BEYOND G.I. JANE: A LOOK AT THE REPRESENTATION AND PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN ARMED SERVICE MEMBERS IN MODERN MILITARY MOVIES

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, the topic of women in the military has garnered a lot of attention in recent years-particularly media attention. Of particular interest for my study was the depiction of military women in modern military films. I examined the construction of men and women—specifically, soldiers—through the genre of film. I conducted a textual analysis on a random selection of fictional military films that were released from 1993-2013. I chose to focus on films because of the belief that media (specifically film, in this case) and cultural are undeniably linked. I used frame analysis from feminist and gender studies perspectives in order to understand my data. I found that, while there were some exceptions, overall such films conceive of soldiers as straight white men. I also found that, while there were cases where women soldiers were prominent characters within the films, they had to behave in stereotypically masculine ways in order to be depicted as competent, equal soldiers. Thus, the films mainly reproduced the idea of soldiering as something done by men and as a conventionally masculine endeavor.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the topic of women in the military has garnered a lot of attention in recent years. Issues concerning discrimination and roles of women in the military, as well as problems involving the sexual harassment and assault of women, have been at the center of the discussions. There are also still debates (both in and out of the military) about whether women should be in the military at all, as many still believe that women should not be able to enlist, or at least not participate as combatants (Michaels 2013; Associated Press 2012). Nonetheless, as of 2013, 14% of the active military personnel were women (Harris 2013), and with continued focus on challenging the inequalities faced by women in the military, that number will probably continue to grow. Relatedly, women soldiers have been showing up in the media more and more in the past couple of decades—in the news, in television, and in films. In fact, there have been some films, such as *G.I. Jane* (1997) (as noted in my title), that focus specifically on exploring the idea of women soldiers.

Background: Women in the Military

With some exceptions, women were not officially allowed to serve in the armed forces in the United States until 1948 (Nuciari 2006: 287). Before that, women were only allowed to participate in the military during emergency situations, and they often served as nurses or in other support roles. In fact, as Nuciari points out, “[nursing] is the first role to be institutionalized and internalized by Western military institutions to be played specifically by women” (Nuciari 2006: 280). One reason for this, as Nuciari explains, is that the men were needed for combat, so the supportive roles were opened to women as a way to free up men to fight. So, while women were able to participate in the military, they were only able to do so by performing roles that were considered more “feminine” and “natural” to women (Nuciari 2006: 281) (barring those
who pretended to be men and served as combatants, such as those who were documented in the Civil War [Blanton and Cook 2002: 1-8]).

According to Erin Solaro, the U.S. passed the first law in 1948 to allow for women to serve in peacetime forces (Soloro 2006: 11). However, there were restrictions. Women could only make up 2% of the force, and only 10% of the women could be officers. They were also limited in terms of promotions and were not allowed on most ships or on combat duty (Soloro 2006: 11). After 1973, the draft ended and the All-Volunteer Force was setup, which allowed for more opportunities for women and resulted in more women enlisting. However, not all posts were open to women, and they were still technically banned from combat.

Despite the fact that other countries had been allowing women to officially serve in combat since 1995 (Norway was the first), the US did not lift the ban on women serving in combat until January 2013. This means that an estimated 230,000 new roles could be open to women in the military (Harris 2013). As has been remarked by many soldiers (both women and men) women had already been participating in combat in the military—they just were not recognized for it because they were not technically allowed to do so. Solaro says that “the combat exclusion serves only as a divisive social distinction between men and women,” (Soloro 2006: 26), one that only helped to delegitimize women soldiers’ contributions.
Media Importance

Specific ideas about the military, its functions, and soldiers are often put out through the media. Film is a particularly popular medium used to explore war and military issues, in both fiction and non-fiction, alike. Military-focused films are incredibly popular (Sarantakes 2010: 99-104). The films themselves and their depictions of the military and military life are also incredibly gendered. Most of those acting as soldiers in such films are men. One reason for this is because the military functioned “as a true all-male society” until the mid-20th century (Nuciari 2006: 280). Many films about the military (which I refer to as “military films”) also take place during earlier wars in the 20th century, such as World War II and the Vietnam War, both of which lacked women soldiers. However, since the number of women enlisting in the military has been increasing since the 1970s (because of the standards put in place by the All-Volunteer Force), it stands to reason that the ideas about who soldiers are should expand, especially since women are meant to be seen as equals in American society. It would be worth examining current military films to see how they approach the portrayal and representation of women soldiers in light of these ideas about gender equality. As such, I am have chosen to analyze at the way gender is framed in modern military films.
Gender and Military Films

For my study, I examined how men and women-specifically, soldiers-are constructed through this genre of film. I conducted a textual analysis on a random selection of fictional military films that were released from 1993-2013. I chose to focus on films because of the belief that media (specifically film, in this case) and cultural are undeniably linked. As noted by Mary Talbot (2007), media discourse is incredibly pervasive and is something that affects most of us. She also states that, as “discourse plays a vital role in constituting people’s realities, the implications for the power and influence of media discourse are clear” (Talbot 2007: 3). Media and culture have a dialectical relationship; culture influences the media and the media influences culture. Relationships and constructions of power in specific cultures both shape and are shaped by the media. We can see how this is the case when looking at gender and the depiction of men and women in various forms of media. As stated by Jessica Paull, “the media are sites for the reproduction and negotiation of ideologies” (Paull 2004: 2). Representations and depictions of gender can serve to perpetuate and reinforce stereotypical constructions of gender, or they can help to challenge those stereotypes.

The purpose of this study is to interrogate how film can serve as a tool to express and perpetuate dominant ideologies, as well as to challenge them. Representations of gender in films (and other media) can influence how we think about gender in society in general. Our understandings of gender can become normalized or challenged by the representations we encounter regularly. In thinking specifically about military films, if the representations we see are only men as soldiers, or of women as not capable of being soldiers, this can affect how we end up thinking about soldiers in reality. This is what George Gerbner and Larry Gross (1976) refer to as “symbolic annihilation.” As they succinctly put it, “Representation in the fictional
world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation” (Gerbner and Gross 1976: 181).

Representational practices express the social value of people and groups. For instance, when there are very few women soldiers portrayed in military films, the conception of the military as male and the notion that women are not (or cannot be) soldiers becomes reaffirmed. This is not to say that such ideas about gender will be mindlessly accepted or go unchallenged, but that the media is one of many forces of socialization. The lack of women in such roles in media helps to support dominant ideologies surrounding masculinity and femininity. These messages can influence how we view women’s roles and men’s roles, and can reinforce these divisions.

At the same time, film can also challenge dominant ideologies by showing a different reality. For instance, if military films represent women as competent soldiers, this becomes part of socialization as well and as a result expands cultural conceptions of gender. Film (and other forms of media) can also have the ability to inspire. Fictional films, especially, can expose people to other possibilities, and expand how they conceive of the world. As stated by Judith Butler in regards to fantasy (in a broader sense), “Fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not yet actualizable” (Butler 2004: 28). While Butler was not speaking about fantasy in terms of fiction, her point can still be applied. Consequently, my research seeks to answer a set of related questions: How well are women soldiers represented in modern military films? How are they depicted? What are the main roles of women in the films? Are the men soldiers shown differently than the women soldiers? In what ways? How do men and women soldiers interact with each other? How is femininity or femaleness framed within the
films? How is it regarded? What strategies are being used to represent women soldiers as compared to men soldiers? How do these strategies correspond with the dominant views of women soldiers (and soldiering in general) in American culture?

What follows in this paper is an outline of the feminist and gender studies theories that aid me in my film analysis; I then examine literature concerning media, women in the military, and media depictions of said women. After an explanation of my methodology and methods, I finally conduct and analysis of my selected films and work to answer the above questions.
CHAPTER 2
THEORY

I used frame analysis (with a critical gendered analysis) when looking at my data. My analysis draws on the rich tradition of feminist and gender studies scholars, such as Candace West and Don Zimmerman, Barbara Risman, and Michael Kimmel. These scholars come at the issue of gender as a social construct, question the way it is constructed, and look at-through a feminist perspective- how “gender relations are constructed in a field of power” (Kimmel 2010: 214). Anderson and Hysock (2009) define liberal feminism as a movement or perspective that emphasizes social and legal reform through policies designed to create equal opportunities for women. In addition, it emphasizes gender socialization as the origin of gender differences, thereby assuming that changes in socialization practices will result in more egalitarian gender relations (Anderson and Hysock 2009: 358).

The theories I drew from approach gender from this type of liberal feminist conception and build further off of that definition. This quote is also a useful conception of liberal feminism for my study as it notes the importance of gender socialization in the formation of gender differences and inequality. As media is one of the forces of socialization, it stands to reason that a change in the film representations of gender, for example, would be one way to start to change how gender is socialized.

Social Construction of Gender

The argument that gender is socially constructed, as opposed to the innate outcome of biological sex differences, means that the ways in which gender and gender norms become known need to be investigated. This argument forces us to question our assumptions about gender, and what men and women, boys and girls, can or should do or how they can and should be. When we recognize gender as a social construct, the gender inequalities in the organization of social life can be challenged as illegitimate (West and Zimmerman 1987: 146).
West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that people learn and have learned to “do gender,” which is the main reason for gender difference, and that this doing of gender is necessary in order for men and women to function in society (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). As they state, “Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 137). Their focus is mainly on how gender is “done” through interaction, and how one is held accountable for doing gender correctly in interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987: 137). Interaction with other people, the media, and the general social world, then, acts as the source of our gendered selves and helps to perpetuate them.

Judith Butler defines gender as “the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes” (Butler 2004: 42). She goes on to state that “To conflate the definition of gender with its normative expression is inadvertently to reconsolidate the power of the norm to constrain the definition of gender” (Butler 2004: 42). The point here is that gender itself is complex, and that it goes beyond the binary of masculine and feminine. However, there is a particular tendency to overly simplify gender and to conflate gender with the expressions and appearances of masculinity and femininity (that are dominant in a particular time and place). This restrictive view of gender limits individuals and does not allow that a person’s gender identity may not match outside appearances and behavior. Construing gender in such a way means that a person who identifies as a woman, for instance, may be thought of as strange or wrong for behaving in ways that are coded as masculine, such as joining the military. The same holds true, especially, when looking at men who behave in ways that go against the norms of masculinity.
Masculinity

Kimmel (2010) argues that masculinity, and manhood in general, is constructed as both the opposite and as superior to femininity (and womanhood). As such, it is still heavily policed. Masculinity and the continued defense of it relies on pitting it against what is considered feminine and claiming the traditional power men are assumed to have. Women, as they have made strides in gaining equality, are seen by some men as invading traditional masculine spaces and undermining this power dynamic. This has caused movements to cling to ideals of masculinity and try to hold onto as many aspects of traditional masculinity as possible, thus becoming a kind of defensive masculinity (Kimmel 2010: 16-21). As Kimmel says, although there have been changes in the opportunities open to women, many core ideas about gender, and especially manhood, have not changed. He states, “The structure of our lives has changed, but not their culture, the ideologies that give the structure meaning” (Kimmel 2010: 41). Kimmel uses the term “culture lag” to describe this phenomenon.

Kimmel also addresses this in terms of the military and military institutions, which have, for the most part, been seen as male institutions. In this arena, especially, the presence of women has been seen as a threat to traditional notions of masculinity and the idea of soldiering as a manly pursuit. This, as Kimmel notes, can be seen by the way femaleness is denigrated in order to motivate soldiers and cadets, as well as the rhetoric used by those seeking to avoid allowing women into certain military schools (Kimmel 2010: 173-196).

All of the theorists come from the perspective that gender inequalities are real and, not inherent, and thus both fixable (if people recognize their existence as problems) and things that should be fixed. While Kimmel’s theory is structuralist and West and Zimmerman’s is
ethnomethodological, Risman’s is somewhere in the middle. She argues that while individuals are shaped by social structure, social structure is, too, shaped by individuals (Risman 2004: 432).

**Gender as a Social Structure**

Risman argues that gender is a social structure, which is to say that it is “embedded at the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society” (Risman 2004:446). According to Risman, the social structure of gender creates and reproduces gender inequality, as it is organized in terms of a hierarchy. As such, we need to examine how gender and norms surrounding gender permeate every dimension of society, and why this is the case. Risman also puts forth the notion that other types of characteristics and identities (or aspects of identity) are, like gender, social structures. This includes race, class, sexuality, and so on. One must take note, then, of how these social structures intersect and create “multiple axes of oppression” (Risman 2004: 442).

Taken together, these approaches offer an understanding of gender as a social structure; what it means to “do gender” in interaction, how this becomes normalized and the assumptions we attach to it; and the way gender, and the expression of gender, is a concept that relies on a hierarchy-as well as how that plays out in different contexts.
Frame Analysis

In frame analysis, the focus is on the ways in which people perceive and organize the world around them. Erving Goffman approaches frames with the assumption “that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events-at least social ones-and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman 1974; 10-11). This is to say that how a person views a situation is the result of how that event is defined more broadly in the social world, and a person’s own personal history. Frameworks, Goffman says are “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman 1974: 21). Frameworks are the groups or categories of specific frames. They are the underlying assumptions and experiences that inform and shape a person’s perspective. He goes on to mention that frame analysis involves examining these frameworks while looking at how experience is organized. These frames and frameworks are acquired through socialization and experience. Thus, how we frame things is not inherent, but is learned.

According to Goffman, there are different kinds if frameworks. Primary frameworks, he says, “allow [their] user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in [their] terms” (Goffman 1974: 21). Essentially, this allows a person to make sense of the world. Primary frameworks are the most basic frameworks, and are often taken for granted. There are two kinds of primary frameworks-natural and social. Natural frameworks focus on events that are considered unguided and undirected, such as the weather (Goffman 1974: 22). Natural frameworks are seen as being outside of the realm of social forces. Within these frameworks, human beings have no influence; everything that happens is just “natural.” A storm, for instance, may occur no matter what actions people take.

Social frameworks focus on the actions and events that come from intentional human action. These frameworks “provide background understanding for events that incorporate the
will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency” (Goffman 1974: 22). Social frameworks look at actions that are guided, and thus subject to rules, regulations, and standards of behavior. According to Goffman, “the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture” (Goffman 1974: 27). When a primary framework becomes the primary framework of a group or society, then that framework is a belief system, which then governs how people in this group understand certain aspects of society, or how they relate to each other (Goffman 1974: 27). This framework is often a taken for granted way of seeing the world, and one which goes unquestioned by most people.

Robert M. Entman (1993) takes Goffman’s concept of framing and further elaborates on it in regards to texts. As he says, “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman 1993: 52). In Entman’s explanation of frames, he states that “frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture” (Entman 1993: 52). In the instances of analyzing the frames used in films, the communicators become the filmmakers, the texts are the films themselves, the receivers are the audience members, and the culture is that which has been drawn upon within the films, themselves to produce the frames.

Entman explains that what is or is not selected depends on what is supposed to be communicated through the text. The stock of frames available come from the culture in which the text is being created, and it is just as important to take note of the frames that are not selected as their absence means that they are not receiving the same attention, and can help determine what is not as heavily valued or prevalent in a given culture (Entman 1993: 54). When certain frames are selected repeatedly over others, these frames may become normalized.
Goffman wrote a book on gendered framing and gendered representations in his *Gendered Advertisements* (1979). As suggested by the title, he looks specifically at commercial advertisements—and in this case, pictures—but the points he makes about gender displays and rituals can still be applied to other contexts. As he notes, displays of gender in everyday life are seen as expressive behavior, and thus a natural external expression of sex (Goffman 1979: 3). However, these displays become ritualized by the culture itself, and, as part of culture, by advertisements. The way men and women are posed throughout the advertisements he examines, as well as the various actions they are doing and the ways their modes of dress and appearance, are all part of what constitute their frames.

In Sut Jhally’s *Killing Us Softly 4*, Jean Kilbourne continues this analysis of advertisements by looking at how women are portrayed. She notes that women are typically presented in very limiting ways in advertisements—usually as hyper-feminized and/or hyper-sexualized. She states that media have the power to help shape society, and that advertising is one of the ways this is done at a very subconscious level (Jhally 2010). How advertisers choose to frame gender within their ads demonstrates the different ways in which men and women are thought about, and the roles they can play.

The use of frames is especially apparent in films. Of course, when speaking of frames and films, film frames (or still shots) are what immediately come to mind. While such frames are relevant to understanding theoretical framing in film, the individual shots themselves are not what the focus is on, but rather on the overarching frame that these shots are a part of. Filmmakers define the frames when they decide on what stories they will tell and how they will tell them. When looking at gender in films, for instance, the way men and women are shown by the filmmakers provides one kind of frame that can be analyzed. Of course, the interpretation of
the frames within the films goes beyond the intentions of the filmmakers, as the films themselves are both produced and viewed through the society in which they and their creations are embedded. Thus, the frames I identified in my findings may or may not have been intended by the filmmakers. In fact, the frames I found probably were not overtly intentional, but were the product of “commonsensical” thinking (particularly about gender) that came out in the process of filmmaking, which is explored in my analysis.
CHAPTER 3
PREVIOUS LITERATURE

There has been a large amount of literature written on women and gender in the military, and the problems they face, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination (Segal 1995; Woodward and Winter 2004; Nuciari 2006; Vogt 2007; Solaro 2007; Lundquist 2008; Basham 2009; Benedict 2009; Hajjar 2010), as well as the militarization of women as a whole (Enloe 2000) and the hyper-masculization pushed by various militaries and military institutions (Woodward 2000; Kimmel 2010). There has also been much literature devoted to analyses of gendered media, and studies of media’s possible influence on people’s conceptions of gender (Crisp 1987; Signorielli 1989; Milkie 1994; Arnett 1995; Oliver et al. 1998; Paull 2004; Hentges, et al. 2007; Dill and Thill 2007; Lauzen et al. 2008; Hardin and Greer 2009; Meyers et al. 2011; Attenborough 2011).

However, though there have been some studies done on the representation of women soldiers in the media (Howard III and Prividera 2005; Lobasz 2008; Statchowitsch 2013), little has been done specifically on fictionalized portrayals of women and/or gender in the military (Ingersoll (1995) as an exception). My research contributes to the literature by addressing this gap in focusing on the importance of fictionalized representations of women soldiers in films.
Media and Gender

Many of the works cited here mention the importance of looking at the media as one of the forces of socialization and, thus, something that can have a large impact on how people in a society relate to one another and function. In her content analysis of images of women accompanying articles in magazines, Paull¹ (2004) combines both reflection theory and role-learning theory as a means to explain the dialectical relationship between people and the media they consume.

In combining the theories, Paull suggests that media both reflects and creates reality. As she notes, this is something that can easily be noticed in regards to the media and gender. She argues that the depictions of masculinity and femininity may be said to be realistic, the general favoring of showing one type of reality means that those particular messages about gender are reproduced and normalized. In a sense, it becomes cyclical, where the reality that’s being depicted is constantly perpetuated as a result of that depiction.

In her analysis, Paull looked at the subordination and objectification of women, as well gender stereotypes, in the images. As she points out, editors do have some degree of agency in choosing what images to put out-yet they also are influenced by the “patriarchal nature of our society” (Paull 2004: 24). She found that the magazines overwhelmingly featured the objectification of women, and that many of the images implied subordination, as well. In terms of what this implies about the general view of women in society, she states

At an institutional level, I feel the results emphasize the place of women in society. Even women’s interests magazines, which feature articles about the “independent” women of today, publish images that objectify women. Although the media depicts reality in an exaggerated way, it reinforces the patriarchal norms that exist within our society (Paull 2004: 35).

¹ I would like to thank Jessica Paull for allowing me to look to her own thesis for guidance.
However, as she points out, her findings are not completely supported by the literature, as she found little evidence of objectification of women within general interest magazines (Paull 2004: 45). Paull’s use of role-learning theory is also somewhat questionable, given the fact that, although it does point to the social construction of gender, it also suggests that such roles are “situated identities,” which we know is not the case with sex and gender, as they are categories that transcend most situations (West and Zimmerman 1987: 128). Another issue is the fact that Paull chose only to examine images of women. A comparison between images of both women and men, and the similarities or differences in the depictions therein, may provide a richer analysis.

Though Paull’s study is quantitatively focused, as opposed to my own, it provides a good example for how to approach the issue of media representations of women. It also exposes the overall pervasiveness of images in which women are objectified and/or shown as subordinate, which points to the need for further investigations of media portrayals—in this medium and others.

Meyer et al. (2011) reviewed texts in media studies on the framing of mental illness in terms of gender. They used a Foucauldian lens in their examination of the texts, and argue that the media frame mental illness as specifically feminine, and that such frames contribute to the construction of mental illness in such a way (Meyer et. al 2011: 216). The article points out how specific notions about femaleness (in this case in relation to madness) become “ideologically salient” through media constructions and representations (Meyer et al. 2011: 222), and how these conceptions about femaleness and madness continue to be perpetuated through cultural discourse.

The authors’ make valuable insights about the ways in which our notions about gender and gendered behavior can be reinforced by media portrayals that play into certain stereotypes
(Meyer et. al 2011: 219). However, it would have been useful to see them go beyond the current literature on the topic, and instead apply Foucault’s theory on the construction of madness through language to actual data consisting of women representations in various forms of media.

**Military and Gender**

Enloe (2000) examines the militarization of women, as a whole. As such, she looks at not just women soldiers, but women outside of the military and how the military impacts their lives. Enloe’s points about the overall militarization of women, and how the military seeks to perpetuate specific ideas about both ideal womanhood and manhood, sheds light on the myriad of ways in which the military plays a significant role in the construction of gender. However, although her book proves useful for my analysis, Enloe approaches the subject already with a bias against the military and militarization, as a whole. As I am only looking to examine the military in terms of gender (and race) issues, the overall criticism of it as an institution is irrelevant to my purposes.

Hajjar (2010) illustrates how there is still a problem in the military in regards to the treatment of women soldiers (as well as other groups). As noted, women soldiers face sexual harassment, sexual assault, and general resistance within the military. Hajjar argues that it is essential for the military to work on its internal diversity issues in order to deal with other cultures, and in order to function at its best (Hajjar 2010: 247). As he outlines, the acceptance of women in the military is one of the main issues that needs to be focused on. He contends that the military is still struggling to accept women as equals, which may stem from the military and its members having a very traditional view of gender (Hajjar 2010: 255).
An issue that has come up is that of gender harassment, which he defines as, “the harassment based on resistance toward the changing roles of men and women in society” (Hajjar 2010: 255). This definition actually came from a study conducted by Laura L. Miller (1997), and refers specifically to the “resistance strategies” of Army men due to women’s expanding roles and participation in the military (Miller 2007: 33). By these definitions, this kind of harassment is different than other types because it is a reaction to women’s presence in the military and is used as a form of protest (Miller 2007: 33).

Hajjar does not use his own data to make his arguments; instead, he relies on past studies and reports done about issues such as sexual harassment in order to provide evidence for his claims. Hajjar does not analyze any data and instead takes a purely theoretical focus. His main goal in writing the article appears to be to explain why the military needs to change in regard to the treatment of women and homosexuals, and to offer ways to make this change come about. While he makes logical and helpful points in the article, turning it into an empirical piece and collecting and analyzing data on the importance of cross-cultural competence in the military may help bolster his arguments.

Vogt et al. (2007) conducted a study of former men and women Reservists in order to “document attitudes toward women among military personnel, to identify demographic and military characteristics associated with more positive attitudes toward women, and to examine associations between attitudes toward women and tolerance for sexual harassment” (Vogt et al. 2007: 879). Their data were collected through telephone interviews with identified Reservists, in which they asked questions relating to beliefs about women’s abilities in the military and the acceptance of women in the military (Vogt et. al 2007: 882).
The researchers found there to be a correlation between attitudes about and toward women, and feelings or tolerance for sexual harassment. They contend that because the military is and has been a traditionally masculine institution, the presence of women can be seen, by those that hold more traditional views on gender, as negative and disrupting. This, in turn, may lead to more feelings of aggression towards the women and a higher tolerance of sexual harassment towards women soldiers (Vogt et al. 2007: 882). The large amount of (reported) accounts of sexual harassment and assault of women, (Vogt et al. 2007: 880) as well as the relative lack of discipline concerning perpetrators, points to a lack of respect and acceptance of women in military culture, overall. This study does focus only on former Reservists, and does not seem to provide an explanation as to why. They do note that because of this, their findings may not be generalizable to both active-duty forces and current Reservists (Vogt et. al 2007: 897). As such, it would be beneficial to see if there are similar findings among these groups.

In connection with this idea of a sexist and permissive (as in allowing such type of behavior) military culture, Solaro (2007) addresses, in her book, the instances of sexual assault and harassment at the 1991 Tailhook Convention which was held for Navy and Marine Corps aviators. She notes that such behavior (and the condoning of said behavior by Navy leadership), demonstrates an attitude problem (Solaro 2007;170). The problem has to do with a sense of entitlement to women’s bodies that is nurtured in an environment that says women are inferior and that non-consensual sexual conduct will be swept under the rug. As Solaro states, "The military allowed too many servicemen to view sexual assault and harassment as ways of male bonding, and Tailhook was a public expression of that criminal bonding" (Solaro 2007: 178).

Woodward and Winter (2004) and Basham (2009) focus on gender issues in the British Military. Specifically, they note how important language is in constructing the military as a
gendered institution, and how such discourse also contributes to the construction of gender itself and gendered expectations (Woodward and Winter 2004: 279). Woodward and Winter’s study argues that it is necessary for there to be an in-depth understanding of what women go through in the military. They use discourse analysis and post-structuralism to examine the statements put out by various British government organizations and the media in 1998-1999 concerning women’s participation in the British Army. They found that, though policy statements from the British military appear to be “positive and enthusiastic about equality of opportunity,” the debates centering on excluding women from direct combat positions work against this supposed acceptance, as they rely on the idea that women would interfere with unit cohesion (Woodward and Winter 2004: 294).

Basham’s study, which combined observational research, focus groups, and interviews with British military personnel (Basham 2009: 730), also points out the issue of harassment that comes up in the use of language and policy, as it can be seen as "othering" women and making operational cohesion more difficult to obtain, as women soldiers are singled out for their femaleness (Basham 2009: 733).

Though the authors are speaking about the British military, their points about gender issues in that environment can still be applied when looking at the U.S. military. Specifically, when thinking about language use, the construction of the military as masculine, and the various policy issues concerning women’s roles within the military (such as combat exclusion), there are many parallels that can be drawn.

These pieces all highlight some of the issues facing women in the military. They also point out the problem of the overall culture of the military, and the need for it to change. The points made by the authors in terms of military culture and gender will be have been useful to me.
when viewing and analyzing my films, as they helped guide me in what to pay attention to when it comes to the portrayal of the military. I used them to see if the films touch on the points brought up, and how the films approach and depict these topics—that is, do the films show harassment of inequality in a critical light? Or do they help to normalize these issues?

**Media Depiction of Soldiers**

I was only able to come across one study that examined the fictional depiction of soldiers through a gendered lens. Ingersoll’s (1995) analysis of Brian De Palma’s film Casualties of War focuses on how men soldiers are portrayed in the film. He examines how the film constructs masculinity through the American soldiers in Vietnam. As he argues, the film frames masculinity as desirable and femininity as the opposite. The soldiers, particularly Meserve, who enacts the “macho” archetype, use misogynistic and homophobic slurs in order to bond with, motivate, and insult others (Ingersoll 1995:3). Masculinity is then constructed as being tough and heterosexual, and femininity is seen as being weak, vulnerable, and potentially victimized.

Though Ingersoll’s analysis only focused on men soldiers, he brings up important insights about the construction of masculinity—and thus, gender—in military films. He provides an example of what to watch for in the portrayal of both men and women soldiers when viewing my own films. That said, his writing was difficult to follow at times and some of his arguments could have used deeper analysis. His arguments also may have been bolstered by grounding them more theoretically within masculinity and feminist studies.

Most of the studies concerning media and women soldiers have focused on the depictions in news media (Howard III and Prividera 2005; Lobasz 2008; Stachowitsch 2013). In examining the construction of women soldiers (and specifically Jessica Lynch) on news networks and news
magazines in 2003 and 2004, John W. Howard III and Laura C. Prvidera state, “The media further complicates women's military roles by representing stories consistent with the dominant patriarchal militaristic narrative. Media stories are consistent with people's gendered understandings” (Howard III and Prvidera 2005: 89). The media help solidify this idea of men as protectors and women as needing rescuing and protecting. This construction is dependent on the binary of male/female, man/woman, and masculinity/femininity—which is how most people understand the world. This is also what is taken as reality, and is why, Howard and Prvidera argue, Private Jessica Lynch was portrayed and focused on as the archetypal woman soldier. Not only were there other women soldiers (Specialist Johnson and Private Piewesta) with Private Lynch when the attack happened, but they actually participated in the combat. Their stories, though, were generally glossed over by the media. Yet for all three women, when talked about, the focus was generally on their civilian lives and more “domestic” sides, instead of their lives in the military (Howard III and Prvidera 2005: 95).

As Howard and Prvidera point out, the framing of women soldiers (in this case, Private Jessica Lynch) as “damsels in distress” that need to be rescued by men soldiers, as well as the overall erasure of the stories of women soldiers that defy this archetype, plays into and reaffirms the gender binary that says that women are the victims and men are the heroes (Howard III and Prvidera 2005: 96).

Howard and Prvidera’s study is of particular use for me, as their examination of the media’s discussion of women soldiers not only shows that it is a topic worth investigating, but also gives my study some guidance in knowing how to approach my films and in knowing specific themes to look for within them. However, the study only examined the news discourse surrounding one woman soldier (with some mention of two others). It would be worth
investigating how other women soldiers are talked about in news media, and how this compares with the media treatment of men soldiers.

Lobasz’s study also examined the portrayal of Jessica Lynch, as well as Pfc. Lynndie England. She uses predicate analysis to look at the media narratives surrounding the two women, and how they, as she says, still fit within the “hegemonic articulations of femininity,” despite some feminist claims to the contrary (Lobasz 2008: 307). Her data came from five popular newspapers and consisted of news stories, editorials, and letters to the editor that mentioned either of the two women. She also compared their narratives with those of men soldiers, and came to the conclusion that there were two types of women soldiers represented: “The Woman in Peril [Lynch] and the Ruined Woman [England]” (Lobasz 2008: 315).

As with Howard and Prividera’s study, Lobasz found the coverage of Jessica Lynch mostly framed her as a traditionally feminine and “pure” “damsel in distress,” despite various attempts from liberal feminists to keep Lynch’s efforts from being undermined (Lobasz 2008: 323-324). For England, her past sexual history was used by the media as an additional way to shame her, outside of her actions in Abu Ghraib. She was also depicted as not as culpable as the others (men soldiers) involved, with media descriptions suggesting she was under the influence of the men. As Lobasz says, “Ruined Women are presented as either lewd from birth or as easily deceived and incapable of exercising agency” (Lobasz 2008: 327). Lobasz points out here the liberal feminist attempts to use England’s example to show that both women and men are capable of being depraved or sadistic, and that women should not be held to a higher moral standard, though, as Lobasz says, this too has been contested as it has been argued that England’s reason for behaving in such a way was that she was “stripped of her femininity” by being in the military (Lobasz 2008: 328).
Lobasz’s article demonstrated the power of media narratives, and how two different types of narratives which, on the surface, have the ability to appear more feminist, can be used to reproduce “hegemonic gender discourses identifying masculinity with war and femininity with peace” (Lobasz 2006: 306). Lobasz’s arguments, though, did not seem substantiated enough—as they were only focused on the narratives surrounding two women soldiers. While she did compare these narratives with those of men soldiers, it may have been useful for her to also try to find stories or narratives around other women soldiers from the past or more recent years, to see if the two tropes she identified held up.

The above studies, overall, lacked a thorough examination of the depiction of women soldiers in other forms of media, including film. They all also only focused on non-fictional depictions, which means that the fictional realm and its possible contribution to perceptions of women soldiers has been overlooked. My own study draws on the issues addressed in this literature. Not only does it expand on some of the points already made, but it contributes something new to the literature by looking specifically at the portrayals of women soldiers in modern military films.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodology

I have conducted a textual analysis of 8 films about military service made between the years 1993 and 2013. I am looking at the films in the context of American society and arguments about gender equality, and am looking to see how women soldiers are represented in comparison to men soldiers in the films (Grbich 2013: 202). I am approaching the topic from a critical standpoint, as I am looking at the films with the knowledge that film depictions are affected by and have the ability to affect gendered power relations. I am paying attention to and analyzing the framing of gender relations and gender inequalities shown within the films. For the purposes of this study, I am using the term “soldier” as an umbrella term for service members in the U.S. military (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard).

A textual analysis is the best method because I am seeking to examine the messages and themes in the films in regard to women soldiers. I did not conduct a content analysis because I am interested in more than just frequencies. I am looking at the “aspects of the cultural context or social organization [being] reflected” in the films (Grbich 2013: 202). Specifically, my study is a textual analysis of how gendered relationships, hierarchies, and roles are constructed in films depicting military life. It is critical in the sense that I am paying attention to power structures within the films, and am seeking to note and confront injustices that come through in the films (Daly 2007: 89). The claims I make are focused on issues concerning gender, in this case-specifically gender representation in military films. My study is grounded in the concept that films function as sites where injustice and inequality can be reproduced or challenged. However, while I have come at my data with certain expectations in mind (for instance, that women soldiers will be underrepresented), I do not ignore cases that do not fit with those expectations.
I am approaching my research with a constructive epistemology and am using analytic induction to examine my data. I am looking at it with the “perspective of theoretical sensitivity to existing concepts, ideas, and theory,” (Daly 2007: 49). From a constructivist epistemological standpoint, I am using existing theory to help guide my understanding and analysis of the data, though I am not letting it limit my interpretations. In using analytic induction, I have gone through my data to look for initial patterns and themes surrounding the portrayals of soldiers (with special attention paid to gender), and then developed codes based on those patterns. I then developed master codes based on the codes established, and used sub-codes in order to be more detailed (Grbich 2013: 261-262). I am using these codes to develop an analysis of modern military films in terms of gender (men and women).

As I did not work with human subjects, I did not need to be concerned with the specific ethical issues that would arise in other types of studies. As my study is a textual analysis on films, I also did not need to be approved by IRB. However, I am still responsible for being truthful and transparent in my data collection and my research findings, even if what I found goes against any preconceived notions or expectations. In the name of reflexivity, I need to mention that I am a feminist and am conducting this study from that perspective. I am also a lover of film and believe that the media can significantly influence and shape the beliefs and behaviors in society. I say this both as a sociologist who has learned about the effects of media by studying them, and as someone who believes to have personally felt the impact of the media in daily life. I also believe that there should be gender equality in the military, and that

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2 I would like to thank Sarah Boeshart for assisting me in understanding analytic induction.
3 I would also like to thank my fellow classmates for reading through and helping me with some of my codes.
representing women as both present in the military and as capable soldiers is one of many ways to help meet this goal.

To ensure credibility, I am going by the standards for qualitative research. I have not tried to take an objective approach when analyzing the films. I am aware that knowledge is situated, which is true for me and for those who created the films. The messages I take from them may be different than the ones they were trying to convey, based on our own lives and social locations and experiences. I have provided context and information so that others will be able to understand how I came to my conclusions. I have also kept memos and notes about my thoughts during the data collection and coding process, have kept track of how I developed certain ideas. I am also using theoretical triangulation and have used multiple theories in order to examine the films. (Daly 2007: 252-257).

Methods

For my sample, I chose films produced in the years 1993-2013 to see if the representation of women in military films changed within a twenty-year time frame. I used purposive sampling to locate relevant films during this time period. In order to select my sample, I went to the websites http://www.movieweb.com/, imdb.com, netflix.com, and also conducted a google.com search to find military movies from 1993-2013. “Military film,” in this instance, is defined as a film that focuses on military life and/or war. In my search, I disregarded historical films taking place before 1973, foreign films, and documentaries. I did this because I wanted films that would take place after the time period when more women were joining the military. I also focused on the United States military, so foreign films were not applicable. I took out documentaries because I wanted to focus on the representation in fictional films. Of the films gathered, I used a list randomizer on random.org and selected the first 15 films from the randomized list. However,
in first attempted to conduct this study, I came to the conclusion that 15 films was too much for me to undertake, so I selected the first 8 of the films from the initial list of 15. Given that the amount of women in the military has increased since the 1970s, I wanted to choose a time frame that would allow for the most representation. Given the time restrictions of an MA degree, I decided to only examine 8 films. I chose this number because it seemed to be a feasible amount of films to analyze in order to discover a range of themes in looking at this topic. I did not reach data saturation with 8 films, so I am considering this a preliminary study to be expanded upon at a later point. The films I selected are: *Battleship* (2012), *G.I. Jane* (1997), *Act of Valor* (2012), *Jarhead* (2005), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Stop-Loss* (2008), *Home of the Brave* (2006), and *In the Valley of Elah* (2007). As noted, *G.I. Jane* did fall into my sample, which is appropriate—not only because of the title of this study—but because it is considered by many to be the quintessential “woman-as-soldier” film.

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CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS: SOLDIERS AS MEN

In conducting my study, I have found that a dominant frame within the films was the depiction of the military as the domain of straight white men, and that being in the military is a masculine endeavor. My analysis in this chapter concerns how the films frame soldiering and the military in the aforementioned way. This is based on the representations of soldiers, the language used concerning soldiers and the military, and the language used and attitudes expressed concerning women and femininity.

Overall I found, as many casual viewers might, that the predominant image of soldiers in these films was that of a white man—regardless of whether the soldier appeared in a lead or supporting role. Of the eight films that I examined, three contained some exceptions to this pattern. In this chapter I explore the main theme and the variations.

The dominant framing of soldiers as white men was produced through three film making techniques. First through casting there is an overall lack of women soldiers (as compared to men soldiers) present in the films. In casting, the majority of those shown in military roles—be it as lead characters, supporting characters, minor characters, or extras/background characters—were white men. This was the case for all eight films. *Black Hawk Down*, which took place in 1993 and is about the attempts to capture a Somali warlord provides a good exemplar of this casting technique. There was only one shot of a woman soldier included in the film. She was shown in a group of soldiers training on a gun range at the base. The rest of the film followed the actions of the other soldiers, who were mainly white men.

Second, some films amplified the points of view of men (as the leads of the films) through the use of voice-overs to narrate the scenes. Voiceover or narration was used in in the beginning and ending of some of the films For instance, *Jarhead, Home of the Brave*, and *Act of
Valor all used this device. In these films, the voiceovers are being given by a man who either is or was a soldier. This man also happens to be is a lead character in the film. This is the perspective through which we the audience are meant to view the story. The voiceovers tended to reference men and manhood, specifically in relation to soldiering and ideals of soldiering. For example, the opening (and closing) monologue in *Jarhead* talks about being a soldier, specifically a marine in this case, as something a man does. Anthony Swofford in *Jarhead* presents the story of a marine as the story of a man (or men):

*Screen is black. There is no sound except for a man's voice.*

A story. A man fires a rifle for many years... and he goes to war. And afterward, he turns the rifle in at the armory...and he believes he's finished with the rifle. But no matter what else he might do with his hands...love a woman, build a house...change his son's diaper... his hands remember the rifle (*Jarhead* 2005).

The monologue is meant to represent all marines, but it is framed as a role that only men take. A woman is only mentioned as someone who is “loved” by the man Marine, and as someone who will produce (male) offspring for him. This also brings up the heteronormativity of the monologue. It depicts marines as both men and straight, and women as love interests and mothers. There were no women marines shown in *Jarhead*, and this monologue supports their erasure by producing them as a marginal presence in the lives of men. In all of the films, groups of soldiers were often referred to as “men” or “boys.” This was the case even when there were women soldiers represented and shown within the film.

Finally, the films relied on dialogue to reproduce this hegemonic framing—in particular the ways that soldiers were talked about and talked to. The scenes outlined above provide an example of the discourse surrounding the military and soldiering. Another example, from *G.I. Jane*, does include reference to women as soldiers. In this scene, men from the Department of
Defense and Flag Officers are trying to strategize on how to select a military program for a woman test case to be a part of. This is due to the issue of gender discrimination in the military having been brought up at a senate commission hearing. In the previous scene, they met with Senator DeHaven, who is a woman and the one who called attention to the issue. The men were not happy about the idea to fully integrate the women into the Navy:

EXT. CAPITOL BLDG. - DAY

*The DOD boys move down [the steps] to meet with Hayes and two
FLAG OFFICERS. All three are white men. Hayes is in his fifties and is the oldest.*

**HAYES:** Well, Doug?

*Camera shifts to DOD #1*

**DOD #1:** *(shaking hand and smiling)* Congratulations, Mr. Secretary.

*Camera shifts to Hayes.*

**HAYES:** *(Smiling, confident)* So, what program?

**FLAG OFFICER #1:** I'd go CRT. *(Camera focuses on him)* Combined Reconnaissance Team. Seals. 60% drop out rate.

*Camera shifts to Flag Officer #2.*

**FLAG OFFICER # 2:** No woman is going to last a week. I don’t care who she is.

*Camera goes back to Hayes.*

**HAYES:** Then I suggest we start there.

*They start walking down the steps.*

**HAYES:** Good work.

*Dramatic music plays us out.*

*(G.I. Jane 1997).*
This scene demonstrates the reluctance to the idea of letting women into all branches of the military. The men are shown as clearly against it, as they are determined to find a program that they are sure a woman would fail at. Here, they also group all women together, and make one woman (the one who is not “going to last a week”) the representative of all women. The assertion that a woman can’t be a SEAL frames it as something only a man can do. It is implied that SEALS are men, and that is something that both won’t and shouldn’t be changed.

These scenes demonstrate how the representation of soldiers and the language use in the films work together to frame soldiering as something done by white men. This is a frame that is repeated throughout the films. In frame analysis, as noted by Entman (1993), it is important to take note of what frames are not being used in a given text (or texts). The consistent framing of the soldier as a white man, with limited or minimal disruptions to that frame, helps it to become normalized (Entman 1993: 54). When the other available or possible ways of framing the soldier are rarely used in film, what is presented is a very limited depiction of who is and who can (or should) be a soldier.

Despite these examples, there were, of course, some exceptions to the dominant framing of the military as a straight, white, masculine endeavor. There were films that included both women soldiers and soldiers (both men and women) of color. One or both groups were present in some way in all of the films, but their degree of representation varied within each film. For instance, *Home of the Brave* had two black male soldiers as leads (the two other leads were white). In all the other films, the lead or most prominent characters were white. *Battleship*, *G.I. Jane*, *Stop-Loss*, and *Jarhead* had men soldiers of color (and a veteran) in supporting roles. *In The Valley of Elah* had two men soldiers of color in minor roles. Despite these variations, the dominant theme prevailed as men and women soldiers of color were often in the background
and, if not playing lead or supporting roles, had few to no lines. In terms of gender, out of eight films, only *G.I. Jane* and *Home of the Brave* had women soldiers as lead characters, and *Battleship* was the only film to have a (black) woman soldier as a supporting character. *G.I. Jane* did have another (white) woman soldier as a minor character, and *Jarhead* included one scene with a (white) woman military nurse (which had traditionally been one of the only roles open to women in the military, anyway—which underscores the lack of women marines in the film). *Act of Valor*, too, had a (white) woman soldier as a minor character (she only appeared in one scene). As with the men soldiers of color, most of the woman soldiers (of all races) appeared in background shots (if they appeared at all).

In looking at both race and gender, I found that the prominent soldiers of color, with the exception of Petty Officer Cora Raikes from *Battleship*, were men. The lead women soldiers were white women, as were almost all of the supporting, minor, and background women soldier characters. Soldiers that were both women and people of color were the most underrepresented group.

The presence of these characters, who were not white men, shows that there is some attention being paid to representing difference within the military. At the same time, the fact that many of these characters do play minimal roles, and that only one or two soldiers of color and/or woman soldiers can play a prominent role in any given film from the sample, is telling. So, while white women and men and women soldiers of color can be said to have been included in the films some of the time, their overall representation was lacking. As noted, the soldiers that the films focused on, and those whose stories were being told, the majority of the time were white men.
Masculinity and Femininity

A subtheme that warrants further exploration is the overt gendering of soldiers within the films and the use of gender stereotypes and ideals to keep them in line as both soldiers and men (in the context of the films). As mentioned, the use of language surrounding soldiers and soldiering often took on a very gendered form. The maintenance of a hegemonic form of masculinity—one which says that in order to be a man, or at least a man worthy of respect, one should have the qualities of strength, toughness, resilience, authoritativeness, and overall lack of emotionality (Kimmel 2010: 182)—was present both explicitly and implicitly throughout the films. This notion of masculinity also emphasizes differences between men and women and positions masculinity as both the opposite and better than of what is regarded as feminine (Risman 2004; Kimmel 2010). Consequently, representations of hegemonic femininity are constructed through weakness, emotionality, softness, and frivolity. In fact, as Kimmel points out, it is these such qualities that have been attributed to all women and, subsequently, used to exclude women from military institutions (Kimmel 2010: 180).

One of the primary ways the films employed the use of these binary gender constructions was through the use of language in order to both police and assert masculinity. This was often overtly done when speaking about soldiers, during boot camp and training scenes, and in scenes where the men soldiers are bonding with each other. The films also framed the men soldiers, through the overall depictions, according to this hegemonic masculinity in more subtle and implicit ways. This was achieved through the use of scenes in which (mostly men) soldiers were portrayed as having the qualities (or as needing to have them) of heroism, toughness, resilience, and so on, that are associated with the aforementioned hegemonic masculinity.
Certain scenes within the films framed soldiering as something that is not only done by men, but something that is important for the establishment and preservation of masculinity. In the film *In the Valley of Elah*, there is a specific scene in which the equation of masculinity with being a soldier is brought up. In this scene, the character Hank, an (white) army veteran, is telling his (white) wife, Joan, that their son (a soldier in the U.S. Army) is dead:

*Joan on the hall phone by the stairs.*

**JOAN:** I'll get a plane ticket.

**HANK:** No.

**JOAN:** What do you mean "no"?

**HANK:** I'll bring him home soon as I can.

**JOAN:** I need to see him, Hank. I need to be with Michael.

**HANK:** He is gone, Joan.

**JOAN:** I need to be with my boy, Hank.

**HANK:** There is nothing left.

**JOAN:** What the hell does that mean?

**HANK:** Joan, for once in your life can you just take my word for something?

**JOAN:** -- For once? For once?! I seem to remember me being the one saying "no" and you saying "it will be good for his character!" Who won that argument, Hank?!

**HANK:** Mike was the one wanted to join, I sure as hell didn't encourage it!

**JOAN:** Like he could ever have felt like a man if he hadn't gone. Both my boys, Hank. You could have left me one.

*And with that she finally weeps, the sound so piercing and full of pain that it goes right through Hank.*
HANK: Joan?... Joan, please. (finally) Joan, I can't listen to you cry.

JOAN: Then don't.

*She hangs up and sits there, alone on the floor.*

*(In the Valley of Elah, 2007).*

In this exemplar, representations of men and women are delineated in several ways. First, Hank and both of his sons had been in the military, while Joan had not. Joan’s assertion that Hank encouraged them and that Michael “could not have ever felt like a man” if he hadn’t have enlisted implies a model of masculinity in which a true man is a soldier, and in which there is an expectation of a son fulfilling that role. The implication in this scene is that the boys felt pressure to live up to this specific idea of masculinity, and needed to enlist in the military in order to, as West and Zimmerman say, “do gender” correctly, in that regard (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126). Being a man, in this case, was intrinsically tied up with the expectation of being a soldier. Further, Joan’s apparent lack of agency is underscored when she says: “Both my boys, Hank. You could have left me one.” This suggests that she had no say in the matter, and that Hank’s desire for his sons to be in the military was given more importance than her own thoughts on it.

Additionally, Hank’s refusal to “let” Joan join him has certain implications. Hank states that he didn’t encourage Michael to enlist, yet he did not stand in his way. Michael was able to make his own choice in the matter (which, implicitly, is what a man should do). Hank, too, has been able to decide for himself what to do in regards to his son’s disappearance. Joan, both the only woman in the family and the only one who has not been in the military, is not given this kind of agency. In an earlier scene, Joan wanted to join Hank when he was going to go to the military base to look into Michael’s disappearance. Joan wanted to go, but Hank insists that that

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would be a bad idea. In the scene outlined above, Hank again denies his wife the right to go to the base, even though it is now clear that Michael is dead. It would appear that part of being a man, for both Hank and his sons, is the ability to make one’s own decisions (and to make decisions for his wife)-and have them be listened to and respected. Going by these scenes, the same cannot be said for being a woman. Hank is shown as having the authority, having the ultimate say in both what he can do and what his wife cannot. This is something that Joan is meant to just accept, or at least this is what is expected of her by Hank. Joan, then, is shown as having a passive role in the family, whereas her sons and her husband were and are able to have active roles.

The framing of military masculinity is prevalent in the other films, as well. For instance Battleship and G.I. Jane include scenes where it is implied that such a form of masculinity needs to be defined in opposition to notions of femininity. What this means in the films is that femaleness and/or gayness (as the two are often equated) is presented as something to be ridiculed. This was especially noticeable in scenes where the instructors or drill sergeants were trying to rile up and motivate the soldiers. For instance, during an obstacle course scene in G.I. Jane, the instructors shouted various things to the soldiers, such as “Do you want me to get you a dress?” and “Do you squat when you pee?” (G.I. Jane, 1997).

These epithets reinforce the idea that there is something inherently wrong with being a woman or acting in a womanly manner, being a woman means not being a soldier. As with masculinity being defined in opposition to femininity, so too is the act of soldiering. Clearly being a soldier means not being a woman. This heckling is meant as an insult and is intended to belittle the soldiers and shame them into working harder. The concept of a soldier, aligned with hegemonic masculinity is juxtaposed against femininity.
Another example is this scene from the beginning of *Jarhead*. After the Anthony Swofford’s monologue, the film opens with a line-up of marines being yelled at by a drill sergeant:

**DRILL SERGEANT**: You are no longer black, or brown, or yellow or red!
You are now green!
You are light green or dark green!
*Camera cuts to shot of Drill Sergeant standing between two rows of soldiers.*
*They are all men. Most are white.*
Do you understand?
**MARINES**: Sir, yes, sir!
**DRILL SERGEANT**: (Turns to look at Swofford) Swofford!
*Camera cuts to Swofford’s face.*
**SWOFFORD**: Sir, yes, sir!
**DRILL SERGEANT**: (Approaches Swofford) You the maggot whose father served in Vietnam?
**SWOFFORD**: Sir, yes, sir!
**DRILL SERGEANT**: Outstanding!
Did he have the balls to die there?
**SWOFFORD**: Sir, no, sir!
**DRILL SERGEANT**: Too fucking bad! He ever talk about it?
**SWOFFORD**: Sir, only once, sir!
**DRILL SERGEANT**: *(Camera shifts to focus on Drill Sergeant’s face)* Good!
Then he wasn't lying!
There is a pause. The camera shifts back to Swofford’s face.

Drill Sergeant walks closer to Swofford and steps to his side.

The camera follows him so that Swofford’s face is now in profile.

**DRILL SERGEANT:** Are you eyeballing me with those baby blues?

Are you!?

**SWOFFORD:** Sir, no, sir!

**DRILL SERGEANT:** Are you in love with me, Swofford?

**SWOFFORD:** Sir, no, sir!

**DRILL SERGEANT:** Oh, you don't think I look good in my uniform, Swofford?

**SWOFFORD:** Sir, the drill sergeant looks fabulous in his uniform, sir!

**DRILL SERGEANT:** So you're gay, then, and you love me, huh?

**SWOFFORD:** Sir, I'm not gay, sir!

**DRILL SERGEANT:** Do you have a girlfriend, Swofford?

**SWOFFORD:** Sir, yes, sir!

**DRILL SERGEANT:** Guess again, motherfucker!

Jody's banging her right now!

Get on your face and give me 25 for every time she gets

fucked this month.

Down on your face!

*Swofford drops to the ground and starts doing pushups.*

*(Jarhead 2005).*

This scene uses the notion of homosexuality as a tool for derision. The idea that Anthony

Swofford could possibly be gay is thrown at him by the drill sergeant as a belittling statement.
Also noteworthy is the reference to Swofford’s girlfriend only in terms of sex and the possibility of her having sex with another man. Her “get[ting] fucked” by someone else is used to further humiliate Swofford in boot camp.

Though not during a drill, the following exemplar from Battleship provides another instance in which femininity is ridiculed—this time by a woman. The scene takes place during a soccer match at the beginning of the film. Petty Officer Cora Raikes, a young black woman, is circling around an injured teammate. She is the only (visible) woman on the field:

RAIKES (aggressively circling injured teammate): What’s wrong with you, drama queen?

Camera shifts to play on the ground, holding his leg in pain. It goes back to Raikes. She slaps her hands together and leans forward to help him up.

RAIKES: Get up princess! Come on!

The teammate gets up and runs forward. Raikes slaps his behind and he runs along.

(Battleship 2012).

Raikes is shown as belittling her teammate (who is a man) by comparing him to a woman. She does this by using terms such as “drama queen” and “princess.” Her use of such terms can be seen as a way of diminishing his masculinity, so as to prompt him to get back in the game and be tougher. It is implied that being a princess or drama queen is the opposite of being tough, and that it is unacceptable for him to act in such a way.

The statements made in the above scenes are not pointed out or commented on within the films. In other words, the films do not problematize the way women/femaleness are used as labels of ridicule in these scenes. Rather, this derision, and the subsequent indifference, combined with the overall lack of women soldiers in all of the films, reinforces the idea of the
military as a (straight) male arena—even in films such as *G.I. Jane* where the point of the film is to bring attention to issues of gender inequality within the military.

Finally, the language and dialogue in scenes that showed the groups of men soldiers bonding with each other typically excluded women. *Stop-Loss, Jarhead, G.I. Jane, Black Hawk Down, Home of the Brave,* and *Act of Valor* all included scenes in which the groups of men were having fun, joking with, and relating to each other. Usually, women were not included in these bonding scenes. Sometimes, this bonding included references to women, but as outsiders An exemplar of this phenomenon can be found in *G.I. Jane,* as the men at the Coronado Naval Base are gathered in the mess hall and talking about O’Neil, a white woman in the Navy who is being used as a test case for the inclusion of women in elite military programs:

*Camera focuses on a group of men in the mess hall of the Coronado Naval Base.*

**SOLDIER 1 (LT. MILLER):** Average woman? Twenty five percent body fat. Twenty-five. That's one-quarter fat, man. I mean, think about that.

**SOLDIER 2 LT. MCCOOL:** If she pulls her own weight, I got no problem with it.

**SOLDIER 3 (LT. CORTEZ):** No split tails’ getting through this program . No way, Jose.

*O’NEIL enters the mess hall. The other soldiers are already eating. She is the only woman in a room full of men. When they notice her, there are whistles and laughter. The camera pans to the men. They are staring at her. One stands up.*

**SOLDIER 4: (Standing)** Oh man, doesn’t she know it’s rude to point?

*The camera shifts back to O’Neil. She gets in line and runs a hand over her head.*

*Camera goes back to the men and focuses on a specific group sitting and eating. It focuses on one man.*
CORTEZ: Look, I don’t know what she did to get in here… I hate to speculate (camera shifts back to O’Neil, who is walking with her tray of food. It follows her as he talks), but I petitioned for two years to get into this program. (Camera focuses on another soldier, who is eagerly watching her. It goes back to the soldier that is speaking) That’s two years of letter-writing, two years of pulling string, and now I finally get here and it’s going coed? (Camera focuses on O’Neil as she sits at a table). Elite combat unit, whose genius idea was that? That’s bullshit.

Camera shifts to the other soldiers in his group, listening to him. One of them is Lt. McCool (a black man) who looks like he doesn’t agree. He had stated earlier that he was fine with her being there

I mean they can’t do what we can do. How does that—how does that happen? (Emphasis mine)

Camera focuses on soldier who is still watching here. He turns his attention to the group.

SOLDIER 5 (LT. SLOVNIK): All I’m saying is one night, lord, just give me one night and I’ll set her sta-raight.

(A few of the other soldiers fist-bump him after this statement).

(G.I. Jane 1997).

The men talk about O’Neil as an outsider. With the exception of Lt. McCool, the men position themselves as superior to O’Neil (and by inference to all women) because they are able to do things that “they can’t do.” They construct being SEALs as a male-only activity. In their conversation, being a SEAL truly is, and should remain, a “boys club.” For Cortez, apparently part of what makes being a SEAL appealing is that women aren’t able to do it. His reaffirmation of masculinity relies upon a presumption that men are superior to women. Kimmel refers to this
style of interaction as “dominance bonding” (Kimmel 2010: 52). As he states, “Dominance bonding can be anything from two (apparently) straight men nodding with lascivious smirks as a beautiful woman passes by along a continuum of public sexist or homophobic comments or humor-or worse” (Kimmel 2010: 52).

In Kimmel’s book, he makes reference to this form of bonding as a way for men to bridge racial differences and simply come together as men. The instances of men soldiers (with only other men soldiers) bonding (which happened across all the films) are also relevant because of the arguments that have been used against women being in the military. As noted by Woodward and Winter (2004) in their study, men are constructed within military discourse as part of a “bonded, homosocial team. There are echoes here of discourses of military masculinity seen in popular culture, of the ‘band of brothers,’” and so on (Woodward and Winter 2004: 292). They also note that, similarly to Kimmel, “Modes of aggressive heterosexual behavior have also been identified as part of this bonding process. This behavior necessarily relies on the construction of the figure of woman as a sexualized ‘other’ within lay discourses of soldiering” (Woodward and Winter 2004: 292). The images in the films of men coming together in such a way, without women present in their groupings as fellow soldiers, help to reinforce the idea that the military should be populated by men, and that, perhaps, women soldiers would be a disruption to unit cohesion (Woodward and Winter 2004: 292-293).

Interestingly, in *G.I. Jane*, though McCool, the one non-white soldier in the group, is part of the conversation and does take part in other bonding with the men (and is not treated as an outsider), he is the only one to disagree that O’Neil should automatically be discounted because she is a woman. In this sense, there is an alignment of marginalized identities. McCool later

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6 In this case, they are speaking about the British military, but the point still applies.
expresses that similar ideas about black men’s abilities were used to keep his grandfather out of the military, which he recognizes as unfair. McCool’s willingness to accept O’Neil and give her a chance demonstrates that his ability to relate to her on such matters. As such, McCool appears as an outlier, in that he, unlike the other men, is not trying to separate himself from O’Neil, nor is he asserting his difference to her and his superiority. He is the only one that expresses the view that O’Neil could, in fact, be an equal.

There is also the implication that, based on the statement made by Slovnik, O’Neil is a lesbian, but that having sex with him would “set her straight.” Slovnik is making the assumption that because O’Neil is a woman who is interested in participating in SEAL training, which is seen as a masculine endeavor, that she must be a lesbian. Thus, Slovnik is associating gender expression with sexuality, as well as playing into gender stereotypes, by asserting O’Neil’s supposed lesbianism in relation to her interest in SEAL training. He also seems to buy into the myth of the power of a man to turn a lesbian woman straight through intercourse. The line also seems to imply that “set[ting] her straight” would result in her no longer wanting to be a SEAL, and instead being set on the “right” path for her gender. As exhibited by the men’s comments and attitudes, O’Neil is seen as someone who doesn’t belong and is intruding on an almost sacred male space.

*Jarhead*, too, included scenes of dominance bonding that was primarily accomplished through references that objectified women. For instance, this scene when marines are being deployed to the Persian Gulf:

*The (mostly white) marines are on a plane, heading to the Middle East. There are four (white) women on board. They are flight attendants. They are all standing and dressed in*

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7 As noted by Sarah Boeshart in her study on corrective rape in South Africa (2014), this is something that is often fueled by both misogyny and homophobia.
red, while the marines are all sitting and in their green uniforms. The marines are talking amongst themselves. One of the flight attendants comes to the row of seats Swofford is sitting in with two other marines, Chris Kruger and Alan Troy.

**FLIGHT ATTENDANT:** Would you like some nuts?

(Camera cuts to Swofford smiling and taking a packet of nuts)

**ALAN TROY:** No, thanks.

(Camera shifts to Chris Kruger)

**CHRIS KRUGER:** (Leaning forward) Yes, are they warm nuts?

(Camera shifts back to Flight Attendant)

**FLIGHT ATTENDANT:** (smiling) Uh, I believe they're room temperature.

(Camera shifts to Kruger, taking a packet of nuts)

**KRUGER:** Well, maybe later you can come and warm up my nuts.

(Camera stays focused on Kruger and Swofford. Swofford is laughing.)

**FLIGHT ATTENDANT:** You know, I don't really like the little ones.

(Swofford laughs. Camera goes back to Flight Attendant.)

**FLIGHT ATTENDANT:** Okay, is that all?

**TROY:** Yeah.

(Flight Attendant walks away. Camera cuts back to the three marines.)

**SWOFFORD:** (Turning his head to face Kruger) You poor bastard. Camera shifts so we can see the Flight Attendant in the background)

I bet your recruiter promised you a whole wide world of pussy, huh?

(Camera shifts back to focusing just on the marines)

**KRUGER:** (Turning to face Swofford) You’re fucking A. Cocksucker knew the price of
every whore from Olangapo to Stockholm.

*(Kruger bites open his packet of nuts.)*

**SWOFFORD**: And here we are, headed to the desert. No pussy in 1,000 miles.

**KRUGER**: *(Raises hand up)* Fucked by the green wienie again.

*(Jarhead, 2005).*

The flight attendants are the only women shown on the plane, and are the only people present who are not military. They, as with O’Neil, are seen and discussed as outsiders to the main group. The flight attendants are also conventionally attractive and are in a service position, which appears to make them targets for sexual harassment in the film. The fact that they are women, in contrast to the marines, is something that was not left unremarked upon. Kruger here is shown as feeling he has the right to sexually harass the flight attendant, which the other marines find amusing. The men then go on to talk about women by reducing them to their genitalia and sexual accessibility. Most of the times the marines speak about women in the film, they talk about them only in terms of sex. This is a topic that I expand upon in a later chapter.

The men soldiers were overall portrayed as tough, mostly lacking in emotion/being told that they should be lacking (or at least overt displays of it), resilient, and heroic. This was generally the case across the films. Thus, the films made use of the masculine warrior hero ideal in the depictions of the soldiers. This was achieved through the inclusion of scenes in which soldiers (both men of color and white men) were shown bravely entering into battle, withstanding the rigor of both training and combat, and performing heroic and self-sacrificial acts. I found this throughout all of the films, though certain films featured such scenes more than

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9 There were some exceptions during scenes in which fellow soldiers were injured or killed.
others. For instance, *Black Hawk Down* and *Act of Valor* both act as exemplars, as they included many instances of male heroism, resiliency, and sacrifice. In *Black Hawk Down*, many of the men soldiers continued to fight after having been wounded, and routinely went back out to join in the combat because they knew that they were needed. Some scenes show them bloodied and injured—in some cases close to death. For instance, this scene takes place after Black Hawk Super-Six One is shot down during a mission to capture Mohamed Farrah Aidid, a Somali warlord. A group of Rangers were part of the ground forces trying to extract the soldiers from the crash site. They sustained injuries from the Somali militia and had to return to base:

*LTC Cribbs walks up to LTC McKnight, who recently returned after the failed rescue attempt. He and some of his fellow Rangers sustained injuries. McKnight appears dirty and bloody.*

**CRIBBS**: McKnight. Between the 10th mountain and the UN, we got enough personnel, OK?

*They stare at each other. Camera focuses on McKnight. He is smoking a cigarette.*

**CRIBBS**: Danny, you guys do not have to go back out again.

*Camera focuses again on McKnight. He looks up at Cribbs. We cut to a shot of McKnight then leading the convoy out.*

(*Black Hawk Down*, 2001)

McKnight is depicted as stoic and unfazed. Despite the complications of the earlier mission and the fact that he is told he and his team do not have to go back out, he decides to continue. His characterization matches the American soldier ideal of the brave, persistent, resilient hero who will do whatever he can to complete his mission.
*Act of Valor* devoted a large amount of time to the SEALs’ rescue mission of a (Latino woman) CIA agent, which they were successful in completing. The SEALs are presented as brave, capable, and heroic in their missions. Lt. Rorke, one of the main characters, is particularly shown as honorable and worthy of praise. He is the father of the boy being addressed in the film’s opening and closing narration. In a pivotal scene near the end of the film, the SEALs are in Mexico trying to prevent a group of terrorists from entering the U.S. This scene takes place in a factory where the terrorists are located. (In slow motion) A grenade is thrown into the area where the SEALs are situated. Lt. Rorke sees the grenade and notices that no one else on his team seems aware of it. He shouts “Grenade!” and, with resolve, throws himself on top of it while dramatic music plays. The grenade goes off underneath his body. The other SEALs look around in confusion and start shouting when they realize what happened. Their shouts are muted—all that is heard is the music (*Act of Valor*, 2012). The “act of valor” the title is referring to comes from Rorke’s decision in this scene. His self-sacrificial action marked him as a military hero.

When it came to race, there were typically not overt comments about it, but there were instances when the soldiers that were men of color were shown differently than the white soldiers. For instance, the tendency to portray of men soldiers in according to the characteristics of the aforementioned hegemonic masculinity seemed to be intensified in the depiction of men soldiers of color (particularly black men). This scene in Black Hawk Down acts as an exemplar:

*The soldiers (comprised of Army Rangers, Delta Force soldiers and SOAR aviators) are at the base in Somalia. A group of Rangers (all white men, except for Kurth) is gathered together, talking.*

**LT BEALES (looking at a piece of paper):** Listen to this, if one skinny kills another skinny, his clan owes the dead guys clan a hundred camels. A hundred camels.
PVT WADDEL: Camels, I wouldn't pay one camel.

SGT GALENTINE: Must be a lot of fucking camel debt. Is that really true Lt?

BEALES: Well, ask Sgt Eversmann. He likes the skinnies.

*Camera cuts to Sgt. Eversmann, looking up from a book.*

GALENTINE (in disbelief): Sgt. Eversmann, you really like the skinnies?

SGT EVERS Mann: It's not that I like 'em or I don't like 'em. I respect them.

SPC KURTH: See what you guys fail to realize is that the Sgt here is a bit of an idealist. He believes in this mission down to his very bones don't you Sgt?

EVERSMANN: Look, these people, they have no jobs. No food, no education, no future. I just figure that-- I mean we have two things that we can do. We can help or we can sit back and watch a country destroy itself on CNN. Right?

KURTH: I don't know about you guys, but I was trained to fight, you trained to fight Sgt?

EVERSMANN: Well, I think I was trained to make a difference, Kurth.

*Everyone laughs.*

*(Black Hawk Down, 2001)*

In this scene, the focus of the conversation is on the Somalis, or “skinnies” as they are referred to, and their way of life. The term “skinnies” is a racial/ethnic slur (Baumann 2003: 68; Doyle 2008) that is, especially in this case, being used as a way to other the Somalis and present them as less than human.¹⁰ That Eversmann “likes” them, or doesn’t immediate seek to demonize them, causes confusion in the group, leading him to need to justify his feelings. When he does this, he expresses his desire to help them, instead of just fight and kill them. This prompts Kurth,

¹⁰ Referring to the Somalis as “skinnies” seems to be a way to other them and create more distance between them and the soldiers.
the soldier of color in the group (and someone who does not get a large amount of screen time or dialogue, to say that he was trained to fight (not necessarily to make a difference). Kurth, then, is framed in contrast to Eversmann, who is shown in a more thoughtful and honorable light. The implication is that Kurth seems mainly motivated by violence, whereas Eversmann would like to “make a difference.” That Kurth also has little dialogue, is used sparingly in the film, and is one of the only soldiers of color also means that he becomes the token representative of his race in the film. As such, showing him as the counterpart to the white and seemingly noble Eversmann

In *Home of the Brave*, both of the leading black men soldiers resorted to violence in attempting to cope with their problems at home. SPC Jamal Aiken uses a gun to hold up the diner where his ex-girlfriend works. This results in him getting shot by the police as he is getting ready to surrender. Lt. Col. William Marsh develops a drinking problem and struggles with anger issues. He ends up violently attacking his son during Thanksgiving dinner.

The image of black men soldiers that is shown to us through these films is one that harkens back to the idea of black men as violent and “thuggish.” This depiction, in combination with the overall lack of soldiers of color, shows black men soldiers in a one-dimensional and stereotypical manner.

Not all of the men soldiers that were framed as very tough and violent were black (or of color), but it is worth noting that almost all of the prominent black men soldiers were framed in such a way. While violence was shown to be a part of soldiering, the black men soldiers tended to be depicted as having more of a propensity towards violence. This framing of black men in such a way characterizes them as overly violent (or at least more violent than their white counterparts). The stereotype of the violent black man continues to be drawn on and perpetuated in the films.
The Framing of the Soldier

In this section, I have sought to demonstrate how, through a variety of techniques, the films I viewed presented soldiering as something done by white men. This framing was achieved through writing and casting, as mainly white men were cast in the roles of soldiers and it was their stories that were told; language about who or what a soldier is (and conversely, who or what a soldier is not), which included talk about soldiers as men and soldiers as masculine (and the opposite of that as feminine); and through the general depiction of the men soldiers (and how race came to play a role in such depictions). This framing was achieved by having white men play most of lead or prominent soldiers-as was the case in six of the eight films. By including women soldiers and soldiers of color as mostly minor or background characters (and even then, very minimally), this reinforces the idea that only the stories of white men soldiers are important. The language surrounding the military and gender was also shown to play an instrumental role in the this framing process. The promotion of hegemonic masculinity and, consequently, the derision of femininity and women, worked to erase the very notion of the woman soldier and to define both soldiering and gender along very rigid terms. The overall depiction of men soldiers, too, was done along these lines and drew from the attributes of maleness proscribed by hegemonic masculinity. The image of the stoic, emotionally detached, tough soldier was what came through the most.

Though the films did tend to frame soldiering in such a way, there were some exceptions. As mentioned, women soldiers and soldiers of color (and sometimes women soldiers of color), did make some appearances in the films. It should also be mentioned that, though the outright denigration of femaleness and homosexuality was present-and, I believe, important to address—it did not show up in my sample as much as I expected it to. This could have something to do with
the amount of films I was able to view, the fact that most of the films did not have training or boot camp scenes (where this seemed most prevalent), and the specific films that were part of my sample, but it is important to note that my initial assumption that this frame would be part of all or most of the films was proven to be incorrect. In terms of women soldiers within the films, though there was some representation, it can be argued that they were underrepresented and typically underutilized as characters within the films’ stories. This is a topic I explore in greater depth in my next chapter.
CHAPTER 6

DATA ANALYSIS: THE WOMAN SOLDIER AND THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION

As the films did frame soldiering as the job or activity of white men, women soldiers were shown as a rarity. That is, the existence of women soldiers was addressed within the films, but just barely. As stated above, women soldiers were often not the focus of the films and, typically when they were recognized within the films, they were minor characters or only in the background. Through the overall framing of soldiers as men, women soldiers exist outside this frame and, as such, can be seen as unimportant. The woman soldier as its own frame was one that, in comparison to the frame of the man soldier, was not often explored.

The framing of the women soldier as a rarity was achieved through the use of the same techniques for the framing of the soldier as a man. This is unsurprising, as this frame is the other side of the previous frame. As such, the writing of roles mostly for men and the casting of the soldiers as almost all men was one of these techniques. To extend this, the inclusion of one or two women soldiers in prominent roles in a given film serves to highlight this stark contrast in representation.

When women soldiers were present in the films, they were shown to be tough and competent, but only under certain circumstances. For instance, the women were framed as needing to be more conventionally masculine in order to be taken seriously as soldiers and to perform well. The techniques employed by the filmmakers to achieve this include showing the main women soldier characters with short (or shaved) hair-and, relatedly, feeling the need to remove markers associated with femininity (again, such as long hair); having the woman soldier symbolically become male; and by not depicting more conventionally feminine soldiers as equally competent and active as those that fit the more masculine mold.
Women soldiers were largely absent in the films. This was especially true of combat scenes or scenes showing soldiers in the field. In fact, if there were women in the field, they were, more often than not, shown as helpless civilians or victims. When there were women soldiers, they were often minor characters or extras. Only three of the eight films featured women soldiers in prominent roles. The few soldiers that were both women and prominent characters in the films were Rihanna Fenty (Petty Officer Raikes) in Battleship, Demi Moore (Lt. O’Neil) in G.I. Jane, and Jessica Biel (Sgt. Price) in Home of the Brave. Each of these films only featured one woman soldier as a main or supporting character, while men constituted the rest of the prominent soldier roles—both in these films and the other five. This discrepancy in representation has the effect of making the few women soldiers appear as tokens.

When Women Soldiers Are Represented

Interestingly, two of the women soldiers that were focused on in the films were shown as capable and deserving of respect (as many of the men soldiers were shown in most of the films), but in different ways. For instance, we see that Lieutenant Jordan O’Neil of G.I. Jane had to go through great lengths to earn the respect of her fellow soldiers and the instructors (which culminates in the interrogation scene), while Petty Officer Cora Raikes of Battleship already had respect. Both films also had scenes where the main women soldiers rescued fellow men soldiers. In G.I. Jane, this was meant to be a big deal and to prove a point, whereas it went unmentioned as something special in Battleship. These depictions both do show women soldiers in a positive light, but again, these films only focused on one woman soldier each.

Of course, context needs to be taken into consideration, as G.I. Jane was specifically about the lack of women in the military (and in this case, the Navy SEALS), and the issue of full
integration\textsuperscript{11}, whereas \textit{Battleship}’s focus was simply on a battle with an invading alien force. Still, the fact that the film’s premise was set up so that only one woman would be part of a test case, and therefore one woman was meant to represent \textit{all} women and their abilities and impact on the other trainees, makes O’Neil particularly stand out. \textit{Battleship} was not attempting to look at gender politics, but having only one prominent woman officer in the Navy made her standout. In this case O’Neil, a white woman, became the quintessential woman. \textit{Home of the Brave} featured one woman soldier as one of the four main characters, and, as with \textit{Battleship}, was not trying to address gender political issues. \textit{Jarhead}, on the other hand, had no women marines, even though there were women marines serving in 1989 (when it took place). \textit{Black Hawk Down} had one visible female soldier in one shot (shown, interestingly, shooting a rifle in training). \textit{In the Valley of Elah} also had very few women soldiers (only one that was visible, and she was in the background of one scene), but did have a woman detective as one of the main characters. \textit{Act of Valor} had one woman soldier with a speaking role and had a woman as a CIA agent.

As there were, altogether, only three women soldier characters in the films, it is difficult to discuss patterns or trends in their depictions. I can say that, in two of the three cases (Cora Raikes in \textit{Battleship} and Jordan O’Neil in \textit{G.I. Jane}), the women were presented in ways that are more typically thought of as masculine (or were shown as having to take on those traits).\textsuperscript{12} For instance, \textit{G.I. Jane} features a scene in which Jordan O’Neil shaves her head in order to fit in and be taken seriously. At the beginning of the film, a point is made by Senator DeHaven that the test case has to be an “attractive woman” (she initially rejects one woman who is considered to be

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} It should be noted that there were other women soldiers depicted in \textit{G.I. Jane}; they just were not in the same situation as O’Neil and were not focused on.
\textsuperscript{12} That is to say that they present themselves in ways that are deemed masculine—not that they are inherently masculine behaviors. I am also not saying it is wrong or bad that they were shown in such a way—just that the films seemed to imply that having these qualities was the only way to be a good or competent woman soldier.
\end{footnotesize}
too masculine looking and unappealing). This coincides with the fact that O’Neil (initially) has long hair. Though the other trainees have shaved head, she is told that she does not have to shave. In fact, when O’Neil first gets to the training camp, her conversation with the commanding officer, who is a white man, reestablishes the fact that she is different. After she introduces herself the topic of her hair comes up:

**LT. O’NEIL (Noticing C.O. staring at her):** Barber was my next stop, sir. Would’ve had it regulation sooner, only –

**C.O. SALEM:** Don't worry about it. If it's off your collar and out of your eyes, that's all I'm going to ask.

**LT. O’NEIL:** Sir, I’m not looking for any special treatment–

**C.O. SALEM:** I'm not trying to change your sex, Lieutenant. You'll have a separate bed, a separate head. If you have specific medical needs, inform the infirmary. If a classmates or superior acts in a harassing or otherwise unbecoming manner, please inform me immediately so that I can deal with it immediately. It may not always run smooth, but we’re trying to make it as painless as possible.

**LT. O’NEIL:** Thank you, Sir. But I expect a certain amount of pain.

**C.O. SALEM (Leaning back, smiling):** Any questions?

**O’NEIL:** None at this time, Sir.

**C.O. SALEM:** Then we’re done, Lieutenant.

**LT. O’NEIL:** Yes, Sir.

*She gets up. She hesitates for a moment.*

**LT. O’NEIL:** Permission to speak, sir?

**C.O. Salem nods.**
LT. O’NEIL (close up on her face): I’m not here to make some kind of statement. All I care about is completing the training and getting operational experience. Just like everyone else, I suspect.

Cut to C.O. Salem.

C.O. SALEM (tone somewhat resentful): If you were like everyone else, Lieutenant, I suspect we wouldn’t be statements about not making statements, would we? Dismissed. (G.I. Jane 1997).

C.O. Salem’s conversation with O’Neil emphasizes her difference. Though O’Neil expresses that she is fine with shaving her head, Salem ignores her. Though O’Neil also makes it clear that she does not need or want special treatment, and that her goals are the same as everyone else. Yet Salem dismisses this request (and her in the process). He continues to view her through a gendered lens and, therefore, cannot or will not treat her the same as the other soldiers. He also, in his insistence that she does not need to shave her head, not only conflates sex and gender, but imposes his own definition of femaleness onto her. Her hair becomes a symbol of her femininity. It is also something she later feels, based on the attitudes of and treatment from the other soldiers, that she needs to get do away with so as to not be seen as an other or an outsider.

When she does shave her head, the implication is that she is sacrificing traditional femininity for her to be accepted. The head-shaving scene is framed in such a way as to represent empowerment. O’Neil shaves her own head (as the barber was not there at the time) with determination while a song (sung by a woman vocalist) is played loudly in the background. The scene seems intended to show that O’Neil is taking control of her situation and how she is perceived. She is personally ridding herself of her hair, something that has served as a point of
distinction. She smiles at one point and has a gleam in her eye while she does it. In order to fit in and not be met with resentment, she is not allowed to have markers of femininity.

O’Neil’s need to take on a more masculine role is further demonstrated later during in the famous interrogation scene. In this scene, the trainees are enduring a simulation in which they have been captured and are being held as P.O.W.s. Some are being put through simulated interrogations, O’Neil included. O’Neil’s interrogation by The Chief turns violent, he eventually drags her outside by the cages where the other trainees are being held:

_The Chief slams her face back into the table. The camera cuts to their legs, where we see O’Neill kick him. The camera shifts back to her face on the table, and she rises up and head butts him in the nose with the back of her head. The Chief falls to the ground. Now he is on his hands and knees, and O’Neill is standing. The camera shifts to her face as she angrily kicks the Chief in the face. He gets knocked back and then gets back on his hands and knees. The camera goes back to show her kicking him again, this time in the stomach. He gets knocked onto his back. The men in the cages are cheering. She kicks him in the groin. The camera follows her as she spits out blood and approaches the Chief again. He is in fetal position and has his hand on his groin. She moves to kick him again, but he trips her. She lands on her back. The camera goes back to the men in the cages. They are shouting at her to get up. They are rooting for her. The camera goes back to O’Neill and the Chief. They are both getting to their feet. The camera shifts to O’Neill._

**O’NEIL:** *(To the Chief in a condescending tone)* My, don’t you look pretty.

_The camera shifts to the Chief. His face is bloody. He is panting and getting into a fighting stance._
THE CHIEF: Don’t start something…you can’t finish.

The camera shifts to O’Neil, who is staring at him and also trying to get into position.

Her hands are still tied behind her back.

The camera shifts to the Chief. He kicks O’Neil in the face. She falls to the ground. The camera shifts to the men, who are grimacing and letting out moans. They start shouting for her to get up. She struggles and gets up. The Chief grabs her face. The camera focuses on his hand on her face, and then shifts to focus on him. It focuses on her face again. Her face is bloody and her mouth is open. She looks like she is weakening. He uppercuts her in the chin. The camera stays with her as she stumbles backwards and falls against a tree. She then falls to the ground and stops moving. The men are shown being disappointed.

The Chief walks over to the men. His face is covered in sand and blood. He grabs onto the bars of the cage and leans in to talk to them. Many of the men have turned their backs to him.

THE CHIEF (To the men):

Guys, I’m saving her life… (Camera shifts to O’Neil who starts to get up) and yours. (Camera shifts back to the Chief) Her presence makes us all vulnerable. (Camera focuses on the backs of the men, and then shifts back to O’Neill. She is lifting her head. It goes back to the Chief) I don’t want you learning that inconvenient fact under fire.

Camera focuses on O’Neill, who struggles to get to her feet. She is staring at the Chief’s back.

O’NEILL: (With attitude) Master Chief?

Camera shifts to the Chief, his face pressed against the bars of the cage. He is
aggravated.

**THE CHIEF:** Lieutenant, seek life elsewhere.

*The camera shifts back to O’Neil. She is angry.*

**O’NEIL:** Suck my dick.

*The camera focuses on the Chief’s face. The men start cheering and applauding. The Chief lifts his head up and turns around. He approaches O’Neil. He stares at her while the men continue cheering. He gives a slight nod and walks past her. Triumphant music plays. The men start shouting, “Suck my dick!” The camera stays with O’Neill as she falls to her knees and starts to smile*

*(G.I. Jane 1997)*

O’Neil’s being female is still used against her and seen as a negative by the Chief. He tries to prove a point in his attack on her, by stressing her difference and trying to make the men react. O’Neil is shown as being able to put up with and handle the abuse being thrown at her by the Chief. She also strikes him back and, though she starts to weaken, she is shown as being resilient. She is made to prove herself in ways that the men are not, and is, in fact, being put through a harder time because she is a woman. Yet the act that ultimately gains O’Neil the respect from her fellow soldiers is when, after having been beaten and bloodied, she defiantly tells the Chief to “Suck my dick!” This causes the other soldiers erupt in cheers and applause. In this instance, she can be seen as taking on the role of an “honorary man.” It is this that acts as a turning point in how she is seen and treated by the others. The penis is what is then reinforced as the ultimate source of identity for being a soldier. It is the achievement of this maleness, by reference to her “dick” that allows her to become a soldier worthy of the others’ respect. O’Neil has to metaphorically adopt a penis and position herself as male in that instance in order to
finally be seen as an equal. She proves her right to be there and to be treated as a fellow soldier/SEAL-in-training by declaring herself as one of the men.

Similarly, Battleship’s Petty Officer Cora Raikes, as outlined in her scene in the previous chapter, appeared to be presented in a more conventionally masculine way (the belittling of her fellow teammate by insinuating that he is weak and womanly for reacting to an injury during the soccer match). As with G.I. Jane’s O’Neil, Raikes is an attractive woman with short (but not shaved) hair and was shown as the only prominent and active woman soldier in the film. She was also the only black woman soldier depicted in a prominent role. She was involved in the main combat scenes in the film, and proved herself to be an asset. Her race is significant in this representation since black women are often stereotyped as being aggressive and possessing a kind of “female strength” (Collins 2013: 33). Consequently it is notable that the film did not represent her as needing to work to be accepted in a mostly male environment (as was the case with G.I. Jane), yet she uses femininity as a shaming tool (at least in this particular scene). The scene was framed in such a way so as to be humorous to the audience watching, based on the tone and actions of Petty Officer Raikes—the humor, of course, coming from the fact that Raikes was belittling her teammate by insinuating he was womanly, and by the fact that she, herself, was made to appear tougher than he is.

Based on these examples, it appears that in order for a woman soldier to be depicted as competent, active, and resilient, she needs to present herself in a more conventionally masculine manner. Put another way, if a woman soldier is to be presented in a similar manner to men soldiers, or to be shown as part of the warrior hero archetype discussed above (Woodward 2000), she needs to be shown as more stereotypically masculine. In some cases, as in G.I. Jane, she needs to undergo a transformation and try to prove her worth by diminishing any traces of
conventional femininity that she may have subscribed to before (such as long hair) in order to become an honorary man. In other instances, as in Battleship, she is already at that point, and her behavior and appearance serve to reinforce her status as an honorary man.

*Home of the Brave* \(^{13}\) proved to be an exception in the depiction of a woman soldier (as a prominent or main character). In this film Sgt. Vanessa Price was presented as a conventionally attractive and feminine white woman (with shoulder length hair). The film emphasized her presence as a mother and (midway through) as a disabled person. The majority of the film focused on her (and the other main characters) trying to get re-acclimated to civilian life after having just served in Iraq. In her first speaking scene in the film, Sgt. Vanessa Price was shown at the base in Iraq, on the phone with her mother. The conversation revolved around her son. Later, while out in the field, she was speaking to a fellow soldier about her son and her longing to get home and see him.

While Price was shown, with the other soldiers in the film, in a combat situation, her main action was trying to drive her vehicle to get out of the line of fire, as opposed to getting involved in it. She was part of a team that was sent into the field on a humanitarian mission. She was one of the soldiers driving a vehicle as part of the convoy to perform the mission. The cars got stalled while driving through an Iraqi village and then they began to get shot at. When the attack was happening, Price reacted with panic and fear while her (male) passenger in the other seat tried to give her directions. Of the four main characters in *Home of the Brave*, she was the only soldier who did not participate in the firefight. All of the soldiers shown actively engaging with the attack were men. In this sense, her role as driver enable a polysemic reading of Price as both in control and as vulnerable.

\(^{13}\) There is no available transcript for this film, so I described the scenes as best as I could.
Despite the fact that Price was shown as a soldier and was shown being active in the field (though not in combat), her character development centered around her single motherhood. From the moment we meet her in the film, the audience understands that that is who she is. Her identity as a mother comes was made as prominent (or more prominent) as her identity as a soldier. The insights made by Howard III and Prividera in their study on the media representations of soldiers are applicable in looking at this case. As they noted, what was most emphasized about them, despite their roles and actions within the military, was their domestic lives and their conformity to traditional femininity outside of the military (Howard III and Prividera 2005: 95). This type of focus acts as a kind of reassurance to those who are uncomfortable with women acting in ways that are seen as untypical of their gender. In this film, Price was the only prominent woman soldier, her identity as a single mother defined her in predominant ways, and she was the only person in the main cast not to be shown actively participating in combat. She was also the only soldier in the main cast who did not handle a firearm or any other weapon. Consequently, as a woman soldier, she was framed differently than the other (men) soldiers.

In the combat scene in *Home of the Brave* Price drove over a bomb and her vehicle was blown up. Her passenger died and she ended up seriously injured. She was presented as a victim of the attack, and her savior was Lt. Col. Marsh (it should be noted that Marsh and Price were the highest ranking of the four main characters). Marsh pulled her out of the car (later, Price visits him at home to thank him. She says that he is a hero.) Marsh was a medic and he was shown as actively participating in combat as well as performing medical duties. The other soldiers in the scene actively participated in the combat. They pursued the shooters and fired shots back at them. Some of the men soldiers did get wounded during the combat scene (and some died), but
they were shown as being tough and resilient—continuing to fight despite their wounds and their pain. For instance, SPC Jamal Aiken and SPC Tommy Yates get injured at one point, yet they tried to keep in the fight and provide cover for PVT Jordan Owens (who was not injured, but did end up getting shot and killed in this scene).

To be clear, the expectation is not be that Price would or should necessarily be able to fight through her injury (which resulted in her arm being amputated). The depiction of her in that scene, compared with the depictions of the other men soldiers in that scene and in other films (as noted previously, such as the soldiers in *Black Hawk Down* and *Act of Valor*), is what makes this worth recognizing. Had there been other women soldiers in the combat scene that were active participants, or if there were other women soldiers shown fighting through their wounds in the other military films examined (aside from *G.I. Jane*), this characterization would not be as noteworthy. This, again, goes back to the overall lack of women soldiers represented in the films, and the lack of different types of representation, therein.

Though there were women soldiers within the films, their presence was extremely limited. There also seemed to be an implication about what “type” of woman could be shown as a soldier, particularly one that could be characterized in a similar manner to the men soldiers shown. What appeared to be implied, based on the small amount of women soldiers depicted, was that in order for a woman soldier to be framed in the ways the men soldiers often were, such as tough, authoritative, capable, and so on, she had to appear in a more conventionally masculine way—through appearance and behavior. We see this overtly in *G.I. Jane*, as O’Neil becomes more competent as a soldier and receives more acceptance as she takes on these traits. We also see it, though not as starkly, in the characterization of Raikes in *Battleship*. Both of these women showed themselves to be capable soldiers, and both demonstrated a certain physical prowess.
They also both acted as rescuers in their respective situations. In contrast is Price from *Home of the Brave*, who is shown in almost the opposite way. Price was primarily framed both as a soldier in distress (who needed to be rescued) and as a mother. What comes through, overall, is that while women soldiers can and do exist (at least some of the time), they need to fit a certain limited mold in order to be taken as and presented seriously. They need to become honorary men, or at least behave and appear in ways that correspond with conventional notions of masculinity. In regards to the films viewed, being a woman soldier who is conventionally feminine and one who is competent and active were framed as mutually exclusive.
CHAPTER 7

DATA ANALYSIS: WHEN WOMEN WERE NOT SOLDIERS

As noted in the previous chapters, most of the women shown in the films were not soldiers, while most of the men in the films were. In seven of the eight films, women were shown as being connected to the male soldiers through roles outside of the military, usually as mothers, daughters, wives, and girlfriends. Many of the women in the films were shown in roles outside of the military, and often as an outside support for the male soldier. That is, when non-military women were shown, they were usually connected in some way to the main/supporting male soldier characters, typically as family or significant others. Consequently this dominant framing provided a very specific context through which exceptions—i.e. representations of women as soldiers—could be understood. In this chapter I examine the various ways the films position non-military women.

This framing of women as belonging outside of the military and/or in supporting roles was achieved in the films through the overall depiction of women as the wives and girlfriends of men soldiers; through scenes showing the stark distinction and distance between the domestic world (feminine realm) and the military world (masculine realm); through the men soldier’s positioning of women only in terms of sexual gratification; and through the lack of significant others outside of the military who were men.

When women were in the films as civilians, they were typically represented as significant others to the men soldiers. The films only showed the existence of military wives and girlfriends

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14 G.I. Jane was an exception, as Jordan O’Neil was, herself, in the military though she did also have a fiancé in the military, as well.
(thus erasing the existence of military husbands and boyfriends). This framing of women as domestic support was partially produced through including shots of the military wives in their civilian lives while the soldier husband was in combat or on the base (as was the case in *Black Hawk Down, Jarhead, Battleship, Act of Valor*), which had the effect framing the two roles as distinct. Yet the women were most present during scenes when the soldiers were home. They were shown as support for their husbands and boyfriends by greeting them and cheering when they arrived back home, spending time with them (both before deployment and after they came back), and providing comfort (which occurred in *Act of Valor, Stop-Loss, Home of the Brave, Battleship,* and *Jarhead*).

There was a divide between the female civilian wives and the soldier husbands that was represented throughout the films, but several scenes from *Act of Valor*, in particular, act as excellent exemplars. For instance, there was a scene that takes place at a beach after the members of SEAL Team Seven (all men) returned home after their deployment. The scene included the men and their wives and children. The scene depicts the men talking together and surfing, while their wives were shown talking amongst themselves and their children are playing. The families later were shown gathered together again to eat and drink. After this, men split off from their families and gathered around a fire to talk about having to deploy again.  

The scene outlined above subtly frames the men and women in different ways. Both the men and women end up grouped off according to gender. The women are also left with the children, while the men go and surf. Though the families do come together again, the men later gather amongst themselves to talk and bond. They were shown as being connected to each other through their soldiering, something that their families could not relate to. This is understandable,

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15 There was no screenplay or transcript available, so I described this scene to the best of my abilities.
given that they spent much of their time together as soldiers. What is striking is the gender 
divide, and the way the it plays out as the men separating themselves from the women, instead of 
the soldiers splitting off from their civilian families.

Another scene focused on Lt. Rorke of SEAL Team Seven leaving for deployment 
shortly after the scene at the beach. His pregnant wife was shown standing in the threshold of 
their home watching as Rorke, dressed in military fatigues, walked away. The scene is visually 
meaningful, as it places the woman squarely in the domestic sphere, while the man is actively 
walking away from it and going into the public sphere.

This scene also shows a clear divide between the men (soldiers) and the women 
(civilians). This type of framing harkens back to traditional notions of femininity and 
masculinity, and, adding in the military context, the civilian wife and the husband soldier. The 
framing of the wife in the home also serves as a reminder of the concept of separate spheres on 
the basis of gender.

In a scene from Home of the Brave, Lt. Col. William Marsh is having an argument with 
his wife. He is back home from Iraq and has been suffering from PTSD, which has resulted in 
him being violent, angry, and distant. This scene entails his wife, Penelope, confronting him 
about his behavior after getting back from Iraq:

Penelope wakes up alone in bed. She hears the TV on downstairs. She goes down the 
steps and sees Will sitting on the couch watching TV.

PENELOPE MARSH (concerned): Will?

WILL MARSH (not looking up): This guy Martinez hit a homerun in the 15th inning. 

Won the game. (Camera focuses on his face while he eats a chip) Five hours.

Unbelievable.
PENELOPE MARSH: Come back to bed, baby.

WILL MARSH: Can’t sleep.

PENELOPE MARSH: Don’t you have surgery tomorrow morning?

(Close up of Will’s face while he eats another chip. He doesn’t respond)

(Close up of Penelope)

PENELOPE MARSH: Will, what happened over there?


PENELOPE MARSH (walking over to him): Then tell me. I wanna know.

(She leans into him on the couch)

WILL MARSH: Do you? (Close up on Will) Wanna know what a blast wound looks like? What an OR in the desert smells like? What really happens to them? How they die? (close up on Penelope. She is starting to move away from him). You really wanna know? (Close up on Will) You want us to come back like nothing ever happened. You don't want to get your hands dirty with the details

(Close up on Penelope)

PENELOPE MARSH: That’s not fair at all. Do you really think I don’t care? (Camera zooms out so they are both in the frame) If you want to tell me then tell me. And maybe you’re right, maybe I don’t want to hear about what happened to the rest of them, but I would like to know what happened to you.

Will stares at her and continues eating his chips. He is silent. He then gets up and goes out the front door, while Penelope stays on the couch and watches him go.

(Home of the Brave, 2006).
Will emphasizes the divide between their roles and their experiences. He positions her as someone who doesn’t understand, and who can’t understand, what he has been through and what war is like, because she is not a soldier. This barrier is solidified further because, even though she expresses interest in hearing about the ordeals her husband went through, he rebuffs her. He implies that she would not be able to handle hearing the details about his life “over there,” and so he does not share them with her. He won’t allow her to try to relate, and when she still expresses a desire to hear about what her husband experienced, he ignores her and leaves the room. Will is the one who, as with Hank from In the Valley of Elah, has the most power in the relationship. His choice to not respond and then to leave, instead of talking to his wife, can be read as an expression of that power which, by extension, reinforces her separation from his military life.

Later, in different scene from the film, Will and Penelope are having a conversation about their son, who got into a fight with Will after having gotten into trouble at school. The conversation turns into an argument after Penelope confronts him again:

*Penelope gets up and walks towards her husband.*

**PENELOPE:** You smelled like a bar at Billy’s school. Do your patients know?

**WILL:** *(pointedly)* I am handling it. *He turns to leave.* Now leave me alone.

**PENELOPE:** *(Grabbing his arm)* No I will not leave you alone, I’m sorry.

*He turns to her.*

**PENELOPE:** *(camera focuses on her face)*: Do you think you’re the only one who’s had it rough?

*He stares at her.*

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16 See first chapter of analysis for Hank and Joan’s interaction.
PENELOPE: I was the one who got up every single morning online to check that casualty list and I was the one who got sick to my stomach every time I heard about another roadside bomb. (Her anger is building, camera zooms in closer) And who do you think told our daughter every night that daddy wasn’t coming home tomorrow or the next day or the day after that, but that he still loved her? And me.

Camera is on his face. He is staring apathetically, unaffected.

PENELOPE: Now I understand you feel compelled to serve and I supported that-hell, I left my job and got another one just so one of us would be home some of the time with our daughter. And when you asked to extend your deployment, I supported that too, because I think what you did was right, and noble, but I did not spend the last eight months of my life in sheer hell for you to come home and be an asshole.

There is a pause. They are staring at each other. Will, who is holding a glass of liquor, starts to take a drink, and then offers it to his wife. She angrily takes it. He leaves the house and slams the door. She, exasperated, throws the glass.

(Home of the Brave, 2006).

This scene details specifically the role Penelope was expected to play as a military wife. Her identity revolved, and revolves, around her husband’s identity as a soldier. She was meant to be in the supportive role and change her life according to his military status. She also had to be the only caretaker of their children, essentially becoming a single parent during the time Will was deployed. The role of the “Good Military Wife” (Enloe 2000: 161) is to support her husband while he is soldiering (which is seen as masculine) and to take care of the home and domestic duties (which are seen as feminine). The way Penelope structured her life in response to Will’s
deployment is in line with this type of thinking about masculine and feminine roles with regard to the military.

Will and Penelope’s relationship was also framed as hierarchical, with Will as the one with the most power. Will’s reaction to Penelope’s concerns, in both scenes, was to remain mostly unengaged. In both cases, he physically left the house, while Penelope stayed inside. Again, this sets up the visual of the domestic wife in the home and the public husband stepping into the outside world. As before, Will’s refusal to engage Penelope and his decision to simply leave shows how he is the one with the power to end the conversation, and there is nothing she can do about it. That she stayed behind both times, and only reacted by throwing a glass after he had left, demonstrates her overall lack of power within the relationship.

The positioning of women as outside of the military was further achieved by the references made to women by the soldiers, themselves. Wives and girlfriends were referenced through talk and photographs pulled out by their husbands and boyfriends in almost all of the films. There were also conversations about women included (usually somewhat sexualized) pictures of said women, and ended up with the men making sexual jokes and innuendos about them. These conversations were shown as another way for the men to bond with each other.

These specific types of conversations occurred in *Jarhead, Home of the Brave, Stop-Loss*. Thus, these women were not just framed as outside of the military and only in relation to the men soldiers, but they were also turned into sex objects by the soldiers. In some films, this was also the case when women were not even in relationships with the men soldiers, but only existing in the films as women, such as in the airplane scene in *Jarhead* (mentioned above).

Also in *Jarhead*, the audience only sees the girlfriends and wives of the marines (outside of photographs) a couple of times, and each time it is in a sexual context. For instance, this scene
near the beginning of Jarhead, in which Anthony Swofford is narrating about important events in his life leading up to his enlisting:

*Door opens on a naked Swofford having sex with a girl against his wall. She is young, white, and blonde.*

**ANTHONY SWOFFORD (VO):** Studying after school with my girlfriend.

(Camera zooms in on their faces)

**KRISTINA:** Oh, my God, I love you.

**ANTHONY SWOFFORD:** I love you, too.

*Cut to a shot of Kristina girlfriend. She is topless and putting on a USMC shirt.*

**ANTHONY SWOFFORD:** Giving away my favorite USMC T-shirt.

**KRISTINA:** *(smiling)* I'll write you every day.

*(Jarhead 2005).*

The audience only sees Anthony Swofford’s girlfriend, Kristina, when she and Anthony are having sex, and then again when she is half naked and putting his shirt over her body. The audience also sees another marine’s wife in a sex tape that she sent to her husband (with the purpose of angering him). Again, the way the significant others are shown and spoken about, in these instances, reduces them just to sex and their sexuality-particularly in relation to the marine. Outside of these relationships, they are unimportant within the film.

The aforementioned examples of women military significant other depictions highlight the overall absence of a military husband/boyfriend in the films. Even though women soldiers were scarcely represented in the films, they were (usually) shown as existing within the world of the films. Yet while the military wife/girlfriend was well-represented, the same cannot be said
for the male equivalent. As Enloe points out, the military spouse or significant other is typically presumed to be a wife or girlfriend, even though there are now women in the armed forces (Enloe 2000; 182). Within the films, the topic significant others was rarely brought up in regards to the women soldiers. *G.I. Jane* is an exception to this, as Jordan was shown as having a boyfriend. However, unlike the women military significant others shown in the films, Jordan’s boyfriend, Lt. Commander Royce, was also in the military. Thus, he was different from the other types of military significant others in that he had his own life in the military already, and his role was then played out differently—which, as Enloe notes, is typical of men that are military husbands (Enloe 2000; 183). While the audience did see him and Jordan speaking to each other while she was in training, and him acting as her support in this situation, he was also seen outside of his connection to her while doing his work in the military. Put more simply, his own ties to the military extended beyond Jordan, as he had a military career.

Another point about Royce is that, while his role as a military boyfriend somewhat flips the script on the expected relationships in the military arena, it was done so begrudgingly on his part. In fact, Royce asked what Jordan expects him to do if she completes the training and goes on operational duty for three years. He asks: “Will I wait if you go off to war? Is that what you’re asking me?” (*G.I. Jane* 1997). He questions this incredulously, as if it were a ridiculous thing to expect of him, yet it is something commonly expected of “good” and “patriotic” military wives and girlfriends (Enloe 2000; 162-164). This notion of Royce having to be the supportive

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17 Of course, even if there were no women soldiers in the films, the military husband/boyfriend would still be relevant if homosexual soldiers were ever acknowledged (outside of jokes). While many of these films came out before being openly gay in the military was considered acceptable, the films treat gay soldiers as nonexistent.

18 In fact, one of Jordan’s complaints is that she and Royce started in the military at the same time, but he outranks her because he has had operational duty which has been denied to her on the basis of her being a woman.
military boyfriend while Jordan is “off to war” was framed as odd and met with some hostility, as it does not fit with how most people understand the roles of men and women within military relationships.

Though the military significant other was shown typically framed as a wife or girlfriend whose identity revolved around the soldier they are involved with, there were exceptions. In the film *Battleship*, for instance, the character of Sam Shane was a main character Lt. Alex Hopper’s girlfriend. She was also the daughter of Navy Admiral Terrance Shane. In this case, she was connected to two men in the military, but was not in the military, herself. However, she was depicted in the film outside of her connection to the two men. For instance, she had several scenes where she was at her job and working with injured and disabled veterans. When there was an alien attack, she was shown first as emotional and helpless, but eventually, with the help of a disabled Army veteran (Lt. Col. Mick Canales), she was able to respond to the attack proactively and be an asset. While her roles as Hopper’s girlfriend (and eventual fiancé) and Shane’s daughter were the most emphasized, Sam, unlike most of the other military significant others in the films, was given more of a presence within *Battleship* and was able to be more active.

There were also exceptions in the depiction of non-military women. Not all of the non-military women in the films were connected to the men soldiers (as their wives, girlfriends, mothers, or daughters). There were women in these films who fell outside of those roles. Interestingly, two of the films I viewed showed women in law enforcement/security roles outside of the military. *In the Valley of Elah* featured a women police detective in a main role. *Act of Valor* showed a woman CIA agent as a supporting character. Both women were in positions of power and authority, but they were shown in different ways within the films.
Detective Emily Sanders in *In the Valley of Elah*, was depicted as intelligent and capable, but she had to constantly work around her male co-workers who do not take her seriously. Her character’s determination and persistence in investigating the murder of a soldier near a military base was what was emphasized throughout. For instance, the following scene takes place after it has been discovered that the young soldier was murdered. She has just been given assigned another case and decides to question the Lieutenant, Lt. Burke, about it:

**SANDERS** *(marches over to Burke)*: Excuse me, Lieutenant, but I was wondering how I came to be assigned this case.

**LT. BURKE**: ...Which case?

*Detectives Hodge and Wayne [are standing beside him.] They choke back their laughter.*

**SANDERS** *(reading report)*: Jacob Ronald Millard, slaughterhouse employee, arrested for torturing chickens.

**MILLARD** *(calling across the room)*: It's no big deal, everybody does it!

**SANDERS**: Everybody doesn't poke out their eyes, asshole!

**MILLARD**: Sure they do.

**SANDERS**: Shut up.

**MILLARD**: My boss just doesn't want me humping his daughter!

**SANDERS** *(to Millard)*: Now we are shocked beyond words.

**LT. BURKE**: You see the way you can draw information out of people? People just like you, Emily. That's how you got promoted from traffic to the detective squad, am I right?

**SANDERS** *(confused)*: ...I'm sorry?

**LT. BURKE**: Oh, don't be. If Wayne and Hodge could have fucked their way into the squad, they would have, too.
**DETECTIVE HODGE:** Wayne would have. One of us needs to know what they're doing.

**SANDERS:** Ah. See, that's what concerns me. Having fucked my way into this job, I may not be qualified to piece together this complex of a crime. I mean, take the murder site; I would have never come to the conclusion that that soldier had been killed on Army property. I would have been fooled by the signs of struggle on the shoulder of the road. And that trail of broken brush leading from there to where he was burned would have made me think he was killed in our jurisdiction and moved because the killers didn't think it smart to chop him up right under a bright streetlight. I would have totally misread the crime scene.

*Silence. Sanders walks away. The three men stare at her.*

(*In the Valley of Elah 2006)*

The men in this scene clearly were trying to undermine Sanders and make a fool out of her by assigning her a non-serious case. The line about her “having fucked” her way into Detective, with the implication that she did not earn her job, shows another level of disrespect from them. Yet Sanders dismissed this notion by pushing the men on that accusation and demonstrating why she deserves her job. Despite the attempts to question her qualifications, Sanders was able to prove her worth and render the men silent. What this shows is that, while Sanders had to deal with a sexist and disrespectful environment, she was still able to challenge it and demand recognition for her crime solving efforts.

Though she was a single mother, this role did not become her main identity within the film. Her persistence ended up matching that of Hank Deerfield, that father of the murdered

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soldier. She proved to be a vital asset and is instrumental in solving the murder, despite being dismissed by her partners and co-workers. She was never shown in a victimizing fashion.

CIA operative Lisa Morales in *Act of Valor*, on the other hand, was mostly framed as helpless. She was captured by the man she and her partner (who has been killed) were targeting fairly early in the film and spent much of the time being tortured by her captors. She was presented to the audience, then, mostly as a victim, and one who ended up being saved by men. The film repeatedly went back to show shots of her hanging by a chain, clad in a tank top and pants. There were numerous shots of her being tortured and after she is tortured, and close-ups of her wounded face. Right before the SEAL teams (both made up of men) go in to rescue her, there was a shot of her chained to a table. At this point, she was begging her capture to release her. He then started torturing her again, which prompted her to start screaming. Her screams were heard by the SEAL teams outside, which appeared to incentivize them to move in to rescue her. The shots of the men getting into formation and preparing to rescue her were juxtaposed by the shots of Morales about to be tortured, in the act of being tortured, or after having been tortured. They were displaying active heroism in comparison to her passive victimhood.

When the soldiers did get to her, she was unconscious, and was in a tank top and underwear. Her wrists were chained behind her head. The soldiers killed the men of the cartel that were attacking them and killed Morales’ torturer. She was carried out (but first she got covered by a jacket) and taken to safety. Again, the men of the SEAL teams were active and heroic, and were framed in the male warrior hero archetype, while Morales was the passive victim that needed to be recued (thus causing her to fit into the female victim archetype) (Woodward 2000; Privadera and Howard III 2006). Though Morales was a (presumably)
capable CIA agent, her role as a victim was emphasized the most in the film, while for the soldiers, their bravery and heroism was what is emphasized.

In the films viewed, being a woman usually meant being both non-military and being related or connected to the main men soldier characters in some way. It also meant being of minimal importance to the overall plot outside of their personal connection to a specific soldier (exceptions aside). Typically (and especially if they had prominent roles within the films) women were shown as significant wives, girlfriends, or mothers. The films achieved this framing by mainly including women in the films to play said roles, through the use of scenes that frame the domestic sphere as feminine (and specifically populated by women) and the military sphere as masculine (and specifically populated by men), by including sexual references to them made by men soldiers, and by neglecting to represent, for the most part military husbands and boyfriends—thus framing the military significant other as a woman.

These representations of women, in general, in the military films are significant, as they represent women on the sidelines, supporting their men, in ways that pass largely unchallenged in the films. In these cases, women’s existence in military films was centered around their relationships to the men soldiers. Much of the representation and talk of the women as wives and girlfriends also tended to be sexualized and reductive, thus positioning the women only as sexual objects both for the men and the audience, which further minimized their roles as fully rounded characters or people within the films.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The topic of women in the military is one that continues to be relevant (and, I suspect will remain relevant in the years to come). I chose to explore this topic by looking at the framing of these women in military films. The importance of this type of media study rests on the idea that media depictions and the frames that are produced through them matter. Though my data is, admittedly, limited, there were patterns that emerged in the framing of women and men soldiers. My overall findings were that women soldiers were not very present within the films I viewed, and that soldiering itself was primarily framed as something done by straight white men. This depiction of the soldier is the one that has remained the most salient. This supports Nuciari’s argument that the military is thought of as an “all-male society” (Nuciari 2006: 280). Though the military is no longer this way, this view is supported by the films and reinforces the idea of soldiers as men. The overall lack of women soldiers in the films, the ridiculing and squashing of femininity and homosexuality, and the general assumption of soldiers as male or men give support to the idea that only straight men are, and should be, apart of the military. It is worth pointing out that the shortest analysis chapter is the chapter on women soldiers. This is due to the overall lack of women soldiers in the films, which meant there were few portrayals to analyze.

These patterns align with the literature concerning women in the military and the media depictions of soldiers-particularly the literature that delves into the particular limiting ways women soldiers have been depicted—as well as theories pertaining to gender and gender inequality. My study adds to this literature by examining how the films frame soldiering in gendered terms. The perpetuation of the specific frame of soldiering as something done by straight white men was achieved through the exclusion of types of frames. This framing also
included a heavy reliance on the conformity to a hegemonic masculinity—which pits itself as both opposite and superior to femininity.

When speaking of the framing of women soldiers in these military films (as with soldiers of color and non-straight soldiers—be they women or men), it is the general absence of their depictions that merits discussion. Women soldiers, then, remain overwhelmingly outside of the framing of the military and soldiering. Their exclusion from this frame then means that they are not part of the cultural stock of frames surrounding soldiering (Entman 1993). The dominant frame of the soldier as a white man relies on the exclusion of the other ways of framing soldiers—in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and so on.

Gerbner and Gross’s concept of symbolic annihilation (1976) provides insight into the exclusion of specific identities. Even though there were some women soldiers portrayed, their underrepresentation is a form of absence. The multitude of other roles played by women in the films (wife, girlfriend, mother, news anchor, waitress, stripper, and so on) says something about the expected and accepted roles of women and men. In allowing women to (mostly) be in some roles but not others, the dominant gender ideologies about how women and men should be or what women and men should do become reproduced. This theory applies to (American) soldiers of color and those who don’t identify as heterosexual (both men and women), as well, as they were largely underrepresented. In addition to this, when it came to depicting wars and battles between the American military and a foreign military made up primarily of certain racial and ethnic groups (for instance, the Somalis in *Black Hawk Down*) the framing of the American military as racially homogenous had the effect of setting up a binary between the two militaries, which essentially resulted in painting whites as heroes and people of color as villains.
In the films that I analyzed, women were represented as the symbolic other—a key finding consistent with Kimmel’s (2010) analysis of masculinity. The films achieved this through framing being a soldier as the opposite of being feminine or womanly. The ways in which gender was framed were very much in line with Kimmel’s theories. As Kimmel states, women become a “symbolic other” for men to measure themselves against when they are not around (though, as the films show, the idea of woman-as-other still pervades even when there are women soldiers present) (Kimmel 2010: 182). *Jarhead*, for instance, positioned women as other in the boot camp scenes and in framing default soldiers as men. The films, overall, equate soldiering with masculinity, and equate “true” manhood with being tough, unemotional, aggression, ability to be violent, and resilience.

The resistance to Lt. O’Neil’s presence in Navy Combined Reconnaissance Team was very similar to the resistance of women in military institutions as described by Kimmel. In the film, the complaints focused on O’Neil not “belonging” on the team, and not being able to do what the other soldiers could do because of her status as a woman. There was also a sense of resentment because she was encroaching on a previously all-male space, and destroying that atmosphere by existing there as a female-bodied person. Her being there and trying to do what the men soldiers were doing was a source of aggravation and anger for the men. Her wanting to be an equal could be seen as a challenge to the idea of men being superior to women out of their ability to do things that women can’t (Kimmel 2010: 182-183). This challenge, then, was used as the basis for them to lash out and try to undermine her. As put by Kimmel, “Women’s exclusion [seems] to be necessary for men to feel confident about their masculinity” (Kimmel 2010: 182). Essentially, the films offer a definition of soldiering as incredibly gendered.
It also helps support the dominant view that being a woman or gay, in general, is negative. In *Battleship*, it is especially interesting that the person deriding their fellow soldier for supposed displays of femininity is, in fact, a woman. It suggests that she, too, has taken on the idea that weakness or succumbing to pain is a feminine trait, and to be feminine is to be inferior. Michael Kimmel’s observations of the Virginia Military Institute’s “rat line,” in which young men were routinely yelled at and berated during training exercises, seem to match these scenes through the positioning of femaleness as undesirable (Kimmel 2010: 173). As Kimmel notes, this seemed to be one of the many ways for the institution to try to enforce and maintain a “hegemonic version” of masculinity (Kimmel 2010: 182).

The men soldiers in the films are never questioned about their abilities to do the work of soldiering because they are men. They are also not disrespected or denied the opportunity to perform certain duties on the basis of them being men. There may be other reasons for certain characters to have doubts about their abilities or for them to lack respect, but these attitudes are the result of something other than gender. In other words, the men are not called out on the basis of gender (outside of being accused of being womanly). The implication is that men can automatically perform their duties without their gender getting in the way, while women have to make sure their status as women does not hinder their capabilities. Femininity is something that has to be fought against or buried down, whereas masculinity is something that is propped up and that striven for.

This construction of masculinity in relation to the military was one of the main themes that emerged. The pitting of masculinity against femininity, and the emphasis put on men in the films to fit into a very narrow definition of masculinity. The frames in the films show, not only how gender is approached in the films in relation to the military, but also how gender is thought
about, in general. Point being that the military culture depicted in the films, as well as the military culture in reality, does not exist in a vacuum. Gender frames in military films rely on extreme versions of masculinity and very binary and essentialized understandings of gender. These gender frames are consistent with those constructed and maintained in the larger society.

The exceptions in the films showed that there were some places where these understandings of gender could be ruptured, but they, themselves, were not without issues in regard to framing. The decision to frame the few prominent women soldiers in masculine terms, for instance, still helps to reinforce the idea that masculinity is superior to femininity. If the films were to depict a woman soldier who was both conventionally feminine and a capable, active soldier, that could be more boundary breaking and less limiting.

As it stands, the films I reviewed primarily reinforce the traditional gender divisions and norms-both inside the military and out. What this study shows is that stereotypes about gender and the military still prevail within film, and, as such, there is room for improvement in terms of representation. As film can serve as one of the tools of socialization, these types of representations in race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on are important to acknowledge and interrogate. In not particularly diverging from the status quo, the films perpetuate the image of soldiers as men, and all the other assumptions that accompany it. This adds to our cultural stock of knowledge about the military and gender roles, which in turn has the ability to influence gender relations by emphasizing this power imbalance (usually through essentialist discourse), and setting limits on what men and women can, or should, do. Showing the military and gender by using a variety of frames could, along with many other social forces, result in changes of attitudes about these topics.
While, through my study, I was able to point out and make claims about themes that run across different texts (in this case, films), I could not make claims beyond those texts. As I only conducted a textual analysis, my observations could only be applied to the films themselves, and not on the actual effects they may or may not have had on people. The purpose of my study was to analyze the films themselves based on what the frames employed, which meant that I did not deal with human subjects. Other methodologies, such as interviews, participant observations, and ethnographies may do a better job of addressing the possible casual impact of the films.

I recognize that my analysis of the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality was lacking and this would be another point of improvement in an expansion of this study. It is important to look at how these characteristics and identities are approached and depicted within the film world. I focused mainly on gender depictions and representations in my study, but perhaps a future study could take a more in-depth look at the complexities inherent in the portrayal of these identities and any combination thereof. For future scholars looking to expand on this study, or conduct a similar one, I would also recommend that they fully understand and prepare for the time commitment necessary, and that they should, if analyzing more than three to five films, work in a team in order to make their study more manageable, and to allow them to conduct a richer analysis of the films in question.
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