifiers relegate women service members to that imagined female-as-helpmeet position, rather than foreground them for the warriors they were and are, fighting, dying, or coming home and sometimes winning seats in Congress, sometimes struggling to get up in the morning.

“You get better,” says veteran Michelle Jones in the documentary *Served Like a Girl*. “You learn to live with it.” And they loudly and often brashly proclaimed this truth of their experience in their nascent genre of literature, delivering their stories in the strong vocality identified as the sound and source, and inspiration, of this study.

In 2009, six years before the *People Magazine* story, Helen Benedict’s *Lonely Soldier* and Kirsten Holmsedt’s *Girls Come Marching Home: Stories of Women Warriors Returning from the War in Iraq* were published, followed in 2010 by Laura Browder’s *When Janey Comes Marching Home: Portraits of Women Combat Veterans*, Cynthia Enloe’s *Nimmo’s War*, *Emma’s War*, *Making Feminist Sense of the War*, and Shoshona Johnson’s *I’m Still Standing: From Captive U.S. Soldier to Free Citizen*, and in 2011 Janet Blair’s *Hesitation Kills: Female Marine Officer’s Combat Experience in Iraq* – all classics in the genres of military and women’s studies. This same material available to Westfall and McNeil was at that moment informing Williams, in the process of publishing her groundbreaking memoir, *Love My Rifle More Than You* previously cited, and there is nothing “quietly” stereotypical about that text, right from its opening salvo:

Sometimes I wake up before dawn and forget I am not slut. ... The only other choice is bitch. If you’re a woman and a soldier, those are the choices you get...A woman soldier has to toughen herself up. Not just for the enemy, for battle, or for death. I mean toughen herself up to spend months awash in a sea of nervy, hyped-up guys. ... I was a punk-kid

rebel, and now I'm part of the most authoritarian institution imaginable. I thought this war was probably wrong, didn't want to go. .. Everything I thought I knew about what it would be like turned out to be wrong. So I wanted to write a book to let people know what it feels like to be a woman soldier in peace and in war. (13)

Like Kayla Williams, most women in this Athena project enlist and sign up for jobs before the official refusal to place women in infantry, armored units, special forces, and field artillery is reversed by Barrack Obama's Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on 24 January 2013. The argument that wins the day, delineated in the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawsuit, is that "(women are) denied a core component of full citizenship – serving on equal footing in the military defense of our nation" (Desnoyers-Colas *Marching* 56). Tabitha Nichols, who experiences combat as a driver in Iraq, explains that when she enlists, "I wasn't allowed to 11 Bravo, only guys can do that frontline -- kind of shoot 'em up kinds of people. That's the only position I couldn't do. I mean, jag, if I scored high enough, I had my pick of jobs" (Personal interview). Women like Tabitha are, nonetheless, likely to experience combat and/or violence in any setting on their tours of duty, and they are prepared to respond: "'I'm a soldier now,'" Tabitha recalls telling her senior high school class upon her return from boot camp. "'I've been through a lot, they've trained us, I'm an adult' ... It was part of your identity. Yeah."

Kayla Williams, whose MOS is Military Intelligence, details women's experience in the years before the ban on combat was lifted:

We are Marines. We are Military Police. We are there as support to the infantry in almost every way you might imagine. .. We carry weapons – and we use them. ... Insurgents' mortar attacks reach us, too. In fact, because insurgents strike supply lines so often, it's

frequently the non-infantry soldiers like us – with fewer up-armored vehicles – who end up getting hit and engaging in combat. (*Love My Rifle* 16)

Goldie Ann Johnson, Information Technology Specialist, explains: “If you look at the military as a whole, it’s not that women have just started. It’s that women are just getting the opportunity – to be out about it, yes” (Personal interview).

This changing field of battle in 21st century warfare and women’s active duty in that setting are the special interests of Tulsi Gabbard, Representative of Hawaii who served for 18 months in a medical unit outside of Baghdad: “I think the policy change was long overdue and reflected kind of a catching up to the reality of some of the jobs that women have been doing in combat situations now for some time,” she argues. In a 2014 interview, Gabbard offers a context for the agency and action she demands we recognize in women servicemembers:

Within the last twelve years that our country has been at war, it’s been a very unconventional type of combat. It’s different from former concepts of ‘the front lines’ and ‘the rear,’ and who is doing what, and where the attacks are coming from. Again, this is a matter of policy, and people’s perceptions being so far from reality. (Caplan-Bricker)

The title of this section, “Playing the Game: ‘Perception Behind Reality,’” is in fact derived from Gabbard’s contention that the breadth and depth of women’s engagement are dismissed, distorted, undervalued. The data presented herein clearly shows that despite the military’s former restrictions and current reservations, women themselves harbor no doubts about their ability to serve and their right to do so unimpededly, whatever policy or pop culture might aver: this is the central tenet of the feminist sophistic their stories create. The clarity of Lindsay Allen’s statement, “I realized my role as a leader, and took charge with ease” (Written interview), is underscored by each woman’s account of her years of service, be they two or 22, in warehouses

or submarines, on helicopters or convoys “outside the wire” in Iraq, commanding or obeying orders, alone or working as squad or team members. Their belief in their equality in this primarily male culture is an unshakeable tenet of their standpoint that sustains them through the enlistment process and their tenure of service thereafter, despite the prejudices they encounter and countervail. It is the way they strategize to earn their seat at that table. It is the way they learn to run “the game.”

“Myself and Other Female Leaders Took Control and Leadership of the Situation”

There is, of course, the cultural meme of females as the weaker sex that most American women contend with: “I got little comments but nothing crazy,” Kristin Hall, Crew Chief assigned to jets, reports of being one of two females in her mechanical training classes. (Personal interview). Still, the women in this study are at pains to address such pestering comments by pointing out their prowess: “I felt fine,” Kristin continues. “I was kicking everybody’s butt. I was top of my class,” a statement repeated throughout these narratives (e.g., Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Alexis Hart, Brandy Lockhart, Amber Nadeau, Kylie Pugh). Those biases are, perhaps, the last gasps of the cultural stigma placed on women as breeders who create and inhabit a private sphere of child-bearing and nurturing that men fight wars ostensibly to shield and sustain: “Americans balk at moms in combat,” notes Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas, Public Affairs Officer in the Air Force (*Marching* 63). In the 2009 study of Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, “Supporting ‘She Who Has Borne the Battle,’” Melissa reports: “I was told that I could not be both a soldier and a mother at the same time” (Mulhall 4). Emily Satterfield, who becomes pregnant while serving at her permanent duty station as a 3051 Warehouse Clerk in the Marines, offers insight into this instruction:

Due to the military being a male-dominated field, many of them did not know how to handle me being pregnant. I was the first female in my shop that became pregnant so I was a learning experience for them which was a very unpleasant experience for me; they treated me as if I had a contagious disease (Written interview).

The bias could signal as well an illusion of sentimentality that serves to essentialize women as the sensitive souls of a culture to be “fought over and protected,” discussed by political science professor Laura Sjoberg in “Women Fighters and the Beautiful Soul Narrative.” Sjoberg sets out to track the “gendered dimensions” (54) of warfare traditionally in which, rhetorically, “there is no room for women fighting wars” (56), and the persistence of this ideology despite the fact of women’s service as soldiers globally. In the “beautiful soul narrative (women) provide love and nurture, and at once serve as a support for the logistical and moral fighting for the war and as a symbol of the good and pure that requires the evil of fighting to save it.”

Not all women servicemembers accept this critique on its face value. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Lisa Bradley, Sensors Technician who worked with infrared systems, reports that while she did experience gender bias “occasionally,” she emphasizes that “what people don’t seem to understand about the U.S. military is that it is a snapshot of the current public. It is no worse or no better than the civilian population of its time.” Bradley adds an important and thought-provoking codicil: “But it is held to a higher standard” (Written interview). It may be that the civilian world has something to learn from the military about women, rather than imposing its gender biases on this culture-in-transformation: that women can and do not only aspire and perform, but direct and lead in military spheres formerly male-identified, “Girls Not Allowed.” To this discussion we might add the argument of both Tulsi Gabbard and Kayla Williams, former Military Intelligence and Director of the Women’s Center

at the VA – that women participate in war regardless of their status as officially sanctioned warriors, and are, in any case, the “badass” human beings that Nichols aspired to be: “Women have survived war going back to the beginning of human history, often as non-combatants, but women are in war settings,” Kayla avows. “Women are affected by war deeply and women have done incredible physical things as well.” Kayla offers an insight that might explain the cultural meme of the “weaker gender” that women, here in the military setting, face and strive to overcome: “(We need) the understanding that with practice, with training, with work, we can endure. I feel like it’s a message we haven’t gotten in pop culture growing up, in the same way that men have, so it doesn’t really form part of our identity” (Personal interview).

The Athena women prove the folly of a discourse of weakness as part of women’s public identity and the sense of themselves they need to confront and / or shake off to imagine a military identity for a woman who chooses this profession. The story of “Maggie White” is instructive here:

I remember a basic training field exercise where we pretended our base was under attack and we had to respond. My flight of females with our brother flight of males had to work together. Interestingly, myself and other female element leaders took control and leadership of the situation and our brother flight followed our orders given for successful completion of the exercise. The Training Instructor who oversaw us, commented on how he would not have issues fighting alongside us and that we portrayed excellent military leadership. ...Meaning that I have seen many women leading, whether it be in the squadron, group, wing, or base. (Written interview)

Experiences such as “Maggie’s” are still not truths universally acknowledged: consistent areas of concern include “physical ability, efficiency, morale and cohesion, military readiness, tradition,

abuse by enemy, and career advancement” (Maninger qtd. by). A 2015 article in *Military Review* by retired Marine Colonel Charles E. Rice, “Women in the Infantry: Understanding Issues of Physical Strength, Economics, and Small-Unit Cohesion,” states the issue succinctly: “Infantry combat, especially in a full-scale conflict, is a relentlessly physical ordeal. The optimal demographic for this endeavor is young, healthy males” (53). But maybe not: “What kills me is I was always attached to infantry,” retorts veteran “Nicole” in the documentary *Served Like a Girl*:

So wherever they went, I went. When they went into the field, I went into the field. When they went to Iraq, I went to Iraq. The general public is like, ‘Oh, women aren’t in combat.’ Well, I was with the infantry, I was with the armor. You want to put me in these sites, you don’t want me to wear your man patch.

Writing in that same year, 2015, Tammy Duckworth, Black Hawk pilot, dismisses such concerns as artificial and reiterates the fact that women are serving in combat beside the “young healthy males” of popular imagination: “Throughout American history and in the last decade in particular, women have served in combat zones with distinction and honor. In fact, the Army has adopted the Combat Action Badge and given it to all troops who engage in combat, including women” (“Completing the Mission”). Duckworth, like Mary Jennings Hegar profiled earlier, places the struggle for recognition of women’s military careers in a broader sociological context of bias in military quarters that privileges the male, hetero, and white warrior template. She suggests, in this encomium to the demographic change the military is experiencing, that integration leads to a greater military force: “There has always been some level of opposition to increasing the diversity in our military whether it has been minorities or women,” she notes. “It is clear that the inclusion of groups like African Americans and Asians has made our military stronger (“Completing the Mission”).

Goldie Ann Johnson concurs – with a codicil: “I think it would take time (for a masculine culture) to adjust. I mean, I compare it to gays being in the military. It took years for them to come to the conclusion that a gay person can serve as just as well as a straight person” (Personal interview). While an ethnographic study of military culture is not within the purview of this paper, nonetheless its *nomos* forms the context, with positive and negative charge, for the discourses created by the Athena speakers as they first imagine their roles therein. The message of this “communion of unmerged souls” is unmistakable: they are not afraid to fight like a woman. And that truth, I suggest, does not require a transformation in them --- but in us.

Playing the Game: “I’m Kicking a Lot of These Guys’ Asses”

Prior to the lifting of that combat policy, the list of opportunities presented to women in the enlistment process could be truncated, despite the performance on both academic and field tests, as noted previously. Elizabeth Avila, Transportation Coordinator, admits: “My expectations were high but ended up being a bit different than what I was told” (Written interview) -- an experience shared by Goldie Ann Johnson, despite her having scored at stratospheric levels in her assessments:

When I first went in I didn’t understand that some jobs were off limits, some opportunities were not for females because when you go in you’re not looking at that. In MEPS (editor’s note: the Military Entrance Processing Station) they don’t sit down and say, ‘Oh no, you can’t be a paratrooper,’ when you go in and you’re selecting your job. They tell you, ‘Oh, you can apply for it. Oh, you can do that later. (Personal interview).

The restriction on jobs could also adversely affect women’s ability to achieve the career that the quality of their work might otherwise have assured. Not all women experienced this limitation,

as emphasized by Kylie Pugh, Military Police: “I would say I experienced almost the exact opposite (of the stories that say women are prevented from promotion) because it could be a small base, but people that got awards at that base were almost always women” (Personal interview). However, Lisa Bradley in another context remarks that women’s experiences are not universally shared: “I realize some women in the military didn’t have the same experience that I did and that they might have been in a place and time that didn’t treat them fairly” (Written interview). This aspect of the Athenas’ feminist sophistic emerges from the narrative data and defines this rhetorical field as a multivocal, multivalent one.

The differences in discourse and experience and interpretation become clear when comparing success stories with the 2017 study by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, “She Who Borne the Battle,” which notes that 345,000 women have been deployed since 9/11, and 40% believe that “women’s advancement in the military has been limited by restrictions on women in combat.” Nor is this uncertainty unfounded for many women in this context. Multiple sources (Nancy Bullock-Prevot; Elizabeth Desnoyers-Colas; Paige Whaley Eager; Mary Jennings Hegar; and Lila Holley) note that women could not always advance because combat duty, officially inscribed, is often a requirement for promotion (Zeigler and Gunderson 12). Despite the contention, “We did it anyway,” women discover a narrowed field of opportunity in what is a profession traditionally male (Ziegler and Gunderson 14)¹⁶; also, Eager; Grohowski; Hegar; “Maggie White”; Williams; Wise and Baron; Zeigler and Gunderson). Gabbard’s account of losing jobs she desired, for which she was not only qualified, but superior, because of her

¹⁶ Ziegler and Gunderson compare resistance to women in the military and in policing and corrections work. They note that resistance is couched in terms of “strength and agility – women just can’t handle the physical demands of the job. However,” they argue, “the persistence of male objections, despite clear evidence that female performance equals that of men, suggests that something more is at issue than mere physical differences.” They conclude that in a “quintessentially male profession, we can reasonably expect that the men who enter into and derive their identity from such a professional (sic) will be resistant to the presence of women” (15).

gender provides grounding for this denial of ambition or capacity that empowers the standpoint of strategic patience depicted in this study:

One of my drill sergeants after I graduated from basic training said, ‘You would make an outstanding infantry soldier.’ It was not an option for me at that time, nor is it an option today (editor’s note: in 2014). There were missions that I volunteered for while deployed that I was turned down for because they didn’t want any women. At times it was because of cultural concerns, especially in the Middle East, but in my personal experience, there were reasons that had nothing to do with respect for a culture and everything to do with the fact they did not want women to serve on these missions. (Caplan-Bricker)

As Heilbrun observes, “Safety and closure ... have always been held out to women as the ideals of female destiny, but these are not places of adventure or experience, or life” (20). But despite the enclosures around their job prospects, these women enter military service with few doubts that they could, would, and should pursue and achieve their goals.

Each woman considers the military a viable alternative to Applebee’s, or Walmart, or other “dead-end” jobs (in Lindsay Allen’s characterization), and share a belief in a future there on equal terms with their non-female comrades in arms. Nor do they respond peaceably when their aspirations collide with policy restrictions. Take, for example, Senator Martha McSally’s reaction to learning that her aspiration to be a fighter pilot is prohibited at the time of her enlistment in the 1980’s:

So I find out when I get to the (Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs) that it’s against the law for women to be fighter pilots, and I’m like, ‘What? I’m going through the same training as you. I’m kicking a lot of these guys’ asses, and somehow, just because I have ovaries, I can’t be a fighter pilot? That doesn’t even make sense to me.’ (Dickinson)

Most women in the Athena study enlist under the same restrictions that McSally resists.

Nonetheless, it is not uncommon to hear women refer to the military as an equal opportunity employer, unlike professions in the civilian world: “The military has more resources on how to deal with discrimination than that of the public sector. ... I was treated as a service member, never as a woman,” writes Lisa Bradley” (Written interview). Lindsay Allen, Avionics, concurs: “Our generation is different than it was years ago,” writes Lindsay Allen. “Females are accepted in the service and are treated as equals.” Further, we find in their stories a faith that the military, unlike any other professional world, would accept them as they are and find appropriate placement for them. For example, Elizabeth Avila, born in Puerto Rico, scores too low on the English test for the Navy – but nonetheless persists in her attempts to enlist, is sent by the Army to study English for two months at the Defense Language Institute before her basic training, and finds employment as a Transportation Coordinator. Elizabeth notes that language, rather than gender, is her “challenge”: “There were times where I was punished for not understanding an order or because I misunderstood something” (Written interview). Goldie Ann Johnson, who is surprised that her list of jobs is cut once her contract is signed, was told that despite her lack of a high school diploma, “We have a plan for you.” Johnson explains that she then worries about making the grade in the Army – not because of intimidation or feelings of incompetence or weakness, but an abundance of spirit and strength:

As far as being successful? I went in knowing that that was pretty much the only option

for me. Now I also went in with little parrots in my ear telling me I wouldn’t make it.

Basically anybody in my family or anybody who knew me knew I was stubborn,

headstrong – my intelligence. It’s a trait that has helped me because it gives me the

strength to do what I think needs to be done. It’s not something that – you know, yes, it’s

a curse, but at the same time if I wasn't stubborn, if I wasn't headstrong, I would have quit. You know. (Personal interview)

The job itself, finding and nailing it, is the point, the motive, the agency, purpose, and destination, particularly if, as in the case of Johnson, the military "was pretty much the only option."

"A Seat at the Table"

A bold impetus and fearless imagination empower these women, like Kristin Hall, to approach that recruitment office in the first place: "I was really strong ... From the minute I walked into the Air Force recruiter it just felt perfect. He signed me up, I think it was that day. ... To go to school was part of it. ... I feel like I was a lot wiser than people my age" (Personal interview). I think it can be argued that they physically move from a theory of standpoint in which they are intrinsically the object of male dominance against which they must forever strive, about which they bear witness exquisitely as their posture in this theoretical model, to a Hekman setting that makes agency and productive action possible. They achieve this goal by (1) shifting their own scene, and deciding to look for their job or career in the military; (2) keeping an open mind about the jobs they could and would accept; and (3) signing on to the one game in town in which they are confident they have a chance to be a player and fight to win a seat at the table. They pursue this process despite the fact that no template exists for the kind of female identity they need to enact in this robustly and unapologetically male culture. D. Alexis Hart, Naval officer, speaks up and out about her own capability as a young graduate, the first woman in the Navy assigned to an amphibious assault ship, and the successful identity she imagines for herself:

When I got to my ship, I went to meet the commanding officer, and he said, ‘We are going to make sure you’re a success.’ I said, ‘No, sir, you’re not.’ He said, ‘Excuse me?’ I said, ‘With all due respect, I’m going to make sure I’m a success.’ I said, ‘If you make it appear that I’m doing a good job if I’m not, or if there’s any perception that I’m getting credit beyond what I deserve, this is going to go really badly for me and for any females who follow me. I want you to assess and I plan to do a good job but assess my work on my merit.’ (Personal interview)

Clearly, by virtue of the act itself, these women forge their own decisive path. They do not conform to conventional choices of college or Walmart’s and marriage.

A wedding, it cannot be emphasized enough, is never mentioned as a career choice in these wide-ranging interviews -- a lack of interest in matrimony that blatantly contradicts the accepted wisdom about women’s enlisting to find a man: Solar informs us that “it was often believed that with the exception of nurses, women who entered the services were trying to get away from a man, looking to marry one, hoping to become one, or looking for love among each other” (qtd. in Eager 36).¹⁷

That seat at the table remains a matter of choice for them. They evince no connection or reference to the military male template, a further example of how they play the game in this

¹⁷ Patten and Parker report that 46% of women servicemembers are married (as differentiated from 58% of males in the same profession) (6). It is interesting to consider the role of marriage in classical warfare as Vernant explains in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*: “(A) girl who refuses marriage, thereby also renouncing her ‘femininity,’ finds herself to some extent forced toward warfare, and paradoxically becomes the equivalent of a warrior. This is the situation in myth of females like the Amazons and, in a religious context, of goddesses *such as Athena* (emphasis mine). Their status as warrior is linked to their condition as a *parthenos* who has sworn everlasting virginity. It could even be said that this deviation both from the normal state of women, who are destined for marriage, not warfare, and from the normal state of warriors, who are men, not women, gives a special intensity to warrior values when these are embodied in a girl. They cease, in a way to be merely relative or confined to a single sex, and become ‘total’” (34).

world, constructed in its timbers and myths as the ultimate test of masculinity. But not for these women, as Amber Nadeau makes eminently clear:

The commander in the recruiting office was a female and she was a parachute rigger



when she first enlisted, so she pulled me in and told me, ‘Listen, you can go work in an office anywhere, but how many times, or how many people, can say they’ve jumped out of an airplane? (see fig. 26) How many people can say that they’re an awesome airborne soldier?’ and really it kind ofand I thought to myself, one day, I’d like to have a family of my own, and be a mom, and just to be able to tell my child that your mom used to jump out of airplanes, I mean that’s really cool.¹⁸ (Personal interview)

Figure 26 Amber Nadeau after parachute jump. Courtesy of Amber Nadeau (Frame from video in "Appendix 3, Supplemental Files")

The point, clearly delineated by LaRayne Hurd, is moving up and out, beyond the precarious status of their earlier selves, in defiance of *dicta* that would relegate them to auxiliary or secondary status and impede their ability to achieve their goals. LaRayne’s statement, proffered earlier in Methodology as an example of identification as a factor in recruitment, is relevant to this moment in the data analysis: “I seriously had no doubts about being able to reach my goals. I wanted to be a leader....My recruiter was the first great example of who I could be in the military. She looked like me, spoke like me, and had reached a point I so desperately wanted for

¹⁸ Amber is currently a new mother, with part-time military engagement at the rank of Sergeant.

me” (Personal interview). I see the hand of *metis*, too, in LaRayne’s willingness, which is shared by her colleagues in service, to watch, learn, wait. *Metis* encompasses, I think, the way these women do not always know how to achieve their ends, and look in their employment for their creative chance: “I can do this, I can do that, I’ll do it. I don’t care,” Dulcie Burrow tells us (Personal interview). Brandy Lockhart, who closed her 16 years of service in Special Ops in the Air Force in Iraq (“I dealt with all the bombs”) admits, “I had a guaranteed job and that was Munitions Systems and I didn’t know what that meant” (Personal interview). This sense of “wait and see” is evinced in the plans of Nancy Bullock-Prevot, Cryptologist in the Navy: “When I first joined the military, I did not have any expectations. It took a couple of years for it to truly sink in, that being in the military could be a career and that there women doing great things for the military” (Personal interview). Of course, Judy Young was ready to do “anything but what I do now” – which leads to the parachute jump that has landed on the first page of this category, “Playing the Game,” and leads to this series of accounts that show these women to be restive, always ambitious, driven, always real.

“What I Would or Could Be As a Woman in the Military”

I would argue as well: always female. D. Alexis Hart, who starts her career in the Navy as the only woman aboard a combatant vessel, tells us, “I was acutely aware of being a woman” (Personal interview) --- not only in that precise setting, but throughout her training and her career. They do not question, nor are they conflicted about, their identity as women, but they refuse to be assigned a military identity based on gender assumptions and consigned to lower status, lesser claim to service and duty, fewer opportunities than males. Nor is an obsequious or subservient identity the one they imagined for themselves as women servicemembers. In the

earliest texts in feminist standpoint theory Hartsock talks about the power of males to structure activities and relations in their own image, so that women enact an abstract masculinity when they engage in these situations (*Feminist Standpoint* 123).¹⁹ We see the danger of this power in the male appeals in the Marine Recruitment Station website. This imposition of gender judgement on women's actions while in service recurs throughout the themes and topics presented in this paper -- women who enlist in the military become men -- despite stark and unassailable evidence of their own testimonies.

The mission here is to avoid perceiving women servicemembers through a masculine lens as "other" (Germano; J. Scott) or, in the cogent remark of Desnoyers-Colas, as "honorary men" (Personal interview). There is the oft-repeated suspicion that women accepting jobs such as "Equipmentman" (as Judy Young, the scholar-teacher of language, emphasizes) or work that even they might view through gendered eyes (from Dulcie Burrow: "I took auto-shop in high school, I was the oddball, I liked doing all the manly stuff" [Personal interview]), are in fact denying or compromising their gender. Judy tells us, "No, I did not care for the '-man' suffix, and I always introduced myself as an Aircrew Survival Equipment *technician*: my little gesture of resistance" ("Note Jobs Uniforms"). Instead, their stories serve as a means of pushing back -- hard -- against the charge that women because of their DNA are incapable of working as a mechanic -- or Combat Photographer, like LaRayne Hurd; Black Hawk pilot, like Tammy Duckworth; Avionics, like Lindsay Allen; Special Ops, for Brandy Lockhart; Battalion Commander for Germano -- and ultimately combat on the battlefield itself. To these women their gender is a trait that has no bearing on the jobs they hope to do, commit to do, and in the case of Jennings Hegar, sue the military establishment for the right to do.

¹⁹ See also Luce Irigaray and Margaret Whitford's *Luce Irigaray Reader*.

Subtending these themes of emancipation and, in some cases, defiance, is always a sense of discovering a capacity and proving something to oneself – looking to see what qualities might be there, and how the personal quest might be fulfilled in the job one performs. “Maggie White’s” description of her motivation in this respect is notable for its refusal to be defined in gendered terms, even as she never questions the fact of her female identity: “My expectations of who I would or could be as a woman in the military were the same as what a young man’s expectations could also be” (Personal interview). Like “Maggie,” the women refuse to affirm the old male entitlement saw in favor of unwavering belief in their own capacity to “play the game” – how an act of imagination allowed them to design a female servicemember out of an entirely male template, like the warrior Athena – that is the subversive ingenuity of their enlistment.

Imagining the Female Military Identity

Pt. 3: Revamping the Uniform

For when bodies gather ... to enact their plural existence in public space, they are also making broader demands: they are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are exercising a right to appear, to express freedom, and they are demanding a livable life. – Judith Butler *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*

Proving Ground: Amber Nadeau

There are so many military regulations, and one of them has to do with your nails. Females have a little bit different regulation than males because females are allowed to get their nails done -- acrylic nails, but they have to be clear and they can't be longer than one-quarter of an inch past your finger. I got mine done right at the end of AIT (editor's note: Advanced Individual Training) graduation, and I was so excited I wanted to look cute on my graduation date. Well, I didn't know I was going to get selected to go to the board, and those are the top NCOs, the leaders of my command are there, and they have to judge me and they have to judge my uniform, my hair, everything. So, I get up there and do my speeches and all this stuff, and one of them goes, 'Let me see your nails.'

So, he made me walk up to this desk, and put my nails down, and they measured my nails with a ruler! With a ruler! They asked me the regulation and I knew it. And I hadn't even gotten a rank yet. I was still a nobody. They asked me and I challenged the senior of that command, and he didn't know it. He did not know it. They had to look it up and they found out I was right, and I won that board.

I felt so good. And he held a grudge against me for a very long time.

– Amber Nadeau, Personal interview



Figure 27 Amber Nadeau on active duty. Photo courtesy of Amber Nadeau

Introduction: “I Love the Army. I Love My Uniform. But...”

Drawing on interviews and published accounts with women service members, I will explore in “Revamping the Uniform” the tension between military garb and the female body. In similar ways the female body in uniforms patterned for males achieves this bold combative result, changing the landscape of this male setting by virtue of their visibility as women. Positioning this analysis in the storied context of women’s fashion, I will examine women’s keen awareness of the rhetoricity of their clothes and, in acts of imagination, revamp the male uniform to fit and reflect their female physique. “I Was a Nobody. I Challenged the Senior of that Command” discusses the innumerable ways they design a new appearance and stand up for their decisions. Further, I will argue in “Hypervisible Text: ‘Sir, With All Due Respect’” that women in uniform present such a composition (from Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson, “Reconfiguring Rhetorical Fitness”) on which we can read their disruption of that originary masculine figure with the purposeful stride that signals dominance. Finally, in “The Comfortable Obscurity of Sameness, The Clarity of Visible Rank, The Ease,” I will propose that among the “strategic possibilities” of this attire is the metistic intelligence that empowers women to change their appearance and become, while wearing camouflage, themselves authentically. Athena is the embodiment of that talent for transformation, and her American counterparts, I argue, are equally adept in pairing a flak vest and Revlon nail lacquer and thus redressing the issues of fitting into the military world by an act of subverting it, thereby imagining a new genre of gender in military contexts.

Women’s approach to their uniform is in fact an attempt to focalize two competing theories of dress: the military requirement of standardized attire, and women’s understanding and use of fashion to express their distinctive personalities and identities. “Being in uniform” is #10

on Jessica Scott's list of the "Top 10 Things I Won't Miss About Iraq": "I love the Army," she writes in her blog, *To Iraq and Back*. "I love my uniform and completely respect what it stands for. But damn! I'm ready for girly clothes and makeup and feeling like a woman again" (65). Her insight is particularly apt in the context of women who claim without question equality with males in the U.S. Military, but are acutely aware of their love of "going ultimate girl" at home and "going to glam it up" before their return to active duty and "no makeup and under-eye circles galore" (66).

"I Was a Nobody. I Challenged the Senior of that Command."

An act of imagination allows women to perceive – and see right through -- the architecture of a military system built to represent a specific genotype of American male, and see professional opportunity for themselves. This type of male embodies a classic military trope: he is a tough guy, fearless soldier, and fierce warrior defined as such by his membership in that community. In our public imagination and *mythos*, embodied in our discourses, the warrior trope is quintessentially male. A Google search for this term, "warrior trope," retrieves, for example, Michael Matthews' article, "What Is Military Psychology?" in *Psychology Today*, which sketches part of this male warrior trope physically: "A purposeful and swift stride, eye contact with strangers and a head held high with a slight controlled swivel is a dead giveaway that a confident soldier, sailor, airmen or Marine is in the area" (Matthews). In classic standpoint theory, the women's perspective of this male world of "controlled swivel" would be an alert and privileged one. Germano tells us that "research shows that, in most instances, men's confidence exceeds their actual abilities, but they don't feel any reticence in faking it until they make it. Why? Because they can't hear you over the sound of how awesome they are" (45). Marked

female and obviously “other” on the historically “male turf” of the dominant warrior, women experience power in ways that the purposeful striders never even suspect: “When women talk about what they do and how they do it, they are perceived differently from men who do the same thing,” she asserts (*Fight* 45).

What is more relevant here, however, is Hekman’s revision of standpoint, which argues for women’s power to act politically from that engaged position. Hekman defines that position as a contingent and dynamic one, susceptible to change through circumstance and time. But Hekman adds to this process an aptitude to work productively with those whose dominant position a standpoint, in classic terms, critiques. The kind of persuasion that results from this tension has enabled feminists, she argues, to “change the parameters of patriarchal economic and political institutions,” and succeed, for example, in having sexual assault and harassment declared as crimes (238). Standpoint, in her view, is a state of flux, of creative chance: it is not fixed, however revelatory about the mechanisms of power. Hekman’s theory works in tandem with Foucault’s critique of that selfsame power. No group, Foucault avers, is sovereign; no power is centralized. Rather, power is diffuse and its pulses are found “everywhere and come from everywhere” (*History* 93). Thus, acts of guile and subversion offer “fields of strategic possibilities” (in Foucaultian terms) to transform an existing order, in this case and this chapter of this study, “Revamping the Uniform,” which offers acknowledgement of women’s capacity and experience in enacting that warrior trope.

One such “field” is women’s attempt to fit their fashion sense as American women within a military vocabulary, a discussion in which the professional manicure should not be underestimated. Amber Nadeau and the story of her acrylic nails delineates this point.

Analysis of women's fashion, in academic discourses, can be reductive of Amber Nadeau's experience and her account of it. Epistemologies of military studies tend to privilege men's knowledge and values, as a glance at any media or publication list will prove. In this context a focus on fashion might seem both trivial and irrelevant. Indeed, the relationship of women and fashion is fraught to begin with, as attention to dress is often seen as a means of keeping women in their place. Dyed-in-the-wool feminists since Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 have refused to honor the matter of fashion; to them it shapes, and is shaped by, women's oppression and obedience.²⁰

However, two responses to this disdain arise for any self-respecting feminist sophistic analysis: one from the celluloid world of film; the second from the field of rhetorical inquiry. First, the insightful art director Nigel in the film *The Devil Wears Prada* compares fashion designers to other creative artists: "What they did, what they created, was greater than art," he notes, "*because you live your life in it*" (emphasis mine). When we revamp this insight with a basic tenet of rhetorical analysis, i.e., "clothes convey meanings in society beyond the superficial" (Owyong 1) we see the power, for women and men alike, of the military uniform. Jennifer Craik, scholar of uniforms in multifarious settings, has concluded that "uniforms are intriguing" because "uniforms are all about control, not only of the social self but also of the inner self" (128). Amber Nadeau's account reveals the flux in that control as she, "a nobody," asserts her own agency in waging that battle: "I challenged the senior of that command." Nor can we discount the possibility that this "senior" who publicly marked Amber for rebuke at a moment of her great success had an issue with her wearing that uniform in the first place. If his

²⁰"8 Current Fashion Trends That Belong to Feminists" by Kat George. Refinery 22 March 2018, www.refinery29.com/en-us/feminist-fashion-trends.

attack as she stood on that stage were not serious, he would have no reason for that “grudge.” Recall the historical fact that Jeanne d’Arc, one of these women’s professional ancestors who worked in full armor, was burned at the stake for the mortal sin of “wearing men’s clothing (and) upsetting the natural law” (Kalinowsky). Acrylic nails with a dress uniform in the U.S. Army may serve the same disruptive purpose, to more productive effect.

Revamping

In fact, Amber Nadeau’s story encapsulates the complex challenges that women servicemembers confront, sometimes without warning, as they embody and enact a successful assault on a culture that has, at least rhetorically, excluded them from its ranks since its inception. Amber and her sisters-in-arms know the constraints on acrylic nails and all other features, for both women and men, of the uniform in which they live their lives. Story after story affirms this statement from Lisa Bradley: “We were taught how to properly wear the uniforms and how to conduct ourselves during basic training. It was very strict as the public’s perception can be easily altered by just one inappropriate or unprofessional incident ... Only in dress was there a slight difference due to gender” (Written interview). In true *metis* fashion, the Athena women show that they are prepared strategically to defend their attire and refuse to view their engagement in fashion as reductive of their commitment or competence. Among this myriad crew is Kylie Pugh, who resists the Navy because of its policy of cutting women’s hair; Brandy Lockhart, who faces down a challenge like Amber’s over an inverted belt and also wins her point, only to suffer equal retaliation; an entire team of Athena women who describe, down to the “completely trashed” suede boots (Lockhart Personal interview), the “digi-blues” (Burrow Personal interview), the “sailors’ dungarees” (Young “Note Jobs Uniforms”) in which they have

walked each day of their military tenure. In so doing, women revise a male uniform code according to their own design and values, the *nomos* of being a woman in America where clothes convey political and social meaning. The reactions they consequently face (“he held a grudge against me for a very long time”), and often face down, reveal the depth of their comrades in arms’ resistance to it. Nor is this censure entirely male – a testament to the tensile strength of what we are calling, in this section, “revamping the uniform.”

The word “revamping” is fitting here, traceable to a 13th-century term, *avant-pied*, for repairing the top part of a stocking or shoe. It evolved by the 18th century, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, from the “vamp” of the shoe to its current figurative meaning of restoration generally. The term in both discourses aligns with the theme of this section and indeed, the argument of the Athena study itself: a uniform unsuitable for all who join this community is now repaired by the women compelled to wear it, designed for others, as a sign of membership. The serious import of shoes, given the work these women do and the mission they bear, is clear in their stories and pictures where footwear is often a focal point. Kayla Williams is only one example of this reliance on a secure, and comfortable, vamp:

Oh, and those boots, they took SO LONG to break in, my heels were raw and abraded for literally months; I put moleskin on my feet, on the boots, it was agony to walk. Once they finally fit, though, no shoes had ever been so well suited to my feet. (Email interview)

It can be said, I think, that the process of making the standard uniform “well suited” to the women compelled to wear it is a revamping of both the material garment and the culture it represents and signals. As Lisa Bradley has noted above, the women were taught “how to properly wear the uniform” because of its impact on “public perception.” The servicemembers engaged in the Athena study reveal the extent to which they newly imagined and revamped their

military attire to embody and reflect the women's story, too. Nor was this particular restoration without impact, not only on the women who walked in those clothes, those shoes, more easily as a result.

As earlier chapters in this study make clear, women experience military life differently from men, and the alterity of their standpoint applies to their relationship with dress. Indeed, the interviews make clear that women exercise supreme agency designing their identity through the medium of clothes, whether it be a function of the homogametic xx-chromosome or glossy ads in fashion magazines, or, as feminist and philosopher Irigaray suggests, the desire to distinguish themselves from other women (Marcus 218). Nor is the discourse of women's dress confined to a simple line-up of garments hanging on closet racks and folded in bureau drawers. Its purview extends to styles of hair, jewelry, make-up, nails, piercings, and "ink" as intrinsic to women's fashion ethic, and analysis of their revamping of military attire must take these elements into account.

"My Uniform"

Perhaps no experience in the process of enlistment is as effective in making these women physically conscious of the servicemembers they are now as putting on that uniform, which they enact as they describe it in detail: "My uniform was a lighter camouflage color, and the Air Force switched over to green boots," explains Kristen Hall, "and I had 'US Air Force' over here (she indicates her left chest, above her heart) and my name over here (indicating her right chest)" (Personal interview). And perhaps nothing conveys the message of conformity as clearly. Kayla Williams refers to this phenomenon as "the stifling" ("Re: Happy News – Athena Project"). Yet if any characteristic of the Athena women conflicts with the theme under investigation here -- the

“lack of uniformity in military uniform” (Eager 44) – it is an independence of spirit that impels them to pursue their quest and go military in the first place. This decision shows these women – the 1.25% of American women who have chosen a military career²¹ – as the bold nonconformists that many analysts of this group, women among them, refuse to acknowledge that they are. Brodkey argues that social institutions (the military, in this case) are sites of cultural hegemony that “oppress certain designated classes, namely ... women” (106).

But maybe the body does matter. And maybe that hegemony is not so absolute. It could be that accepting as probable these notions of female erasure and male hegemony shuts out the potential for change. For these women at this time, breaking a fiercely defended gender barrier and doing so with starch – the hardwired conviction of their co-ownership of this terrain and right to enter it, in battle dress, unchallenged and not accosted -- becomes material and real as they decide to deconstruct and fit the standard-issue uniform on their bodies. Unlike their mythical analog, identified in the Introduction to this study as “the maiden clad in goat skin who specialized in war” (Graves 99), these women were not born already fitted and fully equipped with helmet, shield, *aegis*, spear, and emblem defining her alliances to the crow, owl, serpent, sphinx, and the dire Medusa (Deacy *Athena* 13). Rather, these Athenas needed to find a way to pin, tailor, seam, and tuck the uniform in which they would lead their military lives for the duration of their service – in this study, as noted, from two to 22 years. They needed to confront the way the meaning of their bodies in that uniform was produced, and negotiate the distance between how they viewed themselves, and how the culture saw them (Wilson and Lewiecki 51). Their stories show how staunchly they were equal to this task

²¹ In the context of all Americans, .05%, according to Reynolds and Shendruk, “Demographics of the U.S. Military.”

The Male “Size M”

Athena’s birth encased in the classical equivalent of an armored tank has been described as the image of “powerful femininity and patriarchal sell-out” by those who interpret her warrior identity as “the triumph of patriarchy and suppression of *metis*” (Deacy *Athena* 13), akin to the inevitable result of the cultural hegemony in Brodkey and Goodman. I raise these arguments here to rebut them, not only in defense of the powerful Metis, by whose intent and in whose physical and rhetorical image Athena was formed, but also as argument for the gender identity both she and her present-day sisters enact and attempt to express in the male “Size M.” The garment of that size easily could, like Zeus with Metis, encase and devour them. Kristen Hall, who describes her Air Force uniform earlier, is eager to “bring up” this topic: “They don’t have women’s sizes. Period” (Personal interview). From the skunk highlights they hide in an artful knot of their hair to the nails they paint to relieve the stress of combat, these women resist being “packaged into a male template,” as Beard phrases the crisis and danger women face in joining a culture identified as quintessentially male, whether that characterization is true or mythologized (82).

The critical purpose of the standard-issue uniform, “the equalizing feeling of the military uniform,” (Kalinowsky), is, ostensibly, a material sign of equality and membership in a society marked for a single mission: “to defend the U.S. and its interests” (Military.com). Nothing in that statement signals a gender preference in that society: how it works; what it looks like. However, the descriptor Brandy Lockhart offers for the t-shirts she purchased the night before training camp is telling: “Thank goodness my recruiter did give me a really helpful tip,” Lockhart reports. “He said just look plain, whatever you do, don’t bring any attention on yourself.” So far, so good. Then Lockhart goes on: “So I had a plain navy blue bag, I remember going to Target the

night before and I bought some plain boy t-shirts, and I had a pair of jeans, a regular pair of shoes, nothing to stand out. And I was so thankful to him” (Personal interview). The phrase, “plain boy t-shirts” is rhetorically very significant – a show-stopper, in verbal terms – and indicates the acceptance, salience, and ubiquity of male-preferred design. This timely advice stands Lockhart in good stead as she arrives at basic training and sees a female co-recruit in the middle of a group of Training Instructors (TI’s), in Lockhart’s words, “yelling at her”:

I’m not even exaggerating at all, she had high heels on, a mini skirt, big fake long eyelash extensions. She looked like she was going to a club. And on top of that, she had a bright blue Air Force backpack which was like, if you were a good recruiter at that time, they warned their people going in, ‘Don’t wear the Air Force backpack, be inconspicuous.’ So she’s got all this, she’s like the extreme opposite of how to show up to basic training.

(Personal interview)

This besieged young woman, clearly attempting to fit in with her new Air Force backpack, offers a clear and poignant example of the rhetorical power of women’s fashion. The converse of her ostentatious manner of dress in this setting is the military uniform, which Mariette Kalinowsky, a heavy-machine gunner in combat, argues has no fashion statement to impart. On the contrary: the uniform is a “lexicon” in which the story of its culture, and the body within it, can be and is inscribed and read (Craik *passim*). Meanings gleaned from military garb are described on the “U.S. Army” website:

The Army is a profession. By wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army, Soldiers embody their professionalism and commitment to the Army Values – loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. The uniform is a symbol of honor

and tradition, of *esprit de corps* and morale, and of personal excellence and pride.

(“Army Uniform”)

These valiant words notwithstanding, the actual effect of the military uniform is camouflage, which Brandy’s co-recruit learns in her experience of public shaming for showing who she is as she arrives at the first portal she must pass to succeed in her new profession.

In line with the lesson Brandy learns appreciatively from her recruiter, the participants in Holmstedt’s study, *Band of Sisters*, emphasize how hard they work, “not wanting to be average” (x), although the gender of that speaker changes “the fundamental notion of what a soldier is” (xxi), as do Brandy, her co-recruit, and the female 16% (Reynolds and Shendruk) of the U.S. military as a whole. In that respect, it is not the “red or gold braid” Dulcinea Burrow tells us distinguishes good conduct from bad (Personal interview), nor is it Amber Nadeau’s maroon beret (Personal interview) or Judy Young’s favorite navy dress uniform (Written interview) that made them stand out from the manly crowd. Tammy Duckworth, Senator of Illinois and Black Hawk helicopter pilot, may opine that she is “not a big fan of being identified as a woman anything” and that she “worked hard not to be different from the other Soldiers” (“Foreword” *Band*). It may seem that the actual experience of inhabiting the uniform affirms the description of Athena’s concealed sexuality in Deacy: “Everything about that little girl was sharp: her eyes, the point of her helmet. Every female concavity was hidden away, like the reversal side of her shield” (151). However, such assertions as these can be (and will be, as the argument of this study demonstrates) viewed as gender affirmation, and it is by virtue of gender that women are, at this moment and fundamentally, distinctive in the traditional American military context, visible in that terrain.

But powerful in its tradition and ubiquity the male *aegis* and uniform remain, and the women in the Athena study are sensitive to attempts to enforce them as regulation, and clear about the effects on their identity as women:

When I went to boot camp, I made sure my hair was short before I got there. During our P-1 (editor's note: Processing) days, that's when it all started. They taught us how our clothes, hair, and nail polish should be. ... The uniforms were ill fitting, one size fits all, and I lost my sense of being a female. (Bullock-Prevot, Written interview)

The literature on women in military uniforms supports the reaction of Bullock-Prevot, e.g., Kalinowsky in her article, "'Slut, Bitch, Dyke': Joan of Arc and the Modern Military Woman": "The camouflage utility uniforms are the most recognizable icons of the modern military, and for the most part are cut with men's anatomy in mind. These work uniforms unsex women by squaring their body shapes, acquiring an androgynous effect" (2). Craik, the prolific scholar of uniforms, affirms the masculine design of service attire ("buttoned jackets, heavy skirts ... tailored shirts and slacks ... necktie, leather belt, neat hair [tied up if long], heavy lace-up shoes,...cap" [140]) and notes that this "style code" was the medium for conveying "the link between masculine ideals and military power" (134).

The rhetoric of these garments in terms of power clearly affects Nancy Bullock-Prevot as she inhabits them. Without indicating contradiction – indeed, in her view, there may not be one - she states: "When I wore my uniform, I felt a sense of pride and professionalism" (Written interview). Craik's analysis offers insight to Nancy's complicated response to military fashion that affords her stature by erasing her gender and therefore, in her view, her identity: "There is a disjunction," notes Craik, "between the ostensible meanings of uniforms – as embodying sameness, unity, regulation, hierarchy, status, roles – and the experience of uniforms" (128).

That experience can effectively “unsex” and “defeminize” (Kalinowsky) the woman enlistee, as vividly articulated by Nancy here. And there is, to Nancy, a more toxic effect of her gender-related discomfort: “It was like they took away the fact you were a female, but would at times remind you that you were a woman and you would never be equal with a man” (Written interview). In her response to the natural discomfort of her female physique in the male patterning of the uniform, we see as well the sort of conflict discerned by Heilbrun “between the destiny of being unambiguously a woman and the woman’s palpable desire, or fate, to be something else” (21) – i.e., in this setting, Cryptologist in the U.S. Navy, where Nancy hopes to shape a career.

Hypervisible Text -- “Sir, With All Due Respect”

However – and it is a major “however” – uniforms designed for their utility and clearly patterned for the male body could and do, often, serve to heighten awareness of a woman’s physical features even as they seem to deny and efface them. This distinguishing mark of gender – “F” for “Female” akin to the archetypal “A” in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* – leads to a second important feature of the military uniform: the female body in military dress disrupts an *ethos* of “order, control, confidence, and conformity” (Craik 128) and becomes a *hypervisible text* (Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson 31). This term, adapted here from its canonical use in studies of disability rhetorics and “freak” culture, signifies a body perceived as different, typically, in these discourses, as deviant. In the context of this Athena study, that “other,” or hypervisible text would be Brandy Lockhart, for example, “singled out” in Air Force munitions:

One interesting fact for women is because the way our pants buttoned up we were allowed to wear women's pants or men's pants but our belt could be – in the regulations your belt had to be a certain way but women's could face either or way.

So I was like, 'Alright if this guy's going to single me out and pick on me for everything, I'm going to start getting him at his own game.' So what I would do is purposely do stuff that I knew I could do but I doubted he knew, so he would call me out in front of everybody, try to humiliate me. We had these shop meetings with 30 people in there and, one day, I remember him looking at me and he was like, 'Uh' – you could have (your outer shirt) off and have your t-shirt and belt and your pants, and I purposely had (the outer shirt off and the belt turned around) and I purposely was standing up because I knew he was going to try to look at something and get me. So he called me out and I said to him, 'Sir, with all due respect, the AFI states that I am allowed to have it like this.' So he went and looked it up, he got real huffy, and I said, 'But I will turn it around for you, if that would make you more comfortable, however.' And the higher ups were in there, too, so they knew -- they didn't know what I was doing, but they knew I was correct. So he started basically trying to get into me about that, started going off on me, and they shut him down.

So then of course that put a bigger target on my back. (Personal interview)

It is important to note that the term "uniform" in this and other military contexts can apply to the total physical self, not merely material garments, as Desnoyers-Colas affirms in her account of African American women's attempts to adapt their hair to standard military fashion:

I think black women, to me, we had to -- there were things that we couldn't get away with that our white counterparts were able to get away with. For example, the texture of

my hair. You know, some of my African American colleagues wore wigs, so they would have *the right context and texture of their hair*. I chose to be natural until there was a brief period of time where I wore a perm, but I never had my hair long or anything like that. (emphasis mine, Personal interview)

The words “right context and texture of their hair” are stunning, given their unspoken obverse, i.e., that a woman’s hair can be wrong in its very molecules. The story of these women’s experience shows the insidious effect that standardization can have on women’s sense of identity on the deepest levels. Moreover, the insight that Elizabeth brings to this potentially demoralizing issue accords with the contention in this study that women’s fashion “look” – from the roots of her hair, apparently, to the soles of her suede boots – creates a story not only personal, but cultural. The body in uniform becomes a “rhetorical production,” as Hawhee explains in her analysis of military performance (*Bodily Arts* 10-11 *passim*). In the context of this Athena study, that production informs the “feminist sophistic” that stories about the ethic of women’s hair create to reveal the ways that women discover and overcome the constraints on their identity as women service members. In this case, the question of right or wrong is applied to color and texture of hair.

The feminist scholar Irigaray poses a set of questions that simultaneously composes and expresses a sophistic analysis of the problems of women in standard-issue wear: who is speaking in this hypervisible text, “to whom, about what, with what means” (qtd. in Marcus 285). These questions are reminiscent of Foucault’s analysis of discourse (described in “Chapter Two Epistemology”). Here they suggest a dialogue between the woman’s body, with its “contours and specificities” (Irigaray qtd. in Marcus 218) and the military tradition of fashioning garments for a non-female physique. Both sides of this discourse, best described as contentious, reveal both

expectations and needs not easily resolved, as Elizabeth discovers when her body is deemed all wrong for a uniform fit:

I was very, very conscious of the way I look as well as my build. Black women, we tended to be, our weight was always something that was under contention. I grew up and was called big boned, so to speak. So, I was always very athletic, but I was always close to my weight restriction simply because, I think, the weight restrictions were discriminatory against minorities, particularly minority women.

A lot of female friends that were put on the ‘fat girl’ program because of their weight, and they weren’t heavy, they just weren’t overly thin like our white female counterparts. (Personal interview)

Although Elizabeth does not go into detail, it is clear that she experiences pressure based on her personal appearance. She speaks of the ways that a woman in her position would “watch herself in action” (Personal interview). Indeed, this Savannah professor of language and advocate for African American women defines the ways a body within the uniform is read: “You always had to (know) that you were going to be someone that was going to be visible,” she notes (Personal interview). Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson articulate the rhetorical problem of bodies identified as “other” that scholars should not, in their view, overlook:

While feminist researchers have the tools to reanimate the rhetorical tradition and re-invest the body with rhetorical meaning, they should recognize that disability reaches into all bodies, not only those that appear ‘abnormal.’ It isn’t enough to simply reclaim the body – we must examine the ways that this body shapes possibilities for expression by disciplining bodily differences or enforcing bodily norms. (28)

Enter LaRayne Hurd, for whose athletic build the square rigging of male uniforms had not been designed, and who is more specific in her account of the painful scrutiny she endures at training camp. Kalinowsky posits that clothing intended to neuter the female form works as an anodyne against sexual tension (2). However, in LaRayne's case, the uniform serves to limn her body in ways her drill sergeant, a woman, as it happens, finds conspicuously and offensively sexual, and LaRayne is daily subjected to the kind of mortification that Brandy Lockhart's co-recruit experiences, despite, or perhaps because of, her inhabiting the standard uniform that clearly illuminates her gender:

My Drill Sergeant was a real, world class bull dog. She rode all the females in the platoon twice as hard as the males and meaner than any of her male counterparts. She used to constantly punish us for our posture during pushups, the way we stood when talking to males, the way we walked, spoke or broke down after an extremely draining or challenging day.

I used to constantly draw her ire, I have always been curvy and not even the oversized physical training uniforms could hide my hips. She would accuse me of altering my shorts, and trying to sleep with the male drill sergeants just because I had a figure.

That was my first introduction into that stereotype being applied anywhere other than the halls in school. This would not be the last time this assumption was made.

Since I had a nice figure and was talking to a male I must either a) want to sleep with him or b) am already sleeping with him. (Written interview)

Other Athena women have spoken with an amused exasperation at the ways their friendly approaches to colleagues are misinterpreted as flirting, and Kylie Pugh recalls her training

instructor scolding her several times for smiling at him. However, LaRayne's situation is based expressly on her physique. Both Irigaray and Marcus consider the text of the body to be a visual autobiography. In our investigation here, the body is a hypervisible autobiography; for LaRayne, that story is badly misconstrued, and the effect of that misreading goes well beyond amusement, as she recalls the insult to this day.

But considering this relationship a "dialogue" between the enforced standardization that plagued these women and their biology suggests the absence of a silencing dominance. Amber Nadeau and Brandy Lockhart, publicly challenged for alleged violations of a male dress code, effectively turn the tables on their accusers. Nancy Bullock-Prevot, despite her feeling erasure of her gender and therefore a loss of identity, attains the rank of Chief Petty Officer during her 21 years in the Navy, and focuses specifically on assisting her female colleagues: "I was always very vocal," she says. "I was a strong advocate for what women were doing in the armed forces particularly the Navy. I joined committees and boards where I could be a part and influence change." Desnoyers-Colas pursues the same course and helps establish a pattern of mentoring women that has become her special mission for advocacy:

We knew we were being watched, so we knew we had to look a certain way So we worked with each other, and we would reach out to our enlisted counterparts, and say, we see so-and-so over working at Base Ops, she's got some 3510 clothing issues with her uniform, so you might want to reach out to her and talk to her.

So, we were watching out for each other, and the sisterhood that I experienced was strong all the way throughout my service. ... It was a survival type of thing.

(Personal interview)

Their colleague LaRayne Hurd defends with strong vocality her right to be seen and treated as a Combat Photographer in the field who wears the “same uniform as the rest of the soldiers (and) earns the same pay”:

In a time when technically women were not allowed in combat, I was in a position that had combat in the job title. (Technical job title: Combat Documentation Production Specialist, 25V). I worked out just as hard as the guys, did the same training and carried the same equipment. During my deployment in 2007, I worked alone and would have to prove myself every day when a mission would come up. (Written interview)

The truth that this story imparts is that LaRayne Hurd was forced to address, consistently, efforts to reduce her physically to sexual terms. The tension that Kalinowsky posits could be relieved by the male pattern of military dress was instead exacerbated not only by women’s seemingly harmless fashion choices, such as acrylic nails and an inverted belt, but by the fact of their female bodies.

Ultimately, the trick in scrutinizing the hypervisible text is that the viewer loses uniqueness and becomes an “indistinguishable body” (Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson 31) – i.e., standard-issue – in the face of a highly identifiable “other.” According to this logic, the male uniform in military culture gains credence as a standard when women arrive and subvert it – with the “contours and specificity” of the female body (Irigaray qtd. in Marcus 218) – including pregnancy; acrylic nails; inverted belts; and other fundamental elements of female fashion. It is interesting to surmise that the male *qua* male standard gains clarity in the period of its passing, perhaps a further reason for the grudge Amber Nadeau contends with, the target Brandy Lockhart’s back becomes, and Nancy Bullock-Prevot’s ill-fitting garments, all of which compose a visual story that elicits intense response and often distaste as a way of imagining the military

uniform as women's attire. Thus, women in uniform reveal the "counterhegemonic potential" of the military identity they imagine and design in the fit of their boots and "digi blues" (Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson 51).

"The Comfortable Obscurity of Sameness, The Clarity of Visible Rank, The Ease"

The view from *within* that hypervisible text could be, and often is, suddenly borderless: an opening view that conjures a sense of freedom from confinement. The transformative power of that release suggests the rhetorical mode of *metis*, which allows us here to look critically at the ways women strategize to enter military culture and fulfill their particular quests. The most relevant dimension of *metis* in this inquiry is the power to transform oneself – as Metis, Athena's mother, assumes any shape that will help her achieve her purposes: "in *metis* appearance and reality no longer correspond to one another (Detienne and Vernant 21). Dulcinea Burrow speaks directly to that point: "I was so excited. I got to wear this uniform that made me different. I wasn't the same person I was anymore" (Personal interview). Far from fashion's spheres where clothing serves to showcase the storied ideals of womanliness or, conversely, is purposed to punk or queer those feminized forms (i.e., in street fashion, "bubblegum" or homeless chic), a woman wearing military uniform disrupts expected categories of the female body by the very act of ignoring them. As Dulcinea's epigraph reminds us, "I joke around all the time, I traded in my stilettoes for boots. And I do not regret it because those boots are so comfy" (Personal interview).

Yes, the clothing can be and should be interpreted as male: it is designed to fit, if not to enhance, a male physique (Kalinowsky). But the uniforms are utilitarian, created to permit – or at least not obstruct – a particular task. With the exception of heavy skirts, women's uniforms do

not restrict movement, and many women have liked the release from the rigors of feminized design. Kayla Williams admits, “How I felt wearing (the uniform) is different in retrospect that it was at the time, I think, (but) today, I often deeply miss it: the pockets (cargo pockets! many and large!) Women’s business attire lacks pockets” (“Re: Happy News – Athena Project”). Even the military maternity uniform seems cut from a decidedly male pattern, and offers its wearers comfort, ironically, because of its generous cut. As D. Alexis Hart explains to us, “The funny thing about the maternity uniforms is that they come in a size ‘9 months,’ so until you reach that point, it feels a bit like you’re wearing an art smock” (“Re: Happy News – Athena Project”). Both D. Alexis Hart and Emily Satterfield immediately mention these specialized garments when the subject of uniforms arises, with Emily noting that her ability to wear tennis shoes was a relief in a job setting wherein her colleagues “treated me as if I had a contagious disease” (Written interview). However, D. Alexis indirectly and tactfully addresses Emily’s point of feeling egregious – that female hypervisible text again in military precincts – by noting, “It was important for me to normalize motherhood in uniform” (“Re: Happy News – Athena Project”), in perhaps the one true instance in which a male fullness of cut accommodates the female form in performance of the one task that their male colleagues cannot share.

Otherwise, an ad for a major apparel company that appears in *Vogue Magazine*, one of the sacred texts of American fashion, might well apply to women’s reading of military constraints on dressing the female body: “Our Clothes, Your Style.” Women’s agreement to wear the uniform includes a clause, added silently, to accept and affirm the self-fashioning that women assume as part of their fashion manifesto. *Women in Clothes*, a compendium of personal essays and interviews edited by Sheila Heti et al. (editor’s note: “& 639 others”), offers over 500 pages of proof that women understand the “language” of the outfits they compose (Guy and

Banim *passim*), and use the style they assume or invent as part of their social vocabulary.²² Transferred to a military setting, women who adapt to the male pattern are in fact enacting a version of women's fashion story – “making it work,” in the mantra of design scholar Tim Gunn on “Project Runway.” And this particular style is their choice in imagining a new identity as women in this context.

“I Tailored My Uniforms So That They Fit”

The ways that the uniform serves as a “vehicle of the expression of the female self” (Marcus 221) may indeed take many forms – and women's freedom to choose a style that satisfies and suits them is a critical point here: “(The uniforms) are not actually made for women ... that was actually something I wanted to bring up,” Kristen Hall states. Her topic? Fit – and the way women must seriously strategize to find or make a good uniform fit in standard-issue military attire. Hall explains how she and many women deal with this problem:

You have to get them altered. You have to pay out of your own pocket to get them altered. All of my uniforms had to be altered. I don't know if it's just because I'm short, but ... When I worked out on the flight line I wore coveralls like mechanics wear in the auto shops, and when you get to your duty station, they give them to you. I remember walking up there and (I said), like, ‘Small, coveralls, women's,’ and all they had were men's Medium. They don't have women's sizes. Period. And so they were huge on me, sleeves were hanging down here. (Hall indicates about six inches below her fingertips.) I had to go get them altered. (Personal interview)

²² Examples of interviews in that text include “Oh My God Who Wears That”; “Women Looking at Women.”

Kylie Pugh also arranges to have her clothing, the ABU's, or Alpha Bravo Uniform, altered because of "too much material" that interferes with her tasks: "I tailored my uniforms so that they fit, because we had so much gear and the uniforms are really just height, not weight. They're really so big, with your vest and stuff that you had to wear all the time, there's too much material. So I had mine fitted" (Personal interview). Despite her diminutive size, Judy Young explains that she "didn't have much of a problem" with most of her uniforms, nor does she feel "a denial" of her gender. However, she notes that the "most comfortable uniforms I've ever worn" are khaki sets she has custom-made during her first tour as an officer, and pays for these bespoke garments since she needs the otherwise "ill-fitting" garments tailored anyway. Her greatest unhappiness, however, is the hat, which refuses to accommodate women's regulation styles of hair:

The dress cover (in the Navy, the uniform hat was officially called a 'cover') often caused problems for women like me who preferred to keep their hair long and pin it up when in uniform. This was perfectly regulation, according to uniform standards, but that hat disagreed – it was only barely compatible with a bun at the back of the head.

Also, there was at that time a blue beret for women of all ranks. A beret sounds great, doesn't it? The problem is that it was pre-formed, so you couldn't shape it to your head. It sat one way and one way only, just a big black bubble on top of the head. ("Note – Job – Uniform")

In addition to tailoring and custom uniforms, as well as regulation items that cannot be altered to suit a woman's style, a system of barter allows women to trade uniform items with their comrades in arms of any gender, and try to find clothing that fits. Amber Nadeau explains that

both her ACU, or Army Combat Uniform, and OCP, or Operational Camouflage Pattern, are clear examples of uniforms not designed, as Kristen Hall has told us, for women's bodies:

Both (uniforms) came extremely large on me. I drowned in my uniform. A lot of soldiers (including me) would switch uniforms with others so we could get the sizes we need. Because ordering new ones would take too long and buying them at the store was too expensive, finally after being in the Army for years you could get uniforms that fit you. Currently my uniform pants are too tight around my waist but way too long, my uniform top fits just right, but my patrol cap is huge and hangs over my face! ("Re: An Athena Question about Your Job and Uniform")

Kayla Williams trades her uniform "with a guy who had the opposite problem": "My uniform was too big when I got it, and then I lost weight until I was practically swimming in it" ("Re: Happy News - Athena Project").

Aside from the sheer utility of a uniform that fits properly so that women can perform their jobs without undue distraction and yards of extra material, there is the strength that the military female needs to impart, particularly in combat or command. A male size M or L on a petite figure, or a square men's shirt on a woman's curves, can only undermine her competence on the job: note Judy Young's decision to have her khaki uniform set custom-made upon assumption of her duties as officer. Whether the poor fit, until women themselves remedied the problem, is intentional on the military system's part, or a refusal to take seriously a meaningful and productive dimension of women's *nomos* into account, or utter ignorance of how to appeal to women as effectively as the helmeted warrior ads persuade men – or the ad in *Vogue Magazine* addresses women's values – the outcome is the same. Women know their clothing needs are not met and create their own fashion culture within the military *patois*. Ultimately, as previously

disclosed, they discover in this revamping of standardized design and their own female desires a style worth fighting for.

And, finally, fight they do, like women. Beyond the defense of their hard-won allowances for hair and nails, their search for uniforms that fit and midnight sessions refining them, there is the *metis* that holds them up and helps them endure the process of making that uniform their own. Kayla Williams walks us through that story:

I remember how it made my body feel: after months in Iraq, I had callouses on the fronts of my ankles where my boots rubbed, and on my collarbones where my flak vest rubbed. What odd placed to have callouses! Oh, and those boots, they took SO LONG to break in, my heels were raw and abraded for literally months; I put moleskin on my feet, on the boots, it was agony to walk. Once they finally fit, though, no shoes had ever been so well suited to my feet. Sometimes I pull my uniforms out of the bin in the garage and touch them, try them on, try to remember what it felt like to wear them every day. It's not normal any more. I'll never feel the way I did while wearing them again. Never again experience the comfortable obscurity of sameness, the clarity of visible rank, the ease, the stifling. ("Re: Happy News – Athena Project")

Revamping the male standard issue: so women take on a uniform that seems to camouflage their bodies and their gender, and use it, refashion it, refine it, and reshape it, thus becoming the female military identity they imagined, and summoned to life.

Category Two: Shaping a Female Military Identity

How many rules am I to break
 Before you understand
 That your double-standards
 Don't mean shit to me?
 I know exactly what you say
 When I turn and walk away
 But that's OK
 Cause I don't let it get to me.
 - Salt-N-Pepa, "None of Your Business"

Proving Ground: Germano

As I prepared to take command at Fourth Battalion, the boot camp for brand-new female recruits, I told myself I would have to stop cussing so damn much.

I would have to reconstruct my "resting bitch face" into a countenance brimming with sunshine and light.

I would work to encourage a culture of compassionate listening, and I would try not to yell.

It was, after all, the Marine Corps.

I was excited to take over – proud that I had been hand-selected, and eager for a new challenge. In every position I had ever held, I did my best to leave it a better place. I aimed for efficiency and to improve the Marine Corps overall, but I also worked to improve the quality of life for Marines under my watch. After years of deployments, the last thing I wanted was a Marine feeling stressed out over recruiting duty or a drill-instructor tour.

This job – commanding officer of Fourth Recruit Training Battalion – seemed perfect for me. I hoped to take the lessons I had learned as a Marine – but also as a female Marine – and build up a group of women who understood just how capable they were. I wanted to prepare them to succeed in a Marine Corps that might not always be supportive or understanding of their goals and I wanted them to come out with a strong vision of themselves and their abilities. I wanted it for my drill instructors. I wanted it for my officers. And I wanted it for my recruits. The Marine Corps had treated me well, and I knew that strong, capable women could only help the service.



Figure 28 Germano from: "Hi, I'm Germano.." www.kategermano.com/
 Accessed 12 February 2020. Photo courtesy of Kate Germano.

- Kate Germano, *Fight Like a Girl: The Truth Behind How Female Marines Are Trained*

Category Two: “Marked Inclusion”

This category, “Shaping a Female Military Identity,” shows that these women are deeply sure of themselves, even in pain or regret about outcomes of their service. As they themselves articulate their own experience, a pivotal act (in Desnoyers-Colas; Heilbrun; hooks; Irigaray; Smith; Sullivan) and a privileged standpoint here, it is clear to their listener and reader that they know who they are; they do not equivocate; they speak with authority; and if they do not know an answer or have not reflected on an issue, they say so. For example, Nancy Bullock-Prevot is concise and pointed about the gender bias she witnessed in her Navy career, but not ready to frame her story as one of victimhood, survival, or resilience, a word the many servicewomen consciously avoid: “I don’t know how [the gender discrimination I faced] has affected me,” she writes. The discourse she prefers is one of success, strength, and speaking out on behalf of colleagues who need her: “I feel I have become an advocate for women veterans who have lost their voice along the way,” she says.

By virtue of their very bodies they are oppositional, their standpoint as women has mapped them in this setting, and the “hero’s journey” story of mythologist Joseph Campbell is relevant here: “In the face of resistance and indifference, risk, certainty of invisibility and physical death – they go anyway” (*Joseph Campbell*). Indeed, as if channeling the storyline of this hero whose mantle they refuse to assume by never applying that honorific to themselves, they repeat the same words: “We did it anyway” (Pugh Personal interview)

Their discourse demonstrates these decisions as clearly practical. The ways that in the performance of their duties they are creating a new identity and image of the female warrior in the U.S. Military are clear in the three themes I explore in this section. “Serving While Female” shows that the women are not intimidated by demographic disparities that could and often do

create a condition of “marked inclusion” (Lazar 19), an experience also presented by Hawkesworth as equal but marginalized (96). The theme “We Did It Anyway” illustrates a potentially new way of apprehending and discussing the female military identity in action, as women determine the most efficacious way to perform it and in the performing, shape that identity “on their own terms” (Reinharz 19). Finally, “*Aretē*: 'We As Black Women'” argues that as they discover and confront resistance, Black women as a marked group respond in ways authentic and most useful to them and not only redefine the culture they are entering, but the ancient concept of *aretē* itself.

The words “experience,” “military experience,” “journey,” and other nominatives for the narratives investigated here may often seem as generalized and sweeping as the act of speaking of “combat woman” to cover all women and standpoint to cover all situated positions. Just as each woman comes to her decision, enlistment, and tenure in service from her own response to often common circumstances – a dead-end job, minimum wage, legacy, stasis, yearning for adventure beyond their sleepy town and boring routine – so her actions, encounters, relationships, and tasks within the military syllabus and system are specific to her and the ways she perceives, answers, and remembers them.

Shaping the Female Military Identity

Pt.1: Serving While Female

She is one of the icebreakers, the gun runners, the window smashers. The armoured tanks who climbed the rough ground, drew the enemies (sic) fire. – Virginia Woolf, unpublished, from “Death of the Moth”

Proving Ground: “West”

My America: Version 2019

*Do you know what it feels like to be hated?
For simply being unapologetically YOU?
A female, a conservative, a veteran
Three strikes and they assume you have no clue.*



*Does it bother you in today's world
You are trained out of the blue
To hate me and my opinions
Just as much as I am taught to love you?*

*America was built on the lofty ideas
Of the men and women who pursued their
dreams
And today, we are taught to tear down each
other
While our country falls apart at the seams.*

*In 1776, when Americans declared
independence
Those men and woman fought hard and bled
For life, liberty, and not the pursuit of
vengeance.*

*Today more than ever before
Each of us needs to hold dear
That every American has a purpose and
dream
That deserves to be revered. -“West,”
Public Writing*

Figure 29 Soldiers. Photo courtesy of Amber Nadeau

Introduction, Serving While Female

The feminist philosopher Hartsock devised the gestational argument for feminist standpoint theory, i.e., the “ruling group” in any community or culture has the power to make its vision “real” by setting the terms that define and unify the system (Harding *Reader* 39). In some versions of feminist standpoint thinking, such as “the outsider within” theorized by Hill Collins, women occupy a privileged position that allows them to see and critique the power of the ruling group more perceptively than that dominant group can comprehend itself. We veer in this study slightly away from these iterations of standpoint, albeit precise in analyzing certain situations – like Hill Collins’ analysis of women in antebellum slavery; and my own M.A. thesis on Dorothy Wordsworth among the romantic writers – and agree with Hekman’s interpretation of standpoint as catalyst for action and change (so noted earlier), which in this study includes a shifting of standpoint itself away from a fixed set of definitions and dispositions because, as GTM reveals, the women told that story.

I have already discussed the multiple ways in which the women of the Athena project maintain their discursive independence and present their actions and purposes strictly on their own terms. A standpoint of subordinate status that might be assumed for them and assigned to them is one they have fought hard to alter, tailor, redesign, or dispense with altogether, like the ill-fitting garments analyzed in Category One of this chapter, “Imagining the Female Military Identity: Revamping the Uniform.”

This portion of Chapter Five, “Serving While Female,” serves to illustrate Kylie Pugh’s assertion that she had never before experienced “the word ‘female’ as a derogatory term.” Stories in the first topic, “Men Look Down,” reveal the myriad ways that women’s successes are disbelieved, and when they occur with regularity, are discredited. Against this denial of agency

and capability, women assert and cite metistic proof of commitment and confidence in their own prowess equal to that of their male comrades. As explained in the second topic, "Until You Tell Me I'm Better Than You," the stress of contending with skepticism, indeed, disdain, leads nonetheless to an exaggerated focus on gender by recruits who had not perceived this trait as a roadblock to ambition and commitment. One unfortunate effect of this heightened attention is an attitude that Kayla Williams compares to a "Stockholm Syndrome," in which women join with men in discrimination toward their sisters in arms. A solution to this troubling issue and a way forward devised by Mary Jennings Hagar brings this critical analysis to a close in the third topic, "As Men Are Treated."

Whether they choose to make their gender a focal point in their military stories or, with Tammy Duckworth, declare that that they're "not a big fan of being identified as a woman anything" ("Foreword" *Band*), they each have their own lexicon for explaining how "marked inclusion," the term developed for feminist discourse analysis by Lazar, feels for the woman experiencing it, and how each woman resists it. Recall Kylie Pugh's comment in Chapter One: Introduction: the gender classification "Female!" was used as a form of direct address, and not in a manner that complimented the one so marked: "Imagine someone screaming like a terrible obscenity at you but it's not an obscenity," Pugh informs us, and offers the visual of her group's awareness of the word and its tone and implications on their first night together: "It drove us nuts" (Personal interview).

"Men Look Down on Women in the Military"

The assumption of women's incapacity to serve on a par with men does not appear in the Athena discourse, a manifestation of the women's self-esteem and self-knowledge that bears

repeating because of the intensity of resistance to the change in military culture that women's presence and prowess represent. Air Force veteran Mary Jennings Hegar asserts that "for some reason, some people, they want to hold onto a sense of superiority and gender, and the military is the last bastion where that's allowed. It's such a small minority, but they're such a vocal minority" (Personal interview), an insight shared by each woman in the Athena study, no matter the weight they assign to this attitude. As duly noted in the recent *New York Times* article by Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "The Marines Didn't Think Women Belonged in the Infantry: She's Proving Them Wrong," that particular corps was "a male-dominated organization that had fiercely opposed integrating female troops into combat," even after Leon Panetta removed official restraints on women's service in 2013. Gibbons-Neff notes that this inclusion is "something that still unsettles many within the ranks," and he could indeed be speaking for all fields of service, given the experiences women relate from Navy submarines, Air Force munitions plants, Army compounds in Korea: the military historians Zeigler and Gunderson begin their study, *Moving Beyond G.I. Jane*, with the notice that "attempts to integrate women into the armed forces are met with fierce intransigence" (vi).

In his article Gibbons-Neff features the personal mission of First Lt. Marina A. Hierl from her decision to enlist, when "it had not occurred to her that her gender could have kept her from leading Marines in war," to achieving her aspiration now as the first woman to lead a platoon in the Marines. Hierl has not sought this publicity, and desires only "to be seen by the Marines in her platoon as a leader, not as a trailblazer because of her gender." In the context of the Athena study this wish must remain unfulfilled. Because of her trailblazing, her decision to follow her quest even when faced with 'resistance and indifference, risk, certainty of invisibility and physical death' (*Joseph Campbell*), women who share her aspiration to "lead a platoon"

because she “didn’t think there was anything better” she could do, who, like her, “wanted to be part of a group of people that would be willing to die for each other,” will not be addressed by their gender, “Female!” as an “obscenity” for much longer. Brandy Lockhart in this study confirms the sense of mission articulated by Hierl: “That’s the thing,” Lockhart explains, “no one says they want to go in the military, ‘offer my life up for everybody else,’ for fun. It’s a very deep passionate sense, is all I can say” (Personal interview). For many women, this impulse and the commitment thus entailed resolves any issue and soothes any qualm they might feel on entering a culture where “the vast majority are males,” as Pugh informs us as this section begins, and the culture is defined and infused by that “very masculinity” (Zeigler and Gunderson vi).

Marina Hierl is spoken of respectfully, now, by a young man out of the 35 in her platoon as “one of us.” However, Gibbons-Neff reports that this group “quickly became the punch line of what several Marines in the unit described as sexist, *if unspecified*, insults by others” in the company, the kind of welcome he considers “strange” (emphasis mine). Most women servicemembers might consider that kind of welcome “strange” as well, but not in the sense that Thomas Gibbons-Neff means it. And sexist insults are, in their accounts, specified.

To them and their increasing numbers of sisters in the fold – women represent 16% of the armed forces¹ -- the “ruling group” that seeks to subsume them in its own discourses and thus shape their experience in ways that both erase and use them simultaneously is composed of overlapping spheres of influence:

- the military traditionalists who demonstrate aggressive masculinity in both *ethos* and ideology: “The old school military men feel that if a woman wants to be in the ‘man’s

¹ While Gibbons-Neff reports that “overall, women make up about 15 percent of the military’s 1.3 million active-duty troops,” Reynolds and Shendruk in the “Demographics of the U. S. Military” on the Council on Foreign Relations site, as of April 2018, put the figure at 16%, as do Patten and Parker at Pew in 2019. This represents a 2% increase in the year since I began this project.

world' of the military then they should conform to male standards," notes Emily Satterfield in this regard. "A majority of men I met in the Marines looked down on women in the military" (Written interview);

- scholarship about military culture that may or may not be focused on women particularly, but nonetheless assumes their positionality in various distorting and oppressive castes, e.g., the depictions of women as fundamentally unsuited to military service;
- a public discourse or *habitus* unable easily to accommodate within its categorically gendered imperatives the image or the reality of a woman serving on equal terms with men, e.g. the injury-prone incompetents in Stephan Maninger's polemic, "Women in Combat: Reconsidering the Case Against the Deployment of Women in Combat-support and Combat Units."
- these injury-prone incompetents were, as potential child-bearers, fundamentally disabled.

I would like to mention in this regard the note of surprise at women's daring to enter this field and the undue admiration that they succeed. I will signal the impulse, or cultural compulsion, for Gibbons-Neff to point out that his subject did her job not only competently (she was not the one Marine who struggled with the black gas mask at the end of his story), but he notes that she performed "well" as the point in the brief reflection he wrote about the dramatic change of reporting on a female leader in the Marines -- as well as the writing of that reflection, "Reporting as a Veteran on What Once Seemed Impossible," the need for this metadiscourse, in the first place. Gibbons-Neff, among others, notes the absence of women so far among what he calls "the elite" corps of Navy Seals and Special Ops, which has an 80% failure rate in its training courses. Women might ameliorate his dismay, if dismay is the reason he emphasizes this point, after a few more years of military opportunity -- and they will strive without the support and training of

the tradition spanning millennia that their male comrades enjoy. Kayla Williams makes that salient point:

Women are affected by war deeply and women have done incredible physical things as well. Women climb Mt. Everest, women do the Iron Man, right, like women can do all of these things. Many of (these feats), especially the physical accomplishments, they take a lot of practice and training, and that understanding that with practice, with training, with work, we can endure. I feel like it's a message that we haven't necessarily gotten in pop culture growing up in the same way that men have, so it doesn't really form part of our identity. (Personal interview)

“Getting Him at His Own Game”

To connect this discovery in our research to existing theory: Hartsock articulates the ways that a deeper reality – in this instance, the capacity of women to succeed in the U.S. military, compete with the men for whom the *nomos* has been designed and who have been trained to win in this arena their entire lives, and equal or best the performances of their male peers – “both includes and explains the ‘surface’ or appearance” (Harding *Reader* 37). We have seen this articulation as the “beneath truth” previously in this study. The “surface or appearance” here is the fact that women’s equality is contested, doubted, and disposable to colleagues in service and civilians who have fixed ideas of who women are and what women can and should be and do. This phenomenon indicates, in Hartsock’s view, “the logic by means of which the appearance inverts and distorts the inner reality” (Harding *Reader* 37). So a model who waited tables at Applebee’s and a college dropout from San Diego, as the “surface” would read, are promoted regularly and significantly despite the disrespect and resistance they face from male

colleagues, and are accused of achieving their success because they are women. They recognize and describe the face of this contempt for their manifest prowess: one function of their discourse is to move beyond its hegemony as the theme of their military story, and shape the discourse for themselves. So a rebel at loose ends who did not believe her body was capable of “running six miles, walking 50 miles, doing 55 push-ups in two minutes,” ends up in Iraq where, she informs us, “you keep going or you die,” became the Director of the V.A. Center for Women Veterans, and is now Director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security.

Nor are women themselves immune from bias toward their own gender, as they will often readily, and sometimes ruefully, admit. Brandy Lockhart is quoted earlier as one who requested an Air Force job minus “a lot of women” because she felt “fed up” with what seemed to her a very feminine way of betrayal; she notes, “I was like, maybe I’ll just work with a bunch of guys and that will be that” (Personal interview). She has not at that point experienced the male colleague who fails on their shared job in Munitions and, in her words, “took every opportunity to make my life miserable.” Nor has she encountered the superior officer who targets her from the start – perhaps, she muses, because he was “maybe 5’1” so I’m 5’10” so off the bat I don’t think that did well for me, so the funny thing is whenever I had to talk to him, I would have to go sit at his desk, he couldn’t come address me face to face. I think that was an intimidation thing for him, and that’s fine.” The day comes when she and two male colleagues in munitions arrive two minutes late because of the layers of security around their plant: “It was very difficult to get there,” she recalls. “You’d have to show up almost an hour before work, you’d have to exchange one badge for another, and you this code, and only ten people could go through these certain gates at a time, so you’d have this long line out there every morning.” The punishment they

receive is scrubbing the toilets with a toothbrush -- “I’ll shut up and clean the toilet, you’re paying me, that’s fine, I don’t care,” Brandy reflects. Then she hits the point that shows the social stratification she deals with every day: “The part that irritated me, though, was that everybody else, the other two males, got out of the punishment, he needed them to build bombs, and I had to clean the toilets, clean everything.”

Brandy’s tag line, “That’s fine,” is a loaded phrase, and metistic in its intent. *Metis*, it will be recalled, “knows how to wait patiently for the calculated moment to arrive” (D. Hoffman 101), and Brandy bides, but does not waste, her time:

I was always staying late, and reading or researching because I was frustrated, because I felt like I was being targeted but at the same time I’m like the only I thing I can do is know all this stuff, because if I know the information, know what I’m doing, how is he going to pick on me. He can’t. So I would stay during my lunch break and I would read. I mean, there’s technical instructions. If you want to go build a bomb, you don’t just go build a bomb. There’s step by step. So I’d go through and read them and find, like, ‘There’s something wrong with this one because it should be this,’ or I would go through and read our regulations for our uniforms.

So I was like, all right, if this guy’s going to single me out and pick on me for everything, I’m going to start getting him at his own game. So I would purposely do stuff that I knew I could do but I doubted he knew, so he would call me out in front of everybody to try to humiliate me. (Personal interview)

As she bests him in each encounter, which “put a bigger target on my back,” she recalls, she decides: “If I get out, it doesn’t matter, but I’m going to make myself do the best I can do while I’m here and go from there.” Brandy’s resolution, “I knew I could do the best I could do,” leads

to her earning a status known in the Air Force as “below the zone,” i.e., gaining her rank six months early, a rapid promotion given to one person in her flight, or section: “The high ups decided I was not an idiot, as this guy had essentially made me out to be.”

That is when, she recounts, “I never forget this, this guy (who was against me for this) looked over at me and he said, ‘The only reason why you won is because you have a vagina.’ Verbatim, that’s what he said to me” (Personal interview)

The distortions and tensions in that scene – Brandy’s promotion despite the toothbrush, the toilet, the belt controversy described earlier, the calling to humiliate; the vagina comment; the refusal to accept women servicemembers by the officer who rose to her defense – prove the accuracy of Hartsock’s analysis. The public rituals of masculine privilege serve to distort the reality of Brandy’s achievement and the strategies she devised to resist, survive, and thrive. What comes to mind immediately upon posing the problem in this way is the idea of competition. If, as Beard and others have argued, men have traditionally viewed their military prowess as the means of proving masculinity, then the news that women can compete on equal terms and win the day would not be welcome. Indeed, competition is not only resented, but disbelieved. Mary Beard, in her study of women’s power, provides encouragement for the kind of sustained effort that Brandy typifies: “If you venture into male territory, the abuse comes anyway” (56-57). That is fine, as Brandy would say. If you want to go build a bomb, you do not just go build a bomb. You take it step by step.

“Women Really Earned Leadership Roles”

Kylie Pugh in Great Britain, a hemisphere away from Lockhart in munitions training for her deployment to Iraq, shares the recognition of earning “below the zone.” Her winning early

rank occurs at a base wherein “the people that got awards were almost always women,” to the chagrin of male colleagues: “The guys that were up for it with me were livid.” Kylie explains her careful and, like Brandy, metistic preparation for her award:

I was one of those airmen (sic) that volunteered a lot. I was older by about four or five years, a lot of the airmen were about 18 and they were excited that they could drink because they were in the UK and at that point I’m like, I’m kind of over the party scene and that behavior. I ended up ‘babysitting’ a lot.

I focused my attention on volunteer work or finishing academic pursuits. But when I got put for an award or for leadership positions it was usually met with a lot of anger and resentment and frustration because people thought that I only got it because I was a woman. And it didn’t matter than I had all these things to back it up, things that I did. I was very prominent in the community. It didn’t matter. (Personal interview)

Kylie describes working conditions in which a common refrain was, “Oh, a girl beat me for below the zone,” a *topos* invented by the belief that “the women won awards because they were women.”

However, Kylie offers intriguing nuance to this portrait of discrimination that demonstrates once again the truth of Mary Jennings Hegar’s warning in *Chapter Five An Introduction*, “You can’t hear one or two stories and take a broad brush and apply it to our military” (Personal interview). Resistance to women’s awards and benefits in these stories can arise from suspicion of sexual favors: “If a woman gets a good post repeatedly or more than once it’s got to be because the person that’s in charge of posting thinks they’re attractive or is sleeping with them or is trying to sleep with them or is playing favorites.” Further, in her own post with the military police, Kylie describes opinion of the job itself as sexually charged: “I never met a

person who thought highly of a female cop. Ever. Either ‘the women are slutty’ and ‘they’re sleeping with everybody’ and ‘using their looks to their advantage to get what they want.’”

However, the reaction she labels “resentment” at women’s achievements, be they promotions or posts, occurs for reasons Kylie considers more personal than sexually-tinged gossip: “Just for being a girl,” she declares. “And you’re outnumbered. And it would be sexist if they didn’t give you that award” (Personal interview).

What Kylie has catalogued, both including and beyond a generic sexual interpretation of women’s attaining recognition for their efforts and successes, is theorized by Joanna Russ in *How To Suppress Women’s Writing* as a “denial of agency ... What to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense is to deny that she wrote it” (20). I will expand the words “written” and “wrote” to include acting and speaking, and apply the critique by Russ to an attack on a woman’s authority to act composed of “techniques of containment, belittlement, and sheer denial (which are) so very illogical (and so very prevalent) (sic)” (17). The ultimate purpose, Russ argues, is to refuse them entry where “‘manhood’ is normative and ‘womanhood’ somehow deviant or special” (41). The dispiriting aspect of the argument in *How To Suppress* is its date of invention: 1983, and Russ’ analysis remains relevant 35 years later. On a more encouraging note, the women who confront this military “mask” of masculinity² are not only undaunted, but also provide a corrective to the resentment and the record. D. Alexis Hart rejects outright the notion that her unit was “socially promoting women to try to be right. The women who earned their leadership, *really earned their leadership roles*. It wasn’t tokenism or representationism” (Personal interview). But D. Alexis offers a significant disclaimer to her statement – how she knows nevertheless, in ways that “resonated,” to repeat her potent word,

² A phrase invented during the course of this project by Nicholas Fox Edele, my son.

that she is being treated differently from her male colleagues. The suspicion may not always be sexually grounded, but “it is clear that no matter the circumstance, effort, or grace, despite the work and recognition of that work, this group confronts unceasing awareness about being female” (Eager *passim*). LaRayne Hurd clarifies the complexity of this condition: “When it came to the big picture, I feel like the Army tried to make it seem like ‘they’ did not see gender. We were addressed as Warriors, Soldiers, Troops and none of that has a gender, but it is inherently considered to be a ‘he’” (Written interview).

“If I Had Been a Man”

This hyperawareness of one’s gender offers insight to stories such as LaRayne’s account of dealing with her drill sergeant who interprets her body, from day one, as promiscuous, and never lets her forget it. That the drill sergeant is female shows clearly the ways that the *ethos* of the “ruling group” (from Hartsock) – in this case, a masculine militarized one – can infuse a culture and inform the gaze and practices of its adherents, unless they resist it actively:

My drill sergeant rode all the females in the platoon twice as hard as the males and meaner than her male counterparts. She used to constantly punish us for the way we stood when talking to males, the way we walked, spoke, or broke down after an extremely draining or challenging day. She would accuse me of altering my shorts, and trying to sleep with the male drill sergeants just because I had a figure. (Written interview)

As a Combat Documentation Production Specialist and the only woman technically assigned to troops “outside the wire,” LaRayne experiences further special treatment from both her American and Iraqi fellow soldiers, beginning with a grueling orientation by the commanding officer:

I worked alone and would have to prove myself every day when a mission would come up. I had superiors tell me that they were not going to slow down for the ‘camera girl,’ that I’d better not try to sleep my way through their platoon, and that I was there to take pictures and not be a distraction, all because I was oftentimes the only female in the briefing room. (Written interview)

She recalls in detail a particular tour with the local Iraqi Army whose soldiers found it amusing to discuss a price for her, once they realize she is a woman: “One of the guys took it too far and grabbed my arm, and while it was not a totally hostile move, it was more than necessary,” at which LaRayne’s hand automatically drops to the holster of her side arm. Her American comrades intervene: “They got between me and the other guys and set the record straight that the conversation was not acceptable.” LaRayne compares this move to her relationship with her siblings, who would tease her “relentlessly” but fight anyone outside the clan who targeted her: “I’m not saying it makes it right, but those were my brothers and no matter how much they picked at me and joked about how many goats someone would be willing to pay, they were going to protect me.” Although LaRayne considers this protective instinct as part of the pact she has with her comrades – “men whose back I have and who are supposed to have mine, and they do” – the experience is not as simple as perhaps a film about troop camaraderie would depict it. Her account is devoid of sentimentality because, she recalls, “I have been sexualized by (these) very men” – the “joke,” for example, of bartering her for goats. Nor is the scene with the Iraqi soldiers without a subtext of gender discrimination, as LaRayne explains:

If I had been a man and one of the Iraqi guys had grabbed my arm, I am almost certain no one would have reacted that way. Even if I had put my hand on my weapon, they would

have come behind me and seen what was going on. But they only removed me from the situation because I was a woman and they needed to protect me. (Written interview)

Resisting the “marked inclusion” she experiences, “the idea of women as emotional, weak, and unstable in combat,” as she describes the cultural landscape women inhabit as servicemembers, is a battle “I fought every day,” she says.

LaRayne’s struggle is intensified by virtue of her status as the solitary woman in the platoons with whom she is stationed. From the time of her duty in the States, when she contends with “minimal and trivial little things, such as being romantically linked to someone just because I hung out with them, and being passed over for an assignment because it would take too much effort to get the logistics in place for me to have a place to sleep,” LaRayne is harassed by sexual issues. On a mission with accommodations indoors she is constrained, as the lone female, to sleep in the same digs as the leader and his sergeant: “I know it was because they wanted to have full accountability of me. It would not do if I was off in the burned-out building next door (in a compromising position) with half the platoon.” The compensation, she notes, is “getting a nicer spot than everyone else ... running water, AC, and electricity while the guys lived out in tents.” But this benefit turns out to be a battle in which LaRayne must engage, too:

While deployed I got kicked off a few night missions because the commander did not know what to do with me once it was time to sleep. Once I realized that was why I kept getting the boot, I quickly informed him that I wear the same uniform as the rest of the soldiers, earn the pay and I can sleep in the same dirt as them.

So when outside the wire, I slept where the platoon I was with slept. (Written interview)

Like Brandy Lockhart in the Air Force and Marina A. Hierl in the Marines, this soldier gets the job done despite contending with gender targeting at the same time, and her strategy of patiently and persistently completing her missions also reflects the presence and potency of *metis*: – “I worked out just as hard as the guys, did the same training, and carried the same equipment,” she tells us. LaRayne succeeds in her personal mission of moving beyond an imagined sexual promiscuity, despite a *habitus* that includes “a little bit of crude deployment humor (about) the attractive level of a female when deployed, and how the longer you are there, the prettier you get, stuff like that.” Each time she reaches the end of a mission and needs to move to a new unit, she says, “those same leaders would tell me how much the guys were going to miss me, and that whenever I needed I would always have a seat in their vehicle” (Written interview).

Nonetheless, when LaRayne bids farewell to her last unit and returns to the States, her struggles with mild Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and severe feelings of survivor’s remorse are ignored by the VA: “I came back from deployment acting completely differently and out of character.” She is certain, she says, “that if I had been a man, I would have been referred to mental health for an evaluation.” It is an old friend who enlisted with her whom she credits with saving her life: “He called to check on me because he knew I was struggling with my transition back home.” And it is the men outside the wire, men with whom she shared those missions and complicated relationships – deployment humor; field training; protection; sleeping on the ground; stealing shower time – whose memories she cannot shake: “I just could not justify why God brought me home when I had watched so many men with a greater purpose than my own die in a country where their soul would never find peace.” In our College Composition II class online, she appeals to her younger, more jejune colleagues in discussion forums: “Men and women make the choice to serve this country, give the military

everything they ask for and when they are done see no light in the world” (Hurd “Public Writing Class Wiki”). She still has her fellow soldiers’ backs. Believing that her issues “were diminished or not taken as seriously” because she is a woman, she now – sharing her beautifully-rendered story; addressing the issues of women *vis-à-vis* the VA; earning surpassing grades; pursuing her career in social work – watches her own.

“Until You Tell Me I’m Better Than You”

Such a diverse array of comment and narratives – Tammy Duckworth, Germano, Mary Jennings Hegar, Kylie Pugh, Brandy Lockhart, LaRayne Hurd, Jessica Scott -- both similar and contrastive, reveal how deeply woven into the fabric of this culture are techniques of “containment, belittlement, denial” that Russ identifies in her text of 1983. They may appear in bold relief at any provocation (“You only won because you have a vagina,” as with Brandy) or be inscribed as a common rhetorical tactic (“Oh, a girl beat me for below the zone,” as with Kylie). Or they may be so completely normalized in military culture that women have learned to work both confidently and metistically around and through them without comment or pause, keeping their eyes on their own purposes. In this respect they evoke an anecdote, again from Kylie Pugh, about a superior officer who confronts her, in a way she considers “half-serious,” about smiling at him: “Don’t smile at me. I’m a married man. I’m married. So don’t smile at me. Don’t smile at me. I’m already taken. My wife doesn’t want you to smile at me. I don’t want you to smile at me.” The message here is that Kylie, by smiling at a male officer, is flirting – however, once again, she offers a sharp pivot to a stereotypical situation, which is instructive in terms of women’s inattention to their “marked inclusion”: “The more people yell at you, at some point, you get really desensitized to it so it’s hard not to laugh and not to smile more” (Personal

interview). It is hard, we should consider, not to shrug and not to stride past, with aim and purpose, an attitude toward women in this overwhelmingly male culture to which one has become accustomed, since birth, because it is ingrained in American culture itself. This attitude, if given free rein, could indeed prevent their achieving the ambition and fulfilling the quest that led to their enlistment.

Amber Nadeau offers a chilling example of gender defined in just this suppressive way, as reason for targeting and punishment, which shows the power that inheres in an individual when a culture protects his prerogative as part of its ideology and tradition. Her assistant squad leader, an NCO, or non-commissioned officer, whom she describes as “somebody, that man who had the smartest answer to everything, always able to find the reason why his answer was the right answer,” treats her in a way she considers “extremely belittling and extremely disrespectful” on a daily basis. One day he harasses her, repeatedly insisting, “You can’t leave today until you tell me I’m better than you.” Amber details her response and its unfortunate, unfair, and tolerated effect in that setting:

I was fed up. I was just like, you know, there’s that hard position where you have to either bite our tongue or understand that if you say something, it’s going to get big. At first I was like, I had my back to him and I was typing on a computer, and he was sitting at a desk and he kept saying it and saying it. I was like, ‘Sergeant, I’m being respectful, but I’m not going to tell you that. I do not agree with you.’

And then he used his rank against me. So, as soon as I tell him, ‘No,’ he’s like, ‘Private. Why are you not standing at attention or standing at parade rest talking to me. How dare you? I’m a senior NCO.’ He suddenly flips and literally makes me stand there. Kicks everybody out of the room. Brings in one other sergeant to be there and is just

yelling at me. At this point, I am crying and huffing. I'm a very emotional person. If I'm angry, I start to cry, so then I'm even more mad at myself because in my eyes I'm letting him win.

I ended up getting in trouble for that because I was known as this star soldier that always did everything right, top of all my classes. He wrote it up. 'She didn't obey an order. She did not stand up for parade dress when I was talking to her.'

It's so hard to fight something like that. I mean, when I look back at it now, it's so little. (Personal interview)

When Amber's squad leader returns, he tells her: "I know how this guy is, and I know he's like that and I'm sorry this happened to you, but he's got the rank and he won it." Nor is Amber alone in this experience of harassment: she reports that he has accused another female soldier of the same offense, and that soldier appeals to the chain of command and the legal department because she fears, as Amber explains, "he was trying to get her kicked out of the military." Amber serves as a witness: "I gave a statement about how he treated her and I used my story, too. This is how he was. He was very belittling, and she was a great soldier until she had him as a leader, and he had such toxic leadership to her." Ultimately Amber's female colleague was removed from the military: "I would say," Amber remarks, "because of his connections." She notes that she only sees this behavior with women: "He was cool buddies with everybody else."

No woman in this study, however distant her stance from public displays of male contempt or resentment, suggests that her gender itself ever disappears. She may express a feeling of invisibility attendant on that gendered marking, or assert the opposite with "Maggie White": "I know within the military females are not invisible" (Written interview). The reminder to us in the civilian world, repeated in various scenarios by Mary Jennings Hegar, is apt here: "I

wouldn't want (you) to paint my gender with a broad brush" (Personal interview). As she fulfills her terms of the women's shared commitment to military service, lives out the duties of the Athena she is, each woman survives and thrives within her own context as well, which explains Dental Technician "Maggie White's" unequivocal statement: "I never witnessed gender discrimination" (Written interview) in the same professional discourse as the troubling testimonies presented here in "Serving While Female." Such an assertion may appear counter-discursive to the argument of this data analysis. However, as Mackenzie Rieselt, whose sense of discrimination is akin to "Maggie's," admits, she was not in a position to witness it.

"It's a Load of Shit that Women Feel Marginalized"

But there is a form of assessment and discernment, if not always deprecatory, that most Athena women mention: women, the women say, are tough as nails on other women: "Oh," Kayla Williams says emphatically, "I think we are hard on one another" (Personal interview). Irigaray is primary among feminist theorists to offer a means to interpret this internal pressure as a function of women's lives, "dispersed and exiled," within a masculine culture:

Our societies are built upon men-among-themselves (*l'entre hommes*). According to this order, women remain dispersed and exiled atoms....Without rites and myths to teach us to love other women (*nos semblables*), to live with them, mutual destruction is a permanent possibility. We need values we can share if we are to coexist and create together. (191-192)

Irigaray's "great insight," according to legal scholar Yvette Russell, "was that the universal subject espoused by the men of philosophy and psychoanalysis is not universal or neutral, as they had asserted, but in fact masculine and that this subject had achieved its domination through the

suppression and denial of the feminine.” In this context Irigaray argues for a specific female subjectivity that allows women to understand and define themselves and one another without reference to the masculine sensibility or template that has inspired, shaped, and infused our western world and its discourses and institutions, such as the military. “Society and morality act as though woman, without being a full social or political person in her own right, had to love a social person: man. How is such love humanly possible without subjective status?” she asks (192). The literature, including the Athena sources and interviews, is replete with women’s cooption in a culture where disrespect of women is tolerated; in LaRayne Hurd’s terms, “ignored, justified, accepted” (Written interview). Irigaray advises that “subjective status” be “constituted in relation to self and to like” – i.e., other women – “the two being connected.” Athena women demonstrate the need for this sense of connection: for example, one woman avows that women bring disrespect on themselves by protesting treatment they believe is unequal and unfair: “Because of your attitude, you’re allowing it” (Unnamed Personal interview). Another woman expounds on, and discursively proves, that point:

Respectfully, and I apologize, but it’s a load of shit that women feel marginalized and invisible. It’s bull because all these females are going ‘I’m going to get paid less than the males, I’m going to get so much work, I’m going to be treated so different,’ I’m sorry, but you’re an idiot. Have you actually seen what we do? How we get treated way better than the men do? (Unnamed Personal interview)

It is, notably, a woman who vocally dislikes that “attitude,” her point of view reminiscent of the meme in the military blog *Blackfive* that depicts a laughing party of women in camouflage on the left side of the frame enjoying iced coffee, and, on the right, a platoon of men on patrol in the smoke of a bombed street.

Women are accused by other women of “allowing” their own harassment because they should know that men are “too cocky,” or, in another account, “men can be pigs,” and have “little respect for some of the women because the women were reacting to their flirting....They will sleep with some even when they are married and then trash them.” It is a woman drill sergeant who first accuses LaRayne Hurd of promiscuity, based on a scolding assessment of her body. It is a woman who makes Dulcinea Burrow’s life a misery in her Navy administrative tasks:

She wanted control of us. ‘I still think I’m a Navy chief, and you’re going to do what I say. She would play this act of, ‘I’m going to be nice, and talk with you, and then I’m going to manipulate you and use you as much as I can, and throw you under the bus. And it was exhausting to the point where I said, ‘I can’t. I can’t do this.’ (Personal interview)

And it is women who discriminate against Elizabeth Avila because, as she explains, “they suspected that I was a lesbian.” Elizabeth tells us that she is discharged under the policy of “Don’t Ask. Don’t Tell” because “I confessed myself out. I had personal reasons why I made the confession” (Written interview). It is not men, Elizabeth reports, who disrespect her because of her sexual orientation: “I never felt any discrimination ... I had to remind them that I am a lesbian so this helped me not allow any men to disrespect me.” However, Avila notes, women “would stop talking to me and some even avoided me,” an issue of women’s contentious relationships examined in Chapter One.

On the subject of giving tacit approval to disrespectful behavior toward woman, and thus, through Irigaray’s lens, contribute to women’s dispersion and inability to cohere, Kayla Williams offers the most pertinent insight and instruction. Her reflection deserves to be quoted here, and in

the theoretical work to come about the complex issue of women's resisting the "marked inclusion" of military service, at length:

Two things I want to mention about my time in the military. One is that when I look back now, I sometimes feel as if I was experiencing Stockholm syndrome. I cannot imagine being in a setting where I listen to some of the things I hear men say and that I would not say anything or that I would laugh or I know that all that happened, and I can talk about theories of why women were silent and I can, again intellectually, go back over all of this stuff. But where I am right now, how safe and how secure I am right now, I'm like, how did that happen? How did I experience that and tolerate it?

The other piece that I can understand intellectually in a sense but that I'm ashamed of it that when you're in that setting, to many women, and I think myself as well but I hope not as badly, but it felt like a zero sum game. There were so few of us and so few paths to success to being included that only some of us could make it and so there was not necessarily a sisterhood that would support one another. There was huge competition. (Personal interview)

With this analysis, and like the leader she is, Williams initiates the process that Irigaray prescribes as the way to begin the creation of female subjectivity within environs that would, upon the clear identification of women's identity, no longer be defined as male turf.

The first step, she advises, is to "convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it" (124), which Kayla demonstrates here in her powerful questions: "How did that happen? How did I experience that and tolerate it?" And following this act of affirmation, Irigaray asks that a woman "resubmit herself ... to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, so as to make visible what is supposed to be invisible" (124),

and indeed Kayla accomplishes this difficult task: “I listen to some of the things I hear men say ... I would laugh” – and her bravery in this act is underscored by the number of women in this project who admit the same kind of conspiratorial engagement with “masculine logic,” who tell us they “joined in” without (as yet) enduring the kind of examination of conscience that Kayla describes to us.

Hartsock’s argument is relevant here: a move such as that achieved by Kayla – “I cannot imagine,” she begins, and then she risks it – is integral to the standpoint of the marked cohort who confronts its marginalization by a “ruling group”: “(The point is) to create a politics so that a marginalized group can name itself and participate in defining the terms that structure their world” (Harding *Reader* 263). The ultimate questions that women resisting their “marked inclusion” must reach, Irigaray advises, are “essentially political” and intended to change the system so that “the masculine would no longer be everything” (128). In the context of the Athena interviews and published accounts, women would need to be harder on themselves, perhaps, as in the process Kayla models, than they are on one another.

“As Men Are Treated”

Irigaray suggests inquiry that addresses directly the experience of women confronting and, in various and often contradictory or counterintuitive ways, resisting a male-infused culture with the intent of changing it: “How can women analyse (sic) their own exploitation, inscribe their own demands, within an order prescribed by the masculine? *Is a woman’s politics possible within that order?* What transformation in the political process itself does it require?” (128) Mary Jennings Hegar articulates a way forward that she believes has already begun – perhaps because of the work this section illustrates: awareness; determination; strategy; persistence;

action. “I think it’s going the way I want to see it going,” she notes. “I want women to be treated as men are treated. I don’t just mean treated like them, but given the same amount of respect and space.” What is remarkable about Mary’s version of military culture is the way it then enacts Irigaray’s vision of “a genuine coexistence between masculine and feminine subjects, without hierarchy” (Russell). As if Irigaray’s ideals have become her playbook, Mary delineates the benefit that men derive from this transformed politic:

I would also like to see other men respect each other and feel safer stepping up and saying something because so much of the problem is in the people that are complicit because they’re silent, and they’re silent because when they speak up, they get made fun of in their own ranks. So I’ve had men come up to me and say, ‘How do I handle when my buddies are saying shitty things about women, and I know it’s wrong, how do I handle that?’ It’s sad to me that they would have to ask. (Personal Interview)

In practical terms, Mary applies the idealistic Irigaray notion of a culture cleansed of “marked inclusions” and gender distinctions to the American military system:

I’m hoping that the culture gets to a point where men and women and people are just respected as individuals given the space to try to accomplish their goals and their dreams without being held back based on someone else’s insecurities, and that they have a safe space to act professionally and not to do whatever they want, because that’s what we’re kind of talking about, right?

For so long, men have had a safe space to act inappropriately. I’m asking that everyone on both sides of gender have a safe space and a culture such as they can act respectfully and professionally without having their careers hurt, without being made fun of, without being isolated. (Personal interview)

“I don’t know,” she notes. But she does. She knows what these women want, and what their critique, including their speaking out in the forum of this study, most of them allowing us to know their names and see their stories plainly, call us to do. She knows the purpose of creating their sophistic on these pages – which, despite the resistance of some Athena women to the word, is “feminist” in the most originary and productive sense: by women, for women, to do what La Rayne Hurd has hoped from the beginning: anything to give their lives meaning. She knows, finally, that whatever these women resist, in the end, is not the world they value and believe in – which their presence, by their presence, changes in its molecules, its $E=mc^2$. They resist, shrug off, subvert, and summarily reject hostile and direct attacks on their sovereignty as human beings and equal partners in this military enterprise. The trick and the work of their discourse in this respect is to bring the surface and appearance of Hartsock’s critique into accord with the “deeper reality” of their commitment, confidence, and tenacity.

Shaping the Female Military Identity

Pt. 2: “We Did It Anyway”³

It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes who 'I' am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who 'am' I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. – Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*

Proving Ground: Tammy Duckworth

I was interested in becoming a Foreign Service officer; I figured I should know the difference between a battalion and a platoon if I were going to represent my country overseas someday. What I didn't expect was to fall in love with the camaraderie and sense of purpose that the military instills in you and even with the misery of training. The thing is, when we were exhausted and miserable, my fellow cadets and I were exhausted and miserable together. When the instructor yelled, he wasn't singling anyone out, but yelling at all of us, together. It took all of us working as a team to succeed.

I had been pursuing a Ph.D. in political science when my National Guard unit was sent to Iraq. Eight months into our deployment, in November 2004, a rocket-propelled grenade fired by Iraqi insurgents tore through the pilot's side of the Blackhawk helicopter I was flying. My right leg was vaporized; my left leg was crushed and shredded against the instrument panel. My pilot in command miraculously brought down the helicopter safely. I went from being the most senior member on board to the weakest. I could easily have died that day, but my crew wouldn't give up on me. They pulled me from the disabled aircraft and, when help arrived, insisted I be attended to first even though some of them were also seriously injured.



Figure 30 Tammy Duckworth Official Portrait, 113th Congress. The US Congress image is in public domain.

– Tammy Duckworth, “What I Learned at War”

³ This Athena mantra has a technical term, “collocation,” which Eager (quoting Rosemarie Skaine’s *Women in Combat*, not listed among her references and so needed some investigation here) defines as a battlefield situation in which “units operate in such close proximity to other direct ground combat units that they are almost indistinguishable from direct ground combat units in terms of the physical demands of the soldier, source of support, or possible physical contact with the enemy force” (35). I believe the women would quarrel with the word “almost.”

Introduction: “The Camaraderie and Sense of Purpose”

Interviews and stories clearly depict a double standpoint occupied by the Athena women. Standpoint, it will be recalled, delineates the ways that power works to sustain or suppress the status of a given social group (Harding *Reader* 3; Schell and Rawson 139). The more contemporary theory of standpoint by Hekman and others challenges a fixed position, and asserts the use of one’s standpoint to move out from conditions that limit one’s freedom and opportunity, and enact change. I argue here that such a flexible and forceful standpoint is clear within the stories of these women. Athenas are situated in the world of the team as both women and warriors. Their discourse reveals the ways these positions align – “I always felt like I was just there, and I was part of the team and there to help” (Rieselt Personal interview) -- and diverge: “I was acutely aware that I was a woman,” repeats Alexis Hart (Personal interview).

In many ways their sense of “military identity,” which “Maggie White” interprets as the tension between the individual and the team, accords with the concept of “double consciousness” perceived by W.E.B. DuBois in his foundational work, “The Soul of Black Folks.” DuBois argues that we can belong so fundamentally to two separate, and perhaps contrastive, cultures that we are prevented from forming a cohesive and unified identity:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness ... two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals ... (longing) to merge (the) double self into a better and truer self. In this merging (one) wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.⁴

Whether this tension – which even Lindsay Allen, of all the Athenas the most assimilated, admits – is the “productive strife of the contest” (Hawhee *Bodily Arts* 21 *passim*) or the source of stress or longing, it seems increasingly apt to read the Athena stories as impervious to resolution. A

⁴ In *Souls of Black Folks* 1903, Etext in the Gutenberg Project.

tenet of Hekman's extension of classic standpoint theory holds that these positions are fluid, that they represent "multiple knowledges" (239), that status is not a fixed *locus* of struggle but rather an inflection point that leads to action. The ways that this revision leads directly, like a divining rod, to the twin positions – and double epistemologies – available to women servicemembers are delineated in the first topic, "Standpoint of Female; Standpoint of Fighter." Then, topic two, "An Unusual Job for a Woman," examines the dual role and double consciousness of these Athenas as women and as warriors. The alliances and divisions between and within these two personas is illustrated here by close profiles of two veterans, Tabitha Nichols and Brandy Lockhart. Their stories are replete with commitment, conviction, and a strategic approach to the challenges they faced from colleagues or the nature of their work. Both Tabitha and Brandy – and the Athenas on whose behalf their stories here speak – delineate the real and potential force of women's equal participation in the military mission. The final topic, "The Refusal of Patriarchal Protection," explains how both stories, while limning the usual *Topic* of gender and the connection of competence to the Y-chromosome, illustrate the equally clear persistence of *metis* achieving a highly-valued goal. Adapting to unexpected circumstances, such as the opportunity to drive the camp commander, or marshal a camp's munitions, reflect the sophistic contingencies on which this survival relies. As examples, both Tabitha and Brandy endured conditions of extreme vulnerability, each in her unique way.

Standpoint of Female; Standpoint of Fighter

Judy Young, Navy, reminds us not to "elide the complexity and the very varied texture" of women's experiences in military teams: "Clearly terrible things have happened to some women service members because of gender discrimination, (but) such things did not happen to

us all. And in fact,” Judy adds, “many of us were able to succeed and thrive in the military environment” (Written interview). The Athenas’ assurances of feeling comfort as women within their military commitment are, like Goldie Ann Johnson’s comments here, persuasive:

I’ll go down burnin’ for anybody. The only way to relax and get along is to make friends.

It can be male. It can be female. In (my duty station) Japan there really wasn’t a ton of females that weren’t married, so a lot of my friends were guy friends and they were single. (Personal interview)

Equally strong, even within Goldie’s encomium to her mission experience and confident membership in that team, is the awareness of one’s gender that may be ignored in these accounts and may, discursively, be easily dismissed. But the issue of gender subtends the military experience. It is at its core a culture designed to define and shape a warrior male identity, which in turn distinguishes that culture, and now contends with women striding into enlistment offices, claiming a rightful place in the ranks, requiring acceptance “on their own terms” (Reinharz 19), demanding respect: “I can joke around all day. But don’t touch me. And if I tell you I’m not comfortable with it, don’t do it. Don’t make a big deal out of it, don’t do it. Just be respectful” (Personal interview).

And D. Alexis Hart mentions, in passing, what may be the crux of the problem in women’s inhabiting two standpoints, previously incompatible, with an equally powerful stake in each situation: “I was commissioned at the top of my class and people used to joke, “Oh, Alexis, you’re not a girl, you’re ROTC” (Personal interview).

What seems to happen when service members called “Female!” embark on the mission assigned to their team is that their “marked inclusion” can and does often dissolve, which occurs in Tammy Duckworth’s harrowing account of her final mission. “I didn’t want to be in combat,”

Tammy Duckworth tells us. Yet her enlistment leads to a record of 200 combat hours as pilot of a Blackhawk helicopter. Duckworth nearly dies when insurgents along the Tigris River launch a rocket-propelled grenade which explodes beneath her cockpit: “My right leg was vaporized; my left leg was crushed and shredded against the instrument panel” (Duckworth “What I Learned at War”). The grievous injuries that many women in this study have experienced and the deaths in combat they observe enter their discourses of war as references, often oblique, and rarely with the specificity of Tammy’s agony. The specter of the battlefield and its egregious wounds are present in the economical word “combat” as we read of employment opportunities and the lawsuit Mary Jennings Hegar files in 2012 in which she sues to open infantry and other combat positions to women, which takes place from 2013-2015. But the violence of that setting, in which Tammy’s pilot in command, Dan Milberg, sees what he thinks is the top half of her body in one part of the cockpit and her leg in the other, determines to land the helicopter, and succeeds, in her estimation, “miraculously,” thus saving the lives of the crew who in turn save her life – that violence and its agency and purpose are rarely cited as the ultimate point of acing the tests of skill and will, acquiring expertise in target practice, racking up more hours in simulated flying than any cadet in history, as Tammy does.

The job descriptions are frequently banal and drawn in neutral tones, such as Transportation Coordinator, Warehouse Clerk, Parachuter, Equipment Specialist. But the cold facts are apparent in a declaration repeated like a clarion call throughout the stories that have inspired this dissertation: “We did it anyway.” Lisa Munday, author of “The Combatants’ Experience,” reports that “service women have patrolled streets with machine guns, served as gunners on vehicles, disposed of explosives, and driven trucks down bomb-ridden roads” (177). In that study, Specialist Veronica Alfaro tells us, “I did everything (in combat). I gunned. I

drove. I ran as a truck commander. And underneath it all, I was a medic.” Joni Ernst, Senator of Iowa, commands 183 soldiers in convoy duty, delivering supplies to shifting front lines in Iraq: as multiple stories make clear, Iraqi infantry and bands of insurgents target such convoys, often by using IED’s disguised as rubble, old coats and backpacks, dead animals – and sometimes living women and children.

After her interview is completed, Tabitha Nichols sends me writings in which she describes her experience as scenes she revisits in her dreams. “They also appear in my nightmares,” she notes:

While out on missions convoying through the streets of Iraq, I would see people standing on the roadside. These people were not smiling, waving and/or holding American flags. These people were not cheering our presence. These people wanted us dead and out of their country. We understood.

Instead of smiles and American flags these people would wave AK-47's at us, children included. I realized that rebels, terrorists, etc. would be there, but to see the children with them put me in utter disbelief. To see these little boys wearing hatred on their face, aiming weapons at me was surprising. These children were taught by their elders to hate America and American troops. (Notes and Poems)

We cannot fail to acknowledge and confront the fact that these women are trained in jobs pragmatically and empowered for war which, as General Mattis, arguing against women’s engagement, describes as “lethal” (Sisk). Their stories demonstrate awareness of this functionality as well as innocence born of their physical readiness to leap – literally, in the cases of Judy Young and Amber Nadeau – into an unknown culture whose precincts have been closed to them in many ways. The word that Judy Young proffers for their intrepid youth is “naivete.”

The Duckworth account and its sister stories and commentaries serve as object lessons for the Athena theory and model I propose in this dissertation. These women enlist with different expectations about the combat action they are trained to execute and in which many excel, as we have seen in their reports. Some women, including Tabitha Nichols in this study, do not expect a frontline assignment. Nonetheless, they consistently emphasize a willingness, and often a desire, to engage directly with enemy forces in defense of America's security: "You have to do what you can't," Dulcinea Burrow informs us (Personal interview). This conviction is clearly articulated as well by two powerful words in Tabitha Nichols' account – "We understood." This acknowledgement is supported by three other veterans who witness women and men together in combat: Tammy Duckworth, Kayla Williams, and Tulsi Gabbard. Duckworth's statement on the occasion of women's accession formally to combat missions emphasizes her experience as one who "did it anyway": "As a veteran who saw combat action I know the inclusion of women in combat roles will make America safer" (Herb). In a later interview with Rebecca Nelson of *GQ* she develops this idea:

Female service members are so integrated into the military, so critical and vital to all functions of the military, from combat service support to combat support, to direct combat, that we could not go to war as a nation, we could not defend America, without our women. (Nelson)

Kayla Williams is adamant on the point of military effectiveness: she cites research⁵ which shows that divisions with equal participation of females and males are more successful in the field than those with gender restrictions (Personal interview). Tulsi Gabbard adamantly agrees: "If you look at units that have had both men and women serving, especially in combat situations,

⁵ "Even in the Marine Corps study, which was probably designed to try and see women fail, teams with more women on them were seen as more effective." (Williams Personal interview)

they will tell you that we have a professional force. I think some of the challenges that are talked about may be inflated by those who have not experienced how this cohesive team can work together” (Caplan-Bricker). It is crucial not to diminish or underestimate the commitment these women have made to this mission, and their statements as evidence of their intent are factual, flat, and implacable. Tulsi explains that “there are so many different examples that one can speak of, of incredible women service members who have acted courageously and heroically, under duress and under fire” (Caplan-Bricker). Whether they be ordered to frontline duty, or stationed in Korea or Pensacola, on aircraft carriers, or, pregnant, on warehouse duty, to a woman they are each prepared to serve. They speak of themselves as ready to sacrifice their motility and ability to forget the war they had witnessed. We hear them speak of other sacrifices: family; health; physical safety; privacy. But they balance the hardships they endure with a conviction of choice. Their discourse is replete with faith in their decision to enlist and sense of agency in fulfilling their service.

They become, as Air Force Technical Sergeant Lisa Bradley defines the experience, part of the team, where the issue “was not one of gender but one of who was a good worker and who wasn’t” (Written interview) -- whether intelligence gathering; building munitions; guarding the duty stations and warehouses; driving the convoys; deployed in the field, in assault submarines, in Blackhawk helicopters; enduring attacks inside the wire; relaxing with “the guys” in camp; leading a crew; and caring for those who perform these tasks. As Rhonda Seward reports, “You’re trained and designed to function as a team. When you grab a weapon and jump in a fox hole, you’re not really thinking about man and woman” (Jones “Woman at War”).

“We were equally scared, we talked with each other, we were trying to figure things out, we looked to each other and how they put it – we’re brothers and sisters, we’re here to help each other out, we work together as a team,” recalls Dulcinea Burrows, Army (Personal interview).

“No matter how much shit I went through I was taught that we are to be there for one another,” Emily Satterfield, Marine, who served as Warehouse Clerk, explains. “Our collective *ethos* in the Marine Corps (included this Leadership Principle): ‘Train your Marines as a team.’”

Lindsay Allen in Marine Avionics agrees: “The Marines were looking out for one another” (Written interview).

“My experience while in showed me that the military culture is that of a close-knit group,” Emily Satterfield further explains, “many coming from all different states and even other countries, that becomes like a family and has your back no matter what is going on” (Written interview).

The family image is one that Lila Holley, Military Intelligence Analyst, is firm in asserting as the strength that women bring as “nurturing leaders” who teach their troops that “we’re going to make it through, together, we’re a team, and we’re going to do this” (Personal interview).

“As far as the warrior image and camaraderie in basic training I quickly learned we all work as a team and suffer as a team,” explains “Maggie White,” Air Force (Written interview).

Joni Ernst describes the servicemember’s experience entirely in terms of the mission and the team: “While deployed overseas, I had the opportunity to serve alongside some of America’s bravest men and women. I saw how important it is for our military — Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve — to work together as one cohesive unit. We are strongest in numbers; when

working together to support and build one another up. We come together from all corners of the country united with one clear mission: to defend our freedom” (“An Interview”).

“I loved to deploy, even in horrible conditions because I really got to know and care about the people I was with, this was especially true when we were stationed in undesirable places,” writes Lisa. “I never felt invisible or underserved, instead I felt like I was part of a team” (Written interview).

Kayla Williams, Army, former Director of Women Veterans’ Affairs in the VA, defines the military *ethos* succinctly, “We all succeed together or we’ll all fail together” (Personal interview).

For many Athena women confronting the fact that “men dominated the military” (Avila Written interview), the singular situation they face is their membership in the team as the sole female. The words of D. Alexis Hart, the first woman in the Navy assigned to an amphibious assault ship, are repeated throughout her narrative: “I was the only woman” (Personal interview). Her colleague Tabitha Nichols, Army, agrees: “I automatically knew I was gonna be one out of 100 guys, I thought that was gonna be the case, and I didn’t anticipate any gender-bashing, I just figured it would be, ‘Okay, just be with the guys’” (Personal interview). The role as the sole female that Hart and Nichols describe is repeated throughout the interviews, but Elizabeth Avila, Army, speaks for many Athena women when she makes no distinction in gender about the folks with whom she served in the team: “I cannot say I was mistreated or treated differently than males. I was treated accordingly and I responded equally” (Written interview). The point, the reason they have all come together in this particular place at this precise time, is “to do a job – and I want to do the job together,” D. Alexis Hart emphasizes. Her statement is reinforced by Brandy Lockhart, Air Force -- “We don’t complain, we just get it done” – which in turn is

reinforced by Dulcinea Burrow: “You’re there to do your job, go ahead and get it done. Your job is there to fulfill your mission” (Personal interview).

While the world of the team in action, as Athena women recall and relive it, is not essentially constrained by gender biases, I argue here that the mission women bear opens two fronts for them: they share the duties, objectives, and orders of the team, with “a shared strong sense of duty with both genders,” as Lisa Bradley depicts it; yet being viewed and valued as equal to male team members are not givens, but goals for which they often need to strive. It is not unusual in these stories to find the “Yes Repeat No” of this seeming contradiction, i.e., the genderless mission; the comrade called “Female!” Indeed, the realization and ultimate conviction that a woman needs “to do more” – needs, in fact, “to earn their respect,” in the words of Elizabeth Avila -- are also shared by most women in the Athena project and presented by Emily Satterfield, for one, as an accepted part of Marine *ethos*:

While in boot camp our drill instructors beat in the fact that we will always have to prove ourselves to the males because they think we are less than them and that in order to make it in the male world that is the Marine Corps, we have to constantly strive to be better than them. (Written interview)

The Marines are identified previously in this project as the corps most resistant to women’s admission. However, even the women who chose the Air Force (Lisa Bradley; Kristen Hall; Mary Jennings Hegar; Brandy Lockhart; Kylie Pugh; “Maggie White”) because of its reputation for treating recruits well encounter a strong current of gender bias under a surface of welcome and inclusion.

“An Unusual Job for a Woman”

Classical scholar and don Beard, of course, argues that a woman cannot identify as warrior because that warrior is, by definition, male, which raises the problem of Athena. The mythological deity of wisdom and war becomes directly relevant to her American progeny because her own gendered accomplishments and attributes remain in flux, contingent on their tellers and their times, thousands of years beyond her birth from her father’s forehead, on the tablet of Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Athena appears a binary: her martial attire, talents, and tools enact her father Zeus’s purposes and serve, in the eyes of her critics, his patriarchal regime; she is the mission her mother, Metis, bears in secret and releases at “the calculated moment” (D. Hoffman 101). Thus her very existence speaks of “a context of cunning intelligence” (Deacy and Villing 315). Scholar of classical Greek history and mythology Vernant describes Athena as a kind of double-edged sword, obedient to both her father in war and mother in strategy; in a personal email to me, Mary Beard remarks that Vernant alerted her to the role of the mother years ago (“Re: Question about Women and Power”). Critics of American Athenas insist that these women succeed because they share masculine values (Eager; Sjoberg) and become men, as Alexis Hart’s speakers (“You’re not a girl”) and Beard’s own reading of this mythology aver.

However, women servicemembers themselves neither decry nor deny the biological imperatives of their gender. They speak, for example, of their periods and pregnancies, the strengths they carry that distinguish them from men. At no time do they suggest that exigencies of gender compromise their capacity to complete a mission. Rather, the double standpoint depicted in this section, “We Did It Anyway,” perhaps provides them with the “wisdom” dimension of Athena’s inheritance. They demonstrate alignment with metistic analysis in the feminist theory of Reinharz, who speaks of “a woman (who) was all too conscious of the kind of

world she lived in and chose what she thought to be the best strategy for herself” (52). Athena, it bears repeating, appears in Deacy as a female “at home in the world of men” (72), as Lisa Bradley, Dulcinea Burrows, Tammy Duckworth, Germano, D. Alexis Hart, Brandy Lockhart, Tabitha Nichols, Kylie Pugh and their “camouflaged sisters” have chosen to be. Athena both “promotes ordered combat and is filled with *metis*” (Deacy and Villing 18). Here perhaps we find the complicated truth beyond the gendered binary and recall the admonition of Desnoyers-Colas from Part One of this chapter: “We don’t come in as honorary men” (Personal interview).

Further, there are those instances when either the bonds of the team or the weight of the mission dissolve the gender disparities and disputes, and dispel the “push-me pull-you” of competing theories. “We’re not out there because of a theory,” Tabitha Nichols, Army, reminds us. At these times, sophisticated in their contingency, the crew, like Duckworth’s, moves to a place where both women and men immersed in their assigned mission or task are able to forget and forego their differences, their gendered allegiances, and focus on “doing a job” (Hart Personal interview). For women in particular, their recounting of their experiences connects the double standpoint and unifies the double consciousness, so that they truly perform the work of the female servicemember at ease and at one with her own professional identity. This sense of balance can occur as the women perform tasks in training for deployment that require focus and precision. It is no doubt incongruous for civilians, with no experience of military contexts and their routine practices and cultural suppositions, to discover that women do achieve that balance when handling munitions or weaponry.

“I did PGM, Precision Guided Munitions. We’re in charge, I was, we maintain all the bombs and missiles, the ammunition,” Brandy Lockhart explains.

I ask her if she found her job, which had been a guaranteed position in Munitions Systems, of which she knew nothing going in, scary.

“I guess I wouldn’t say scary’ would be a word,” she says, seeming surprised at my question and recognizing, perhaps, the civilian ignorance behind it. “If you understood how (munitions) worked, it’s not like you’d walk up to a bomb and they’d diffuse on you, (or blow), there’s a safeguarding, there’s a system in place, and there’s a reason for that. I thought it was fun. I liked it. There would be times I’d say, yeah, scary, but that was when we were out on a job, and someone was being unsafe, but usually for that moment, you’re like, ‘What are you doing? Stop!’” But at that moment it’s almost like if you see your kid, you think they’re going to run out in front of a car, that heart leap and you stop them, so I would say, yes, scary at times, but it just depends on the situation” (Personal interview).

I am imagining the dedicated student in front of me, known for her composure, creativity, and wit in Public Rhetorics and Writing class, working her way through college at Baptist Medical Center, “owning,” as she frames it, weaponry to be deployed in Iraq. I ask her about the ratio of women to men in this position.

“Yes,” Brandy says, “this was an unusual job for a woman.” (Personal interview)

Tammy Duckworth was taught to use this weaponry as Battle Captain and Assistant Operations Officer, working with the combat missions of a 500-soldier aviation taskforce in Iraq. “I actually shoot,” she explains. “I enjoy target practice. I find it really zen. You focus on nothing but the target. You have to control your breathing. It’s all part of my years in the military, where I was taught to become a marksmen, but also to respect my weapon” (Nelson).

The “zen” that Duckworth identifies is most pronounced in accounts of active duty against insurgents in Iraq: “I drove and shot,” Tabitha Nichols states. “I felt trusted. I loved

what I was doing. I was friends with my guys” (Personal interview). Her story and that of Brandy Lockhart, Special Ops, illustrate the ways that issues such as gender can indeed become inconsequential when the team for which they have trained is called to arms.

Tabitha

“I wanted to go out with a QRF team, the Quick Reaction Force Team, that was all guys, but I was friends with them, with a couple of them. I was like, ‘Hey, I want to go out with you guys one day.’” The speaker is Tabitha Nichols, daughter of a Marine and veteran of Iraq, who joined the Army eagerly as a junior in high school: “I was like, I just wanted to be a badass, I just joined for fun. ‘Cool!’ ‘Let me do it!’ ‘I can do that!’” She is a storyteller with the “Telling Project” and “She Went to War,” theatrical performances that travel the country and invite the audience to hear, with “brutal honesty,” according to the *Twin Cities Art Reader*, the experience of war in Iraq.

“At that point my unit was garbage,” she recalls. “I didn’t want to go out with them. I was like, ‘I’ll go with another unit, whatever.’ You can be flexible like that because we’re all in the same camp, and there’s so many mixed up on the camp, you could say, ‘Hey, I’m going to work with them today,’ and well, you can do whatever you want to, basically.”

Tabitha still contends with the injuries she sustained in her deployment. She has sent me a sheaf of poetry she writes as consolation, recollection, recovery, and, for us, illustration, such as her verse entitled “10 year anniversary,” reproduced in full here :

It was about ten years ago when a teenage girl flew

X amount of miles to a land she never knew

Armed with pride, fear and much confidence
To complete a mission she'd soon want to forget
The sun was blazing that day. Panic appeared on the faces of brothers
As they begin to run away. There's a thud, followed by a boom
She looks but can't find Top. Sand begins to fly
Get in, she hears. But there's no time
Another boom, this one louder. What is happening
I'm dying
She thought
Nineteen years sure go by fast, not knowing much about life
Except wanting it to last
Somehow, it did
It was about ten years ago when my life changed forever
I learned what life was and what it was not
At the time, neither seemed better
When I returned from my mission I scared friends and family away
Their stinging voices were redundant
You're different, they would say
My anger was in abundance. I looked for a friend.
At the bottom of every bottle I could find
Nothing! ... Nothing was strong enough
To remove the things I'd seen and done from my mind

Each day is a struggle. Each moment of it is a battle
 Each night is worse when you wake up screaming
 at your spouse to "get down"
 And sometimes get physical. You're lucky they're still around
 The pain hasn't eased. The guilt hasn't gone.
 It's exhausting being on constant alert
 Even at home I just take it day by day
 And night by night
 Step by step
 Living to survive

We meet on one of those close July mornings in Pensacola, Florida when nothing moves. The palms and Spanish moss seem painted on a white matte screen: a university campus in still life. What strikes me first as Tabitha and her small daughter approach on the sandy walk – before her beauty, her stately height – is her composure and eyes from which, it's clear, little escapes, that lend her smile its wariness. I know something of the pain she bears: we have been members of the "Standing Down" veterans' reading group devised by Christopher "Scott" Satterwhite on the campus of the University of West Florida. Moving beyond her trauma in Iraq is her mission now: "Living to survive." I know she expresses her facts and feelings in her art – performance and poetry. And we do not speak of this. Instead we explore her experiences and observations, from the teenage desire to be "badass," to driving out to the ruins of Babylon, a "sacred city," whose beauty she finds stunning, to relaxing, or trying to, in camp with "the guys," and the sounds she hears at night, surrounded by teenagers fighting insurgencies miles away from home.

She refers to the connections among them all as a “brotherhood,” and in the context of this study I might call her on that, trying to be the astute interviewer, living up to some investigational ideal: why the masculine collective? what does the term “brotherhood” say about a female’s identity in that setting?

But I do not. At one point in her story, as our daughters paint their portraits together in the cool of a shaded room close by, Tabitha looks directly at me and says, “We’re not out there because of a theory. That’s not going to be a place for this and this.” And I get it. Impose nothing. Back off. This story is real. The relationships are real. Do not go after what we choose to call them.

I can tell you this: nothing about Tabitha Nichols is erased or invalidated by a word that represents, in the world she is revisiting, the highest calling of her profession: “brotherhood.” I see for the first time, through Tabitha Nichols’ language, beyond the limitations of ours. Sometimes in this setting the word “brother” defines a reality and relationship beyond its gender assignment.

“My guys, when we go out, ‘Oh god, Nichols is with us, we got to find her a tent,’” she recalls. “‘No, you don’t, I’m fine right here, put my cot right in the bag,’ they want to put up a little curtain, that’s fine too, but I mean, we don’t have to be separated, we drive together, we shoot together, we ride together, you know, friends with ‘my guys.’ It’s like, ‘Oh she’s not prissy, she’s tough, and she works hard,’ and then we all have, it’s a brotherhood, we all have this major respect for one another, whoever, usually the groups that convoy out together, usually it’s same people, you get really close, and well, you gotta be, you’ve got each other’s back. And I tried to create that trust.”

“We don’t have to be separated.” I see that word, “brotherhood,” connecting with the words “respect,” “together,” “close,” “trust.” I see that word as a tribute to her “guys.”

Tabitha Nichols served for eight years, eight months in the Army National Guard, from 2003 to 2011. She deployed at age 19 to Forward Operating Base, Camp Kaslu, Iskandariya, Iraq, 20 miles south of Baghdad, which she had not expected:

I was surprised at being deployed. I thought I was going to be going to floods and tornadoes, that’s what I thought. I thought. Kinda young and dumb, I thought only like Marines, regular Army went overseas. I really didn’t know we could get called. Until everybody started leaving.

Tabitha was first assigned as office assistant to the camp commander, who explained that his missions and consequent paperwork would be delayed because he needed a driver. Tabitha jumped at the chance: “Can I go? Can I drive?” she asked – whereupon, she reports, “He like choked on his tobacco, he chewed tobacco. Ew! And he was like, ‘Really? If you think you’re tough enough.’” Tabitha passed her training test, “flying colors,” and drove for the camp commander even after she sustained her injury. It’s worthwhile to repeat here, in her dedicated article, her description of the landscape she discovered in her tour of duty as commander’s driver:

Oh, seeing the country! That’s why I volunteered to be his driver, like I want to go out, I don’t want to be stuck at this camp for a year, and only see sand 100 miles in every direction, I want to go out and see what it looks like.

Iraq is so gorgeous. People look at me like I’m crazy when I tell them that, like, if it wasn’t a war, I might go on vacation, it’s so pretty. The beautiful part – I remember

palm trees, and these beautiful lakes and huge palaces. Parts of it were like an oasis, just gorgeous.

Tabitha earned her *ethos* in that position by working hard to create trust with her comrades, almost entirely male. Her answer to how a woman lives with this disparity in numbers is clear and immediate: “You achieved. There’s nothing they do that we couldn’t do.” Initially, she confronted resistance and skepticism from the troops in her convoy:

Before our first mission, I would be first there, loading up the truck, getting it ready, have the map out, call them over. ‘Look, guys – hm. Who does she think she is, running the show, what is she doing. She seems pretty serious about this.’ I’m like, ‘Look, we need to get done what we need to get done. My job is to protect the commander, because the commander is like the president.’

Tabitha made it a point to show up before everyone else, spread out the maps, chart the course, and perhaps most efficacious of all, garner her arguments for the route she chose. The instance that established her chops and cemented her authority, once and for all, was her insistence, over multiple objections (“we argued for about 20 minutes”), that her convoy avoid a particular route because “we had just had some guys get blown up on that route, and knew that route was dangerous, but it was the quickest, otherwise it’s an hour out of the way. I said, ‘I don’t care. We’re going to drive an hour out of the way.’” And indeed, she explains, “something bad happened on that road.”

Identified popularly as “badass,” Tabitha adapted easily, as noted previously, to the life with the troops in the field. At no time did she experience feelings of incompetence and inequality, nor did she feel the need to protect or shield herself from “the guys.” She notes that her female friends, alone in a company of males, needed accommodation, and seems both

pragmatic and proud that she herself did not. As a woman her physical needs were unique in such a company: her period was, she recalls, “miserable”:

It really is. Oh my gosh, it’s already burning hot, you can’t even imagine the heat, and then that thing comes and you’re like, ‘Really?’ and you’re just, you have product, and you’re like on care packages, that’s really cool because the stuff they have may not be the best.

Additionally, the Army supplied women with an apparatus that enabled women to relieve themselves more easily in the field, “make us like guys,” known as wenises”:

You know what that is? It’s a plastic cup that’s shaped like a U, it has a thing coming out, it’s all plastic, and so you unzip your pants, you stick it in, and you pee like you’re a guy. You don’t have to pull your pants down. If you stop on the side of the road or whatever, the guys can just go pee over there, but you gotta pull all this down. With a wenis you don’t have to do that. It’s woman’s penis, a wenis, so weird.

How do they accommodate women out there? Wenises. (Personal interview)

Tabitha draws these descriptions with a light touch because she carries, within the shell of her composure, extremely painful memories that she is willing to share. Her account begins with a deceptively peaceful account of relaxing at camp with “the guys,” a scene that could be replayed on any humid September night, on any street where friends’ low voices blend with frog choruses, in her hometown of Pensacola:

There was a couple guys that had guitars, and they would play for us. And we would just sit and talk, and try to get the day off our heads, we had stuff, they ship it over, alcohol, they give us near beer, terrible stuff, a waste of production. So that’s how we would relax, have a drink, or do whatever.

And then her narrative turns chilling.

Didn't work. It's too much. You're seeing too much. It helps ease it just for that night, but it was too much. ...

After the hardest thing to deal with, at night, late at night, completely dark, we had no lights at night because we were in a red zone. We had flashlights. You can hear sobbing from some corner of the camp. It's tough. It's the only way you can deal with it. A lot of people let it out at night. But dealing with it, was the biggest thing. It wasn't the heat, it wasn't the dust storms. It was really just seeing blood and guts and bodies.

The thing to come to terms with.

Since her discharge from service, Tabitha has determined to speak and write about her experiences as a very young woman contending with both military culture and deployment in the Iraqi war. As a result, she delivers her script for the "Telling Project," as well as her commentary in the veterans' study group, "Standing Down,"⁶ with uncompromising honesty. She knows certain statements or truths are often impossible for veterans, and women veterans in particular, to verbalize, and even more impossible for civilians to hear. Yet she perseveres because she has committed herself, despite the fact that "the pain hasn't eased," to breaking our communal silence about the experience and effects of our war on the women and men who carry it. And there is no contradiction, with Tabitha, when out of her membership in a corps she calls the "brotherhood," she articulates her decision to speak publicly and persistently of this trauma in feminist terms: "I'll be that woman," she says – and she brings her "badass" identity to this story, as well, determined that we face what she, what they confront, "day by

⁶ "Standing Down" is a veterans' study group supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and organized by Navy veteran Christopher Satterwhite at the University of West Florida.

day, night by night, step by step”: “You had to become this heartless machine. After a while everybody turned into a heartless machine. You can’t have any emotions. You laugh at odd things that would probably get you locked up over here” (Personal interview).⁷

Brandy

“Imagine going to sleep while being attacked by terrorists, the sounds of our anti-mortar rounds going off all night for months,” Brandy Lockhart writes to me at the turn of the new year, 2016. She includes a link to the Counter Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar System (CRAM) so I can get some idea of these percussions. Newly arrived at my dissertation topic, still circling a theme that I, a civilian, had no clue how and where to approach for a landing, I had asked her what she considers the most precarious or vulnerable part of a veteran’s life today. I trusted my students, who had inspired this project in the first place, to guide my inquiry, and Brandy began by describing the difficulty of “fitting into the ‘real’ world” after deployment in a war zone where, as Brandy explains, “our world revolved around who we are fighting and who we are about to be fighting,” and the attacks and fear of attacks are unremitting.

Somebody had gotten hit. A mortar round had come through the top of their area and hit him, gone through the top and bottom bunk. I don’t remember how the story went, but I will say one time I was sitting at – like, we had one little desk (and) whenever we shot off rounds we had to account for them, so I’d do them every night, or whenever I had time to do them. So I remember sitting there and I heard something go “Fffffff,” like a weird

⁷ Works-Dennis seconds this experience – but extends the need for humor in their communications home: “There is some unwritten rule about being upbeat and full of optimism. All the near misses and firefights and mortar attacks are somehow funny. Do we write with humor to save ourselves, or those back home? We cope.” (16)

noise. I looked over and a bullet had come through the roof and hit into the concrete a foot away from me, and thankfully it wasn't me.

To Brandy, the fact that only 1% of the American population has served in the military since 2001 is “depressing” because of the distance, both geographical and psychical, between these worlds:

How can the mass population understand, relate, or accommodate the uniqueness that the average Veteran is these days? My husband (a veteran also) and I have lived by three core values for years: Integrity first, Service before self, and excellence in ALL we do. So is the biggest issue that *veterans* don't know how to adapt? I wouldn't say that is the issue. Or is it that America is such an entitled country that it turns a blind/selfish eye to the daughters and sons who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for freedom.

(Emphasis and explanation added, Email Communication)

It is hard to catch her at a free moment, this woman who has dedicated her life to service, as she builds her civilian life, her military years behind her. She is raising two small daughters, working as a medical scribe in the Emergency Department at Baptist Health Care; earning honor grades as an undergraduate at the University of West Florida; preparing for graduate study in epidemiology.

Brandy retired from active duty after 19 years: her sense of mission had strengthened after she assisted in community building and, in particular, served as stalwart support to a woman who lost her home to fire. This dedication to service, the impetus to her enlistment after 9/11, was born and bred in Brandy as a teenager when she needed to act as caretaker to her family after her mother and grandmother were physically incapacitated. She decided to leave the

military and pursue degrees in biomedicine not only as a professional decision, but also as a personal statement about a system where standards were lessening, in her view.⁸

There were a lot of political games or just unfairness. You had your core values, integrity first, service before self, excellence in all you do. I caught so many high-ranking people lying. How can you be married and I'm watching you sleep with other women on TDY (note: military slang for "Temporary Divorce for a Year"). It just upset me. I felt like there's supposed to be camaraderie, we're supposed to help each other, and be with each other. It's like a support system, but you guys are taking this as a free for all to go party and do as you please.

Brandy's scars, unlike those that Tabitha bears, are entirely related to disillusionment. In this regard I think of the challenges Brandy overcame in earning her position in Special Ops in Iraq. Her experience, contrasted with Tabitha's achieved and strategic camaraderie, was more problematic: her many successes were hard won and with metistic patience, hard fought. She endured both long-term harassment and the verbal slap delivered by her rival for prize she won:

⁸ Emily Satterfield decries the same conflict between *ethos* and actuality in the Marines: "We are taught from the day we hit the yellow footprints that we are a team and that we are always supposed to act in a professional manner as to never disgrace the Marine Corps or ourselves. The military may be mainly males but our collective ethos aren't just about the male warrior trope of being a hard ass but one of working hard and becoming the best we can. Now there are always the bad eggs and those that don't fall in line and they either get weeded out and kicked out or they manage to slip through the cracks due to bad leadership and therefore making up a small portion of the Marine Corps.

"I was very receptive to this ethos when I got in because it made things sound like there wouldn't be issues with how things would be handled. Later after getting to my unit I found out that just because we are taught these things doesn't mean that everyone uses them. I was unfortunate enough to have an incompetent command that was more concerned about themselves than improving the command and lifting their Marines up and making them better. So even though my experience was a bad one we are taught that that isn't the way it's supposed to be" (Written interview).

I had won (stripes) for my flight, or section, ... and I never forget this. This guy looked over at me and he said, 'The only reason why you won is because you have a vagina.' Verbatim that's what he said to me.

It was a guy who was against me for this. We were up against each other, and I looked back at him and I said, 'No, the reason why I got it is because I actually do what's outlined in our guideline.' They tell you, you've got your regular job and they want you to do self-improvement, then they want you to do classes, and they want you to volunteer. And I had done all those things. And I said, 'No, I did what I was asked and told to do and that's what it was.'

I still knew I could do the best I could do. No matter where they put me, I just decided, all right, well, that's fine, if you're going to try to break me down, essentially. If I knew ... a supervisor didn't like me, that was fine by me, that's great, I'll just go read about this stuff, and learn more, and then I'll know. And essentially that's what I did.

It was, perhaps, Brandy's decision to focus and learn the instruction manual and policy books better than any man who might challenge her authority – expertise that led to her untiring efforts to achieve and her respect for those whose work was as unsparing, such as her Special Ops team in Iraq:

When I was in I worked for special operations. Basically our world revolved around who we are fighting and who we are about to be fighting. 'Silent operator' is what we were meaning, before the mass population is even aware we are there or have been and left (there being a hot spot/war zone). We trained to leave at a moment's notice.. walk away from our families, friends, daily lives etc.

Furthermore, as a supervisor you are a mentor 24/7, respected just from the stripes on your sleeve and not to mention constantly hearing about friends being killed.

Don't forget living in fear of death yourself while deployed.

I have heard and read Brandy's point of view in an hour's interview that yielded 25 pages of transcript, as well as three years of written communications on topics as various as her work for my Public Writing class; an interview project with my spouse, head of a middle school; Trump cartoons; Kardashians; her daughters' Christian school. The two areas in which her story becomes seamless encompass what seem to be her two most powerful experiences that bookend her active duty: i.e., the decision, in a moment of patriotic clarity post-9/11, to enlist; and her deployment to Iraq. In neither narrative does Brandy articulate doubt about the intensity of her commitment and immersion in her team, beyond gender as a restraint or suppressive trait: "I never felt at a disadvantage. Nope." The arc of her endurance stretches from her desire to join to her decision to leave, expanding with sophistic sensitivity, the situational intelligence of *metis* (Hawhee *Bodily Arts* 12 passim), to each circumstance she encounters, such as her assignment in munitions, and each challenge she stares down: the superiors who harass her; the peers who cannot tolerate her win; the position of expert in munitions she achieves. Here is Brandy's harrowing account of an instinctive but skilled move she made to save her crew, "the bomb department," surrounded by munitions that were packed in trailers ready to be deployed, from an incoming mortar attack:

One time we were getting attacked and they called out to everybody. (As Special Ops) we were there but we weren't there, so they didn't call and tell us, they didn't let us know.

All their people were already in the bunker.

And I thought, ‘This is weird.’ I remember we were working and there was a flare. We were sitting there and I was like, I asked the guy next to me, ‘That’s really weird, because doesn’t normally their shift come out at this time?’ and he was like, ‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he wasn’t thinking about it. I’m like, ‘I just think it’s kind of odd that they’re not out here yet because they always come out here at the specific time,’ it was one of those things, I’m like, ‘Something ‘s not right.’ And so I told him, ‘We’re going to stop and we’re going to go figure out what’s going on.’

As Brandy recalls earlier, her Special Ops in munitions was “there and not there,” and so they were not warned of an incoming attack. She recalls the flash decision to shield her crew:

I called them on the radio, they didn’t answer, I go, ‘All right, something weird’s happening.’ So we stopped our operation and we left and then I heard this big KATHONK! as we were leaving. It shook the whole area ... there was a bunker there, I was like, ‘Get in this bunker!’ We got in the bunker, and what had happened was, apparently they had intel we were going to get attacked. They didn’t think about us, they didn’t realize we were out there, the shift changes, and they didn’t realize we were there.

The thunk I heard was a mortar round. They had shot at us, but it didn’t detonate, it didn’t hit any of our bombs. They were all built and ready to go. We had trailers ready to go. The coordinates were given to them by somebody that was putting in lightening protection systems for us. Thankfully it had literally fallen into the holes they had dug for their own coordinates and had I not, thinking back on that (note: she pauses) ... we would have been gone. We were literally, we were 25 – 30 feet away, it was very ... that was a very crazy thing. (Personal interview)

Her statement about these matters as she reached the final days of her service both define it and signal her way forward. She offers this message at the end of her story about her superior officer who complains that despite the fact that he outranks her, she enjoys more respect from the troops.

“Well,” she says, “I’ll share with you this quote that I heard and it’s stuck with me. ‘People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.’”

This capacity to care illuminates not only the personal stories that Brandy shares with this study, but also the ways that her stories allow us to see in a new light the depth and extent of women’s commitment to their military roles, indeed, to the profession and its purposes themselves.

“The Refusal of Patriarchal Protection”

The use of *metis* as a means of applying commitment and confidence to a precarious situation, like a camp concussed by mortar attacks in Iraq, is ultimately considered a move that compromises male dominance in military culture. A brief medley of comments in these two stories shows in bold relief the ways the dual standpoints that Athenas occupy – as women; as warriors – can finally resolve: “I shot and drove” “I got there early and spread out the maps” ... “You achieve” ... “If you care.”

The thing about *metis* is its inexorability. Those endowed with this kind of courage and patient ambition never give up. In its original guise, the titan Metis who bears Athena in stealth and so fashions the first female armed for battle, this persistence transcends the possibility of death, which Metis refuses to recognize and concede. Indeed, a version of her story in classics scholar Vernant’s *The Universe, the Gods, and Men* claims that Zeus becomes fully possessed by

Metis (*Meioesis*) and her resourcefulness as he swallows her (28). The presence of *metis* that can be traced in the stories of Tabitha and Brandy, that tensile strength with which they think through the tough and seemingly impossible problems assailing them, informs their identity and mission as American Athenas, born as well from acts and skills of war. It can indeed be argued that Metis deploys her warrior daughter with aegis, shield, and sword – Medusa engraved on her breastplate – far beyond dependence of her father, as in fact the physical form of the refusal of “paternalistic provisions of protection” (*Notes* 140).

Metis is dangerous (Deacy 30). Her actions are strategic: by erasing the gendered identity of the warrior, they take away the military role of endowing masculinity on service members. Men, as noted by Marcus, have seen in the military a mirror of their own masculinity: an illusion of their own totality (219). This radical shift initiated by the arrival of women inverts the *nomos*; roils tradition and discourse; turns the *habitus* upside down; destroys, with patience and slow time on its side, enstructuration. Her daughter Athenas contend still, each in her turn and story, with colleagues and cultures, civilian and military, that too often doubt these women can succeed as warriors and get the job done.

Even as they do.

Shaping the Female Military Identity

Pt. 3: *Aretē*: 'We As Black Women'

You may write me down in history
 With your bitter, twisted lies,
 You may trod me in the very dirt
 But still, like dust, I'll rise.
 - Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise"

Proving Ground: Lila Holley

I had a kid at 15, I grew up in the hood, I was the oldest with a lot of responsibility placed on me at very young in my life. And so, for me, that was life. You pick up, you fight, and you keep going.



Figure 31 Lila Holley from:
 "Lila Holley: My Story."
www.lilaholley.com. Accessed
 25 October 2018. Reprinted
 with permission from Lila
 Holley.

We as black women -- you walk in a room with people already going to look at you with a perceived notion. Oh, we've got to walk on eggshells and it might be that time of the month and here comes the angry black woman. Then the statistics ... society is going to place labels on us... They placed labels on me when I had a kid at 15. I read the statistics that my life was literally over at that point and time, and if I listened to that, and I received that as my destiny, I would have laid down and died right there. I would have been no good for my son or anybody.

But, you take back your power when you define what that label means. ... Like for me, when I was a teenage mother, I knew what the statistics said and what that meant for me, but me, I was like, 'Shoot, yeah, I had a kid at 15, but you know what that means to me? That means I'm going to just work a little bit harder to make sure I graduate on time with my class.' I had my son in August. I was back in school in September. I graduated on time with my class in 1988. You know what I mean?

So, you have to take back your own ownership. You identify what those labels mean. You can receive them or you cannot receive them. It's just to me, being a black woman in America, hardship comes with the territory. ... A lot of the times, for black women, hardship is par for the course. It is what it is. You put your big girl drawers on and you fight and you keep on pushing. You know?

- Lila Holley, Personal interview

Introduction: 'I Have to Come In Proving Myself'

In Greek culture, whose contests and stories of valorous heroes have shaped our own discourse of battle, Aretē is the goddess who extracts a cost from warriors striving to win her favor. She will “bring many labours,” Aristotle writes (“Fragment”), a depiction the Roman world later develops in its image of a woman “worn out with toil” who nonetheless values nothing “not won by hard work” (Philostratus). Her appearance represents a life replete with struggle: her garments are not the sophisticated draping of Olympus goddesses, but rough, “the plainest of raiment” like a uniform designed only for practical purposes and fits so poorly that “no vanities” are possible. She is, they say, a “discipline” in which “you steel your will resolutely,” and “overcome lions ... hydras ... monsters ... all other labours” (Philostratus). Romans call the discipline of *aretē*, “Virtus”(Carr), and it is this practical virtue of “fighting the good fight” against the kinds of “monsters” that serve as symbols for biases and constraints, as our own vernacular would have it, that characterizes the discourse of Black women in U.S. Military culture.

“I don’t take prior successes for granted,” Lila Holley, author of the *Camouflaged Sisters* anthologies, tells me. “I go in at ground zero with a clean slate knowing that I have to come in proving myself, so I can’t come in taking anything for granted. That comes with sacrificing, it comes with long hours, that these are the standards you placed on yourself, that (the U.S. Military) is the work you dedicated yourself to, this is the extra stuff I have to do to just be on the same playing field with my peers, my counterparts” (Personal interview).

This exploration of stories these women tell will present the ways they narrate their creation and performance of a female military identity despite the challenges they recognize and strive to overcome. In the first topic, "I Was a Girl. I Was Black," I examine how these women

employ strategic patience (*metis*) to confront and overcome the discrimination they encounter and experience as a “double minority.” All women express their refusal to allow discrimination to mark them as “outsider” within a system they have considered their terrain to enter and to change since the moment they decided to enlist, a standpoint of commitment to self and community I discuss in the second topic, "The Insiders: 'Take Back Your Power.'" I close, in "Implications: 'It Is Important That I Speak,'" which offers potential effects of this focus on the narratives of this cohort, both for the women themselves and the military culture they increasingly sustain.

The stories as presented enact the qualitative strategies of breaking through conventional thinking and listening to what the speakers say and do, as noted in Corbin and Strauss in "Chapter Three, Method" (88). Often the stories, written sequentially, create a multivocal narrative in itself, and I present those statements without interruption by researcher commentary. Through Grounded Theory we study how the data reflects “positions, conditions, and contingencies” (Charmaz “Constructivist” 169) that lead to the creation and performance of a specific female military identity. It was through listening to the narratives of these women, and reading the few published accounts of Black women’s experience in U.S. Military culture, that I realized the truth in their depiction as “our most invisible heroes” by the National Veterans Foundation. I realized, too, how closely their discourse aligns with the classical value of *aretē*, or valor. And it may be, I propose, that this cohort of “camouflaged sisters” creates and performs a military identity that most clearly possesses that notable and noble quality.

“I Was a Girl. I Was Black”

In her 2013 investigative report “Sexual Assault in the Military” Jennifer Koons reports that women are deemed “less worthy” in this culture than their male cohort, and “as a distinct, less worthy minority,” are therefore more vulnerable. This assessment is reinforced by Elizabeth M. Trobaugh in January 2018: “Women still face stereotypes about who they are and how capably they perform their duties” (1). A powerful discourse of discrimination establishes a firm context for discussion of bias toward Black women in military culture and their identity as a “double minority,” i.e., female and Black. They contend with this bias despite their status as the fastest-growing cohort in that profession, currently over 30 percent of all women servicemembers, and nearly equal in number to White women in the Army (Reynolds 8).

In terms of women servicemembers overall, Trobaugh distinguishes between “hostile” and “benign” sexism, a binary wherein the word “hostile” denotes overt bias, and “benign” refers to overly-solicitous attitudes. The same terminology may be applied to racist attitudes, as illustrated on the Council on Foreign Relations website, “Demographics of the U.S. Military,” wherein the Black servicewoman is positioned, her face blurred, behind her White comrade whose face is clearly defined. Relegation to a background figure when one’s demographic group is swelling the ranks of a profession, I suggest, is not a benign form of racism for Black servicewomen. Rather, it serves as an ideograph of microaggression beneath a seemingly unconscious discrimination. As the African-American photographer, Carrie Mae Weems, instructs in a recent *New York Times* profile, “A camera has become more than just a journalistic or artistic tool, but a kind of weapon itself – one that reveals the truth” (O’Grady 140). Although

included in this photograph, the indistinct portrait of the Black servicewoman reinforces her “camouflaged sisters” image as a marked beleaguered group.⁹

Certainly, a story within the story of this community is their *ethos* as the most vulnerable minority group (African American Policy Forum). In *Marching As to War: Personal Narratives of African American Women’s Experiences in the Gulf Wars*, a GTM analysis by Desnoyers-Colas, these women share their experiences, often for the first time, and express a concern about the “physical safety” of women with men, whom women counted among “potential threats” (85). This precarious position may account in part for the repeated claim throughout myriad sources that Black servicewomen “suffer disproportionately” (African American Policy Forum) as they face the double discrimination of which they are acutely aware.

But their accounts contain the countervailing claim that the military is, of all American institutions, the most accommodating to Black women. Just as clearly revealed as the struggles they endure is their creative use of metistic strategy: patience, resourcefulness, and the smart move at the right time. Black servicewomen meet their hardships with this metistic code of resilience and tenacity, not only to survive and endure, but also to achieve, an ambition here defined by LaRayne Hurd, as she describes the reasons she listens to a persistent recruiter, a Black woman whom Hurd identifies as the professional she aspires to be, and signs up:

The Army was a way out. I grew up poor, black, and in the South. The decision to enlist for me was a decision to take the lifeline in front of me and do something, anything with my life that would give it meaning. ... I wanted to be a leader. (Written interview)

Nor was Hurd’s ambition misdirected. From the mid-1990’s, this profession is portrayed as “colorblind” and “gender blind,” a place where Black women perceive more opportunity than

⁹ It should be noted that all women servicemembers pictured in Trobaugh’s article about bias are White.

offered them in civilian professions such as business, education, law, media, technology (Donegan). Shoshana Johnson, who records her harrowing 22 days as the first Black female prisoner of war in Iraq in *I'm Still Standing: From Captive U.S. Soldier to Free Citizen*, describes her family's legacy of service and conviction of the military's *ethos* of inclusion:

I had been raised with the understanding that a military career was one in which you could succeed based on your skills and abilities, a career where color, gender, and even nationality have little to do with your success or failure. I had watched my father move up through the ranks and my sister was an officer. Putting on a uniform was the logical thing to do. (10)

Despite the stereotyping that still exists in military quarters, Black women in fact have filled most positions of leadership among female non-commissioned officers (NCOs) which “reflects their longer stay in the service” (National Association of Black Military Women).

Indeed, competing themes of accommodation and discrimination typify and complicate the discourse of Black servicewomen. The identity created and performed herein accords remarkably with depictions of *aretē* as a “discipline,” in which the warrior must “steel (her) will resolutely” (Philostratus) and, in fact, develop the strategic patience that is the core practice of *metis*. Not only do Black women in military service face and deal with challenges endemic to their chosen profession, but simultaneously strive against a general culture of male dominance and racial biases that mark them as physically “different” and therefore, often, a target.

Metistic Opportunity

Nancy Bullock-Prevot, the first Black servicewoman I interviewed, introduces the concept of double discrimination into this study: in response to the question, “What would you

like us to ask you?” she responds, “What is it like to be a “double minority” in the military?” As the interviews progressed, it was clear to me that by their physical presence alone Black servicewomen serve as a focal point for rhetorically pre-scripted ideas about skin color or gender. They note that a profile has preceded their arrival, marking them as “strong Black woman” (Desnoyers-Colas *Marching* 66), or “angry Black woman” (Holley Personal interview) and “angry, hostile, unapproachable” (Hurd Personal interview). These epithets, long familiar to them, serve to shape their colleagues’ approaches to them. La Rayne Hurd illustrates the difficulty of discerning the origin of the set of prejudices she learns to negotiate, all the while performing her military occupational specialty (MOS) as Combat Photographer in the battleground of Iraq:

I know for me, more than anything (the problem) was my gender. It was because I was a woman. If I had been a male then they would have focused on my race. But I do think that while deployed my gender was at the forefront. A handful of instances in the states I know it was my race because I would be in a group of women. (Personal interview)

A parabolic version of this story is offered by Desnoyers-Colas as she relates the advice she received as a young recruit from her first squadron commander, an African American women:

She told me that I always need to remember I was going to be a raisin in the general’s tapioca pudding, and you know the position of the tapioca being primarily White, and then you put the raisins in. She said that you always have to remember that you’re always going to be visible, and you’re always going to be looked at. If the general doesn’t like raisins in his tapioca pudding, he’s going to pick them out and get rid of them. And so you always had to make sure that you were going to be palatable for the general to keep you around. So I always was very, very aware. (Personal interview)

The need to be “very, very aware” is frequently compounded by a position as the only servicemember of African descent and the only female in their squad: each woman interviewed describes herself as “someone that was going to be visible” (Desnoyers-Colas Personal interview). In a culture whose customs and values (*nomos*) are based on the principle of the team whose members “look out for one another” (Allen 3), each Black servicewoman depicts herself as solitary, a notable feature of the identity she enacts in the story of her military experience.

Indeed, “the solitary” may be considered an integral part of this sophistic analysis,¹⁰ the sense of being marked as “different” and apart from the cultural norm in their specific and valued community, be it the Air Force, Army, National Guard, and Navy (to name only those in this section). “I was a girl. I was Black,” LaRayne reports. “When I went out on assignments (as Combat Photographer), there were a lot of times where I was the only female and I was the only Black person” (Personal interview). In similar straits Lila Holley constructs a picture of isolation and describes the military as “a lonely place” for her:

Often times I was the only Black officer on the staff and the only Black female in the office. I often joked about being the only ‘little chocolate face’ in the room during a briefing to the general or in a staff meeting. While I was able to joke about it, the lack of Black female representation had an impact on me. (*Camouflaged* 11)

Awareness of their solitary status does not compromise the strength of their commitment to this chosen profession, however, and their reflections are clear on that point. For example, Elizabeth Bullock-Prevot’s distinguishing characteristic, both in the course of her service and her work

¹⁰ Helen Benedict, Professor of Journalism at Columbia University, investigates this solitary status of most women servicemembers in her collection of personal narratives, *The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq*. Benedict develops this theme in her play, “The Lonely Soldier Monologues.” Her work is the inspiration for the film, “The Invisible War,” a connection she discusses in her article, “A Call for Change: Helen Benedict on the Lonely Soldier and the Invisible War.”

thereafter, is advocacy for women veterans “who have no voice” (Written interview). Her response to discrimination, e.g., “I was always very vocal” (Written interview), typifies the metistic ways these women confront an obstacle they consider untenable and discursively determine to overcome: “A lot of the times, black women, hardship is par for the course,” Lila Holley reminds us. “It is what it is. You put your big girl drawers on and you fight and you keep on pushing. You know?” (Personal interview)

Her “camouflaged sister” Tabitha Nichols never signals ethnicity or gender as difficulties to surmount, and yet she puts in play a strategy that is unerringly metistic, replete with her resourceful spirit and perfect timing, when she reports to the camp commander for duty as his secretary. In this situation, when the commander mentions his lack of a driver, Tabitha creates her opportunity and then fulfills it:

‘Can I go, Can I drive?’ He like choked on his tobacco, ... and he was like, ‘Really? Well, you have to get trained.’ Sent me out in like five minutes, ‘All right, let’s do it, it makes sense, you’re gonna be doing all the paperwork, why not be with me, if you think you’re tough enough.’ I think he put me through a little test, flying colors, I can drive combat maneuvers, he let me do it. I did it after I got hurt, too. I was the only female too.
(Personal interview)

Tabitha thus becomes indispensable to him as his trusted driver; she also, at the age of 19, moves into a position of power that gives her both stature, as the commander’s driver, and scope: no longer relegated to an office chair and computer, writing up the field reports, she charts the passages that informs them and, as she explains, “I shot. I drove,” which sustains her even after a grievous injury (Personal interview).

This method of metistic responding to opportunities as they arise also informs the tenure of Nancy Bullock-Prevot, whose very career, as cryptologist in the Navy, develops as she realizes the opportunity that exists for her:

When I first joined the military, I did not have any expectations. It took a couple of years for it to truly sink in, that being in the military could be a career and that there were women doing great things for and in the military... (How I responded) depended on the situation, I had to adapt my attitude, demeanor to each situation, but [throughout my career] I was always firm and fair. (Written interview)

Her Army colleague Lila Holley informs us that she, too, never loses awareness of her singular identity as a Black servicewoman, along with a certain wariness, as she assesses her status in her work with military intelligence:

I made high ranks. I always explain to people that my process walking into say, the meeting room, if you will, I tell them, first, the first thing they see is a woman, right, so they have to get past that layer. The second thing they see is a Black woman, and they have to get past that layer. And then they will eventually see, 'Oh, that's Chief. Chief has entered the room.' You know what I mean? There's a couple of layers I have to go through to get to the table, but there's definitely a seat at the table. So I took that consciousness with me as I progressed in the ranks, understanding that and always having that in the back of my mind. (Personal interview)

Their status as "double minority" thus empowers them to see and understand, and always keep in the back of the mind, the ways they are perceived and positioned according to a pre-printed and imposed label of "different," despite their own refusal to have their experience and future determined by that sobriquet. "I would walk into these male dominated environments and I was

5'4", at the time about a buck 30, and I was a junior enlisted person," reports La Rayne Hurd (Personal interview). They are, like LaRayne, fully aware of the changes they embody and portend. However, the identity that they themselves create and perform as military women, while it may be limned as solitary, is nonetheless composed of equal parts awareness of the customs and *realia* of military culture, and determination to succeed on their own terms, defined by Lila Holley as taking back "your own ownership ... (identifying) what those labels mean ... receive them or not receive them" (Personal interview). A response that enacts the rhetorical strategy *metis*, i.e., "I was very, very aware" (Desnoyers-Colas Personal interview), enables them to confront and endure the stress they experience as essential non-conformists in a culture founded on conformity.

Black Women's Hair / Black Women's Bodies

Personal appearance is the point on which Black women's acceptance into military culture seems most aggressively contested and their integrity disputed: "Military culture uniquely harms Black women in myriad ways," the African American Policy Forum reports. The topic of that particular report is the ban on certain hairstyles, "disproportionately favored by Black women" (African American Policy Forum). Black women's hair is a site of conflict in the larger culture: suspicion and suppression on one side; identity and integrity on the other: "America has always had trouble with black hair," notes Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps in their article, "When Black Hair Is Against the Rules." The policy caused Black women to feel "they were walking targets because the regulations were subject to interpretation" (Mele) after April 2014, when the Army, for one, "enacted policies that explicitly prohibited locs, twists, brands,

and other protective hairstyles common in the African-American community,” which caused “outrage” in the community of Black servicewomen (Kenny).

“Black people around the globe have worn dreadlocks for centuries,” report Byrd and Tharps. “They can be easily and neatly worn under a helmet or in a bun. Two-strand twists, a popular option for black female soldiers that look similar to braids but are much easier to style, especially in the field, are versatile and require little maintenance. AR 670-I does allow women to wear wigs and hair extensions, a suggestion that borders on the ridiculous when considering the time and cost required for upkeep in a salon – let alone in a desert army barracks” (Byrd and Tharps).

Although these regulations were eased in 2017, the attempt to treat all women as if they share the same physical traits, no matter their ethnicity, begins with those discriminatory regulations for hair. Shoshana Johnson, in her chapter “Woman Stuff,” remarks that women’s challenges in military service were all about “simply being a woman” as she elaborates the process of dealing with her hair in preparation for deployment:

I was going to war. It was entirely possible that I might find myself in a place where there wouldn’t be anyone around who could help me with it. There are plenty of people in the world who are ignorant about what it takes to manage black hair. It’s not a matter of running a comb through it or tossing it into a cute little ponytail. I required a plan. I brought a curl relaxer with me, thinking that once we got settled, I could relax it and that would make the management of it easier, but until then, I had to get it braided. (134)

Shoshana Johnson comments wryly: “I didn’t realize I would be wearing those same braids for many weeks” (135), and indeed, the condition of her hair was a primary concern upon her release from a captivity that was particularly inhumane.

At the time of the enlistment of the women in the Athena study, hair restrictions were still in place, requiring them to efface themselves, “relax” their hair with chemical straighteners, as the cost of enlisting to serve their country, their penalty for sacrifice. Army Captain Danielle N. Roach states she “got treatments that used harsh chemicals to keep her hair straight,” and notes that she “went every four to eight weeks for the treatments, which cost up to \$80” (Mele). Desnoyers-Colas notes that “there were things that we couldn’t get away with that our White counterparts could,” and hair was one such *topos* where her “femininity was questioned”:

The texture of my hair .. you know, some of my African American colleagues wore wigs, so they would get the right context and texture of their hair. I chose to be natural until there was a brief period of time where I wore a perm, but I never had my hair long. ...I was very, very conscious of the way I look. (Personal interview)

Indeed, in a move to maintain her own sovereignty over her body and appearance, Naval recruit Nancy Bullock-Prevot cuts her hair before enlisting to conform with this policy. Combat Photographer LaRayne Hurd, in writing to our Public Rhetoric class at the University of West Florida, implores her peers to remember the sacrifices of those who served (ENC 1102 Class Wiki). Civilians, and perhaps the mainstream media itself, may not realize that Black women have been asked to relinquish their claim to a dimension of their personal identity: their natural hair.

“For me,” Army Staff Sgt. Chaunsey Logan notes, “it wasn’t just about hair. I am completely against blind conformity, and I’m rebellious by nature” (Mele).

Desnoyers-Colas offers a clear visual, rhetorical in its aim, intent, and targeting, that precisely signals the military’s female ideal, an image at variance with Black women’s bodies as well. As the only scholar who analyzes the current stories of Black women servicemembers in

the context of military history, she is acutely aware of the image of women that pervades this culture. In her view, the culture's acceptance and affirmation of military women are patterned after "the White girl, the consummate GI Jane, petite female military fighting machine, a cute but tough-as-nails commando, ultimate Army of One servicewoman" (*Marching* 6). The problem of literally fitting women into military life is clearly embodied by Black women in the standard-issue uniforms supplied to them.

Nancy Bullock-Prevot imparts the rhetorical message impressed on the body when the uniform does not work on the actual figure. In her view the uniform takes away one's physical identity as a woman: "The uniforms were ill-fitting, one size fits all, and I lost my sense of being a female," she relates. "It was like they took away the fact you were a female, but would at the same time remind you that you were a woman and you would never be equal with a man" (Written interview). In the constant discomfort it causes, the uniform serves as a reminder that the women cocooned in it are interlopers to a "White male-dominated career field" (Holley 8). Desnoyers-Colas describes her own body as "athletic" and "strong," which defies the notion of the military ideal that she calls the diminutive "GI Jane," a body type she shares discursively with women of her ethnicity:

I was very, very conscious of the way I look as well as my build. Black women, we tended to be ... our weight was always something that was under contention. I grew up and was called 'big boned,' so to speak. So, I was always very athletic, but I was always close to my weight restriction simply because, I think, the weight restrictions were discriminatory against minorities, particularly minority women. A lot of female friends were put on the 'fat girl' program because of their weight, and they weren't heavy, they just weren't overly thin like our White female counterparts. (Personal interview)

Uniforms produced by this distorted image thus appear to accept, but in fact disparage and reject, the bodies required to wear them. Black women emphasize these points as examples of the profiling and stereotyping they face that lead to feelings of difference and precariousness. The military norms ostensibly devised to achieve equality and inclusion through standardized appearances and clothing offer no relief: both hair styles and uniforms are modeled on White physicality and cause these women feelings of discomfort and, in the case of Bullock-Prevot, trouble her sense of who she is.

Nevertheless, the discourse is unequivocal that in the spirit of *aretē*, they persist.

“My Sex / Gender”

Their ill-fitting garments, too close for the wearer’s comfort, can mark the Black woman as a target for sexual antagonism and aggression, which LaRayne Hurd experiences in boot camp and on her active duty in Iraq: “I had spent so much of my life dealing with discrimination that came from my skin color that it never occurred to me that my sex/gender would ever be a hindrance to anything,” she states (Written interview). Indeed, LaRayne’s female drill sergeant harasses her without respite because, Hurd explains, “I have always been curvy and not even the oversized physical training uniforms could hide my hips. She would accuse me altering my shorts, and trying to sleep with the male drill sergeants just because I had a figure” (Written interview). Her attention is, in LaRayne’s retelling, unrelenting, insulting, and pernicious: “I used to constantly attract her ire” (Written interview).

The sense of being sexualized pervades her narrative of service, which, it will be recalled, she has joined to find a meaningful career with opportunities for leadership. LaRayne is currently working toward a graduate degree in Social Work and she deals every day with scars of injuries

she sustained in the field. But the effect of continuous suspicion that sexualized her is as deeply carved in her discourse as it seems to be in her consciousness. Prior to joining the service, she notes, the comments and innuendo involved innocent matters, such as who was dating whom in high school: here, even on mission, LaRayne interprets the commander's separating her from the troops at night, and requiring that she sleep in his quarters, as sexual surveillance:

When we slept in a building, I always slept where the commander slept. Even though I was just a Specialist, I slept wherever the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant slept. Which usually meant getting a nicer spot than everyone else, but I know it was because they wanted to be able to have full accountability of me. It would not do it if I was off in the burned out building next door (engaged in sexual activity) with half the platoon.

(Written interview)

The danger and potential aggression that lay at the heart of this kind of attention rears its head in her story of the Iraqi soldiers, compadres to her division on a mission:

I remember being out on a mission one day with the local Iraqi Army and a few of the Iraqi soldiers thought it would be funny to discuss a price for me, once they realized I was a woman they suddenly took an interest in me. One of the guys took it too far and grabbed my arm, and while it was not a totally hostile move it was more than was necessary. I carried a side arm and my free hand immediately dropped down to my holster. (Written interview)

By grabbing her without her permission and discussing in her hearing how much she would be worth as a bought woman, her supposed colleagues ostracize her. In one sordid joke, they define her solely in terms of her female biology and her kinship with women who have been purchased historically, and in the Middle East, still are, for purposes of sanctioned rape.

A similar “grab,” not of her arm, but her breasts, causes extreme pain and shock to Shoshana Johnson immediately after capture in Iraq. The soldier assaults her sexually despite her suffering bullet wounds that transited both legs and broke her ankle, wounds that receive rudimentary treatment and are still unhealed at the time of her rescue nearly a month later. She further describes her fear, based on comments from guards about her marriage potential, that she would be taken against her will as wife and disappear. She recounts an experience of being openly assessed, and the advice of a fellow captive that she speak of herself as unavailable:

A man in uniform came to my door. He opened it and stood there, staring at me. ...I didn't like the looks of the guy. He was pudgy, with a thin mustache, wearing a black military beret and a brown khaki uniform. His dark eyes raked over me.

‘Are you married?’ he asked me, an angry, almost accusatory tone to the question.

‘No.’

‘Children?’

‘Yes.’

He stood there for a long moment continuing to stare. Finally he shut the door and left and I wondered what that had been about. Then I heard Williams through the wall.

‘Shana, from now on, if anyone asks, you are married,’ he said.

(S. Johnson 186)

There is, admittedly, a lack of reliable data for sexual assault in military culture, although these women are clear in their discomfort with Iraqi and Saudi soldiers, as LaRayne Hurd and Shoshana Johnson indicate. Desnoyers-Colas speaks of women who define American military culture as a “sexual abuse climate” (*Marching* 88), and women who have experienced rape but who consider reporting as painful as the assault. In one specific case, “no one believed” the

woman who has been raped, and frequently the “superior” to whom the report would be filed is the woman’s rapist; more frequently, she is ordered to work with her attacker (*Marching* 88).

Most perniciously, then, the double discrimination they experience as a result of their “double minority” status, a position that Nancy Bullock-Prevot wishes they were asked about more frequently (Written interview), redounds on them in instances of sexual harassment and, in some cases, assault. The seamline between the colorblocking of women, i.e., White & Not-White, appears with greatest clarity when Black women discuss the double jeopardy their bodies represent: either they are unacknowledged as physical facts that do not fit the military’s female paradigm, or they are sexualized by men and women alike.

It should further be noted that a tenet of GTM, and of discourse analysis as well, is attention to the element of silence: “We don’t know what (our study participants) left unstated” (Charmaz 171). Speaking for her “camouflaged sisters,” and subtending the stories that tell of being “very, very aware,” is a comment by Heather Overstreet in the Desnoyers-Colas study: the “White males” with whom she has served “thought that being Black meant that I was ‘easy’” (85). Her insight is supported by Carolyn Morgan, same study, who reports, “If you made eye contact with them, this was considered an invitation,” and whose awareness of physical threat is dismissed by her commanding officer (85-86).

But, as noted previously, the traumas of assault, harassment, and insult that these women endure, sometimes relentlessly, are not the only stories. Not all Black women experience the kinds of direct offenses that are recounted here and in the Desnoyers-Colas study: for example, Tabitha Nichols responds to the question about the need to shield herself with astonishment: “Protect myself from what? I feel like, when did I have to do that?” (Personal interview). It’s important, too, to emphasize the methods Black women devise to sustain themselves through

such experiences. Lila Holley delineates a strategy metistic in its sensitivity to circumstance and cunning disguise that offers her protection:

As I served longer and longer and over the years ... I've got a big mouth, you know?
 I went toe to toe with people because I'm from New York, and I felt I've got a good sense of humor, too, so I take everything in stride. I knew as I got higher up in rank structure, *I started to hold some things in. I felt like the military is not an environment where you can let them see you crack too much*, you know what I mean? (Personal interview, emphasis mine)

The Insiders: "Take Back Your Power"

The choice of a journey along this path – for such Desnoyers-Colas calls it, “the military life journey” as noted – accords with the reasons that non-Black women in the Athena study join the troops. They, too, seek “a way out,” escape, a “lifeline.” But these intentions should not be too easily classified, especially since this decision, for the mothers among them, demands considerable sacrifice in time away from their families (Bullock-Prevot Written interview; Desnoyers-Colas and Holley, Personal interviews). The demographic studies show that 47 percent of African American servicewomen have children, compared to their White (30 percent) and Hispanic (27 percent) counterparts (J. Johnson). When asked, “What do you want people to know?” Nancy Bullock-Prevot speaks immediately to this point: “It’s hard, doubly so,” she explains, when you deploy and wonder if you’re going to make it back home, and if you’re doing right by your children” (Written interview). Women interviewed by Desnoyers-Colas describe missing their children as “horrible” and bonding in “collective sadness” with other women (*Marching* 66-67).

This “strong commitment to their maternal roles” (*Marching* 67) may, counterintuitively, have led many Black women to enlist in the first place. Black women have not been “extensively studied,” notes a Rand Corporation Study, but a high percentage of Black women “fit the bill” for the security of “job training, good benefits, and help with college tuition” (Dao). The African American Policy Forum speculates that women respond to the “benefit of job training, funding for higher education, and access to a steady middle class career with excellent benefits” (“Neglected at Home”). Certainly women in the Desnoyers-Colas analysis report that they “perceive an equal playing field in job training, in pay, and in the ability to advance professionally” (*Marching* 80). Although, in her written interview, Hurd speaks of a search for “meaning” in her decision to enlist, the word “meaning” does not necessarily translate into monetary rewards or security. Nor does the military offer the only means of supporting one’s children: Lila Holley is emphatic on this point. Although she once described herself as “a 15-year-old pregnant Black girl from the hood” who needed the military to provide for her family (*Camouflaged* 7), she notes now that the qualities that led to her success in the male-dominated military world also have stood her in good stead as a young mother in civilian life. The question that she wishes people would ask Black servicewomen is, “Why did you choose the life in service in the military?”

I think people make a lot of assumptions about us, that we were down and out, and this was our last recourse. And no, that’s not everybody’s story. I feel like if I did anything just because of my drive and motivation of being a young mother, I would have it in life regardless of the route that I took. But I feel like if they really take the time to stop and ask military women why, they would be really shocked and surprised to find out the

answer, the rank if you will, of these women who serve their countries. (Personal interview)

This more complex and nuanced explanation for Black women's enlistment, not mentioned in the published accounts of their reasons for service, presents further proof of the limited research into these narratives. Desnoyers-Colas offers a tantalizing glimpse of motivations that remain unexplored in the existing scholarship or story analysis, i.e., the desire to serve "out of a sense of moral obligation to the country (and) to demonstrate their worthiness" (*Marching* 27).

I would suggest that vigorous investigation, starting with Lila Holley's question, "Why did you choose the military?" would not only shake loose the stories beneath the facile suggestions – that Black women choose this profession for economic reasons only -- but also reveal a deeper "meaning" ("anything to give my life meaning," as Hurd explains, the tone of her sentence poignant and tough [Written interview]) that all female recruits might seek.

As noted, studies of this demographic are replete with rhetorics of economic, medical, and social need, and offer a distorted view of these women and their experiences. A GTM analysis allows us to hear the authentic voices of these servicewomen and explore their stories of origin; their aspirations, trials, and successes. Using this material as foundational, this section of the Athena study shows that Black servicewomen possess a standpoint all their own, i.e., a perspective on their experience that offers them, and the audience who listens, deeper insight into their contexts, both military and civilian, than the typical and stereotypical inquiries allow. In fact, these women may occupy the most complicated and difficult standpoint in the U.S. Military, compounded as it is by their perspective and hard work as warriors with a clearly defined mission; women who are perceived as invaders on male military turf; Black women who have fought against racist discrimination their entire lives, and face it here as well, in a culture

that prides itself discursively, and necessarily in combat, on inclusion. However, the evidence is clear that these “camouflaged sisters” have developed strategies that not only define them as “invisible heroes” noted earlier, but also distinguish them as the group most likely to survive and resolve the traumas they endure.

The Question of Equality

The question of equality is not a stated concern in these stories: the concept and the word itself do not come up. As is true in the discourse of all women servicemembers, their parity and equal partnership with male comrades are not their quest because they never doubt their own capacities or right to be there: all stories in the Athena project attest to that fact. Black women are, nevertheless, realistic – “Yeah, first off, you don’t take anything for granted,” Holley avows (Personal interview). These women have dealt their entire lives with the certain knowledge that they are marked by color in American culture where “hardship comes with the territory,” in Lila Holley’s words, and “people are going to look at you with a perceived notion” (Personal interview).

This preconception can create the unique perspective of the “outsider within,” developed to analyze the standpoint of Black women in slave culture. The “outsider within” possesses a privileged perception of the dominant community that bars her entry and membership: she sees the insiders more clearly than they see themselves; she sees how they define and position her:

Black domestic workers stress the sense of self-affirmation they experienced at seeing White power demystified – of knowing it was not the intellect, talent, or humanity of their employers that supported their superior status, but largely just the advantages of racism. But on another level, these same Black women knew they could never belong to

their White ‘families.’ In spite of their involvement, they remained ‘outsiders.’ This ‘outsider within’ status has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Afro-American women. (Hill Collins 103)

To those enamored of and accustomed to White male hegemony in the armed forces – a *mythos* that exhibits remarkable staying power despite the fact that “women have been on the front line for years” (Bullock-Prevot Written interview; Desnoyers-Colas and Williams Personal interviews), Black women embody a cultural difference and challenge to the “good ole boys’ club” (Hurd Written interview). They are, as examined earlier, the “double minority” who survives a hostile climate by strategic use of intelligence, patience, pluck, and “resolutely” steeling themselves to achieve their goals (Philostratus).

Indeed, in counterpoint to the *outsider* within, arising from their discourse is an equally tenacious conviction that this career and culture are theirs. This conviction, I believe, empowers the distinctive military identity they create and perform. It is the reason why the stories of their experience should be studied as the discourse of a discrete cultural group. While no community, including this dynamic one, shares a single voice on all matters, the Black women in this Athena project speak as insiders from a standpoint they define themselves, a status imposed on them *a priori* and uniquely, i.e., the double discrimination that arises from that “double minority” position. As women, they represent 16 percent of all servicemembers; they are, as noted previously, “joining the military at a greater rate than any other cohort” (“Eliminating the Gaps”), currently 31 percent of all women, which in fact “makes up the largest group of minorities employed by any branch of the federal government” (Johnson, Jason “Sister”). The pressure of compounded prejudice can be felt acutely, as Desnoyers-Colas says, “you’re always being watched” (Personal interview); or it can be muted through a protective shield of “personal

commitment” that blinds them to discrimination, as Hurd explains (Written interview). Whether they confront these challenges directly during their tenure of service or later, in reflection or resolve, they describe their endurance in terms sophisticated in their attention and response to circumstances. The discourse of their service is replete with both metistic patience (“It is what it is,” says Holley. “This is life” [Personal interview]) and metistic strategy: “Take back your power” (Personal interview). Holley teaches with this purpose – the credo and destination for her entire troop of “camouflaged sisters”: Because as a Black woman in this White male dominated masculine career field, you can get rolled over, dismissed, overlooked, rejected, minimized, or ignored. I was not about to let that happen. (*Camouflaged* 7-8) How they attempt to align their double-stigma with military standards that mark them at first sight is their decision to beat them at their own game – by working double-time, and resolving to keep a firm grip on power that is also recognizably theirs.

“Take the Hard Assignments”

To a woman, and in almost the same words, this cohort articulates the one and only way a female and specifically a Black woman can succeed in military culture: “We place these, I call them, astronomical standards on ourselves to be that much better than our male counterparts just to progress through the career,” Holley explains (Personal interview). Elizabeth Bullock-Prevot addresses the need make oneself “stand out” and “be the best”:

I think I challenged sex and gender norms, my rating is extremely male dominated.

There were challenges; to be the best, work harder, to get promoted, and to make myself stand out. ...Yes, I experienced gender discrimination. It made me work harder. I had to

sacrifice some things for a promotion. I had to take the hard assignments to be promoted at the cost of my family. (Written interview)

Even Tabitha Nichols, who considers herself “lucky” that she is spared the trials endured by other women despite her small stature, feels the need to prove herself:

I didn’t hear that (‘Oh, she’s just a girl’) (but) I felt like I had to keep up. I felt like I had to prove myself, to be on their level. Yeah, it was (hard) – I kinda feel like that, I was small, I was 110 pounds, I wasn’t some big tough female, ‘oh what is her little butt going to do.’ So I felt like I had to work twice as hard, beat them there, do everything before they do it, start early and leave late, just to prove myself. Probably I didn’t have to, maybe, but I just felt like I needed to. It wasn’t so much negativity to where I was, like, ‘All right guys, I’m going to prove myself.’ It was an internal thing. (Personal interview)

What they are striving in their stories to overcome, perhaps to overturn as well, is the connotations of binary thinking in which specific fixed traits are built into the female / male assignments, so that the production of *realia*, or material objects such as uniforms, accords with their makers’ biases rather than physical fact, and thus become rhetorical in purpose and effect: abstraction, rather than human. Elizabeth Bullock-Prevot defines the problem succinctly: “I didn’t want to seem like a ‘typical female’ in the military, that men looked at as being weak and incompetent” (Written interview).

“Sisterhood Was Strong”

One quality that distinguishes their military discourse, a characteristic that’s notably and often pointedly absent from the narrative of other female groups, is their emphasis on very specific community customs and values (*nomos*) that sustain them. This *nomos*, which

constitutes the service of these women and is constituted by their performance of that service, derives from their devotion to their families, their religious faith, and their community. The care of others, and generosity toward others in that marked group, is the source of what Desnoyers-Colas calls their “resilience ... which was going to have to be a reality if (they) were going to succeed” (Personal interview).¹¹ Their community spirit and concern also distinguish their narratives in this Athena project. Desnoyers-Colas emphasizes the support system Black women construct for one another as a hedge against their “double minority” status.

A lot of times we would just help each other out. Sometimes people did my hair for me. I would teach people how to say certain words, and teach them subject-verb agreement. Things like that. I would make sure we looked right. If we had to be ... on the weight program, we would go walking, we would exercise together, because we knew that we were going to be ‘it,’ as far as female officers, we knew there were only a few of us. We knew we had to look a certain way, and talk a certain way, so we worked with each other, and we would reach out to our enlisted counterparts, and say, ‘We see so-and-so over working at Base Ops, she’s got some 3510 clothing issues with her uniform, so you might want to reach out to her and talk to her.’ We were watching out for each other, and the sisterhood that I experienced was strong all the way throughout my service, and not so much a negative thing, but it was a survival type of thing. (Personal interview)

This service to community, which activates and defines the quality of their service to country and informs their military identity, continues in their post-service commitment to their kin and kith.

¹¹ Kayla Williams, who served as Director of the Center for Women Veterans at the Veterans Administration at the time I interviewed her, told me that “resilience” is a problematic word for many women veterans, who resist its connotation of unequal and victimized status, and prefer to emphasize achievement and valor. Williams is currently the Director of the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for New American Security.

For example, Nancy Bullock-Prevot has dedicated her prodigious energy and focus to secure a future for veteran women in need of shelter and work. In addition to her scholarship in the military culture of African American women, Desnoyers-Colas was an activist for the election of Stacey Abrams as the first Black woman governor of Georgia: “I think after we get out we gravitate towards some type of service, that helps to reignite the service that we have already given our nation when we were in the military,” she notes (Personal interview). Holley is a national figure who practices support: her message is “take back your power” to veterans in need of the leadership she achieved in service and did not leave behind (“Lila Holley: My Story”). After a painful transition to civilian life, which caused a change of personality that she blames the VA for not treating, La Rayne Hurd is earning a degree in Social Work to assist those who suffer as she did. Tabitha Nichols fearlessly performs and thus relives her most painful experiences in “Talking Service,” speaking on behalf of women veterans who cannot, deeply aware of the dire need for a sister-in-arms to represent them: “I’ll be that woman” (Personal interview).

The point is not the pain they experience or need to assuage. Despite, or perhaps because of, the proliferation of studies that track and decry the instances of PTSD, homelessness, and unemployment of Black women veterans, it is a mistake to over-interpret the story of this group as monolithic, tragic in its effects, and characterize their position in both military and civilian worlds as victimhood. This ostensibly benign rhetoric serves effectively to disqualify their service and sustain the double discrimination they battle throughout their military service. The public discourse is wrong in this respect and challenged by the evidence in these stories and others that appear in this myriad collection of veterans’ accounts. Desnoyers-Colas speaks of the

strength that Black women embody: “We’re expected to be the matriarchs, and we’re expected to be strong, we’re expected to be the nurturers” (Personal interview).

“A Strong Sense of Being Survivors”

What elicited this testimony from Elizabeth is a study of the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) I stumbled upon while researching demographics for my dissertation, the Athena Project, and presented for her comment. This study, only briefly described in the official documents, demonstrates the discovery that Black women have the lowest rate of suicide of all identified veteran groups and in the nation overall. This signal of inner resources, i.e., “We’re needed in our community,” notes Elizabeth, “why would we go anywhere?” (Personal interview), is “not completely understood” by the Department of Defense, which hopes to “re-create elements of black female culture that may help stop military veterans from killing themselves” (Kemp). Each Black woman in the Athena study responds in the same way when asked about this finding: they stress that their resilience comes directly from, and not despite, the odds against which they strive throughout their lives, and serves as perhaps the clearest sign of *aretē* in the discourses of this group specifically.

The VA report isolates the factors listed earlier here, i.e., family, faith, community. However, the women themselves were not asked how they account for these statistics. Nor does this report address the ways that the multiple discriminations that Black servicewomen face have served as a means to “take back their power,” in Lila Holley’s words (Personal interview). A study published after our interviews, in March 2018, “Resilience, Cultural Beliefs, and Practices That Mitigate Suicide Risk Among African American Women Veterans” by Brooke A. Dorsey

Holliman et al., does indeed address this phenomenon with the women themselves, who reinforce the source of resilience that Athena women relate:

Women talked about the hardships they faced due to their race and how these played a role in their development into ‘strong Black women.’ Despite facing adversity, the words participants used to talk about themselves described feelings of empowerment and a strong sense of being survivors. They mentioned waking up every day and continuing to live, despite these challenges. Overwhelmingly, participants described taking actions to improve their lives, and described focusing on the positive aspects of their lives, despite adversity. (5)

The theme of courage in the face of hardship that all Black women in this study share redounds on the issue of the suicide rates as well: while the results are reported by the VA, the reasons the department offers are merely speculative. They do not know. This enormous percentage of the female military population who “shoot” and “drive” (Nichols Personal interview), who have fought in combat despite their being hired as support capacity (Desnoyers-Colas *Marching* 55), attest to this fact to an audience that still, in many ways, resists it.

The published record of a VA hearing on the topic of attention to minority women weirdly supports this obvious need for more interest and research in this area. The participants in this hearing, in response to a question about minority services, repeat assurances of this dedicated work, without providing a sliver of evidence or atom of fact: it is the cohort of mental health professionals in Colorado, led by Holliman, who study this phenomenon. What the VA hearing shows with a cynical thud is the lack of hard information about women servicemembers as a discrete group, whose interest, skills, needs, histories, and potentialities are not the same as

those qualities in their brothers in arms, and in particular the shallow and accordingly facile understanding of Black women.

“I feel I have become an advocate for women veterans who have lost their voice along the way, due to no fault of their own,” Bullock-Prevot explains. “I feel that the service taught me that I could persevere through anything” (Written interview).

Lila Holley, who speaks, teaches, travels, and writes on the subject of empowerment and leadership, describes the effect of living a “story that must be told,” but is not:

If life wasn’t hard, I would think I’m being punched or something. This is life. This is what we as Black women ... you walk in a room with people already going to look at you with a perceived notion. Oh, we’ve got to walk on eggshells and it might be that time of the month and here comes the angry Black woman. Then the statistics ... I talk a lot about labels. I feel like society is going to place labels on us. ... It sucks. Absolutely it does suck. (Personal interview)

Indeed, this valorous group of women, encountered on “on their own terms” (Reinharz 19), represents not only the most difficult aspects of the decision to serve one’s country, but also the best and most enduring, the *aretē* revealed in their stories about the experience of service and, remarkably and virtually unreported, their tenacity at its end.

“It Is Important That We Speak”

Desnoyers-Colas explains that the importance of telling their stories and having them heard is the clarion call in Black women’s tradition, at least as far back as Anna Julia Cooper’s *A Voice from the South* in 1892 (*Marching* 15). This gestational work in Black feminist thought by an activist, scholar, and teacher exhorts this community to “muster the creativity and ingenuity to

develop their own collective and rhetorical voice” (*Marching* 15). The crucible that turns the cry into a powerful statement of stance is the act prescribed by scholar hooks in her polemic, essentially a personal letter to Black women who feel silenced, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*:

It is important that we speak. What we speak about is more important. It is our responsibility collectively and individually to distinguish between mere speaking that is about self-aggrandizement, exploitation of the exotic ‘other,’ and that coming to voice which is a gesture of resistance, an affirmation of struggle. (18)

Veteran Michelle Jones, in the film “Served Like a Girl,” succinctly concurs: “You have a voice.” Each woman offers critique not only of patterns of misogyny and racism in a culture to which they have committed, but also to the ways they are portrayed in our national “text and talk,” or discourse, about Black female servicemembers. Against powerful odds, akin to the “lions ... monsters ... all other labours” (Philostratus) that the warrior must overcome for the sake of attaining *aretē*, Black women create and perform a military identity all their own, and a distinctly valorous one.

Aretē is not entitlement or privilege, but the embodiment of prowess hard-won in the *agōn*, or battle. For the sake of *aretē*, Aristotle tells us, one must “endure cruel unresting toils” – and it is this quest, and not the winning, not the trophy necessarily, but the persistent attempt, “related repetitions of virtuous actions (that) constituted and/or produced virtuosity,” that allow one to achieve victory on this particular field (“Fragment”). Conclusively, I believe, Lila Holley tells the story of *aretē* for all Black women whose “unresting toils” fortify this culture. She speaks on behalf of those who serve their chosen communities and those for whom each day is

challenge enough, with elegant precision: “I entered a shy young girl ... I feel like I’m a beast”

(Personal interview).

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: Boots

My life will be influenced forever by this experience. I see through new eyes. This was by far the most challenging experience I've ever been faced with – physically, mentally, emotionally, and morally. I have a newfound respect for soldiers throughout history. I now understand the difficulties and challenges that come from war that every vet faces. – Michelle Zaremba, *Wheels on Fire: My Year of Driving ... and Surviving .. In Iraq*

Proving Ground: Rachel Coggins

I sometimes feel it is impossible for other people to understand a Soldier's feelings. How can you know what shoes are if you have never seen or worn them? If a person has never worn boots into battle, can that person understand the drama, the passion, the obsession, the compulsion? How it takes over a Soldier's life and drives him or her? Drives him or her to think less and less of the other world they came from and focus more on the world that is now his or hers? Only it is all blurred. Blurred by the confusion, the fog of war, the obsession to stay alive and help the people nearby stay alive.

Someone said to me one day, "You think everything is a crisis!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I wanted to scream out: What do you mean? Don't you see this? We're in a war? There is crisis everywhere. Can't you see how hurt these people are? How tired they are? How much their families are suffering because they have been separated so much?

Was this reaction a symptom of over-intoxication of the pain and suffering around me and a sign of my need to step back and find healing? The questions continue to whirl in my mind, my spirit, my being. After going around in full circle, I end up back at the place where I started. Like the hands of a clock, with the chime in the background striking midnight, it is time for a new day – time to stop and then start over.

*Go home and write the story / Go home and give the glory
To the brave men and women who are out there
Living in the dirt, feeling the hurt,
Dying for our freedom.*



Figure 32 Amber's Boots. Photo courtesy of Amber Nadeau

Introduction: “If a person has never worn boots into battle, can that person understand”

What carried these women through their “military journey”¹ was not -- like their transition to this supremely challenging culture and their experience as warriors -- without pain, indeed “agony,” as Kayla Williams describes it, a “raw and shredded” condition needing protection of something like moleskin, or miles walked that break in the hardest soles. The metaphor of their boots – “green” at the start, Kristin Hall tells us (Personal interview); their suede “completely trashed” at the close, according to Brandy Lockhart (Personal interview) – “tan (usually disgustingly dirty due to jumps) army combat boots” to Amber Nadeau -- seems most fitting to represent the path they forged themselves, the sole prints they have left for increasing numbers of women servicemembers to walk in, test, deepen, and expand. In the end, Kayla tells us, “no shoes had ever been so well suited to my feet” (“Re: Happy News”). “Amanda,” profiled in the film “Soldier On,” is adamant that she “loves” her boots. Like Tammy Duckworth and most who speak in military tropes, they equate “boots on the ground” (Duckworth “What I Learned at War”) with the qualities of *aretē*, valor in tough and perhaps unwinnable zones of war. And like Dulcinea Burrow, few regret the decisive act of enlistment that traded what they might consider the flimsy and useless civilian footwear such as her “stilettos” for combat boots that turned out to be “so comfy” (Personal interview), against all cultural and historical odds.

It is true, as veteran Rachel Coggins emphasizes in the headnote to this chapter, that we who listen to these stories do not, and cannot, come close to understanding the experience of wearing boots into battle. Army Sergeant Sharon Allen of Operation Homecoming, in “Writing a Wartime Experience” on PBS, opines that “everyone says they are supporting us,” but most

¹ Desnoyers-Colas defines her tenure of service in these terms, as noted.

civilians “have no idea about who soldiers really are” or what they go through (Mundey 175). As some have noted, the phrase “thank you for your service,” our cultural note of appreciation, can serve to blanket or blur, perhaps consciously, the “beneath truth” of their stories.² And we will learn in this chapter how the word “resilient,” offered as compliment in similar ways, is unwelcome for many women,³ imposed by those who, as Kylie Pugh informs us, never say those simple words, “Tell me,” or inquire, “What would you like to be asked.” I came upon those phrases accidentally out of my own ignorance, and because these women’s generosity, no less potent than their desire to tell their stories in their own voices, evoked the kind of response that Jarratt, channeling hooks, has called “speech that compels listeners, one that is heard” (*Rereading* 114), an assertion that bears repeating here.

“... the drama, the passion, the compulsion, the obsession”

Feminist study is a sophistic “in the best sense of the word by describing rhetorical solutions to the crucial problem of defining a theory with the most power for changing women’s lives” (Jarratt *Rereading* 78). If I were to apply the processes of GTM to the theories at work in this study, the impetus toward change would be the one and only category, or theme. The stories and their theories that emerge from this analysis are infused with values of freedom, movement, change – from restless escape to refusals of imposed ideas and gender *personae*. Perhaps counterintuitively, the idea we hear most compellingly when women speak of their military tenure is their quest for personal and professional freedom, even within the constraints of martial

² I thought of our responsibility while listening to an interview with Washington Post reporter, Manuel Roig-Franzia, on *The Last Word* with Lawrence O’Donnell (7 February 2019) in which Roig-Franzia explains the work of investigating a difficult topic: “Turn every page. Every single page.”

³ Women appear to object to these phrases because they overlook the cost of their experience of service.

culture. “Freedom” may not be the first word that comes to mind, for most of us, when discussing military issues, and some analysts, such as Goodman in *Gender for the Warfare State*, frame women’s experience in a way that might resemble surrender on their part: “Caught between life-giving and death-dealing, women’s bodies come to appear as inorganic and non-human, disappearing entirely into the machine, inhabited by death: paralyzed, consciousness-less, impassive, and yielding” (48). Certainly these women are specific about the obstacles and outright assault, both physical and psychological, they experience as “marked by – made real by – (their) difference” (Hicks 52). But there is no question, as Goodman’s study also shows, that they depict their experience as one they control, which allows them room and scope to imagine and shape an identity of ambition and achievement. They recognize in discourse the regulations of physical appearance and uniform; they recite, sometimes with a wry sense of discovery and surprise, the orders that situated them at various duty stations – how, for example, prowess in physical aptitude and a request for a placement as Firefighter results in an astonished “Maggie White’s” assignment in dentistry, her 9th choice, and how this work helps her create a life beyond the military precinct as a Dental Technician. Freedom for most of these women is an ability to seek and discover escape from a life of little or no hope of adventure, change, and a future that offers both security and, to borrow LaRayne Hurd’s aspiration, “meaning.”⁴ They may, like D. Alexis Hart and Tabitha Nichols, assert their freedom to fulfill a family legacy. It is, for them, the promise of the American Dream of opportunity found.

Service to something greater than oneself – practical, not philosophical or theological -- is an integral part of this equation. It is, perhaps, the first move toward consciously turning the personal sphere of hair dyed pink and punk music or dead-end summers in dusty southern towns

⁴ Patten and Parker of Pew report that 97% of women veterans “feel proud of their service,” and 79% believe that military service has helped them “get ahead” in life (12).

into the professional act: leaving the aisles of Walmart behind, becoming the best shot in the squad, the commander's driver, the NCO herself. In this respect they embody and enact the classical image of the female warrior, Athena, whose mythological prowess and purpose are manifest in their discourses. Do not assume, Lila Holley reminds us, that women are only enlisting in increasing numbers for economic reasons (Personal interview). Amber Nadeau reinforces this assertion: "People go and say they're going for a scholarship. (But) I realized this wasn't a joke, and it could come down to the point where it was life or death, and I needed to take everything seriously. It was extremely real" (Personal interview). The pride of membership in military culture that is evident throughout their interviews and writings serves to inform and fulfill their personal and professional goals while diminishing neither. The data shows these women as fierce defenders of military culture and its rationale and work – so that, as Tammy Duckworth argues, they not only sustain the institution and discover resources within themselves, but "we could not go to war as a nation, we could not defend Americans, without our women" (Nelson).

As Kylie Pugh informs us, "The male is the universal" (Personal interview). These women nonetheless persist and push forward – with very little assistance from the culture they embody and whose missions they enact – in these precincts. "I was fighting for the freedom of our country," "West" tells me in an informal forum post in our public writing class, "and by being a woman in the military I was challenging the status quo, because even though women have been in the military for a long time there still isn't equality." In the remainder of this final chapter, the conclusions of the American Athena study, I will describe the actions that animate their discourses as they contend with military culture not welcoming to women and forge their own path forward. I will discuss the concisely articulated argument against which they walk, and

their stated awareness of the struggle that male dominance portends, still, despite the women's effective and measurable defenses; and their tenacious movement forward, through assault, insult, and obstacle. In so doing they imagine, shape, and create a female military identity of their own making, "a communion of unmerged souls," and – a fact that was, in an uncomplimentary cliché that aptly describes my own researcher oblivion, "staring me right in the face" -- carry that newly-forged identity into their lives as veterans. I will discuss the implications to scholarship, research, and cultures, both military and civilian, that the standpoint of these women suggests. Desnoyers-Colas offers here a glimpse of the transformation that these valiant women achieve, the identity they imagine and shape, as they continue to help determine the future of military service: "I think we bring compassion and empathy to the military," she notes. "There's a certain thing that changes when women are in the room. If women come in the military, we don't come in as honorary men. Let's bring the human factor in ... the voice of reason. All women bring that" (Personal interview).

The Pathway of the Storyteller

The feminist sophistic paradigm in which I have placed these stories arose, as noted in the opening chapters of this dissertation, from a desire to learn about this military experience through the eyes of these women, not the other way around, which has been catalogued intensely and extensively; and not in light of others' opinions. A feminist sophistic, derived from the work of classicist Jarratt, identifies elements that these theories have in common; the most powerful of these components are a conviction of the contingent nature of action and speech, and a decisive movement toward change. Jarratt's description of this connection is focused on the usefulness of this sophistic for "changing women's lives" (*Rereading* 78; also, "The First Sophists" 39).

And it was this proposal that served the purposes of this dissertation, “telling the story their own way,” “women’s experiences told in women’s words,” aligning “a woman’s selfhood” with the “right to her own story” (Heilbrun 17), as noted in "Chapter Two Epistemology." Existing studies focus on ways the culture, as system and structure, functions as the oppressor and might be resisted and changed (Benedict; Blum; Browder; Browne; Desnoyers-Colas; Eager; Enloe; Holmstedt; Lemmon; Thorpe; Truth Goodman; among others). Indeed, productive change is a key theme in the stories discussed in this dissertation. However, the difference of a feminist sophistic from a rhetorical treatment of military culture is an urgent need to discern the women’s stories within the male hegemony that constructed this world and assumes a right to inform, if not infuse, its *ethos* and discourses. The question that constitutes, fulfills, and represents the purpose of this sophistic and triangulates its design and potential discoveries is deceptively simple: “How do the women themselves talk about their experiences (i.e., what does the research show)?” My discovery in this study is that the power of the storyteller creates the focus and freedom of the feminist sophistic analysis I had hoped to realize from the start. Theory is not imposed from an external and detached idea repository. Rather, theory is grounded in the story’s own elements, the voice and the silences of the individual speaker herself. I have come at the end to believe that this process is the only appropriate method to analyze the stories of these women as female warriors. Despite the accurate and useful ideograph and mythology of Athena, these women in reality push the story further. They resist easy classification and appear to defy existing categories. Indeed, the women who share their stories here refuse to distort their service through the rhetorical gaze of those who question, reduce, or reject them. Rather, they develop strategies to continue moving – and often, particularly in the case of Black women, decisively walk one another beyond the effects of a system built to sustain the dominance of males.

Admittedly, my bias as researcher with a record of scholarship in feminist standpoint theory would cast that particular eye to analysis of any text. However, this study's grounding in the discourse of women is feminist by definition. Its paradigm is the urgent need for these women to tell their stories their own way, the core principle of the feminist project since the first courses in women's studies formulated the central question: "What is this woman's sense of herself?"⁵ I argue, with Jarratt, that a feminist mode of analysis is intrinsically rhetorical, a sophistic in its DNA, because it pays attention to the contingency and variance of women's discourses, the vagaries of their individual lives. It does not seek to universalize women's experience. Despite their shared sense of how to imagine and shape the military identity to be female, and the ways they bond in their commitment, their sense of capability, and strategic intelligence to achieve their goals, the Athenas have come together from different places. Their destinations are equally divergent. Nancy Bullock-Prevot is able to tell us how a Black woman becomes an advocate for other women facing what she learns to term "double minority" status. Her colleagues D. Alexis Hart, Goldie Ann Johnson, Emily Satterfield, and Maggie White explicate the experience of pregnancy⁶ while on active duty with uninformed comrades.⁷ Deployed women such as Tabitha Nichols, Kayla Williams, LaRayne Hurd, Mary Jennings Hegar, and Tammy Duckworth take us to front lines and reveal the after effects: one re-enacts her tour of duty on the national stage; one heads a veterans' research institute; one is earning

⁵ As noted, I was a student in those classes, in the early 70's, with Minna Weinstein and Judith Newton at La Salle College, Philadelphia, PA. The courses were "Women in History" and "Feminist Approach to Literature."

⁶ Eager reports that 2500 – 3500 women servicemembers are generally pregnant, which she notes is about the same percentage as in the civilian population (43).

⁷ "Female service members are looked down upon even more than normal if they become pregnant or get married," Emily says. "We are thought to be whores/sluts if we have an unexpected pregnancy. People will tell you how stupid you are and that you ruined your career, and talk down to you the whole time you are pregnant" (Written Interview). Maggie specifically details the issues on which the criticism is experienced as harsh: "Maternity leave, breast feeding, fitness level, appearance (weight), parent duties vs. military duties" (Written Interview).

credentials in social work; one writes a book after achieving combat status for women, and runs for Congress; one serves as U.S. Senator, the first to bear a child in that office.

“Women May Be Better Suited to Survive Horrors”

The use of GTM to uncover the operant themes of this feminist sophistic has enabled me to define the deep commitment women feel to a culture that both accepts and rejects them. Each woman, no matter what happens to her, feels enormous pride in her service, believes that she gained in both knowledge, strength, and character, and believes unequivocally in women’s aptitude for warfare, whether she chooses the battle or finds it inflicted upon her, as happened to Tabitha Nichols and Brandy Lockhart, profiled on the front lines in "Chapter 5, Category 2, 'We Did It Anyway.'" Notes Mary Jennings Hegar, “Women may be better suited to survive horrors” (Personal interview). Their stories, however dismissive or minacious the conditions described therein, reflect an “internal confidence” (Wise and Baron 32) that makes the gender differential of such import to others, be they military or civilian, “irrelevant” to them (Wise and Baron 2). As Tammy Duckworth writes in her “Foreword” to Holmstedt’s *Band of Sisters*, “(The stories) are about being tough and professional ... It’s about not wanting to be average” (ix-x). It is also about the basic tenet of performance in battle that we inherit from those earliest models of prowess and virtuosity on the fields of Ancient Greece, where “one is what one does,” and the self is produced “in movement through active struggle” (Hawhee 16) which, to this day, remains the single most foundational concept in our military and, indeed, our American personal, political, and social systems.

That struggle infuses the women’s military experience without defining it. The military itself provides the context for the determination of Mary Jennings Hegar to gain official

combat status for women who, as we have observed, “do it anyway,” which is achieved in 2013. As Tulsi Gabbard remarks, “I think that the policy change was long overdue, and reflected kind of a catching up to the reality of some of the jobs that women have been doing in combat situations now for some time” (Caplan-Bricker). What is precarious is the position that both military and civilian cultures assign to them. Their commitment in that context could cause them to be silent or dismissive when confronted with incidents of discrimination. They experience both camaraderie, as their stories indicate, and, at the same time, and sometimes from the same men and women, an assessment that is painfully critical and marginalizing. Kylie Pugh remarks, “You will meet opposition not just from men but from other women. Other women are just as responsible for the punishment of female military members” (Personal interview; also, Elizabeth Avila; Brandy Lockhart; Kayla Williams). But the data shows that in most cases, such difficulty does not diminish the “pride” women define and repeat as integral to their particular military discourse (one premier example: Tabitha Nichols’ poem in “Chapter Five, Category 2, ‘We Did It Anyway’”). Judy Young addresses this issue in all its complication:

I cannot say that I never experienced any gender discrimination in the Navy. But to just say that I did elides the complexity and the very varied texture of what happened to me. And that elision is emblematic of something in the larger women-in-service discourse that I want to be sure we do not neglect. That is, though clearly terrible things have happened to some women service members because of gender discrimination, such things did not happen to us all. And in fact, many of us were able to succeed and thrive in the military environment. (Written interview)

It is not, in this respect, my brief to challenge the way they invent, arrange, and deliver their stories. When they enter the interview room or answer their calls or emails, they are not facing

judge and jury, but welcomed with the greeting: “Tell me ...” They are asked to build a discourse in all its complexity, as Judy perceives. Their words are “purposes (and) maps” (Adrienne Rich, the headnote to *Chapter Four, Methodology*), as well as coded, secret, silences both strategic and unintended, partial truths, and fictions. A rhetorical analysis like the one attempted here has always recognized the tension of “moral conflict” at the heart of the stories we tell one another (Murphy and Katula 21). My purpose was to listen and record and find, if possible, the patterns of their “language in use” (Gee *Introduction* 26), the categories of their experience and thought, and attempt to locate, if not resolve, the rhetoricity of their accounts.

“Women Are Weaker, Have Less Endurance”

The doubts, indeed, disparagement about women in military settings persist, even as restraints on women in combat are lifted, even as the testimonies of women serving in combat “anyway” abound. Recall the Pulitzer Price-winning political journalist Applebaum who remarks in the Chapter Five data analysis that women are now officially warriors and western civilization is still intact. In many ways, and despite the local and distinctive origins specific to each speaker – Tabitha Nichols, a junior in a Florida high school, fulfilling her family’s legacy; Lindsay Allen seeking to leave a “dead-end” job in post-industrial New England; Kylie Pugh, feeling as if she were “drowning” in student digs in San Diego – the one story all women in this study share is the process of walking against a male-inspired analysis that promotes the anachronistic *mythos* of female essential weaknesses, to wit:

Characteristics often applied to the female gender (are) meekness, low self-esteem, and second-guessing yourself ... Some argue that women don’t possess the attack mentality and ego necessary to be a successful fighter. (Holmstedt *Band* 93)

Nothing in the discourse created by these women states or suggests that they see themselves as “too emotionally fragile ... too physically weak,” ... (unable to) lead men in battle effectively” (Blair “Five Myths About Women in Combat”) or any other typically humiliating or reductive epithet. Rather, the individual avowals that redound on them as a group, a genre, a context, and an ethic are the repeated “Because I can” (Holmstedt *Band* 96); “We did it anyway,” and – in the face of extreme discomfort or combat intensity, “Suck it up.... You’re alive” (Holmstedt *Band* 56; also, K. Hall). Every word of their conjoined narratives, whatever their differences and tensions, signals the certainty of these women that they are engaged and fully equal servicemembers: “I never felt at a disadvantage,” states Brandy Lockhart (Personal interview). Lockhart speaks in a quiet voice, but her gaze does not waver: “Nope.” And it is not as if Lockhart were not challenged, daily, a “target” on her back, when her diligence and excellent work – sustained now as a straight-A student in graduate school for Public Health Policy; mother of two young daughters; teacher at her daughters’ school – provoke the envy of some male colleagues and superiors.

In terms of performance, particularly military work, a common trope of the female in American culture – what Amber Nadeau refers to as “‘the stereotype’” (Personal interview) – is perfectly and ruthlessly rendered by military scholar Stephan Maninger in “Women in Combat: Reconsidering the Case Against the Deployment of Women in Combat-support and Combat Units”:

Women (on average) are at a disadvantage in competing against men at certain tasks ...

Women are weaker, have less endurance, are more prone to injuries and require more time off from military service ... Women who enlist in the army and undergo boot camp or advanced training are more likely to suffer injuries or take time off due to sickness.

The third major physical limitation that places women at a distinct disadvantage (is) their ability to have children. (Parpart and Partridge 555).

The relevant contested literature of women in combat situations spotlights the anomalous fighter, such as Jeanne d’Arc, who is called by God, through no will of her own, to patriotic fervor and service. If indeed this esoteric, albeit heroic, figure fights to protect a cause or country about which she cares passionately, she is depicted as one who acts despite her female identity, like Granuaile, the 16th century pirate queen Grace O’Malley, who stares down the gender conventions of her time: “A woman that hath impudently passed (over-stepped) the part of womanhood perhaps, but in so doing, she played a unique role in history” (Chambers 10). Tulsi Gabbard, veteran, congressional representative of Hawaii, and erstwhile candidate for the presidency, reminds us that gender constraints and subversions are not confined to medieval Europe:

You can look back in history through different conflicts in our nation’s past when women have been serving on the so-called front lines as far back as the Civil War, when women were disguising themselves as men. The ability of women to serve in these combat roles is there, and has been there for quite some time. (Caplan-Bricker)

And then Gabbard reminds us, too, as noted previously in this study, “It’s really the perception that’s been different from reality” (Caplan-Bricker). Even the scholar Maninger, who abhors the idea of women in combat because “the qualities essential for a warrior ... are best embodied by men,” admits that women can fight, have done so, fiercely, “are quite capable of killing opponents,” and possess the requisite courage (Parpart and Partridge 555).

“You Can Be a Victim or Survivor, or Choose to Thrive”

What is noteworthy to me as I question and probe, listen and read, is how completely, in the face of such antagonism, these women carry their own emotional and analytical weight. They do this through the demands of military service, of which Lisa Bradley and Rachel Coggins in this study contend that civilians cannot imagine, as well as the pressure of many colleagues who disparage their work, indeed, the very idea of value in their service, in private opinions and public insult. The spurious arguments and memes of others that presume, on the basis of gossamer evidence, to tell the women’s stories are weirdly detached from their narratives. In fact, these deceptions occlude our understanding of a complex and often decent and inclusive military culture, despite its ideology and *nomos* as a male domain. These unfounded attitudes can also create the false impression that women call or beg for affirmation, attention, and validity to which they are not entitled, for imagining and shaping a job beyond their scope and skill level or living a pampered and privileged life by virtue of their gender:

The culture is still very male driven due to the male to female ratio so women are treated very differently and kind of just pushed to the side sometimes, or they are overly praised and then the males say we are only being praised because we are women. (Satterfield Written interview)

Like Goldie Ann Johnson who could shoot, as she tells it, “everything – grenades – expertly” (Personal interview) and Desnoyers-Colas, who graduates second in command and is the only woman in her ROTC detachment (“It was just me and the guys” [Personal interview]), the women in this project validate themselves – which does not mean they do not feel the need to prove their own valiance:

I felt like I had to keep up, I felt like I had to prove myself, to be on their level. Yeah, it was hard. I kinda feel like that, I was small, I was 110 lbs., I wasn't some big tough female. 'Oh, what is her little butt going to do?' So I felt like I had to work twice as hard, beat them there, do everything before they do it, start early and leave late, just to prove myself. (Nichols, Personal interview)

Nor is there a sense that these women succeed militarily because they share "masculine values, as Sjoberg's interpretation of "performing gender in the military" would have it (Eager 11). The rejoinder to this too-facile description is veteran Mary Bigelow Krueger's statement in Wise and Baron's *Women at War*:

Are we equal to men? We are not the same, but we are equivalent. I never try to be a male Soldier because I am not! And I would stink at it. I am proud of being a female soldier because there are unique things I bring to the table. When I hear things like, 'You could get hurt,' I answer, 'Well men could get hurt too – or are you saying that men's lives are not as valuable? (87)

The fact that women carry their "professional weight" is "under-represented and under-appreciated" (Desnoyers-Colas 112), and most empirical data of combat is focused on men. But unlike bands of female fighters such as the Amazons of Greek myth and the warrior-women of Chinese antiquity, the context these women enter has been both discursively and materially male, a masculine fighting world since its inception, where *aretē* was a masculine virtue of "strength and swiftness to succeed in battle" (Hawhee 21). Of course, that concept has evolved herein to include other sorts of battle and a new genre and identity of warrior. The women's entry into this equally well-armed and well-armored world creates the condition described critically by Lazar as the "two classes" delimited by gender (6-7) – a world, in the words of Staff Sergeant Katherine

Ragazzino, wherein “you can be victim or survivor, or choose to thrive” (qtd. in Holmstedt *Soul* 96).

Recall the argument of Kylie Pugh who recounts how women are called to attention in her squad, “Female!” -- the “terrible obscenity (that) is not an obscenity,” she declares, the calling out of “who one is” as fundamentally wrong and out of place.

“Field of Strategic Possibilities”

Eminently clear in the narratives is the fact that the Athena women are ambitious human beings who carry within them to this day a sense of determination, *kairos*, of moving forward and finding, in Heilbrun’s terms, “adventure” and experience of life. As they describe the act and scene of confronting the test, result, job offer, and occupation code,⁸ two themes emerge from their stories: first, a feeling akin to Kristin Hall’s “I was strong” (Personal interview), delivered with pride and/or vindication to the town, school, family, strangers, and friends who applaud or oppose, or regard with doubt or indifference, this declaration – perhaps their first – of independence; and second, from Beard’s analysis of *Women and Power*, “How do I get to belong?” (38) The processes across Air Force, Army, Marine, Navy trace a similar pattern, inscribing a system on the individual free spirit that Foucault, in his critiques of power, describes as regulation, repetition, regimentation, to maintain a discipline that labels, marks, and then “distributes them and circulates them in *a network of relations*” (emphasis mine, Foucault

⁸ A United States military occupation code, or a [Military Occupational Specialty code](#) (MOS code), is a code used in the United States Army and United States Marines to identify a specific job. In the U.S. Air Force, a system of Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) is used. In the United States Navy, a system of naval ratings and designators is used along with Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC) system. Military Information. *Military*1. 4 March 2014.

Discipline 146) – in this instance, the military categories of employment. Lindsay Allen’s description of her career almost visually captures this process:

After my training was finalized, ... I began work as a Comm/Nav Aviation Electronics Technician. I tested, troubleshot, and repaired a variety of Communication and Navigation systems utilizing a variety of different test equipment for F-18’s (36 months), Ch-53’s (12 months), Ospreys (18 months), Harriers (3 months), and C130’s (9 months). I was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps as Marine Corps NCO, where I gained valuable leadership skills by managing Marines under me in production efforts and program adherence, on a daily basis. During the final year of my enlistment, ... I worked as PMO (Provost Marshal Office) for a little over a month. I was armed with an M-16 and was stationed at the gate, tasked with security and ID checks. I, also, performed full and partial random searches of vehicles, and stood guard in the guard towers. (Written interview)

Embedded in the RNA of this particular “network of relations” is, however, the kind of hierarchical power structure that Foucault eschews. But women in their discourse of service describe that hierarchy and the obeisance required of them in almost teleological terms, i.e., their duty proceeds from a sense of purpose, a need for order, a successful completion of a mission to which they have committed. “Maggie White” addresses this faith in a higher “good”:

I knew that it was going to be a whole lot of, ‘do what I tell you to do and don’t ask questions’ and with that I knew that I could continue to become a strong, loyal follower and leader. How we were instructed to act was to build a chain of command to ensure order. I was okay with the military identity. I understood the purpose behind it. (Written interview)

Tammy Duckworth has emphasized the unswerving attention to mission that reifies this hierarchical *schema* and seems to make critique of regulation in this setting a moot point:

The military gave me leadership skills. It taught me to stand up and express myself. It taught me, then, to defend what I think is the best solution. I can ask those tough questions in Washington, DC, on military that others aren't able to ask. One of the things about being in the military is it's all about the mission. It's not about you or your personal ideologies; it's about getting the mission done. ("Completing the Mission")

It should be noted that feminist critics of Foucault have based their theory and their cause on the hegemony of an entitled group – i.e., males, and in this context, males in their military culture – a standpoint that would, if removed, erase as well all motive and reason from women's sense of historical restriction and suppression, such as Martha McSally's reaction to discovering that her gender makes her ineligible to fly, and her continuing fight to shake free of it. "Maggie White" suggests something of that struggle when she describes the effect of military discipline on her spirit, and tellingly, uses the word "suppress":

Now, after reflection I do feel that there was a part of me that was stripped away temporarily, my silliness and sense of self creativity. It took a while to realize that I was suppressing that part of me but I have learned to bring it back and like any adult I learn the appropriate times to express the different parts of my personality. (Written interview)

However, their narratives also align with Foucault's definition of discourse, which in his theory of history carries the possibility and indeed the likelihood of productive opposition to the power, in this study, of what arguably is the "most authoritarian institution" (Williams Personal interview):

Discourses are *not once and for all subservient to power* or raised up against it... We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, *a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy*. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, *but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart*. (Emphases mine, Foucault *History* 100-101)

The use of the word “strategy” in this context is extended, for this study most pertinently, to his idea of the “field of strategic possibilities,” i.e., choices that “(make) it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games” (*Archeology* 37). In rhetorical terms, this notion of “strategic possibilities” and “choices” seems identical to Jarratt’s argument for contingency in the feminist sophistic. And both theories evoke, for me, the power of *metis*, the use of cunning intelligence and design to achieve desired ends, which may allow us to discern the ways that women “get to belong” to military culture while retaining and shielding their own power of will. Goldie Ann Johnson, for example, explains that “most of the guys can join a unit and follow behind, just fall in line, follow the leader, but women, whether it’s because society makes us that way, we feel like we have to step out of line a little bit, you still follow the leader, but you make yourself distinctive” (Personal interview). A blurring of the distinction between leader and follower, and the readiness to enact either role if required as a “strategic possibility” for the sake of that purpose and that mission, is articulated by Mackenzie Rieselt, who is able to apply her gift for math in her work with helicopters:

I knew I was independent and ... wanted to do my own things, but I also knew to fall in line. My parents instilled that in me. They weren’t military or anything but I respected them and I still respect them. If I was told not to do something or I knew not to do

something, I wouldn't do it. It was the same when I joined the military. There's things I was like, 'This is not a smart thing to do,' but if I was told to do it, then I would do it.

Mostly I can follow or I can lead. It doesn't really matter to me. (Personal interview)

Perhaps it can be argued that women service members embody and enact both sides of this dispute about power – its dispersion throughout the American military system that enables women to choose, at any given moment, their response to its pressure, and its totalizing grasp that ensures repression and necessitates revolt, as feminists who oppose Foucault insist.

An example of “strategic possibility” and productive opposition, in one swift decisive act, is D. Alexis Hart's response to her first two Navy achievement medals inscribed “For His Service”: “I made them send them back,” she tells us. “I didn't just keep them. I think there's work to be done within the military” (Personal interview).

“People Conclude that Girls Don't Do Combat Zones. That's Bullshit”

Parachute Jumper. Pilot. Munitions Specialist. Sensors Technician. Crew Chief. Systems Technology Specialist. The job offers and choices help define the feminist sophistic these stories create with their spirit of adventure, exploration, and strategic approach to “the game.” The essence of the sophistic since its inception in our most ancient teaching practices is contingency (Jarratt; Murphy and Katula; among many others, *passim*) – how Brandy Lockhart can feel a surge of patriotism in Applebee's parking lot on 9/11, ask “what can I do to help,” and end up in Special Ops in Iraq; how “badass” Tabitha Nichols cannot escape the faces of Iraqi children as she tries to sleep. The letter she writes to me about these vivid pictures merits quotation in full:

The children... the children. Images of their faces still appear in my dreams. They also appear in my nightmares. There were some children who were simply being ‘children’

and were completely fascinated with our ‘big trucks and tanks’ coming through their streets. It was understood by us soldiers that these children were taught/told by their parents/elders that we were there to protect them from rebels, ISIS, terrorists, etc. who were destroying their once peaceful villages. These children would wave tiny American flags when we drove by. They would shout ‘we love America.’ Those type of children are the ones who appear in my dreams.

The photo of me and a small boy, he lived just outside of my camp. I would watch him and his sister play and bathe in the canal, which was between my camp's boundaries and his family's shack. I was doing a foot patrol around the camp perimeter and he was playing on the road. I spoke to him. He told me "you pretty" and asked if i would play with him. I asked him if he would take a photo with me and he happily obliged.

The photo of me holding the beautiful infant was also taken right outside of my camp. During another foot patrol, we came across a grandmother, mother and infant. We stopped and spoke to them. In a few moments, I was captivated in conversation with these two women. In broken English, they thanked me for being there and asked me to take the infant with me so she may have a better life in America. (“Re: Notes and Poems”)

What is true about this discourse is its function, in Foucaultian terms, as “a starting point” for action and “field of strategic possibilities” that are typified by a productive response to circumstances, a signal rhetorically of contingency and *metis*, or designing intelligence. The women in this study never call themselves “feminist” – in fact, Mackenzie Rieselt, who considers her assignment on helicopters “awesome” and recognizes, as well, that the quality of her work directly affects combat in the Middle East, considers “almost really feminist” those

women “who would say, like, ‘You know, it’s really unfair our women are being treated unequally.’” To which Mackenzie appends: “I was like, ‘It’s because of your attitude. You’re allowing it’” (Personal interview). Yet feminist they are by their unassailable conviction of their competence and those who doubt them never win this fight. These women are as much a part of Mary Jennings Hegar’s claim of women’s right to all military careers as is her signature on the lawsuit filed on their behalf: these women are her proof. They attest to the fact that one need not be a card-carrying feminist to work effectively as one. The point, as Heilbrun insists, is to have one’s voice in the discourse matter (18).

And the ultimate power of the particular sophistic these stories create is that they illuminate the identity they create in a culture that offers their authors security, solace, travel -- and a terrific benefit package – as well as the risks they rarely talk about, but shape everything they do. Kayla Williams, writing her foundational *Love My Rifle More Than You* in winter 2005, has the last word on this complex, perhaps quintessentially American, balance of youthful *elan* and danger: “I do love my M-4, the smell of it, cleaning fluid, of gunpowder: the feeling of strength,” she writes. Then, writing before the lifting of the combat ban, she dispels with ease the cultural myth of women’s incompetence and fragility:

But isn’t Congress keeping women out of combat? There are no women in artillery, no women in the infantry. We are not permitted to drive tanks. We can’t be Rangers or Special Forces. There are also some teams we rarely go out with because the gear is considered too heavy for the average female to hump on her back.

So people conclude that girls don’t do combat zones. That we’re somewhere else from where the action is. But that’s bullshit. (15-16)

There is power in standing up to a falsified myth with all the grit one's got; setting one's sights toward one's aspirations and purposes; and power for these women in setting their record straight, resolving the difference between reality and perception, learning the rules of the game to circumvent them. Through an act of imagination composed of adventure, ambition, and confidence – and not a small measure of innocence on the cusp of a dangerous, potentially deadly experience – they create a personal and collective identity that countermands the masculine system they insist they have the right and *brio* to enter, and by entering, transform.

The poet and scholar of Greek mythology Robert Graves has said of the warrior, Athena: “She never loses” (99).

“Not Something I Felt I Needed to Prove”

In “Telling Feminist Stories” Clare Hemmings argues that we often revise and valorize stories from the past in order to legitimize a present intent or reality. Our histories, in this respect, are rhetorical; they are sophistic in their relationship with and reliance on the cultures or discourses that give rise to them; they speak to purposes that alter over maps of time. In deliberately feminist contexts, she emphasizes, “which stories predominate or are precluded or marginalized is always a question of power and authority” (118). Her argument speaks to the purposes and, finally, the point of the Athena study directly. In asking women servicemembers to tell the story in their “own way,” the project evokes their challenges to chronicles and discourses wherein the “power and authority” are vested in their male comrades – to them, the “other” with whose acts of humiliation, disrespect, and assault they walk against, achieve their various goals, and transform themselves into “Athena,” ultimately, women warriors in both the military and in life. It would be an error, however, to assume that these challenges are always conscious or

intentional: they do not enlist to deconstruct and remake a system, or create an identity that references existing male structures. Their self-sufficiency is the baseline in their narratives.

At the same time, and as strongly, Athena women offer stories that counter a discourse suffused with suffering and victimization. Indeed, it is the rebel appeal within Goldie Ann Johnson's narratives and researches of women's military lives that inspired this fledgling study of an almost completely unexplored field. Hemmings posits the operative question here: "What textual, rhetorical, exclusionary, inclusive, or diversionary tactics are employed to secure this story and not that one, this present and past and not those ones?" (119). We hear in the Athena accounts not only the incisive events they live through or observe, but also the whispers from history's shadows and locked places: "Women have always fought," Kayla Williams tells us, as does Tulsi Gabbard:

You can look back in history through different conflicts in our nation's past when women have been serving on the so-called front lines, as far back as the Civil War, when the women were disguising themselves as men. The ability of women to serve in these combat roles is there, and has been there for quite some time. It's really the perception that's been different from reality. (Caplan-Bricker)

We hear as well the clarion call for attention to the stories that are, as we herein examine, "uniquely unreported" (Desnoyers-Colas; Wise and Baron; *passim*). The exigence of this narrative is not, as Hemmings cautions, a "corrective" of an inaccurate record, thus replacing one absolute or "essentialist" story with another, but evidence of discourses wherein "meaning is always multiple rather than singular" (119). The songs of experience here are female and male, in harmony and counterpoint, even within those stringently marked categories. Hemmings refers to Foucault's comment in the *Archeology of Knowledge*: "Discourse is not life. Its time is not

your time” (119). My reading of that resonant statement and its relevance to the Athena study lie in its refusal to allow a single ownership of the facts and artifacts, texts and textures, rhetorics and stories of a particular shared geography, experience, era. The discourse, in this study, is the culture of the U.S. Military. The refusal to be cast in essentialist terms is female. D. Alexis Hart delivers the truth of this thesis in one rapier-like statement when she avers her right to be there “is not something I felt I needed to prove” (Personal interview).

This study’s justification is, and has been since its inception, the chance to demonstrate the “power and authority” (Hemmings 118) of voices like D. Alexis Hart’s. Female by definition, thus a site of complication to the belief in a single military discourse that has excluded them, they recreate the landscape and the social networks of that culture through their words. To challenge potential charges that such accounts are anecdotal or relative, Hemmings extends the idea that “challenge to a single truth allows for increased rather than decreased ... accountability” (118). One practical way to enact this critique, Hawkesworth proposes (*Chapter Two “Epistemology”*), is a feminist revision of objectivity, a range of stories arrayed beside one another and studied for their similarity and estrangement (96). This close reading and rhetorical analysis of these 99 accounts is one initial step in pluralizing the discourse – telling not “the” story, but “their” story, in all its complications.⁹

Vivian Lord

In a recent news story, the six-year-old Vivian Lord is playing with her bucket of little green soldiers which, as feminist critics would quickly remark, enact a lesson in gender identity that Mary Beard addresses as well: the military figure is male. The budding critic Vivian notices

⁹ Murphy and Katula identify a sophistic as the idea that one’s truth is not the only truth, and argue that an issue has many facets (27) that lend themselves to “reasoned discourse” (32).

that all figures were male. Her parents attempt to find female soldier figures, and only locate pink male soldiers – whereupon Vivian writes to the toy companies of America: "Why do you not make girl army men," she prints. "My [friend's] mom is in the army to!!(sic)" Her letter details her complaint: first of all, some girls do not like the color pink: "[Please] can you make army girls that look like women. I would play with them every day and my [friends] would to!!(sic)" (Sherry and Zdanowicz). One company, BMC, responds with alacrity: it has considered manufacturing the soldiers she describes, and now the toys are slated for sale in 2020. Here not only is the recognition of women in combat a fact – those little green helmeted figures with female bodies are displayed in the story beside her letter – and the news report foregrounds the girl's demand for a warrior image that represents her physically, as if she hears the line that is both lament and lesson and undergirds the Athena narratives: "We did it anyway." It is further telling that the story is deemed significant enough to broadcast publicly and then expand – to some, perhaps, confound – our cultural discourses of women, of warriors, and of our received ideas, our histories, in which the positionality of these communities has been cemented in a single mold: the classic toy designed to represent and shape identity for boys alone, the male soldier. "Maggie White" addresses this point with acuity:

The military culture recognizes how coed the military is, while America is still misinformed on how many women do serve in the military and their impact. With an increasing number of women serving, I can only imagine and hope that the image of the woman will continue to strengthen. (Written interview)

As recounted by Benedict in *The Lonely Soldier*, Mickiela Montoya, who forges her mother's signature so that she can enlist at 17, sums up her experience in Iraq in one statement powerful enough to inspire both performance and publication:¹⁰ "I'm a soldier. Not a gender" (174).

Her assertion is supported throughout these consultations, conversations, and interviews. I will offer two: Works-Dennis tells us bluntly, "The weight of my M16 has always been on my back. These are good things. Things I want. Things I chose. I am a soldier" (16). And Ladda Tammy Duckworth writes in her disarmingly honest foreword to Holmstedt's *Band of Sisters*: "I worked so hard not to be different from the other Soldiers for most of my career. Being effective in combat requires only that you place the mission first, that you will never quit, never accept defeat, and that when a buddy falls, you do not leave them behind."

"(Younger women) may not have gone through some of the stuff that has made me reluctant to have myself identified as a 'female' Soldier. I am just a Soldier. Progress is made with each generation" (viii).

The related point about the discourses of military women, present also in the point of view of Vivian Lord as she prints her letter, is the distinctive savvy of women entering a male precinct with an assured sense of self. I have noted previously the difference between this unique "double consciousness," and the "outsider within" of Hill Collins' analysis of women known as "slaves" in the self-described "owner's" house. However, as noted, this classic paradigm for a woman who is and yet is not a member of the culture she inhabits does not precisely describe the position and status of these women who feel as entitled to enlist and compete within their military clan as the males who attempt to sustain their dominance. The women's sense of

¹⁰ *The Lonely Soldier Monologues* by Artists Collective Theater, Belinda Linn Rinçon's *Bodies at War: Genealogies of Militarism in Chicana Literature and Culture*; and Geoffrey Wright's "I'm a Soldier, Not a Gender: Iraq War Literature and the Double Bind of Being a Woman in Combat."

membership is determined by themselves alone: that point is clear in every story, no matter the depth of its appeal for recognition and respect. As salient as the Hill Collins model can be when studying many other marked communities who deal with dominant groups within a given culture, women servicemembers, noted earlier, do not acknowledge or describe themselves as outsiders. The interest and tension of their discourse arises from the keen awareness of most women in this study that they are often perceived and treated as the unwelcome “other,” the one “on the outside looking in.” This conflict across genders affects what I would call the ontology of women’s storytelling in the Athena study. They describe how they themselves can be objectified in that military domain, and explicate the events in which they are treated as objects and against which they move intrepid forward, and, often, especially in the stories of Black women, advise and guide one another. The accounts align, again, with Hawkesworth’s feminist concept of “objective,” which signifies validity beyond the individual and the moments she relives in narrative. Conversely, and at the same time, the women have devised diverse strategies to sharpen the edges of their enlistment and especially their experience deployed, owning their subjective accounts and, in the process, asserting their agency. Thus, for them, gender does constitute a new genre – not only in the chapter of military culture and history, but also the literature of service and women’s discourse themselves.

Standpoint As Action Figure

I should write, “subjectivities,” because the standpoint discovered in the course of researching these stories by GTM is not a standardized model depicting all women who enlist as one unitary force. Indeed, they could be discussed and to an extent understood by classic standpoint analysis, which powerfully situates a marginalized group on the economic and social

grounds of their potential opposition. On this point it should be noted that Hemmings refutes the classic model on the basis of its potential essentializing of women's experience (121).

Independent of these tendentious ideas, it is the discovery and proposal of the Athena project that the standpoint most precise and representative of these women's lives and stories about their lives allows for moveable points of status, as theorized in the work of Hekman and depicted in their discourses. On the subject of feeling the need to prove themselves, for example, the women present a series of complex, fascinating, and fine distinctions. They do not question their right to be there and their certainty of equality, as Tabitha Nichols states succinctly: "There's nothing they do that we couldn't do" (Personal interview). However, Tabitha and her colleagues Goldie Ann Johnson and Amber Nadeau explain that women respond to the pressures of physical competition with males by believing they have more to prove.¹¹ Emily Satterfield traces this notion to the lessons of boot camp:

Our drill instructors beat in the fact that we will always have to prove ourselves to the males because they feel that we are less than them and that in order to make it in the male world, that is the Marine Corps, we have to constantly strive to be better than them.

When I got to my duty station I had a female as my 'supervisor.' She was always harsher on the females because she didn't want us to degrade the female name and give males a reason to think less of us. (Written interview)

More pertinently, the standpoint that informs each woman's story – how and where she begins her military journey; the position she occupies; the decision she makes to alter her circumstances

¹¹ "If you look at the standards for performance, the standards were already lower," Goldie Ann Johnson reports in her Personal interview. "So where a man had to do 45 pushups, a female only had to do 19. So that was already a sore spot for most of the males. At 18 or 19 you don't understand that a woman's built differently. You don't understand that a woman can't have pecs like you can. In the same sense that women have an easier time with sit-ups. Guys don't understand that."

– is most aligned with Hekman’s notion of the standpoint as action figure (my analogy) because her reinterpretation moves beyond a fixed position of discernment and critique as rationale for action, and introduces change, difference, and choice, in one’s standpoint, for which the women’s boots may serve as an unlikely metaphor – a standpoint that presupposes movement.

When speaking of proving herself, Tabitha Nichols describes that power of choice: “I kinda *put myself in the position to prove myself* because I wanted to go out with the QRF Team, the Quick Reaction Force Team, that was all guys” (emphasis mine, Personal interview). We see women’s ideas alter through their military experience, as do they. It is my own conclusion, based on the one unassailable fact that ties these stories together – i.e., the speakers and writers are women – that they themselves, by entering that context, create and provoke change. Their bodies are themselves sites of productive opposition. Their bodies are their standpoints: “I was acutely aware that I was a woman,” D. Alexis Hart informs us (Personal interview). Just by being there, they speak to and enact the insight of Beard in *Women and Power*, as introduced as the purpose of this inquiry in “Chapter Three: Method”: “You have to change the structure. That means thinking about power differently” (87).

When a Woman’s at the Helm

However, what women bring, in its full potentiality, remains to be discovered. Kylie Pugh comments that “the full culture of the military is still very old school,” a notion shared by LaRayne Hurd in her interview, and that “we can’t force (progression), there will be no amount of women entering the military that is going to fix that” (Personal interview) – a reading at variance with my own interpretation of women’s engagement and leadership, as argued in this study. Kayla Williams agrees with Kyle and LaRayne and similarly posits that “it’s too soon to

tell ... the mere presence of women does not change a culture. Women existed in vast numbers and we still had sexism. I think other things have to happen” (Personal interview). Toward this end, the Athena women themselves emphasize particular traits they characterize as female that might serve as these “other things,” and whether this conviction is the result of biological or cultural DNA is the purview of a genre not my own. Chrystal Nguessan addresses this point optimistically, her argument excerpted earlier in *Chapter Four Methodology*:

I think women have transformed the military. The air, land, and maritime forces should be representative of the nation itself – not just male Soldiers, Seamen, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen. This representation considers not only physical differences, but perspectives, behaviors, and attitudes. Women provide a different gender perspective to the daily situations and problems of the military and diplomatic events, so their increasing presence has captured a sense of feminine resilience and reaction to hardship. Simple things such as responding to PTSD in women vs. men, dealing with the challenge of postpartum weight loss, and female weight standard have changed the way the military tackles these subjects and consequently, how the rest of the world does as well. (Written interview)

What is pertinent here is not only their awareness of these qualities in themselves and one another, but also that they speak of them without apology. “Women are emotional,” I hear at my interview table, repeated as fact. Goldie Ann Johnson, who echoes Kayla in her edgy reluctance to idealize women’s effect on military culture, speaks directly to this point:

It’s not necessarily true (that having more women makes the military more humane). It does help. Women in general think more emotionally. I think women biologically are more emotionally driven. I do think it’s biological. Look at how your brain works. We

have different chemicals in our brains than males do, so it makes sense that it's biological. (Personal interview)

D. Alexis Hart recounts an experience of “choking up” at a change-of-command dinner for a highly esteemed colleague, and rather than this demonstration of human feeling be perceived as appropriate in this setting, she is criticized as weak: “I got a lot of flak because I was being a woman and crying and there were a couple of people that gave me a hard time about it for a good four months after that. I felt like one of those ‘typical women’ crying over something. I had to earn back respect from a couple of the people” (Personal interview).

“‘Oh, suck it up,’ I heard over and over. ‘You gotta have a thick skin to be in this job.’ I heard that so many times. ‘You gotta have thick skin.’ I don’t have thick skin,” Kristin Hall rejoins. “Women have way more emotion. That was my biggest thing. I had so much emotion. I think the more women do come in, it will continuously get better” (Personal interview).

“Men seem to be scared of women when we show emotions,” Emily Satterfield posits. “Because we are more emotional than men, they feel we cannot handle the military lifestyle and that we will buckle under the mental pressure. They feel that this makes us unable to handle combat because we are ‘mentally weak.’ Yet I have seen males ask friends to break a body part of theirs, usually an arm or a leg, to get out of a deployment” (Written interview).

To this complicated scene of women whose purposes are more than just “serve my four years, go to college, and get out,” as one interviewee describes her intent, Dulcinea Burrow presents a comparison between women and men as leaders, and, indeed, as peers. Dulcinea reveals the women’s strong desire to forge a path ahead – with implications both for the women depicted, and the military itself:

The men were more lazy, and the women wanted that leadership position. They wanted to fight to be in charge, and there was also incentive for us. If we were at the top of our class, we would get early promote, where they would make -- you would be able to get a certificate saying, you did awesome in this class, and you're up for promotion in the military. So you'd automatically get a, like, a push-start, where you automatically on your evaluation get recognized and get authorization to get promoted to the next rank, instead of just waiting and having to take the exam. You're automatically in the line to be promoted no matter what. (Personal interview)

Yet Dulcinea adds nuance to this contention by noting that the specter of "combat action" is one factor that unifies female and male into a team from the first day of boot camp: "We were all scared" (Personal interview). With these intricate and sometimes thorny, sometimes comforting, relationships in mind, it is useful to ask the question: when women aspire to leadership, what does that military authority look like?

As D. Alexis Hart indicates, "Many of the young people don't know a time when there wasn't both genders working. More young men have been in situations in which there was a woman who was a person of leadership" (Personal interview). Does that "success and progress through the ranks" (Holley Personal interview), that authority, as Beard maintains, "fit the part of power" because it forces the woman to "appear more male"? It is, after all, a case of women affording themselves of the agency provided within the military structure to "be in charge," while their male confreres are less aggressive – perhaps, in Nancy Bullock-Prevot's terms, less pressured to "be the best, work harder, get promoted" (Written interview).

To Desnoyers-Colas, the answer is resoundingly No – although, because of her deep voice and athletic physicality, Elizabeth finds her "femininity questioned," she explains in our

telephone interview. However, this Air Force veteran is not only able to resist the imposition of others' gendered assumptions, but also develop her own strong vocality as a measure of women's particular kind of leadership, a final stroke on the diagram of standpoint this chapter has been designing: "I became a person able to speak out on behalf of other women, and I could teach them to speak out." Her notion of female leadership is based on what she considers women's strength – an argument that has been criticized in other feminist forums as essentialized, but which, in this Athena study, will stand as argument to be pursued: "We bring compassion and empathy. Certain things change in the room when women come in. We bring 'the human factor.'" She adds: "Women have to find themselves and where we are valued" (Personal interview). To this end, she is a strong proponent of women assisting and mentoring other women, which is an intrinsic component of women's aspiration to power.¹²

"Women bring compassion, kindness, the human touch," agrees Lila Holley, author of *Camouflaged Sisters* among other texts (Personal interview). Holley is clear about her intention, and has been since a childhood profoundly influenced by her great grandmother, whom she describes as "a woman of service": "There was a leader inside of me," Lila notes. "I fell in love with leadership."¹³ The words she uses to profile the woman as leader in a military context are "approachable and compassionate," and in fact her description is aligned with that of Elizabeth in ways that suggest the vital need for further study. (See Lindsay Allen's collage of Homeless Vets in "Appendix 3 Supplemental Files," as an example of compassionate leadership.)

¹² A quirky manifesto by John Gerzema and Michael D'Antonio, *The Athena Doctrine: How Women (and the Men Who Think Like Them) Will Rule the Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), notes that qualities like those listed here will lead to "effective leadership and success in our work, our communities, and our personal lives" (22).

¹³ Reynolds and Shendruk in "Demographics of the U.S. Military" report that the percentage of women leaders is nearly equivalent to the percentage of women in that particular branch of service, to wit, women comprise 18% in the Army leadership (14% membership); 18% in the Navy leadership (17% membership); 7.5% in Marines leadership (8% membership); and 21% Air Force leadership (19% engagement).

Indeed, Amber Nadeau, her handbook of training for drill sergeant on the conference table between us, shares the purpose that Elizabeth enacts and teaches, a philosophy of leadership Amber gleaned from her own division leader: “She told us, ‘I’m here because I want to be here. I want the next people to protect one another.’” Amber agrees with Dulcinea Burrow in her assessment of her male peers as “lazy” compared to the women aspiring for leadership roles, and in her own quest refused to allow it to “ruin (the) career” she loved, which she intends to pursue: “I want to make an impact on people’s lives, and verify what I want to do. My message is, ‘If I can do it, you can do it. You don’t have to be masculinized.’” (Personal interview)

“I think we have more of a tougher mentality,” Dulcinea contends. “And it’s because we go through so much as it is that we’re able to push past it. ...That’s one thing I have to say about the women I worked with. They have such tough exteriors and they will cry on the inside, but they will not let you see it.” (Personal interview)

“I would say that, in general, women in the military are smarter,” Kylie Pugh firmly states. “Women bring level-headed thinking. I would say that critical thinking skills are masked as nurturing skills.” (Personal interview)

Mackenzie Reiselt agrees with Kylie about women’s intelligence, their ability to say, “It would be smarter if we did it this way, instead of doing it this way,” and notes: “Women can definitely have a big mouth and they might not take no for an answer, and I think that could be a really good thing.” (Personal interview)

“Women bring intuition,” Tabitha Nichols tells us. “Men aren’t that smart. I mean, they’re tough.... Women have that thinking factor. They can assess a situation and figure it out. Our brains work differently. I think that’s a good help.” (Personal interview)

“If they’re dealing with something, they can come to me and we’ll tackle it. We’re going to find a resource, we’re going to find the answers to help you through whatever it is you’re dealing with, and I don’t see that as a weakness. I see that as a strength,” Lila Holley adds.

(Personal interview)

The ways that women create a female military identity that expresses who they are distinctly without reference to a male model are, for me, best encapsulated by Tabitha Nichols. Tabitha, as her narrative indicates, is unflappable as the driver of the camp commander and unfazed by her male colleagues, both on the road and relaxing, or trying to, at camp. But Tabitha, for all her “badass” ambition and attitude, connects with the women she encounters in her sojourn in Iraq:

I got to meet Iraqi women. They don’t talk to anybody. I got to talk to them personally.

Oh, gosh, it was so interesting. This one woman was beat to hell, three or four times, trying to leave the country. She wanted out. Trying to get to school. They didn’t want her to go to school, go to America. Crazy. (Personal interview)

Tabitha does not, like several of her “camouflaged sisters” (Lindsay Allen; Lisa Bradley; Tulsi Gabbard; “Maggie White”; Kayla Williams) address the topic of specifically female traits directly – until she speaks of the children:

I’ve never been asked about the children. Which is weird to me, because everybody assumes women to be motherly and nurturing. Nobody asks about the children, the Iraqi children. They asks about the bold and guts. Nobody asks about the children. (Personal interview)

The kind of compassion that Tabitha feels for Iraqi women and children, shared by Mackenzie Rieselt specifically (“I definitely felt more compassion for women and children” [Personal

interview]), is a crucial part of the leadership styles identified by Elizabeth and Lila. Although we may view these nascent structures as changes or even, as Hemmings warns, “corrections” to the archaic male systemologies, it bears repeating that these new casts of military bearing and identity are forming out of who women are, believe themselves to be, and aspire to be, without reference to a male model: “The military may be mainly males but our collective *ethos* isn’t about the male warrior trope of being hard ass, but one of working hard and becoming the best we can,” reports Emily Satterfield (Written interview). The little green figures set to appear in 2020 may be dressed and positioned like their male predecessors, but the bodies they depict – in the words of Kayla Williams, “the strength and physicality as a part of what women can be and are” (Personal interview) -- tell their own story.

What is remarkable is that, for many women in this study, this assured and secure sense of self is clear, and clearly articulated, even as they recount the periods of confusion and disarray – “What am I going to do with my life?” – as a quest that precedes their inquiry and enlistment in the military. It must be noted, too, that with few exceptions, the Athena women pursue this goal with certainty as teenagers and very young adults, a time of “naivete,” as Judy Young reminds us, but also a notable *aretē* perhaps unique to them, a valorous spirit that bade them enter and sees them through the battles they encounter on multiple fronts, herein described, some more than others, such as Black women in the ranks: from peers both female and male; from superiors in the hierarchy; from enemy forces; from the discourses about their service in civilian worlds; the books that claim to describe them; from, sometimes, themselves. The emphasis on a quest, “a profound and questing pursuit,” is a key feature of classical *aretē* (Hawhee 23 *passim*). But I’d like to bring into bold relief the comments that come to me, unbidden, since it is not a question I

ask, from five Athena women in personal interviews who speak with elegant concision to this very point and thus establish the grounds of our meeting:

“I guess it never really occurred to me that I couldn’t,” says Mackenzie Rieselt. (Personal interview)

“I wasn’t afraid,” Amber Nadeau tells us. (Personal interview)

“I realized my role as leader,” reports Lindsay Allen. (Written interview)

“I’ve got a big mouth, you know?” Lila Holley notes. (Personal interview)

And finally, from Tabitha Nichols: “I can hold my own.” (Personal interview)

The Problem of “Resilience” As a Term of Art

By hearing and pondering these assertions now, I come closer than I have been able to do thus far to comprehending a point that Kayla Williams emphasizes in our conversation, and I have inferred from most accounts in this study, that is, the way they abjure the word “resilience” as the term of art for their experience. I first learn of this problem from Kayla:

A lot of us felt trapped by the term of being ‘resilient.’ When this was discussed (among women veterans), I was surprised at how strongly it resonated with me as well. So people call women resilient and I do it. I talk about myself that way. The narrative I’ve written for myself is that I am resilient. ... There can be this weird dichotomy, like you’re either a hero or you’re a victim. ‘Oh, you’re in the uniform, you’re amazing, you can do no wrong, which is bullshit. We’re not all amazing. You take off the uniform, and you might be homeless and suicidal and broken. So if you decide that no, I’m going to be the resilient veteran, it can be really hard to say, this isn’t working out for me right now and I really need some help. (Personal interview)

Consequently, I query Goldie Ann Johnson on this point, and she promptly agrees: “When you say that someone’s resilient, in my mind, it implies that at some point I was weak and I had to come back. Not saying I’m totally strong and infallible, but I don’t think resilient is the best word. Not resilient” (Personal interview). Rereading the narratives, I notice that some women, such as Desnoyers-Colas, do indeed speak of “resilience”: “As an African American woman, I think that we grew up knowing that resilience was going to have to be a reality if you were going to succeed” (Personal interview). Nevertheless, I realize that the subtext and theme of even those particular accounts resist the kind of unrelenting repression that might elicit that kind of response. It seems more true to me to propose that the women experience moments where resilience is required: “I can do this,” Brandy Lockhart notes in boot camp, for example. Later in her interview she expounds on that situational rebounding:

I wouldn’t say it was particularly difficult. It’s just at times, there’s going to be stressful times for everybody and for me, the most challenging was just being sick. You don’t feel well, you’re run down, you’re in this place, you’re like, man, I could just quit right now and go home and wouldn’t that be great. I could just sleep in. Then I thought, ‘You’re so close to the end. Just keep going. So I finished it. (Personal interview)

But the women themselves reject consistently the notion that “resilience” is a concept to characterize their tenure of service. I have reached the conclusion, on this point, that once again we meet and realize the way this feminist sophistic works to allow their stories to surface and contend with one another: resilience is, for each of them, contextual and kairotic, one human quality among all others they could summon in need. It is not, they plainly say and demonstrate, the paradigm and central truth of their stories.

I wonder, too, if once again we meet and realize the limitations of language to describe the new phenomenon of these women, without reference to the existing male domain. Here, I think, we can refer to the metaphor and rhetorical mode of *metis*, a way of a woman's waiting, watching, and acting when the *kairos* seems auspicious. *Metis* is clear and traceable in each Athena story, as the *Metis imago* is guardian and guide for the mythical Athena herself. With intellect, patience, and steely intent, each woman imagines herself in the military, shapes her identity as a female servicemember. She forges her own path through, evoking the trope of Athena with shield and sword. I think it is the cunning and energy and wits, indeed, the physical courage, like a raised sword, required for success in these battles that impels the contempt for "resilience" as the title of their story. Perhaps it is, to them, as blind to their true experiences, and as bland, as the automatic "Thank you for your service" that is our cultural meme, and therefore, often, banal and essentially dismissive.

But a look at the etymology of the word "resilience" might reveal the truest reason for objection to its relevance here. Indeed, it acts against the content and the meaning of the Athena story perniciously. Whether the women know the linguistic history of a word they fundamentally distrust, their most tenacious argument about their military service is compromised by the word in its molecules. "Resilience" comes from the Latin *resiliens*, "a leaping back"¹⁴ and as it is used in discourse, "resilience" has come to signify "a rebounding." But the manifest resilience of "begin again" is not the story told by these women. Mackenzie Rieselt responds to this problem:

I can understand how women wouldn't like that. Why? Because you wouldn't call a guy that got hit in the face and popped back up, you wouldn't call him resilient. It would just be normal for him. If a girl got hit in the fact, and she popped back up, they'd be like,

¹⁴ "resilience." *Etymology Online Dictionary*.

‘Yeah! She’s a fighter!’ or there’s a different tone to it. Because women are ‘more fragile.’ But I still don’t see that. I see that women are strong than men. Most of the women I know are much stronger than the men I know. (Personal interview)

The notion and action of a “rebound” is not only irrelevant to these narratives, but inimical to the meaning and significance of their service – and for most of them, their fundamental identity and inevitable movement toward a future as representatives of service and the valor that accompanies their sacrifices, which the word “veteran” sustains and teaches.

Metistic strategy encompasses the women’s ability to push forward, not rebound, and alter her reality and her shape to achieve her goals: “(Metis is) the goddess of cunning intelligence, of hidden plans realized at the right moment” (D. Hoffman 99), and indeed her “disguise becomes her identity” (Hawhee 52). It is clear in the literature about Metis that such quicksilver changes are like the much decried sophistry that critics, from Plato to present-day scholars, consider the rhetorical trick. However, these inheritors of both Metis and her offspring Athena speak of physical and intellectual changes as a process of maturation and a strengthening of their character and resolve. Kayla Williams, who questions the relevance of the term “resilience,” notes her own ambivalence about that term as she speaks of the character lessons of her deployment:

It became part of my identity and who I am, thinking of myself as someone who is strong, who is resilient, who can handle things and do things. I’m sure that a lot of that was already there, I just wasn’t aware of it, and part of it was also I do have to credit the military for the training, right? The ability to handle myself in a crisis when I was watching somebody bleeding. (Personal interview)

The camouflage they may have metistically assumed, along with the standard-issue attire, allows them to confront and move beyond “the flak” of colleagues (Hart Personal interview) and the dismissal and indifference of superiors. That camouflage is indeed a function of *Metis*. But I would argue that metistic intent can also be interpreted as a study of ambition. It will be recalled that unrepentant decisions have moved these women out of lives they define as unacceptable to them. “Anything to find meaning,” La Rayne Hurd has told us, and we see manifestations of this purpose and willpower throughout their stories. They use argument, cunning, negotiating, pushback, skill, subterfuge, and legal redress, whatever strategy would achieve their goals in often hostile territories. Sometimes, like Nancy Bullock-Prevot, their decisions need time to anneal, and they can work their way forward more practically: “There were challenges, to be the best, work harder, to get promoted, and to make myself stand out” (Written Interview). The *metis*, ultimately is found and traceable within the shape they have imagined at the start – forging it out of their own resources, and thus becoming the women warriors they aspire to be.

A Note on Theory and Rhetorical RNA

As I read and coded the stories, hunted for the familiar or new theories that might emerge from the ways the narratives and reflections would interweave and diverge, I realized, without surprise, that my entire enterprise – from the moment Goldie entered my classroom in Spring 2015 and insisted, “we all matter too,” to this endwriting now – is rhetorical in ways I did not expect, even as I conceived of the project as a sophistic and examined my own researcher conscience to admit that I view everything human designed as rhetorical. I noted along the way that Grounded Theory focused on the women’s storytelling only and arising from their situated knowledges, aligned this method – first developed for discovery of a patient’s real story without

manipulation or suppression by medical professionals' opinion – with both the sophistic of my intent and title as well as the unique standpoint these women reveal as individuals as a “communion of unmerged souls” (for which I have Bahktin to thank) who worked in “concerted action” (Hekman) for “changing women’s lives” (Jarratt *passim*).

But in my researches I also came upon a brief note in reference to a text, “The Aristotelian *Topos*,” that suggests a deeper level to this theoretical *nexis* with its rhetorical soul and messaging RNA. We have explored how the standpoints that position these women in ever-shifting scenes and life stories that lead to coordinated action are composed, along with unwavering commitment to their cause and unassailable equality, of *metis*, the alert intelligence that waits and watches, hunter-like, for its creative chance, its *kairos*. And this strategic use of pluck is apparent in each story these Athenas tell, from the move to enlist to the moment an opportunity for a medal or promotion or recognition is seized, regardless of disdain (“you won because you have a vagina”), envy, shunning, or vindictive manufactured charges (“you disrespected me”), as recounted here briefly and more completely as indictment in published accounts. The *Topos* text I found traces *metis* to an ancient theme in Greek epic poetry, wherein Ulysses is depicted as “polymetic, or many-skilled, the paragon of craftiness and cunning” in multiple situations (emphasis mine, Miller *Topos* 138) – his journey a sophistic before the invention of the word, if not the concept – i.e., adaptive to contingencies and mutable relationships. There is a welcome cohesion, and a coherence, among these factors and functions that offer, as an oxymoron I cannot escape, an essential basis to rhetorical inquiry, an approach which refutes all question of essence. And most pertinently, the list of the professional souls who need *metis* the most – “the navigator, the physician, the hunter, the warrior, the weaver, the politician” (Miller *Topos* 138) – ends with “the sophist.”

But the kicker, in argumentation, is the classical value placed on the movement of *metis*, the urgency that is a carefully calibrated, strategic, and surprise attack – i.e., *aretē*, or valorous trial. *Aretē* in this contingency, however, is itself a form of situated knowledge, grounded in the life story of the one making the attempt, taking the risk. *Metis*, the ancient *topos* indicates, is the *aretē* – the achievement, if not victory – of the street, the “banausic,” and the strivers, not the elite or “aristocrat” (Miller *Topos* 138) who take achievement for granted, as a birthright they need not earn, and therefore never truly own it. So in the end we see standpoint, defined by its original theorist, Hartsock, as “an achievement” (“Experience” 179; also, Harding *Reader* 17) ineluctably elided with *aretē* as a driving force within the Athena discourses.

Athena is therefore, by definition, the embodiment, indeed the essence, of valor.

“Like a Veteran.”

It is my hope, finally, that the dissertation has achieved a dual purpose: (1) to discover the commonalities and differences within the discourses of women who have traversed the historically male domains of the U.S. Military; and (2) to discover within their stories a model that shows the creative and persistent ways they both imagine and shape the identity of the female warrior on their own terms. As hooks has observed, within constraint and limitation we find “radical possibility” (*Choosing* 15), an idea that infuses the discourses of the Athenas in this study. We can discern and trace this potent message and the experience that grounds it in their standpoint of commitment, competence, and strategic patience.

“I’m excited to talk about it,” Kylie Pugh tells us. “No one ever asks. I wish that people would ask, ‘what is the woman’s story?’ And nobody seems to want to even ask because they have that disposition of, ‘we’re going to hear about just whining that they’re not equal.’ Even

asking the question to me is refreshing, nice, that anyone is even concerned about it” (Personal interview).

These are indeed early days in the uncovering and discussion of these stories. Their analysis, particularly in methods that recognize and sustain, indeed, are essentially derived from, the agency of their speakers, is untrodden ground. Stephanie Szitanyi, writing in her dissertation “Degendering and Regendering: Contemporary Gender Trouble in the United States Military,” decries a process she describes as a reassertion of masculine dominance in response to the increasing presence of females:

Certain masculinized narratives erase women’s roles in the military from public consciousness, placing military service performed by women below a threshold of visibility. ... I suggest that these pervasive military discourses sustain a value hierarchy that subordinates the lives and contributions of ordinary individuals to the potent sacrifice of the ultimate (masculine) warriors. (iii)

Szitanyi’s study accords, certainly, with accounts of male hegemony that saturate the literature of military women. However, I close this dissertation with an amplified view of that story, one that creates stasis in the conversation and stands the female soldier firmly as fact, a point however newly fixed, that counters an ultimately successful regendering of “hetero male privilege” (Szitanyi iii) in military culture. My argument here is akin to a question in the (smartly) titled article by Jacky Coates et al. in *Feminist Studies*, “Isn’t Just Being Here Political Enough?” For this inquiry, I would repair the query to read, “Isn’t Just Being Here Military Enough?” – indeed, the material fact of a female “Being Here” is the main point of my study and a direct challenge to an aggressive discourse of male supremacy that Szitanyi, for one, affirms even as she critiques it. I add the profound insight of Butler in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory* to further clarify

this point: “What we are seeing when bodies assemble,” she writes, “is the exercise ... of the right to appear, a bodily demand for a more livable set of lives” (24).

This “bodily demand” is intended to contest a system, an “enculturation,” in Anthony Giddens’ terms, which deeply impresses its lessons through successive generations and seems an apt description of military culture. As ethnographers Heath and Street have remarked, “every (speaker) reflects habits, loyalties, and ideologies forged in cultural patterns that existed long before they were born” (6). Indeed, it has been the intent of this dissertation to trace the evidence of the new vistas that female veterans are working to create: Heath and Street, while working within a cultural context, affirm the potential for individual decision: “Cultural patterns, shifting and cumulative as they are, provide the basis through which every human creates, explores, sustains, and tests social relations while developing a sense of agency” (6). In the patterns of military culture, male hegemony has seemed inviolable: however, the irrefutable fact of the female servicemember stands out, in boldface print, in a proliferation of narrative accounts – at least 20 citations in the last five years, surpassing in number the previous ten, and countless interviews and posts in published and private studies and internet discussion forums. As hooks asserts, “writing can be a powerful form of political resistance” (*Harding Reader* 12). We might, having listened to each woman “telling her story her own way,” move beyond an inflection point of resistance to the most salient question: What kind of military culture do the commitment and engagement of these women create?

“The Story Begins with Redemption. It Ends That Way, Too.”

The Athena Model is one, and by no means final, step forward to define and read the new genre of this storied discourse, which is, in the enduring words of Bakhtin, both “multivocal” and

“multivalent” – “a communion of unmerged souls” (18) – a discourse that constitutes a fertile field for inquiry. For example, Lindsay Allen, Elizabeth Avila, and Kylie Pugh offer competing topic sentences as they interpret their narratives of deployment:

“We are not treated any different than the men are treated,” Lindsay explains (Written interview).

“We all cooperated and male warriors did their job,” says Elizabeth. “I cannot say I was mistreated or treated differently than males. I was treated accordingly and I responded equally” (Written interview).

“The female experience in the military and the male experience in the military (are) 100% different from the lowest rank to the highest,” Kylie tells us.

And the woman whose word, “redemption,” offered this study one of its foundational precepts, Works-Dennis, complicates her own insight: “I don’t know,” she writes. “Maybe there is no redemption after all. I’ve been home for over five years now and I’ve read through (my story) a hundred times, editing, reading out loud, always with a glass of wine to numb the impact. Always trying to get it right, and maybe get through to someone, anyone, that combat isn’t what it is cracked up to be. I am not redeemed. Service in the military is damaging. It hurts, but it also transcends. Whatever I felt I needed to prove in this life ... I feel I proved enough in Iraq to see me through” (48).

It is possible, too – inevitable, if we were to refer once again to Lloyd Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, that “redemption” in this story, these discourses, is not only confined to those who speak to us, but possible, if we the audience listen, in us as well. Air Force veteran “Hanna” addresses this potential:

I want Americans to know that the people who are risking their lives fighting for their freedom are real people. Until I joined the military, I imagined soldiers as being single men who did not have families. When I heard about another soldier dying it was sad, but I never thought about who they may have left behind. ... I want them to hear my story so they know that they are not alone in this world when life doesn't treat them entirely as fair as it should. I also want them to see that they will be okay, everything will work out in the end. I love this quote by Hugo Claus, 'I am a person who is unhappy with things as they stand. We cannot accept the world as it is. Each day we should wake up foaming at the mouth because of the injustice of things.' (Public Writing)

“Putting One Foot in Front of the Other”

The texts of these women encompass both published material as well as private projects such as Tabitha Nichols' poetry shared with this project; their stories are aligned with or constrained by studies that serve to contextualize them with demographic data and historical or genealogical information. The most promising approach for the research proposed here is to apply the Athena model to questions posed in this study and develop new models, new questions, the better to hear the many voices and discover the multiple truths within these stories. Here I am reminded of scholar and discourse theoretician Gee who reminds us that “discourses are not ‘units’ with clear boundaries”:

In the end a Discourse is a ‘dance’ that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times, and places and in the here-and-now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination. Like a dance, the performance here-and-now is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to

what the. ‘masters of the dance’ (the people who inhabit the Discourse) will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance.

(*Introduction* 36).

The “masters” of this “instantiation,” of course, are women. In this respect I view this study as a contribution, one of the first of its kind, to a Discourse comprised of the material of military women’s experiences, which is as robust as it is largely unacknowledged. Evidence of this Discourse is the emerging genre of military women’s literature, certainly, our subject in these pages, but also the wealth of other activities and texts that compose authentic Discourse: performances, personal relationships, reading and writing clusters, social media groups, academic departments and dedicated curricula, conferences, retreats, personal writings, films works of art, and other features that enable our recognition of a distinct and flourishing culture, an “enstructuration” to Giddens, a *nomos* of its own making. Within the “Big ‘D’ Discourse” Gee identifies discourses, language as it is actually used, and here, I believe, we can locate the topics of the Athena model: the commitment to military purpose and desire to belong to that community; the confidence to enlist and unquestioned equality; the intelligence and pluck to see it through.

We can, as this Athena study demonstrates, apply that model productively to each stage in their “military journey,” each station they needed to attain along the way, from “Moving Out” of dissonant situations or times of indecision or, more prosaically for teenage girls, high school to valued career; throughout enlistment, deployment, nights listening to the cries of comrades in their cots, “We Did It Anyway,” adapting to life in uniform and its often tendentious effects on companions they often, in complicated ways, considered allies and friends. As Works-Dennis remarks at the start of this dissertation study, “I know there would be plenty of people out there

who (would) say, ‘What the hell does she know about combat?’ That’s fine. I really don’t give a shit what you think. The military gives me the ‘inner fortitude’ to tell you that” (3). Throughout this progression, for such it is for each woman, a learning curve that has changed her view of life and of herself entirely, so that the word “resilient” comes nowhere near describing her “inner fortitude” and emergence as Athena, warrior, we see how she has imagined a female identity in this genetically male system, and shaped that identity without reference to male customs and values. Rather, she defines Athena on her own, despite the fact that, as Kylie Pugh reminds us, “The vast majority (of servicemembers) are male, (and) there’s no need to identify them. The use of the word ‘veteran’ is male” (Personal interview).

But, despite the careful reconsideration we see in Works-Dennis and her search for the right word to signify women’s military experience, I think one form of “redemption” in this story is the act of saving themselves from invisibility and silence. The story shows the ways that they came through the fire – of battle; of customs designed to extinguish them. On the final pages of *Danger Close: My Epic Journey As a Combat Helicopter Pilot in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Amber Smith offers her thoughts at the moment of realizing that she and her squad “had made it,” and I present them here in full:

My life had changed during my time at war. I’d made some friends, and lost some.

Learned some lifelong lessons, and done things I hoped I’d never have to do again. I’d flown in some of the most rugged and unforgiving terrain in the world. I’d witnessed terrorists, Taliban, and al-Qaeda. I’d been shot at too many times to count, had some close calls, but luckily was not injured by enemy fire. My Kiowa got shot up in Iraq in the same AO where the then leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was killed by a U.S. air strike. I spent time in some of the most notoriously dangerous valleys

that were witness to some of the most intense and dangerous combat in the world, where many brave soldiers earned the Medal of Honor. Somehow, I'd survived. Most of my fellow pilots had survived – but not everyone. For those of us who had made it, we had a future to look forward to. The war had taken its toll on all of us, but what we made of that was up to us. (255)

Drinking with friends and sleeping, which were Army Sergeant Jeanna Marrano's habits when she first returned home, became in short order the realization that she wanted control and direction in her life: "I didn't want to be another military statistic and waste away my life," she says. "I knew in time the depression and stress would go away or get easier" (Holmstedt *Marching* 167). Indeed, this chapter ends with redemption – albeit the kind they must acknowledge and build upon every day. "Fly safe, Lace," Amber tells her younger sister, Lacey, whom she must leave behind for her "year of suck" in Afghanistan. "Never get complacent and always keep your eyes open" (254). Her advice applies as well to these women as they move from active service to lives as veterans, embodying another salient phrase from Amber's story, "still ... putting one foot in front of the other," with the choice to "either sink or swim" (72).

Implications: Multiple Narratives of Identity

If I had another three years and 400 pages to devote to this dissertation and allow its discoveries to evolve, I have developed a list of proposals and questions I would pursue with alacrity. I offer them here, unresolved and indeed unaddressed, as implications of this study and topics that, among other "cold cases" turned up by other researchers, are open for investigation. They are:

(1) The Paradoxes

- a. their sense of freedom in military constraint;
- b. their perception of community within a diverse and often fractious group of women servicemembers;
- c. their perception of opportunity in a culture of discrimination (for Black women, an identified “double discrimination”);
- d. their ability to create a self, perhaps their truest self, in camouflage;
- e. their ability to sustain reality among the stereotypes;
- f. their ability to use their military experience to talk forthrightly and honestly about their lives as women and discuss issues civilian women do not.

(2) The Question of Balance

- a. On the assumption that what the military does better than anyone else is logistics – logistics as context; logistics as strategy; logistics as skill; and as talent and technique for survival:
- b. Do these particular women enlist because they, too, share a propensity to rely on logistics as structures?
- c. Do they instinctively adapt metistically to a context of logistics, which seems one and the same as their strategic intelligence?

(3) The “Beneath Truth”

- a. Important work could be pursued that looks at these and the stories to come through the lens of Mary Beard’s theories of women and power; Susan Hekman’s “feminist subject”; bell hooks; Luce

Irigaray's ideas of *nos semblables* (those like us; here, "our sisters" – twinned with Holley's "Camouflage Sisters" and the experience of Black women); and further analysis with the unpredictable grounded theory method.

- b. Equally exciting projects (in my view) would focus on the discrete incidents and topics that serve as headings or subheadings in these chapters: for example, I was able to collect an enormous file on the issue of uniforms, most of which, in the interest of galloping length, I could not use. But there it is – embodying the comment of my UW colleague Stevi Costa in a Facebook post: "Fashion isn't frivolous; it's a valid site of critical inquiry."
- c. In her email to me Robin Truth Goodman explains her perception of the "combat woman's" life story: "I think when people talk about their experiences, they are already inside the social crisis, so what counts as 'authenticity' is analyzable as social crisis" ("Re: Question about Gender, Warfare"). Although Goodman admits that rhetoric is not her interest or subject, I was able to connect the ways the Athena women, within their sophistic, create their discourses by speaking out, as all feminist scholars, teachers, and theorists advise, from the cultural pressures and social dominance they experience.
- d. I found a similar idea in *Reading Autobiography* by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who define the life narrative as "historically

situated practice of self-representation” (14). But the connection with Goodman was in their idea that we superimpose discourses over those that are imposed on us.

- e. Thus, as Goodman and Smith and Watson indicate, we interweave multiple narratives of identity.

These are ideas worthy of study. Fonow and Cook remind us that women’s empowerment has been, since the inception of formalized feminist discourse and thought in “consciousness raising” movements of the late twentieth century, concerned with the “policy implications” of the kind of research presented in this Athena study. “Most of us believed,” they note, “in one way or another that, to study and understand change, one had to be an active participant in political struggle” (2223). The stories herein represent that engagement – the stories themselves embody it – as would further investigation of the issues these women bring to our attention.

“This Is Who I Am NOW”

It was much later, after I had completed the first draft and the voices so vibrant in interview and memoir were consigned to a stack of printed pages on my dining room table, that I realized I had not in fact achieved – with all that typing, all that rumination and “theoretical sampling” of the Athenas’ and my own thinking, the structural and sentence-level proofing and revision, the attempt to resolve as far as possible the tensions inherent in rhetorical analysis of discourse – a conclusion. This lapse in researcher judgement was the secret, unsuspected by me, of this dissertation, despite its depth of content and ever-increasing length. I had followed the Charmaz method of GTM and offered my own extensions to that rhetorical process (or so I will always argue its insight of contingency of discourse and will to teach [*docere*] and change

[*movere*]¹⁵). I had pursued the avenues of discovery that uncovered for this discussion the ways that gender is genre for these women, and genre in fact consisted here of a newly imagined and actively shaped female identity in military *ethos*, precincts, and routine. And I had located within gender / genre / identity *nexis* a deep and probing, changeable and transformative standpoint of commitment, fierce equality, and patient alertness never to be underestimated, in the shadow of Metis. But what I had not done was move – as these Athenas had physically moved – to the next step of the story. And it was in my hearing, the interviews I listened to, over and over, my sightline as I transcribed the conversations, all along. Lila Holley had said it first, perhaps most forcefully and succinctly: “I came out a mighty fighting woman, you know? I feel like I’m a beast, you know?” (Personal interview). The truth of her words was and remains apparent in each woman I interviewed, each narrative I read, whether or not they still bore the scars and sometimes open wounds of their battles in duty stations and combat. I realized -- much as Charmaz describes the *frisson* of abductive reasoning, a realization that hits you like Brandy Lockhart’s recounting of the “big KATHONK!” (Personal interview) in a sudden shelling – that these Athenas had not only created a new identity for a military female to embody in her unique fashion, but for themselves as women in the world and indeed for all women who listen to the stories of their quest and strength in battle, the very essence of *aretē*.

Yes, everything these women told me, the discourses they compose, each voice building on the last, that I heard, taped, transcribed, heard, edited, quoted, fitted into my own narrative, everything spoke of quest, movement, change. In fact, the quest story was my first argument about these stories, and not a wrong-headed move, given the integrity of its relationship with the classic warrior virtuosity, *aretē* (Hawhee 23 *passim*). As one perhaps too immersed in rhetorical

¹⁵ The Latin canons of rhetoric are proposed by Cicero in *De Oratore* from 55 b.c.e. and this researcher’s personal favorite strategies.

practice and pedagogy, I was too close to a theory and argument that is a matter of course to me: I do not believe there is any other reasonable way to think and theorize, and therein, I must confess, lay my lack of awareness of the end of this chapter, the start of the next. I was observing a teacher leading her class through a lesson in hidden messages in texts, and the line that guides me beyond the confines of my study became suddenly clear to me. I drew a line in

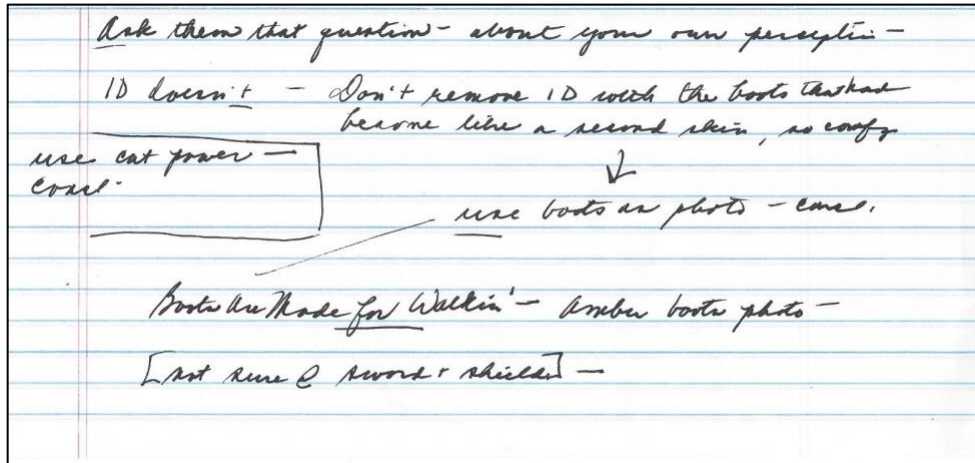


Figure 33 Clip from Observation Report of Aha! Moment With Conclusion

my observation report and beneath it, in reference to the Athenas, wrote: “Don’t remove ID with the boots that had become like a second skin, so comfy” (fig. 33). I turned the page, drew another line, and found the conclusion of this study: “In many ways, most significant relationship in their lives – the connection they refer to – regardless of what happens, they love their time in service – refer to it -- ID themselves in those terms – it becomes not only the female military identity for others who follow to recognize and negotiate, but THEIR ID itself.”

"It becomes," I wrote, "who they are" (fig. 34).

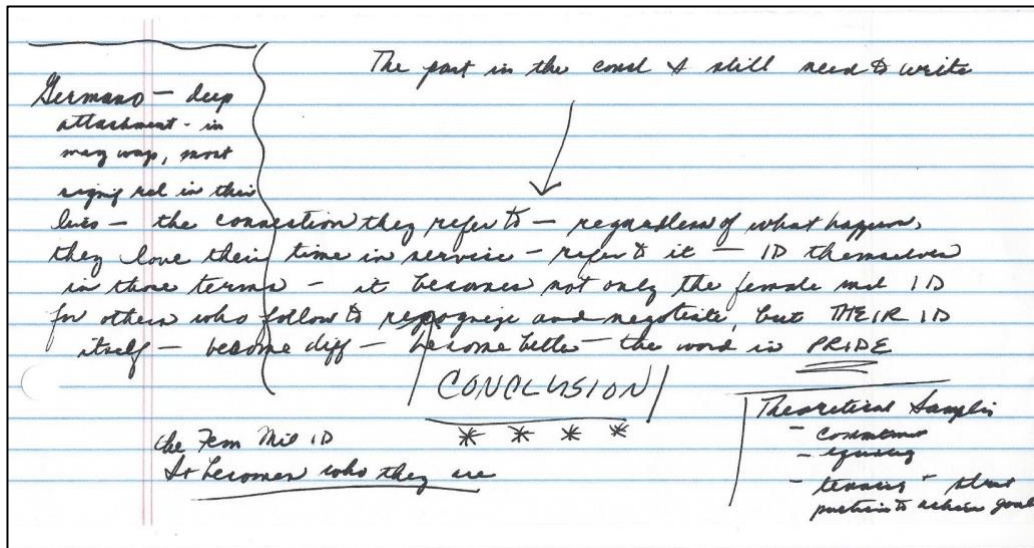


Figure 34 Clip from Observation Report of Draft Conclusion

At the end of all storytelling, at the point where each woman makes a stand like that of Jas Booth, profiled in the film "Served Like a Girl," who tells us emphatically: "We are not second class veterans ... We are warriors," what is clear is the accuracy (in Hawkesworth's terms, the "objective" truth) that their tenure of service IS in many ways the most significant relationship in their lives. "Salvation," Works-Dennis tells us bluntly. "Lots of people get it at the altar. I got it in uniform" (3). It is the cornerstone they refer to, the inflection point that alters the way they talk about their lives prior to enlistment and then decisions and experiences now. "I look at myself and the progress over the years that I've made, the things that I've been able to do with my life in that 22 years of service," Lila Holley tells us. "I entered a shy, young lady, and I came out a mighty fighting woman, you know? I feel like I'm a beast, you know?" (Personal interview) Regardless of what happens – and they offer discourses of resolution following the violence of warfare and death of comrades, as well as more private traumas – they evince a deep abiding attachment to their military experience: "Such an experience," Rachel Coggins tells us in

her memoir of service as chaplain, “is forever implanted in our mind and our very being” (x).

Lila Holley extends that sentiment: “Well, I would do it again, really,” she states. “If I had it all over to do, I would absolutely do it again” (Personal interview). Like Lila, these women identify themselves in terms that directly communicate commitment to a tradition and mission they value, their conviction of their own equality, and metistic tenacity in achieving their goals, which Hekman, for one, posits as the point of acknowledging the women’s standpoint (239) – in this dissertation, as servicemembers. From the standpoint of Uma Nayana, they “reclaim for themselves the value of their own experience” (214). This sense of themselves becomes not only the female military identity they create in the conduct of their service, but their own identity as women. It is who they are now.

As part of a continuing email correspondence between us, Lila comments that she agrees with these conclusions, “especially your statement, ‘This is who you are now.’ Once I embraced who I am as a result of my military experience, it freed me to be me with no limitations,” she notes. And then she makes a revision to that statement, and one that perfectly and succinctly hits the final point of this American Athena study: “This is who I am NOW,” she writes.

“I love the fact that I did that,” Tabitha Nichols tells us, firmly, in her personal interview. “It makes me proud of myself. I went for it. I got the experience. And I try to keep the same thing now, I mean, I just go for it. Like a veteran.”

“Being a veteran now?” Goldie concludes. “Why are they calling me out? I’m proud of my service as a veteran. But I feel like I have to make it known that I have a different view, that I’m not just the average college student sitting in a classroom passing my opinion. I’m not just ‘this person.’ I’ve been around the world, I’ve seen different things, I’ve seen different people, I’ve experienced different cultures. So when I speak, I’m not speaking out of ignorance.”

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Keywords

Memoir -- Methodology – Women Veterans Memoirs and Narratives – Women Veterans Analysis and Opinion – Rhetorical Analysis -- Metis – Greek History and Mythology: Metis & Warfare – Theory (CDA; Rhetoric; Narrative) – Women and Warfare – Veterans – Agency – CDA – Pedagogy – Public - Orders of discourse – Rhetoric – Discourse – Multimodality – Material – Visual – Feminist – Race - Narrative

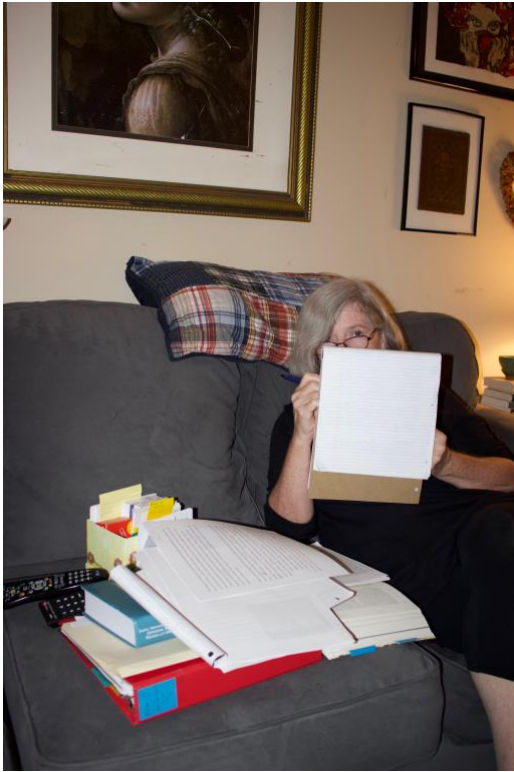


Figure 34 Portrait of the author. Photo by Chloe Fox-Edele

Appendix 1: IRB Approved Material

Appendix 1 contains a compendium of documents foundational to the Athena project. Included here are the results of courses required for the IRB; the IRB permissions; the invitations and consents that the women received and signed, as well as resources available to them if the memories revisited in this project troubled them.

Statements Defining the Project March 2017

1. The stories of women veterans are different in content and purpose, history and idea, from their male counterparts in military culture. Their experiences as well as their post-service aspirations are situated in their identities as women. But this literature is nearly invisible in research beyond trauma and victim study. The purpose of this project is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of these stories – a first in the literature -- and see the world these women have inhabited – military and civilian – through their eyes. Texts under investigation include first-person accounts as well as published storytelling. This IRB application is related to interviews conducted at the University of West Florida (UWF).

The research questions are: (1) What is this woman's sense of herself and her situation in the context of military culture? (2) How does she describe her response to this culture? (3) Does her story represent a counter-discourse to this culture, and if so, in what ways is her resistance enacted? (4) How can the advice of veterans studies scholar Mariana Grohowski – to “listen ... share ... advocate” – be practiced in the process of working with these stories?

The research is pursuant to my dissertation in English from the University of Washington in Seattle (contacted to see if they also require IRB) as well as a series of critical articles in this emergent field of study.

2. The research participants, all women veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, include both students and alumnae of the University of West Florida (UWF) as well as women who have participated in the veterans' reading groups and performances on the UWF campus. I hope to recruit 10 women from this group, including several former students whose stories inspired this project in the first place, as well as 5-7 veterans in public life, such as the authors of published accounts and members of congress. (Broadcast permission and recruitment material.) I would also like to invite participation from members of social media sites, such as Women's Veterans on Facebook (of which I am a member) where women create communities of storytelling for themselves alone. As D. Alexis Hart has noted, such communities “‘voice the landscape’ of female military service and (women who participate) have discovered a space in which they can and do use ‘a discourse of their own.’”

3. The texts are published narratives and polemics by women veterans, in print and digital form, as well as my own interviews in the community of women veterans here at UWF, email correspondence; and writings contributed by the participants to this study. The material will be secured and stored on a dedicated external hard drive that is password-protected and located in my home office. No one besides me will have access to that hard drive. Emails and other correspondence on Google accounts will be deleted and stored on the external drive. It is the participants' choice to reveal their names or remain anonymous. If they choose anonymity, their

stories will be identified by a code name, and I will store their contact material in a separate file in my home office, to which no one has access.

4. The project is called "American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Soldiers." The "feminist sophistic" methodology is derived from the work of Susan Jarratt who proposes a "feminist sophistic" in rhetorical pedagogy (in her *Rereading the Sophists*), a critical theory based in contingency, change, and a specifically female stance that challenges the universal male narrative and trope of "the veteran." On this theoretical basis I built a research perspective from three strategies, i.e., the "Athena Model." I've put together (1) feminist standpoint theory to identify how the women speak of themselves as part of a system described consistently as "white hetero male" and privileged accordingly, and how they describe what they experience in that structure; (2) a rhetorical analysis using *metis* -- the idea (based on the story of the Titan Metis, who was Athena's mother) of resilience and survival in tough straits through embodied intelligence and cunning; and (3) an idea from Critical Discourse Analysis that's called "analytical resistance" (from Teun von Dijk) and identifies both resistance and efforts that lead to change.

I plan to conduct a **semi-structured interview** to elicit material about women's discrete experience within that culture – how they claimed and exercised their agency. I'll amend the interview format with the request, in the live settings, that the women contribute questions they themselves would like to be asked, an approach suggested by Marilyn Jacoby Boxer and Catherine Stimpson's instructive work, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America*. The sequence of each woman's involvement would be (1) initial contact; (2) interview, by email or in person at UWF, depending on the woman's preference; (3) follow-up communications which might include notes of appreciation, concern, resolution, reflection – whichever approach is most appropriate.

To sort and classify the data collected from interviews and close readings of texts, my method of inquiry will borrow elements of **grounded research** described in Kathy Charmaz et al., *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry*. The appeal of this protocol lies in its commitment to "let the text speak" without the *a priori* imposition of the researcher's values and conclusions. The procedure I will follow begins with (1) the coding of pertinent passages, which leads to (2) the writing of interpretive "memos" (that, in this study, align with feminist inquiry) and (3) the development of discursive categories and themes.

The final step is the alignment of these discursive categories and themes with the Athena model in order to analyze and theorize the relationship between story and critical perspective: i.e., standpoint – *metis* – CDA. I'm looking for information that might relate to the research perspectives of the Athena model and address sequentially the following questions:

1. What knowledge does this woman possess from her standpoint as "outsider within" a culture by virtue of her gender?
2. In what ways does this text reflect the creative intelligence of *metis* strategy?

3. How does this text present an “analytical resistance” to the culture that seeks to dominate and silence its author?
4. Indeed, women student veterans express their determination to persuade others – particularly their fellow veterans (male and female) who “have the same story or even worse ones” (as one of my students wrote) -- that embodied difference is power. Further, a study of the discourses created by the community of women veterans could add a significant dimension to the fields of women’s rhetoric and veterans’ rhetoric – no such study exists in the literature as yet. This study can therefore benefit both its participants, in terms of their desire to express their points of view, tell their stories, hear the stories of others and see how critical analysis reveals the power within the narratives, and also the larger domains of textual study and veterans’ pedagogy.

Potential risk is evoking the feelings connected with these experiences, which could be stressful. It is not my purpose to include participants who are struggling with diagnosed PTSD to the extent that the interviews will be painful. It is, however, not my perception that this risk is greater than these particular women experience in their normal lives – since it is they who volunteered their stories without reservation and led to this project in the first place, and had no hesitation in sharing their stories with me or the class groups of which we were a part. One way a potential risk can be ameliorated is to include them (as noted in methodology) in devising their own interview questions. Another is to assure them that they have control over the material at all times – they may conclude the interview, withdraw their stories, and without any issue whatsoever remove themselves from the project.

Invitation and Recruitment Letter

Dear Friend,

I am writing to ask your help in participating in a research study I'm conducting on the storytelling of women veterans who were deployed during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I'm a member of the English department faculty at the University of West Florida and also a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington in Seattle. This study will collect material for my dissertation, "American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Soldiers." The project will look at the ways the stories of women veterans represent their experiences in a traditionally male culture in terms of struggle, resilience, and pluck -- as well as the ways that difference is a source of power.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a woman who served in the U.S. during this period and have spoken publicly about your experiences. I am familiar with your accounts of your experiences. Your participation is confidential and voluntary and you are free to answer any questions you'd like, to withdraw your consent and/or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your story will be included among material I am currently gathering from published narratives (in newspaper articles and longform texts) as well as analyses of the wars and female participation in military matters in history and myth. I estimate that there will be at least 20 participants interviewed.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I will first ask for some brief background information about your enlistment by e-mail or phone in order to prepare for our interviews. With your consent, I will then ask you to provide about 1-2 hours of your free time for an audiotaped, face-to-face interview, or, if you prefer, written answers via email to five short sets of questions (about 2-3 pages of print). The interview will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences as a female in the traditionally male U.S. military as well as your response to ideas about women veterans as "marginalized" and "invisible" in the culture. I will ask for your assessment of the effect of women's increasing presence and influence in this culture. Finally, I will ask if there are any questions you wish you, and other women veterans, could address. The interview, either in person or by mail, will be scheduled at a time and place that is most convenient for you. If you are available, I may also get in touch with you to cover any follow-up questions, although you are free to decline at any stage of the research. Other than potential discomfort in answering these questions, risks will be minimal, given these interviews are strictly voluntary and confidential and interview questions are open-ended. The benefit of this research is not only in service to the growing field of women veterans studies, but also, more immediately, to you and your partners in this project who may be supported or consoled by seeing in print the patterns you have in common with one another and the currently published accounts.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Nancy Fox Edele at: Department of English, University of West Florida, nedele@uwf.edu. If you are interested in participating in this study, you may either contact me directly or give me permission to contact you by filling out the information below. I greatly appreciate your help and look forward to meeting you. Please fill out the following information below and return to Nancy Fox Edele.

Sincerely, Nancy Fox Edele

Preferred method of contact (circle or highlight one): home/ cell/ office phone/ e-mail

Contact info: (phone)

(e-mail)

I give permission for Nancy Fox Edele to contact me at the above phone/e-mail contact:

Signature

Print Name

Informed Consent Form

The “American Athena” Project Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: “American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Veterans” by Nancy Fox Edele, English Faculty, Department of English, University of West Florida, and Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, University of Washington

I. Federal and university regulations require us to obtain signed consent for participation in research involving human participants. After reading the statements in section II through IV below, please indicate your consent by signing and dating two copies of this form, and you will be given one copy of the signed form.

II. Statement of Procedure: Thank you for your interest in this research project being conducted by Nancy Fox Edele, a member of the English Department faculty of The University of West Florida and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington. We have talked about the procedures we will follow in conducting our interview and discussion of any material you contribute to the project. This research project involves careful study of the stories that selected women veterans tell about their experiences as a member of the military. Carefully read the information provided below. If you wish to participate in this study, sign your name and write the date. Any information you provide to us will be kept in strict confidence. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, please contact Nancy Fox Edele in the English Department at The University of West Florida at (206) 660-7438 or by email at nedele@uwf.edu.

I understand that:

- (1) I will be asked to disclose certain information about my experiences as a female service member. I understand that I will be one of approximately 20 women veterans being interviewed for this study.
- (2) My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on campus or in the study will be told.
- (3) Participation involves being interviewed by Nancy Fox Edele from the University of West Florida and the University of Washington either in person or by email. The in-person interview will last approximately one to two hours. Notes will be written during the interview. An audiotape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. I may decline to be taped with no penalty. The interview conducted by email will garner about 2-3 typed pages of writing.
- (4) I understand that the researcher, Nancy Fox Edele, will only identify me by name with my

written permission. My confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. No one besides Fox Edele will be present at the interview or have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will **Appendix 1: IRB Approved Material: Informed Consent Form p. 2**

prevent my comments from having any negative effects. According to federal regulations, the material must be retained for three years before it is destroyed. However, the information will be held in a secure setting.

III. Potential Risks of the Study:

- (1) A potential risk is that the storytelling involved in the study may evoke uncomfortable feelings connected with the experiences you share.
- (2) Several local counseling services are available for participants who experience discomfort and this information is provided to each study participant.

IV. Potential Benefits of the Study:

- (1) This study can benefit its participants in terms of their desire to express their points of view, tell their stories, hear the stories of others and see how critical analysis reveals the power within the narratives.
- (2) Since no such research has been attempted in these stories as yet, a study of the discourses created by the community of women veterans could add a significant dimension to the fields of women's rhetoric and veterans' rhetoric, as well as the larger domains of veterans' critical studies, veterans' pedagogy, and critical methods in general

- V. Statement of Consent:** I certify that I have read and fully understand the Statement of Procedure given above and agree to participate research project described therein. Permission is given voluntarily and without coercion or undue influence. It is understood that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I will be provided a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name (Please Print)

Participant's Signature

Date

Interview Questions (Basic & Follow-Up)

American Athena Interview Questions

Nancy Fox (Edele)

IRB Approved, Spring 2017

1. Define the branch of the armed services that you joined, your position, your uniform, and how you felt wearing it. Please describe your decision to enter the military. What were YOUR expectations of who you would be or could be, as a woman in the military? Where did they come from? Do you think you challenged sex and gender norms?
2. Describe your experience as woman service member. How would you describe yourself at that time? Were you aware of the demographic data, in terms of gender, in the U.S. military? What was your work? What were your living conditions? How were you told, shown, or instructed about your particular identity in the military – who you were, what you could and could not say and do? Did the male warrior trope construct the military community and sense of collective ethos? How did you respond to these messages?
3. The U.S. military has been described, by scholars in the field of women veterans' studies, (such as Alexis Hart, Mariana Grohowski, and others), as “a culture that salutes the marginalization and inequality of women.” What is your response to this statement and can you illustrate your answer with examples? Did you experience gender discrimination – if so, how did that experience affect your life within and beyond the military?
4. After their deployment, female veterans have described themselves, in both public and private writings, as “invisible” and “underserved” – is that description true in your view? What does your experience say about military culture? Our American culture? How might you be writing the genetic code for a new military, in language and action?
5. What questions should we be asking you? What do you want folks to know?

Addendum

1. Why do you think women see and seek freedom in this rigorously structured culture and system? How do those two ideas fit together?
2. What are the consequences for women in this culture? Were you aware of them before you enlisted?
3. How did you meet the challenge – survive it – use it – overcome it?

Counseling Statement for Participants

Counseling Statement for “American Athena” Project

Some of the questions in this interview might cause you to recall unpleasant or emotionally upsetting experiences. If you feel you need to speak with a professional counselor about these memories or your response to them you may contact the following services for help:

For UWF students

University of West Florida, Counseling and Psychological Services Building 960, Suite 200A

(850) 474-2420 (M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

(850) 474-2000 (After hours; ask for Counseling Services)

For UWF employees

UWF Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Provided through
Aetna Resources for Living (800) 272-7252

For community members in Pensacola

Pensacola Veterans Center

Kevin Weinzimmer, LCSW, Center Director

4504 Twin Oaks Drive

Pensacola, FL 32506

850-456-5886 (M-F 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.; 1st and 3rd Saturday of
the month 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.)

Media Permission

Institutional Review Board The University of West Florida

Recorded Media Addendum to Informed Consent

For use with general informed consent documents for studies that involve audio, video, photographic, or any other recording (hereafter referred to as recording) of research subjects.

Project Title: *American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Service Members*

Investigator: Nancy Fox Edele

Date: March 21, 2017

Email Address *nedele@uwf.edu*

Phone 206-660-7438

Description and Purpose of Recording:

The researcher, Nancy Fox Edele, would also like to make audio recordings or, with your permission, take photographs and/or use your existing digital projects and texts about your experiences in the U.S. military in order to analyze the storytelling of women veterans and illustrate the research in dissertation writing and articles in relevant publications.

Confidentiality:

The digital and recorded material will be secured and stored on a dedicated external hard drive that is password-protected and located in my home office. No one besides me will have access to that hard drive. Material sent by mails and other correspondence on Google accounts will be deleted and stored on the external drive. It is your choice to reveal your names or remain anonymous. If you choose anonymity, your identity will be masked and your stories will be identified by a code name, and I will store your contact material in a separate file in my home office, to which no one has access. Multimodal or audio or video material will be destroyed at the required three-year point after the close of the study, or, if requested, returned to you.

Voluntary Consent:

By signing below, you are granting to Fox Edele the right to use your likeness, image, appearance, and performance in digital material – whether recorded on or transferred to videotape, film, slides, photographs, or other media – for preserving, presenting or publishing this research. No use of recorded media will be made other than for the reasons stated herein.

Your participation is voluntary and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may discontinue participation and withdraw this consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Nancy Fox Edele
University of West Florida
Building 50, Room 227
206-660-7438
nedele@uwf.edu

University of West Florida Institutional Review Board
11000 University Parkway, Building 11
Pensacola, FL 32514
(850) 857-6378
irb@uwf.edu

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
Parent / Legally Authorized Representative's Printed Name & Signature (If applicable)	Date
Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date

Required Coursework, Human Subjects

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

Nancy Edele (ID: 4476747) University of West Florida (ID: 2862) nedeled@uwf.edu
English and World Languages

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher

Same as Curriculum Group

Stage 1 - Basic Course

Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

14369424 10-Mar-2017 09-Mar-2020 80

99

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY

Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127) Students in Research (ID: 1321)

History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)

Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491) The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)

Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)

Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)

Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)

Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)

Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)

Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508) International Research - SBE (ID: 509)

Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)

Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects (ID: 488)

DATE COMPLETED

09-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017

SCORE

3/3 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 4/5 (80%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?keec8aa7c-5661-498a-9c8f-7d888204ccfa-14369424

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2 COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

Nancy Edele (ID: 4476747) University of West Florida (ID: 2862) nedeled@uwf.edu
English and World Languages

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher

Same as Curriculum Group

Stage 1 - Basic Course

Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

14369424 20-Mar-2017 99

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES

Students in Research (ID: 1321)

History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)

Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)

Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)

The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)

Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)

Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)

Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)

Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)

Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)

Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508) International Research - SBE (ID: 509)

Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)

Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects (ID: 488)

MOST RECENT

10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 09-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017 10-Mar-2017

SCORE

5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 3/3 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 5/5 (100%) 4/5 (80%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?keec8aa7c-5661-498a-9c8f-7d888204ccfa-14369424

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org> **Certifications, University of West Florida and University of Washington, Seattle, Spring 2017 (Extended for One Year: Spring 2018)**



Completion Date 10-Mar-2017
Expiration Date 09-Mar-2020
Record ID 14369424

This is to certify that:

Nancy Edele

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of West Florida

CITI

ZIPLINE

Human Subjects Division
University of Washington
Box 359470
Seattle, WA 98195-9470

Notification of Approval

To: Nancy A Fox

Link: [STUDY00001801](#)

P.I.: Nancy A Fox

Title: American Athena

Description: This submission has been approved. You can access the correspondence letter using the following link:

[Exempt_STUDY00001801_Fox_Initial.pdf\(0.01\)](#)

To review additional details, click the link above to access the project workspace.

ZIPLINE

JW Tower 17th floor
(206) 543-0098 tel
(206) 543-9218 fax
hsdinfo@uw.edu
www.washington.edu/research/hsd/

Appendix 2

Appendix 2 presents the written process of Grounded Theory Method from coding the raw data and teasing out abstractions from the data to the point of achieving the theoretical categories defined in Chapter Three Method, imagining and shaping a female military identity which did not exist until they became it. Discovery in this process also informed the standpoint which, I believe and argue herein, defines the purpose and strategy in creating that new identity.

Examples of Coding, Levels 1 & 2

CODES

Have to move toward abstract – general – original

Escape – Challenge – Response

**Consciously joining group as minority because of systemic benefits – putting
advancement / experience / status above potential challenges**

Being a marked group determined to achieve regardless

Forging new ID? Discovering new dimensions of self?

Transferring new ID to larger culture

LEVEL 1

Acknowledging suffering
Feeling betrayed
Experiencing verbal / physical assault
Acknowledging male protection
Suffering survivor's guilt
Being grabbed by Iraqi soldier
Going for her gun
Aligning clothes with gender
Feeling companionship
Rebelling against convention
Feeling desire to escape
Feeling possibility of death
Feeling disillusioned
Believing military will fulfill dreams
Feeling displaced
Joining military to feel empowered
Experiencing racism
Facing darkness
Developing faith in military
Fearing failure
Facing female roles
Growing up in the military
Feeling others pass judgement
Experiencing suicidal thoughts
Questioning value as mother
Feeling necessity of overwork
Enlisting with optimism
Learning dominant role of men
Learning subordinate role of women

LEVEL 2

Feeling conflicted
Experiencing gender discrimination
Feeling sexualized
Feeling danger
Feeling unfairly a sexual suspect
Suffering loss of self
Experiencing personal growth

Entering sexist field
 Entering male-dominated field
 Feeling constant awareness of selves as women
 Internalizing view of self as promiscuous
 Retaining independence
 Protecting herself
 Refusing to forfeit power
 Experiencing army discrediting accusers
 Being treated like a slave or bartered woman
 Calling her sexual innocence into question
 Representing change vs. tradition
 Feeling diminishment of gender
 Aligning sexuality with gender
 Coming of age in the military
 Feeling emptiness of attaining a false dream
 Using female roles to succeed
 Finding fulfillment
 Witnessing heroism

Rejecting notion of resilience *****

Suffering ID crisis
 Losing the illusion of power
 Losing sense of individuality
 Discovering inner strength
 Discovering outer strength
 Experiencing injustice
 Being silenced by injustice
 Feeling isolated
 Losing hope
 Experiencing loss of innocence
 Aligning love and sacrifice
 Fighting oppression of women
 Experiencing rebirth
 Embarking on quest for discovery
 Embarking on quest for self-discovery
 Learning power of silence
 Learning power of tradition
 Feeling power of patriotism
 Overcoming others' assumptions
 Overcoming the past
 Overcoming weakness
 Feeling conflict between inner and outer selves
 Developing self-awareness
 Focusing on self-preservation
 Developing self-reliance
 Hoping for social mobility
 Learning the pain of war
 Not talking about the pain of war
 Feeling the will to survive
 Struggling

From Emily

Experiencing sexual harassment
 Feeling awareness of youth and lack of knowledge of military matters and commitments
 Proving oneself
 Experiencing maternity discrimination
 Men and women thinking differently
 Wanting to be "one of the boys"
 Dealing with poor hygiene and poor living conditions (lack of feminine products)
 Not feeling recognized after service
 Feeling invisible
 Finding women are hard on women

Themes Emergent from Coding

Themes from Coding

- Joining young
- Recognizing commitment
- Belonging
- Expectations vs. reality
- Youth and lack of knowledge of military matters and commitments
- New identity
- Knowing men outnumber women
- Finding female authority role model
- Proving self
- Division men & women
- Men and women thinking differently
- Wanting to be “one of the boys”
- Hygiene and poor living conditions
 - Lack of feminine products
- Maternity discrimination
- Feeling physically equal & capable
- Sexual harassment
- Age stories
 - Didn’t want to act immature
 - Wanted leadership and status and respect
- Tension
 - Sexual
 - Repression
 - Caution
- Glad about what they gained
- Acknowledging veteran status
- Lack of Acknowledgement
 - Not feeling recognized after service
- Invisibility
- Women hard on women

Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: Example of Memo Outlines & Synthesis of Coded Data, Interrogation of Data; Reference to Existing Theoretical Frames; Emerging Categories

10/3/17 Comparing Nancy & LaRayne

Nancy

1. Seeing loss of female ID as loss of ID (or – experiencing double loss? Self & gender?) (team = male)
2. Pointing out “double minority” status (NO ONE ELSE DOES THIS AND YET THEY MUST HAVE EXPERIENCED IT)
3. Emphasizing marriage – family – kids
 - a. Worrying effect of deployment on kids
4. Admitting possibility of death (NO ONE ELSE DOES THIS AND YET THEY MUST HAVE EXPERIENCED IT)
5. Focusing discrimination on career (not personal), gender, and race (i.e., “how I overcame it”) NOTE: VA SUICIDE SQUAD SAYS IT WAS RESOURCES THAT AF AM WOMEN DEPENDED ON THAT GOT THEM THROUGH – NANCY’S STORY REFUTES THAT – IT WAS HER DECISION; HER ADVOCACY

LaR & Nancy

1. Radical feminist solution – analysis (Zeigler 4-6) look up
2. Race:
 - a. Nancy: post –mod (Zeigler) look at race, too
 - b. LaRayne – race is there as context (follow-up interview)
 - i. Military values – Zeigler 8-9
3. Outsiders can’t understand demand
4. No advancement without combat experience (Zeigler 12)

LaRayne

1. Connect to power of Burke’s identification with recruiter who changed her mind and set her on path to military
 - a. Role of recruiter as answer to desperation and lack of future

10/4/17

LaRayne

1. Discovers and defines aspiration to be leader and sees models of female leadership in Army
 - a. Compare Nancy – no female authority in Navy
 - b. Nancy assumes leadership role nonetheless
2. Notes pressure on women to be twice as good, work twice as hard

3. Doesn't note or reflect on the reasons women leaders were harder than men
4. Being objectified sexually – from female drill sergeant
 - a. Entire experience framed by gender – including treatment of injuries later (HOW WERE YOU INJURED?)
 - i. Didn't describe injury
 - b. Sexualized, possibly as black woman, from boot camp on
 - i. Accused of promiscuity based on body
 - ii. Woman sergeant first to do it
 1. Were men given sexual instructions at boot camp? Or normalized, with women asked to adapt?
 - iii. Sees separation from platoon as more evidence of promiscuity
 1. Puts self in position of power – holds sexual power
 - iv. Doesn't mention protection from other soldiers – only Iraqis (see Eager or Zeigler)
 - c. Says past discrimination had been racial
 - d. Didn't see high school sexual comments as discriminatory
 - i. Calls them "trivial"
 - ii. Apparently accepted sexual commentary as "normal" until repeated at Boot Camp
 - e. Didn't realize sexual objectification she experienced in high school same as racial discrimination – still may not –doesn't put them together
 - f. Doesn't connect sexualization with racism in Army
 - i. Experiences immediate marking on both terms with female boot camp sergeant
 1. Describes this only as female body – "nice"
 2. Doesn't connect with sexual stereotype of black folks
 - ii. Experiences verbal/physical harassment verging on assault on racial/sexual grounds from Iraqis
 - g. Only woman most of the time
 - i. Sleeping conditions – could be for her protection (but she interprets herself at fault)
 - ii. Notes plethora of protection for women –
 1. Marginalized can also mean status markers
 - a. Sleeping in commanders' building
 - b. Compare with Nancy –
 - iii. Protection can also be surveillance – she switches from one to the other
5. Shows ability to protect herself (in platoon; with Iraqis) but men intervened
 - a. Language shifts from active to passive voice – "was removed"
6. Asserts physical strength and endurance is equal to boys
 - a. Compare Emily – "women emotional"
7. Discusses death only as part of breakdown later
 - a. Survival guilt or remorse is focused on the men in her troop

LaRayne and Nancy

1. Aware of reduced role of women in military – yet see opportunity
 - a. LaR makes note of “combat” designation on job
 - b. Nancy decides to advocate for women in Navy

Maryland (10/9/17)

1. Compare with Nancy – advocating for other women reason for participation in this study
2. Compare with LaRayne – feeling physically equal to men
 - a. BUT – sees women as “more emotional”
 - i. Compare with military idea that women work better with indigenous populations, have more “emotional intelligence” – does Maryland mean that? **ASK HER**
 - b. drill sergeants harder on women
 - i. Women needing to prove themselves
 - ii. Importance of dressing right
 - c. Emulating older women – ALMOST SAME WORDS
 - d. System is “old boys” – “old school” – ALMOST SAME WORDS
 - i. **(are you implying change when younger gen takes over?)**
 - e. Wanted military career

RUNNING LIST KEY WORDS: Nancy – LaRayne – Kristin – Maryland – Kylie - race – identity – minority – gender – male-dominant – freedom – equality – military values – recruitment through identification (Burke) – sexual discrimination – objectification – process of objectification

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Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: Moving to Categories and Theory

Began 10/17/2017 Category / Theory

1. For each woman joining the military is personal quest story: "Who am I?"

- a. Forging a new identity
 - i. Women are aware of reduced role of women in military, yet see opportunity
 1. Nancy – speak up and advocate for leadership role (ASK HER TO SPECIFY)
 2. LaR – “desperate” to escape being “poor, black, in the South” and forge a future
 3. Kristin fits here, too
 - ii. Women are aware of challenging gender norms (all)
 - iii. Women feel physically equal to men (Maryland; LaR)
 - iv. Emulating older women (ALMOST SAME WORDS LAR & MARYLAND)
 - Femme-centered (always aware of selves as women)
 - Feeling empowered
 - Feeling enabled
- b. Women express a paradoxical view of attaining freedom within military structure
 - i. How women see freedom in joining authoritarian structure
 1. Freedom to be and do what?
 2. Freedom from what?
 - ii. Despite awareness of reduced role of women in military (at that time)
 - Acquiring military ID
 - Fulfilling aspirations
 - Joining to clarify an ID to their town, family, self
 - Joining military to feel empowered
 - Seeking freedom within military structure
 - Enlisting with optimism
 - Embarking on quest for discovery
 - Embarking on quest for self-discovery
 - Challenging gender norms
 - Feeling physically equal to men
 - Enlisting despite limited opportunities
 - Emulating older women

2. Confusions of Roles: Community Status or Marked “Other” (Can Be Simultaneous)

- a. Status as Community Member
 - i. Experience acceptance and friendship
 1. Tabitha: “They were great guys”
- b. The “marked other” in male culture

- i. Experience a multi-lateral process of objectification
 - 1. Loss of identity
 - 2. loss of individual identity through uniform – collapse of individual identity into group nomos - for women includes loss of gender ID since group nomos constructed and represented as male
 - 3. shame accorded to gender identity through marking and language and physical separation –
 - 4. loss of racial identity through shearing hair
 - a. Unresolved problem: how process also emphasizes female ID by fact of objectification as female body & female comrade
 - b. Military seeks to erase female ID by means of marking it – essential contradiction in ways military addresses women
 - c. Military believes itself to be “gender neutral” (LaR & Nancy)
 - i. Connection with Standpoint Theory Outsider Within – women have privileged stance because can see discrimination where dominant caste cannot
 - d. Gendered protection can be surveillance
- ii. Discrimination is practiced on multiple levels
 - 1. Allied with theory of intersectionality (see Charmaz)
 - 2. Gender – race – (is class aligned here? Why was LaR marked as promiscuous but Nancy doesn’t talk about that and emphasizes leadership?)
 - 3. Nancy – leadership; LaRayne – physical; sexual; Kylie – intellectual
 - Being defined and marked as different from male norms
 - a. Internalizing view of self as promiscuous
 - b. Facing female roles
 - c. Being penalized specifically because female
 - d. Feeling oneself over-scrutinized
 - e. Feeling sexualized and devalued
 - f. Experiencing challenge to / loss of former self
 - g. Experiencing racism
 - h. Feeling others pass judgment
 - i. Suffering ID crisis
 - j. Losing sense of individuality
 - Feeling companionship (LaRayne) – (Maryland No)
 - a. Discovering inner strength
 - Challenging lower status
 - a. Challenging female roles
 - b. Feeling loss of power

- c. Feeling loss of agency
- d. Feeling men don't take women seriously enough
- e. Playing a supporting role
- f. Learning dominant role of men
- g. Learning subordinate role of women
- h. Feeling necessity of overwork

3. The complexity of post-war experience can include a simultaneous cost and sense of personal gain.

- a. Post-war trauma
- b. Personal growth (in a) Sexist field; indeed, a Male-dominated field
- c. Representing change vs. tradition - "I Am a Promise"
- d. Rebelling against convention (joining up)
 - Facing darkness – LaRayne; Emily; Tabitha
 - a. Struggling / Feeling isolated
 - b. Acknowledging personal suffering
 - c. Isolation leading to suicidal thoughts
 - d. Feeling lack of TLC & attention
 - e. Feeling lack of transition services
 - f. Experiencing suicidal thoughts
 - g. Identifying survivors' guilt or remorse
 - Refusing to reify male military
 - a. Feeling military hasn't adapted to women
 - b. Feeling men created public standard
 - c. Overcoming others' assumptions
 - Gaining a valued self
 - a. Feeling the will to survive
 - b. Controlling the narrative for oneself
 - i. Feeling power of words
 - c. Taking control of one's life

Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: Theoretical Coding

10/16/17 **CODE NOTES**

Simultaneous process

Experiencing challenge to / loss of former self

Experiencing gaining a valued self

Explaining process of coming to terms with who you are

The achieved standpoint

A dilemma NANCY resolves (do the others?)

The veteran women's 3rd person accounts go so heavy on the machinery of what they do – it becomes who they are – to prove the point

Being defined and marked as different from male norm

Being penalized specifically

Feeling over scrutinized

Loss of power

Loss of agency

Beyond expected as army / military

CHART

Challenge

Formal

Informal

Following Orders without Challenge

The trauma of war exacts personal cost and enables

Women experience both personal cost personal growth

Ambiguity – not monolithic

Quest

Role confusion

Status – how achieved / target – how survived

Cost – growth

Complexity of post-war experience can include a simultaneous cost and sense of personal growth

Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: Categories, First Rendition 10/21/17

Statements of category

1. **For each woman joining the military is personal quest story: “Who am I?”**
2. **Women experience confusions of roles: community status or marked “other” which can overlap.**
3. **The complexity of post-war experience can include a simultaneous cost and sense of personal gain.**

Notes

Grounded Theory – Design Theory (Steve – Stanford)

Narrative Arc – the three categories

Align theories to categories – not theoretical grounding, but alignment –

Each category can become a paper

Sections within categories can become papers

African American women = most resourceful group and toughest survivors

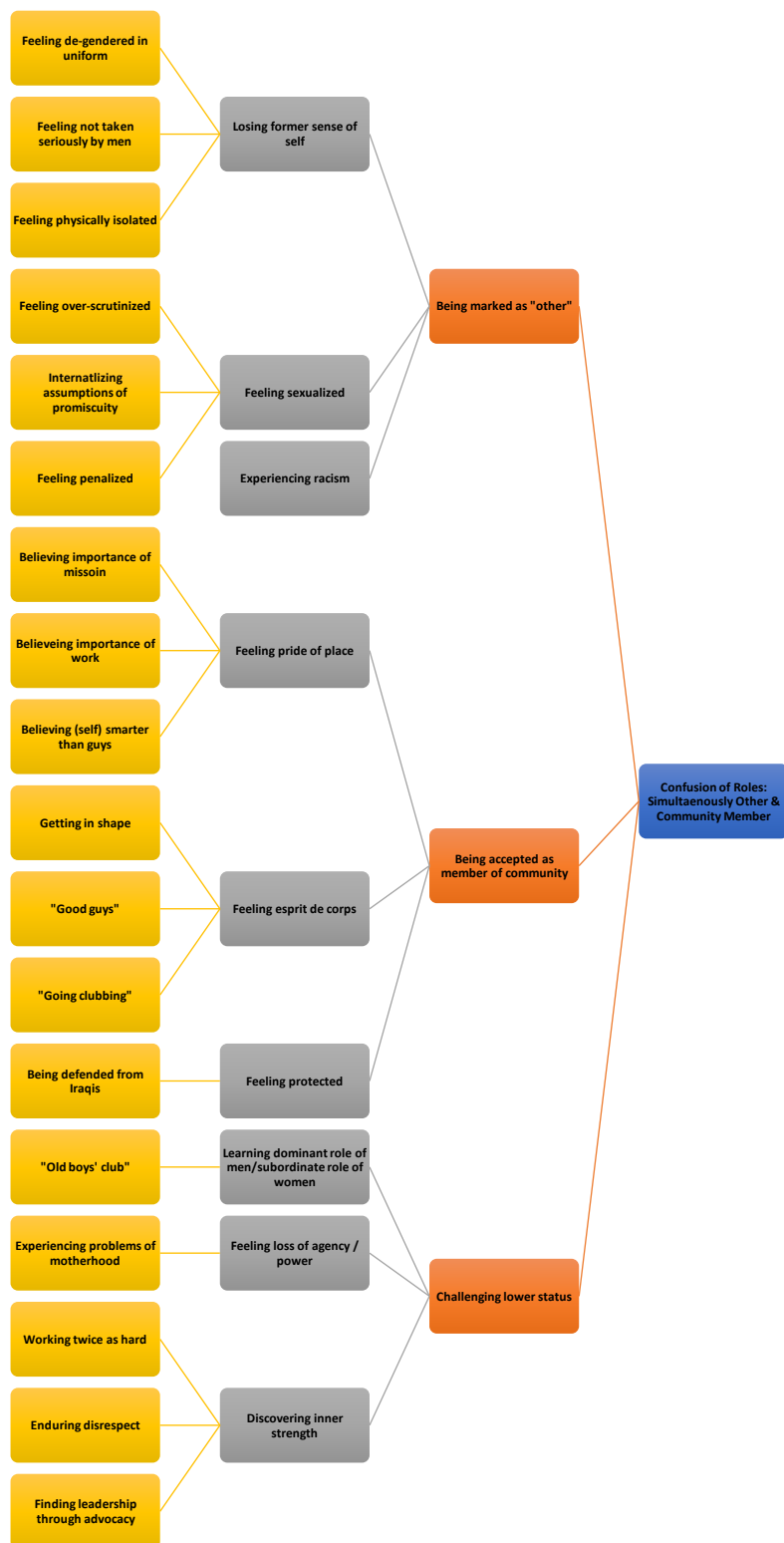
Overlay friendship status & position as target

Use codes for follow-up questions and letters to authors and public figures

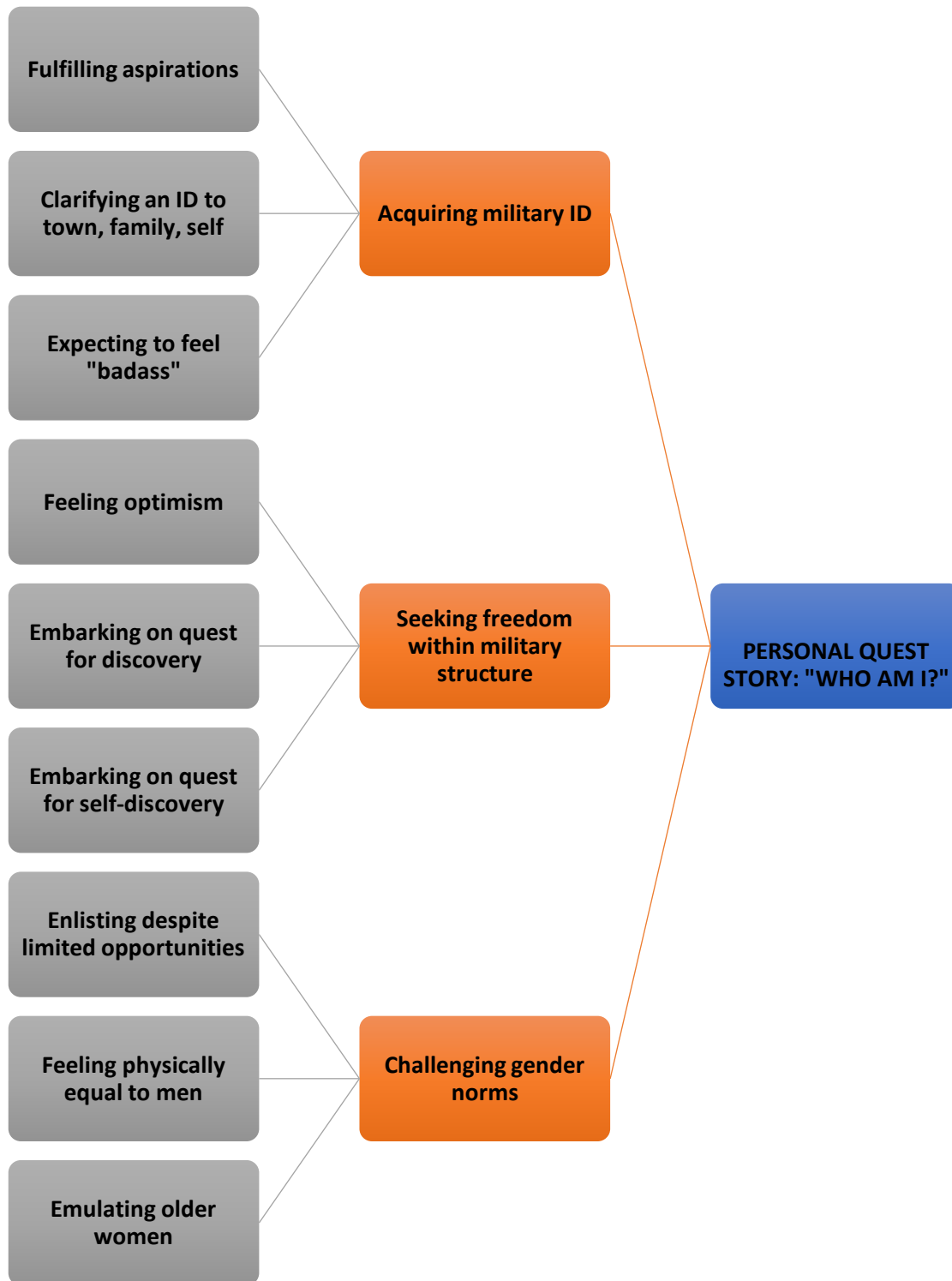
Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: 1st Set of Diagrams



Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category 1st Set of Diagrams, Category to Potential Theory



Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: 1st Set of Diagrams, Abstracting from Data & Categories



Grounded Theory Process, Coding to Category: Outline for First Draft

CATEGORY 1 ACQUIRING FEMALE MILITARY IDENTITY

TOPICS - DISCOURSES

1. Quest (by Name – 15 Subjects)

1.1.1. Seeking Direction

1.1.2. Believing in Ability to Reach Goals

1.1.3. Aspiring to Leadership

2. Enlisting

2.1.1. Being Recruited

2.1.1.1. FOLLOW UP Qs

2.1.1.1.1. Enlistment Dates

2.1.1.1.2. Title – One-line Description of Job

2.1.2. Finding Job

2.1.3. Assuming “The” Uniform

2.1.3.1. Acquiring Identity

3. Confronting Male Culture

3.1.1. FOLLOW-UP Qs

3.1.1.1. Any awareness of / hesitation about female in male territory

3.1.1.1.1. Addressed by recruiter?

3.1.1.2. Describe connection w/ & community of women in military

3.1.2. Developing Pride / Finding Community Membership

3.1.3. Seeking Women Leaders

Nancy Ann Fox Bio

Nancy Ann Fox (Edele) teaches Public and Professional Writing and Special Topics in Rhetoric at the University of West Florida (UWF). She earned her Ph.D. in Language and Rhetoric at the University of Washington, Seattle (UW) which awarded her the Hilen Foundation dissertation fellowship. Her dissertation, “American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers,” was inspired by the projects of women veteran students at UWF. Her areas of concentration are classical and contemporary rhetorics, critical discourse analysis, and rhetorical pedagogy, in seated classrooms and online. In collaboration with her colleagues in Composition she has composed and edited *Rhetoric and Writing: Composition at UWF*.

Her recent publications include a chapter from her dissertation, “*Aretē: ‘We As Black Women,’*” in the *Journal of Veterans Studies* and the study, “Multimodal Classroom Practice in Public Writing: The Documentary Profile Project, “Back to the Future,” in *Florida English Journal*. She has also published an academic essay, “Discourse of Aspiration” in *Staging Women’s Lives, Gendered Life Stages in Language and Literature Workplaces*, part of the SUNY Feminist Theory and Criticism series, and “Logos Is (Not) Synonymous With Logic” in *Bad Ideas about Writing*, edited by Cheryl Ball and Drew Loewe. Earlier published works include a discourse analysis of Ida in James Baldwin’s novel, *Another Country* and critical discourse analyses of a student project, “Dream America” and Lisa Cholodenko’s film, *The Kids Are All Right*. Additionally, her poetry has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Four Quarters*, *A Room of One’s Own*, *The Green Age Review*, and other small magazines. She and two students were credited with a new discovery (“A Tale in a Tail-Rhyme”) in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, which debuted in *Jabberwocky, the Journal of the Lewis Carroll Society* in Oxford, and *The Annotated Alice*.