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Perceived barriers to reporting military sexual assault: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Wendy Jo Rasmussen
University of Iowa

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PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO REPORTING
MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by

Wendy Jo Rasmussen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Psychological and Quantitative Foundations (Counseling Psychology)
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Professor John S. Westefeld

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations at the December 2016 graduation.

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To my mom and sister, for their quiet strength.

“Forget conventionalisms; forget what the world thinks of you stepping out of your place; think your best thoughts, speak your best words, work your best works, looking to your own conscience for approval.”

Susan B. Anthony

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes a qualitative study that explored the perceived barriers to reporting military sexual assaults that servicewomen experienced following a sexual assault while on active duty. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) *What barriers to reporting did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive?*; (2) *What role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision?* Semi-structured interviews with three servicewomen who were sexually assaulted while on active duty and did not report the assaults were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Four superordinate themes emerged from the data including (1) external factors, (2) internal processes, (3) interpersonal aspects, and (4) need for a cultural shift. A review of existing literature, research methodology implemented, a review of results including supporting quotes from participant narratives, and a discussion of the results will be presented in this dissertation. A minority stress model adapted for servicewomen will be explored, as well as implications for clinicians and suggestions for future research.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Women have been involved with the United States military across centuries, volunteering to serve in a range of roles including water bearers, nurses, and saboteurs. The ongoing debate over the role of women in the military has become entangled with the emerging military sexual assault (MSA) crisis. Research has shown sexual assault is a severely underreported event in both civilian and military settings. According to Department of Defense data, in fiscal year 2014 only 1 in 4 victims of sexual assault in the military chose to file a report. This means it is estimated that 3 out of 4 victims chose not to access healthcare or legal services following an assault.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the barriers that servicewomen perceive that prevent them from reporting sexual assaults. This study is novel in using qualitative methodology; to date, studies of this phenomenon have been limited to forced-choice survey data. By examining the participants' narratives, this study found an interaction of external factors, internal processes, and interpersonal interactions either supported or deterred reporting. For the participants, the risks related to reporting proved too high compared to the potential benefits. In environments where the participants felt supported and included, they were more likely to self-advocate. The results of this study overlapped with the Minority Stress Model, and an adaptation of that model is presented. Implications for clinicians and directions for future research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Women have been involved with the United States (U.S.) military across centuries, volunteering to serve in a range of roles including water bearers, nurses, laundresses, and saboteurs (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011; Foster & Vince, 2009). Although women were not technically allowed to be in the military until 1901, there are examples throughout U.S. history of their involvement on the frontlines. Examples range from Molly Pitcher who was involved with direct combat in the American Revolutionary War (Berkin, 2006) to the several hundred women who dressed as men to fight on the frontlines in the Civil War (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011).

The formal inclusion of women in the U.S. military began in 1901 with the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). The Navy soon followed with the establishment of the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908 (Wilmot, 2013). In 1948, The Women's Armed Service Integration Act allowed women to serve in permanent positions in the U.S. Armed Forces, with the exception of serving aboard ships, in combat aircraft, or in ground combat (Service Women Action Group, 2011). Over the course of the 20th century, women continued to break new ground within the military, becoming generals and admirals, combat fighter pilots, service academy instructors, space ship commanders, and combatant ship commanders (Service Women Action Group, 2011). As of 2009, there were 213,000 women serving Active Duty and 190,000 in the Reserves and National Guard (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). Additionally, women comprise 8 percent of the Veteran population, although this statistic is expected to increase to 15 percent by 2035 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011).

During the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the debate over formally

allowing women to serve in combat units has continued. What is often overlooked, however, is that women have been informally serving in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). While being barred from serving in direct combat positions, servicewomen are assigned to “combat support” occupations that still set them in combat situations (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). For example, U.S. Army pilot Captain Kimberly Hampton was the first woman pilot to be shot down and killed by an enemy in 2004, and in 2007, U.S. Army Specialist Monica Brown was awarded a Silver Star after “running through gunfire” and shielding the wounded bodies of her fellow soldiers (Service Women Action Group, 2011). Although service women are risking injury or death, combat experience is not formally included in their records, and they may not be compensated or promoted for their service. In 2011, the Military Leadership and Diversity Commission recommended that combat exclusion policies be lifted and in January, 2013 the formal ban was lifted. In November, 2013 four women completed the Marine Corps infantry course for the first time, but were referred to support positions rather than combat leadership jobs (Carroll, 2013). In August, 2015 two women completed and graduated from the Army’s Ranger School, which is now open to all women (Lamothe, 2015). On December 3, 2015, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced previously closed jobs would be opened to women, including special operations (Rosenberg and Philipps, 2015).

The ongoing debate over the role of women in the military has become entangled with the emerging military sexual assault (MSA) crisis. Morris, drawing on psychological and sociological research, posits that the hypermasculine “warrior culture” of the military puts individuals at significant risk for experiencing sexual assault (1996).

In 2011, 23% of military women endorsed experiencing unwanted sexual contact at some point during their military career (Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members [WGRA], 2013). “Military sexual trauma” (MST) is the term used by the Veteran Affairs healthcare system (VA) to describe “both sexual harassment and sexual assault that occurs in military settings” (Street & Stafford, 2011, p. 66) including unwanted sexual contact. “Unwanted sexual contact” is defined in the WGRA as “intentional sexual contact that was against a person’s will or which occurred when the person did not or could not consent, and includes completed or attempted sexual intercourse, sodomy (oral or anal sex), penetration by an object, and the unwanted touching of genitalia and other sexually-related areas of the body” (WGRA, 2013, p. 1). Further, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) defines sexual assault as, “intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013e, p. 18). “Consent” is defined by the DOD as

words or overt acts indicating a freely given agreement to the sexual contact at issue by a competent person. Lack of verbal or physical resistance or submission resulting from the use of force, threat of force, or placing another person in fear does not constitute consent. A current or previous dating relationship by itself or the manner of dress of the person involved with the alleged offender in the sexual contact at issue shall not constitute consent (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013e, p. 15).

The term “military sexual assault” (MSA) will be used throughout this paper rather than MST. Although this may appear inconsistent with existing literature, it is my opinion

that language should be used which accurately describes the event, rather than the terminology provided by the VA. The term “trauma” is too broad a term and does not accurately capture the interpersonal violence inherent in an assault or harassment.

Recently, a myriad of events including several lawsuits, a popular documentary, and the arrest of two military officers in charge of sexual assault response programs (for sexual assault-related offenses) have drawn the attention of the media, the United States President and members of Congress. In 2012, three separate lawsuits were filed against the Navy and Marines (Klay and Hellmer et.al. v. Panetta), service academies (Marquet and Kendzior v. Gates et. al.), and the DOD (Appeal in Kori Cioca et. al. v. Donald Rumsfeld, et. al.) (Protect Our Defenders, 2013). The release of the documentary *The Invisible War* in 2012 increased public attention on the issue of MSA. The film featured several stories of servicewomen who were assaulted while serving, including their experience of assault, the response of their command, and the range of effects that have resulted from the assault and (for some) retaliation by perpetrators and fellow servicemembers (Ziering & Dick, 2012).

Once a rarely discussed issue, both female and male service members are reporting experiences with MSA in greater numbers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a). In fiscal year 2011-2012, there were 2,949 reports of sexual assault involving service members who were victimized (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a). It is estimated that this figure only represents approximately 11% of sexual assaults involving service members (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a).

Although victims of MSA have shown courage in volunteering to serve their country, this does not protect them from the negative outcomes associated with sexual

assault. In the general population, several studies have shown women to be at greater risk for developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while controlling for trauma type (Kessler, Sonnega, & Bromet, 1995; Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Tolin & Foa, 2006). Tang and Freyd (2011) reviewed gender differences and PTSD, finding that higher rates of PTSD in women are partially accounted for by greater incidence of sexual assault compared to men. DePrince and Freyd (2002) propose that “betrayal trauma” (BT) is partially accountable for higher rates of PTSD in women, who are more likely than men to experience assault at the hands of someone with whom they have a close, interpersonal relationship.

A “betrayal trauma” occurs when “the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person’s trust or well-being” (Freyd, 2008, p. 76). Freyd, a feminist psychologist, originally developed “betrayal trauma theory” (BTT) to account for *why* victims of childhood sexual abuse may forget memories of the abuse (1996). More broadly speaking, the theory was developed to account for the impact of social relationships and context on post-traumatic outcomes (Freyd, DePrince, & Gleaves, 2007) rather than simply the physiological fear response (DePrince & Freyd, 2002). In order to maintain attachment to caregivers who were also perpetrators, Freyd proposed it is adaptable for victims to avoid remembering the incident(s), which she termed “knowledge isolation” (Freyd, 1996, p. 15). More recently BTT research has expanded to include the concepts of bystander betrayal (Freyd & Birrell, 2013), betrayal blindness (Freyd & Birrell, 2013) and institutional betrayal trauma (IBT) (Smith & Freyd, 2013). IBT posits that institutions have the power to betray victims, such as seen in the military’s response to sexual assault victims or a church’s cover up of sex abuse scandals

(Smith & Freyd, 2013). Research has shown that experiencing MSA tends to lead to increased risk for PTSD compared to experiencing sexual assault as a civilian, either before or after military service (Himmelfarb, Yaeger, & Mintz, 2006; Suris, Lind, Kashner, & Borman, 2007). Several researchers have proposed that BT may account for this increased risk and have called for studies examining the relationship between BT and MSA (Allard, Nunnink, Gregory, Klest, & Platt, 2011; Freyd & Birrell, 2013; Smith & Freyd, 2013).

The issue of betrayal is echoed in service members' descriptions of their experience with MSA. In a National Public Radio story on MSA, a rape victim and former captain in the Marine Corps stated, "When you are raped by a fellow service member, it is like being raped by your brother and having your father or mother decide the case" (Chang & Siegel, 2013). Ariana Klay, a former Marine Corps officer stated in a press conference about her Congressional testimony:

The retaliation is the same in almost every case of sexual assault, command appointed attempts to diagnose those who report with a personality disorder, by officials with no medical training, whatsoever, commanders appointing and rewarding senior female military members to participate in the retaliation, command issued protective orders against the accused, ostracism, intimidation and isolation. The humiliation of the retaliation was worse than the assault. Because it was sanctioned from those same leaders I once would have risked my life for. All the policies, programs, and posters against assault added to this, as powerless tokens that only made humiliation more official (Gillibrand, 2013).

It appears that military culture and policies have an insidious effect on victims for several reasons. Sexual assault is a traumatic experience on its own, but it then becomes compounded by a sense of betrayal when a person once trusted becomes a perpetrator. Military indoctrination teaches servicemembers to value the group above individual in all situations. This cultural norm conflicts with a victim's right to report assault by a fellow servicemember (Street, Kimerling, Bell, & Pavao, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, in the past few years Congressional and media attention has increased in terms of the issue of MSA. In May, 2013, the President, Secretary of Defense, and the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for changes to protect service members from assault and harassment (Zengerle, 2013). Gen. Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the current status of the issue as “a crisis” (Zengerle, 2013). Several bills were introduced in Congress in 2013 that called for changes in the military justice system or for greater care for victims (Congresswoman Jackie Speier, n.d., Senator Claire McCaskill, n.d., The Office of Kirsten Gillibrand, n.d.).

Research has shown sexual assault is a severely underreported event in both civilian and military settings (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013; Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Rennison, 2002). The DOD-Wide Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Strategic Plan features five priorities, one of which is “Increase the Climate of Victim Confidence Associated with Reporting” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a, p. 3). The Department of Defense seeks to increase rates of reporting in order to “provide victims with needed care” and “hold offenders appropriately accountable” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a, p. 18). A review of the

existing literature indicates that servicewomen choose not to report for various reasons (WGRA, 2013; Mengeling, Booth, Torner, & Sadler, 2014) including not wanting others to know about the assault, fear of reprisals, and hearing of others' negative experiences with reporting. 60% of servicewomen in Mengeling and colleagues' study (2014) felt healthcare "wasn't needed" after an assault and therefore did not seek it. If victims lack confidence in potential outcomes after reporting an assault, perpetrators may continue harassing or assaulting others. This is especially problematic in a military setting, where perpetrators live and work with potential victims, and nobody has the option to quit their job (Street & Stafford, 2011).

MSA is an event that can impact all aspects of a servicewoman's life including her mental health, physical health, relationships, career trajectory, and so forth. Studies have shown that sexual assault is related to several negative outcomes, and experiencing sexual assault in military settings increases a victim's risk of developing PTSD. Although this experience has been occurring for decades, only recently has the general public and policy makers begun to take action to effect change that may protect women who serve.

Statement of the Problem

Given sexual assault victims are at increased risk for negative health and psychological outcomes, it is imperative to look into all aspects of military life to see where improvements in safeguarding service members can be made. This may include cultural, contextual, personnel, and policy issues. To date, barriers to reporting sexual assault in military settings have only been examined quantitatively via surveys with limited options for response (WGRA, 2013). In order to better understand barriers as

they are experienced by women, qualitative methods will be utilized in this study. To date, one qualitative study has examined barriers to health- and mental healthcare in a sample of male service members (Turchik, McLean, Rafie, Hoyt, Rosen, & Kimerling, 2013), but no qualitative studies have examined barriers to reporting in a female military sample.

A better understanding of barriers to reporting could potentially inform changes to the military justice system, which in turn could create a climate of increased confidence. Further, if service members have greater confidence in reporting, perpetrators may be held more accountable, victims may be able to continue with their military careers, VA healthcare costs may decrease, and the public's trust in the military to take care of service members may increase.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to explore women veterans' experience of sexual assault and their decision not to report or seek healthcare, as well as their experience of betrayal. A review of the existing literature shows that service women are not reporting for vaguely-described reasons often supplied by surveys (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a). By using qualitative inquiry, the veterans' voices will be used to better understand the phenomenon. Using this understanding to create an environment in which reporting is considered a safe option may lead to an increase in seeking justice or healthcare after an assault. This would also be congruent with the DOD's priority of increasing reporting of MSA. Finally, the transformative purpose of this study is to amplify the voices of servicewomen who were assaulted within a culture and context that

encourages victims not to report and which tolerates sexual harassment and degradation of women (Hlad, 2013).

This study will employ Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative approach which seeks to uncover the meaning individuals make of their social world, as well as particular events and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this approach, the researcher explicitly uses their worldview and biases as a lens through which they make meaning of the participants' meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Since I am a Naval officer and have gone through military indoctrination, including participating in sexual assault prevention trainings, my worldview will provide both an etic and an emic perspective. Further, my clinical work with survivors of MSA will provide an additional frame of reference for the participants' meaning making.

This study will explore the following research question: What barriers did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive to reporting their sexual assault, and what role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision?

Summary

The issue of MSA has gained public attention in recent years, thus making this study a timely one. As debate continues in Congress over how to best address the issue and effect change, the experiences of victims should be included in these conversations. In a culture that encourages individuals to put their needs below those of the military, a study that amplifies victims' voices can contribute to the healing process of the participants by providing a platform to tell their story. Allowing servicewomen to tell

their own story, as opposed to filling out a survey that quantifies their experience at the group level, may further send the message that their experience matters.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will begin with an overview of military culture, the military justice system, and current legislation and policy in order to describe the context in which MSA occurs. The discussion will then turn to a brief overview of psychological and physiological issues related to sexual assault generally. Risk factors and outcomes related to MSA will then be reviewed. Feminist theory and specifically, betrayal trauma theory, will then be discussed to provide context for negative outcomes of MSA. Lastly, the purpose of the study and research questions will be presented.

Military Culture

The experience of sexual assault in the military is unique for several reasons, one of which is the existence of the particular culture within which service members live. Although each branch has its own subculture, and variations exist within each branch, it is generally accepted that there is an overall “military culture” within the US Armed Forces (Moore, 2011). Military culture includes shared traditions and norms, language and dress, and belief systems and rituals (Moore, 2011). The U.S. military teaches service members early on in their training that they must be disciplined, focused, and always in control (physically and emotionally) (Halvorson, 2010). During this initial training, service members are also taught to rely on and trust each other, knowing that the time may come when they will be called on or will need help to survive (Halvorson, 2010). Additionally, service members are taught that they are held to a higher moral standard than civilians and are expected to adhere to and live by their service branch’s value system (i.e. Navy: honor, courage, commitment). Generally speaking, military values include “loyalty, respect, selfless service, honor and integrity, excellence and

commitment, personal courage, and devotion to duty” (Halvorson, 2010).

One of the most strongly held values of members of the military is the privileging of group over the individual (Moore, 2011). Under this collectivist umbrella, the individual service member feels a sense of belonging to the group, emphasizes group goals over their own, and develops a sense of “emotional investment” in the group (Christian, Stivers, & Sammons, 2009). In order for units to operate effectively in combat, all members must work in unison. If one person strays from this, it can wreak havoc on the mission and cause serious harm or death (Moore, 2011). Therefore, a sense of group identity begins to occur early on in a service member’s indoctrination (Hsu, 2010). It is in this way that service members begin to view each other as family.

A highly structured chain of command is believed to be necessary to maintain mission readiness because it makes decision-making easier and clarifies responsibilities (Halvorson, 2010; U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Every service member has a clear chain of command, which may run from the E-1 in boot camp all the way up to the U.S. President, who is the Armed Forces’ Commander-in-Chief. Each service member has a rank and grade, but generally speaking service members are divided into two groups: officers (O) and enlisted (E). Officers are leaders and responsible for their units. Enlisted service members make up approximately 80% of the active duty force and are expected to carry out the lawful orders given to them by their command (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). Clear boundaries are expected to be maintained between officers and subordinates. As such, “fraternization” is a punishable offense per the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Fraternization includes any relationship between an officer and an enlisted service

member, a senior enlisted and junior enlisted, or a senior officer and junior officer. The purpose of the fraternization policy is to deter the perception of favorable behaviors, which can disrupt unit cohesion and affect mission readiness.

Lt. Col. Karen O. Dunivin, an Air Force personnel analyst and sociologist, published an excellent article on the tensions between the long-held military cultural “paradigm” and the evolving cultural “model” (1994, p. 531). Dunivin describes the U.S. military culture as a “combat, masculine-warrior (CMW) paradigm” which is centered around preparing for combat (p. 533). Since combat has traditionally been viewed as within the purview of men only, the culture has been shaped by men and traditional masculine norms and values (Dunivin, 1994). Dunivin goes on to state that traditional military culture is “homogenous, exclusionary, hostile, and moralistic” and as such, does not value the inclusion of women, and gay and lesbian service members, who are viewed as “deviant” from the norm. However, with the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, which allows gay and lesbian service members to serve openly, and with the military opening previously-closed combat jobs to women, it is likely that traditional military culture will continue to be challenged. Whether the military can live up to its own saying (“adapt and overcome”) remains to be seen.

Morris (1996), a Duke law professor, also authored a piece on military culture, highlighting group norms and attitudes toward masculinity and sexual behavior that may result in an environment more conducive to violence against women, particularly sexual assault. Morris states, “The rape-conducive attitudinal constellation, including elements of hypermasculinity, adversarial sexual beliefs, promiscuity, rape myth acceptance, hostility toward women, and possibly also acceptance of violence against women, is

reflected in various ways in military culture” (p. 707). He further notes that these norms are not explicitly established (on the contrary, the DOD has a published zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment), but rather through “normative attitudes” that are “conducive to rape” (p. 707).

Military Justice System

A second aspect of the MSA phenomenon that differentiates it from sexual assault in the general population is the military justice system. This system oversees laws and regulations that apply to service members once they take their oath of service, and which is enforceable within the military. Service members are charged with and punished for offenses that are found in civilian penal codes and for some that are unique to the UCMJ.

History

The U.S. military has operated under its own justice system since the late 1700s (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Section 3 of the Manual for Courts-Martial (MCM) states, “The purpose of military law is to promote justice, to assist in maintaining good order and discipline in the armed forces, to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the military establishment, and thereby to strengthen the national security of the United States” (Joint Service Committee on Military Justice [JSCMJ], 2008). It is a generally accepted notion in the military that “good order and discipline” are necessary for mission readiness (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). As such, commanders are given central roles in enforcement of the UCMJ (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c).

According to the U.S. Department of Defense military justice fact sheet, the first military justice codes developed were the American Articles of War and Articles for the Government of the Navy, both of which existed before the US Constitution and the

Declaration of Independence (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Once the Constitution was drafted and enacted, Congress then had power to regulate the military, while the President was named “Commander in Chief” (U.S. Const. art. II, § 2).

Between the original Articles of War’s development and the end of World War I, the codes were amended and revised, but had mostly been the same until the end of World War II (WWII; U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Substantial changes were implemented after WWII due to a dramatic increase in the number of courts-martial (2 million during WWII) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). The increase in courts-martial has been attributed to the unprecedented increase in the size of American forces (over 16 million service members) during WWII (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c).

Following the end of WWII, several groups advocated for changes to the military justice system that afforded more protections to service members, including the American Bar Association, the American Legion, the Judge Advocate Association, and the New York Bar Association (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). At the same time, Congressional hearings on military justice were initiated (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Congress, acting on its Constitutional authority over regulation of land and naval forces (Article 1, Section 8) enacted the UCMJ in 1950, which provided a “standardized code of military justice” that applied across all service branches (Library of Congress, 2010).

Enforcement

When individuals enter the military, they do so with the knowledge that they are subject to the UCMJ (UCMJ, 64 Stat. 109, 10 U.S.C. Chapter 47). The UCMJ is completely separate from the civilian justice system, and as such, service members are

subject to offenses and punishments unique to the military. These offenses are implemented as Executive Orders given by the President and published in the MCM (2008). For example, disrespect toward a superior commissioned officer, rape and extramarital affairs (“carnal knowledge”), malingering, conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, and dueling are examples of punitive offenses not seen in the civilian justice system (UCMJ, 64 Stat. 109, 10 U.S.C. Chapter 47).

Article 134 (“General article”) is a catch-all charge, defined as “all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces, and crimes and offenses not capital, of which persons subject to this chapter may be guilty” (UCMJ, 64 Stat. 109, 10 U.S.C. Chapter 47). Under Article 134, commanders have freedom to charge service members for offenses they deem to be affecting mission readiness. According to the DOD, this responsibility is a necessity because military members “have tremendous responsibilities and must be counted upon to perform them. These responsibilities require that the military have a disciplinary system that enables commanders to respond to such misconduct – potentially with criminal charges” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). Commanders in the military essentially function in the way police and prosecutors in the civilian world do. After an investigation, during which commanders may be aided by a lawyer (“judge advocate general”), they decide whether offenses should be charged and the offender punished (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c, p. 15). Commanders have three options for responding to offenses including administrative resolution, non-judicial punishment (Article 15, UCMJ), or refer to court-martial (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c).

Enforcement of the UCMJ occurs through a system of courts-martial. A court-martial is essentially a criminal trial that takes place within the military justice system. There are three levels of court-martial, with each occurring at a higher rank within military command hierarchy (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). A summary court-martial can be convened (“normally a battalion or squadron commander”), a special court-martial (“normally a brigade or wing commander”), or a general court-martial (“normally a general officer who is commanding”) (p. 15, U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c).

Although any person subject to the UCMJ can file charges, referred to as “preferring charges,” it is usually the unit commander of the accused who prefers charges (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c, p. 16). The commander who prefers charges will recommend what level of court-martial should be convened. If the commander advises a general court-martial, which is the most serious, then an “Article 32” investigation is initiated (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). An Article 32 is the military equivalent to a civilian pre-trial, discovery phase as well as a preliminary hearing (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c, p. 17).

Until the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 (NDAA) in December, 2013, military attorneys had been granted “wide latitude in cross-examining witnesses” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c, p. 17). In contrast, sexual assault victims in civilian courts have been protected from attacks on their character during testimony since the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994 (The White House, 2013). The so-called federal “rape shield law” has been in place since 1994 to “prevent offenders from using victims’ past sexual conduct against

them during a rape trial” (The White House, 2013). The lack of protection from exhausting testimony, which calls into question the victim’s past behavior, has been covered in the media with the case of a Naval Academy midshipman who accused three of her shipmates of sexual assault (Steinhauer, 2013). The New York Times’ coverage included description of the midshipman’s testimony

In the Article 32 cross-examination, defense lawyers repeatedly asked the midshipman about a consensual sexual encounter she said she had the next day. In some of the most widely disseminated testimony, Andrew Weinstein, a lawyer for Mr. Bush, asked the woman whether she wore a bra or other underwear to the party and whether she “felt like a ho” afterward. Lt. Cmdr. Angela Tang, a lawyer for Mr. Graham, also asked the woman repeatedly about her oral sex technique, arguing over objections from the prosecution that oral sex would indicate the “active participation” of the woman and therefore consent. (Steinhauer, 2013).

In addition to changes in Article 32 procedures, the NDAA also made changes to the conviction process. Although there had been language in the UCMJ protecting the decision of a subordinate officer, there were no regulations in place to prevent a higher-ranking officer from disposing of offenses (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c). After a court-martial came to an end, the convening authority (the commander who convened the court-martial) had “extensive discretion” in determining whether they agreed with the findings and sentence (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c, p. 32). The convening authority had the discretion to dismiss a guilty finding and to change the sentence handed down based on their own review of the proceedings. However, they were not permitted to change a not guilty finding.

In recent years, this issue has received substantial media coverage due to two high-ranking Air Force officials overturning sexual assault convictions of officers under their command. Lt. Gen. Craig A. Franklin overturned the conviction of Lt. Col. James Wilkerson III of abusive sexual contact, aggravated sexual assault, and three instances of conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman. Lt. Gen. Franklin stated in a memo following the dismissal that after reviewing the evidence presented during the trial (and additional evidence that was not allowed to be submitted in court), he believed Lt. Col. Wilkerson was not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt because, among other reasons, he was “a doting father and husband” (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2013). In another case, Lt. Gen. Susan Helms overturned a jury’s conviction of an Air Force captain on aggravated sexual assault charges, stating that the prosecution had not proven their case that the captain was guilty beyond reasonable doubt (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2013). The DOD’s Response Systems to Adult Sexual Assault Crimes Panel, Role of the Commander Subcommittee recently released their report on their consultation with Allied forces (Australia, Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom) whether the Allies’ removal of the chain of command from the prosecution of sexual assault charges has resulted in increased reporting (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013d). The recommendation of the panel was that none of the Allies were able to connect the removal of commanders from decisions to charge and prosecute to increased reporting.

As media coverage of the court-martial process and overturning of sexual assault convictions has increased, public awareness of issues within the military justice system has increased as well. With increased public awareness there has been increased pressure on Congress, who regulates the military, to take action to address sexual assault issues.

Proposed UCMJ Policy Changes

Two bills were brought to Congress in 2013 by members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, as part of the annual defense authorization bill for 2014. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's bill, the Military Justice Improvement Act (MJIA), sought to remove sexual assault prosecutorial decisions from the accused's chain of command to independent military prosecutors (The Office of Kirsten Gillibrand, n.d.). Senators Claire McCaskill, Kelly Ayotte, and Deb Fischer proposed a second bill that would take away commanders' ability to overturn convictions, mandated dishonorable discharge or dismissal of offenders convicted of sexual assault, and provided special counsel to victims, amongst other amendments (Senator Claire McCaskill, n.d.). Congresswoman Jackie Speier proposed a third bill, the Sexual Assault Training Oversight and Prevention Act (STOP Act), which would move the "reporting, oversight, investigation and victim care of sexual assaults" from the chain of command to an autonomous group made up of both civilian and military personnel (Congresswoman Jackie Speier, n.d.). All three bills attempted to make changes to the military justice system that would hopefully result in increased reporting of sexual assault and harassment and provide more protections for victims.

In the fall of 2013, Congress passed the NDAA for fiscal year 2014 (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, 2013). In this Act, Senator Claire McCaskill's bill was included, which removed commanders' ability to overturn convictions or reduce guilty findings, required dishonorable discharges or dismissals for convicted offenders, allowed victims to apply for permanent change of station or unit transfer, gave commanders the authority to move alleged perpetrators, and provided

specially trained victims' counsels to provide legal advice to victims (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, 2013). President Obama signed the bill into law in December, 2013.

In December 2014, Congress passed the NDAA for fiscal year 2015 (National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, 2014). The Act included several notable reforms to sexual assault prevention and response policy, including 33 sections of law and 16 military changes to the UCMJ (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). These included removing the use of the "good soldier" defense, requiring commanding officers' fitness reports include whether the commander has created a unit climate that supports the reporting of sexual assault offenses, allowing victims to choose whether the crime is prosecuted in civilian or military courts, and perhaps most importantly, providing victims with special counsel (Kime, 2015). The law further clarified which medical personnel may conduct SAFE exams. Additionally, victims are now provided the option to appeal discharges from the military. At the time of writing, Sen. Gillibrand is continuing to work on getting the MJIA passed separate from the NDAA (The Office of Kirsten Gillibrand, n.d.).

Current Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Programs

The Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Office (SAPRO) was developed in 2005 to be the sole authority overseeing the development of sexual assault response policy within the military (<http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/about/mission-and-history>). The department's mission statement states that SAPRO, "serves as the single point of authority for program accountability and oversight, in order to enable military readiness and reduce -- with a goal to eliminate -- sexual assault from the military"

(<http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/about/sapro-overview>). SAPRO implements prevention programs, treatment for victims of MSA, and accountability of the department's policies.

In addition to changes implemented through the annual defense budget approved by Congress, the Secretary of Defense directs initiatives aimed at improving prevention, response, and adjudication of sexual assaults (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015b).

These initiatives are part of the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Strategic Plan, most recently updated in January 2015 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015b). This plan focuses on five lines of effort including prevention, investigation, accountability, advocacy/victim assistance, and assessment (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015b). Prevention efforts consider “the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors and allows the Department to address those factors that put people at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a, p. 12). The objective of the Investigation line of effort is to “achieve high competence in the investigation of sexual assault” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a, p. 12). To support these efforts, the Special Victim Investigation and Prosecution Capability was established and fully operational by January 2014 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). Accountability efforts are focused on holding offenders accountable, which can only happen through victim participation in the military justice process (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). To support these efforts and empower victims, the Special Victims' Counsel/Victims' Legal Counsel Program was established and fully operational by January 2014 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). Through this program, victims are provided specialized legal assistance to help them move through the military justice system. Advocacy/Victim Assistance efforts

“focused on the delivery of consistent and effective victim support, response, and reporting options” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a, p. 13). Victims’ rights were broadened by “giving them the opportunity to provide input during the post-trial action phase,” improving the screening criteria for those who work with victims, and increasing the document retention length to 50 years regardless of the type of report (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a, p. 13). Within Assessment efforts, DOD aims to “effectively standardize, measure, analyze, assess, and report program progress” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a, p. 13). In 2014, the department implemented the first “Survivor Experience Survey” to get a better understanding of victim satisfaction with the abovementioned prevention and response efforts (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a).

Department of Defense Data

DOD Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military

As part of the accountability piece, the DOD is required to release comprehensive annual reports on sexual assault within the military, including the outcomes of each of the 6,000+ reports of sexual assault. The SAPRO annual reports give an overview of all aspects of MSA policy, including prevention and treatment programs. The Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members (WGRA) is conducted every two years to review the efficacy of SAPRO programs and “for assessing the gender-relations environment in the active duty force” (WGRA, 2013, p. 1). The annual reports include data from the most recent WGRA on demographics and prevalence rates. The WGRA data is useful because it includes information about unwanted sexual contact that is reported or unreported.

In fiscal year 2011-2012, 6.1% of servicewomen reported unwanted sexual contact in the previous year. The survey collected responses regarding the “experience that had the greatest effect” (WGRA, 2013, p. 2). Within this 6.1% of servicewomen, it was reported that 94% of offenders were male only and 5% were males and females; 67% happened at military installations; 57% of offenders were military coworker(s); and 38% were military person(s) of higher rank/grade outside of their chain of command (WGRA, 2013). There were 2,949 reports of sexual assault involving service members who were victimized (both male and female) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a). The majority of the victims who reported were of lower rank (E1-E4: 73%) and female (88%) (WGRA, 2013). Service members have the option of filing restricted or unrestricted reports. Restricted reports allow a victim to receive healthcare and advocacy services confidentially without triggering an investigation or notification of command (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a). An unrestricted report allows a victim to receive the same healthcare and advocacy services, but also results in a referral of the report to a Military Criminal Investigation Organization and notification of command (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013a).

The annual report for fiscal year 2014 showed a decrease in unwanted sexual contact among active duty women, from the estimated 6.1% in 2012 to an estimated 4.3% (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). The decrease among active duty men (1.2% to 0.9%) was not statistically significant (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). Rates of reporting were 25% (filing a restricted or unrestricted report), which is the highest reporting rate the military has on record (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). This rate reflects 6,131 reports of sexual assault (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). Of these,

4,660 were unrestricted reports and 1,840 were initial restricted reports. Of these restricted reports, 1,471 remained restricted reports (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a)

In addition to the bi-annual WGRA, the 2014 report included findings from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study (RMWS) (Morrall et al., 2015). The RAND Corporation study was commissioned by the DOD in early 2014. RAND was tasked with conducting “an independent assessment of the rates of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination in the military” (Morrall et al., 2015). The RMWS offered more precise measurements of sexual assault (crimes), and sexual harassment and gender discrimination (military equal opportunity violations) than what has been used in the WGRA (Morrall et al., 2015).

RAND Military Workplace Study

The RMWS was completed by more than 170,000 service members in August and September 2014. The study measured sexual assault as defined by Article 120 and Article 80 of the UCMJ, and sexual harassment and gender discrimination as defined in DOD Directive 1350.2 (Morrall et al, 2015). Major findings from this study were as follows.

In terms of sexual assault, which is a criminal offense under the UCMJ, an estimated 20,300 of 1.3 million active-component service members were sexually assaulted in the previous year. Broken down by gender, approximately 1.0% of servicemen (10,600) and 4.9% of servicewomen (9,600) were sexually assaulted. This is equal to approximately 1 in 20 women (Jaycox et al., 2015). This study further analyzed gender differences in sexual assault experiences. Compared to servicewomen, servicemen were more likely to have been assaulted multiple times in the previous year, were more likely to have been assaulted by multiple perpetrators during a single assault, and were

more likely to have been assaulted at work or on duty (Morrall et al., 2015). Servicemen tended to describe the assaults as “hazing or intended to abuse or humiliate them” (Morrall et al., 2015, p. 2). Men were also less likely to report or tell anyone about the assault. Airmen/women were at the lowest risk for sexual assault compared to all other branches of service (Jaycox et al., 2015), while the proportion of women in the Marine Corps and Navy who were sexually assaulted was significantly higher than other branches. Junior enlisted service members (E1-E4) had the highest rates (significantly higher) of victimization than any other pay grade (Jaycox et al., 2015). It is estimated that 90% of sexual assaults against active-component service members occurred in a military setting or were perpetrated by military personnel. Offenders were a man or men only in 79% of assaults, while a woman or women only were the perpetrator(s) in 15% of the cases. In cases where women were assaulted, offenders were a male or mix of men and women 98% of the time (Jaycox et al., 2015). In most cases, the victims knew the offender(s) (93% of women, 85% of men) (Jaycox et al., 2015).

Sexual harassment, which violates military equal opportunity policy, includes a “sexually hostile work environment – a workplace characterized by persistent or severe unwelcome sexual advances, comments, or physical conduct that offends service members” and “sexual quid pro quo – incidents in which someone uses his or her power to influence within the military to attempt to coerce sexual behavior in exchange for a workplace benefit” (Morrall et al., 2015, p. 4). Gender discrimination is defined as “incidents in which service members are subject to mistreatment on the basis of their gender that deprives them of equal opportunities within the military” (Morrall et al., 2015, p. 4). Results of this study indicate 116,000 active-component service members were

sexually harassed in the previous year, a figure which represents 22% of servicewomen and 7% of servicemen. Additionally, 43,900 service members endorsed experiencing gender discrimination (12% of servicewomen, 2% of servicemen). In almost 60% of these incidents the violations were committed by supervisors or unit leaders (Morrall et al., 2015). Most importantly, service members who endorsed experiencing sexual harassment or gender discrimination in the previous year had “far higher rates of sexual assault in the past year” thus supporting a link between sexual harassment and gender discrimination with sexual assault (Morrall, et al., p. 3). In the portion of the survey on beliefs and attitudes, 77% of women (versus 45% of men) endorsed “sexual harassment is either ‘common’ or ‘very common’ and 69% of women endorsed “discrimination against women is ‘common’ or ‘very common’” (Gore, Williams, & Ghosh-Dastidar, 2015, p. 55).

The RMWS also inquired about sexual assaults that occurred prior to joining the military. Approximately 2% of service members (8.2% of women and 0.9% of men) were sexually assaulted prior to joining the military, with Navy respondents endorsing at higher than average rates and Marines endorsing the lowest (Jaycox et al., 2015). When broken down by gender, women in the Marine Corps had the highest rate of pre-military sexual assault (9.64%), with Navy 9.00%, Army 7.69%, and Air Force 7.62% (Jaycox et al., 2015).

In terms of reporting, the study found 52% of women who reported offenses experienced professional or social retaliation after reporting. Among women who did report, types of retaliation included social retaliation (44.4%), professional retaliation (27.5%), unwanted administrative actions (25.1%), and punishments (10.4%) (Jaycox et

al., 2015). Interestingly, fear of retaliation was not generally endorsed as the primary reason people did not report sexual assaults and violations (Morral et al., 2015). More frequently service members “wanted to forget about it and move on, or because they thought it was not serious enough to report” (Morral et al., 2015, p. 3). Additionally, the RMWS found a double standard in that service members were more likely to encourage someone else who experienced sexual harassment to report it than if it happened to themselves (71.3% versus 61.1%) (Farris, Jaycox, Schell, Street, Kilpatrick, & Tanelian, 2015). The same held for sexual assaults (77.7% versus 67.5%) (Farris et al., 2015). This double standard may potentially be another barrier to reporting.

Sexual Assault

This literature review will now turn to the issue of sexual assault across settings. Researchers have examined many aspects of sexual assault, including risk factors, psychological outcomes, physical health outcomes, revictimization, perpetration, cultural issues, and so forth. Although examining all of these facets of the phenomenon is beyond the scope of the current study, a general overview of what is currently known about sexual assault survivors will be useful in understanding the risk factors, negative outcomes, and barriers to reporting in military settings.

According to the latest data in the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), there were 346,830 victims (age 12 or older) of rape/sexual assault in the United States in 2012 alone (Truman, Langton, & Planty, 2013). This rate translates to 1.4 rapes or sexual assaults per 1,000 people. Further, only 40% of rapes were reported, giving more support to the notion that rape and sexual assault are severely underreported crimes (Truman,

Langton, & Planty, 2013). The majority of sexual assaults and rapes (78%) are perpetrated by someone known to the victim (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013).

One issue that is prevalent in the scientific literature is that of revictimization (Classen, Palesh, & Aggarwal, 2005; Messman & Long, 1996; Messman-Moore & Long, 2003). “Revictimization” is the term used to describe childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors who are victimized again as adults (Messman & Long, 1996). Rates of revictimization in research samples have ranged from 15% to 79% (Roodman & Clum, 2001). Given the negative outcomes associated with cumulative trauma, more recent research has sought to understand the mechanisms and risk factors that leave CSA survivors vulnerable to revictimization. Researchers have examined factors such as PTSD symptoms (Cogle, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2009), interpersonal betrayal (Gobin & Freyd, 2009), living in high-poverty communities (Klest, 2012), cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors (Noll & Grych, 2011), and alcohol and sexual risk behaviors (Testa, Hoffman, & Livingston, 2010). Messman-Moore and Long (2003) separated areas of focus in their review of the revictimization literature into intrapersonal psychological factors (e.g. dissociation, risk recognition issues, substance abuse) and theoretical explanations (e.g. psychodynamic perspectives, an ecological model). The authors conclude that an overarching theoretical model must include both victim characteristics and perpetrator behaviors.

In addition to revictimization, one of the most well-studied aspects of sexual assault in the general population is post-assault sequelae (Campbell, Sprague, Cottrill, & Sullivan, 2011). Although not all survivors will develop mental and physical issues, survivors have consistently been shown to be at higher risk for physical, mental, and

interpersonal problems (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012) including depression and anxiety, substance abuse, gynecologic problems, chronic pain, high-risk behaviors, and so forth. Campbell and colleagues' review of longitudinal studies with sexual assault survivors found research on anxiety, depression, and heightened startle response in the late 1970s and early 1980s laid the scientific foundation for understanding survivors' mental health (2011). Later researchers extended this line of inquiry to include therapeutic interventions and prevention of substance abuse (Campbell, et al., 2011). Chen and colleagues (2010) reviewed epidemiological longitudinal studies between 1980 and 2008 and found a statistically significant association between sexual abuse and lifetime diagnoses of anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, PTSD, sleep disorders, and suicide attempts. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010), the most commonly diagnosed sexually transmitted infections among sexual assault survivors include trichomoniasis, bacterial vaginosis, gonorrhea, and chlamydial infection. Additionally, rape has been found to result in approximately 32,000 pregnancies per year (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1996).

In terms of reporting, it is generally known that sexual assault is an underreported crime. Reasons survivors give for not reporting include fear of reprisals, feeling guilty or ashamed, fear that they will not be believed, feeling nothing will be done, fearing the response of police and medical examiners, and so on (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Survivors are encouraged to report assaults in order to prosecute perpetrators and potentially prevent them from perpetrating again (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

Although this is only a brief overview of the issue, it is clear that sexual assault is a pervasive and multidimensional issue. Survivors are at increased risk for a myriad of negative outcomes. Feminist theory related to the interpersonal nature of sexual assault as an explanation for such outcomes will be reviewed next.

Feminist Paradigms and Sexual Assault

Feminist theorists and activists have been at the forefront of sexual assault awareness and activism since the 1970s (Herman, 1992). Throughout the 1970s, the women's movement in the United States spurred research, raised awareness, and changed the way society responds to victims (Herman, 1992). Most importantly, feminists shifted the definition of rape from a sexual act to a violent crime (Herman, 1992), meaning the motivation to rape is not based on sexual desire, but is rather the expression of power and dominance (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979). Empirical support for the relationship between dominance and sexual assault has been demonstrated over the decades since (Hockett, Saucier, Hoffman, Smith, & Craig, 2009). At its core, sexual assault is an attempt to violate another person's sense of control and autonomy (Herman, 1992). The ensuing guilt and shame seen often in survivors is "a response to helplessness, the violation of bodily integrity, and the indignity suffered in the eyes of another person" (Herman, 1992, p. 53). Self-blame or self-responsibility can serve a protective function for survivors who may rely on this process to build a sense of control over the assault (Koss & Harvey, 1991). In addition to disrupting an individual's sense of self, sexual assault also damages the survivor's interpersonal relationships and basic beliefs in the safety of the world around her (Herman, 1992).

Rape Myth Acceptance

In the late 1970s, feminist and social psychological research were combined to develop the concept of “rape myths.” Rape myths are defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) later operationalized the definition of rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Rape myths shift the blame for assault from perpetrators onto victims (Burt, 1998). Four main categories of rape myths that focus on victims include: nothing happened, no harm was done, she wanted or liked it, and she asked for it or deserved it (Burt, 1998). A full discussion of the function of rape myths is beyond the scope of the current paper, however, Lonsway and Fitzgerald address three main functions (1994). These include justifying the minimization of a crime so that individuals and society do not have to face reality (Brownmiller, 1975), rape myths as an example of the just world phenomenon (Gilmartin-Zena, 1987), and to oppress and socially control women (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980, 1991).

It is generally understood that the acceptance of rape myths is prevalent, at least within the United States. This affects survivors who may internalize rape myths, thus compounding a sense of shame and guilt (Ullman, 1996). At a time when survivors need the support of their social context to help them make sense of a traumatic experience that violated their sense of self, the pervasiveness of rape myths may actually exacerbate survivors’ negative experiences (Moor, 2007). Research on post-assault interactions between the victim and their support network, police, prosecutors, healthcare providers,

and so forth, has shown victims to be at risk for secondary victimization (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Groth & Birnbaum, 1979).

Research on rape myth acceptance (RMA) has shown attitudes and beliefs about rape are resistant to change and complexly linked to other attitudes (Roze & Koss, 2011). Numerous studies have found men endorse higher rates of RMA (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010), thus offering support for the feminist theory that gender inequality reinforces RMA (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Locke and Mahlick (2005) found that the higher men scored on conformity to masculine norms that included power over women, interpersonal power, disdaining gay men, and believing emotional involvement with sexual partners is a bad idea were associated with higher rates of RMA. RMA has also been found to predict an individual's self-reported likelihood to rape (Hockett, et al., 2009). Suarez and Gadalla's meta-analysis of rape myths also confirmed a positive association between RMA and sexual aggression and other hostile attitudes towards women (but not sexual promiscuity) (2010). Most notably, the researchers found other oppressive beliefs were present with RMA, including ageism, classism, religious intolerance, and racism. They posit this association is potentially an indicator of structural violence. Structural violence (Galtung, 1990) normalizes violence against certain individuals or groups.

Betrayal Trauma Theory

Several studies have shown women to be at greater risk for developing PTSD, even while controlling for trauma type (Kessler, Sonnega, & Bromet, 1995; Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Tolin & Foa, 2006). Tang and Freyd (2011) reviewed gender differences and PTSD, finding that higher rates of PTSD in women are partially

accounted for by greater incidence of sexual assault compared to men. DePrince and Freyd (2002) propose that “betrayal trauma” (BT) is partially accountable for higher rates of PTSD in women, who are more likely than men to experience assault at the hands of someone with whom they have a close, interpersonal relationship.

A “betrayal trauma” occurs when “the people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person’s trust or well-being” (Freyd, 2008, p. 76). “Betrayal trauma theory” (BTT) was developed to account for the impact of social relationships and context on post-traumatic outcomes (Freyd, DePrince, & Gleaves, 2007). Freyd (1996) has proposed a model of betrayal trauma to describe trauma related to childhood sexual abuse and other interpersonal violations. BT is conceived to occur when a person defies role expectations of care and protection. Clearly, MSA fits into this category. Initially, victims may feel distressed or confused and only later once they are able to comprehend the event as a violation or betrayal do more severe symptoms (such as dissociation and numbing) appear (Freyd, 1996). Additionally, victims must cope with the loss of relationship that occurs once they realize they have been violated by someone they trusted (Freyd, 1996).

BT can occur at the micro level (perpetrator is a member of the same unit or command) as well as the macro level (providers purposefully or inadvertently practice victim blaming; VA denies benefits). The issue of institutional betrayal trauma is a timely one. An executive report released in late March 2012 by the Vietnam Veterans of America and the Veterans Services Clinic at Yale Law School showed the US military discharged more than 31,000 service members due to personality disorder (PD) diagnoses between 2001-2010 (2012). Interestingly, discharge rates fell dramatically after media

and congressional attention were focused on this issue, from an average of 3,849 per year across all branches from 2001-2007 to 907 per year in 2008-2010. Veterans who are discharged based on a personality disorder diagnosis face not only the stigma related to such a diagnosis, but may be required to pay back enlistment bonuses, become ineligible for disability retirement pay, and are less likely to receive service-connected disability pay. From an outside perspective, MSA seems to be an experience with a high risk of feeling betrayed on multiple levels. This chapter will now focus on sexual assault in military settings.

Military Sexual Assault

Within research samples, prevalence rates of MSA have been difficult to determine (Gregory, Klest, & Platt, 2011) due to differences in samples, measurements, and varying definitions of MSA (Street, Kimerling, Bell, & Pavao, 2011; Suris & Lind, 2008), as well as general underreporting of sexual assaults. Zinzow, Grubaugh, Monnier, Suffoletta-Maierle, and Frueh (2007) compiled an excellent review of the literature on trauma among female veterans. They found the following prevalence rates among female veterans in literature published between 2002-2007: 38%-64% lifetime sexual assault, 24-49% adult sexual assault, 30%-45% military sexual trauma. The lifetime sexual assault prevalence rate is higher than that for civilian women (Zinzow, et al., 2007) meaning that servicewomen are more likely to report childhood or adult sexual assault.

Gender Issues and Differences

Although most research and media attention has focused on women's experiences with MST, men experience MST in similarly equal numbers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). The needs of male veterans who have experienced MST have often

been overlooked (Febrarro & Gill, 2010; Morris, Smith, Farooqui, & Suris, 2014; Street et al, 2011). Until recently, it was generally considered that men did not experience MST. The universal screening tool implemented by the Veterans' Health Administration (VHA) requires that all patients going through the VHA for healthcare be screened for MST (Street & Kimerling, 2006). Results from the screening show that roughly as many men as women report experiencing MST. Men are at greater risk for developing PTSD after sexual assault than women (Kang et al., 2005; Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995). Additionally, male service members have been found to be more susceptible to negative mental health outcomes related to sexual harassment than female service members (Street et al., 2007; Vogt et al., 2005). Male service members may be more likely to keep their MST a secret based on beliefs that nobody will believe them or that they will be stereotyped if others learn of their victimization status (Morris et al., 2014; Street et al., 2011). Further, male survivors may also struggle with more self-blame and shame than women. Again, the victim role is seen as counter to the key military value of servicemembers (and in particular men) being physically strong, in control of their environment, and incapable of being victimized. Concerns around sexual orientation and gender identity further create dissonance and stress for male victims of sexual harassment or assault (Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005). Morris and colleagues (2014) suggest future research comparing the experiences of men and women who have experienced MSA would be informative.

Men and women tend to experience and respond to MST differently (Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). Street, Vogt, and Dutra (2009) reviewed studies to evaluate stressors deployed women have faced in Afghanistan and Iraq. They noted that

in addition to increased risk for sexual assault, women in the military are also at increased risk for gender harassment (behaviors used to reinforce traditional gender roles, such as derogatory comments based on gender), which have been associated with negative mental health outcomes in female service members (Rosen & Martin, 1998). In fact, servicewomen were found to perceive gender harassment as more of a problem than sexually-based harassment (Rosen & Martin, 1998). Further incidences of gender harassment occur as servicewomen return home and adjust to the “Veteran woman” identity (Street, et al., 2009). Although great strides have been made in the public perception of women in the military, some sectors have yet to accept the concept that women are “real Veterans” or have been exposed to “real danger” (relative to Veteran men) (p. 692). This perception was highlighted when it was announced that the exclusion of women in combat would be lifted in January, 2013 (Peralta, 2013). The authors note that this may leave women Veterans feeling “unsupported, invalidated, or unappreciated for their service” (p. 692), which can make homecoming rather stressful. The social context’s response to women veterans can potentially act as a mediator between trauma exposure and postdeployment PTSD (Fontana, Schwartz, & Rosenheck, 1997).

There are several potential reasons research and media efforts have been more focused on women than men. One of these is the acceptance of the myth that men cannot be raped. By framing MSA as an issue only relevant to women, it meant only a minority of service members were affected by this crime. Another reason is that servicemen are more unlikely to report than servicewomen, making male MSA even more stigmatized. Recent literature reviews, as well as DOD reports, have called for more research into male victimology (Morris et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Defense, 2015a). By focusing

efforts on men's experiences, MSA will shift away from the premise that it is a women's issue. Decreasing the genderization of MSA will improve prevention efforts aimed at shifting military culture.

Risk Factors

Servicewomen report higher rates of CSA than civilian women (Rosen & Martin, 1996; Sadler, Booth, Cook, & Doebbeling, 2003). As discussed earlier, individuals who experience CSA are at risk for revictimization as adults (Classen, Paresh, & Aggarwal 2005; Merrill, et al., 1999; Messman-Moore & Long, 2003). Prevalence rates for CSA in women veteran samples range from 27%-49% (Zinzow, et al., 2007). Additionally, women may seek military service to remove themselves from violent environments (Sadler, Booth, Mengeling, & Doebbeling, 2004), thus increasing their risk for cumulative trauma. Cloitre, Scarvalone, and Difede (1997) found survivors of CSA reported difficulty labeling threat triggers. Interestingly, Himmelfarb and colleagues did not find CSA to be a predictor for MSA (2006), but did find CSA and MSA to predict the occurrence of post-military assault. The authors attributed this surprising finding to differences in methodological approaches and definitions of sexual assault. Stander and colleagues (2007) examined attrition rates in the Navy and found servicewomen who reported experiencing rape prior to entering their service were 1.69 times more likely to exit the Navy before their 4-year commitment was complete.

Risk factors for sexual assault in civilian settings (“alcohol use, risky sexual behavior, feared stigmatization for rejecting sexual advances”) (Messman-Moore & Long, 2003, p. 386) are also found in military settings. Goyal and colleagues presented a review of literature on servicewomen (active duty and veterans) and high-risk sexual

behaviors (2012). The researchers used the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force definition of high-risk sexual behavior, which included using condoms inconsistently, having multiple current partners, having a new partner, or having sex while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Goyal, et al., 2012). Servicewomen who were unmarried, young, and new to service were most likely to engage in sexually risky behaviors (Meyers, Wolff, Gregory, Marion, Moyer, Nelson, Petiti, & Sawaya, 2008). Further, 33% of respondents in one Army study reported binge drinking in the previous month (compared to 6-7% in the general population) (O'Rourke, Richman, Roddy, & Custer, 2008), which can lead to unwanted sexual activity (Goyal, et al., 2012). One qualitative study found Navy servicewomen engaged in binge drinking to fit in with the masculine military environment (Duke & Ames, 2008). Some researchers have pointed to the hypermasculine military culture as one of the greatest risk factors contributing to the occurrence and sustainment of sexual trauma in the military (Morris, 1996; Murdoch, Pryor, Polusny, Wall, Ripley, & Gackstetter, 2010; Rosen, Knudson, & Fancher, 2002).

Additionally, environmental factors have been found to contribute to sexual assault risk for women (Sadler, Booth, Cook, Torner, & Doebbeling, 2001). Sadler and colleagues' 2001 study on environmental risk factors for women's non-fatal assaults in the military found leadership tolerating sexual harassment, as well as unwanted sexual advances while on duty and in sleeping quarters were both independent risk factors. Interestingly, mixed gender sleeping quarters alone did not increase the odds of physical assault (Sadler, et al., 2001) but once sexually harassing behaviors occurred in sleeping quarters the risk increased almost sevenfold.

Assaults and harassment often occur where servicemembers live and work, meaning they are expected to continue working and living with their perpetrators (Street & Stafford, 2011). Servicewomen do not have the option to quit their jobs. Although they may request a transfer, to do so may require bringing attention to their assault. Further, victims may be relying on perpetrators to determine work assignments, performance evaluations, promotions decisions, and so forth. These forced interactions have been shown to lead to “an increased sense of feeling helpless, powerless, and at risk for additional victimization” (p. 8). The response of unit command and military hierarchy, as well as clinical providers, to sexual assault victims’ claims of harassment and/or assault present an opportunity for secondary victimization (Campbell & Raja, 2005). In addition to environmental and cultural risk factors, there are also unique risk factors on an individual level. Women who enter the military at a younger age, who are enlisted, and have less education are at higher risk of being assaulted (Sadler, Booth, Cook, & Doebbeling, 2003).

The Centers for Disease Control published individual, relationship, community, and societal risk factors for sexual violence perpetration (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Individual and relationship level factors have been consistently supported by research, whereas the community and societal level factors are theoretically-driven. Individual risk factors include alcohol and drug use; coercive sexual fantasies; delinquency; empathic deficits; general aggressiveness and acceptance of violence; early sexual initiation; preference for impersonal sex and sexual-risk taking; exposure to sexually explicit media; hostility towards women; adherence to traditional gender role norms; hypermasculinity; suicidal behavior; and prior sexual victimization or

perpetration (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Relationship level factors include a family environment characterized by physical violence and conflict; childhood history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse; emotionally unsupportive family environment; poor parent-child relationships, particularly with fathers; association with sexually aggressive, hypermasculine, and delinquent peers; and involvement in a violent or abusive intimate relationship (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Community level factors include poverty; lack of employment opportunities; lack of institutional support from police and judicial system; general tolerance of sexual violence within the community; and weak community sanctions against sexual violence perpetrators (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Societal factors include societal norms that support sexual violence; societal norms that support male superiority and sexual entitlement; societal norms that maintain women's inferiority and sexual submissiveness; weak laws and policies related to sexual violence and gender equity; and high levels of crime and other forms of violence (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

Psychological and Health Outcomes

Platt & Allard (2011) note that victims of MSA are facing a distinctive set of stressors that are involved in both a war zone environment and those associated with interpersonal betrayal. Most notably, being victimized conflicts with core values promoted by the military such as being strong and able to defend oneself. Street and colleagues (2011) describe a "shattering of key worldviews" that makes MSA so hard to resolve and overcome for service members (p. 139). Victims are often expected to remain silent about their experience in order to maintain unit cohesion. In addition to

remaining silent about their experience, MSA victims cannot rely on the support and shared experiences of their unit (unlike combat-related trauma).

Sexual assault has been linked to high rates of PTSD in both civilian and military populations (Kang, Dalager, Mahan, & Ishii, 2005) and has been found to be a stronger predictor for the development of PTSD than combat. Kimerling and colleagues (2007) found a strong association between sexual harassment and assault in military with the development of PTSD symptoms. Servicewomen who report a history of MSA in particular have been found to be nine times more at risk for developing PTSD than those with non-sexual assault histories (Suris, et al., 2007). Himmelfarb and colleagues (2006) compared rates of PTSD in groups who experienced sexual assault during premilitary, in military, or post-military timeframes. In their sample, 60% of those reporting MSA developed PTSD, whereas the premilitary and postmilitary groups had lower rates (47% and 55% respectively). MSA has been shown to be linked not only with symptoms of PTSD, but also a range of psychological concerns including depression and substance abuse (Suris, Lind, Kashner, Borman, & Petty, 2004), eating disorders (Skinner, Kressin, Frayne, Tripp, Hankin, Miller, & et al., 2000), emotion regulation, dissociation, somatization, self-perception, and interpersonal relationships (Luterek, Bittinger, & Simpson, 2011), mood and anxiety disorders, and suicidal ideation (Zinzow, et al., 2008).

In terms of physical health outcomes, sexual assault has been associated with increased pain-related physical health problems (Smith, Shipherd, Schuster, Vogt, King, & King, 2011), gynecological problems, back pain, gastrointestinal symptoms, and chronic fatigue (Frayne, Skinner, Sullivan, Tripp, Hankin, Kressin, & et al., 1999), and overall reporting of poorer health compared to those without a history of MSA (Skinner,

et al., 2000). Sadler and colleagues (2000) found female veterans' quality of life was reduced after sexual or physical assaults due to emotional and physical health. Suris and colleagues (2007) examined the impact of assault type on quality of life. Servicewomen with a history of MSA were compared to servicewomen with a history of civilian sexual assault. Women in the MSA group reported "significantly poorer quality of life" and higher rates of depression and alcohol abuse than the civilian group.

Minority Stress Model

Women are a minority in the military, making up approximately 15% of the active duty force. Further, traditionally feminine qualities tend to be undervalued in hypermasculine military environments. As such, military women experience an additional layer of stress compared to their peers who are of dominant identity groups. The minority stress model (MSM) (Meyer, 2003) was developed to account for the effects of stress individuals with minority identities experience within dominant cultures. Meyer described "minority stress" as "the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (p. 675). Meyer (2003) described distal and proximal stressors, with distal being objective or environmental stressors and proximal being subjective or internal stressors. Examples of distal stressors include discrimination and violence based on marginalized group membership. Proximal stressors are the internal experiences that result from interacting with the distal stressors, including expectations of rejection and internalized discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Researchers of minority stress posit this type of stress is unique in that it is additive stress requiring stigmatized individuals to engage in adaptive processes that non-stigmatized individuals do not. Further, minority stress is

chronic due to being based on social and cultural structures, which are generally constant. Minority stress is also unique in that it is socially based, within processes outside of the individual (Meyer, 2003). Minority identity is proposed to be a mediator of the effects of stress on an individual, in that minority identity can be a source of strength, or a secondary identity (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress, as it is presented in the MSM, may partially account for the effect of military culture and environment on servicewomen's mental and physical health outcomes.

Barriers to Reporting

Studies have shown that victims of civilian sexual assault tend not to report or seek healthcare, and this seems to be the trend in military settings as well (Kilpatrick, et al., 2007; Rennison, 2002; WGRA, 2013). In a national civilian sample, 15.8% reported the assault to police and only one-fifth of respondents sought post-assault healthcare (Kilpatrick, et al., 2007). Women who identified their assault as rape were significantly more likely to report.

There are several factors that make the experience of sexual trauma in military settings different than in civilian settings. Bryan and Morrow (2011) describe the "warrior culture" of the U.S. military as "one that values strength, resilience, courage, and personal sacrifice" (p. 17). Servicemembers are expected to "master stress without difficulty" (p. 17). When viewed through the lens of culturally-responsive care, it is clear that traditional mental health treatment models are both working as a barrier to care for servicemembers, as well as maintaining stigma around help-seeking within the military.

The 2012 WGRA revealed servicewomen were unlikely to report due to not wanting anyone to know (70%), feeling uncomfortable making a report (66%), thinking

their report would not be kept confidential (51%), believing nothing would come from reporting (50%), or hearing of others' negative experiences with reporting (43%). Some of these reasons speak to a lack of confidence in the military justice system, and others are not detailed enough to make conclusions about motivations to not report. From a feminist perspective, each of these reasons may speak to servicewomen's perceived lack of power in military settings. In Sadler and colleagues' (2003) cross-sectional survey looking at risk factors for military, one-fifth of the respondents did not report their assault because "rape was to be expected in the military" (p. 266). Further, the survey results reflected much of the same results of the WGRA 2012 survey, including "a sense of shame, futility, or fear of the possible negative effects of officially reporting rape" (Sadler, et al., 2003, p. 266). In a more recent study of barriers to reporting and receiving healthcare, 60% of respondents with a history of MSA endorsed not seeking healthcare because they "felt it wasn't needed" (Mengeling, Booth, Torner, & Sadler, 2014). Interestingly, in the same study, officers were less likely to report than enlisted servicewomen.

Given service members are subject to the UCMJ and do not have rights to pursue legal recourse in the civilian court system, it is understandable that sexual assault victims would be unlikely to pursue charges. Military values around not creating difficulty for others further complicate the situation. Commanders, who are responsible for events within their units, may be unlikely to go forward with punishments in the courts-martial system because they are ultimately responsible for the service members' behavior. Reporting offenses within the military justice system can affect commanders' reputations and service records, which are reviewed during the promotions process. Further, with

commanders of the accused perpetrator holding the responsibility to prefer charges, victims may be less motivated to report.

If sexual assault survivors are relying on the perpetrator or members of the perpetrator's social network for promotions or even survival, it is possible they may be more motivated to not report. This is aligned with the experiences of CSA survivors' experience described in the BTT research (Freyd, 1996). Research is needed to further examine the relationship between perceived betrayal and post-assault outcomes. Having a better understanding of this relationship can inform changes to DOD assault prevention and response policy, healthcare offered to survivors, and mental health interventions.

Summary and Conclusion

Sexual assault is an experience that can lead to a multitude of negative mental, physiological, and interpersonal outcomes. Sexual assault in military settings appears to be particularly traumatic in that servicewomen are in a position where they may be relying on perpetrators for leadership and promotions, and in some cases, survival. The experience of being assaulted by a fellow service member appears to compound the already negative experience of sexual assault by affecting victims physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, vocationally, and interpersonally. Further, experiencing and then reporting an assault appears to go against military culture, which values physical and emotional strength and putting the needs of the group above the individual.

Purpose of the Study

A review of the literature shows a lack of qualitative inquiry into why some servicewomen choose not to report or seek healthcare post-assault. Quantitative inquiry is useful for understanding group experiences, but qualitative research is needed to better

understand the unique experiences of assaulted servicewomen. Further, no studies have yet examined the potential relationship between betrayal and MSA in terms of barriers to reporting. A review of the existing literature shows that servicewomen are not reporting for vaguely-described reasons often supplied by surveys (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013c).

By using a feminist approach to qualitative inquiry, the servicewomen's voices will be used to better understand the phenomenon. The transformative purpose of this study is to amplify the voices of servicewomen who were assaulted within a culture and context that encourages victims not to report and which tolerates sexual harassment and degradation of women (Hlad, 2013). A qualitative study can provide MSA survivors an avenue for expressing their unique experience with MSA, the UCMJ, and potentially, their experience of betrayal.

Research Questions

This study will explore the following three research questions:

1. What barriers to reporting did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive?
2. What role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is rooted in idiographic (individual) and hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology, meaning the researcher is interested in uncovering the essence of the individual's experience, with the caveat that the researcher's own experience is part of the interpretation process (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was developed for use in psychological research and has been adapted for use in related social sciences as well as health sciences (Smith et al., 2009). The IPA researcher is described as making meaning of participants' meaning making (Smith et al., 2009). IPA participants are expected to be small in number and have shared the experience under study (Smith et al., 2009). A homogenous sample is needed to investigate the essence of participants' experience (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA was particularly suited to this study for several reasons. The first, and most important, is that IPA is the method to use if one is attempting to examine the *meaning* that participants make of an experience, such as in this study. Second, it is congruent with my values around feminist inquiry and social justice. Servicewomen are an oppressed group within a patriarchal, hypermasculine military culture. Research to date on this population has mostly been quantitative in nature, which reduces participants' experiences to numbers and statistical analyses. These approaches are useful for understanding group experiences, however, they do not inform researchers concerning what the individual servicewoman experiences as a result of being assaulted. A line of inquiry that highlights individual participants' experiences and amplifies their voices also deserves a place in the collective knowledge. Third, numerical data may have the effect

of neutralizing the impact of a traumatic experience by dehumanizing it. To read about statistical significance is one thing. To read about a woman vividly describing the experience of being assaulted is quite another and could lead the reader to different conclusions. Fourth, in my opinion, one's biases and life experience can never be fully "bracketed off" as is expected in traditional phenomenological inquiry (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). To acknowledge and then make use of these biases seems to be a more useful approach to data collection and analysis.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What barriers to reporting did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive?
2. What role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision?

Participants

Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest a sample size of three to five participants, which should provide enough data to explore both similarities and differences between cases without overwhelming the researcher with data. As such, this study included three participants total. Participants were women Veterans or active duty servicewomen who were sexually assaulted while serving in either Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2011) or Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2014) in any of the service branches, and did not file a restricted or unrestricted report. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, women with a recent history (within the previous six months) of self-harm (intentional injury without suicidal intention), suicidal behaviors, or diagnosis of substance use disorder were excluded from the study. Additionally, women with a diagnosis of Borderline

Personality Disorder (BPD) were excluded due to the high risk for suicidal and self-harm behaviors (Black, Blum, Pfohl, & Hale, 2004). The above risk factors were assessed based on self-report utilizing an initial screening questionnaire (Table 1).

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were recruited locally through advertisements at the Iowa City VA Medical Center, University of Iowa Veterans' Center, rape crisis centers, and women's centers in the Iowa City area. Participants were also recruited through advertisements at Veterans Centers on college campuses across the United States. The University of Iowa research list-serv was utilized to send out a recruitment email to all students, staff, and faculty who are subscribed to it. Lastly, participants were recruited through announcements posted with military sexual assault advocacy groups' websites such as Servicewomen's Action Network (servicewomen.org), and Protect Our Defenders (protectourdefenders.org), as well as women Veterans groups' Facebook pages.

Once participants were recruited, they were given a screening questionnaire to assess for the above-mentioned risk factors including recent suicidality and self-harm, substance use disorder diagnosis, and/or BPD diagnosis (see Table 1). If they met all selection criteria, an interview was scheduled. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and via Skype. The interview protocol, provided in Table 2, allowed participants to talk about their experiences in the military at length, while also providing prompts that allowed them to focus on their experience with sexual assault. Interviews were audiotaped with the participants' permission. Interview length ranged from 1-1.5 hours. Debriefing occurred after the interviews and participants were given mental health

Table 1. Screening Questionnaire

1. In what branch did you serve in the military?
2. When did you serve?
 - a. If between 2001-present, proceed.
 - b. If before 2000, stop.
3. Did you experience a sexual assault while serving in the military?
 - a. Yes, proceed.
 - b. No, stop.
4. Did you report the assault or seek healthcare?
 - a. No, proceed.
 - b. Yes, stop.
5. Have you ever been diagnosed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist with Borderline Personality Disorder?
 - a. No, proceed.
 - b. Yes, stop.
6. In the past 6 months, have you:
 - a. Engaged in self-injurious behaviors without suicidal intention?
 - i. No, proceed.
 - ii. Yes, stop.
 - b. Engaged in suicidal behaviors?
 - i. No, proceed.
 - ii. Yes, stop.
 - c. Been diagnosed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist with a substance use disorder?
 - i. No, proceed.
 - ii. Yes, stop.
7. Are you available for a 1-hour interview that will take place in person at your home or a location at the University of Iowa campus?
 - a. Yes, proceed.
 - b. No, stop.
8. Would you be willing to be audiotaped during the one-hour interview, with the audio being available only to myself (the researcher)?

Table 2. Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me how you came to join the military?

Possible prompts: How did you choose which branch to serve in? What was your MOS/Rate? How did you feel about joining the military at the time?

2. What was your unit like?

Possible prompts: How was your relationship with your command? Was there anything surprising or unexpected about serving?

3. As you know, I'm interviewing veterans to learn more about why some people chose not to report sexual assaults that occurred while serving. Bringing one particular sexual assault experience that happened while you were on active duty to mind, can you tell me about the events leading up to the assault?

Possible prompt: Was this your only experience of being sexually assaulted? When did the assault occur (while deployed? While working?)? Can you tell me more about the environment prior to the assault (safety? harassment?)?

4. Can you tell me about the assault?

Possible prompts: Did you know the assailant?

5. What happened in the hours and days after the assault?

Possible prompts: How did you feel? How did you make sense of what had happened? Was there anyone you went to for support?

6. Can you tell me about your decision not to report the assault after it occurred?

Table 2 – continued

Possible prompts: Were you aware of what your reporting options were? How did you feel about your decision?

7. What did you anticipate might happen if you reported the assault?

Possible prompts: others finding out? Triggering prosecution? Expectations of outcomes? Disrupting your unit?

8. How were things for you after the assault, in terms of relationships?

Possible prompts: co-workers, friends, command, family?

9. Did experiencing the assault impact your decision to remain in or leave the military?

Possible prompts: did the assault impact your perception of the military? How do you feel about the military now?

10. Looking back, how do you feel you were able to get through this experience?

Possible prompts: Internal resources? Social support?

resources in case the need arose for services after the interview concluded, including their local medical center mental health clinic contact information and crisis line information.

Data Analysis Procedures

All interviews and journals were first transcribed by myself in order to become quickly familiar with the data. All transcripts were produced in Microsoft Word and password-protected. Transcripts noted verbal content as well as non-verbal behaviors that contributed to the narrative. Audio files of interviews will be permanently destroyed six months after the conclusion of the study.

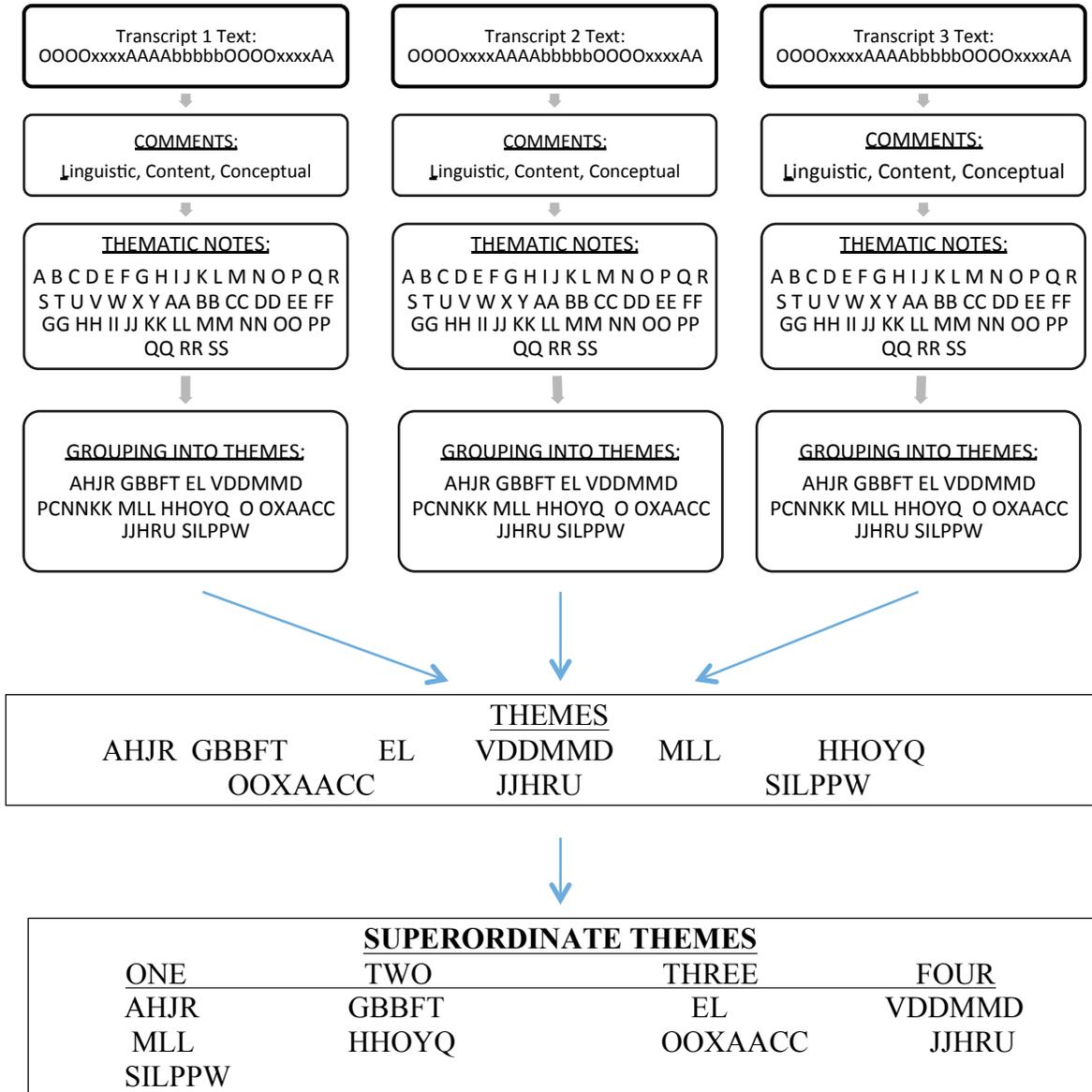
IPA methodology is focused on learning what “matters” to participants and what “meaning” they make of what matters (Larkin & Thompson, 2011, p. 105). IPA takes an idiographic approach to analysis, meaning each case is analyzed individually (Smith, et al., 2009). Smith and colleagues (2009) provide an outline of the analytic process in IPA. Although not the only approach to IPA analysis, the following steps guide researchers through the analytic process. A flow chart outlining the analytic process is available in Figure 1.

Step 1: Reading and Re-reading

The initial step in analysis is to immerse oneself in the first written transcript and focus on the participant. As initial connections and observations come to the researcher’s mind, they are encouraged to write this down to return to later. Rather than quickly reading through the transcript, the researcher must “slow down” and begin paying attention to meaningful portions of the interview, which may be dispersed throughout the transcript.

Step 2: Initial Noting

Figure 1. Flow Chart of Steps of Analysis



Although IPA does not require the researcher to divide the transcript into “meaning units,” and then comment on each unit, a set of detailed notes and comments is the goal of Step 2 (p. 83, Smith, et al., 2009). This close analysis focuses on the description of that which matters to the participant, and the meaning the participant makes. The researcher examines the language utilized by the participant, the context in which the events take place, and then moves to a more abstract conceptualization of the meaning the participant makes. “Exploratory commenting” utilizes three discrete types of comments including descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83-84,).

Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes

In this step, analysis shifts to focus on the exploratory comments developed in Step 2, rather than details of the transcript. This involves developing an interpretative account, which arises from the researcher using their psychological knowledge to attempt to understand the meaning for participants of the particular concerns that arise (hermeneutic approach). Larkin and Thompson (2011) refer to this process as a “dialogue” between the researchers, their coded data and their psychological knowledge (p. 109).

Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

Once themes have emerged, they are then mapped or charted according to the relationships determined by the researcher. Connections between themes may appear through processes including (but not limited to) abstraction (“putting like with like”), subsumption (placing themes under one main theme), polarization (cluster by opposite

relationships), contextualization (placing themes within narrative events), numeration (frequency), function (of behavior, language, and so forth) (Smith et al., 2009, p. 96-99).

Step 5: Moving to the Next Case

Once the first case has been analyzed, the researcher then moves to the next step to begin the process again. It is important for the researcher to maintain the idiographic approach to data and allow new, or possibly unique themes to develop in the next case. This process begins anew with each subsequent case.

Step 6: Looking for Patterns Across Cases

The final step in analysis is to examine the data across cases to look for patterns across multiple cases. It is at this stage that the researcher may move to a more theoretical level of analysis. There is no one perfect level of analysis according to Smith and colleagues (2009). However, researchers are encouraged to move to as interpretative of an account as they are comfortable with.

Establishing Validity and Trustworthiness

Similar to other qualitative methods, I recorded my personal reflections during the inquiry process (Smith, et al., 2009). Trustworthiness is established in IPA through this reflexive process, supervision and consultation, and/or an external audit (Smith, et al., 2009). Validity for this study was established through each of these three methods.

Throughout the analysis stage I participated in ongoing supervision with a member of my dissertation committee to discuss reflexivity and the validity of the findings. These supervision sessions occurred following each interview with participants, and following the completion of analysis of each transcript. Within these supervision sessions, initial impressions and thematic findings were discussed.

Further, once relationships and patterns of themes were established, the findings were subjected to an external audit to test the interpretive validity. All transcripts, notes, and findings were provided to the auditor who was familiar with IPA and feminist theory, but did not participate in any other aspects of the study. The independent auditor provided feedback on their ability to follow my process from the raw data of the interviews through the steps of analysis to the results. The auditor also provided feedback on feminist interpretations of the data. Once the findings were subjected to validity testing, a narrative was created that guides the reader through my interpretation.

Role of the Researcher

As in all qualitative research methodology, the researcher was considered the primary instrument in this study. Particularly with IPA, the researcher's analysis is expected to be influenced by their worldview. As such, an identification of my biases, values, and experiences that could potentially affect the study should be discussed. I initially became aware of the topic of military sexual assault as a counseling graduate student in San Diego. I was interested in working with military populations, and the issue of power and control inherent in sexual assault further piqued my intellectual interest. The topic then became dormant until early 2012 when a confluence of events re-energized my interest, including my commissioning as a Naval officer, the release of the documentary *The Invisible War* (and subsequent increased media coverage), and my work with military sexual assault survivors at the local VA outpatient mental health clinic.

My commissioning and subsequent involvement with the Navy and military culture at large has been informative regarding the norms and values of the culture. I

participated in the Navy's Officer Development School in June 2013. During the 5-week training, I was exposed to the "militarization" phase of my Naval career. Included in this course were several one- to two-hour SAPR trainings on preventing assault, as well as information on victim care. Additionally, there were posters in the women's restrooms about reporting options, how to increase one's safety, with whom one can discuss an assault with confidentiality, and so forth. I noted at the time that the posters were heavily victim-focused (rather than perpetrator-focused). Since the course was designed for staff officers who are clinicians and professionals (doctors, nurses, lawyers, dentists, psychologists, and so forth) the indoctrination was focused more on Naval history and customs than on how to be a "warrior." Although I was on inactive duty while in school, I remained connected to the Navy psychology community through list-servs, newsletters, and social media. I began serving active duty as a clinical psychology intern and lieutenant while analyzing the interviews in this study. Subsequently, as I continued to work full time as an officer and intern, my interpretation of the data was undoubtedly affected in that I was able to provide more of an emic perspective on military culture that the participants described working and living in. For example, I was supporting patients as they navigated the reporting process and military prosecutions under the UCMJ. In addition to working with sexual assault survivors, I also came to understand the power and effect of living within the rank hierarchy, which was discussed by the participants at length. Having a greater understanding as an insider provided a lens that is unique to this study.

In addition to my personal experience in the military, the documentary "The Invisible War" presented first-hand accounts of military sexual assault including factors

leading up to the assaults, the military's response, the public's response, and most importantly, the broad and singular effects on the servicewomen's lives. Watching the documentary as a newly-commissioned officer sensitized me to military women's issues at large, the far-ranging effects of military sexual assault, and the need for collective action to effect change. Working with military sexual assault survivors to address psychological and emotional issues impacted me personally and professionally. Experiencing these events influenced my adoption of feminist values, rather than feminist values pushing me to work with this population.

As a feminist, my assumption is that patriarchy exists, particularly in the military where the culture does not value women and feminine qualities as much as men and masculinity. As a clinician, my assumption is that servicewomen are pushed to adopt patriarchal values in order to adapt to the context and that these values present a barrier to help-seeking. Although I will be attuned to power differentials as they arise in the data, I also do not view the participants as "victims" who have no power themselves. In fact, the survivors I have worked with have shown great strength in the face of adversity. Finally, I believe that the root of the issue of sexual assault in the military lies in the hyper-masculine "warrior culture" which values physical dominance, taking power from others, and despises being victimized (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Hlad, 2013). This worldview certainly has potential to bias the findings of this study, but IPA makes provisions for using the researcher's worldview to inform findings (Smith et al., 2009).

As data was collected and analyzed, I participated in ongoing supervision with a member of my dissertation committee, who has experience providing psychological services to survivors of sexual violence and does not have any military experience.

Through our dialogues, I was able to note when the aforementioned biases emerged and shaped my understanding of the participant's experience. As my supervisor challenged my thinking and required clarification of my thought process, we were able to come to a more balanced understanding that reflected the emic perspective on my part, and the etic perspective on hers. The external auditor also shared the experience of providing clinical services to survivors of sexual violence, and did not have any military experience in her background. Through her additional questioning and clarification, the analysis continued to be balanced between the participants' narratives and my frameworks.

Conclusion

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA was chosen for this study to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences while incorporating my own experience as part of the interpretation process. Two main research questions were presented, as well as an overview of the sample of participants, data collection procedures, and steps of data analysis. An overview of my role as the researcher, including biases and a feminist framework for interpreting data was provided. The next chapter will present the results for this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the results for this study. The chapter will be organized in the following manner. First, an overview of the participants' military and sexual assault experiences is presented as a way to provide context for the following discussion of results. Following, themes are introduced and include descriptive quotes from participants. A summary of themes is provided in Table 3. Lastly, a summary of findings will be provided.

As discussed in Chapter 3, results are based on interviews with three participants. The final sample included three women who ranged in age from 30 to 43 years old; all three women were Caucasian. Their service branches included the Navy, Army National Guard, and Marine Corps. Length of military career ranged from 9 to 24 years. Participants' military occupational specialties included aviation supply specialist, bridge crewmember, and aviation (declined to specify). One participant was continuing to serve on active duty presently, one elected to separate from the service, and one retired. Four superordinate themes emerged from the data including: (1) external factors, (2) internal processes, (3) interpersonal aspects, and (4) focus on the future. The chapter will now turn to a contextual overview of participants' experiences.

Participants' General Military Experience

All three participants discussed their motivation to join the military. Joining for the benefits of service, whether monetary or experiential, was consistent across all three participants. Military service provided a way for each individual's financial or

Table 3. Summary of Emergent Themes

Theme	Central Meaning
<i>External: Environment & Culture</i> -Gender Issues -Hostile Environment -Military-specific Aspects	Aspects of the environment and culture which contributed to or detracted from safety and belonging
<i>Internal: Psychological & Emotional Processes</i> -Shock -Internalized Rape Myths -Risk/benefit Analysis -Protection -Breaking Point -Meaning Making	Internal processes that supported or detracted from reporting assaults and harassment
<i>Interpersonal: Social Context's Response</i> -Validation and Invalidation -Betrayal	Experiences with others that either validated or invalidated beliefs
<i>Focus on Future</i>	Cultural shift needed to effect real change

psychological needs to be met. Participants varied in the extent to which they considered their decision an informed one.

Sarah came from a family of sailors and described a heavy Naval influence in her family. For her, the Navy was seen as a provider. She discussed how her life circumstances pushed her to finally enlist, after considering service for seven years:

I was terrified, but I was excited. I, I had nothing, I mean I had \$16 to my name and so I was excited about getting on my feet and being able to take care of myself and my son. I was a little bit older, I was coming in at 24 and at the time I had had to move in with relatives and it was really humbling and humiliating and so I was looking forward to the independence that being a sailor would give me. [...] all of those things kind of just led me back to this is my chance to kind of start over from scratch, here are all the things that I need, the Navy would provide [them], I regret not doing it before so, you know, I'm gonna take a leap and go join the Navy.

Similarly, Lee had family members who were in the Army National Guard. Lee was 17 years old when she enlisted and described a childhood marked by poverty and neglect:

I came from a very poor family, single mom, lived off welfare, I mean there was times we never had any food in the house, you know, I'd go eat at the neighbors or go find somewhere to eat. And so for me, I found [enlisting] as survival.

Lee described a less empowered decision to enlist than Sarah, one in which she was deceived by family members, and bullied:

Well, I was not making good decisions in high school and getting in a lot of trouble and, my uncle who was a Vietnam vet served on active duty [and] was in the local National Guard unit and so was his son, and they tricked me and sent me to a recruiter and sat me down when I was 16 and basically said this is your life and this is your choice. This is what you need to do. [...] I was not expecting that because they told me a lie, [they said] they needed a ride and it led out to the recruiting station and then when I went in they weren't nice, they said sit your ass down, and the recruiter had everything laid out, ready to go.

Jessica shared a parallel experience of feeling a sense of deception by a family member. She was also a teenager at the time, and described her decision to enlist as being her choice, but the decision to join the Marine Corps having been her father's:

Actually, I didn't really decide, my dad decided for me. He said, he had always told me if I got good grades, I wanted to be a lawyer, and he always told me if I got good grades he would pay for me to go to college. And then when that time came, he asked me, "well what are you doing when you graduate?" And I said I'm going to college and he said, it's like, "eh yeah that's not gonna happen, we can't afford it." So I suggest the military, and he was very adamant that he wanted me to join the Marine Corps and so I didn't really know what I was getting into.

Jessica also shared the experience of coming from a "broken home" in which she had a stepmother who she described as "hugely mentally abusive." For her, the military was also a way for her to escape that environment.

In terms of their careers in the military, each participant described different motivations to stay in or separate from the service. Sarah intends to have a career in the Navy, and is pursuing the enlisted-to-officer route. For her, the decision to pursue a career is an empowered one, fueled by pride in her service:

I don't want to quit just because it got hard you know. It gets hard for everybody at some point. I think it is harder for women especially. I'm a single mom so I think it's uniquely difficult for me, but I feel like I have so much to give and I want to be here, I want the service, I want the pride in it, and I want to show other people that it can be done, you know, just cause your life circumstances aren't ideal, it doesn't mean that you can't do it. So I don't know, I feel like I get a lot out of it.

Lee decided to separate from the National Guard as a result of years of negative experiences, during which she described being targeted, and having poor leadership and lack of support. She noted, "They tried to get me to stay in, they dangled Sergeant in front of me like, oh we'll promote you, [and I] said I was done. I was like, I'm done, I'm completely done."

Jessica retired from the Marine Corps as a Gunnery Sergeant, after serving for 24 years. Similar to Lee, her decision to retire came after reaching a breaking point at a command within a hostile environment. Her decision was also responded to by leaders who attempted to get her to stay in:

I dropped my papers [...], I could've picked up Msgt, my mentor really wanted me to stay in so that I could pick up Msgt, but I would've had to stay where I was and that was absolutely not gonna happen, I was not gonna stay there. I was not going to continue to put up with it and at this point it was just like you know what [...] the only thing I have to gain is meds, like (*laughs*), like I'm gonna be on meds, [...] I'm gonna lose my mind. And it just, for me it wasn't worth it. That extra rank, because I would've had to wait for the next [selection] boards so that would've been a year and then I would've had to pin on so whenever that would've happened, and then I would've had to have been that rank for another two years. So [...] you're talking about four or five more years at that place. That was absolutely not gonna happen. No. Under no circumstances was that [going to happen].

Jessica further described the mixed emotions that came with her decision to retire, "It's so hard because I love the organization. I love the organization itself. So it shows you just how brainwashed you are (*laughs*). You can put up with so much crap and still be like, 'I love it.'"

Although each participant described joining the military for differing reasons, they each shared complex feelings about the military. Each participant described multiple incidents of sexual assault and harassment, but varied in the way these experiences impacted their decision to stay in or leave the service (to be discussed further in later sections of this chapter). The chapter now turns to these experiences.

Participants' Assault Experiences

All of the participants described several experiences of sexual assault and harassment while serving on active duty. The assaults and harassment occurred on and off base, perpetrators were friends and strangers, and participants varied in whether they

reported the assaults. A summary of participants' assault experiences is available in Table 4.

Sarah's first sexual assault occurred while she was waiting to move to begin A-school (advanced training after boot camp). She did not report the assault. The perpetrator was a fellow sailor who had been helping her get around the base and acted as a friend. Her second assault occurred when she offered to help a fellow sailor get to where he needed to go on base during working hours. She attempted to report this assault by telling her friends/co-workers what had occurred immediately following the assault. One of her friends told their LPO (lead petty officer) what had occurred. The LPO stated Sarah would need to come talk to him directly in order to file a report. Sarah felt "too embarrassed" to follow up with the LPO. She described a physical assault at a later command after which her leadership intervened to defend her and correct her shipmate's actions. Sarah also described a hostile work environment due to one co-worker who frequently used derogatory and misogynist language. Sarah confronted the co-worker and reported him to her LPO.

Lee described serving in units in which harassment and hostility were prevalent. Given her service in the National Guard, her relationships with the people she served with continued while off of active duty. Lee's first sexual assault occurred the first night on their way to deploy to Iraq for a year. The perpetrator was a member of her unit with whom she had attended high school. Lee did not report the assault. Lee further described ongoing harassment and hostility towards women at the hands of her fellow Guardsmen while deployed. Lee's second assault occurred a few years later and again the perpetrator was a fellow member of her unit. She did not report the assault at the time. Later, while

Table 4. Summary of Participant Experiences

Participant	Experiences with assault and harassment
<i>Sarah</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sexual assault (rape) – did not report2. Sexual assault (groping) – attempted to report, report not filed3. Physical assault (arm grabbing) – colleagues and leadership intervened4. Hostile work environment (ongoing derogatory language) – reported
<i>Lee</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sexual assault (attempted rape) – did not report2. Sexual assault (attempted rape) – did not report3. Sexual harassment – attempted to report
<i>Jessica</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. “Pre-Tailhook”: ongoing harassment and assaults – reporting procedures not in place2. Attempted gang rape – sergeant intervened3. Sexual assault (unwanted sexual contact) – did not report, confronted perpetrator4. Physical assault – did not report, self-advocated through outside channels

the unit was deployed in South America, the perpetrator began verbally harassing and humiliating her in front of the unit. At this time, Lee attempted to report the harassment. In response, the perpetrator stated he was going to report she had sexually harassed him. At this point Lee stated she felt “backed into a corner,” and attempted to report the second sexual assault. Lee experienced ongoing harassment from members in her unit until she left the service.

Jessica served a lengthy career in the Marine Corps, spanning multiple decades in which great changes were made to sexual harassment and assault policies in the military. Jessica separated these periods of time into “pre-Tailhook” and “after Tailhook,” marking the events around the Tailhook scandal in 1992 as a turning point in how women were treated. In 1992, at the annual convention of active duty and retired Naval aviators in the Tailhook Association, 70 officers were implicated in the assaults of at least 26 women at the Las Vegas hotel where the convention was being held (Schmitt, 1992). This number is suspected to be lower than the actual number given most attendees refused to cooperate in the investigations. As a result of public scrutiny, the military began to institute “zero tolerance” policies in regards to sexual harassment and assault, and instituted sexual harassment training. Jessica described sexual harassment and assault of women as to be expected in the Marine Corps when she was younger, and alluded to having been subjected to hostile living and working conditions. During the period of inclusion for this study (2003-2015), she was assaulted by a friend/colleague and did not report the assault.

Each participant appeared to be in varying places in terms of how they have processed their experiences of sexual assault and harassment. Sarah stated she had never

sought counseling or discussed her assaults with anyone prior to this interview. Her style of discussing her experience seemed to be one of processing as she answered the interviewer's questions. By contrast, Lee reported she had been in counseling for several years. Her style of communicating seemed to have a more narrative tone, as if she had told her story many times over. Her responses to the interviewer's questions were more tangential, and moved away from sharing what she was experiencing internally (psychologically and emotionally) at the time to what was occurring in her environment or what she has experienced since. Jessica communicated as if she were feeling the emotions that she had at the time of the events she was describing, particularly anger or frustration. She too has been in counseling, although only more recently. For Jessica, the experience of betrayal by leadership and the organization she had given her life to was the most distressing (rather than harassment and assaults). Overall, the participants' accounts can be summed up as focusing on the internal (Sarah), external or environmental (Lee), and organizational or cultural (Jessica). Within these broad frameworks, consistencies and similarities appeared across the participants' accounts, regardless of what the main focus of the individual narrative was. These similarities will be discussed at length in the following sections.

Themes

Four superordinate themes emerged from the data, somewhat parallel to the aforementioned frameworks, including 1) external factors, 2) internal processes, 3) interpersonal aspects, and 4) focus on the future.

External Factors

Participants described environments that made living and working as women difficult, thus putting them at risk for victimization and making it difficult to report. Problems in the environment included misogyny and other issues related to gender; hostile environments in which harassment and misconduct were the norm; and military-specific aspects such as the rank hierarchy, the influence of leadership, SAPR policies, and the UCMJ.

Gender Issues

The role and impact of gender on participants' military experiences emerged in all three interviews. Participants described environments in which women were treated as less than, targeted for hostility and harassment, and devalued for being women. Interestingly, all three participants used the terms "women" and "victim" interchangeably when discussing sexual assaults and harassment. One has to wonder whether this is the result of rape and assault being framed as "women's issues" generally (across civilian and military settings), whether the participants feel rape and assault is an "occupational hazard" for servicewomen, whether rape and assault are framed as only happening to those who can be victimized (and thus anti-masculine), or because of rape culture more generally (or any combination of the above). For example, Sarah stated, "You don't want to blame the perpetrator, the guys, you know this is a problem with the men in the military and women are always the victim, so the victims are always right." Jessica also stated:

So I think they have scaled [hazing] back, and actually made hazing safe which is a good thing, whereas with sexual assault there's, there's no safe sexual assault (*laughs*) you know what I mean? It's still, it's still on the women. Whereas hazing

has never been on the person who was hazed, it's always been on the perpetrator.
(Jessica, Marine Corps)

If the terms “women” and “victim” are used interchangeably by the participants, then it follows to think not in terms of “victim blaming” but rather “women blaming.”

Participants described feeling as though they had adapted to the hypermasculine environment of the military. Lee succinctly described the process, simply stating she felt, “like I was one of the boys you know? The boys will be boys” in the unit where she felt the most comfortable and socially supported. Sarah's experience was more specific to the aviation community in which she worked:

I worked [in] an aviation squadron, and maintainer humor, like flightline humor is pretty crass, and so I had to adjust to that and I worked in a shop with 50-some odd people and almost all of them were men, and for the most part they were fine, it was like having you know, your older brothers, you know with their dirty jokes and stuff but nothing that I couldn't, that I was super uncomfortable with, you know. A lot of jokes I didn't understand and they'd laugh at my expense and stuff because I just didn't get a lot of it but I didn't feel, I didn't feel harassed.
(Sarah, Navy)

Similarly, Jessica's description of her experience was specifically related to the “alpha” culture of the Marine Corps. However, unlike Sarah whose adaptation developed in spite of having a more naïve, feminine personality than her peers, Jessica seemed to attribute her ease in adapting to the environment to her personality:

I thought that I had a great camaraderie with my other Marines. And I'm a very thick-skinned person, [I'm] not phased by men, I'm not someone who, [for example] the word fuck doesn't offend me, you know what I mean? Like, I'm just not that person, I'm pretty thick-skinned, I have a pretty good sense of humor. And I thought I had a really great rapport with my fellow Marines. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

The ability to adapt to the environment was undoubtedly a protective factor for each woman. If the participants were able to fit in and avoid standing out, they were less likely to be targeted by sexist and misogynist behaviors described later in this chapter.

Although each participant described positively adapting to the hypermasculine environment, all gave examples in which women were devalued by their peers. This issue was more distressing for Lee and Jessica, who gave several examples in which women were devalued. Sarah provided one example in which an individual's misogynist behaviors were tolerated:

There was one individual in particular that was in my shop that I, I couldn't stand, he was a pig and I ended up, I ended up reporting him to our [lead petty officer] because he created a hostile work environment. He was constantly coming in and talking very loud and obnoxious and just talking about his, his conquests with women. He called them bitches, you know sluts, very degrading and so this went on for a long time, this is just how he was, it was how he talked to everybody and so I got sick of hearing it. And nobody ever said anything, I was really surprised, we even had a female Chief in the shop at the time, and nobody batted an eye. It was just, how he was and everybody had accepted this. (Sarah, Navy)

Lee and Jessica focused on broader descriptions of misogyny within their units or branch.

In hypermasculine environments, internal rifts along gender lines may appear more frequently, with women being devalued by their peers. Lee described an incident in which women were targeted by their male peers:

[...] at that point, the women in the unit, [the] few ladies that were sergeants, [...] they started speaking up saying that's not right, those younger females don't need to be treated [like that]. We had another sergeant who had cheated on her husband with another guy in the unit and there [were] letters that were laying around the unit that called us [women] Camp Whorehouse, and that us women [were] nothing but whores, so the unit started, started kind of perking up like, oh something [bad] could happen. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica had a broader perspective of the issue, discussing the effects of women Marines being devalued by the organization at large:

Whereas with women it doesn't matter how good of a Marine we are, it's completely irrelevant, it's completely irrelevant. We are detrimental to the Marine Corps in their minds and, and it's unfortunate. [...] it doesn't matter how well you think you get along with someone, when it comes to them having the back of the male Marine they will. [So] who do you go to when 90% of the people that

you're gonna work with are men, who do you go to? Who do you go to? (Jessica, Marine Corps)

In situations such as sexual assault, where the perpetrator is likely to be male and the victim female, and thus “he versus she,” women Marines are likely left feeling unsupported. Further, in sexual assault cases where the character of both the perpetrator and victim are called into question, women victims are likely to feel it is hopeless to pursue justice.

Servicewomen were further subjected to incidents which communicated they were the property of the men with whom they served. Jessica, in discussing her most recent sexual assault, described the cultural norm as, “The problem was, is that I went from being a married Marine to a single Marine, and anytime that happens [...] it's the mentality of, ‘you either belong to one or you belong to all.’” Once she was divorced, her fellow servicemen (and more importantly, men she considered friends) began to treat her differently, expecting she would welcome sexual attention from them or that she was available to them. Lee exasperatedly described a lack of privacy or sense of ownership over her own body:

It was constant, like even in Iraq I felt like everybody needed to know where my vagina was, [...] needed to know if I was in the shower, [...] needed to know if I was in the latrine, [...] needed to know you know, if I was at the chow hall, everybody was so concerned about who I was talking to, or any of the girls, I mean, whoever we were talking [to], wherever we were at, [they] constantly [had their] thumb on us, and if we were talking to somebody outside the unit, “oh you're sleeping with them,” or “you're doing this with him,” you know? (Lee, National Guard)

The idea that the men in their unit considered the women available to them was consistent across participants. This perceived accessibility extended to women being

targeted or singled out for harassment at the workplace. Sarah shared her experience in needing to set boundaries with her male peers:

[...] some of the guys were trying to hit on me or whatever and I kind of made a joke at their expense and they left me alone after that. We were friends after, I didn't know them at the time but ended up having a good working relationship [with them]. But I kind of let them know that, "hey I'm not here to flirt, I'm not here to date, I'm not here to go out to dinner with anybody," like, I'm here to work and just, leave me alone and we'll all be fine kind of a thing. (Sarah, Navy)

This is the first example in Sarah's narrative where she successfully went against the norm. For her, the need to set boundaries and maintain professionalism outweighed the risk of standing out. Similarly, Jessica discussed the ways in which women were specifically targeted at work:

[...] when I came in a lot of those kind of things (harassment) did happen, or they attempted, [...] you literally could not go to work you know, we'd had charlies (khaki service uniform) but they would only have the women, what they would do is they would tell [the women] you had to wear the charlies with skirts, [we] couldn't wear trousers, had to wear skirts. But then you'd get to work and all the men were in cammies and the women were in charlies, in skirts. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Illustrating one of the ways in which military environments are unique compared to civilian, Jessica further provided an example in which she and fellow women Marines lived in unsafe conditions as a result of male Marines' sense of availability and ownership of women:

Because when I was in Okinawa the first time you couldn't leave your door unlocked because if somebody came in, which happened all the time, the guys would come back from the club and they would be drunk and [...] their thing was to check the doorknobs, and if your doorknob was unlocked that meant you wanted to have sex. That's not what it meant, sometimes it meant you just left your door unlocked, or you forgot, or your roommate forgot. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Lee provided several specific examples of being targeted herself. In describing her perpetrator she stated, "It happened with a guy who was in the same [grade], he was the

same age as me, he bullied me all through high school, he was not nice.” She further described being targeted once leaving for deployment:

Well when I had gone to bed that night, I knew who had passed out next to me and I knew I wasn’t the only one in the room and it was another guy that I had trusted and I knew and had grown up with. [...] I remember him in the other bed and I was in my bed by myself. Well, in the middle of the night [the perpetrator] had come and knocked on the door, I was still passed out and [he] had said, “oh we had like a private arrangement [...], [my friend] didn’t know, he believed him, so he left the room and went to a different room to sleep. (Lee, National Guard)

Later in her career, Lee had decided to report sexual harassment after the perpetrator of her second assault had publicly humiliated her. Immediately after doing so, the people in her unit began speaking about her:

I finally, you know, I was just like get away, get away, I finally looked at him [and said] I’m gonna press sexual harassment, get away from me. [...] I went up to our platoon sergeant and said, “I’m pressing sexual harassment against him.” Well, they never dealt with that before, so we get back to camp, they removed him, sent him down the road to where the officer quarters were and all I heard was, (*whispering*) “oh that girl over there is pressing sexual harassment.” You know I just kept getting it from all of the men in my unit, got it from [men] in other units, I got it from all the other females. Everybody just kind of, I felt like attacked me. (Lee, National Guard)

Lee further shared examples from her unit in which women were targeted for the entertainment of their male peers, which occurred after she had been assaulted en route to Iraq:

[...] I remember being in Kuwait and there was a contest in our unit to see if the males could I guess, masturbate while the females drove and as disgusting as it sounds, it was a contest and I had no clue that it was going on. And I don’t know if [the perpetrator] tried when I was driving and I couldn’t see up over the hump, but I do know his bunk buddy or his battle buddy [...] was successful at it with his female driver. So it was like already, we were not treated as equal. It was a contest. (Lee, National Guard)

In each of these examples, men felt empowered enough to single out particular women or groups of women for harassment, humiliation, and assault. In fact, for the women in this study, the singling out of women was the norm.

Across participants there was also a sense of unequal treatment between the sexes that appeared frustrating for the women. The experience of differential treatment based on gender appeared to support the feeling that in the military, women were not as valued as men. For Sarah, the double standard was most salient in terms of the expectations of mothers versus fathers on active duty. To her, servicewomen were expected to sacrifice where men were not. She framed the different expectations as an aspect that highlighted the strength of women:

But I've come to appreciate the resolve of ambitious women and the strength of women to balance it all. [...] I don't see any guys, I don't know any single dads with sole custody who are in the military. I don't see very many, very many guys having to make the same choices that I see women having to make [...] so [being a role model is] appealing to me and I want to show these girls that they can do it, you know. (Sarah, Navy)

In contrast, Lee and Jessica framed double standards as highly negative and harmful to servicewomen. Lee stated:

I struggled throughout my military years with being yelled at or being told by [males], "you have to do this," or, "you're my bitch," or, "go do that," and "you have no choice." I felt that that was very sexist, they looked at us [women] in a different way and treated us different. Especially being a female, there were a lot of women in my unit. Not a lot, but a good number of women in my unit and they treated them all the same. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica echoed Lee's frustration and anger while describing an example of the prevalence and insidious nature of sexism in the Marine Corps:

[...] me and another gunny (E-7) who was in the unit at the time, we would have to go to the weigh-ins and stand there and watch them [measure] height and [weigh] our Marines because they would try to, you know if you hit the half inch, you're supposed to round up. Well they wouldn't do it. They would do

everything in their power that they could, and this is Marine Corps wide, [...] to screw over the women but if it was the men, oh well let's just give him another week, oh just go run that off and come back [...]. Oh but the women, nope, nope, you're one pound over [the height/weight limit]. No dude she gets two pounds over for PT gear [...]. And we'd have to stand there and tell them and we know they know this. But it was just a way to like get women so mentally drained that it's like, "I don't want to stay in, I don't want to do this." And it's so prevalent and so constant, and I get frustrated hearing men talk about [...], "it's not that bad." You have no idea, you have no idea. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Although Jessica provided examples of unequal treatment on an individual level, she expressed more distress when discussing the issue on a cultural level. Her perception was:

Because the reality is, is I think [...] the way that men are considered "good Marines" is completely different from the way that women are. So you could be a good Marine and still be a rapist. You could be a good Marine and still be a sexual assaulter. That's why the blame always goes on the victim. Because, "oh he was a good Marine." Clearly he's not. If you believe in all of our core values and leadership traits and principles, clearly he's not. He may have been great at his job or he may be a 300 PFT'er (perfect score on fitness testing) or whatever, but clearly he doesn't embody those [values]. And that's what the Marine Corps' not willing to embrace yet, is that there are a whole lot of men who aren't these perfect Marines. Instead it's easier to blame the 10% of the population (women) instead of going after the 90% of the population (men). (Jessica, Marine Corps)

all of the participants suggested that the issue of sexism and double standards can only be combatted by an increase in female role models and leaders. Sarah shared the way in which this belief fuels her motivation to become a leader:

I see a lot of people quit, especially women, it's so easy to [...] to find reasons [...] why it's better to just kind of [...], I don't want to say quit, but pick alternate paths because you know, this is difficult or it's not ideal or it requires you to leave your family. [Women sailors] don't have a lot of role models, there's very few women in senior leadership, even fewer once you get into the officer ranks, of women who have managed to balance it and I want to believe it can be done. I want to believe we don't have to pick one thing over the other, that we can have it all. (Sarah, Navy)

All three participants described environments in which women were treated as less than men, targeted for hostility and harassment, and devalued for being women. The

experience of being a woman in a masculine environment was salient for all of the participants. Beyond hostilities based on gender, the environments in which the participants were assaulted in could generally be described as hostile.

Hostile Environment

In addition to a felt sense of sexism and misogyny within their units and military culture more generally, participants described multiple instances of behaviors in the workplace and barracks that created a hostile environment. Hostilities included gender-based and sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, bullying, and a sense of being unsafe. Sarah shared her experience of living in a hostile environment:

It was hostile. It was not what I expected. I went from boot camp where everything was, was very motivating and structured and the people who were leading you had a purpose and were there to instill that purpose in you, and I got across the street and it was just the most, (*pause*) everybody was, there was really bad morale. I guess what happened was a lot of the schools were backed up so the students were there for really long times, a year maybe more sometimes, and so they were losing motivation, there was a lot of sexual assault, there [were] a lot of drugs, there [were] a lot of alcohol-related incidents, a lot of trouble, a lot of troubled students. The staff I think was just overextended dealing with it. (Sarah, Navy)

Participants described multiple settings in which they were subjected to harassment (ranging from mild to severe) or unsafe conditions, particularly at the time of their assaults. In what Jessica described as the worst experience of her military career, she described being subjected to ongoing gender harassment by male colleagues. For example:

There were two master [gunnery sergeants] (E-9's) who worked in the maintenance department who, hated me, hated me. [...] It didn't make any sense because I really didn't deal with them much, they [were] only there two days a month, two weeks a year, [...] I rarely had any interaction with them, but when they came on deck they really expected like the whole world to stop for them. I got called a cunt in front of the entire formation, not to my face, never, never did

it to my face because that would've been ugly. But I got called a cunt to my Marines, I got called a bitch to my Marines. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

She attributed this harassment to being a woman in a male-dominated environment.

Consistent with the literature, gender harassment had a greater negative impact on Jessica than any of her previous experiences with assault and harassment:

[...] that was the worst year, [...] and they kept saying it's not because you're a woman, [then] why else is it? What other reason do you have for treating me like this? I am never disrespectful, I don't even deal with you, you just don't like the fact that I'm a department head, I'm outspoken, and I'm a woman. And you called me a cunt, so, that's a [feminine] term, you know, you called me a cunt, so, yeah. So [...] that was the worst year in my Marine Corps career. Worst. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Sarah described working with male peers who were resistant to changes being implemented by the Navy that improved the way women were treated. She noted:

[...] there were some people who were really [resistant] to the changes that were taking place, they weren't really happy about it. They weren't, [...] women just kind of need to deal with it, this is a man's, it's a very male-centric environment, and you know, if you can't take a joke, or you can't stand up for yourself, you know, you're gonna get walked on kind of a thing. (Sarah, Navy)

However, for Sarah sexual harassment was more prevalent and distressing in the most hostile environment she lived in, particularly because there was no reprieve from it:

[...] people were always making comments, you know you're the new girl, and you know, hey baby, and things like that, just little things. Which began to bother me over a period of time, and by themselves I can handle it, but over time it just started to irritate me. (Sarah, Navy)

As a result, Sarah lived with her guard up, ready to defend herself. When someone attempted to help her, she was unable to see it:

[...] so I'm getting all my supplies together, and this guy comes up to me and he's in civilian clothing and he asked me if everything's ok. And I thought he was just kind of hitting on me, and so I told him I was fine, and just I'm fine, I don't need anything, just, good to go, leave me alone. And he put his hand on my shoulder and he told me, "shipmate, tell me what's wrong," and I like flipped out [...] and

he starts yelling at me. Turns out he was the Chief (E-7) of the barracks and I didn't know (*laughs*). (Sarah, Navy)

Lee described a unit in which sexual harassment and misconduct were prevalent. In addition to the previously described incidents involving men masturbating while females drove, she recounted:

[...] then the incident that kind of threw everything I guess off the edge when we were in Iraq, was his battle buddy and another gentleman had gotten caught shooting a video of us girls in the shower. So they had snuck into the shower, put a camera [in] there and shot a video of us in the shower. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica made several references to the Marine Corps "pre-Tailhook" meaning prior to the Marine Corps beginning to instill policies and procedures to fight sexual harassment and misconduct. Her described experience in the Marine Corps "pre-Tailhook" showed that sexual misconduct was the norm:

I mean you would go to work and you would be groped, [...] don't be the last person on clean up because there was gonna be a guy there waiting for you. It was just a part of the atmosphere, the environment, it was just like that, and so, I had dealt with a lot of that stuff coming up in the Marine Corps. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

During this time, Jessica was protected from potential rapes by a sergeant she was on duty with. The sergeant knew that rapes were occurring in the barracks, and rather than confront perpetrators, he tried to reduce the risk to Jessica by telling her to stay at the duty desk. Several Marines approached her at the duty desk and asked her to unlock their barracks room door:

[...] and as we're going in my duty is running down the hall yelling, no no no not her, and I didn't get it you know. I got my butt chewed out [...] he was like I told you not to fucking go down there, don't go anywhere, you stay at the duty desk. And I was like, "aye Sergeant, aye Sergeant," and I thought I had just totally messed up. And about a month later the exact same thing happened to another girl and she was gang raped. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Bullying was also prevalent for the servicewomen in their units, more so very early on in their careers. Lee's experience was unique in that the bullying was a result of her cousin being the unit's commanding officer, as well as having a higher ranking uncle:

My uncle was a hard ass, he was a Vietnam vet, he didn't care, he did things his way, and people [...] retaliated against me for some of his decisions. Then I'd always get comments [...] about, well your cousin did this and his dumb decision was this, he's putting us here [...] and I had no control over [their decisions].
(Lee, National Guard)

Sarah was also targeted, but for being new to the command. She described how being ostracized impacted her:

So obviously I was brand new, the "booter," the brand new person and people were mean. They were really vicious. Nobody would talk to me. Even the girls were mean to me, the girls that I shared a barracks room with were horrible. So I just felt really alone, really isolated. (Sarah, Navy)

Viewed together, harassment, bullying, and tolerance of misconduct appeared to contribute to a general sense of feeling unsafe, at a time when the servicewomen were new to the military. Sarah shared an example where she feared for her physical safety in the barracks, "I had another sailor, a male sailor, pull me aside one night, pulled me into a dark room by myself, which I didn't like, and he was acting absolutely insane." Jessica provided several examples as well, but noted that the expectation that they (as women) were unsafe actually helped them take action to feel safe, "I mean being a female Marine it was dangerous, [...] you didn't walk anywhere by yourself, you didn't. But [...] you knew you were in this frame of mind."

Military-specific Aspects

In addition to hostile living and working conditions, participants discussed the impact of aspects unique to military service that created vulnerabilities to harassment or assault, and influenced their decision to report. Participants discussed the impact of rank

and a sense of empowerment or powerlessness, leadership (both positive and negative), and the military's sexual assault prevention and response policies.

Rank hierarchy. The impact of rank was a major concern across participants.

All participants shared comments that highlighted the importance of the rank hierarchy in their lives. For Lee, her lived experience within the rank hierarchy continued to impact her while not on active duty, "but definitely the National Guard because it's [...] 4,000 people in the entire state, you do get to know everybody, you do get to know the rank."

The rank structure also affected her family relationships:

I had my two family members, but my cousin's an officer and so I was closer to my uncle who was a sergeant (E-6), but my cousin I wasn't so close to because, just military ranks, you don't mingle with officers, or you don't have anything to do with them. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica's trust in the rank hierarchy and the expectation that she would be given respect based on her rank caused her to feel betrayed when she wasn't afforded that respect, "[...] they refused even though my position, my rank, my experience level, all of that dictate, even the way I presented myself rated that, they refused to give it to me." She placed blame for the lack of respect and harassment she experienced squarely on her leadership, thus reflecting a servicemember's strict adherence to the rank hierarchy:

Because honestly, I don't put it on the offenders. Offenders are assholes, they're jackasses, they do it because they can, that's why they act like this. If my CO would've called those [master gunnery sergeants] and been like, knock it the fuck off, I don't care what your issues are, I don't care what your personal shit is, knock it off, it'd been done. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Sarah shared a positive example in which higher ranking sailors advocated on behalf of lower ranking ones, such as herself. She stated:

I had a second class petty officer (E-5) grab me by the arm one day. Another petty officer jumped in and got in his face about it and then they pulled the Chief (E-7) in and kicked me out of the room. [They] had a stern talking to with him about

how we don't grab shipmates, we don't grab females, which made me feel better. (Sarah, Navy)

Similarly, the other participants discussed the powerlessness they felt as lower ranking servicemembers. Jessica and Lee described similarities in the expectations and hardships of a low-ranking servicewoman. Jessica stated:

[...] when you're in the lower ranks you're supposed to put up with an element of bullshit, it's different for males than it is for females, you're gonna have to sweep the floors, you're gonna have to be somebody's "bitch," you know what I mean, you're gonna be taking out somebody's trash, you're gonna be calling people sir and ma'am [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Lee's experience as a young servicewoman was similar:

Well when you're that young and have no rank, you're pretty much a slave. And that's what you're treated like and you do everything under the sun. You're somebody's bitch as they call it. So, all my responsibilities would be from cleaning to fetching something to guard duty to this that or the other. I really didn't have a say in that. (Lee, National Guard)

The process of "picking up rank" led to feelings of empowerment for Jessica and Sarah. For Jessica, advancing up the rank hierarchy allowed her to move out of the barracks and gain a level of reprieve from the hostile environment, "and by that time I had picked up some rank so it was a different level, I wasn't in the barracks anymore [...] so I wasn't living that day to day." Sarah was unequivocal in noting how picking up rank might impact her decision to report, "If it happened today, you know I'm not married now and I'm a little bit, I'm more senior than I was at the time. I think I would feel more assertive in reporting it."

Leadership. Across participants, leadership played an impactful role in the servicewomen's lives. Given the participants' lived experience of powerlessness based on their rank, it is understandable why higher-ranking leaders would have a profound effect

on their daily lives. Participants discussed the power that leaders wielded over subordinates, examples of positive leadership, and examples of negative leadership.

Lee provided an example in which she was summoned to meet with her platoon sergeant, immediately after returning from the hospital where she underwent surgery. This example illustrates Lee's lack of choice in responding to the order as well as negative outcomes as a result of their interaction. It further demonstrates how the decisions of Lee's higher-ranking family members affected her negatively:

So I had just [gotten] back and was recovering and my platoon sergeant had called all the females over to the males' barracks. Well they woke me up and they made me come over. So I went over and he said what he had to say, and I was really not [awake]. Well then he pulled me into a room and there was another girl there, and he just ripped my ass. I mean he was just screaming and hollering at me because my uncle raised hell over me being left at the hospital two days beforehand and no one [had] come to get me and he felt that I was tattling on him to the 1st sergeant and all this stuff. That was when I had my first panic attack.
(Lee, National Guard)

Jessica focused more on the role that leadership plays in setting unit climate. It is possible this was due to her years of experience as a non-commissioned officer. Speaking about the role of leadership, she shared, "[...] but what will they put up with? Because I could be a model Marine, but if you're allowing somebody to grope me everyday, it's only going to be so long before I'm not that Marine anymore." She put the responsibility for establishing a culture of safety firmly on leadership and what they were willing to tolerate within their unit or command. While discussing the physical assault she sustained in a hallway before a meeting, Jessica shifted from reflecting on her own experience and example, to the impact that experience would have more broadly. She spoke with a tone of disappointment in the lack of protection provided by an officer who witnessed the assault:

And she was a lieutenant so she didn't have much power and she was new, but still. I can't imagine being a woman and as an officer you're automatically in a leadership position, you see a troop because as a gunny I'm her troop and she did nothing. And that's the legacy that you're gonna leave because that determines how you're gonna respond to everything. Because that's not gonna be the only incident that she ever sees. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

In contrast, participants also discussed their experiences with positive leadership. For them, positive leadership acted as role models who encouraged the participants to self-advocate. Additionally, positive leadership demonstrated their commitment to equality between genders.

Positive leadership appeared to be an intervention that empowered the servicewomen, no matter what rank they were at. Jessica provided several examples in which she worked under positive leadership. Most notable for her was a leader who early on encouraged her to stand up for herself:

I had a, a Major (O-4) who's actually a Major General (O-8) now, he would tell me, I don't care what your rank is, you don't have to take that. It was just like, ohhh, ding! Duhhh, I don't have to take it, I don't have to put up with this. I mean he would back me, no matter what, and not just me but any of his Marines, if somebody was mistreating them in any capacity, he would be the person to be like, "stand up for yourself, I've got your back," and he would. It wasn't all just talk, so, I think that was my favorite. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

The most impactful part of this experience was having a leader who not only said the right things, but gave permission to lower ranking Marines to defend themselves from mistreatment. She further discussed the ways in which the Major viewed the female Marines in his command as valuable rather than a hindrance:

[...] he really saw us women as people who were to be protected and to be used to our capacities, they pushed us hard but [...] they very much had a sense of an untapped resource, like you know what, we're not using our women to their potential and it's because every day they have to worry about all of this other stuff and being groped [...] whereas, if we can take that away and let them do their jobs and let them be fantastic, and they were, I mean they were amazing, amazing,

amazing, amazing. I think that that's where I really figured out who I wanted to be [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica carried this experience with her as she moved further into the Marine Corps where she experienced misogyny, harassment, and assaults. It is possible that this early experience was an important lesson in empowerment for Jessica. She noted:

[...] working for him and just that whole command it was just such a different mindset, it was shocking but it was also liberating like oh, oh I don't have to take it anymore, I can blow up on you boys and you know, be protected to some level so it was, I think it was freeing in that aspect [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Sarah, in discussing her experience with having her arm grabbed by a higher ranking enlisted shipmate, spoke of feeling protected by leadership:

I think that really made an impact on me. It just showed me that some people [...] will intervene, they will step in and they're not gonna let somebody bigger and stronger just sit there and manhandle you. I mean it wasn't anything sexual, but it was still intimidating and so I don't know, it made me feel better. And it kind of set the standard for me too, that if I see something I should intervene too. Just because I wasn't saying anything and I was allowing it to happen, doesn't mean that it's okay. So I kind of like that they jumped in. (Sarah, Navy)

The modeling of positive leadership likely had a lasting impact on Sarah, who later spoke of advocating for a fellow shipmate she perceived was being harassed. It is also likely this experience of empowerment will continue to influence Sarah as she goes on to become an officer.

Each participant also provided examples of negative leadership. Following her experience with having leaders defend her, Sarah attempted to report a coworker who was creating a hostile workplace environment. Her attempt at reporting and improving the workplace environment was not handled as she expected it would be:

And the LPO (lead petty officer) talked me out of it. Or, I was pretty upset about it, and he said, "just let me talk to him, let me handle it, and I will counsel him privately and if it doesn't stop well then yes we'll document it, but, you know, let me, let me handle this," kind of a thing. [...] I was pretty upset because this was

an LPO that I really liked, really respected and I had hoped [...] would say you're right, it's completely inappropriate and let's nail the guy. Because it's just one counseling, it's not like he's gonna go to Captain's Mast for it, then I wanted it documented. And I felt like he basically was chalking it up to inappropriate water cooler talk, that could be handled with a little, "hey you need to remember that there's females in the shop and you can't talk this way around females," when that's not how I felt about it. I felt like you shouldn't talk this way at work, period. Regardless of who is present, just the fact that I had an issue with it doesn't make it wrong, just the fact that it is wrong and I kind of felt like it was really minimized. I wasn't deeply offended by it, but [...] it bothered me. (Sarah, Navy)

In this example, what appears to be troubling for Sarah is a sense of betrayal that her LPO was not handling the problem in the way she had expected him to as a leader. The invalidating part for her was having her concerns minimized and treated as if she should not have felt offended, rather than her LPO using this situation as a way to model how professionalism is achieved.

Lee and Jessica provided examples of feeling threatened by their leadership. For Lee, who provided only negative leadership experiences, the most impactful experience with her leadership occurred when she attempted to report sexual harassment while deployed in South America. The perpetrator of the harassment had previously attempted to rape her, which she did not report. She described the harassment:

So I had been talking to the tent next to us, which were the guys from the Dominican Republic and they're [black], and he did not like that. So when we were out on a mission one day he came up to me and he started spouting all these words that were, that I loved black people, and that I liked black cock, and just very derogatory terms in front of everybody in my unit and he wouldn't leave me alone. (Lee, National Guard)

She described feeling manipulated by her leadership when she attempted to report the harassment and assault:

[...] I felt like they had thought about it the three days before we came home and then when we got home, they're like, we're gonna tell her this and [...] somewhat close to the truth, but we're gonna [...] try to persuade her not to do it. Because

[...] if I would've pressed, it would've fallen on every single ranking person that was in my chain of command, and [...] I think they were scared because they had never dealt with it either. (Lee, National Guard)

Lee illustrated feeling pressured not to report in order to remain with her unit where she felt some sense of safety:

I don't want to move, I don't want to go, I don't want to start over, I have two years left, you know. I was like, I just want to be here, I want to be with the boys, and, I ended up [...] bargaining for it. He was removed from the unit, as long as I didn't press sexual harassment or sexual assault charges, he was removed from the unit and forced to go to a different unit [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

Although Lee felt empowered in her decision to report sexual assault and harassment, she perceived that she was met with unsupportive leadership who manipulated her into not reporting in order to protect their careers. In this way, Lee's experience was minimized and she felt forced to choose between feeling safe and reporting her assault and harassment.

Jessica described a situation in which she was near the end of her career and felt threatened by the commanding officer she worked under. In the context of advocating for herself after being assaulted and harassed by higher ranking non-commissioned officers, she shared:

[...] when I sat down with the CO (commanding officer) he completely went at me and was like, "well isn't it true that you this and you that," and I was like no. And finally I had to tell him I was like, "you know what sir, you need to check your facts." And then he threatened me. He told me if I requested mast, [...] that's the legal step that you do which completely takes it out of the unit, he said, "well if you request mast just know that [with] one finger you point is gonna be four fingers pointed back at you," and I was like, "did you just threaten me?" And the new CO is about to lose his mind, [...]. Because by this time I'm pissed, and I was like, "did you just threaten me? And he was like, "no, you can request mast if you want to, I'm just warning" and I was like, "okay, noted, [...] this conversation is over." (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica responded to feeling threatened by becoming more confident in defending herself. It can be assumed that had this occurred when she was younger, with less rank and experience, she would not have had the sense of empowerment to stand up to her CO. Later she stated, “So the last year, well six months that I was in the Marine Corps, I requested mast twice and I did two IG’s. And they were all in my favor,” meaning her concerns were validated once they were taken outside her chain of command.

Their experiences with negative leadership were enough to push Lee and Jessica to separate from their service branches. Sarah was not as affected by her experience, and appeared to learn more about herself and the type of leader and role model she would like to be.

DOD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR). Across participants, the topic of the DOD’s SAPR programs and policies were discussed. The SAPR policies guide prevention and reporting options within the military. Jessica reflected succinctly on changes she has seen since she first enlisted, “You know when I first came in, to be honest with you I don’t even know how you’d report it.” Lee’s experience of attempting to report was hampered by a lack of understanding (by herself and leadership) of the reporting system available:

[...] when I got home and they’re like, “oh we have 180 days or 6 months to really look into it and you would have to stay in the same unit and at the end if we find [you or he] is lying, or after the investigation we find [we] believe you, then one, you could be removed, so I didn’t want to deal with that rule. I mean, I thought that you pressed and they removed the situation immediately, no matter what. (Lee, National Guard)

At the time, there were no widely publicized DOD instructions, policies, or SAPR offices to access for support. In discussing the current state of SAPR, Jessica noted:

I think that there are formal ways to report it now. [...] they have people in place to listen, they supposedly have you know, a way to protect the victims, they've come leaps and bounds as far as on paper, I'll say that. On paper you get a victim advocate, there's EEO's (equal employment opportunity), there's a UVA (uniformed victim advocate). [...] even the last couple of years, [...] you can report a sexual assault without formally reporting it, you can get help for a sexual assault without having to name someone, without having to formally report it, so I think that was never the case before. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Sarah shared similar sentiments in terms of her opinion of restricted reporting:

The restricted reporting, I think that that's good, if nothing else it at least gets the person the help that they need. I don't know how often that's used but I know how often the unrestricted isn't used (*laughs*), you know I've seen that play out almost every single time. (Sarah, Navy)

Although the participants were pleased that restricted reporting was in place and available, it did not appear that they had confidence in utilizing this option. Sarah shared some reservations in regards to how reporting is implemented:

I think it's tricky because on one hand, you don't wanna blame one person or the other. You don't want to blame the perpetrator, the guys, you know this is a problem with the men in the military and women are always the victim, so the victims are always right. Because I feel like that's kind of where the Navy swung first was you know, all a female has to do is come forward and whisper the name and this guy will just go down in flames and his career will be destroyed and now you'll have your justice. (Sarah, Navy)

Sarah spoke optimistically about the way the Navy has shifted in its prevention and response efforts in more recent years:

It seems like the Navy's perspective on sexual assault has been defined better and better. Every year it seems like they get better about defining what it is and that we're not standing for this, and there will be no tolerance, and they're trying to encourage people to come forward and talk about it. So I don't know, that makes me feel better. I feel like the Navy is moving in the right direction. (Sarah, Navy)

She was especially optimistic about bystander intervention programming. However, she also noted that for sailors, there can be a Navy culture-specific barrier to intervening:

Yeah, that seems to be the new thing, the SAPR training that we're getting now is very focused on bystander intervention, and not just with sexual assault but with

anything - with inappropriate workplace conduct, anything like that. If you see something, you shouldn't be afraid to get involved and it seems to be specifically with sailors, that seems to be an issue. We don't want to be wrong, we don't want to misperceive the situation and say something and then look stupid, you know, so I don't know. But I'm glad that they're harping on that because that would go a long way. (Sarah, Navy)

It is possible the fear of misperceiving a situation and being wrong may be especially salient to lower ranking sailors who are trying to build positive reputations in the fleet. It may also be possible that these lower ranking sailors are highly invested in avoiding the ostracizing discussed earlier in this chapter.

Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Another potential barrier to reporting revolved around the prosecution of crimes in the military, under the UCMJ. For the participants, the unique nature of the prosecution of sexual assault in the military presented opportunities for the potential mistreatment of victims. Sarah was unequivocal in how the UCMJ affected her decision not to report:

I don't know, just a lot of different fac-, and then the fact I was married I was afraid it would all get turned around that you know, I'd had an affair and I'd have charges brought against me, and so it just felt like (*pause*) I don't think I ever even really wanted to report it because I just kind of felt so guilty. (Sarah, Navy)

Although Sarah was separated from her husband, the military does not recognize separations. Therefore, at the time of her assault, she was still considered legally married under the UCMJ. Also under the UCMJ, adultery is a chargeable offense.

Jessica, having worked in legal for many years, spoke of the prosecution of sexual assaults in the military. She discussed at the length the power of the commanders in the prosecution of crimes. She shared:

They don't handle it, I had a woman who claimed sexual harassment or actually sexual assault, and what they did was, [...] instead of having it investigated for a sexual assault, they had it investigated as a conduct unbecoming (Article 133), because [with] a conduct unbecoming there's no victim. She doesn't have to be

notified about what happened. It was absolutely ridiculous the way they handled it, but that's how they get through these loopholes. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

She further explained her experiences in working with COs in prosecuting crimes. She clarified how offenses were viewed, and how the unique nature of the UCMJ created unique motivators for commanders in how to or whether to prefer charges:

I don't think [they prefer charges] because the COs are affected when there are sexual assaults, it comes from the top down - so if I'm a commanding officer and I have a sexual assault in my unit, my boss is gonna say handle it, but he doesn't mean protect the victim, [...] he wants it to go away. We don't want the media to find out, number one, you know what I mean? So for me I really think that when you put that pressure on the COs, their careers are dependent on them pushing it under the rug. So I, as much as I hate to say that I, because it makes it sound like it's an excuse, I think [removing the chain of command from prosecution] needs to happen. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Although she was uncomfortable in recommending the chain of command be removed from the legal aspects of sexual assault cases, she pointed out the potential benefit to COs if they were relieved of the responsibility:

And as much as COs don't like power to be taken away from them, I think it would be a burden lifted off. Like okay, there's a sexual assault, here's where you go (victim) and it has nothing to do with me (CO), [...] cause even convening authorities for legal proceedings, that's all military. That needs to go, they're not lawyers, that needs to go away, I think it all needs to be some separate entity that handles that and I think that that would at least keep the integrity of it. Because COs have a reason for not pursuing, [...] you know you read all this stuff about the command influences and stuff like that. They have a reason for that, and if you take that reasoning away you maintain the integrity of it and then it is what it is, and [...] there's no pressure on the CO to burn somebody who shouldn't be burned or, not burn somebody who should be [...].

Overall, the UCMJ appeared to create unique barriers for victims and commands alike.

Participant description of salient external or environmental factors which impacted their decision to report included issues related to gender (misogyny in particular); hostile environments marked by harassment, misconduct, and retaliation; experiences of victim blaming; military-specific aspects including living within strict

adherence to rank hierarchy, serving under positive or negative leadership, the DoD's sexual assault and prevention policies, and the impact of living and working under the UCMJ. The chapter will now turn to discussing the participants' internal experiences within the above-mentioned environments.

Internal Processes

Interviews with the participants revealed a complex set of internal processes (psychological, emotional) that were occurring prior to, during, and after the assaults. Emergent themes included a period of "shock" following the assaults, during which participants were unsure of what to do or felt immobilized; internalized rape myths; a process of weighing potential risks or benefits if they were to proceed with reporting; a concern about the impact on one's reputation; protecting others or feeling protected; getting to a point of being emotionally overwhelmed; experiencing a process of empowerment over the course of years; and meaning making.

Shock

Participants spoke of feeling unsure of what to do in the immediate moments, hours, and days following their sexual assaults. Sarah described waking up in the hotel room the morning after the assault:

I [woke] up the next morning and we're both naked and that's kind of when it hit me that things are not okay, and I just kind of sat in a chair for awhile. I got dressed and then sat in the chair waiting for him to wake up because I didn't know what to do. (Sarah, Navy)

Sarah also described feeling unsure of what had occurred the night before. She described feeling something negative had happened, but she did not feel certain of it.

I felt really guilty, and then he woke up and he looks over and he says, "I totally fucked you last night." Like, high five kinda (*laughs*), not a literal high five, but,

and I didn't know what to say, I just was so upset about it and I didn't know what I had said, I didn't know if I had consented [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

Lee awoke in her hotel room in the middle of the night to the perpetrator attempting to have sex with her. She shared, "From after that what happened, I stayed up on the phone with my boyfriend [and] I cried and eventually fell back to sleep, didn't really process what happened until the next day." The next day Lee's unit was moving from South Dakota to Missouri, on their way to deploy for the first time to Iraq. Jessica spoke at length about the shock she felt in response to her friend and colleague approaching her in her office while she was transcribing, turning her chair around, grabbing her by the neck and kissing her:

[...] and I was so stunned. I did absolutely nothing. Did nothing. And then he just walked out. And, I didn't do anything. [...] well I walked in and I told my master sergeant (E-8) about it, I just walked in and I just had this look on my face and she said, "what happened?" And I was like, "Sgt S* just kissed me." And he kind of held me, he didn't like grab my neck, but I don't know what he did to my neck, but I know I remember his hand like on my neck, he didn't choke me, but I just remember his hand on my neck. So, [...] I just remember the pressure but, he wasn't choking me, like I could breathe. And I told her and she said, "what do you want me to do about it?" And I was like, (*pause*), no idea, I have no idea. And that was, [...] that was the first time. And I think that that was the most impacting because [...] I knew that things had changed at that point [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica further discussed how these moments of shock and paralysis open up victims to future victim blaming:

[...] then the first reaction's always gonna be, well what did you do, what did you do about it? I did nothing. By the time my brain realized what had happened, he was gone. Like it was just that shocking, you know, so it doesn't matter what you try to prep for, you know, you can you can you can learn all the [...] martial arts you wanna learn and all that stuff and you think your attacker's gonna be someone who comes up in a dark alley and then you find out it's somebody spinning you around in a chair in your office, like you're not prepared for that (*laughs*) just mentally you don't prepare for that. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Internalized Rape Myths

Although participants did not label them as such, the theme of internalized rape myths was present across participants. Sarah in particular spoke several times of the role she felt she played in being assaulted:

I don't think I ever even really wanted to report it because I just kind of felt so guilty for, I felt responsible because I hadn't done anything to prevent it. I'd been really irresponsible going out with somebody, at that point realized I really didn't know this person [...]. I was embarrassed about how I let myself get into this situation, I don't know. I don't know if that stems from the way I was raised or if it was just society, I don't know, but I, I felt like I had a personal responsibility in it, to some extent there was some personal responsibility and I had not done my due part to prevent it. I'd made some dumb decisions that had put me in a compromising situation and that was my fault. I couldn't blame, it wasn't this guy's fault that I went out and bought myself a bunch of drinks, I did that. It wasn't this guy's fault that I decided to leave base with one person that I didn't really know, that was my dumb decision. Things like that, you know, I wasn't using my head and so I don't know, I took accountability for my part in it and, I felt guilty about it. I felt guilty that whether it was intended or not, whether it was sexual assault or not, I felt like I had had an affair, like even though it wasn't romantic or anything, I don't know. (Sarah, Navy)

There is a sense of uncertainty to Sarah's description of the guilt she felt. Her description falls under the internalized rape myth of believing she deserved it because she did not prevent it from happening, that she was to blame for the choices she made leading up to the assault. As a result, Sarah began to subscribe to the myth that controlling her surroundings was the only way to stay safe, and that her choices were to blame:

I felt really guilty because I had gotten so drunk and that was my fault. If I'd been a responsible adult then none of this would've happened. So I started to just be really careful about my decisions. Every decision I made I was trying to be really careful with it. And I still do that. I don't get drunk much, but when I do I do it here at home with people that I trust and that I've known a long time. It was a good wake up call, I think. Hard lesson. (Sarah, Navy)

Sarah also struggled with the perception of false reporting. She spoke of the rape myth that most reports are false:

And there was a big stigma with that because you know, what if it's not true and I don't know what the statistics are as far as false reporting or whatever, but the concept is out there that you know, all a woman has to do is just say this name and this guy's done, he's history, and that's really unjust to people. (Sarah, Navy)

Lee questioned whether she had “asked for it” to happen at some point, in reference to her first sexual assault. She seemed to feel this might explain why she was targeted rather than someone else. She had known the perpetrator throughout high school:

And then I also kind of questioned myself, did I ask for it? Did I ask for it when I was, I guess, you know drunk, and did I, [...] from what I remember I did not even talk to him, I did not even see him that night, he wasn't even at the party, the room party we had. So [...] did I ever even, he bullied me up until we graduated high school and then couple months we didn't interact, he wasn't my friend, you know. So for me, I just didn't know how to take, like, why why me I guess. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica described the myth about perpetrators being strangers in “a dark alley” rather than an acquaintance or friend:

[...] it doesn't matter what you try to prep for, you know, you can learn all the you know, martial arts you wanna learn and all that stuff and you think your attacker's gonna be someone who comes up in a dark alley and then you find out it's somebody spinning you around in a chair in your office, like you're not prepared for that (*laughs*) just mentally you don't prepare for that. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Cost/benefit Analysis

Participants spoke at length on the process of deciding whether the risks of reporting were worth it. The risk of losing something valuable was consistent across participants, but what the “something” was varied from vague to specific. Additionally, participants spoke very little on the potential benefits of reporting.

Risks. Fears that made reporting risky fell into two categories: fear of loss and rejection or fear of negative outcomes. Jessica put it succinctly, “because I've seen it so much, and 9 times out of 10, they don't say anything. And I can't say that I blame them.

Because there's so much to lose." Sarah also spoke of a general sense of potential negative consequences related to unrestricted reporting:

The restricted reporting. I think that that's good, if nothing else it at least gets the person the help that they need. I don't know how often that's used but I know how often the unrestricted isn't used (*laughs*), you know I've seen that play out almost every single time. And I think a lot of it just comes down to people are afraid of the consequences of, the fallout that will occur. (Sarah, Navy)

All participants shared a fear of having their reputations damaged as a result of an investigation. After Jessica told her master sergeant about her co-worker kissing her, she described the following interaction, which highlighted the general sense among women that reporting would not be worth it, due to damage to the victim's reputation:

Yeah and the sad thing about it was that it wasn't even that we had a huge discussion about it, [...] she said, "what do you wanna do about it?" and I just looked at her, and it's like we had this discussion without having a discussion. It was very much like, we both know [...] nothing is gonna happen and all it's gonna do is drag my name through the mud, you know what I mean? And it was the realization we both had right then that wow, it would do absolutely no good to do anything, so that was, yeah, it was disheartening. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Lee's fear of how others would perceive her was especially salient given she had family members within her unit:

And so I told one of the other girls that I was close with in the unit what had happened and from what I remember, I [...] just didn't want to report it, it was just fear of backlash, fear of you know what's this mean, like is this gonna label me, are people gonna think different? [...] how's it gonna affect me in the eyes of my family? [...] is my uncle gonna shun me or think I'm a whore or that I asked for it? My cousin the same way. (Lee, National Guard)

Lee's comments reflect a fear of retaliation and a fear of losing social support. She was more specific in her fears related to other people finding out about her being assaulted that went beyond damaging her reputation:

I feared that maybe they were gonna send me with a different unit, maybe I was gonna get left behind, maybe I was gonna get labeled coward. We had one female who was in a motorcycle accident right before we went over and she was

physically unable to go, and she somehow got a doctor's slip and she didn't go with us. And so I felt like are they gonna deem me suitable for war? Am I gonna be labeled, am I gonna be left behind, am I gonna be put on crap duty [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

Not getting to deploy was a salient issue for Lee, particularly since her reputation would follow her home:

Or like being labeled, you know when we get back home, we lived in a small community of you know, 12,000, 15,000 people, I was afraid [that] when I came home, [...] a lot of my peers were still, you know, they'd gone off to college or maybe back, would I have been judged by them, judged by family, would I have shamed our name, [...] would people say oh that's that girl who, [...] or something happened, she didn't go to war, and she's not worthy of her service. (Lee, National Guard)

She further clarified the risk of losing her sense of pride if she did not get to deploy with her unit, even though her perpetrator was still in the unit:

It would've meant a lot because I [was] proud in a sense that I had made it that far, that I had proved to people that you know, there's more to me than just a punk ass little kid, you know, breaking the law, doing stupid crap. [...] it would've meant a lot I think, you know, [...] how my mom perceived me, you know, the other female members, you know, it would've been shameful or would they not be as proud. (Lee, National Guard)

Sarah described a sense of embarrassment if others were to learn she had been assaulted.

She echoed Jessica and Lee in how important reputation is within the military:

You don't want to be that girl that had the problem and reported it, you don't want everybody to know your business, it's embarrassing already, you know very few people are comfortable with talking about it. I've never spoken publicly to anybody about it before, privately yes, anonymously now sure. But I don't know that I would ever want to get up on stage. (Sarah, Navy)

For Lee and Sarah, joining the military had been a way to provide financially for themselves and/or family. As a result, Sarah minimized the impact of her assault experience:

I think it was the fact that I just, I really needed this. [...] I was coming from a situation where I didn't have anything to go back to so even if it had bothered me

immensely and I felt like I couldn't handle this and I needed to get out, I had nothing else to go back to. And, so I just kind of chalked it up to life experiences [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

I needed to support my kid, I needed to pay my bills, I had a lot of debt that I needed to get out of. I don't know, I didn't want to let little things stop me from the bigger picture. Not that these are little things but in the grand scheme of life it's an incident and it happened and I can learn from it, you know, and in the meantime I've got other things I could be doing. (Sarah, Navy)

Like Lee, Sarah was also afraid of losing the sense of pride that came with service:

I don't want to quit just because it got hard you know. It gets hard for everybody at some point. I think it is harder for women especially, I'm a single mom so I think it's uniquely difficult for me, but I feel like I have so much to give and I want to be here, I want the service, I want the pride in it, and I want to show other people that it can be done, you know, just cause your life circumstances aren't ideal, it doesn't mean that you can't do it, so I don't know, I feel like I get a lot out of it [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

In addition to fears about her reputation and loss of benefits, Sarah shared a fear of being charged under the UCMJ for adultery, "and then the fact I was married I was afraid it would all get turned around that you know, I'd had an affair and I'd have charges brought against me." Although she was separated from her husband at the time, Sarah understood that the military does not recognize separations under the UCMJ.

Benefits. In addition to discussing the risks related to reporting, Jessica and Sarah discussed why reporting might be worth it. Lee did not provide any of these examples because when she attempted to report, she experienced being manipulated by her leadership. For Jessica, reporting became worth the effort because she no longer was risking losing anything, "I think because I had dropped my papers (*laughs*), my retirement papers already, so for me it was like I have nothing to fucking lose. I haven't done anything wrong." In Sarah's case, advocating for others (potential future victims) gave her more confidence and motivation in reporting:

And I said I was too upset, I didn't want to talk to anybody about it, but I agreed it needed to be reported because this guy is going to go be a corpsman (medic) somewhere. He's touching people inappropriately in broad daylight, what is he going to do when he's in a room alone with a patient. So I agreed it needed to be reported [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

However, Sarah also shared her feelings about reporting in "clear cut" cases, "Because even if you get the justice that you're looking for, even if it's a clear cut case and you know this guy goes away and you know, he gets the punishment, you know, your life is never the same either."

Across participants it was difficult to find benefits of reporting that outweighed potential negative consequences.

Protection

The theme of protection emerged across participants, but in varying specific ways. For Sarah, there was a concern for the protection of the perpetrators when it came to reporting. For Lee, there was a sense of protection of her family members or feeling protected by her uncle. For Jessica, protection came from leaders.

After her first sexual assault, Sarah experienced doubt in reporting because she did not want to risk negatively affecting someone else's life if she was not 100% confident she had been assaulted:

But at the time I just, I didn't feel comfortable at all reporting it, I felt like it looked really bad, and I felt like, I don't know, just the fact that I knew so little about what had really happened made me feel that if I reported it and something bad happened to this guy, if he went to jail because I said something happened when I really couldn't even remember. I knew something had happened, I knew what had happened, I just didn't know (*pause*) what had been said, if there was consent, if there was implied consent, if there was you know, assumed consent, I didn't know and I didn't want to see somebody go to jail or their life get messed up because I felt taken advantage of. (Sarah, Navy)

As Sarah continued to discuss her perception of the assault, her protection of the perpetrator began to appear to be motivated by internalized rape myths:

I couldn't blame, you know, it wasn't this guy's fault that I went out and bought myself a bunch of drinks, I did that. It wasn't this guy's fault that I decided to leave base with one person that I didn't really know, that was my dumb decision. Things like that, you know, I wasn't using my head and so I don't know, I took accountability for my part in it and, I felt guilty about it. I felt guilty that whether it was intended or not, whether it was sexual assault or not, I felt like I had had an affair, like even though it wasn't romantic or anything, I don't know. (Sarah, Navy)

Toward the end of the interview, as she discussed cultural shifts that are occurring to normalize reporting, she shared:

I mean at least in my case I worried that [...] if I was reporting it, I was reporting something that might not be right. What if it was my fault? What if I consented and this guy just genuinely thought I was fine and I mean obviously, I was really drunk but what if there was just an honest misunderstanding, is that really worth somebody going to jail, is it worth somebody getting kicked out of the Navy, you know because I made a mistake, you know? Those were my fears, and even in the case with the guy who put my hand on his crotch, [...] what if that wasn't his intention? What if he was just trying to pull me to him and my hand rubbed up on his crotch? What if I'm just, my perspective is just totally skewed on this? You know, you start questioning yourself, and then going is it really worth this guy getting into all this trouble because I was confused and you talk yourself out of it that way. (Sarah, Navy)

By this point in the interview, Sarah was articulating how her self-doubt was motivating her to feel like she should protect the perpetrator.

The theme of protection emerged in Lee's narrative as well, but was centered on her relationship with her uncle. Although her uncle had not been able to protect her from two sexual assaults, she described his reaction when he found out about the second assault, "My uncle was extremely outraged, because at that time we had grown very close, like daughter and father, and we still to this day are very close. So he, he was really upset, I mean, he wanted to know name, he wanted to know everything." She described

wanting to protect him by not telling him who the perpetrator of the first assault was. In this excerpt, she also provides a contrast between a protective uncle and a disconnected cousin:

I will still never give them the name because, I mean, honestly I think my uncle would try to hunt [him] down and kill him. It's just, I think he carries the regret and the, I guess the guilt of what happened to me because [...] after we got close he felt like he was you know, like my dad, the keeper, you know, the keeper, stuff like that. My cousin, you know, he was just like, sorry it [happened] and you know, it didn't really bother him. We're [...] not close, and to this day we still don't talk [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

In terms of feeling protected within her unit, Lee expressed fear of being transferred into a new unit as a result of reporting:

You can be removed from this unit, you could be forced to go somewhere else, we don't know what's gonna happen. Well, my [friends were] here in [this] unit and I have some of my closest friends with me where I felt protection, I felt like well I wanna be here, I don't want to move, I don't want to go, I don't want to start over, I have two years left, you know. I was like, I just want to be here, I want to be with the boys [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

Lee's expressed sense of protection in a unit where she was harassed and assaulted is interesting in that she seems to prefer the known danger in that unit, to the unknown danger that might be in a new unit where she did not know anyone.

For Jessica, protection emerged as a theme connected to leaders. She spoke of feeling protected by leaders in an environment where harassment and assault were the norm:

It was just a part of the atmosphere, the environment, it was just like that, and so, I had dealt with a lot of that stuff coming up in the Marine Corps, but again, [...] you knew that's what the environment was, you (*pause*), you handled it, you figured out how to protect yourself. Your female leaders helped you. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Having female leaders who looked out for lower-ranking female Marines served as a lesson in leadership for Jessica. Late in her career as she was advocating against being

harassed by higher-ranking NCOs, she was still mindful of how her Marines were being treated:

[...] I just want to talk to the CO, I just want him to make it stop. Because it's been ongoing, like this was the culmination, but I was like I just want him to make it stop, I don't want to have to deal with them anymore, I don't want them in positions of power, I want them to have nothing to do with my Marines, they have no reason to have anything to do with my Marines. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica repeated this sense of loyalty to and protection of her Marines:

[...] the hardest time for me retiring was leaving my Marines in the hands of the people that were still there. That was the hardest. Because I knew at least with me they would be protected. Because I would kick and scream and fight and whatever, you can call me a cunt as long as you're not calling them one, you know what I mean? I can take it. [...] they're not in a position you know what I mean? (Jessica, Marine Corps)

All three participants discussed, again in varying specific ways, feeling a sense of security at one point in time when they were not in fact protected. For Sarah, she attributed her sense of protection to naiveté, “So I just had a really false sense of security I guess, and just, I was really naïve.” For Lee, her sense of security occurred prior to both of her assaults when she fell asleep in a hotel room, sharing the room with someone she trusted. Jessica's sense of security was in the organization of the Marine Corps at large. She spoke of feeling betrayed that she was not protected from harassment late in her career, “you can give up everything and they can ask you to sacrifice and then be okay with you being treated like that.”

“Breaking Point”

Participants described points in their careers where they had become frustrated by the surrounding harassment, either directed at them or women generally. It appears the participants got to a “breaking point” at some point. Sarah described feeling

overwhelmed as a result of living in a hostile environment. In one situation, a man in civilian clothing approached her as she was at a cleaning station:

And he put his hand on my shoulder and he told me, “shipmate, tell me what’s wrong,” and I like flipped out, and I threw an elbow and I told him not to touch me and I started yelling because I’d just had it at that point, I was so fed up with the guys and the girls treating me so poorly, and the guys trying to always hit on me, just being inappropriate and he starts yelling at me. Turns out he was the Chief (E-7) of the barracks and I didn’t know (*laughs*). (Sarah, Navy)

Later in her career, Sarah describes becoming frustrated enough with her co-worker’s derogatory language and behavior that she decides to report him to leadership:

There was one individual in particular that was in my shop that I couldn’t stand, he was a pig and I ended up reporting him to our LPO because he created a hostile work environment. He was constantly coming in and talking very loud and obnoxious and just talking about his conquests with women, he called them bitches, you know sluts, very degrading. And so this went on for a long time, this is just how he was, it was how he talked to everybody and so I got sick of hearing it, and nobody ever said anything, I was really surprised. We even had a female Chief (E-7) in the shop at the time, and nobody batted an eye. It was just how he was and everybody had accepted this and I finally just had it [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

The contrast between Sarah’s sense of empowerment around self-advocacy is notable.

Earlier, when she was living in the hostile barracks, she made no attempts at reporting the harassment she experienced. It is only later, at a different command, that she felt empowered enough to report the harassment.

While deployed in Iraq, Lee was required to continue working with her perpetrator, who was assigned as her co-driver. Lee described months of continual hostile interactions with him. She shared, “finally about mid-deployment was when I went and said something about you know, this is enough, I’m tired of his sexism, I’m tired of this.” It was not until the perpetrator had been disciplined for other misconduct that she felt empowered in advocating for herself:

[...] at that point the guy that had assaulted me had gotten in trouble for drugs, had gotten in trouble for drinking, and then finally his mouth, I finally said something. [...] I just told on him. I said [to my sergeant], “I cannot be on guard duty with him all the time, I’m tired of it, I’m tired of hearing the crap.” And so he went away for awhile [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

After Lee was sexually assaulted a second time, she did not report the assault. It was not until later on deployment, when the perpetrator was openly harassing and humiliating her, that she decided to report being sexual harassed. It was not until the perpetrator threatened to report her for sexual harassment against him that she decided to report the assault:

So they sat me down and said, do you understand he’s pressing harassment against you because you told him to fuck off [...], and you responded to him and I said okay, well then I’ll press sexual assault because back in March he came to my hotel room and I have proof and I have a witness and stuff. And so they backed off. (Lee, National Guard)

It seems that Lee attempted to report the sexual assault in response to feeling attacked.

Lee continues to describe the sense of “being trapped” or “backed into a corner” later in the interview when she describes what triggers her PTSD.

Jessica’s experience paralleled Lee and Sarah in that she decided to access her chain of command in response to feeling harassed. She described reaching her breaking point after a year of harassment from two higher-ranking NCOs. The following occurred after the NCOs “smacked [her] nose” and told her not to speak in the meeting with the CO:

[...] so when the meeting is over I walk straight over to the Sgt Major (E-9), that’s fucking it, I’m filing a complaint, I’m bringing this whole fucking place down, I’m fucking tired of it. Because I had been dealing with this for over a year, I mean being treated like a lance corporal (E-3). [...] I won’t even go into everything because it was just ridiculous, but it was because I was a woman, and the Sgt Major didn’t even want to hear it, he was just like okay. [...] and by this time I’m like ready to, because you can tell I’m a very visual person (*laughs*), like

I was like tears in my eyes, I'm like fuming, about to like whoop this guy's ass, and [Sgt Major] was just like okay. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica went on to describe having a “nervous breakdown” the same day as this meeting. She decided to file an Equal Employment Opportunity complaint against the two NCOs who had been harassing her. Jessica discussed how years of harassment had finally culminated in this nervous breakdown:

[...] it could take you years before you realize, because I realize now, how much it's nipped at me and chipped away at me over the years because I had never dealt with it, [...] there was no way of dealing with it, [...] it was just a part of life, [...] it wasn't like I ever dealt with anything. And it wasn't until I actually had had enough that [I thought] okay why is now my breaking point? Because physically it's nothing compared to things that I'd been through in the past, so why is now my breaking point and realizing just how much has been chipped away. So sometimes you don't realize that until later and [...] that's unfortunate. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Process of Empowerment and Personal Growth

All three participants described a process of empowerment that occurred over the course of their service. They described themselves as “naïve” when they first enlisted, and more empowered in advocating for themselves or taking a stance by the time they separated (or were interviewed). Each also described a “turning point” in which they felt things had changed for them.

Lee reflected on her experience:

Well the first [sexual assault] was [when I was] 19, and the second assault I was 25, 26, so yeah I'm 31 now. I know that I cannot believe where I am in my life. Looking back I kind of see a naïve little girl who just has no clue about what the world has to offer you know? I was told one thing, did it, made a decision, rolled with it, you know? (Lee, National Guard)

Lee further reflected on the turning point in her life when she began to feel empowered.

This point occurred once she was out of the military. For her, advocating for others was a way for her to develop a sense of empowerment:

I really found myself when I finally came to a good place in life, when I was able to self-advocate for myself [and] for others. [...] I started hearing others have issues or, just, other events in general, just coming home and having those transition issues. And so I got active. There was a Veterans club on our campus that had just started and I got active with that, I took leadership in that right away, and that led to multiple positions in the state, nationally. [I] did a lot of national travel talking about Veterans, I did international travel, and that's kind of where I think I found a little more of my peace [and] developed myself as a person. (Lee, National Guard)

It was only once Lee removed herself from the military environment, particularly the rank hierarchy and pre-existing relationships, that she was able to grow and develop a sense of empowerment.

While Lee focused on her naiveté and powerlessness surrounding her decision to enlist, Sarah discussed how her perceived naiveté led to her assault. It is unclear whether her perceived naiveté contributed to a sense of self-blame, or she felt naïve after focusing on ways in which she may have been responsible for her assault. Either way, she shared her experience of feeling safe prior to the assault:

And I thought just being older that I'm not a likely target, you know. Older than most these people and you know, they're not gonna want to fool around with me. So I just had a really false sense of security I guess, and just, I was really naïve. I didn't realize that stuff like this actually really did happen. (Sarah, Navy)

She further elucidated that her trust in her community stemmed from her experiences growing up:

I come from a really small town where [...] everybody knows everybody so I feel like [assaults may happen], I don't know, but I feel like it wouldn't because you know everybody. So if something did happen, everyone would know about it, and you'd be ostracized if you took advantage of somebody. And I guess I just kind of assumed the same thing with my shipmates that they're gonna have your back and they're not gonna mess with you, they're your brothers, they're not perpetrators, they're not, you know, rapists. (Sarah, Navy)

Sarah's trust in her surroundings was a trust in the ability of the community to police itself, as well as a trust that for perpetrators, the risk of being ostracized would be a deterrent. She spoke of her assault as a "wake up call":

I didn't trust anybody again after that. I was really selective of who I hung out with, where I hung out with them, if I had to go anywhere with a guy I made sure that someone else was with me or if I had to go into a room with somebody I'd leave the door open, I don't know, I just, not that I felt like everybody was out to get me, but it kinda woke me up to, I needed to be careful and be aware because you don't know who your friends are and it gave me healthy respect for alcohol (*laughs*). (Sarah, Navy)

In spite of these experiences, Sarah went on to develop a strong sense of empowerment. As mentioned earlier, the experience of having higher-ranking colleagues defend her against being "manhandled," appeared to be an impactful one that gave her permission to defend herself and others. She further grew in her sense of advocacy when she defended a younger female sailor against a male colleague who was making disparaging comments about her:

I think for me it was the fact that it was somebody else he was talking about who wasn't present to defend themselves and I didn't like that part of it you know. If he'd been talking about me I would've told him to shut his mouth and that would've been the end of it you know? But it was the fact that he was talking about somebody who was helpless to do anything about it. That really pissed me off. [...] there shouldn't be a different standard whether it's for me or somebody else, but, I think it made it easier to stand up to him because it wasn't me. I don't know, I didn't feel like I was overreacting. I felt like I was doing the right thing. (Sarah, Navy)

More broadly, Sarah stated she felt she had become a feminist as a result of serving in the Navy. She shared:

I didn't really respect women I guess at large when I first came in, I've really come to appreciate the strength of women. I mean you see it so much clearer in active duty than anywhere else. These women are you know, they're making hard decisions, they're putting off having families, or they're having families and balancing it. They're having to leave their children to deploy and you know, they're generally pretty strong and they're driven and you know, they work hard,

they work just as hard as men and they have pride in it and [...] I really liked that, really felt drawn in by that. (Sarah, Navy)

In contrast to Lee and Sarah, Jessica described a sense of empowerment that began when she left her home and abusive stepmother and went to boot camp:

[...] and I was finding my voice and [...] I'd always been stubborn, always been pretty set in my ways, but I also learned how to kind of shut up and just go with the flow and I was learning to not do that anymore, I was learning that I had my own voice, and I was learning that I'm an adult now [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Finding her voice ended up serving her well across her career, and proved to be a positive adaptation to the culture. She stated, “[...] you're gonna have to find your voice, you can't go into the Marine Corps and be meek. You can't go into the Marine Corps and be submissive.” As discussed earlier, having leadership that encouraged and modeled self-advocacy also proved to be a turning point for Jessica. She later relied on these advocacy skills and her sense of empowerment to protect the lower-ranking Marines serving under her. Jessica discussed another turning point that occurred for her after being assaulted by her co-worker:

I realized like, they see a vagina first, like when I walk in they don't see my rank, they don't see my name, they don't see my uniform, they don't see Marine. They see vagina, I mean literally, that's what they see. And it was, it was disheartening. [...] it sounds really stupid but I feel like even being in before Tailhook I feel like moving past that you'd think okay well things do change, and it was like at that point I realized just how much hadn't changed. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

After feeling so disheartened by the fact sexual assault was still a problem and women were still devalued in the Marine Corps, Jessica responded by becoming more empowered and confronting the perpetrator directly:

[...] and I just remember he was in there and he was spouting off some moto, oorah stuff, and I just couldn't [...] take it anymore, like I really, it just spilled over and I was like, shut the fuck up (*laughs*), and we ended up going over to the other room and I just screamed at him [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Across participants, the experience of advocating for others marked a turning point in developing a sense of empowerment. Sarah reflected on this:

But it was the fact that he was talking about somebody who was helpless to do anything about it. That really pissed me off. So, [...], there shouldn't be a different standard whether it's for me or somebody else, but, I think it made it easier to stand up to him because it wasn't me. I don't know, I didn't feel like I was overreacting. I felt like I was doing the right thing. (Sarah, Navy)

Although Sarah articulated feeling more comfortable defending others than defending herself, she also noted this double standard should not exist. In a perfect world, Sarah would be able to defend herself without question. Jessica provided examples of becoming further empowered through protecting the women who served under her. She shared:

[...] and I was in positions where I had Marines under me and most of them were women because again, the court reporting field is mostly women, so yeah, I wanted people to know don't mess with my Marines, don't mess with me, don't mess with my Marines. (Jessica, Marine Corps).

Broadly speaking, participants shared the feeling that they “found (their) voice” directly through serving in the military, as a means of adapting to the environment. Jessica stated:

I think that I really have tried to embody the Marine Corps ethos and the honor, courage, and commitment, and the leadership traits and principles. I think especially in an organization that preaches it and you see so many people who don't live it, [...] for me it made me want to live it even more. It made me want to be, because I never wanted someone to be able to come at me and say well, you don't adhere to these standards. And I think especially in that last year I think that's why I really didn't care anymore because it was like, give me something, give me something that I'm not doing. Give me something, here I am, what am I not doing? And because I can name x, y, z that you're not [doing], we can go down the leadership traits and principles and I can tell you how you're failing, you can't do that for me. So I think, I think in that way, [...] it has made me have a voice [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Meaning Making

The theme of meaning making encapsulates the process of looking back on their experiences on active duty and seeing what can be learned from the negative experiences. Consistent across participants was the feeling that they had become stronger as a result of experiencing adversity while serving. Lee made a direct connection between her negative experiences with being assaulted, disrespected, and unsupported by leadership to feeling more confident presently, “Yeah, I’ve learned to stand up for myself and not be walked on and it was probably those incidences in the military.” Lee went on to provide examples in her civilian life in which she stood up for herself, particularly at her place of employment. Sarah’s way of making meaning of her experiences with assault and harassment was to minimize the impact and focus on what she had control over, “So I guess I kind of just chalked it up to I had some unfortunate experiences and I can learn from it.” Jessica reflected on her last year in the Marine Corps (“the worst year”) and stated, “So, I guess it’s a good thing I went through all the other stuff cause (*laughs*) it got me through that last year.” Overall, the process of reflecting on past negative events and determining positive aspects appears to be an indicator of resiliency for the participants.

Participants also reflected on personal strengths that supported their ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. Across participants, the focus on goals or remaining in the military appeared to support participants’ efforts to move forward in their careers.

Each participant spoke of what being in the military offered them:

[...] it was crazy because I found, [...], I don’t want to say [patriotism] because it’s such an overly exaggerated word, I just found something that I believed in. [...] the core values, and the brotherhood and the sisterhood, and all those things were very, something I really needed and something I really believed in [...] for

me it was something tangible, something that I really really felt like I was holding onto, [...] I mean it was just very real for me, probably the most family I had ever experienced ever in life. Even the thought of [retiring] was very very difficult. And the whole you know being a Marine, the Marine Corps is phenomenal at the propaganda of, “we’re the best” and we’re this and we’re, you know, you have this title and you’ve earned it, and you know, “once a Marine always a Marine,” and it is embedded in you. So for me, once I was in, I was in [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

For Lee, serving in the military was a way out of her impoverished community, “So for me it was survival. Where was my future gonna go? This was my, this was my ticket to do something with my life.” Although she was able to attend school while she was serving, she was cognizant that the educational and vocational opportunities were limited in her community. Similarly, Sarah focused on the financial benefits, as well as her career goals:

I think it was the fact that I just, I really needed this. I don’t know, I was coming from a situation where I didn’t have anything to go back to so even if it had bothered me immensely and I felt like I couldn’t handle this and I needed to get out, I had nothing else to go back to. And, so I just kind of chalked it up to life experiences [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

She further shared:

I don’t want to get out just because I had a bad experience, one bad experience. There are so many rewards, you know you get college paid for, and I’ve been able to provide for my son by myself, and it would take a lot to shake me out of this. One bad experience, two bad experiences with two creepy guys, that could happen in the civilian world too, so I don’t really chalk that up to that it is a problem specific to the military. So I don’t know, it’s been a good experience overall. (Sarah, Navy)

Although Sarah had had some negative experiences, she has remained in the Navy and is pursuing a career as an officer. Lee and Jessica left the military after having negative experiences that outweighed the benefits of serving. Lee was unequivocal about how she feels about her service:

I try to think of the positive things like helping people out when we were in Iraq you know. The humanity side of things. When I look back on all that crap, I feel degraded, and I feel like I'm not even proud to serve in the military. And sometimes when people ask me why I got out it's easier just to say I was injured. I don't say what kind of injury, but I was injured, and [...] they thank me for my service and I move on because I don't like to reflect on that. I think it helped me, [made] me stronger and more determined and [to] not put up with shit anymore I guess you'd say, but it also has hurt me in a sense in that I have a hard time dealing still with male authority [figures] and I guess getting along with males who feel threatening [...]. (Lee, National Guard)

Although Lee feels degraded when she thinks back on her time serving, she is able to see the positive ways in which she has grown. Jessica also shared complex feelings about the Marine Corps, "It's so hard because I love the organization. I love the organization itself. So it shows you just how brainwashed you are (*laughs*). You can put up with so much crap and still be like I love it." She further discussed finding a place of balance in her life, that only came much later in her career:

And yeah, [...] the journey of it has been all of that, and looking back and saying, okay, I've grown in who I've become and what I believe in and what my morals are and, and I know what hypocrisy is, and [...] I know those things, I know what real truth is, you know what I mean? But I also know that you don't have to be strong all the time, there is a time where you can be weak and that you should have someone that you can fall on, you know [...]. But it's having to go so far to the left [...] and then so far to the right, and then having to come back like in the middle. (Jessica, Marine Corps).

Similar to Sarah, Jessica felt that in spite of negative experiences, she would make the same choice to enlist, "Yeah I think I wouldn't take it back, I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I still think it was the best decision that my father ever made for me (*laughs*) I really do."

In terms of internal processes that influenced reporting, participants described the shock that occurred after the assault and kept them from responding in the moment; experience of internalized rape myths; a process of analyzing the potential risks and benefits that could come from reporting; a sense of being protected or of protecting

others; feeling emotionally overwhelmed or at a “breaking point”; a long-term process of empowerment; and a process of meaning making. In addition to internal processes, participants described the impact of interacting with others had on their decision to report or not report.

Interpersonal aspects

The interaction between the participants and individuals in their environments had a notable impact across narratives. The response of people in the participants’ environments played a major role in encouraging or discouraging them from reporting assaults and harassment. Participants described looking to their social support or surrounding environment to confirm or disconfirm their feelings about being assaulted. They discussed experiences being validated or invalidated in response to their concerns. The theme of betrayal was present at individual, group, and organizational levels. “Betrayal” within these narratives was defined as “going against a promise.”

Validation and invalidation

Participants shared examples of looking to their environment for validation of their feelings, particularly when they were experiencing “shock” or uncertainty. Jessica described gathering the women she worked with after being assaulted by her colleague, “And, I looked around and then I remember like gathering my Marines together and just saying does this happen? [...] and I remember asking my ladies like, [had] things changed, and they hadn’t.” She further described the sense of defeat she felt when she realized “things hadn’t changed” in the Marine Corps:

And I know it’s not like, (*pause*), it’s not as bad as other things that I had been through but I think for me mentally it was just, it’s almost like you see the light at the end of the tunnel and then you get to the end and it’s a mirage, there’s no light at the end of the tunnel, the grass isn’t greener on the other side, it’s exactly the

same as it was 12 years ago. [...] I mean, it was the most depressing thing because I felt like there's nothing I can do about it. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Sarah discussed at length the importance of having other people validate her feelings when she had been assaulted. After waking up in the hotel with the perpetrator of the first assault, in a state of shock, Sarah said:

I felt really guilty, and then he woke up and he looks over and he says, "I totally fucked you last night." Like, high five kinda (*laughs*), not a literal high five, but, and I didn't know what to say, I just was so upset about it and I didn't know what I had said, I didn't know if I had consented, I don't know so I was just, I just wanted to get back to base so, so we left, and I went back to base. (Sarah, Navy)

Once back on base, she called her sister to talk to her about what had happened. She was surprised by her sister's reaction, "she was kind of like 'oh good for you!' like another high five type thing. And I wasn't really feeling high five about it. But I don't know, it really confused me." As Sarah received messages from others that it had been consensual sex and not sexual assault, she became more confused as to what it was, thus making it even more difficult to want to report. In contrast, after Sarah's second assault, she immediately went to a group of friends and told them what had happened. Their response encouraged her to try to report the incident:

And maybe that's why I felt compelled to report it at first because when I told people what happened, their immediate response was "you need to report this, that's not right," versus when I told my sister what had happened in the hotel room and she treated it like it was a one-night stand, you know. Well if my sister's saying that, you know, that's exactly what other people [will say], and that was my fear was that people would say that. (Sarah, Navy)

She directly connected her friends' response to her increased confidence in reporting:

I know I should report it, you know we've all been trained to report things like that, but it made me feel better to know that, okay it's not just me overreacting to it, this is something else that other people think is wrong. So it does help when there's a group mentality [...], it can either validate it for you or it can shake the way that you think about it. (Sarah, Navy)

Lee described receiving an invalidating response from members of her unit the day after her first assault, while on convoy to Missouri:

On the ride down there, we had pulled over the convoy and the driver that he was with got out and came up to me and asked me are you gonna charge M* with rape? Are you gonna do something about this? And then I kept getting it and kept getting it from a few of his battle buddies. (Lee, National Guard)

This level of intimidation was present throughout Lee's narrative and contributed to the hostility in her work environment. After attempting to report the second assault and harassment, she continued to be subject to invalidation from her colleagues:

So for the next year all I heard was, I wish V* was here, every time they walked in the room some of the other guys in the unit, oh man, I wish V* was here, they just kept saying that and saying that and saying that. (Lee, National Guard)

It was not until Lee's uncle found out about her assaults did she receive a supportive response, rather than a hostile one:

They (uncle and cousin) found out about the second one when it happened, or a few years later. But no, about the first [assault]. My uncle was extremely outraged, because at that time we had grown very close, like daughter and father, and we still to this day are very close. So he was really upset, I mean, he wanted to know name, he wanted to know everything. (Lee, National Guard)

Jessica focused more on the invalidation she experienced when women attempted to report harassment and assault in the Marine Corps. She described her interactions with unsupportive leaders:

[...] being in [my] leadership positions where things had happened to my female Marines and going in and saying, "okay, she's gonna make a claim," or, "she's gonna report it," and then just seeing their eyes glaze over, it's just like this is a clear cut black and white situation, why are you giving me that look? Like, you should be like, fuck him, I can't believe he did this, I can't believe he's doing this to our unit, I can't believe HE...that's not what they said. It's she. Well, is she sure? And you know, "[...] what did she [do]?" She went up to her room that's what she did. So it's, (*sighs*), it's discouraging. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Had her attempts to support her female Marines been responded to in a validating manner, other women may have felt more encouraged to come forward. It was based on these interactions, and similar others, that left Jessica with the impression that her Marines would not be supported or protected. At the end of her career, Jessica was validated by having her complaints taken seriously, “So the last year, well six months that I was in the Marine Corps, I requested mast twice and I did two [inspector generals]. And they were all in my favor.” Having an entity outside her chain of command take her complaints seriously offered proof that she was not overreacting about the way she was being treated by her command.

Betrayal

The theme of betrayal presented at individual, group, and organizational levels, parallel to the participants’ foci on internal, external, and interpersonal aspects of their experience. Sarah, who focused mainly on her internal experience of self-blame and responsibility for the assault, spoke of feeling betrayed by her shipmate:

I thought because they’re my shipmate they’ll have my back, and I don’t know. So I was really focused on my personal responsibility in this situation, wasn’t really mad at him until later when like, I started thinking about everything I had said up to that point. It was very clear that I wasn’t interested and these were not my intentions and I began to wonder, you know, I don’t know, I never really thought of it as rape or even as sexual assault, but I thought of it as being taken advantage of. (Sarah, Navy)

Sarah’s feeling of betrayal moved her to continue questioning her role or feelings of responsibility for being assaulted. This self-doubt proved to be a barrier to her reporting.

Lee spoke throughout her interview about the familial and other pre-existing relationships that were within her unit. She described her unit:

We were all family. Which is the interesting part. We had I think 42 people that were directly related. So we had a lot of husband and wives, fathers [and] sons, nieces and nephews and uncles, cousins, that sort of thing, brothers, sisters. So we were close in a sense but also not so close. (Lee, National Guard)

Given the close ties between the people she served with, one might assume Lee was in a supportive environment. However, this did not prove to be the case. Lee shared how others around her responded to her reporting the harassment she experienced. She described a sense of betrayal by her peers:

[...] (*whispering*) oh that girl over there is pressing sexual harassment, you know I just kept getting it from all of the men in my unit, got it from them in other units, I got it from all the other females. Everybody just kind of, I felt like attacked me. (Lee, National Guard)

Without support, it would be hard for a service member to move forward with reporting. The risk of ostracizing themselves proved to be very real in Lee's unit. Lee also felt betrayed by her cousin when she was denied a promotion:

My cousin was at the time the company commander, [...] he was in charge. I got bypassed for a promotion [...] and it was the second time and my cousin didn't go to my defense for me. I had all my credits, passed my PT test, there was nothing, I had all points and they couldn't explain to me why, and it was favoritism. Again, I was bypassed for a male. So I decided to transfer. (Lee, National Guard)

Being bypassed for promotion is significant because it equals no increase in pay, as well as no increase in rank. The significance of this in terms of power was discussed earlier in this chapter. A failure to increase rank may also stall a service member's military career.

Jessica also shared feeling betrayed by the perpetrator of her assault, who was a friend, as well as leadership, and the Marine Corps organization at large. She described her friendship with the perpetrator, "We were the exact same rank and got promoted on the exact same day. We had our wet downs (celebration of promotions) on the same day, like we were friends, we were friends. And he was married. He was married." The

betrayal of trust at the hands of a friend proved particularly shocking for her. However, she felt empowered enough to confront the perpetrator, perhaps as a result of having been friends prior to the assault. Jessica expressed frustration and disappointment in the leadership that allowed assaults to occur:

Because honestly, I don't put it on the offenders. Offenders are assholes, they're jackasses, they do it because they can, that's why they act like this. If my CO would've called those master guns and been like, knock it the fuck off, I don't care what your issues are, I don't care what your personal shit is, knock it off, it'd been done. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Her frustration and disappointment extended further to feeling betrayed by the Marine Corps as an organization. She discussed the lack of support she received at the end of her long career:

I don't understand. It took me so long to understand like, how, how (*tears up*) I don't know how you can spend your [life], you can give up everything and they can ask you to sacrifice and then be okay with you being treated like that. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

She further expressed disappointment in the organization for their failure to protect women:

[...] you give so much of a sacrifice, you're expected for the good of the Marine Corps to do everything. To leave your family, to [do] all of these things and yet when something happens to you as a woman it's like well, you know? There's no recourse. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Across participants, the breaking of trust impacted their faith in their peers, leaders, and/or the organization they served in. None of the participants expressed a feeling that reporting would be a betrayal of their peers' trust in them. A sense of betrayal appeared to increase the participants' negative responses to the events that occurred.

The interpersonal aspect of the assaults was particularly salient, with a focus on the manner in which individuals and organizations in the participants' social context

responded to them as well as a sense of betrayal on varying levels. The discussion will now turn to the participants' opinions on ways in which military culture needs to shift in order to prevent sexual assaults and improve reporting.

Focus on the Future: Cultural Shift

Participants discussed changes that would need to occur in the military in order to improve reporting rates or decrease assaults and harassment. Participants consistently pointed to the need for a cultural shift, both within the military and without. What the cultural shift needs to entail differed across participants.

Sarah pointed out that the problem of sexual assault is not unique to the military, "One bad experience, two bad experiences with two creepy guys, that could happen in the civilian world too, so I don't really chalk that up to that it is a problem specific to the military." She further expounded on the stigma she felt that created a barrier to reporting for her and others, that is not unique to the military:

Yeah, I wouldn't want people to know and I don't know why I feel like that. Maybe that's something else that could be focused on too is changing the way we think about it, it shouldn't be something that I'm embarrassed about, you know. I mean, I was embarrassed with the one incident at the hotel because I felt like I'd played a part in it and so I was embarrassed, I was embarrassed by the way that it looked, I was embarrassed by the fact that I was married and this had happened, I mean, I was embarrassed for a few different reasons. But there's no reason I should've been embarrassed especially with the guy with the hand thing, I mean I didn't do anything, anything wrong in that, and I still felt embarrassed and I don't know why [...]. (Sarah, Navy)

Jessica shared similar sentiments and reflected on how the issue of sexual assault and harassment is rooted in culture:

I think, (*pauses*), you know the problem with this type of thing is there's no right answer, you know, this is one of those things that it's (*pauses*), it's cultural not only in the Marine Corps which makes it very, very difficult. It's you know, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape, it's the same type of mentality in the civilian world too. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

She was unequivocal in stating the change needs to be “genuine” rather than due to outside political influence, and that it will take brave individuals to stand up to change the status quo:

[...] but again the problem is, it doesn't translate into how it's supposed to because the cultural shift isn't there and there's still the victim blame and you know, all of that. I really think it's gonna take some very genuine and, I don't even know what the word is, but just people who aren't afraid and who really live and breathe do the right thing when no one's around [...]. (Jessica, Marine Corps)

Jessica was also conscious of the time that it would take for cultural change to occur, “I think it's gonna take a generation or two for that to happen because you have to change the entire mindset of it and that takes time.” Sarah optimistically noted the Navy has been making efforts in term of minimizing sexual harassment and assault, but that some individuals (mostly those who had been in the service for 20 years or more) were struggling to adapt to the changes:

I think that this was kind of all on the heels of the Navy making big pushes with SAVI and SAPR at the time and so, there were some people who were really [resistant] to the changes that were taking place, they weren't really happy about it. They [were], women just kind of need to deal with it, this is a man's [world], it's a very male-centric environment, and you know, if you can't take a joke, or you can't stand up for yourself, you know, you're gonna get walked on kind of a thing. And then there were other people who were a little bit more supportive of it and kind of understood you know, this is the direction we're going in and you guys are the ones who need to change and get on board with it, you know. (Sarah, Navy)

She further shared:

It seems like the Navy's perspective on sexual assault has been defined better and better. Every year it seems like they get better about defining what it is and that we're not standing for this, and there will be no tolerance, and they're trying to encourage people to come forward and talk about it. So I don't know, that makes me feel better. I feel like the Navy is moving in the right direction. (Sarah, Navy)

Beyond changing the culture in order to prevent assault and harassment, Sarah and Lee shared the opinion that normalizing talking about sexual assaults would be a positive change in terms of rape culture in the military:

and I don't know maybe it's something cultural we need to change in the military, just the support for the victims. I'd love to see it be, I don't know, it'd be really nice if you could report something and then nobody know about it (*laughs*) somehow. [...] I want to see people get comfortable with the idea at least of reporting it, or at least talking about it, if we talk about it maybe that will open the dialogue and get people comfortable and so when something does happen, they don't feel guilty that [it happened], they know what it is, they're able to define it, identify it for what it was and then feel like they're doing the right thing when they do report it. (Sarah, Navy)

I think that's [...] what keeps a lot of [women] from talking. I feel like, women like me who do talk about it, [that's] what's gonna help make [talking about it] easier in the future, because [assaults are not] gonna stop. It's gonna keep going. I mean, it's just the nature of the military. It's just what it is, and it's the nature of the beast. I feel like that that's how I'm contributing to help stopping in the future is talking about it, and sharing my story, and then also, you know, helping those who [have been assaulted], you know. (Lee, National Guard)

Participants expressed the opinion that the problem of sexual assault is rooted in the culture, both military and civilian. Sarah appeared the most optimistic in terms of how the services will continue to address prevention of assault and harassment. Jessica felt the changes will need to be genuine, and will only come as the result of brave individuals who are willing to stand up to change the Marine Corps norms, and over a long course of time. Lee felt the culture will never change, but at least she can contribute to women being more comfortable talking about assaults.

Conclusion

In summary, consistent themes emerged across participant narratives that revealed a complex interaction between the individual and their environment prior to and following sexual assaults. Superordinate themes included external factors, internal

processes, the impact of interpersonal interactions, and ideas around how the culture must change in order for sexual assaults to decrease and safety in reporting to increase.

Participants described environments in which assaults happened as hostile toward women in particular, with either negative leadership or a lack of leadership. Gender norms and treatment of women appeared to be particularly salient, which was further reflected in participants' descriptions of positive leadership that modeled valuing of female servicemembers. Factors unique to the military environment were explored, including the impact of living within a rank hierarchy and under the military justice system.

In terms of internal processes that influenced decisions around reporting, participants discussed several aspects of their experience around being sexually assaulted. Participants described a period of shock, followed by efforts to make sense of their experience. While reflecting on their decision not to report at the time, participants described the effect of internalized rape myths. The process of weighing the risks of reporting against the benefits was the most prominent of the internal processes described, and leads to the conclusion that for these particular servicewomen, it was not worth it to report. Examples of potential risks included damaging their reputations or losing the benefits they earned through service. The theme of protection appeared, but varied across participants as to whether they were concerned with protecting other potential victims, protecting the perpetrator from false reporting, or feeling protected themselves. Lastly, a process of empowerment and meaning making appeared to occur over several years, and supported the participants in future self-advocacy and reporting efforts.

Interacting with their social environment served as a barrier or support to reporting. Participants described looking to their social environments for validation of their experience. In situations where they experienced validation, they were more likely to report. It was here that the theme of betrayal emerged across individual, unit, and organizational levels.

All three participants reflected on the changes they believe must occur in order for the rate of assaults to decrease and the rate of reporting to increase. Consistent across narratives was the belief that change must occur at the cultural level. However, there were differences in terms of the specific changes the participants suggested.

Next, these results will be discussed in light of the research questions as well as the existing literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study focused on two research questions: 1.) *What barriers to reporting did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive?* and 2.) *What role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision to not report?*

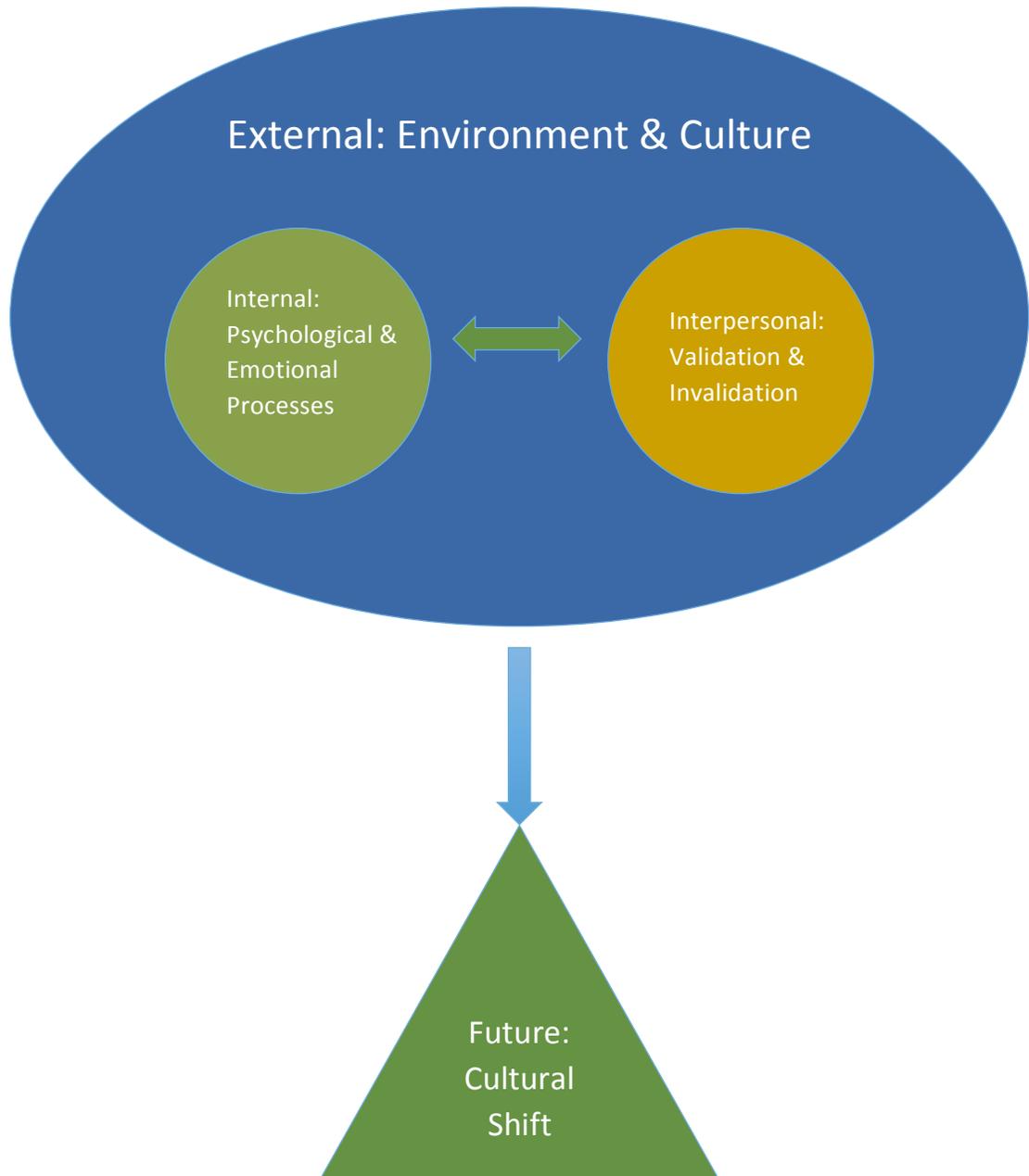
This chapter provides a discussion of the results, including answers to the research questions. Following the results discussion will be a discussion of implications for clinicians. Lastly, limitations of the current study and directions for future research will be explored.

Perceived Barriers

The first research question sought to clarify what barriers to reporting military sexual assault survivors perceived. The overarching theme presented in the narratives was that of the importance of the interaction between the individual and their environment (Figure 2). There appeared to be multiple, interacting processes occurring. These included internal processes within the individual, environmental or cultural processes outside the individual, and the interaction between the two.

Participants' description of their experiences appears to align with the minority stress model, developed by Meyer (2003). Meyer's original model was developed to explain the higher prevalence of mental health disorders in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations. He posited that the higher prevalence was due to experiencing the stress associated with being a member of a stigmatized group. In Meyer's model, the prejudice, stigma, and discrimination that minorities experience may negatively or positively contribute to an individual's mental health (2003). Minority stress is seen as

Figure 2. Diagram of Superordinate Themes



unique because it is additive, chronic, and socially based (Meyer, 2003). Importantly, the concepts in the minority stress model overlap, highlighting the interdependency of the various stressors and coping mechanisms.

Given the fact that women are a minority in the military, and that more feminine characteristics are viewed as undesirable in military culture (King, 2015), Meyer's original model of minority stress processes may be adapted for military women (see Figure 3). Experiencing minority stress, with all of its complexities, appeared to be a major barrier to reporting for the participants. In this adapted model, the themes found in the participants' narratives fit into the various subcategories. No research to date has examined a link between minority stress and mental health outcomes in military women. The adapted model presented in this chapter may provide an alternative theory to existing approaches.

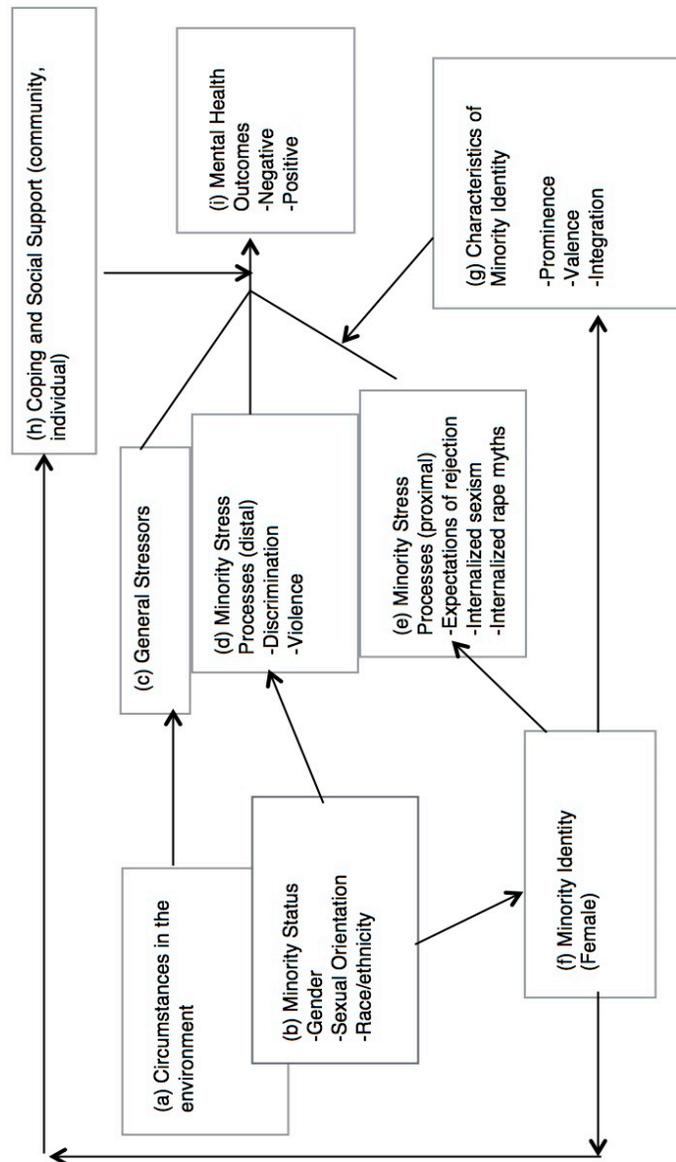
Circumstances in the Environment

Meyer (2003) noted that minority stress occurs within individuals who are situated within a context that may provide advantages and disadvantages. For the participants in this study, the active duty military environment provided occupational and financial stability, potential for community, professional skill building, and other advantages. These were in addition to disadvantages such as lack of freedom of movement, working under negative leadership, and having to interact with abusive individuals.

Minority Status

Women are a minority group in the military, comprising approximately 15% of active duty forces. Further, traditionally feminine qualities have historically been

Figure 3. Adaptation of the Minority Stress Model for Servicewomen



undervalued in the services. The debate over opening combat jobs to women, as well as arguments over changing SAPR policy, highlight the stigma military women face.

Participants expressed feeling at times that they were either undervalued or that men viewed them as detrimental to the armed forces. They described being treated as less than, targeted for hostility and harassment, and devalued for simply being women.

General Stressors

Circumstances unique to the military environment experienced by all servicemembers include living under the power structure of the rank hierarchy, the impact of leadership, the implementation of SAPR policies, and living under the UCMJ. Each of these represents a potential stressor or support for military members. Although not discussed by participants, being an active duty servicemember also requires frequent moving and changing of jobs, balancing demanding work hours with personal responsibilities, the expectation that one perform their job well, and the expectation that one is able to meet these varying demands competently. Jessica stated while discussing the victim blaming she experienced in the Marine Corps, “[...] you were expected to adhere to these standards at all times no matter what the varying degrees of abuse or whatever, it didn’t matter, you were expected to maintain [...].”

Living under the UCMJ and military justice system was a significant barrier to reporting. As part of the risk/benefit analysis participants’ engaged in, the question became whether it was worth going through the military justice system and stress related to accusing an individual of sexual assault. Jessica was particularly vocal on the issue due to years of working in the military legal system. By her report, she observed numerous proceedings related to military sexual assault. She expressed little confidence in the

system to protect victims and successfully prosecute perpetrators. She further expressed the need for commanding officers to be removed from prosecution decisions:

And as much as COs don't like power to be taken away from them, I think it would be a burden lifted off. Like okay, there's a sexual assault, here's where you go and it has nothing to do with me [CO]. [...] cause even convening authorities for legal proceedings, that's all military. That needs to go, they're not lawyers, that needs to go away, I think it all needs to be some separate entity that handles that and I think that that would at least keep the integrity of it, because COs have a reason for not pursuing [...].

One of Sarah's major concerns that kept her from reporting was a fear that she would be charged with adultery under the UCMJ. As she explained, the Navy does not recognize marital separation, only divorce. At the time, although she was separated from her husband she was not yet legally divorced. Her fear of being discharged from the Navy was so great, at a time when she needed to be able to provide for herself and her son, that she appeared to never consider reporting.

The power structure of the rank hierarchy was a significant general stressor for the participants in that it mediated how powerless or empowered the participants felt at the time of assaults. This seemed to impact Lee in particular, who described being treated "like someone's bitch." Moving up the hierarchy ("picking up rank") meant an increase in the amount of power an individual had.

Minority Stress Processes (Distal)

Minority stress has been described as occurring on a continuum from distal (objective/environmental) to proximal (subjective/internal) (Meyer, 2003). Participants' narratives in this study revealed stressors unique to the environment or culture, which were independent of each participant's identification as a woman. Distal stressors may include prejudice events including discrimination, harassment, and violence. The distal

stressors described in this study were perhaps more impactful given participants were not able to leave the environments in which they were occurring.

The hostile environments described by the participants were marked by gender harassment, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and targeting/bullying. These distal stressors mainly target women, and serve to enforce the message that women are not welcome in hypermasculine military culture. Themes related to hostile environments and gender issues are consistent with both Dunivin (1994) and Morris' (1996) discussions of military culture and hypermasculinity. Descriptions of misogyny were particularly salient to the participants. Since military culture values unit or group above the individual, any experience of being singled out or ostracized can create additive stress for an individual.

Sexual assault victims risk being singled out if they report or if their peers find out about the assault. Participants described a culture of victim blaming, wherein victims were seen as causing sexual assaults. In addition to viewing sexual assaults generally, participants used the term "women" and "victims" interchangeably, thus highlighting the view of sexual assault as a woman's problem. Jessica described the lack of protection afforded to victims who report, "Your name is still gonna be dragged in the mud. I don't care how confidential they say it is, that shit gets leaked."

Descriptions of the double standard between how men and women were treated proved to be distressing for the participants. However, aspects of the double standard that were distressing varied. For example, Sarah found the differential treatment of mothers versus fathers to be distressing because she is a single mother and has been forced to make choices she does not believe fathers have to make. Lee was more distressed by the negative treatment she received by colleagues who were higher-ranking than her, which

she attributed to being a female. For Jessica, the treatment of women as a whole in the Marine Corps was the most salient.

Minority Identity

Having a minority identity stems from being part of a group in which one has a minority status (i.e., a woman in the military). It is important to understand that minority identity is both a source of stress as well as a mediator of stress (Meyer, 2003). Minority identity has varying social and personal meanings to each individual, and thus subjective stress that accompanies it.

For the participants, their comfort level and confidence in their identity as women appeared to increase as time went on. This further appeared to decrease the minority stress they experienced. Positive leadership, which essentially gave permission to participants to defend themselves and self-advocate, empowered women to report and effect change in their environments. It is possible this occurred through decreasing participants' feelings of stress related to their female identities. The decrease in minority stress manifested as increased feelings of empowerment, or finding their voice. This finding is particularly relevant to this study, given a decrease in subjective experiences of minority stress led to an increase in attempts to report harassment and assaults. Consistent with the minority stress model, minority identity acted as an effect mediator for participants.

Minority Stress Processes (Proximal)

Proximal minority stress includes the internal or subjective experiences of minority individuals. Distal stressors can become proximal stressors (internalized stigma)

through cognitive appraisals (Meyer, 2003). Within this study, internalized sexism, internalized rape myths, and risk/benefit analyses were proximal stressors.

Internalized sexism was evident in participants' narratives, and appeared either as overt sexism (expressed views of women as weak) to more covert sexism (women need to be protected). Sarah, in discussing her experience of becoming more empowered shared, "I didn't really respect women I guess at large when I first came in." She went on to describe herself as a feminist, but that she struggles with using the label, "probably because where I'm from feminism is kind of a dirty word." This statement further highlights stigma felt as a woman even prior to enlisting. While reflecting on her experience with positive leadership, Jessica described leaders who displayed benevolent sexism, "they really saw us women as people who were to be protected and to be used to our capacities." Internalized sexism was prevalent in Jessica's discussion of becoming more comfortable with her femininity after retirement and how it affects the way she raises her daughters:

[...] it's affected even the way I raise my kids, like realizing that, I want my girls to be independent, I want them to have a voice, I don't want them to have to learn how to have a voice. (*pauses*) But I also want them to be able to be soft, and to be able to be feminine, and to be able to cry, to be able to be emotional, and that to be okay because that's part of being a woman, even the greatness of being a woman, which is something that I never embraced.

Further, Jessica described the defeat she felt when she realized later in her career "they see a vagina first, like when I walk in they don't see my rank, they don't see my name, they don't see my uniform, they don't see Marine. They see vagina." Her description highlights an increased sense of stress based on her identity as a stigmatized minority in the military.

Consistent with the literature, internalized rape myths were another salient proximal stressor. Rape myths function to reinforce patriarchal expectations of normative behavior based on gender roles (Brinson, 1992). Further, rape myths are used as a way to rationalize unacceptable behavior (rape and assault) (Brinson, 1992). Internalized rape myths are another example of distal stressors becoming proximal stressors. Examples of internalized rape myths include Sarah's focus on the role she believed she played in being assaulted, her belief that others would not believe her, her attempts to control her environment through decreased alcohol consumption, her belief in the frequency of false reporting; Lee's questioning of herself whether she had somehow "asked for it"; and Jessica's surprise that the perpetrator was a trusted friend and the belief it was not worth reporting since "he didn't rape me."

Internalized sexism and rape myths contributed to the risk/benefit analysis the participants discussed experiencing when deciding whether to report their assaults. Essentially, the participants described questioning whether filing a report was worth the risk inherent in such activity. The risks varied across participants, but the potential benefits did not appear to outweigh them in any case. Congruent with the minority stress model, participants feared rejection as a result of reporting. This was reflected in statements regarding fears of damage to reputations, losing a sense of belonging, and how they may be judged by family. It was only later, when participants were more confident in their identity as women in the military and thus more empowered, did they decide to report assaults and harassment.

Characteristics of Minority Identity

Three aspects of minority identity impact one's experience of stress including prominence, valence, and level of integration with other identities (Meyer, 2003). The prominence of one's minority identity in terms of other possible identities (sailor, mother, White, elderly, disabled, and so forth) is fluid and generally context-dependent. For example, Lee likely felt her identity as a female was more prominent (and thus may have felt more highly stressed) when surrounded by males who were using derogatory language versus being in a group comprised of supportive females. Valence refers to the negative or positive evaluation one assigns to aspects of their minority identity. As Jessica became more comfortable with her feminine side (increased positive evaluations of being a woman), her feelings of internalized sexism appeared to decrease. Integration of identities is seen as a positive step toward improved health outcomes (Meyer, 2003). Integration involves the movement of distinct identities (woman, mother, leader, ethnic minority, sexual minority, and so forth) toward a complex, synthesized sense of self. All three participants appeared to be moving toward an integrated sense of self by the time they were interviewed for this study. Taken together, characteristics (prominence, valence, integration) of the participants' minority identity as women in the military can modify, enhance, or decrease their experience of minority stress.

Coping and Social Support

Importantly, being a member of a minority group may provide access to additional coping resources, through solidarity and community building (Meyer, 2003). The literature supports the idea of growth through adversity, and the participants in this study reflected on this concept when discussing how they were able to overcome their

various negative experiences. All shared a sense of having become more resilient and empowered as a result of their experiences.

The MSM differentiates between personal-level coping resources such as personality factors, and group-level resources that are available to all minority-identified individuals (Meyer, 2003). By the participants' report, personal coping resources varied. For example, Sarah described minimizing her experience and moving on, while Lee described abusing food, drugs, and alcohol. Although Sarah presents as a resilient individual, Meyer notes that even those with great individual resources may have trouble coping when group-level resources are absent. Sarah described the barracks she was in at the time, "Even the girls were mean to me, the girls that I shared a barracks room with were horrible. So I just felt really alone, really isolated." In contrast, Jessica described a sense of solidarity with her female peers, "At least before you knew it wasn't safe, and you knew how to protect [yourself] and you took up those arms, you knew okay, stay in pairs, the women knew that they had to bond together." Group level resources may positively impact proximal stressors by shifting cognitive appraisals (Meyer, 2003). For the participants, positive female role models shifted the way the participants viewed women in the military, and as a result, themselves. Sarah shared:

I've really come to appreciate the strength of women. I mean you see it so much clearer in active duty than anywhere else. These women are [...] making hard decisions, they're putting off having families, or they're having families and balancing it. They're having to leave their children to deploy and you know, they're generally pretty strong and they're driven and they work hard. They work just as hard as men and they have pride in it and I really liked that, really felt drawn in by that.

Minority Stress as a Barrier

In discussing their experiences with sexual assault while on active duty, the participants described a complex interaction between their internal processes, the environment and culture in which they lived, and the individuals in their social context. Meyer's (2003) minority stress model appears to be suitable for adapting to examine the unique stressors military women face in hypermasculine environments. Initially developed for LGB populations to better understand higher rates of mental health disorders in those populations, the model may account for the additive stressors military women face.

Internalized stigma appeared to be a strong barrier to reporting for the women in this study. Additionally, the belief that their reports would not be worth the potential cost, speaks to the perception of the devaluation of women that persists in military culture. While policy changes have improved some aspects of service for women, there lacks the "genuine change" as one participant put it. Without cultural changes that decrease a sense of stigmatization of femininity and womanhood, servicewomen will continue to experience stress that is unique to women in the military.

Betrayal

The second research question sought to clarify what role betrayal (the act of going against a promise) played in the participants' decision not to report their assaults. The participants described betrayal felt on individual, group, and organizational levels. On an individual level, participants described feeling betrayed by the perpetrator, but more surprisingly, also described a sense of betrayal if they were to report the assault. On a group level, participants described units in which they experienced open hostility versus

support and validation. On an organizational level, participants described the hypocrisy they experienced by leadership who did not live out the expressed values of the organization they served in. “Betrayal trauma theory” (BTT) was developed to account for the impact of social relationships and context on post-traumatic outcomes (Freyd, DePrince, & Gleaves, 2007). Betrayal traumas can occur at or across any of these levels.

On an individual level, participants described feeling betrayed by the perpetrators, who were either acquaintances or well-known peers who broke the participants’ trust. They also described betrayal of individuals in their social context who responded in invalidating ways. Both of these experiences appeared to contribute to a sense of shock, disbelief, and a minimization of the significance of the experience. For example, both Sarah’s perpetrator and sister responded to the assault as if it had been “a one-night stand” or consensual sex. This was highly inconsistent with the way Sarah was feeling and caused Sarah to question her response. She described feeling protective of the perpetrator because of her self-doubt, “I didn’t want to accuse somebody of something and have them automatically be assumed guilty because they were the guy, when I didn’t even know what I had said or done that led up to it.” This theme of protecting perpetrators, framed as finding balance, appeared throughout Sarah’s narrative. Similarly, Lee spoke of feeling betrayed by members of her family, yet also wanting to protect them. To report and bring negative attention to her family’s name would feel like a betrayal to her. This then begs the question of whether this would be the case if rape myths and victim blaming were not so common in her community.

Group level betrayals occurred within units, commands, and communities. The importance of validation or invalidation by the participants’ friends and colleagues made

a difference in whether they were likely or unlikely to report. By hearing other people essentially say, “that was wrong,” participants were less likely to doubt themselves. However, when peers responded with hostility and threats of retaliation, the participants were less likely to report. The one outlier was Jessica’s description of her last command, where she reported as a result of reaching her “breaking point.”

A major organizational betrayal was the hypocrisy displayed by leadership who did not live out the professed values of the branch in which they were serving. This appeared to be highly distressing to the participants, who worked hard to live by these values. As Jessica stated:

I think that I really have tried to embody the Marine Corps ethos and the honor, courage, and commitment, and the leadership traits and principles. I think especially in an organization that preaches it and you see so many people who don’t live it, for me it made me want to live it even more. It made me want to be [better], because I never wanted someone to be able to come at me and say well, you don’t adhere to these standards.

While organizational, or institutional betrayal occurred prior and after assaults, it was Jessica’s experience with institutional betrayal that was the most distressing of her career. Lee’s description of feeling she had to “bargain” to report her second assault as well as harassment, could be viewed as a betrayal by the organization for failing to protect her.

The feeling of being betrayed by an individual, betraying others by reporting, feeling betrayed by their peers, or by the organization they served in all presented as barriers to reporting for the participants. Additionally, the feelings of betrayal appeared to contribute to negative psychological outcomes.

Minority Stress and Betrayal

Two of the most prominent proximal stressors discussed by Meyer (2003) is the fear of rejection and internalized stigma about one’s identity. Feelings of betrayal are

relevant to this discussion for these two reasons. One, the sense of betrayal as a result of being assaulted by a male they trusted functioned to increase internalized stigma (women are less-than). Two, the betrayal felt if one were to report the trusted friend risked rejection from the group. Sarah put it succinctly, “You don’t want to be that girl that had the problem and reported it [...].” Either of these would increase a woman’s sense of stress related to their minority identity. Jessica discussed the expectation that victims were supposed to maintain their composure under duress:

[...] if your performance or if your professionalism, the way you carry yourself changed at all, it was your problem, it wasn’t the person that was doing this to you, it was your problem because you were expected to adhere to these standards at all times no matter what the varying degrees of abuse or whatever, it didn’t matter, you were expected to maintain and if you didn’t you were the problem, not the perpetrators, but you were the problem.

In this example, where reporting or risking disrupting unit cohesion were seen as the problem, women did not stand to gain anything but risked being further ostracized from the group.

Auxiliary Findings

This study sought to expand on the findings of the most recent WGRA surveys on barriers to reporting by gaining a better understanding through servicewomen’s own words. By examining the WGRA results through the minority stress model framework adapted for this study, a more complex understanding of the survey responses is uncovered.

The most endorsed response to why women did not report in 2012 was not wanting anyone to know (70%) (WGRA, 2012). On the surface this seems like a relatively straightforward explanation, but as the results of this study have shown, it is likely quite complex. For example, this response could involve proximal stressors such as

feelings of shame and fear, and distal stressors such as hostile environments where invalidation is likely (thus resulting in an increase of minority stress). Feeling uncomfortable making a report (66%) may speak to, again, proximal stressors such as self-blame, guilt, and shame, but may also be related to avoiding a sense of betrayal of one's unit or friend. Thinking their report would not be kept confidential (51%) potentially speaks to the belief that victims (women) are undervalued, but likely is related to believing nothing would come from reporting (50%), or hearing of others' negative experiences with reporting (43%). What is consistent across all of these is a culture that stigmatizes women and femininity and blames victims rather than perpetrators.

One surprising finding in this study was the participants' belief that serving in the military actually made them stronger and more self-confident. Sarah's statement, "I didn't really consider myself a feminist until I joined the Navy probably," was one of the most shocking in all three narratives because it goes against the pre-conceived notions I had as to what the participants would be like. Congruent with the minority stress model is the idea that being part of a minority in-group provides community and social support. It appears that for Sarah and Jessica, women came together and supported each other for the most part. Sarah describes wanting to be the type of leader that Jessica was – acting as a positive role model for the women serving under her and protecting them. Lee likely would have had a much different experience if the women in her units had been supportive rather than hostile.

Cultural Shift

All participants expressed the idea that the issue of sexual assault in the military will continue to be a problem until there is a shift in both military and civilian culture. In

feminist terms, the cultural shift that needs to occur is to dismantle rape culture in general. Further, until women are seen as equals, rape and sexual assault will continue to be prominent. Presently, there appears to be a shift toward “benevolent sexism” in which women continue to be seen as needing protection, which maintains current power structures. Although the intentions behind protecting women are likely good, they do not solve the problem at the core of perpetrating assaults. In a culture where women are viewed as equals, it is likely that minority stress is significantly decreased. When minority stress decreases, fear of rejection also decreases, thus making it less risky to report.

Limitations

While the current study has uncovered some interesting findings, there are several limitations. First, participants’ military experiences were diverse in nature (branch of service, length of service, occupational specialty) in order to find meaningful similarities and differences. However a study in which participants also represented diverse identities may yield more information in terms of minority stress and intersecting minority identities. Second, given the sensitive nature of the topic under study, it was highly challenging to find women who were willing to talk about their experiences of sexual assault while on active duty. Participants in this study had some particular motivation for wanting to tell their story, and contribute to effecting change. This motivation likely impacted the results. Third, there was a lack of validity checking directly with participants after the results were determined. It is possible that I misinterpreted narratives but without participant checking, there is no way to know for certain.

Future Directions for Research

Although much quantitative research has been conducted on military sexual assault in terms of outcomes, this study is the first of its kind to use qualitative methodology to better understand what barriers to reporting exist. In the process, the results also yielded a greater understanding of the culture in which military women live that contributes to mental health outcomes more generally. There are several avenues future research may take.

First, based upon the results of this study, a large-scale quantitative study that examines minority stress in military women would be highly valuable. A better understanding of minority stress could further hone efforts to shift military culture toward inclusiveness, potentially decreasing the need for mental health services. Beyond sexual assault and mental health concerns, the results of such a line of inquiry could also inform policies related to the retention of servicewomen; improvements to basic training that prepare servicemembers for healthier lives; and improvements to leadership training curricula.

Second, future research may evaluate the effectiveness of command-level interventions that focus on reducing minority stress for servicewomen. The results of this study support the idea of positive leadership that values self-advocacy as an effective intervention. Developing programming that teaches leaders how to improve command culture through valuing equality may be one way to decrease distal stress for servicewomen. Importantly, the leaders need to be able to act as role models and not just deliver talking points handed down from DOD. To decrease proximal stress, programs that teach empowerment through boundary setting may be effective.

Third, future studies may focus on perpetrators rather than continuing to focus on survivors. One critique of this study is that it continues to frame sexual assault as the survivor's problem, rather than focus on the perpetrators. More research is needed that examines cultural and environmental aspects in the military that support perpetration.

Implications for Clinicians

An understanding of the unique stressors military women face is necessary for clinicians who wish to provide culturally-competent care. It is important to go beyond a basic understanding of military culture in general such as customs, language, and expectations of servicemembers. Culturally-competent care involves consulting with patients to understand how the varying levels of culture (military, branch, command, unit) affected their experience. The participants in this study described varying experiences with different commands. It is important not to assume that because a patient was sexually assaulted, their entire experience in the military was negative.

This study highlights the need to understand how being a woman in the military, and thus possibly stigmatized, impacted the patient. For some, being a woman may have left them with an increased sense of being less-than or stigmatized, thus contributing to negative mental health outcomes. For others, military service may have been an empowering experience that helped them find their voice. Engaging in discussion with patients about their experience and validating their stories can be a positive intervention. It is important to further clarify this may not be an all-or-none experience for patients (all good or all bad). Patients may express complex feelings about their time serving. In fact, assuming all military women had negative experiences may be seen as a form of benevolent sexism. Helping military women understand the impact of stressors unique to

being a minority and identifying ways to decrease minority stress can be effective interventions.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to explore two research questions: (1) *What barriers to reporting did servicewomen who survived sexual assault in a military setting perceive?* and (2) *What role did betrayal (the act of going against a promise) play in their decision to not report?* To provide context for the research developed in this study, a literature review of military culture, sexual assault, and betrayal trauma theory was provided. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, a qualitative approach, was used to design and conduct research procedures. An analysis of interviews conducted with three participants who experienced sexual assault while on active duty and did not report the assault(s) resulted in four superordinate themes including: (1) external (environmental or cultural) factors, (2) internal processes, (3) interpersonal aspects, and (4) focus on cultural shift needed. The four superordinate themes with included main themes were described and supported by participant quotes in the results chapter. The discussion revisited the research questions and provided possible answers based on the results of this study. Limitations of the study, clinical implications, and suggestions for future research were provided.

The research on why servicewomen do not report sexual assaults in the military has been limited to survey data that provides a vague understanding of potential barriers. In spite of the limitations of the current study, the results feature new information that has yet to be published in the research literature. The study aimed to gain a more thorough understanding of the barriers that servicewomen perceived, beyond those provided in

survey data. Further, the study also sought to understand what role betrayal may have played in women's decision not to report. Overall, the results of this study point to internal processes interacting with external or cultural aspects that either support women in self-advocacy efforts or further detract from them. The minority stress model provided an existing framework through which the findings of this study can be better understood. In sum, the experience of having a stigmatized, minority identity made it difficult for women to feel reporting assaults would be worth the potential risk of ostracism. In environments where women felt valued, they were more likely to report. Additionally, if women felt more empowered internally, they were also more likely to report assaults and harassment. These findings point to the need to decrease the experience of minority stress for women in the military.

Secondary aims of this study were to give voice to women who felt silenced at the time of their assaults, to raise awareness of the unique stressors women in the military face, and to inspire researchers to continue working on the problem of sexual assault in the military. Effecting cultural change will not be an easy task. As Jessica shared, "I really think it's gonna take some very genuine and, I don't even know what the word is, but just people who aren't afraid and who really live and breathe do the right thing when no one's around."

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