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Perceptions of Female Naval Officers on Combat Role Policy and Career Advancement

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Abstract

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MA, American Military University, 2009

BS, United States Naval Academy, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Women were officially allowed to serve in combat positions when the 1993 Combat

Exclusion Policy was lifted in 2013. There was little research to date on how these

changes may have influenced the recruitment, retention, and promotion of female naval

officers. The purpose of this study was to explore female naval officers' perceptions on

how lifting the combat exclusion policy impacted the factors of recruitment, retention,

and promotion within the military. A generic qualitative study supported exploring

perceptions of female naval officers who experienced combat duty regarding these issues.

Using feminist security studies as the conceptual framework, this study focused on

inquiry of individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and subjective perceptions based on their

everyday experiences. Through individual semi structured interviews with 10 female

naval officers who experienced combat duty, thematic inductive analysis revealed the

lifting of the combat exclusion policy was perceived in a positive manner. Further, all

participants experienced gender-based discrimination and expressed the need to work

harder than their male counterparts to be successful. Combat experiences were deemed

challenging but provided many opportunities to learn and to make a difference. This

qualitative study may help to fill the gap in the literature about how changes in gender

combat policies are perceived by female naval officers who are assigned to combat

positions. This study may provide some knowledge on the unique phenomenon of women

in combat and could also be used in social work theory and practice to benefit

policymakers to promote positive social changes within the military.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to all the men and women I have served with in my naval career as an enlisted sailor, a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy, and an intelligence officer on active duty and in the Navy reserves.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2013, women were allowed to serve in combat roles for the first time due to the lifting of an exclusion policy known as the Aspin Rule, which did not allow women to serve in direct combat roles (McNulty, 2012). Currently, the demographics of the military services are changing, and females made up 24.8% of the naval officer corps in 2020 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), an increase of 4.8% from 2018 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Limited research has been focused on female naval officers' perceptions about how these policy changes have affected their recruitment, promotion, and retention. When women's roles evolve and change, it is crucial to learn how female officers have integrated into combat roles and their perceptions about their careers. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of female naval officers who had been assigned to combat duty on how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. Given this increase in females in the service of their country, it is essential to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and how they perceive the impact of these new roles on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. This study may add to the understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in historically gendered and stressful experiences, such as combat experience in war zones. Such insights may contribute to the considerations of policymakers and be used to strengthen diversity and equality within the Navy.

Chapter 1 provides an outline of the approach to this study. This chapter begins with the background of the problem, focusing mainly on research literature that defines

the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and how the U.S. Navy implemented the changes. It then moves to the problem statement, highlighting the importance, relevance, and significance of this study. Additionally, it is shown through a summary of the literature how the study is relevant and significant to public policy and administration. Chapter 1 also includes the operational definitions of key terms essential to this study, assumptions, the scope of the study, delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and concludes with a summary.

Background

With the lifting of the 1994 Combat Exclusion Policy in 2013, women were allowed to serve in combat positions within the military. The decision to overturn the ban was viewed as a victory by feminists who viewed ground combat as an issue for women's equal opportunity (Justi, 2017). The integration of women first into the Navy and subsequently into the operating forces of the fleet has been an "extended, slow, and contentious process influenced by institutional biases, attitudes, and political and cultural trends" (Balano and Rosenberg, 2007, p. 6). For women in the United States Navy, the lifting of the Aspin Rule represented the opportunity to serve on most combat aircraft and ships and increased the number of qualified women for promotion (Jordon, 2003). This opportunity has led to women comprising the fastest growing segment of the U.S. military population, including 14.5% of all active-duty military, 18% of all National Guard and Reserves, and 8% of the total veteran population (Amara, 2020).

Organizational changes, leadership, and cultural changes within the military have contributed to the integration of women in the military. Cone (2016) examined this issue

as a necessity if women were to be integrated into combat situations with no limitations based upon gender (Cone, 2016). Ahern et al. (2015) explored the challenges and experiences of veterans' deployment in combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and their transition from military to civilian life which were important in providing a better understanding of the experiences of both men and women in the military.

Specific U.S. Navy research by Smith and Rosenstein (2014) showed a gendered difference in career intentions and influences by male and female peers while also examining the retention of women in combat specialties and why retention is lower for women than men. They discovered both men and women leave the Navy due to the impact that service in the Navy, which includes deployments and mobilizations, may have on families and separations, and includes heightened divorce rates (Smith & Rosenstein, 2014). Meadows et al. (2016) looked at ways to improve female officer retention in the Navy and detailed factors that the military can utilize to enhance female officer retention by encouraging female officers to overcome the fears of long-term separation and to address other female officer retention concerns.

Multiple researchers have studied the impact of the military's historical policies and women's participation in the military and the effects on family roles, while cultural values impact policy solutions to reconcile women's roles. Amara (2020) explored the implication of women in combat and the status of female integration, health, and education in the military. Armey (2020) examined women who served in high-risk combat jobs in Iraq and Afghanistan and G.I. bill benefits for higher education. Kamarack (2016) reviewed the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and the equal

access to jobs this provided in the military, based upon qualifications and abilities, to males and females for advancement and retention in the military. Soules (2020) reviewed the relationship between women's status and the lifting of restrictions on military combat roles by performing an analysis of women on the front lines in all countries, not just the U.S. military or NATO nations.

Several well-documented cases focus on the interactions of military men and women serving in combat positions in Afghanistan and Iraq before the lifting of the exclusion policy. These cases focused on the problems in these interactions when women were only allowed to function in a combat support role instead of a fully integrated combat role (Erika & DiNitto, 2019). Since women have been allowed to serve in combat support roles in the U.S. Army, there has been a good deal of research on the impact of integrating women into military combat positions, especially during recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. MacLean (2018) presented analyses of how race, status, and gender are associated with those who served during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lindstrom (2011) investigated the effects of combat experience on female military members in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and the impact of these experiences on female veterans in the Army.

While researchers have focused on integrating women into combat roles, there has been very little focus on understanding how the changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. Thus, it is essential to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and perceive how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted their

recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. A better understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in situations such as combat experience in war zones and their perceptions can impact social work theory. This understanding could also benefit policymakers to improve conditions within the military as the number of women serving in the armed forces continues to increase.

Problem Statement

As of December 2015, the Department of Defense (DoD) opened all combat-related positions across the military to women despite lifting the Combat Exclusion Policy in 2013 (Kamarck, 2016). According to Harris and Gortney (2014), the policy for full gender integration was left to the individual service branches with the Army implementing women into combat support roles before the Department of Navy's implementation.

Previous studies have focused on issues related to women's roles in combat positions and how race, status, and gender affected those who served in the Army during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (MacLean, 2018). Smith and Rosenstein (2014) reported that women comprise 16% of all Navy officers, and retention of women in combat specialties is slower, compared to men. However, research studies have not focused on understanding an association between female naval officers' recruitment, retention, and promotion due to the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. Little research has focused on understanding female naval officers' perceptions on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their careers.

This presents a significant gap in the research that needs to be addressed to develop adequate responses to these issues. The perceptions of female naval officers are important to strengthen the naval forces' diversity and equality within the military. The Chief of Operations for the U.S. Navy in 2022, Admiral Mike Gilday, has stated that, "America's Navy values diversity, equality, and inclusion- striving to build a community of service members who accurately reflect the rich makeup of our country. Our belief is that with hard work and determination, anyone, from anywhere, has the power to be successful in the Navy" (America's Navy, 2021, para 4).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims to explore the phenomenon of perceptions of female naval officers on the concept of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. Since the number of women has increased in the U.S. Navy, but retention lags, the opinions, and perceptions on how the combat exclusion policy has impacted the recruitment, retention, and promotion of female naval officers within the military are critical issues to understand.

The opinions, perceptions, and ideas of women are essential to strengthen the naval forces' diversity and equality and impact policy to improve conditions within the military. Renowned U.S. feminist writer Cynthia Enloe has demonstrated that gender analysis is necessary to understand the motivations, costs, and consequences of militarized conflict (Brooks et al., 2012). It is essential to understand the views of women and to take women's experiences seriously. People in the sphere of war must be

contextualized appropriately and historicized as each set has its gendered phrases influenced by its gendered history (Brooks et al., 2012).

This study offers an opportunity to understand the perceptions of female naval officers who have experienced combat duty and the impact this experience has had on their retention and promotion. This study may also help to fill the gap in the literature about how changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who are assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. Changes that could positively impact both men and women serving together in the military in combat environments may also be identified.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on lifting the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion?

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the feminist security studies (FSS) work of Cynthia Enloe, a feminist writer, theorist, and professor renowned and published for her work on gender and militarism and her contributions to feminist international relations. Women in combat have become policy in practice which has impacted behavior, procedures, and policies within the military. Enloe's work on FSS, feminist theories in international relations, and feminist geography emphasize the need to research military and conflict in nontraditional manners (Enloe, 2015). This study draws on her proposal, including examining disputes, wars, and issues of security and insecurity, which should be

observed with 'feminist curiosity' and study war and conflicts as experience. FSS researchers suggested that women's experiences and narratives are an indispensable part of global conflicts and hierarchic institutions, and it is worthwhile to listen to and characterize women's perceptions (Harding, 1989).

Further, a shared understanding or normality is central to feminist intervention in security studies, and feminist theorizing begins with examining women's experiences. This theorizing can access the varied contexts of women's lives while also remaining attuned to the contextual nature of "normality" (Wibben, 2010). Feminist theorizing has focused on the intersections of gender with class, nationality, race, and other identity markers to inform conceptualizations of women's experience and subjectivity. A consistent theme that characterizes FSS is the need to focus on the multifaceted dynamics of gender relations evident in the feminist work on human security (Wibben, 2010). This concept will be explained further in Chapter 2 of this study.

The assignment of women in combat roles for the Navy has been quite controversial and the use of FSS theory formed the basis for the approach to this study and formulation of the research question. The telling of women's experiences and staying attuned to their experiences is central to feminists' resistance to abstraction. This serves as a corrective to generalizing and universalizing tendencies that may institute bias and obscure responsibility. Qualitative interviews of female naval officers' experiences in war can provide a perspective to shape public consciousness about the issue of women in combat.

The framework of FSS can be best utilized in this study to understand women's perceptions of lifting the combat exclusion policy and how it has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. Understanding their experience and perceptions may contribute to an understanding of combat role assignments on career advancement for these women.

Nature of the Study

Percy et al. (2015) explained that studies that include opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences which cannot be measured require a qualitative method. The key concept being investigated in this study includes the perceptions of female naval officers and how those who have served in combat perceive how their promotions, career-enhancing tours, and educational opportunities may have been affected by the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. This type of information cannot be learned or obtained from statistical analysis. A quantitative study may have provided a relationship between dependent and independent variables for female naval officers by researching polls, questionnaires, or surveys (Creswell, 2013). However, a qualitative methodology is an appropriate method to focus on individuals' thoughts, attitudes, and subjective perceptions based on everyday experiences.

Regarding research, a qualitative methodology is utilized when research is aimed at subjective experiences because it is believed to capture the richness of the human experience more fully (Lyons, 2006). While other qualitative methods may have been helpful, a generic qualitative inquiry or basic research approach was used to focus on the subjective experiences and opinions of female naval officers' experiences. Ethnography,

case study, grounded theory, or phenomenology methods would be inappropriate since the content of the information desired or the kind of data sought did not fit these approaches (Percy et al., 2015)

Thus, Percy et al.'s (2015) approach to a generic study offers the best fit as the method for this study and note that, "researchers considering any study of people's subjective 'take' on actual external happenings and events should consider generic qualitative inquiry as their approach" (Percy et al., 2015, p. 79). Generic qualitative inquiry is appropriate to utilize if a researcher wants to be able to describe experiences more fully from the participants' perspective (Patton, 2002). The main concentration of the generic qualitative method is to explore and discover how individuals construct meaning of the world they live in and experiences they have endured (Berg, 2004).

Additionally, the focus of a generic qualitative inquire is on real world events or issues and data collection elicit reports from participants on their ideas about things that are outside themselves using unstructured data collection methods, such as semi- or fully structured interviews, questionnaires, surveys, content, or activity-specific participant observation (Percy et al., 2015). This approach also provides a step-by-step process for the analysis of data collected from each participant. "Transcripts of participant interviews will be analyzed, and the repeating patterns and themes from all participants will be synthesized together into a composite synthesis, then interpretation or implications regarding the question under investigation" (Percy et al., 2015, p. 80).

Individual semistructured interviews were used to learn about the experiences of ten female naval officers who had experienced combat duty. Interview data was coded

and analyzed utilizing the thematic inductive analysis which is indicative of the generic qualitative methodology and involves searching across the data set to find repeated patterns of meanings analyzing data from the viewpoint that does not attempt to fit the data into any preexisting categories (Berg & Lune, 2012). In qualitative analysis, "themes and categories emerge from the data through careful examination and constant comparison" (Wildermuth, 2017, p. 319).

Definitions

The following terms are operationally defined for this study:

Active duty: Anyone working for the military on a full-time basis.

Direct ground combat: "Engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to hostile fire and a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. It takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect" (Barry, 2013, p. 20; Burrelli, 2013, p. 4).

Glass Ceiling: A political term used to describe the unseen and unbreakable barriers that mostly keep women and minorities from reaching the upper ranks of their chosen fields (Naples, 2016).

Institutional Barriers: Something that blocks access or obstructs within an institution or organization (Chang & Wu, 2013).

Retention: In the military context, this term refers to reenlistment after the expiration of active obligated service (Kapp, 2020).

Military turnover: A term deriving from the term staff turnover defines the scenario in which military personnel leave from military organizations or pull out their services (Hosek, J., 2011).

General Unrestricted Line Officer: Female naval officer designation where the billets (jobs) were administrative in nature. Unrestricted line officer designators connote sea duty, command at sea, and flying status. Title 10, U.S. Code stated that women shall not be assigned to duty in aircraft engaged in combat missions or aboard naval vessels except hospital ships and naval transports (Coye, 1972).

Assumptions

Some frameworks and paradigms determine a research approach, and each qualitative study is based upon a specific genre of research with ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions. Guba (1990) notes there are a "basic set of beliefs that guide action and there are worldviews that shape the discipline area of the researcher with specific genres reflecting particular onto-epistemological assumptions that should be taken seriously through the research process and writing"(Guba, 1990, p. 7).

Ontology refers to a researcher's belief about the nature of reality, while axiology addresses ethics, aesthetics, and religion and, given my position as a researcher and a female naval officer in the reserves, my beliefs on this research topic may agree or conflict with the participants. Epistemology is more philosophical and examines the relationship between knowledge and the researcher during discovery which for my study

I had a very similar background and relationship with research participants, given my background in the Navy. Axiology focuses on what the researcher values in their research. The axiological perspective of a research paradigm is aimed at depicting the level of consistency, reliability, or otherwise reconstructing or extending the previously held theories or construction (Neuman, 1997). This perspective was maintained throughout the study with a consistent level of reliability depicted throughout the study. Methodological assumptions refer to those procedures related to systematically discovering knowledge and the philosophical approaches to learning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Generic qualitative methods examine perceptions, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue without the philosophical constructs of these approaches (Percy et al., 2015). An interpretive method of generic qualitative inquiry was utilized for this study. Qualitative research methodology is fundamentally guided to help the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of people's subjective experiences, thoughts, and feelings to gain information to help increase understanding (Creswell, 2009).

This qualitative study investigated the policy process on the implementation of the combat exclusion policy which involves human actors acting under specific circumstances and rules. A constructivist framework is appropriate given the character of this phenomenon under study. The epistemological considerations of a constructivist framework, "focus exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the human mind "(Patton, 2015, p. 122). In constructivism, an epistemological approach, humans

construct knowledge from their life experiences (Aoun, 2017; Cleaver & Ballantyne, 2014; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). T

This argument includes an epistemological implication due to the human rational interpretation and meaning given to experiences or events. Creswell (2014) and Patton (2015) underline that constructivist logic confirms the belief that knowledge is never definitively objective because the meanings shaped upon reality are just the abstraction of subjective perception and interpretation. However, subjectivity in research management can promote and create social transformation in unfair or oppressed social situations (Patton, 2015).

When data was collected from participants, they were promised anonymity and confidentiality and reminded they could withdraw at any time because participation was voluntary. Participants were advised of the importance of the research, and there is an underlying assumption that participants' responses to interview questions were truthful. Because participants were informed that their responses would be anonymously shared at the outset, it was assumed they felt comfortable answering honestly with no threat to their positions or future career advancement. Also, they were assured they can withdraw without personal consequences. Additionally, it is assumed participants furnished unbiased information regarding their personal experiences. The use of service data was limited to protect the integrity of participants' data and added additional safeguards to maintain confidentiality. Information that could potentially result in contradictory data was bracketed, thus removing bias. Participants shared their lived experiences related to past and present positions in the naval service. The validity of the information provided

was determined by participants furnishing corporate names, locations, position titles, and branches of service for some answers. Also, the participants interviewed provided enough data making additional data collection unnecessary.

Scope and Delimitations

All research must acknowledge the scope and delimitations or intentional constrictions placed on the study and serve as the boundaries upon which the study is based (Ellis & Levy, 2010). This study involved female naval officers who had participated in combat zones and was delimited to participants in the grades of Lieutenant (O-3) to Captain (O-6).

My intended focus in conducting the study was to determine the perspective of junior to senior female naval officers' perspective on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. Participants were geographically dispersed in four locations (Central and Southeastern states), and race, age, and background were not delimitations. Transferability relates to the ability of other researchers to replicate the study and apply the findings to their setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability of the results was enhanced by recruiting research participants currently on active or reserve duty and those who had retired from service, geographically dispersed in the Central and Southeastern United States.

Limitations

Interview results were obtained through virtual participant interviews. The geographic location of participants was a major limitation of this study because the participants were mostly from the Washington, D.C. area. There are always potential

biases that could influence the outcome of a study. Reasonable measures were taken to address any limitations that arose from biases.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is significant for several reasons. Based upon research conducted, there are limited studies on the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and the impact on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. This study examined the perceptions of participants' experiences through statements from which thematic clusters about the meaning of their perceptions were developed. Based on the perspectives of female naval officers, this study may provide some knowledge on the unique phenomenon of women in historically gendered and stressful experiences, such as combat experience in war zones, and could also be used in social work theory and practice to benefit policymakers and improve conditions for women in combat, with a particular focus on female officers in the Navy. By learning more about female naval officers' perceptions of how they have been integrated into naval combat roles, it may be possible to understand the further impact of service to the nation and focus on possible recommendations for improvement in combat role assignments for women.

This study may also help to fill the gap in the literature about how changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who are assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. By developing an understanding of the implementation process of women in combat since 2013 and documenting that development over time, there is the possibility of developing recommendations to positively improve the social

construct and conditions for women in action, with a particular focus on female officers in the Navy. Changes that could positively impact both men and women serving together in the military in combat environments may also be identified to promote social change and improve diversity and inclusion within the U.S. Navy. Others who may find the study significant include federal, state, and local community leaders, military leaders, and policymakers.

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the study and included background information on obstacles women encountered before the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and the impact of removing the combat exclusion policy that allowed women to serve in combat positions. The problem statement and purpose of this qualitative study were introduced and guided through a research question focused on exploring the perceptions of female naval officers on the concept of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. The theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in the FSS work of Cynthia Enloe, a feminist writer, theorist, and professor renowned and published for her work on gender and militarism and her contributions to feminist international relations. Women in combat have become policy in practice that has impacted behavior, procedures, and policies within the military. The nature of the study involved a generic qualitative approach to be used to explore the perceptions of female naval officers about this experience since generic methods offer the space to develop new methodologies and engage in discussions of rigor that cross disciplinary and methodological boundaries (Kahlke, 2014).

As this study focused on perceptions, a generic approach was the best fit. Generic qualitative methods examine perceptions, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue without the philosophical constructs of these approaches. This method can be used if the researcher has a body of prior knowledge or an understanding about the topic that they want to be able to describe from the participants' perspective more fully (Percy et al., 2015). Data analysis in this qualitative study focused on inductive analysis by setting aside all pre-understandings and analyzing the data collected with female naval officers individually. Definitions of key concepts, assumptions that clarify aspects of the study determined to be meaningful were discussed, as well as scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of this study for potential contributions to advance knowledge in this discipline.

Chapter 2 provides a review and begins with a brief description of literature search strategies and the conceptual framework used in this study. It continues by reviewing and assessing literature about the history of combat exclusion, factors to integration of women, the effects on promotion, retirement, and recruitment of women in the military based upon the FSS approaches developed by Cynthia Enloe (2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Understanding female naval officers' perceptions about the impact of lifting the combat exclusion policy on their careers is a meaningful gap in the research that needs to be addressed to develop adequate responses to these issues. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and synthesize the literature relevant to the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and perceptions of female naval officers on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. With the combat exclusion act in place, women could not partake in the advantage to gain higher ranks before retirement (Ross &Donnelly, 2011). When the act was lifted, women began to look at the advantages of serving in combat roles. Since the lifting of the Act, military women have come forward to express their feelings towards their new rights given to them within the military community.

Chapter 2 provides a description of literature search strategies and conceptual framework used in this study. A literature review is provided related to key variables to analyze and interpret the history of the implementation of the combat exclusion act, integration of women in combat and the effects of combat experience, and effects on promotion, retention, and recruitment. A description of the strategy used to gather and analyze the literature extracted for the review, examination on FSS approaches, followed by how the theory existed applied within the context of the combat exclusion policy, and analysis of the literature chosen, followed by the summary and a conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

In conducting research, I utilized the Walden University library to access databases including EBSCO Public Policy and Administration, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Political Source Complete, SocINDEX with Full Text, Business Source Complete and Supplemental Index. I also searched in ProQuest and ABI/INFORM Collection which provided scholarly journals, books, and dissertation and theses. I searched on the terms: *naval women in combat, combat roles for women in the Navy,* and *female naval officers in combat*. I researched other dissertations and theses available through Walden University via ScholarWorks, dissertation and Theses @ Walden University, and ProgQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. I also researched the number of female officers in the U.S. Navy, available via the Naval Personnel Command website and found a Rand study which examined difference in officer career progression in the military with a look at gender and minority differences.

Conceptual Framework

Women in combat has become policy in practice which has impacted behavior, procedures, and policies in place within the military. This study is grounded in the FSS work of Cynthia Enloe, a feminist writer, theorist, and professor who is renowned and published for her work on gender and militarism and for her contributions in the field of feminist international relations. J. Ann Tickner's work on the feminist perspectives of international relations (IR) is complementary to Cynthia Enloe as they both focus on the knowledge gained from women's experiences, but also remains at the margins. Women and gender are both important parts of the daily operation and scholarship and the issues

of gender to the global economy and to understandings of security and militarism
(Narain, 2014).

Additionally, there are multiple studies relating to feminism in politics and IR
which have utilized Enloe's work on FSS feminist theories in IR, and feminist geography
to emphasize the need to research military and conflict in nontraditional manners (Enloe,
2015). This study draws on approaches where Enloe (2015) proposed including an
examination of conflicts, wars, and issues of security and insecurity should be observed
with 'feminist curiosity' and study war and conflicts as experience. FSS researchers
suggested that women's experiences and narratives are an indispensable part of global
conflicts and hierarchic institutions, and it is worthwhile to listen to and characterize
women's perceptions (Harding, 1989). Further, a shared understanding or normality is
central to feminist intervention in security studies and feminist theorizing begins with
examining women's experiences. This theorizing can access the varied contexts of
women's lives while also remaining attuned to the contextual nature of "normality."
Feminist theorizing has focused on the intersections of gender with class, nationality,
race, and other identifying markers to inform conceptualizations of women's experience
and subjectivity. A consistent theme which characterizes FSS is the need to focus on the
multifaceted dynamics of gender relations evident in the feminist work on human security
(Wibben, 2010).

The assignment of women in combat roles for the Navy has been controversial
and use of the FSS theory formed the basis for the approach to this study and formulation
of the research question. The telling of women's experience and staying attuned to their

experiences is central to feminists' resistance to abstraction. This serves as a corrective to generalizing and universalizing tendencies which may institute bias and obscure responsibility. Qualitative interviews of female naval officers' experiences in war can provide a perspective to shape public consciousness about the issue of women in combat. The framework of FSS can be best utilized in this study to understand women's perceptions on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and how it has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. An understanding of their experience and perceptions may contribute to an understanding of combat role assignments on career advancement for these women.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This literature review focuses on key concepts found in studies which are related to constructs of interest and the chosen methodology which include the perceptions of female naval officers on combat role policy and career advancement were chosen for this study. Previous researchers have discovered both the negative and positive side effects of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy among female naval officers (Balano & Rosenberg, 2007). A set of key concepts was used to determine how other researchers have approached this problem and the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches and the rationale for selection of key concepts. These include the history of the implementation of the combat exclusion act, integration of women in combat and the effects of combat experience, and effects on promotion, retention, and recruitment.

By developing an understanding of the development process of women in combat since 2013 and documenting that development over time, there is the possibility of

developing recommendations to positively improve the social construct and conditions for women in combat, with a particular focus on female officers in the Navy. Changes that could positively impact both men and women serving together in the military in combat environments may also be identified.

History of the Combat Exclusion Act

The combat exclusion act was implemented in 1948 when the Women's Armed Services Integration Act excluded women from combat positions, although many women did not serve in the military in combat positions at that time (Schon & Rein, 1994). Women had been discouraged from fighting in combat since before the act and even after the lifting of the act. There have been several policies put into place to ensure that women are given the same rights as men to serve to their fullest ability (Gibson & Clark, 1996). These policies include disciplinary action to be taken against individuals who unjustly deny them a combat position and set numbers of women that must be offered combat positions when enlisting (Sternke, 2011). This is all done to achieve higher numbers of female officers. Kathryn Atwood noted of women who served in the military during World War I, "During the conflict that was placed before them, they not only gained the gratitude of many in their own generation, but they proved for the first time on a global scale, the enormous value of a woman's contribution, paving the way for future generations of women to do the same." (Atwood, 2012, p. 13). Women veterans were not recognized for their contributions to our nation's defense and were not allowed to serve in combat roles, yet they played an integral part in the U.S. military (Rainey, 2018).

When the 1993 combat exclusion act was lifted in 2013, women became eligible for combat positions. It is no secret that men who serve in combat become eligible to be promoted to higher ranks faster than their non-combat counterparts (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). With the exclusion act in place, women could not partake in this advantage to gain higher ranks before retirement (Ross & Donnelly, 2011). When the act was lifted, women began to look at the advantages of serving in combat roles. Since the lifting of the combat exclusion policy, military women have come forward to express their feelings towards their new rights given to them within the military community.

The results provided from past research suggest that most women feel positive about the lifting of the combat exclusion act. It allows them to achieve a higher status within their units and provides them with better retirements. The main downfall is the discrimination they continue to receive from male officers who still believe that combat is no place for women (Sadler, 1999). Many male officers and enlisted members feel that women should only be provided with positions related to data entry and low physical activity (Harding, 1989). This has been a problem within the military community for decades and still influences the mindset of individuals even after women have begun to prove that they are just as capable in combat positions as their male counterparts. The research studies discussed here discovered both the negative and positive side effects of the lifting among female naval officers.

Integration of Women in Combat and Effects of Combat Experience

Multiple researchers have studied the impact of the military's historical policies and women's participation in the military and the effects on family roles while cultural

values impact policy solutions to reconcile women's role. Amara (2020) explored the implication of women in combat and the status of female integration, health, and education in the military. Armey (2020) examined women who served in the high-risk combat jobs in Iraq and Afghanistan and the use of GI bill benefits for higher education. Kamarack (2016) examined the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and the equal access to jobs provided in the military, based upon qualifications and abilities, which offer equal opportunities to males and females for advancement and retention in the military. Soules (2020) reviewed the relationship between women's status and the lifting of restrictions on military combat roles by performing an analysis of women on the front lines in all countries, not just the U.S. military or NATO nations.

With the lifting of the 1993 combat exclusion act in 2013, women were allowed to serve in combat positions within the military. The decision to overturn the ban was viewed as a victory by feminists who viewed ground combat as an issue for women's equal opportunity (Justi, 2017). "The process of the integration of women first into the Navy and subsequently into the operating forces of the fleet has been long, slow, and contentious process influenced by institutional biases, attitudes, and political and cultural trends "(Balano and Rosenberg, 2007, p. 6). For women in the United States Navy, the lifting of the Aspin Rule represented the opportunity to serve on most combat aircraft and ships and increased the number of qualified women for promotion (Jordon, 2003). This has led to women comprising the fastest-growing U.S. military population, including 14.5 % of all active-duty military, 18 % of all National Guard and Reserves, and 8% of the total veteran population (Amara, 2020).

Ahern et al. (2015) conducted a study in which they interviewed individuals who served in Afghanistan and Iraq to determine the challenges they experienced transitioning back into civilian life. During this interview, they discovered that women described their integration as easier than their male counterparts. It was determined that this was due to the different environments the two genders entered when returning home. Women were surrounded by more support than men when it came to mental health issues from combat, whereas men were expected to be able to handle these issues better on their own (Ahern et al., 2015). It was also discovered in Bohm and Hannagan's (2015) research that even though women received more support from their families and partners, they were more likely to face discrimination at the Veteran's Administration (V.A.). In most cases, they reported feeling like their representative was not taking them seriously and even dismissing their mental health as their experiences in combat could not have been as bad as their male counterparts (Mueller-McClenne, 2000).

Organizational changes, leadership, and cultural changes within the military have been contributing factors to the integration of women in the military. Cone (2016) examined this issue as a necessity if women were to be integrated into combat situations with no limitations based upon gender (Cone, 2016, p. 5). Ahern et al. (2015) explored the challenges and experiences of veterans' deployment in combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and their transition from military to civilian life by which were important in providing a better understanding of the experiences of both men and women in the military.

Cone (2016) took their study a step further and interviewed men to determine how they felt about the integration of women into leadership roles within the military. They discovered two things. The first was that men's views on female officers varied greatly depending on the branch, with Navy and Air Force branches being the most acceptable. The second was that most men did not mind serving under a woman if he felt she had the proper experience. When women officers were asked if they felt their male counterparts felt they had the proper experience, many reported that it did not matter where they served or for how long (Cone, 2016). Women officers were discriminated against, no matter their experience (Jordan, 2003).

Dunn's (2015) research explored more into women's feelings about the environment created by male discrimination in the workplace. Many women did not mind the tense and sometimes unfriendly environment they were forced to work in since they were being given the opportunity to hold positions of authority that they had previously been denied due to their lack of combat experience. They had always experienced discrimination and hostility from their male counterparts, but now it came with the ability to hold positions of power (Dunn, 2015)

The next question that many researchers sought to answer was how female officers felt about serving in combat. Enloe (2013) interviewed women who had served in combat and those who were in positions to serve but had yet to be deployed into such situations. When asked if they experienced any fear, most reported that they were nervous but excited to serve. They then asked females in combat positions why they chose combat roles. It was discovered that many wanted to take on a combat role and

experience the military from this vantage point (Enloe, 2013). Enloe (2013) then asked a group of men how they felt about serving in combat and if the decision for them to join in a combat position was theirs. In most cases, men reported feeling pressured to join in a combat position by both their families and recruiters. Farizo (2012) also discovered that men, while feeling the same emotions of nervousness, felt less prepared and ready for their deployments into combat zones.

A few studies analyzing the different fears women had about deploying to combat zones were explored. Erika and DiNitto (2019) discovered that many women feared what would happen to them in their own camps more than fearing actual combat. Hanna (2014) found the same to be true during research when women reported that the number of assault cases on their bases had them more concerned for their safety than exposure to combat hazards. Women officers felt that they were more likely to be targeted for assault by their male counterparts when in combat positions away from U.S. bases due to the lack of resources of support at combat zone locations (Hanna, 2014). Herford (2013) asked a group of female officers if the lifting of the combat exclusion policy was worth this new risk, and many stated that the risk of assault was everywhere, and the lifting of the act was not to be blamed.

When female officers who had already been deployed were asked about the environment on combat zone bases, they stated that their male counterparts could be dismissive and condescending to their authority (Eagly &Heilman, 2016). They felt more pressure to prove themselves, and they felt it was harder to prove themselves as they were seldom given a chance. Eagly and Karau (2002) found that most men they interviewed

would contradict their responses to questions about their feelings towards female officers. Some men have reported that they would respect a person of authority no matter their gender, but they would later report valuing a male officer's opinion over a female's (Enloe, 2004).

Additionally, there are several well-documented cases which focus on the interactions of military men and women serving in positions involving combat in Afghanistan and Iraq prior to the lifting of the exclusion policy and the problems that arose in these interactions when women were only allowed to function in a combat support role instead of a fully integrated combat role (Erika & DiNitto, 2019). Since women have been allowed to serve in combat support roles in the U.S. Army, there has been a good deal of research on the impact of integrating women into military combat positions, especially during recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. MacLean (2018) presented analyses of how race, status, and gender are associated with those who served during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lindstrom (2011) investigated the effects of combat experience on female military members in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and the effects of combat experience on primarily female veterans in the Army.

While researchers have focused on the integration of females into combat roles, there been very little focus on understanding how the changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who have been assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. There is, especially, a lack of research on how female naval officers who have served in combat perceive the impact of their service on the advancement of their careers and if there is an impact on their remaining in naval service.

Thus, it is important to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and perceive how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. A better understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in situations such as combat experience in war zones and their perceptions can impact social work theory and serve to the benefit of policy makers to improve conditions within the military as the number of women serving in the armed forces continues to increase.

Ford-Torres (2018) discovered that men were more likely to be sent to combat zones over women, even if they were in the same position. Ford-Torres (2018) analyzed statistics on women and men in the same military position who had served in combat. Men were twice as likely to be deployed as women (Rafels, 2001). Women who were deployed were more likely to serve in locations that were considered less dangerous or hostile (Renate, 2014). When asked about this discrimination, many women stated that they did not care where they were deployed if it was in an area of combat. Being allowed to serve in combat allowed them to be considered for higher promotions, no matter the location (Kamarck, 2016).

Effects on Promotion, Retention, and Recruitment

When the combat exclusion policy was lifted, the new ability to take advantage of greater promotion opportunities by serving in combat was met with great enthusiasm and eagerness by women. Unfortunately, Asch et al. (2012) discovered this was not always a positive experience. In most cases, the women they interviewed stated that they had still been passed over for promotions they felt they were better suited for over the male

counterpart who beat them. They still felt they were being discriminated against for being a woman in a "male's position" (Asch, 2012).

Balano and Rosenberg (2007) also discovered this to be true in their research. They conducted interviews between both women and men who were stationed together on a submarine underway for three months. Many men stated they had witnessed discrimination against female officers and that even enlisted crew under them would undermine their judgments simply for being women (Balano & Rosenberg, 2007).

Bohm and Hannagan (2015) discovered that female naval officers felt the pressure to be better than their male counterparts, but many did not mind. It gave them a chance to prove themselves, and they felt that when they did finally earn the respect of their enlisted crew, it created a tighter bond among the unit.

Creswell (2013) discovered that when women were promoted, they were treated differently from male officers. Female officers were more likely to face pushback from their enlisted members, and their authority was more likely to be questioned. King (2013) found that many women did not enjoy interacting with most male members in their unit, as they were often disrespectful. This caused them to take more disciplinary action towards their enlisted members. Disciplinary action from female officers was not always found to be effective and often had the opposite desired effect (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Koenig and Eagly (2014) discovered that female officers who took too much action against those who disrespected their positions were more likely to create a hostile environment, but those who did not take enough action would have to deal with members of their unit who did not respect their authority.

Female officers reported feeling that they had to pick and choose which battles to fight with members in their unit who did not respect them (MacLean, 2018). Pederson (2016) also reported similar findings in their research when they stated that female officers reportedly felt that if they were too demanding of respect, they would be labeled as ill-tempered and called names behind their backs. Strong's (2013) research explored how females felt about obtaining a position of authority and if any discrimination they encountered was worth their promotion. Most women stated that they did not mind having to deal with added discrimination and hostility from their male counterparts as they had worked hard for their promotion. Wildermuth (2016) explored how male officers felt about women in positions of authority, and most provided positive feedback. When probed further, most men did not have a problem with women in higher positions. Their problem lay with women in combat zones (Vendrzyk, 2015).

Now that women are allowed to serve in combat positions, they are promoted more often. Kaplan and Donovan (2013) discovered that women have been getting promoted twice as often since lifting the combat exclusion policy, allowing women to retire with a higher pension. When Lyon and Pagnucci (2018) conducted their research, they found that women within the military were working harder than ever to achieve their promotions before retirement. Before lifting the act, most women did not stay on active duty past eight years (Lyon & Pagnucci, 2018). Most women reported feeling that the military did not offer them more than a chance to receive an affordable education. After 2012, statistics showed that more women remained on active duty for longer terms to receive their pension after retirement (Meadows et al., 2016).

Percy et al. (2015) also found that with more women selecting combat positions, the percentage of women graduating from college while enlisted has decreased. They believed this to be due to the higher demands of combat positions and the lack of free time to spend on coursework. Rainey (2018) considered this decrease was due to more women turning their military enlistment into a full-time career that would provide them with a better retirement plan if they stayed for their full twenty years. Serrato (2013) conducted a few interviews on different groups of women to gather their retirement plans to determine the statistical difference between women in the military before and after lifting the combat exclusion policy. Throughout the interview process, Serrato (2013) discovered that 51% more women were planning on retiring at their twenty-year mark to receive a pension, and 23% more women were planning to retire after their twenty-year mark to receive a higher percentage of their base pay as their retirement pension.

To fully determine how the lifting of the act affects retirement in military women, research was compiled on medical discharge and disability pay. Even though this is not considered a retirement, disability payments may be the only type of pay certain members can receive after being discharged from the inability to work again (Smith & Rosenstein, 2017). In Walker's (2017) research, it was determined that 23% more women were medically discharged due to combat conditions. Before 2012, women who were medically discharged most likely had accidents related to physical labor. After 2012, women were allowed to enter combat positions and deploy into war zones (Walker, 2017). The deployment to war zones has caused a rise in mental health issues and severe injuries in women, forcing them into early retirement without pensions. When Enloe

(2015) asked female members if this knowledge affected their decision to join in combat roles, it was reported that most females were concerned for their safety but not enough to reconsider their position. They stated that their male counterparts took the same risk, and they should also accept the risk.

Enloe (2015) researched their study to determine how female recruitment had changed after lifting the combat exclusion policy. It has been reported that measures have been taken to encourage more women to enlist in combat positions to make up for the lack of women within the roles due to the act (Yeung et al., 2017). Enloe (2015) discovered that even though these measures are reportedly in place, some recruiters do not openly encourage women to enlist in combat positions. Yeung et al. (2017) also discovered this to be true in their research. It was reported by 78% of female officers that they felt pressure to take non-combat positions by their recruiters (Justi, 2017). 38% of that statistic stated that their recruiter was a female.

Females within the military felt the decision to encourage them to take non-combat roles was based upon their appearance (Justi, 2017). They felt that if they looked small and too feminine, they were more likely to be offered positions with little physical requirements, where if they showed up to their appointments in more masculine attire, they were offered more physical jobs. McNulty (2012) discovered in their research that more physical jobs did not always mean combat positions. Lim (2011) found that even though women were beginning to get more rights within the military and had the ability to be eligible for more positions, they were not always offered or given those positions.

When enlisting in the military, a recruit is asked to write down their top positions they would like to receive (Patton, 2002). After evaluating their scores, the recruiter will choose a job based on those positions and a need for individuals within that field. Men are twice as likely to receive combat positions over women (McNulty, 2012). Fraley (2011) conducted research to see if both female and male high schoolers were targeted the same for recruitment within the military. Male high schoolers are twice as likely to be targeted by recruiters than females (Fraley, 2011). Male high schoolers also reported feeling more pressure from recruiters to join, whereas female students felt they were simply being given an option. When asked if it bothered them the way they were targeted differently from their male counterparts, most female students felt it allowed them the opportunity to do their own research and decide based on what they knew and wanted and not just what the recruiter told them (Gooch & Quinn, 2001).

Even with the differences in how men and women are recruited into the military, women enlistment rates have gone up 58% (Justi, 2017). Women in combat positions have also continued to increase with each passing year since the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. Vendrzyk (2015) believes this is due to the policies that were put into place to help women achieve these positions and their fight to have them properly implemented. Most female officers report having to force their higher-ups to maintain the policy for them to succeed within their field (Vendrzyk, 2015). Women officers are forced to seek help outside of their command when they are met with resistance due to their positions. Of the women interviewed who reported having to seek help from their chain of command, only half reported being successful in their attempts (Harris, 2009).

While researchers have focused on the integration of females into combat roles, there been very little focus on understanding how the changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who have been assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. There is, especially, a lack of research on how female naval officers who have served in combat perceive the impact of their service on the advancement of their careers and if there is an impact on their remaining in naval service.

Thus, it is important to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and perceive how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. A better understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in situations such as combat experience in war zones and their perceptions can impact social work theory and serve to the benefit of policy makers to improve conditions within the military as the number of women serving in the armed forces continues to increase.

<div align="center">**Summary and Conclusions**</div>

Major themes in the literature were reviewed related to the key variables including the history of the implementation of the combat exclusion policy, integration of women in combat and the effects of combat experience, and effects on promotion, retention, and recruitment. Specific U.S. Navy research by Smith and Rosenstein (2014) has shown a gendered difference in career intentions and influences by male and female peers while also examining the retention of women in combat specialties and why retention is higher for men. They discovered both men and women leave the Navy due to

the impact that service in the Navy, which includes deployments and mobilizations may have on families and separations, divorce rates.

Whereas Meadows et al. (2016) looked at ways to improve female officer retention in the Navy and detailed factors that the military can utilize to improve female officer retention by encouraging female officers to overcome the fears of a long-term separation from the perspective of the family unit to address female officer retention concerns.

Multiple researchers have studied the impact of the military's historical policies and women's participation in the military and the effects on family roles while cultural values impact policy solutions to reconcile women's role. Amara (2020) explored the implication of women in combat and the status of female integration, health, and education in the military. Armey (2020) examined women who served in the high-risk combat jobs in Iraq and Afghanistan and the use of G.I. bill benefits for higher education.

Kamarack (2016) examined the lifting of the combat exclusion policy and the equal access to jobs provided in the military, based upon qualifications and abilities, which offer equal opportunities to males and females for advancement and retention in the military. Soules (2020) reviewed the relationship between women's status and the lifting of restrictions on military combat roles by performing an analysis of women on the front lines in all countries, not just the U.S. military or NATO nations.

Additionally, there are several well-documented cases which focus on the interactions of military men and women serving in positions involving combat in Afghanistan and Iraq prior to the lifting of the exclusion policy and the problems that

arose in these interactions when women were only allowed to function in a combat support role instead of a fully integrated combat role (Erika & DiNitto (2019). Since women have been allowed to serve in combat support roles in the U.S. Army, there has been a good deal of research on the impact of integrating women into military combat positions, especially during recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. MacLean (2018) presented analyses of how race, status, and gender are associated with those who served during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lindstrom (2011) investigated the effects of combat experience on female military members in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and the effects of combat experience on primarily female veterans in the Army (Lindstrom, 2011).

While researchers have focused on the integration of females into combat roles, there been very little focus on understanding how the changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who have been assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. There is, especially, a lack of research on how female naval officers who have served in combat perceive the impact of their service on the advancement of their careers and if there is an impact on their remaining in naval service. Thus, it is important to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and perceive how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military.

A better understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in situations such as combat experience in war zones and their perceptions can impact social work theory and serve to the benefit of policy makers to improve conditions within the military as the

number of women serving in the armed forces continues to increase. This study may also help to fill the gap in the literature about how changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female officers who are assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. Through the development of an understanding of the implementation process of women in combat since 2013 and documenting that development over time, there is the possibility of developing recommendations to positively improve the social construct and conditions for women in combat, with a particular focus on female officers in the Navy. Changes that could positively impact both men and women serving together in the military in combat environments may also be identified to promote social change. Others who may find the study significant include federal, state, and local community leaders, military leaders, and policy makers.

Chapter 3 provides the research design and rationale with a discussion on why the rationale was chosen. The role of the researcher will be explained as well as any personal or professional relationships with any participants, any biases, or ethical issues and how these will be handled. In addition, a discussion of the methodology, with a focus on participant selection logic so that other researchers may be able to replicate the study. Finally, a discussion on instrumentation for data collection, data analysis plan and addressing of issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The primary objective of this study was to explore the of perceptions of female naval officers on the concept of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. This study was conducted utilizing generic qualitative inquiry which allows a researcher to gain an understanding of participants' subjective experiences (Percy et al., 2015). A generic qualitative approach is appropriate when investigating research that elicits individuals' reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections of their experiences of things in the outer world (Percy et al., 2015).

This chapter provides details on the research design and rationale with a discussion on why the rationale was chosen. The role of the researcher will be explained, in additional to any personal or professional relationships with any participants, and biases or ethical issues and how these will be handled. A discussion of the methodology will be provided, with a focus on participant selection logic so that other researchers may be able to replicate the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the research and a summary of the chapter's main points. Study results will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question guiding the study was: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion?

This study used a generic qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of female naval officers about this experience. Generic approaches offer space to develop

new methodologies and to engage in discussions of rigor that cross disciplinary and methodological boundaries (Kahlke, 2014). Generic qualitative approaches examine perceptions, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue without the philosophical constructs of these approaches (Percy et al., 2015). Generic approaches also offer space to develop new methodologies and to engage in discussions of rigor that cross disciplinary and methodological boundaries (Kahlke, 2014). A generic qualitative methodology was selected since the research questions seeks to understand the perceptions of female naval officers who have experienced combat duty and the impact this experience has had on their retention and promotion. Since the focus of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences to provide a complex understanding of the processes involved, generic qualitative methodology is the selected method for this research question (Creswell, 2007).

Additionally, according to Lim (2011), the use of flexible methodological approaches is useful for those conducting research on a topic or in an area where few theories or empirical studies have been available, as is the case with this topic. The specific generic approach is that developed by Percy et al. which examines perceptions, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue without the philosophical constructs of these approaches (Percy et al., 2015). Data analysis in this qualitative study focused on inductive analysis by setting aside all pre-understandings and analyzing the data collection from interviews with female naval officers individually. Once all the data was analyzed, the repeating patterns and themes were synthesized into a composite synthesis to interpret meanings and implications of their perceptions regarding the effects of the

combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, promotion, and retention by following a twelve step-by-step analysis (Percy et al., 2015).

This study drew on approaches which Enloe (2015) proposed including an examination of conflicts, wars, and issues of security and insecurity should be observed with 'feminist curiosity' and study war and conflicts as experience. FSS researchers suggest that women's experiences and narratives are an indispensable part of global conflicts and hierarchic institutions, and it is worthwhile to listen to and characterize women's perceptions (Harding, 1989). Further, a shared understanding or normality is central to feminist intervention in security studies and feminist theorizing begins with examining women's experiences. This theorizing can access the varied contexts of women's lives while also remaining attuned to the contextual nature of "normality." (Enloe, 2015). Feminist theorizing has focused on the intersections of gender with class, nationality, race, and other markers of identify to inform conceptualizations of women's experience and subjectivity (Harding, 1989).

Role of the Researcher

What inspired me to conduct this research study was my interest in gaining insight into the perceptions of other female naval officers who have served in combat roles on how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion. Over the past 35 years, I have served in the United States Navy as an enlisted air traffic controller, a naval intelligence officer, and I currently serve as an intelligence officer in the Navy reserves. I have also deployed in a combat zone to Djibouti where I served in a combat role. I have personally observed some of the

phenomena that I researched and feel this is an important matter to research and provide

recommendations to improve retention of female naval officers in the Navy.

Therefore, my primary role as a researcher was to describe accurately the

participants experiences in relationship to the topic under investigation: the perceptions

of female naval officers on how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has impacted

their recruitment, retention, and promotion. To maintain awareness of the potential for

bias, I journaled biases before and throughout data collection (see Patton, 2002).

Additionally, in analyzing the data from interviews that were transcribed or printed, data

were analyzed objectively by me. Furthermore, I had an understanding and was open to

acceptance of differing beliefs which aided in mastering any potential bias.

Methodology

Cynthia Enloe has demonstrated that gender analysis is necessary to gain an

understanding of the motivations, costs, and consequences of militarized conflict (Brooks

et al. 2012). It is important to understand the views of women and to take women's

experiences seriously. People in the sphere of war must be properly contextualized and

historicized as each setting has its own gendered phases influenced by its own gendered

history (Brooks et al.2012). The participant is the instrument through which his or her life

experiences are lived. Using in-depth interviews, participant data will be collected and

organized for further analysis and interpretation (Brooks et al.2012).

Participant Selection Logic

This study consisted of a sample size of ten participants selected through

purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009). Questions often occur in using a lesser sample

size; however, Lichtman (2006) identifies that eight participants in generic qualitative study can provide rich data in which to gain understanding of the experience being studied with depth. Lichtman (2006) also states that due to the fact the purpose in qualitative research is to describe and understand as opposed to generalize, there are no concrete rules regarding the number of participants a researcher should enlist. The participants included women who served in combat roles in the Navy as the primary source of data. There were individual interviews of female naval officers who have served in at least one combat zone to obtain a broader view of the issue.

Instrumentation

The collected interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and analyzed through thematic inductive analysis which is appropriate for this research design (Patton, 2002; Berg & Lune 2012). Thematic analysis entails combing throughout a data set, which can be obtained through transcribed interviews, to find recurrent patterns of meanings (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis has several different models which include inductive analysis, theoretical analysis, and thematic analysis with content comparison (Percy, et al., 2015). It has been concluded that thematic inductive analysis would be utilized in this research as this analysis is data driven and will not attempt to fit data into any preset categories (Percy et al., 2015). Thematic inductive analysis personalizes data from each participant for analysis, then data is synthesized together to identify repetitive patterns, and finally it attempts to interpret meaning regarding the research question (Percy et al., 2015). The goal of thematic inductive

analysis is to identify themes within the data to form a synthesis of the data collected in reference to the research question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data collection occurred during the spring of 2022. All data gathered from participant resources was collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) number 02-11-22-0332282 guidelines. The data was collected by myself during interviews with ten participants currently serving on active duty in the Navy, in the active reserves for the Navy, or who had retired from naval service. I advertised the intent to conduct my study on the U.S. Naval Academy female officer forum and on female active and reserve officer forums via Facebook. Interviews were conducted individually, and the data was recorded via video.

The use of interviews and observations are commonplace in qualitative research, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). They are one manner of obtaining an insider perspective regarding the issues being studied. The interaction between researcher and participant through the interview is, "the establishment of human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). Interviews with the participants were semi-structured as this provided for consistent investigation of topics with the participant and basic introductory questions, but also afforded flexibility to engage in natural conversation that provided deeper insight. This will make the interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, and allows her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more "realistic" picture (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Data Analysis Plan

Prior to utilizing data analysis, I transcribed all interviews into a Microsoft Word document in which each interview was a separate document to ensure accuracy of data analysis. Then, I used the Thematic Inductive Analysis method of data collection. Since it does not attempt to fit the data into any preexisting categories, the data was analyzed individually while looking for repetitive patterns and themes utilizing an inductive approach (Percy et al., 2015). Thematic Inductive Analysis attempts to interpret the meanings of the data for the research question that is under investigation (Percy et al., 2015). During the process of data analysis, I became familiar with the content of the interview. Throughout the various steps of data analysis, I read and re-read the data coding to identify themes through the process (Percy et al., 2015). Specifically, there has been outlined a step-by-step guideline for employing Thematic Inductive Analysis to data (Patton, 2002; Berg & Lune 2012; Percy et al., 2015, p. 80:

1. Review data collected from each participant highlighting any sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appear to be meaningful.

2. Review the highlighted data and use the research question to decide if the highlighted data are related to the question.

3. Eliminate all data not related to the question.

4. Code each piece of data as a means of keeping track of individual items of data.

5. Cluster the items of data that are related or connected in some way and start to develop patterns. For each distinct pattern discerned, describe it in a phrase or statement that summarizes it.

6. As patterns emerge, identify items of data that correspond to the specific pattern. Place them in the previously assembled clusters that manifest that pattern.

7. Take all the patterns and look for the emergence of themes. As meaningful themes emerge across patterns, assign a yet more abstract descriptor to the theme.

8. Arrange the themes in a kind of matrix with corresponding supportive patterns.

9. For each theme, write a detailed abstract analysis describing the scope and substance of each theme.

10. Complete for each participant.

11. Then combine the analysis of data for all participants including patterns and themes that are consistent across the participants' data.

12. Finally, the data are synthesized together to form composite synthesis of data collected regarding the question under inquiry.

As the principal investigator, I will maintain all relevant signed documentation (informed consent and demographic questionnaire) and research data collected on a personal USB Drive stored in a secured area (locked filing cabinet) in my office for the period of seven years, after that time all data will be destroyed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility or internal validity was established through triangulation of data collection, and member checking to help achieve accuracy of the participant's perspective. Triangulation according to Patton (2001) includes reflexivity in the

researcher's perception of the phenomenon, which includes self-awareness of the researcher's intention about those studied (Patton, 2001, pp. 494-495). The design of the research as explained by Maxwell (2013) specifically sought to minimize validity threats by "evidence, not methods" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). I used evidence derived during the study to address threats to validity. According to Moustakas (1994) citing Husserl, "there is a challenge of ensuring that my perception does not influence the participant's perception of his or her own experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57). The internal validity was inherent in the truth of the participant's words regarding their perceptions of the phenomenon.

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability is understood to be the degree to which the sample represents the focus population as well as demonstrating that the sample has the experience and knowledge to provide meaningful data to the research (Patton, 2002). This study included female naval officer participants who were on active duty or in the Navy reserves and who were as least 25 years of age. Since the study's focus was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of female naval officers and on how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy has affected their retention and promotion, participants should have served at least one combat tour and also served at least four years in the Navy. Thus, the participants had the insight and experience necessary to provide meaningful data regarding their experiences.

Dependability

Triangulation of data is a strategy that is helpful with dependability of data analysis. The convergence of conclusions was expected to be consistent from the participant's perspective and if not, an explanation was presented as an outcome of the study. The key or underlying issue with dependability was "consistency among the procedures and if by design the research questions and features of the study design are congruent with them" (Miles & Saldaña, 2013, p. 312). Coding of the data was reviewed and revised throughout the research process to address the validity threat of dependability. Dependability was addressed by obtaining the same results from the same participants.

Confirmability

Member checking for their perceived truth is the foundation of quality. Miles and Saldaña (2013) stated that the qualitative study quality relies on "truth value" (Miles & Saldaña, 2013, p. 312). Guba and Lincoln (as cited by Creswell (2007) offered a perspective on validation, which involves alternative terms for qualitative researchers to address for trustworthiness. Confirmability could be addressed by sharing the results of the study in different areas of the country or universities, but the study would only be generalizable if future research were conducted on a larger sample population quantitatively. I relied on the participants to provide credibility to the study by sharing their perspectives with other female officers.

Ethical Procedures

When conducting research, it is imperative that the researcher is cognizant of ethical considerations during all phases of research (Creswell, 2009). For this study, I protected the confidentiality and identity of the participants as well as ensuried that each participant was aware of the study, its purpose, and had autonomy of participation. In addition, I protected all data (transcribed interviews, electronic recorded interviews), signed documents, and demographic questionnaire and will continue to protect it utilizing secured locked storage and maintain it for the required five years before destroying said information.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented the procedures utilized in the research study. This chapter reviewed: research methodology, research design, sample size, target population, research question, data collection, and data analysis. This study utilized generic qualitative inquiry as a philosophical theme and employed Thematic Inductive Analysis in analyzing and interpreting data collected during this research. The goal of this research was to understand the perceptions of female naval officers who have experienced combat duty and the impact this experience has had on their retention and promotion. This research relied on lived experiences in gaining a deeper understanding of how female naval officers perceive the impact of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their promotion and retention in the U.S. Navy.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of female naval officers to learn about the impact that the lifting of the combat exclusion policy had on their career, retention, and promotion. This study was conducted to understand how the changes in gender combat policies are perceived by female naval officers. The research question that was used to formulate the interview questions for the study was: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on lifting the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion?

Chapter 4 includes a description of the demographic characteristics of participants in the study and the implementation of the data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3 and a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study results. Data analysis for Chapter 4 is organized by research questions and concludes with a summary.

Setting

All participants for my study met the criteria set forth in Chapter 3. There were no personal or organizational conditions present that influenced participants. Nor were there any experiences at the time of the study that influenced the interpretation of study results.

Demographics

All participants for the study met the criteria described in Chapter 3. Participants included 10female naval officers: four officers in the reserves, four retired officers, and two active-duty naval officers with an approximate age range between 33 and 62 years of age and a mean age of 48.4 years. The age range is an estimate, based upon commissioning date and years in service. Participants had varying designators (jobs) in

the Navy. As noted in Table 1, participant names were replaced with alphanumeric codes
P1 to P10 to ensure confidentiality in interview transcripts, file name, and throughout this
study.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Status	Designator	Rank	Years of service
P1	Reservist	Nurse Corps	LT(O-3)	12
P2	Retired	GURL	Captain(O-6)	30
P3	Reservist	Intelligence Warfare	LCDR(O-4)	20
P4	Retired	NFO	Captain(O-6)	26
P5	Active Duty	Supply	LCDR (O-4)	15
P6	Retired	NFO	Captain(O-6)	25
P7	Active Duty	Cryptologic Warfare	LCDR (O-4)	15
P8	Reservist	Public Affairs	LCDR (O-4)	14
P9	Retired	Human Resources	Captain, (O-6)	25
P10	Reservist	Intelligence Warfare	CDR (O-5)	20

Data Collection

There were 10 participants with whom interviews were conducted and data was collected. Interviews were conducted individually and recorded via video interviews scheduled in the Zoom platform. I asked participants to record the interview on Zoom and let them know when I was recording and when recording stopped. All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded with interviews scheduled to last an hour. The length of time for participants' interviews varied between 40 to 50 minutes.

The transcriptions for each interview were completed via the Otter platform which develops speech to text transcription and translation applications using artificial intelligence and machine learning. The transcriptions were saved as Microsoft Word documents and there were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. I did conduct an interview with an additional participant, who would have been participant 11. However, she decided after the interview was completed that she did not want her information included in the study. I thanked her for her participation and deleted the interview and transcript of the interview for this participant. There were no other unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection portion of this study.

At the conclusion of the remainder of the interviews, I thanked participants and informed them I would send their transcript via email for their review. The audio and transcripts were stored electronically in a password protected device within a password protected account. Within 48 hours of each participant's interview, I sent an email along with the interview transcript. Participants were asked to review their transcripts and confirm if they were accurate. The email also included some of the items that were on the

consent form, including the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and confidentiality. The participant transcript review process took approximately one hour to complete. The participants had three days to respond to me by email. All participants responded that they were pleased with their transcripts.

Data Analysis

The data for each participant were analyzed individually to interpret the meaning for the primary research question that was used to formulate the interview questions: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on lifting the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion? During the process of data analysis, each interview transcript was reviewed by the researcher to become familiar with the content of the interview.

Throughout the 12-step model of thematic inductive analysis as defined by Percy et al.and described in Chapter 3, I read and re-read the data coding to identify themes through the process (Percy et al., 2015, p. 80). The steps in the model were used to ensure the accuracy of findings. The specific model followed, and its use is described below:

Data were collected from each participant and reviewed by highlighting any sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared to be meaningful to the study. Then the highlighted data was reviewed with the research questions to determine if there was a relationship to the research questions. If the highlighted data was not related to the interview questions, the highlight color of this data was changed to a different color to separate it from the original highlighted data. The original highlighted data was then reviewed and analyzed as it related to the research questions, but the other data was also

revisited during the data analysis process to determine if there was any pertinent

information related to the interview questions. Some of the data not related to the

interview questions was used for the participant demographic section. The discrepant

cases were used to strengthen the data closely related to research questions and using

these cases in my findings helped eliminate any biases that may have occurred during the

data analysis process.

The highlighted data related to the interview questions was coded by making

notations within the transcripts. This information was then transcribed into a Microsoft

Excel spreadsheet and organized via questions and responses from each participant with

the initial code. After all the data was coded, related codes were clustered on the

spreadsheet. Within the clustered codes on the spreadsheet, there were several patterns or

categories which emerged. For instance, the importance of diversity and the phrase, 'we

have a stronger team at the end of day when we're not all the same 'was coded three

times in the interview with P1. Once clustered, codes from the transcript were condensed

to nine codes. After completing this process with the interview transcript from P1, the

process was completed for each participant transcript. There were 80 codes from all

participant transcripts that were reviewed to develop patterns from the connected clusters

of coded data.

Throughout the inductive data analysis process, data from each participant was

compared with previously analyzed data. New codes were added to the spreadsheet and

clustered with existing patterns/categories if they were related. New patterns were created

to reflect new data that were not related to existing patterns. Direct quotes from each

participant's transcripts were added to the spreadsheet to support the extrapolation of data

and inductive analysis. By continually analyzing the data, categories were developed with

similar themes identified for each question.

By the interview with P4, the researcher noticed 'women must work hard to prove

themselves' integration codes and patterns repeatedly emerged from participant data. It

was also observed that each participant repeated that 'work life balance' and 'having a

family and a navy career' was a consistent challenge. The interview process continued

because at this point, active-duty officers had not been interviewed. P5 and P7, as active-

duty officers provided similar responses to previously interviewed participants who were

either reservist or retired service members. Active-duty participants also shared that

'women always must prove themselves' and this phrase was consistently repeated by the

remaining participants. Since there was no additional information, codes, patterns, or

themes derived from the current data, data saturation was met at the 10th participant.

All themes and patterns were described and supported by quotes from participant

interviews. Overall, there were 15 primary themes that emerged from the data. There was

one finding related to Q1 and three findings related to Q2 that did not fit into the major

themes and patterns. These findings were reviewed to determine how they supported the

other findings for the study. It was found that one finding related to Q1 supported the

idea that women are capable, and that differences make a stronger team. The three

findings related to Q2 were aligned with the idea that serving in a combat zone is a

challenging experience. The discrepant cases were used to strengthen the data closely

related to the research questions. Although the researcher strived to remain unbiased

during the data analysis process, using discrepant cases may have helped to eliminate any biases in the analyzed data. As a final step in the data analysis process, data was synthesized to form a composite synthesis for each question.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The researcher used reproducible methods to enhance the four components of trustworthiness. The four components of trustworthiness include credibility, known as internal validity; transferability, which is analogous to external validity; dependability, also known as reliability, and confirmability, a concept like objectivity.

Credibility

The results in this qualitative study are credible to the extent that they represent the perspectives of the participants. I adhered to the appropriate steps provided in Walden University's IRB research guidelines to ensure the highest levels of academic standards and ethics were maintained. Credibility can be susceptible to errors in data transcription and is reliant on honest responses by participants, therefore, multiple data sources such as interviews, analyses of documents and reflection field notes were used to promote triangulation and thus achieve credibility and consistency Copeland & Agosto, 2012).

The researcher asked participants to engage in member-checking their transcripts to ensure accuracy of data transcription and if there were any needed corrections. This procedure also gave the participants a second occasion to review and reflect on their responses without the time constraints of the recorded interview. Participants were assured their identities would be confidential which contributed to participant honesty.

The convergence of participant responses on consistent meanings during data analysis further contributed to verifying credibility.

Transferability

To facilitate future researchers' assessments of transferability and to ensure transparency, inclusion criteria was described and adhered to during the interview and recruitment process. Additionally, to properly capture the insight regarding experiences of study participants, direct quotations are provided from the transcripts to allow comparison with the responses of other samples.

Dependability

To address a key or underlying issue with dependability, there was "consistency among the procedures and if by design the research questions and features of the study design are congruent with them" (Miles &Saldaña, 2013, p. 312). Coding of the data was reviewed and revised throughout the research process to address the validity threat of dependability. Dependability was addressed by using the same procedures with each of participants and member-checking of transcripts which did not result in any altering of responses.

Confirmability

Confirmability is used to describe the objectivity and correctness of data or the level of neutrality and lack of bias on the part of the researcher in reviewing participant transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability can be addressed by sharing the results of the study in different areas of the country or universities, but the study would only be generalizable if future research were conducted on a larger sample population

quantitatively. I will rely on the participants to provide credibility to the study by sharing their perspectives with other female officers.

Results

During my study, I sought to address the gap in practice by exploring the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion. Through one-on-one interviews with eight open-ended questions, data was collected data that provided the researcher with enough insight to answer the primary research question for the study.

The primary question used to guide this study was: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion? As noted in the data analysis section of this chapter, the results used to answer each interview question are organized by interview question (see Table 2). The discussion of themes includes relevant portions from active duty, reservist, and retired participants, with each description given a separate sub-section. The discussion of each theme concludes with a third sub-section, in which the composite descriptions from the two groups are compared to indicate how the theme emerged to answer the research question.

Table 2*. Summary of Themes, Based Upon Participant Responses*

_____

	Question	Theme
1.	What are your perceptions of the lifting of the policy?	Women are capable; Must work hard to prove yourself
2.	What combat duty experience do you have?	Challenging experience; Learning experience
3.	Could you describe any experiences or obstacles that you believe are related to the change in policy and how it may have impacted your assignments?	Gender-based discrimination; Work/Life Balance; Make the best of the situation
4.	What opportunities have you experienced by completing or not completing a combat tour?	Additional job opportunities
5.	What experiences related to the change in the combat exclusion policy have you had that would affect your decision to not retire or retire from the Navy?	Work/Life Balance
6.	What are your perceptions of how the combat exclusion policy was implemented by the Navy?	Implementation not widely known
7.	Do you have any suggestions on how to better implement the combat exclusion policy?	Better communications; Inherent sexism; Diversity makes us stronger
8.	Is there anything else that you would like to add?	Gender-based discrimination; Work/Life Balance

Interview Question 1

The first interview question was: *What are your perceptions of the lifting of the policy?* Two main themes emerged to this interview question.

Theme 1: Women are Capable

Data associated with this question indicated that active duty, reservist, and retired participants were excited for the combat exclusion policy to be lifted and anticipated the opportunities that were available to women. All participants favored the lifting of the policy and the majority responded that "women are just as capable of doing combat jobs" and "we have a stronger team at the end of the day when we're all not the same."

P3 noted, "Although there are some decent reasons for restrictions in fields such as Navy SEALS, diversity is key, and the lifting of the policy put a new spin on the types of duty that women could qualify for." In previous deployments, she noted, "stateside opportunities being available to women, but after the policy, there were combat deployments for women to locations such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Djibouti."

P7 expressed, "I didn't understand why there had been an exclusion policy in the first place and opined that the U.S. is extremely conservative, with an insistence to protect a female at all costs, in order to repopulate the world." P7 further noted "there is a place for women throughout every field, every position within the military, and every position within politics. Nations where women are active in military roles and policies results in a more peaceful nation." (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P8 noted "I didn't understand what the policy meant, having never dug into it, but the Navy moved in the right direction with the lifting of the combat exclusion policy."

She conveyed appreciation for the opportunities for herself and said, "it feels like the more barriers that are removed for women will result in better training, and improved career opportunities, and this should result in progress for the whole service." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

Theme 2: Must Work Hard to Prove Yourself

P1, a reservist described an experience where she was an active-duty surface warfare officer on a naval vessel in the Suez Canal and the harbor pilot refused to deal with her because she was a woman. P1 said, "She worked through this issue with the support of her male executive officer who aided her with the transit." P1 expressed respect for the surface warfare community which had, "more brains than brawn and supported women who worked hard and proved themselves."

P2 revealed there were a lot of jobs closed to females, with many limitations on career fields, such as general unrestricted line (GURL) designation (1100). This was her career field, which had no warfare designator, and the jobs were quite limited because there were no specific skill sets required for these jobs, rather the candidates had to be "generalists" and have general knowledge of a subject or be prepared to attend training or often complete on-the-job training to fulfill the job duty requirements. P2 said, "If we were not successful in a position, the result would be poor evaluations, which would then limit promotions and thereby limit other career enhancing jobs." For her assignments as a general unrestricted line officer, P2 noted, "each job could be completely different, and she had to work hard to make something out of nothing from position to position and consistently work harder than the men around her to prove herself."

P4 was told, "You are taking a quota (a spot) from a guy who deserved the spot more than you." This occurred many times throughout her career in the aviation community through to even department head, typically at the O-4, Lieutenant Commander rank or up to 8-10 years of naval service. Of note, P4 was the first female naval flight officer in a P-3 squadron and related that there were only seven squadrons that initially allowed women to be assigned to them prior to the combat exclusion policy being lifted. At the time, she said, "I felt with the seven locations, there were more options available for women in the Navy than were available for women in other services."

Summary Results for Interview Question 1

Participants perceived the lifting of the combat exclusion policy predominantly in a positive manner with a consensus that the policy should have been lifted sooner. They perceived that although physical differences between men and women do exist, women are just as capable of doing combat jobs. All participants reported they had experienced gender discrimination to some degree. They perceived themselves as needing to work harder than their male counterparts to be accepted and to succeed in their careers.

Interview Question 2

The second interview question was: *What combat duty experience do you have?* Two main themes emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Challenging Experience

While combat experience was varied for participants, the predominant type of combat support provided was post 9/11 and included support to locations in the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Djibouti.

P4 and P10 did provide support to Bosnia in the mid-1990's which was prior to the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. This support involved limited overland surveillance by participants aboard naval aircraft and flights into areas where missiles were trained upon those aircraft during flights. In both cases, participants received hazardous duty, or combat pay for their missions flown overland in Bosnia, Albania, or Montenegro.

Data from seven of ten participants noted their combat experience was challenging with P1 and P5 noting a preference for Navy combat duty vice a joint combat environment. This preference was primarily due to the familiarity with their primary jobs of surface warfare and supply in the Navy. P5 noted, "Personnel in positions within the supply work designator receive very specific Navy training and I feel more comfortable performing the duties required of a Navy supply officer since that is what I was trained to do."

P1 explained, "Everyone knew their jobs and supported one another on the ship in the Persian Gulf. On the George Washington, which is a huge carrier, more like a city, everyone was focused on their job and the area that they worked and never encountered any difficulties. It wasn't until I got to go on minesweepers and was reported for

fraternization that I experienced a challenging environment in the surface warfare

community." (P1, Zoom interview, March 2, 2022).

P5 described some of her experience while stationed in Afghanistan saying, "she

helped to train Afghan military personnel on logistics and found this to be challenging

due to the Army-centric focus and Army requirements for driving, shooting, combat

lifesaving, which are not typically a part of Navy required training. P5 also related that,

"Afghans in the area she was working were not keen to work with female officers and

thus she expressed a preference for Navy jobs and combat experiences over joint service

opportunities because, "everyone knows their jobs in the Navy." (P5, Zoom interview,

March 28, 2022).

P3 and P10 deployed to Djibouti and shared that the experience was challenging

due to leaving family behind. P3 noted, "travel throughout Africa as part of my job

responsibilities posed risks that Navy deployment training did not address or prepare me

to face. These risks included traveling throughout Ethiopia, Kenya, or Somalia in areas

with armed Embassy personnel in hardened vehicles or special forces and often there was

a requirement to carry a weapon. This was something as a mother of three children, I was

not used to doing." (P3, Zoom interview, March 9, 2022).

Theme 2: Learning Experience

Data from P6 and P7, both deployed to Afghanistan, spoke to the positive

learning experience from their time in country. P6 was the executive officer of the

Provincial Reconstruction Team which was responsible for engineering projects. She also

worked with government officials to teach long-range budgeting and building

infrastructure. She noted, "It was such a good experience, I learned so much during my time in Afghanistan and even took a civil affairs course to qualify for the job. I'm so glad I did take the course because it helped me so much on the projects I worked on while in country." (P6, Zoom interview, April 4, 2022).

P7 worked as a senior gender advisor to the Afghan Minister of Defense while deployed to Afghanistan. She shared, "from this experience I learned that Afghan women had been in combat roles in Afghanistan for decades. I had the additional opportunity to meet the only female general in the Afghan National Army who was a paratrooper and managed an elite group of female Special Forces in Afghanistan, like Mossad. This was a unique experience to see women being empowered in a Muslim country." While there were risks associated with her time in country, P7 said, "it was a wonderful learning experience where I felt truly able to make a difference. (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

Summary Results for Interview Question 2

Participant support in combat areas included deployments to the Persian Gulf aboard a carrier, Afghanistan, and Djibouti for joint support operations with Army and Air Force counterparts, and two participants who supported the Bosnia conflict in the mid-1990s, prior to the combat exclusion policy lifting. All participants shared that while the experiences in combat were challenging, there were also many opportunities to learn and to make a difference in their specialty area.

Interview Question 3

The third interview question was: Could you describe any experiences or obstacles that you believe are related to the change in policy and how it may have impacted your assignments? Three themes emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Gender-Based Discrimination

With the change in policy, more opportunities to deploy to combat zones with Army elements were made available to Navy active duty and reserve personnel. Participants like P3 and P10, both reservists, found themselves deployed to a joint service environment in Djibouti with a predominantly male, Army populace where the acceptance of women was often challenging.

P3 noted, "the Army colonel she worked for would often disparage the reserve training the Navy provided prior to deploying to a combat zone. He required 12–14-hour workdays, even on Saturday and Sundays and this created quite a challenge for her to communicate with her husband and three children, given the 7–8-hour time difference between Djibouti and her home in the U.S. The expectation was to work these types of hours even though the operational tempo did not require these types of hours or if something event did occur. After the colonel departed, the new colonel in charge changed the schedule to an 8-hour workday during the week, half-days on Saturdays and Sunday, as needed, but most personnel were able to take the time to reconnect with family, work-out, or just relax. This created a much better work environment for everyone" (P3, Zoom interview, March 9, 2022).

P10 also worked for an Army colonel. She related, "he diminished my civilian career within the Intelligence Community" and noted when she was sick from starting the malaria tablet regime, a requirement for being deployed to Djibouti, he would say to her, "You, always look like terrible and was always sweaty and flushed." Alternatively, she noted, "A male Army major who was also a reservist and a lawyer in his civilian career received constant kudos from the Army colonel. While P10 was attending training in Kenya, the Army colonel tried to remove P10 from her position and to send her home. However, P10 relayed, "The Major General in charge of the facility did not allow the colonel to complete this action but gave P10 an opportunity to move to a different organization within the command. She noted that she filed an equal opportunity complaint against the Army colonel for discrimination and after a thorough investigation, the decision of the investigator was that he had discriminated against P10 as well as other women in the organization, and thus he was asked to leave the command early." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022).

Theme 2: Work/life Balance

After 9/11, P2 who is now retired was offered the opportunity to go to the Pentagon as an executive assistant to an Admiral, which probably would have helped her to advance in her career. However, her husband, also a naval officer, was deploying to the Persian Gulf. P2 said, "I chose a support role vice a policy role in order to have a home life with my two daughters who were seven and nine years of age."

P8, a reservist, noted that training for combat zones changed after the policy changes making it possible "for both males and females to be fully prepared to go to a

war zone." She deployed to Kabul and traveled to Kandahar and Bagram. While there were training preparations on what to expect in the field, she noted, "there was not adequate training to prepare her for being away from her family." She shared, "It was very emotional to call back to her husband and four children via FaceTime or to talk on the phone. They would go for two-week periods without talking because it was easier that way. It was very challenging to be away, but she noted within the military there are bonds formed through friendships with those you serve alongside. However, when you return home, you think you're coming home to the exact same thing you left 10 months earlier, and it's totally not the same." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P10 also spoke of an experience in her deployment to Djibouti, which was a mandatory requirement, because of the implementation of the policy.

She said, "If I had refused to deploy, I could have risked separation from the Navy reserves. I had just returned to the United States from a remote field site in Australia as a Department of Defense (DoD) civilian and was told by my reserve unit that I had been selected to deploy to Djibouti in six months. My car and household goods had not arrived from Australia, and I had just purchased a house to share with my daughter, son-in-law, and new granddaughter." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022). She noted the extreme challenge of balancing her civilian job and the responsibilities that entailed with managing the requirements required prior to deploying. This included revising her will, creating a power-of-attorney since she was going to be out of the country for over a year, and so many preparations if something did happen to her while deployed. She noted, "The stress was challenging for me and my family. My 22-year-old daughter had to

become my power of attorney to act on my behalf while I was deployed, maintain all

important paperwork in the event something happened to me, while also raising her

newborn baby. It was a shock to her." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022).

Theme 3: Make the Best of the Situation

P6, now retired, shared that with every experience she tried to take it in stride and

learn from any situation. She did not have any specific details or experiences to relate

from her combat tour that she was willing to share, but she said, "when given lemons, she

made lemonade."

P7, an active-duty officer, learned Dari prior to deploying to Afghanistan in her

role as a gender advisor where she had to convince men that it was worth putting women

into different roles to serve in the military. She explained, "I had to speak to Afghan

families and ensure the safety of Afghan females who served in the military.

One area where females served was as Scan Eagle or drone pilots. In these positions, the

females would report to the safety of a base and fly drones against targets of interest. The

work wasn't sexy enough for the men, but the women got more kills than the guys. I

made the most of the situation and tried to make a difference. I had to speak to the

families and ensure them that their daughters would be safe in the jobs they were going to

be serving in within the military." (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P10, a reservist also shared she had made the best of the combat situation by using

her civilian skills to set up a threat finance cell and leverage contacts from her civilian

government job to assist with this venture which resulted in designated targets of interest

by the DoD. This was a major accomplishment, and she received many accolades from the command and the Navy for her work in this area.

Summary Results for Interview Question 3

Three themes were predominant in response to this question. Gender-based discrimination is prevalent in the Navy, and it is often necessary for women to go beyond just doing a job well and 'proving themselves' to be accepted in a mostly male environment. Additionally, a work life balance which includes serving in the military and raising a family is a challenging experience. If a couple is dual military with both husband and wife are serving, it is extremely difficult. One spouse must make the sacrifice for the other to complete their orders or deployments while the other spouse must be available to take care of the children. 'Making the best of whatever situation given' is a principal theme which showed the tenacity of participants to be successful at whatever situation they encountered while deployed.

Interview Question 4

The fourth interview question was: *What opportunities have you experienced by completing or not completing a combat tour?* One primary theme emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Additional Job Opportunities

Except for P5 and P8, all study participants cited additional job opportunities have been made possible to them by completing a combat tour. P5 felt there were no opportunities from the policy that helped her career in logistics. She shared she didn't

have a good experience in Afghanistan and stated, "I know I can't handle situations like Afghanistan again."

P8 explained that she had lost her job while deployed, came back to a marriage in shambles and experienced stress from deploying alone vice with a unit. As a result, she "found the entire experience challenging and stressful and the experience did nothing to advance her career. She lacked the resilience and coping mechanisms while deployed to Afghanistan as a public affairs officer and this made the experience quite challenging and, "she wouldn't volunteer to go back." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P1 related, "As a surface warfare officer in a forward deployed region, this gave me opportunities for leadership experiences that still benefit me today in the civilian sector. Experiences where even if you failed, it built your leadership and promoted trust from others." (P1, Zoom interview, March 2, 2022).

P2 noted, "I provided support to counterparts engaged in support to Desert Storm and mobilized the USS Comfort after 9/11 and made the most of limited opportunities at a higher rank when nothing else was available. Even though my designator was constantly changing, I was able to make a difference in a support role." (P2, Zoom interview, March 7, 2022).

P3 shared, "There were several large-scale planning exercises I was involved in while deployed to Djibouti which allowed me to travel within Africa, experience several training opportunities, and can travel to Seychelles, Madagascar, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, all as part of her job duties. These opportunities or this deployment location had

not been available to her prior to the lifting of the policy." (P3, Zoom interview, March 9, 2022).

P4 explained, "There is a whole lot more credibility to having completed a combat tour. She further elaborated; this was evidenced by the combat ribbons displayed on her uniform. Combat awards on your chest show you have done the right tours." By completing career-enhancing tours successfully, this helped her to get the staff positions she wanted and ultimately a position within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an exchange officer. She shared that this job was extremely rewarding and one she enjoyed the most from her career, primarily due to the acceptance and respect of her as a female officer by foreign officers and aircrew. "There wasn't the need to prove myself in that tour because I was respected as a female due to my experience and qualifications." (P4, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P6 shared, "the combat experience made her more competitive for promotion to O-6, Navy Captain and her combat tour also provided the credibility to obtain other jobs. This was especially important as I left the aviation field and was selected for a staff officer position to continue her career while her husband, also a Navy pilot, changed his aircraft platform due to the closure of some bases. His aircraft platform changes and her change to a staff officer position allowed them both to stay in the Navy and continue their careers and remain co-located to raise their two children." (P6, Zoom interview, April 4, 2022).

P7 had the opportunity to complete graduate school after completion of her tour in Afghanistan. She related, "The tour helped her get promoted to (O-5) Commander while

also allowing her the opportunity to receive gender advisor training in Sweden and have the opportunity to work with the Afghan people, which was a rewarding experience."

P9, a retired pilot recounted her experience returning home after the deployment to Afghanistan and being viewed as a war hero. She said, "I was honored in my hometown at an air show and got to participate in a Blue Angels flight demonstration." The deployment also helped her to get a job as a training officer in the reserves which in turn allowed her to transition to a human resources officer and remain in the Navy until retirement. (P9, Zoom interview, April 11, 2022).

P10 shared, "I used my civilian experience to train others in the military and this merging of civilian and military experience resulted in being promoted to O-5 (Commander) in the reserves. "She shared that she was also promoted to GS-15 in her civilian job, experienced additional training opportunities, and also opportunities to speak about her deployment experience, and mentor/share her experiences with other officers in her reserve unit." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022).

Summary Results for Interview Question 4

All but two participants expressed the sentiment that multiple job opportunities, promotions, training, and competitiveness for other opportunities from completing a combat tour were a primary theme for this question. The two participants who did not feel there were any additional opportunities that were available to them from completing a combat tour did not have good experiences and one experienced a significant issue with work/family balance upon return from her combat tour.

Interview Question 5

The fifth interview question was: What experiences related to the change in the combat exclusion policy have you had that would affect your decision to not retire or retire from the Navy? One primary theme emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Work/Life Balance

Four (P2, P4, P6, P9) of the ten participants were retired and stated they were at a natural place in their career to retire, but work/life balance was a key factor.

P2 retired from the Navy but worked for an additional 15 years as a DoD civilian before retiring from this second career. She said, "I teach yoga now and love it." After over 20 years in the Navy, P4 wanted to enjoy time with her husband and son and stated, "I didn't want to devote my life to being a flag officer and living at the Pentagon. The Navy is still a boy's club, and I did my time."

P6 was at a natural ending point in a 25-year career in the Navy and wanted to do something different. She said, "I was tired of physical readiness tests and weigh-ins and needed a change."

P9 noted that her decision to retire was not related to the combat exclusion policy, but she served an honorable career and after over 20 years, it was a natural end to her time in the Navy. She stated, "The drain on the family of moving every few years became too much as my children were growing up and more involved in school activities. I wanted to be a part of their lives."

P3, who had reached the 20-year mark in her reserve career and has young kids said, "Family life is critical and I'm not sure if I am willing to roll the dice to see if I end

up in a combat zone again. I can't be mobilized involuntarily until 2023 and at that time, I'll likely have a conversation with my family on whether to remain in the Navy or to retire." (P3, Zoom interview, March 9, 2022).

P8 stated, "I was in San Diego in 2010, I had a baby. And then in 2012, just before I left the command, I had another baby. Those are the two lowest fitness reports (Navy evaluations) I ever had in my entire career. As women, we're always having to constantly prove ourselves and so I think a lot of us don't just sit on our laurels, we go out and make stuff happen because we must. I have so much more to do and I'm just getting started. The sky is the limit and I have no plans to retire." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P9 shared, "I was shocked in 2018 to realize all the women with whom I deployed with were either divorced or in the process of getting a divorce after they returned from a combat zone mobilization." To help other service members, she launched a podcast, focusing on Navy Reserve and National Guard stories. She ran the podcast for two years and in that time, she saw the same traumas and challenges she had also experienced in a combat zone. She noted, "So many people echoed those back to me in those podcast stories and it was so validating and at the same time, so sad." (P9, Zoom interview, April 11, 2022).

P10 shared there are more opportunities now for women than ever before, but "I'm too old to take advantage of them and mobilizations are tough on my family and make balancing a civilian career a challenge. Since I'm near the end of a long and varied career, I'm happy to see that policies are changing, and women are now not a minority at

the Naval Academy and in other positions throughout the navy, as it was when I first

started my career in 1986." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022).

Summary Results for Interview Question 5

Work life balance was the principal theme for this question as primary reasons for

retiring or expressing a desire to retire from the Navy. Underlying themes of gender-

based discrimination and the challenge of combat deployments were also present in the

results for this question.

Interview Question 6

The sixth interview question was: *What are your perceptions of how the combat*

exclusion policy was implemented by the Navy? One primary theme emerged to address

this interview question.

Theme 1: Implementation not Widely Known

Eight of the ten participants felt the Navy could have done a better job of

communicating the impacts of the combat exclusion policy. P2 shared, "The Navy could

have communicated the changes better, rather than change my designator overnight,

which severely limited my career."

P3 noted, "Either I don't read my email, or I missed a notification, but it seemed

like the policy was just there. There was so much talk about whether it was going to be

lifted or not and opinions on whether it would happen, then it was there and now

everything is good."

P4 shared, "The Navy could have done a better job with implementation. For

example, the Navy dropped scoring for flight ability for pilots from 9 to 3 in order to

accommodate more women in the flight pipeline. This action caused major issues of belonging for those women in the flight program and made the women in flight training work that much harder to prove themselves." (P4, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P5 said, "I had not paid much attention to how the policy was implemented but noted with any big policy change, logistics is a big part of that rollout and changes should not be made overnight, but it seems to be working now." (P5, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P7 stated, "With the exception of media, I don't know that it is widely known that the combat exclusion policy has been implemented. I feel like if the Navy truly believes in it, they would be widely advertising. I doubt that recruiters are widely advertising or encouraging women to be in some of these roles they weren't allowed to be in before the policy was lifted. There are some high-profile jobs like women on submarines and I don't think women are encouraged to go into any sort of special operations." (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P8 noted that the implementation of the policy, "didn't receive the same emphasis as sexual assault awareness and there wasn't a campaign to promote it or explain what it would mean for the service." She shared that she didn't realize the implications of the changes, but it, "seems to be working now."

P9 related that, "It didn't have a huge impact on the program I was running at the time, but policy changes take a few years before the rest of the Navy catches up. However, the infrastructure wasn't in place within the Navy to logistically support the policy change at the time of implementation." (P9, Zoom interview, April 11, 2022).

P10 shared she didn't realize how the policy was going to be implemented or the implications of the change but felt the policy changes do seem to be working now. There were two positive comments from P1 and P4 with P1 noting she felt that the Navy and Air Force were the best at implementing the policy stating, "The law says there is something we should do, and we follow our civilian leadership. We are going to make some mistakes along the way, but the Navy isn't stuck in the Stone Age for implementation like the Marine Corps." (P1, Zoom interview, March 2, 2022).

P4 was happy with the opportunities the Navy provided to her because of the policy and said, "The Navy had such an advantage with so many fields open to women, and more opportunities than other services."

Summary Results for Interview Question 6

Participants did not feel that implementation of the combat exclusion policy was widely known. The consensus from participants was that communication and advertising of the implications of the lifting of the policy were minimal, but there have been improvements within the Navy over the years.

Interview Question 7

The seventh interview question was: *Do you have any suggestions on how to better implement the combat exclusion policy?* Three primary themes emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Better Communications

P2 suggested the Navy could release a newsletter which would be one means to improve communications, along with education and mentoring to make implementation of new policies more effective.

P4 suggested the Navy, "Stop talking about it and just do it, implement a policy because people are going to find issues until something is an actual policy. There needs to be total integration vice gimmicks like all female vessels or female submarines." She went on to share, "There is a need to have the best people in the best positions with the best skills to address the world challenges today. Integration and implementation—just do it!" (P4, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P5 recommended a slow, thoughtful approach to implementation in order to evaluate the best course of action on the logistics side and for better perception and understanding of the policy she emphasized that, "logistics have to part of a policy implementation plan." (P5, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P8 believed, "Communication and education is key around the differences that are being made. Outside of the fact that the SEAL community is now open for women applicants, more education regarding the opportunities available to women could serve to provide better communications on what to expect and allow the Navy to have the best people in positions to address world challenges." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P10 opined, "A phased approach might have worked better for implementation. Such an approach would consider the logistics of vessels and berthing requirements as part of the implementation process. A key element to this approach is communications to

let men and women know what the policy meant and will mean for the future. This approach may have prevented some women being placed in positions where they were social experiments." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022). This statement is related to a previous comment in the interview relaying instances where women were placed on surface vessels without proper berthing or separate bathroom facilities. The presence of women prompted surface vessel commanding officers to create their own spaces to facilitate women. This action often created issues involving male officers being removed from their staterooms to accommodate the presence of female officers and the male officers expressed their contempt for their female counterparts for these actions and their presence on all-male ships.

Theme 2: Inherent Sexism

P6 thought, "There are a lot of problems in the Navy that aren't specific to the policy. I think a lot of them are more specific to an entrenched belief system and just inherent sexism. Women must start from square one and prove themselves in every single job and policies are easier to change than people's minds." (P6, Zoom interview, April 4, 2022).

P7 expressed the following, "The Navy isn't prepared for women who are the breadwinners and have children. The Navy is not ready for men who have wives who are in the military or have a full-time career. And I feel like the Navy and the military in general is so geared towards men who have a wife who stays at home. They need to do a better job of trying to reach women on platforms in which women are active, if they are

serious about complete integration of women in the navy." (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

Theme 3: Diversity Makes us Stronger

P1 related a story of when she was at the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), in the late 1990's and the percentage of women was about 10%. The USNA Class of 2021 included 327 women (27%) and a total of 451 minority midshipmen (37%) (USNA Public Affairs, 2021). P1 felt this addition of more women created a stronger team with more female peers to support one another, thereby creating a stronger team when everyone is not all the same. She further noted, "When a minority isn't small, it's normalized, and diversity makes us stronger." (P1, Zoom interview, March 2, 2022).

P3 concurred with this line of thinking by relating that, "Women can do any job we put our minds to." However, she also expressed some concern stating, "There are some jobs that might not be the best for women because they might endanger men who may want to be chivalrous and to protect women. Woman can be on ships in combat positions but might not be prepared to be on the battlefield. Conversely, on a combat ship, everyone is doing their jobs and it's a completely different situation to Afghanistan." (P3, Zoom interview, March 9, 2022).

Summary Results for Interview Question 7

Three themes emerged in the responses to this question for suggestions to improve implementation of the combat exclusion policy. These included the need for improved communications, more education, and mentoring on the policy, as well as taking a multi-phased approach to implementation of new policies which may prove more

effective. Although not related to the policy, participants expressed a belief that sexism is prevalent in the Navy and the military in general with traditions and policy that are as one participant noted are, "Geared towards men who have a wife who stays at home." Finally, the importance of diversity was stressed, which makes for a stronger team.

Interview Question 8

The eighth interview question was: *Is there anything else that you would like to add?* Two primary themes emerged to address this interview question.

Theme 1: Gender-Based Discrimination

Half of the participants added one of the biggest issues for female naval officers is gender-based discrimination and the need for females to prove themselves to their male colleagues. P1 noted, "she was still traumatized be events that led to her leaving active duty and the inequity of treatment between herself and her male commanding officer in a fraternization situation, which resulted in her leaving activity duty. The male commanding officer was allowed to remain on active duty and retire with full benefits and she left the service and later rejoined the Nurse Corps as a reservist, an entirely different area than the surface warfare career she had selected upon receiving her commission. (P1, Zoom interview, March 2, 2022).

P4 stated, "Although a lot of things have improved over the years, there still needs to be continual improvement in conditions, uniforms, and a consistent pattern of improving so that women do feel accepted and do not feel the need to prove themselves."

P5 shared, "Equality is key, and we do still have to prove themselves, but it would be helpful for women to meet the qualifications as men. For example, if women do go

into combat units, the level of training must be the same as men. The Navy shouldn't scale back on the excellence of SEALS to allow women admittance." (P5, Zoom interview, March 28, 2022).

P7 related "Women are not looking for equality, but equity, which is different and finding that special formula for the Navy to recognize that and allow us as much growth as men do is key. It'll be nice to see more women in senior leadership positions and for women to 'get over' our imposter syndrome." (P7, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P8 shared an experience when she was deployed on a Navy vessel as a surface warfare officer, "When you're the only woman on board that ship and you're the only woman that the all-male crew sees month after month and we're not pulling into port when underway, there is so much focus and attention on those women. They can't blend in with the male crew and every action is highlighted and magnified." She shared, "There seemed to be a breaking point on both my deployments with the all-male crews that we never integrated. This was not seen on follow-on deployments to Afghanistan because personnel were more integrated, and the environment was co-ed." (P8, Zoom interview, April 6, 2022).

P9 stated, "Dealing with change is very difficult for everyone, for organizations, for people, for everything. Some policies are rolled out better than others. I felt like as a woman, I had to be better to be as good as a man. If that feeling doesn't change, then attrition of females will always be a problem for the navy." (P9, Zoom interview, April 11, 2022).

P10 noted, "Even today, a woman must work harder to be accepted as men are--even if that woman has higher qualifications. Therefore, fairness and equality need to be consistently emphasized and maintained."

Theme 2: Work/Life Balance

P2 related, "Raising kids and trying to serve your country was difficult. This difficulty increased during COVID and there were immense issues with childcare, while female service members were still expected to serve and go underway. Family challenges are going to continue in today's environment. I just hope that women continue to succeed out there." (P2, Zoom interview, March 7, 2022).

P6 noted, "The navy should offer some flexibility with balancing family life. It's difficult to work on a degree and raise kids—on active duty or in the reserves, same thing. There should be options, since it's not just a woman's issue—the issue affects males with families too." (P6, Zoom interview, April 4, 2022).

P10 shared, "Change is difficult for all organizations and the Navy isn't any different. The rollout of policies needs to be well-timed to not just reach heads of organizations, but also deck-plate sailors. Multiple sources of media are required to affect the level of changes that is necessary for the diversity and inclusion needed for today's Navy. For the Navy to keep qualified personnel, there must be a recognition of the work/life balance issues which affects serving women, as well as men." (P10, Zoom interview, March 31, 2022).

Summary Results for Interview Question 8

The two themes of gender-based discrimination and work/life balance were noted. Gender-based discrimination and the need for females to prove themselves to their male colleagues is still prevalent in the navy and equity of women in senior positions would help with equity for service women. Work/life balance and a need to offer options to balance family life while continuing to serve in the navy were key themes in response to this question.

Summary

The primary question used to guide this study was: What are the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy on their recruitment, retention, and promotion? This primary question was answered by asking eight interview questions of the ten participants in the study. As noted in Table 2 below, findings indicated that participants perceived the lifting of the combat exclusion policy in a positive manner with a consensus that the policy should have been lifted sooner. All participants reported they had experienced gender-based discrimination to some degree. They perceived themselves as needing to work harder than their male counterparts to be accepted and to succeed in their careers. It was noted by multiple participants that equity of women in senior positions would help with equity of service for women.

All participants shared that while the experiences in combat were challenging, there were also many opportunities to learn and to make a difference in their specialty area. Additionally, a work life balance which includes serving in the military and raising a family was seen as quite a challenging experience.

Work life balance was also a principal theme for retired participants or those who were still reservists or on active duty and expressed a desire to retire from the Navy. There is a need to offer options to balance family life to service members who still want to continue to serve in the navy. Underlying themes of gender-based discrimination and the challenge of combat deployments were also presented as reasons for wanting to retire. When asked about the implementation of the combat exclusion policy, the consensus from participants was that communication and advertising of the implications of the lifting of the policy were minimal, but there have been improvements within the Navy over the years. There is a need for improved communications, more education, and mentoring on the policy, as well as taking a multi-phased approach to the implementation of new policies, which may prove more effective.

Chapter 5 includes discussions, interpretations, and implications of these results. It begins with a review and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter. Next, it includes an interpretation of the findings and how they confirm, disconfirm, or extend conclusions of previous researchers. Chapter 5 then includes discussion of the limitations of the study, followed by recommendations based on findings for leaders, practitioners, and future researchers. A summary and closing remarks conclude the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The demographics of the military services are changing today with females making up 24.8% of the naval officer corps in 2020 (U.S. DoD, 2020). This represents an increase of 4.8% from 2018 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). Given this increase in females in the U.S. military services, it is essential to understand how female naval officers have been integrated into naval combat roles and how they perceive the impact of these new roles on their recruitment, retention, and promotion.

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of female naval officers who had been assigned to combat duty on how the lifting of the combat exclusion policy had impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. An objective of this study was to add to the understanding of the unique phenomenon of women in historically gendered and stressful experiences, such as combat experience in war zones. Findings, as noted in Table 2, indicated that participants perceived the lifting of the combat exclusion policy in a positive manner, resulting in many opportunities and benefits for their careers.

All participants reported they had experienced gender-based discrimination to some degree and felt the need to work harder than their male counterparts to be accepted and to succeed in their careers. All participants shared that while the experiences in combat were challenging, there were also many opportunities to learn and to make a difference in their specialty area. Work/life balance was also a principal theme for those participants who were preparing to retire or expressing a desire to retire from the Navy. There were also underlying themes of gender-based discrimination and the challenge of

combat deployments presented as reasons for wanting to retire. There is a continued need for improved communications, more education, and mentoring on the combat exclusion policy, as well as taking a multiphased approach to the implementation of any new policies regarding women.

This chapter contains a discussion of findings presented in Chapter 4 and includes interpretations of findings juxtaposed with existing literature and the theoretical framework. Limitations encountered during the study are presented in this chapter as well, followed by recommendations to leaders and researchers for future research. A summary and closing remarks conclude Chapter 5 and the study.

Interpretation of Findings

After analyzing data from participants, I was able to gain better insight on the perceptions of female naval officers on the impact of lifting the combat exclusion policy on their careers. Using the lens of both the research literature and the FSS work of Cynthia Enloe, including and her attention to feminist theories and the need to observe with 'feminist curiosity' the study of war and conflicts as experience, the findings from my study had several similarities and differences to previous studies.

Findings indicated that participants perceived the lifting of the combat exclusion policy in a positive manner with a consensus that the policy should have been lifted sooner. This supports past research studies and directly correlates to the Sadler (1999) study which discussed the achievement of higher status and better retirements were positive benefits of serving in combat, and the negative effects included receiving continued discrimination from male officers (Sadler, 1999). All participants reported they

had experienced gender-based discrimination to some degree which corresponds with the Dunn study (2015), where they stated, "They had always experienced discrimination and hostility from their male counterparts, but now it came with the ability to hold positions of power" (Dunn, 2015).

Additionally, "The process of the integration of women first into the Navy and subsequently into the operating forces of the fleet has been long, slow, and contentious process influenced by institutional biases, attitudes, and political and cultural trends" (Balano & Rosenberg, 2007, p. 6). Participants in my study echoed this sentiment and perceived themselves as needing to work harder than their male counterparts to be accepted and to succeed in their careers. Multiple participants noted that equity of women in senior positions would help with equity of service for women throughout the Navy.

All participants shared that while the experiences in combat were challenging, there were also many opportunities to learn and to make a difference in their specialty area. Participants were mostly positive about their combat experiences and noted that the experiences were challenging especially for joint duty experiences in Afghanistan and Djibouti, and they did express a preference for Navy deployments within their designation specialty but there were no concerns expressed regarding personal safety or the likelihood of assault in joint duty combat assignments. While Erika and DiNitto (2019) discovered that many women feared what would happen to them in their own camps more than fearing actual combat, this was not the case for participants in this study. Hanna (2014) found the same to be true during research when women reported that the number of assault cases on their bases had them more concerned for their safety than

exposure to combat hazards. Women officers felt that they were more likely to be targeted for assault by their male counterparts when in combat positions away from U.S. bases due to the lack of resources of support on combat zone locations (Hanna, 2014). There were no instances where female naval officers who participated in this study expressed fear or concern for their own personal safety while serving in a combat duty capacity.

Meadows et al. (2016) looked at ways to improve female officer retention in the Navy and detailed factors that the military could utilize to improve female officer retention by encouraging female officers to overcome the fears of a long-term separation from the perspective of the family unit to address female officer retention concerns. Work life balance which includes serving in the military and raising a family was a resounding theme from participants and still represents quite a challenging experience.

Specific U.S. Navy research by Smith and Rosenstein (2014) showed gendered difference in career intentions and influences by male and female peers while also examining the retention of women in combat specialties and why retention is higher for men. They discovered both men and women leave the Navy due to the impact that service in the Navy, which includes deployments and mobilizations may have on families and separations, divorce rates. While work life balance was a principal theme for retired participants, reservists, and active-duty participants, and all participants expressed a desire to remain in the service and retire from the Navy. Table 1 includes the years of service for each participant with the least number of years of service was 12 and the highest year of service was 30, with an average of 20.2 years of service for all

participants. This finding supports statistics which showed that more women remained on active duty for longer terms to receive their pension after retirement (Meadows et al., 2016).

Prior to the lifting of the policy, women veterans were not recognized for their contributions to our nation's defense and were not allowed to serve in combat roles, yet they played an integral part in the U.S. military (Rainey, 2018). Participants recognized the implications of the lifting of the policy and the opportunities provided to them, often to advance their careers or achieve a higher rank, or opportunities for additional training and travel. However, there was a consensus from participants that communication and advertising of the implications of the lifting of the policy were minimal. There is still a need for improved communications, more education, and mentoring on the policy, as well as taking a multi-phased approach to the implementation of new policies, which may prove more effective in improving the role of female officers in the Navy.

This study was grounded in the FSS work of Cynthia Enloe and her work on feminist theories in international relations, and feminist geography and emphasized the need to research military and conflict in non-traditional manners (Enloe, 2015). Enloe (2015) proposed including an examination of conflicts, wars, and issues of security and insecurity should be observed with 'feminist curiosity' and study war and conflicts as experience. The experiences of the participants in my study provided unique insights on their perceptions of the lifting of the combat exclusion policy which were positive and provided insight on the varied experiences in combat zones in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Bosnia, and the Persian Gulf. Multiple participants referred to their combat experiences

as challenging, but also a learning experience which further shaped their careers by providing credibility for having completed a combat tour, additional leadership and educational opportunities, travel, and advancement. Participant combat experiences did not impact retention as Table 1 illustrates the years of service for participants and all expressed a desire to remain in service and retire to receive retirement benefits. Participants relayed work life balance as an issue that also impacts males with families as well and expressed the challenges of raising a family while remaining in service to their country.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the limitations cited in Chapter 1, the qualitative nature of this study also limits its findings. Although the participants provided much depth and detail regarding their experiences, no correlations or causality were established from these results. Also, while past studies on different branches of the military or different locations may have shared similar findings with the present study, these findings may not be generalizable to all branches and groups of the military. Certain nuances between military groups and branches may lead to different experiences for servicewomen and different perceptions on recruitment, retention, and promotion within the military. There was also a limitation due to the limited research in the field for female naval officer perceptions on combat role policy and career advancement. There were only ten participants and all volunteers from a range of military jobs, but there were no participants from the submarine warfare community, which is a relatively new career field for women, post lifting of the exclusion policy.

Additionally, as a female naval officer, I use multiple strategies to address any biases that could influence the outcome of the study. To help remain unbiased during interviews, I followed the interview guide (see Appendix A), remained neutral, and spoke in a positive tone when interacting with interview participants (see Creswell, 2012). Participants reviewed their interview transcripts and confirmed the accuracy of their transcript and were offered the opportunity to recommend changes to their transcript. All participants were satisfied with their transcripts.

Recommendations

Additional research is needed to explore the perceptions of female naval officers and the impact the combat exclusion policy has had on their career, retention, and promotion. My study was limited to 10 participants and did not include any females from the submarine warfare community, a relatively new job designation that became available to female naval officers in 2010 and it is estimated to take until about 2026 before a woman could be in command of a US Navy submarine (McDermott, 2018). Additional research would also be required when female naval officers are accepted into the SEAL community.

The information from my study provided insight from participants on the combat exclusion policy, promotion, retention, and retirement. If surveys or interviews were conducted on a larger scale by the Navy, leaders could use this information to improve communications, provide more education, and mentoring on the policy to improve understanding and build better cohesiveness for female naval officers.

Implications

The findings from my study revealed several themes that affected female naval officers who served in combat tours after the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. By developing an understanding of how the policy was perceived, documenting recommendations to positively improve the social construct, conditions for female officers in the Navy could be developed. These changes could positively impact both men and women serving together in the military in combat environments and may also be identified to promote positive social change and improve diversity and inclusion within the U.S. Navy.

The consensus from participants was that communication and advertising of the implications of the lifting of the policy were minimal, but there have been improvements within the Navy over the years. More advertising by the Navy to female forums on the benefits of the experiences in new communities would encourage women to be in roles, such as submarines and SEALS that were not available to women before the policy was lifted. Phased approaches for launching new policies and having logistics, such as separate berthing facilities, in place prior to introducing a policy would also ease the potential impact of introducing females into new work roles or areas.

Gender-based discrimination and the need for females to prove themselves to their male colleagues is still prevalent in the navy and equity of women in senior positions would help with equity for service women. Continual improvement in conditions, uniforms, and a consistent pattern of emphasizing inclusion and diversity so that women do feel accepted could potentially impact some of the prevalent sexism and

gender discrimination that participants noted to promote positive social change for female service members in the Navy.

An emphasis on work/life balance and the need to offer options to service members to allow them to balance family life, while continuing to serve in the Navy were key themes which have potential implications for positive social change. This should be explored by the Navy to recruit and retain highly training professions within the service of their country.

Conclusions

During my study, I explored the perceptions of female naval officers on the lifting of the combat exclusion policy to help fill the gap in the literature about how changes in gender combat policies were perceived by female officers who are assigned to combat positions in the U.S. Navy. Overall, the lifting of the combat exclusion policy was perceived in positive manner with a consensus that the policy should have been lifted sooner. All participants reported they had experienced gender-based discrimination to some degree and expressed the need to work harder than their male counterparts to be accepted and to succeed in their careers.

Participants shared that their combat experiences were challenging but provided many opportunities to learn and to make a difference. Work life balance was a key theme for retired participants or those who were still reservists or on active duty and expressed a desire to retire from the Navy. Underlying themes of gender-based discrimination and the challenge of combat deployments were also presented as reasons for wanting to retire.

In summary, female naval officers do perceive the combat exclusion policy in a positive manner but could integrate more effectively if they did not experience the challenges that were raised in this study. These findings emphasize the need for improved communications, more education, and mentoring on the policy, as well as taking a multi-phased approach to the implementation of new policies. There is a need to offer options to balance family life to service members who still want to continue to serve in the navy and equity of women in senior positions would help with equity of service for women and promote positive social change for women serving in the Navy.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

The following are the guiding interview questions for the participants for this

Research project. These questions have been developed to learn how the participant

perceives the combat exclusion policy and the impact the lifting has had on their career,

retention, and promotion. Prior to beginning the interview, I will introduce the purpose

this study which is to learn about female naval officers' perceptions of how the lifting of

the combat exclusion policy has impacted their recruitment, retention, and promotion

within the military. I will then answer any questions about the consent form and have the

participant sign.

Begin interview:

Hello, welcome, and thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Do you have any

questions before we get started? I will now turn on the audio recorder.

First, I'd like to ask a few questions about the combat exclusion policy.

1. What are your perceptions of the lifting of the policy?

2. What combat duty experience do you have?

3. Could you describe any experiences or obstacles that you believe are related to the

   change in policy and how it may have impacted your assignments?

4. What opportunities have you experienced by completing or not completing a combat

   tour?

Next, I would like to ask you about how these experiences may have affected your

decisions about your career.

5. What experiences related to the change in the combat exclusion policy have you had that would affect your decision to not retire or retire from the Navy?

6. What are your perceptions of how the combat exclusion policy was implemented by the Navy?

7. Do you have any suggestions on how to better implement the combat exclusion policy?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in the study.