

GUNS & *Rosie*

INSIDE:

SEXUAL ASSAULT
IN MODERN
WARFARE

SILENCING
TRANSGENDER
SOLDIERS

HAIR STYLE
REGULATIONS
ROOTED IN
RACISM

FEATURES:

INTERVIEW WITH
AIR FORCE
ACADEMY CADET



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FROM THE EDITOR

The history of women serving in the United States military has been one of struggle, strife, and bravery, beginning with Deborah Samson Gannett who enrolled in the military under the name of her deceased brother in 1782 (Holm 25). The most recent debate concerning women in the military is whether they should be allowed in combat roles. As E.A. Blacksmith writes in *Women in the Military*, “The debate over whether or not women should fly combat missions has more to do with images than reality” (24). Evidence has pointed to the fact that women are just as good at fighting, but they are perceived as weaker. Twenty two years later, women were finally granted the right to engage in combat.

While there are differing views on the role of the military (and if we should even have one), the reality is that women are serving in the military and this magazine strives to support women in that endeavor. There are strong arguments for why the military cannot be a liberatory institution no matter how “progressive” their acceptance practices become. As Michael Renner writes, “It is time to rethink the utility of large standing military forces and to advance the norm that possession of an offensively armed military is unacceptable” (18). Regardless of this, the dangers and accomplishments alike of women serving in the military are real and should be addressed. *Guns and Rosie* is a magazine for women in the military to read and relate to because no matter what our theories about the military say, the women on the ground need a place of sisterhood to deal with this taxing occupation. This magazine has a focus on theory surrounding the struggle real women are going through. This emphasis is important if we hope change the ways women are treated in the military. As bell hooks writes, “We must continually claim theory as necessary practice within a holistic framework of liberatory activism...we must actively work to call attention to the importance of creating a theory that can advance renewed feminist movements” (41).

In this inaugural issue, we hope to contextualize some aspects of military life in the theories that try to understand reality. Whether that is examining sexual assault, racist regulations, or transgender rights, the theories that help explain these phenomena are the first step towards changing them.

Enjoy this first issue of *Guns and Rosie*. Maybe it will change your mind about something, maybe it won't. Hopefully, it will give you a better picture of life in the United States Military.

Best,

Grace Montesano





Run like a girl.

Throw like a girl.



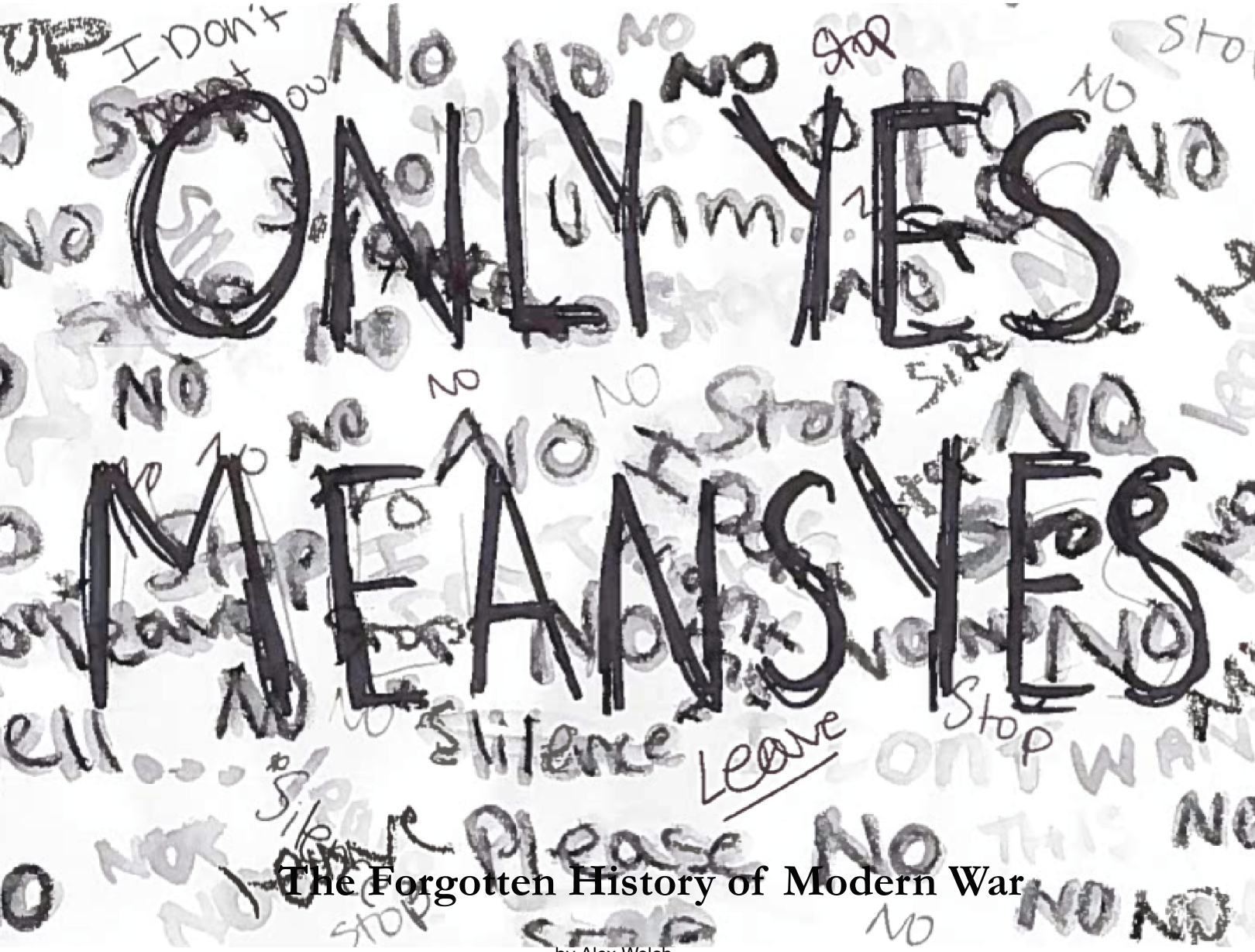
Fight like a girl.

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Back to the Basics:



The Forgotten History of Modern War

by Alex Welch

War is hell. A surreal battleground filled with a torrent of violent acts, committed every day around the world. Civilians are desensitized to watching a school being decimated by cruise missile, a hospital being leveled by an artillery round, or a family being blown to bits by a forgotten landmine. These are considered "acceptable losses", and they

are part of our definition of war. these atrocities is to inflict supreme pain upon the enemy with minimal loss. After all, these are the unavoidable sacrifices that our nation makes in order to win. But what happens when the system turns on itself and our soldiers use their expertise to inflict harm upon their own combat personnel?

The first reaction to soldiers perpetrating

violent acts against fellow soldiers is usually disgust. We recognize from a practical standpoint that violence against fellow soldiers is wrong and soldiers see it as one of the worst crimes imaginable. However, sexual crimes are not held to this standard of scrutiny. Victims of sexual assault are ignored, blamed, and ostracized. This is because no one wants to accuse another soldier of a crime beneath the very notion of Warrior. A soldier is supposed to be hard, a soldier is supposed to deal with the daily grind. Any behavior that is not consistent with protocol is looked down upon. This is the culture of our military and it is designed to remove the individual from the decision making process, and to dehumanize the target and make it easier to pull the trigger. Unfortunately this mindset allows a soldier to partake in any action, so long as they are under the impression that the institution permits it.

A History in Brief

Sexual violence during war time is often seen as the spoils of war, or compensation given to soldiers for a job well done. It has also been used as a psychological weapon, a method of supremacy over the enemy, "Dominance in the male system is pleasure. Rape is the defining paradigm of sexuality, to avoid which boys choose manhood and homophobia. Women, who are not given a choice, are objectified" (Mackinnon 421). Women are reduced to the possession of the enemy and thus are nothing more than contraband. In order to destroy the enemy's ownership, soldiers gain a victory over the adversary through rape. Militarized rape has proven useful by expelling the population from conquered territory, destroying social links, spreading diseases, and eliminating cultural traditions (Askin 26). These crimes are further exacerbated by the fact that militarized sexual assault does not have explicit recognition in international law or applicable humanitarian law (Askin 27, Ward & Mendy 22). Domestic military handling of rape is also a new development and although they are generally ahead of international law, there is still a lot of ambiguity and poor judgment in terms of sexual misconduct.

Recently the US military has come under scrutiny for their mishandling of sexual assault

charges. Historically speaking, this has not been a serious topic of discussion for the Pentagon, given that women have just recently gained recognition for combat roles and that men rarely reported sexual crimes. Sexual assault in the US Armed Forces has been defined in the last two decades as, "intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, physical threat or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent" (US Department of Defense 422). This definition has largely been ignored by the administration since "90% of the victims were eventually discharged from service" implementation. In 2012 the Pentagon found that ~26,000 women and men had been sexually assaulted in the military. Of these 26,000 only 3,374 cases were reported. In 2013 this number increased to 5,061 cases. Many took the increase in reports as a sign that the newly implemented support channels were working. However, only 484 went to trial with a mere 376 convictions. Perhaps even more disturbing is that 90% of the victims were eventually discharged from service (Cooper 3).

Get Back in Line Soldier, We'll Take Care of it

In light of the recent media attention the Pentagon has made efforts to increase the administrative handling of sexual misconduct. There have been new outlets created for victims of sexual assault to report the crimes. These new channels do not remedy the problem, with increased reports of sexual assault amongst previous victims. Lax punishments and disregard for complaints give offenders amnesty for sexual crimes. Perpetrators are permitted back in their unit and subsequently recommit the same crime. Handling sexual assault through internal channels has created severe consequences for the victims. Once the offenders are allowed back into their unit they are again placed in close proximity to their victims. This pressures victims to not report the crime because they know

that nothing concrete will be done about the issue. Just a firm slap on the wrist and a short reprieve. Worse yet, offenders return to their same unit angry that a fellow soldier would accuse them of a crime. This opens up the possibility for further abuse with the added motivation for revenge (Yuhas 3).

In March Senator Kirsten Gillibrand fought for a bill to place military sexual assault cases in the jurisdiction of domestic courts, removing authority from the military's chain of command. The new legal measure is designed to increase accountability and transparency by removing adjudication from military courts. This bill was never passed. The Pentagon has strongly resisted any pressure to relinquish internal control over sexual crimes, arguing that it would "degrade mission readiness and also diminish commander's effectiveness in the fight against sexual assault in the military" (Yuhas 3). As an alternative, the Pentagon has suggested requiring a greater level of commander involvement.

Crossfire

The current procedure has created a horrible system that works against the victims, which leaves the military at odds with the soldiers it is supposed to protect. This is disturbingly similar to what Enloe describes her essay concerning militarized rape, "The very process of human rights documentation may conflict with the needs of the individual's survivor" (Enloe 501). When there is conflict between administrative process and justice, serious consideration and modification needs to be undertaken, "For any string of occurrences to be 'systematic' they must be found to not be random, not ad hoc" (Enloe 502). These abuses need to be read in the context of a systematic failure. This either means that legal authority needs to be divorced from the military or that other lawful authority needs to regulate the internal restructuring of the military's administrative process. More also has to be done in order to ensure that victims, "feel empowered enough to report when they have been raped" (Enloe 501). In order to empower victims, the military needs to address the stigmas attached to non-combat related injuries, such as sexual crimes.

Over the past couple of decades the military

has been underutilizing their personnel due to the mishandling of sexual cases. This wasted potential has led to poor combat performance, readiness, and allocation of resources towards covering up sexual misconduct. The current patchwork of ineffective policies has left our soldiers without support and perpetuated a culture that blames the victims. This not only hurts our combat personnel but also exposes our country to external and internal threats. In order to address this problem more research is desperately needed to readily evaluate the extent of the problem as well as the threat that it possess to our country. In the meantime more effective report and support networks need to be put in place for victims. Once these networks are in place the military can focus on alleviating the cultural stigmas surrounding sexual misconduct. This is not an easy undertaking; however, when the Armed Forces can effectively handle internal problems the US will be better positioned to fight wars on the modern battlefield.

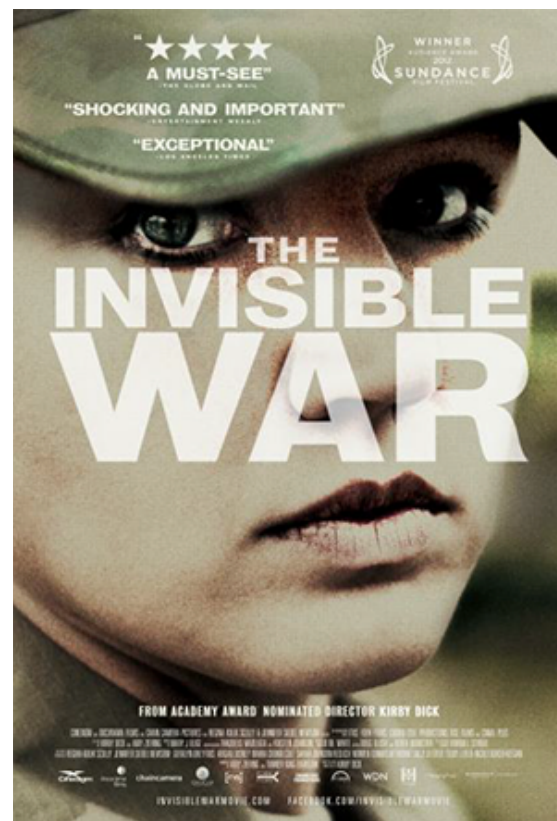


Photo courtesy of Wikipedia



An Exposé on Mental Health: USAFA

by Grace Montesano and Julia Wood

Introduction

The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) had a 15.4% acceptance rate in 2014 (US News). One of the premier colleges in the country, it prepares young Americans to serve as commanding officers in the US military. For years now, reports have come out about the issues military academies seem to have regarding sexual assault. Sexual assault is especially hard for soldiers to report because, as Cynthia Enloe writes, “the woman who has endured militarized rape must devise her responses...not only by weighing her relationships to the rapist...but in addition, she must weigh her relationships to collective memory, collective notions of national destiny, and the very institutions of organized violence” (500). Often, sexual assault victims are hesitant to come forward due to social pressures within the military (Department of Defense). Issues of sexual assault within military academies has received a lot of press recently, perhaps because people are starting to understand what Enloe has argued.

One issue that is not discussed frequently is mental health. Although it is related to sexual assault in some ways, this topic hardly gets the spotlight in civilian life, much less in the military. The consequences for failing to adequately address mental health within the military are great. Soldiers are tested mentally in ways civilians are not. Because of this, a

and mental health is ways in which we discuss and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson Disability, Transforming disability theory addresses as the unity of the category body, the politics of medicalization of the body, the multiculturalism, most interesting aspect of this normalcy”. In an environment regimented and regulated, “normalcy” could theoretically is a long list of personal issues that will prevent an individual While it would seem as though want to suppress expression



feminist theory of disability necessary to examine the work with mental health. writes in “Integrating Feminist Theory”, “Feminist such broad feminist concerns woman, the status of the lived appearance, the privilege of normalcy, sexuality” (516). Perhaps the quote is the “privilege of in which everything is admitting deviance from be a dangerous move. There (both physical and mental) from enlisting in the military. the military academies would of mental illness or weed

those individuals out, the following interview might provide a different outlook on this particular issue.

In this interview with a female cadet at USAFA, some light is shed on the way this particular academy handles mental health and sexual assault. It might not be what you are expecting.

(DISCLAIMER: The cadet interviewed wishes to remain anonymous. She only speaks about her individual experiences and does not represent the US Air Force Academy, nor the United States Military. This is one account of life at USAFA and other accounts may differ greatly from this one.)

Julia Wood: Are there accessible mental health resources available on your campus? If so, what are they?

Anonymous Cadet: Yes. There is the Peak Performance Center (basically a place to go sit in comfy chairs and talk to therapists). We also have people embedded into the cadet wing called PEERs whose only job in the squadron is to be the person that cadets go to when they are stressed out. We also have days throughout the year where we don't have school and it is all about supporting our wingman, whether that is learning about how to support people who have been sexually assaulted, suicide prevention....lets just say there is a lot.

JW: Do you believe that mental health awareness is an issue on your campus?

AC: Not at all. Although we may have cynicism, there are a lot of outreaches for the cadets to open up about their feelings. Since I have been here we have lost over 5 cadets through suicides, car accidents, and ski accidents, so death has unfortunately been a big problem; but I believe the academy is trying to implement as much communication about it as possible.

JW: One of the things we're looking at is ways in which gender identity interacts with mental health in the armed forces. Have you ever known of anyone being treated differently because of gender or sexuality at Air Force?

AC: Yes (this is not necessarily the academy's thoughts), but I also think that there is a point where women put up the barrier of their sex. I have classes where I am the only girl with 18 other guys. One girl may look at it and feel overwhelmed, or she can take a different outlook and say we are all cadets, all intelligent, and will challenge the other guys intellectually and hold her own. It is truly a mindset.

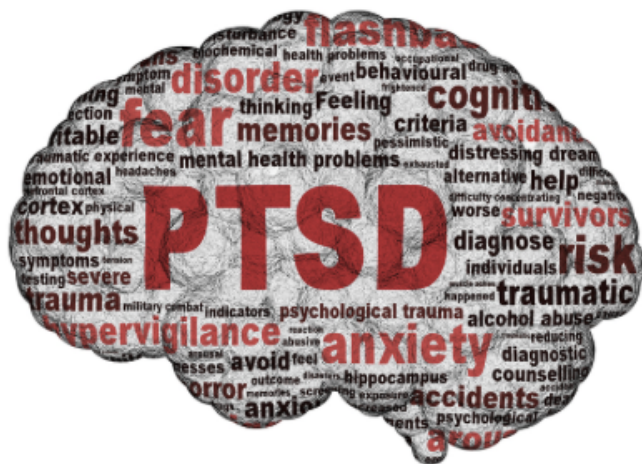


Photo courtesy of thefaceswlive.com

JW: Do you think the fact that there are many more men than women at the Academy affects mental health?

AC: Not at all. We are a military branch, and per congressional specifications we have a set percentage of women allowed in the armed forces and at military academies. It is something that should not even be considered.

JW: Do you see a discrepancy in mental health between men and women on campus?

AC: I think that they tend to lean toward sexual assault mental health on the women's side, but

when it comes to anything else such as family death, friend's suicides, or talking about feelings in general, everyone is open about it.

JW: Does your campus address issues of sexual misconduct with psychological services? If someone were to experience a sexual assault, would it be likely to be reported?

AC: Yes. Yes. Yes. I do not know all of the nitty gritty details but if you really want to look into it, look on the internet. There are so many ways to get help and no matter what you are going through they point you to the psychological services. Generally people will go there first before they realize they have been sexually assaulted, before they go to the hospital to get tests done.

JW: Is mental health a topic that is discussed among peers?

AC: It can be a touchy subject, but the academy has placed a lot of responsibility on the chain of command to open up the conversation. It has been especially prevalent these past years with the number of suicides and sexual assaults.

JW: Do you think that the Air Force Academy appropriately educates students about mental health? Is it discussed within the administration?

AC: To be honest it is such a large amount of education it is overwhelming. I feel completely educated through the administration as well as through the cadets about this issue.

JW: What do you think the Air Force could change or improve upon in the area of mental health on campus?

AC: To be honest, the cadets have what they need. Between our Peak Performance Center, squadron PEERs, military and family life counselors, as well as all of the other family services located in the usual operational AF, the amount of locations and people to get help from is incredible.

JW: Is there anything else you'd like to add on the topic of women in the armed forces and mental health?

AC: Mental health is a real problem in both the armed forces and in civilian life. People who have gone through traumatic events can have just as much PTSD as the next soldier. I can promise you that the Armed Forces are making real improvements and efforts to open up mental health resources to everyone. That being said, it is up to those people with those problems to step forward and take the help. Their leadership may see them struggling and may order them to go to places, but there is a point where you need to make the decision yourself to get help. It does not matter if you are a man or a woman, everyone will have struggles. We just need a strong network to get through it.



22%
of veterans suffer from
post-traumatic stress disorder
or major depression



34%
suffer from other
mental concerns



1 out of 3
of these people seek help

Conclusion

This interview provided a point of view that is not heard frequently. The generic understanding from civilians is that (especially female) cadets are always afraid of sexual assault and don't believe that the institution will be able to help them or even believe them. On the other side is a group of mean administrators who want to keep every military problem under wraps so that they don't look weak to other countries. According to this cadet, there are many measures in place to deal with sexual assault and the psychological trauma such an experience can inflict. The Air Force is clearly more progressive than civilians may give it credit for. Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret.) corroborates this point of view when she writes in her book *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, "Nine months after the Air Force gained its independence from the Army, the WAF (Women in the Air Force) was born...the WAF would be the elite of the women in the services"(130). At the time of its creation, the Air Force was the most progressive branch of the military in terms of women and it has perhaps maintained this role.

In terms of mental health at USAFA, it seems to be something that the administration is taking very seriously. The cadet that was interviewed noted that there are multiple resources from different aspects of the campus available to the cadets to help them in whatever capacity they can. According to this woman, it is clear that the Air Force has recognized the importance of taking care of mental health and ensuring that the minds of the soldiers can keep up with the bodies of the soldiers.

While the Air Force academy is doing what it can to ensure its students have the resources necessary to be healthy and happy, other college campuses as well as civilian life in general do not have the infrastructure in place for dealing with mental health. Perhaps the US as a whole could take note of the way USAFA takes mental health seriously and provides the necessary help for those in need. Maybe the strong camaraderie facilitated in the Armed Forces is something civilians cannot experience, but that doesn't mean that we have to give up on creating a "strong network" to ensure mental health for those who need it.

Curls & Kinks Condemned

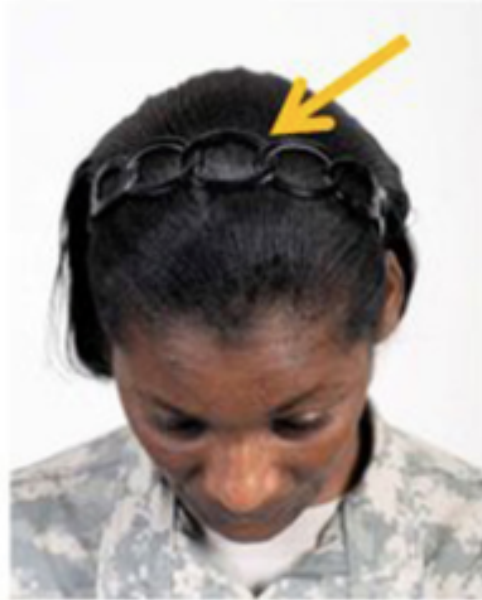
Army's Regulations Rooted in Racism



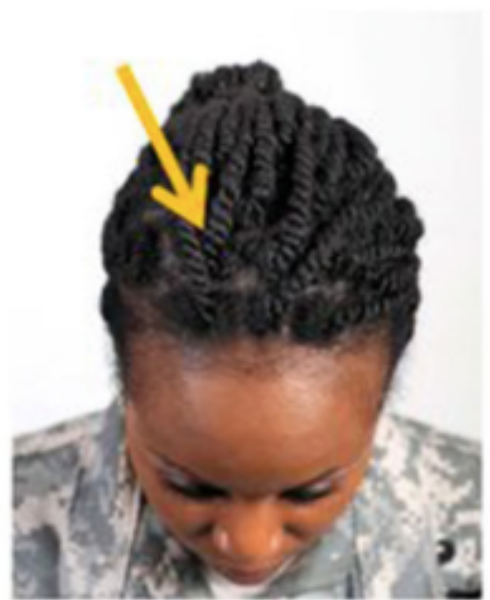
FEMALE UNAUTHORIZED HAIRSTYLES



Multiple braiding



□ Headband is not



□ Twists are not

(1/4) in diameter

Photo courtesy of *Military Times*

by Jazlyn Andrews

Nearly one year ago, on March 31, 2014, the Army released a new grooming policy that restricted predominantly Black women's hairstyles. Army Regulation 670-1 "Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia" forbade all types of dreadlocks and afros along with cornrows, twists, and multiple braids larger than one-quarter inch in diameter (Tan, "Black female soldiers say..."). The styles, described as "matted" and "unkempt," were

banned in order to maintain uniformity (Rhodan, "U.S. Military Rolls Back..."). Concerned by the racist overtones of the policy, the women of the Congressional Black Caucus sent Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel a letter arguing the language used was "offensive" and "biased." The regulation—rooted in Eurocentric beauty standards and racist ideologies—serves as proof of the double burden Black women negotiate each day. Ideologies are the "images, concepts and premises which provide the

framework through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (Hall 104). Dominant ideologies become ingrained in our lives, reproduced through social units, mediated images, and other institutions. Images of the purity of whiteness are held up in comparison to the denigrated images of blackness. As Audre Lorde writes, “Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human difference between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate” (289). The Army’s lack of respect for or knowledge about Black hair care and texture demonstrates the insidious nature of inferential racism, or the “apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race whether ‘factual’ or ‘fictional,’ which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (Hall 106). Assuming that all hair is textured like Cinderella’s reinforces the naturalization of Whiteness in relation to the “other.” Because expression of Black identity through hair threatens the controlling images of Eurocentric beauty standards that tell Black women they must assimilate to whiteness in order to gain social mobility, it has been used as a means to control Black women’s bodies.

Black women’s hair has been a political tool used to control, navigate, or explore identity. The prominence of hair goes back before slavery, to western Africa, where hair was a central representation of self. Realizing the importance of hair, enslavers shaved the heads of their slaves to maintain control and rob the Africans of the ability to self identify

Straight or wavy hair became associated with having free person status, because “Emulating Whiteness offered a certain amount of protection” (Patton 28). Slaves that were lighter-skinned and had seemingly mixed-features were kept as house slaves while darker-skinned women with tightly curled, or kinky hair were sent to the fields. Since house slaves often had more opportunities for education, “white”/“good” hair was reinforced as a signifier of intelligence. As Tracey Owens Patton writes, “the notions of Black beauty and Black inferiority are inextricably bound” (26). Black women have been forced to strive for unreachable standards of white femininity in order to prove their worthiness. However, “white femininity, associated with the spiritual/metaphysical, seems to transcend time and space as its transnational love becomes coded as something authentic, almost something that exists a priori in relation to the body,” (Shome 110). The construction of white femininity relies upon the naturalization of the purity of whiteness, that there is something born inside each white woman that gives her an angelic and ethereal quality—a quality that no Black woman can emulate. The implications of such associations continue to be felt today by Black women.

White features still open more doors into social institutions and many women have lost their jobs for wearing hairstyles that are “too ethnic.” Furthermore, psychotherapists have reportedly noticed an increase in Black women clients feeling “guilt, shame, anger, and resentment about skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body size and shape” (Patton 38). Often times, black women feel pressure to alter themselves out of fear that their appearance will inhibit them from reaching professional and social goals. The 26,000 Black women that believe in this country enough to risk their lives for it, should not have their bodies



restricted by regulations that have racist implications. Many women who will be affected by the change in regulations claim that hairstyles, such as twists, have never interfered with their ability to perform. The Army claims that such hairstyles interfere with the headgear, but as Sgt. Jasmine Jacobs, of the Georgia National Guard states:

I've been in the military six years, I've had my hair natural four years, and it's never been out of regulation. It's never interfered with my head gear...Females with natural hair take strides to style their natural hair in a professional manner when necessary; however, changes to AR 670-1 offer little to no options for females with natural hair (Tan, "Black female soldiers...").

Twists and other protective styles offer a manageable, and low-stress option for women with natural hair. The texture of many Black women's hair does not allow for it to be easily pulled back into the regulation-style bun unless it's in twists. Staff Sgt. Mary Johnson voiced her concerns stating, "I can't simply pull my hair back due to excessive knotting. I proudly wear twists in a professional manner every day and only took them down on the weekends. It makes it very difficult for ethnic females" ("Black female soldiers..."). Women with natural hair are left with severely limited options, forced to assimilate to White standards of beauty and professionalism or face punishment. The limitation of natural hairstyles that have historically been regarded as "signs of beauty, boldness, rebellion self-confidence, spiritual consciousness and whether intended to or not, a challenge to White beauty standards" within the Black community, is really a limitation of Black identity and expression (Patton 30). Creative styling options have given Black women an avenue to self-appreciation and a valuing of oneself and community. The Army's grooming regulations serve as an elimination of the threat of Blackness (natural hair) through the naturalization of Whiteness.

The choice to style one's hair as natural, relaxed, in twists, in knots, or in dreadlocks has political implications that challenge or reinforce hegemonic ideals of acceptable appearance. Afros, braids, dreads, and knots are enmeshed with a history of resistance and Black power. The 1960s saw the rise of the "Black is Beautiful" campaign, within the Black Power Movement, that strove to

"intervene in and alter those racist stereotypes that had always insisted black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable" (Patton 40). Since "being Black encompasses both experiencing white domination and individual and group valuation of an independent, long-standing Afrocentric consciousness" it is crucial that seeds of self-love

be planted through consciousness-raising (Collins 465). Demystifying the controlling images that tell Black women

"Black is bad" is imperative, as such images breed self-hatred and self-contempt. The creation and expression of various natural hairstyles presented Black beauty as a challenge to and antithesis of White beauty. Hairstyles represented an ownership over oneself, a reclaiming of an identity that was cut away, a threat to White supremacy's grasp on the Black woman's body.

We are socialized to value all women based on their outward appearance, rather than their individual capabilities. For Black women, that means demystifying controlling images that degrade Black beauty and assume intrinsic incompetence of difference. As Norma Alarcon writes, "Difference, whether it be sexual, racial, social, has to be conceptualized within a political and ideological domain" since its indicators carry cultural assumptions that enslave groups within images sprouting from dominant ideologies (434). Without a reconfiguring of racist and sexist ideologies, it is nearly impossible to break free of the binding definitions. The perpetuation of associating darkness with unprofessionalism has rendered Black women soldiers vulnerable to be a "slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me [them] but of my [their] own appearance" (Fanon 329). Control of Black identity through hair is one of the master's tools; it serves as a marker identifying otherness and as a justification for oppression. No matter how you choose to wear your hair, to resist the Army Regulation 670-1 is to challenge White supremacy through the control and devaluing of Black women's bodies.

Moving Towards a More Progressive Military:

The Reality of Transgender Service

by Julia Wood

Although the United States military has become an increasingly more open and accepting environment throughout the years, there is still so much progress, both legally and culturally, to be done. Most notably, many individuals are still unjustly prohibited from joining the service if they are openly transgender. Despite the fact that Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) was repealed in 2011, transgender rights in the military are just now arising at the forefront of civil rights debates. It seems that while the military may be moving towards a more progressive practice, the masculine culture of the armed forces still challenges the safety and liberty of transgender soldiers.

After DADT was repealed, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals were permitted to serve openly in the United States military. However, despite this change, the social stigma attached to the hyper-masculine culture within the army still lingers and continues to negatively effect many LGB individuals in the service. "For lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) service members, the risk of suicide that is associated with their role as members of the military may be amplified by a

comfortable doing so. "Because the military values traditionally male characteristics, service is challenging for women, lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, transgender persons, or any gender non-conforming person who is not a heterosexually identified male" (Ross 188). This emphasis on masculinity is problematic for cadets who don't embrace typical masculine identities. However, this pervasive fear of femininity is not unique to the army but is rather a reality of American culture.

It is also very possible that the inclusion of queer soldiers in the armed forces has "pinkwashed" the issue of transgender women and men in the Military. Pinkwashing refers to the process where people who are active in the LGBTQ+ movement are lulled into believing that enough has been done, that the struggle is over. While the repeal of DADT was important for the gay rights movement in America, no progress was made for transgender soldiers. "However, for many in the transgender community, the repeal [of DADT] was simply "another bridesmaid moment"; although the military now allows gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons to serve openly, members of the



Photo courtesy of prezi.com

military may be amplified by a lifetime of experiences as individuals with socially stigmatized sexual orientations” (H. Wilder and J. Wilder 624). It is important to understand, then, that even though people of all sexualities are admitted into the Forces, homophobic and transphobic prejudice still deeply and negatively affect these individuals. Queer soldiers



may have been given the legal right to express their own sexuality while serving, but many still are not safe or comfortable doing so. “Because the military values traditionally male characteristics, service is challenging for women, lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, transgender persons, or any gender non-conforming person who is not a heterosexually identified male” (Ross 188). This emphasis on masculinity is problematic for cadets who don’t embrace typical masculine identities. However, this pervasive fear of femininity is not unique to the army but is rather a reality of American culture.

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progress was made for transgender soldiers. “However, for many in the transgender community, the repeal [of DADT] was simply “another bridesmaid moment”; although the military now allows gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons to serve openly, members of the transgender community are still categorically barred from service because of medical and psychological regulations” (Ross 185). Ultimately, the struggle is certainly not over, and despite progress being made there are still fundamental steps that must be taken.

Despite the military’s refusal to acknowledge and accept transgender soldiers and veterans, there are many organizations that acknowledge the reality of the transgender community in the service. The National Center for Transgender Equality estimates “that 134,000 American veterans are transgender, over 15,000 trans people are serving in the military today despite rules forbidding them to serve openly.” These numbers reflect the amount of individuals who may recognize that they are transgender, but are unable to express this reality in any way. Transgender individuals are required to conceal their gender identity, quite like queer individuals had to hide their sexuality during the time of DADT. This is undoubtedly challenging and likely psychologically damaging to trans people who are denied freedom of their own gender expression.

One of the most significant figures, considered to be a pioneer in the transgender rights movement in the military, is Chelsea Manning, who entered the service as Bradley Manning. After releasing private government documents to the public, Manning fled the country and was eventually arrested. Manning has become the focus of media attention not only because she revealed of National Security documents, but also because during this time Manning began the process of gender transition. Although the U.S. Military initially rejected Manning’s gender identity, by law they have been forced to refer to Manning by her female pronouns and fully recognize her as a woman, even though this was first met with great resistance. This opposition reflects the ideology that “in a male-centered gender hierarchy, where it is assumed that men are better

than women and that masculinity is superior to femininity, there is not greater perceived threat than the existence of trans women, who despite being born male and inheriting male privilege, ‘choose’ to be female instead” (Serano 549). Manning, despite criminal prosecutions, has become a beacon of hope for trans individuals both in the military and in the

“You’re told you don’t belong because you don’t fit into one of the tiny boxes offered by the system. And for those of us in the military, this civil rights violation of trans people’s basic identity is downright life-threatening.”

United States as a whole.

Manning has spoken out about her situation stating, “you’re told you don’t belong because you don’t fit into one of the tiny boxes offered by the system. And for those of us in the military, this civil rights violation of trans people’s basic identity is downright life-threatening.” Manning’s transition represents a rejection of the military’s privileging of masculinity. Edith A. Disler writes of how language within the military linguistically perpetuates a hierarchical system of power that often subjugates women. “The uniqueness of the analysis of gender and discourse in a military environment is the relatively unambiguous delineation of power in the military hierarchy” (Disler 31). From a feminist perspective then, hierarchy within the military not only supports a system of meritocracy, but also a patriarchal system that portrays those who delineate from the typical gender binary as feminine, and consequently lesser.

Many posit that it is the intersection between transitioning genders and mental health that makes transgender soldiers ineligible for service. Despite the fact that those who undergo gender transition are likely to be much more mentally healthy and stable than those who are denied that process, people still fear the ramifications of admitting mentally unhealthy individuals into the service. Although, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues in her article “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” it is important that we reassess disability from a feminist perspective and begin to respect those who do not fit our socially accepted standard of beauty and health. “Feminist disability theory addresses such broad feminist concerns as the unity of the category woman, the status of the lived body, the politics of appearance, the medicalization of the body, the privilege of normalcy, multiculturalism, sexuality, the social construction of identity and the commitment to integration” (Garland-Thomson 516).

While it is important to support health in all facets in the military, we might need to address what we understand to be healthy and how we treat mental illnesses. From a feminist perspective, what the army deems to be unacceptable for service



Manning pre-transition, alongside an artistic representation of Manning’s self-described envisioned identity. Photo courtesy of samual-warde.com

represents a lack of understanding of the diversity within humanity.

Most notably, the military medically restricts those with “psychosexual” conditions from serving. The website for the United States Military explicitly states, “the causes for rejection for appointment, enlistment, and induction are transsexualism, exhibitionism, transvestitism, voyeurism, and other paraphilias.” The language used in this statement clearly implies a correlation between mental illness/disorder and sexual identification. It reaffirms the assumption that gender and sex are inherent binaries, and that personal identification affects your ability to serve. According to an article published through The Guardian, “Until August, the Defense Department described transgender people as suffering from a ‘congenital or developmental defect’ and associated the sexual orientation as one of sexual deviancy and ‘paraphilia’. Under these terms, the military could summarily dismiss transgender people from service” (Yuhas). This assertion by the US government expresses how we, as a society, are resistant to challenge how we conceive of gender.

Finally, many assert that the hormonal requirements that transgender individuals must endure make them, again, ineligible. Women are permitted to take hormones, most notably in the form of birth control, while serving in the army. “Both transmen and transwomen can take their transition hormones by pill...Because the military allows cisgender women to take hormones orally, the military should also allow transmen and transwomen to take hormones orally” (Ross 197). It seems, then, that the medical discourse on the topic wholeheartedly supports trans individuals in the military. Yet despite the overwhelming medical support for transgender soldiers, trans people are still not admitted openly, which leads to the conclusion that the underlying patriarchal culture still controls much of the military.

What does it take to create social change within the military? If it is cultural and societal bigotries that prohibit perfectly able and qualified members of American society to defend their nation, then can our nation or its military be considered progressive? Michael Allsep summarizes the issue of this unaccepting culture stating, “Unless military culture changes in conformity with the realities of the modern warrior, this superficial image of a military open to gay warriors will merely mask the reality of a culture hostile to the very idea.” The law may change,

but our negative culture will persist unless we take active strides towards a more progressive nation.

“Until August the Defense Department described transgender people as suffering from a ‘congenital or developmental defect’”



The *Guns and Rosie* Team



Left to right: Jazlyn Andrews (staff writer), Julia Cotter (art editor), Caleigh Cassidy (editorial assistant), Grace Montesano (editor), Julia Wood (staff writer);
Bottom: Alex Welch (staff editor)

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