THOUGHTS ABOUT INTEGRATING WOMEN INTO COMBAT ROLES AS DEPICTED IN OPINION NEWSPAPER ARTICLES FOLLOWING THE RESCISSION OF THE DIRECT GROUND COMBAT DEFINITION AND ASSIGNMENT RULE

by
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Abstract

This study explored how opinions of women serving in combat roles in the military were portrayed in newspaper opinion articles following the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. Newspaper opinion articles published between January 24, 2013, when the Department of Defense rescission announcement was made, and January 23, 2015 were examined using a qualitative content analysis. The results of the analysis revealed that the newspaper opinion articles favoring the integration of women serving in combat roles viewed integration as the next logical step for the equality of women in the military, an improvement in diversity, an opportunity to expand the military’s problem solving capability, and a means to aid in decreasing the problem of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. Newspaper opinion articles that opposed the integration of women serving in combat roles viewed integration as unfair toward men, politically motivated, a challenge to military efficiency, and a threat to unit cohesion. Understanding these opinions will help military personnel shape communication messages during the process of recruiting women into the military and specifically into combat roles.

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Preface

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Preface ................................................................................................................................................ iii
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................................. iv
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1

Literature Review ............................................................................................................................ 4
  Cultural Concerns ........................................................................................................................... 4
  Military Operational Concerns ....................................................................................................... 8
  Personal Health Concerns ............................................................................................................... 12
  Privacy Concerns ............................................................................................................................ 15

Method .............................................................................................................................................. 20
  Artifact Selection ............................................................................................................................ 20
  Procedures ....................................................................................................................................... 21
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................................... 23

Results ............................................................................................................................................... 25
  RQ1: What Messages Related to Cultural Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate? .............. 25
    Equality of sexes ............................................................................................................................ 25
    Unfairness toward men ..................................................................................................................... 26
    Political correctness over military effectiveness .............................................................................. 27
  RQ2: What Messages Related to Military Operational Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate? ......................................................................................................................... 27
Section 1: Introduction

RQ1: What Messages Related to Physical Ability Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

Limitations of physical ability……………………………………………………………………………….28

Strengths of problem solving………………………………………………………………………………29

RQ3: What Messages Related to Personal Health Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

Physical………………………………………………………………………………………………………30

Mental………………………………………………………………………………………………………31

RQ4: What Messages Related to Privacy Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

Unit cohesion…………………………………………………………………………………………………32

Risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment…………………………………………………………33

RQ5: What Tone is Portrayed in the Newspaper Opinion Articles Covering the Rescission of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in Regard to Women Serving in Combat Roles?

Positive tone………………………………………………………………………………………………34

Negative tone………………………………………………………………………………………………35

Discussion……………………………………………………………………………………………………37

Comparison with Previous Research Studies…………………………………………………………37

Implications of the Findings……………………………………………………………………………40

Limitations…………………………………………………………………………………………………45

Implications for Further Research……………………………………………………………………46

References………………………………………………………………………………………………….48

Appendix A: Sample Articles………………………………………………………………………………54
Appendix B: Analysis Sheet

Curriculum Vitae
Introduction

I conducted a qualitative content analysis to examine how newspaper opinion articles discussed women in combat roles. Women serving in the military and women serving in combat roles are two distinct phenomena that have been a topic of debate for over a century. Burrelli (2013) outlined the historical record of the U.S. Congress’ debate on the issue which began in 1908. Women’s military service was limited to noncombatant services including clerical duties, nursing, and special training from 1908 to 1942. In 1948, following World War II, the U.S. Congress passed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act which allowed 2% of the enlisted force and 10% of the officer corps to be open to women. This policy was repealed in 1967, and it was not until the end of the draft in 1973 and the beginning of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) that women’s opportunities within the military began to expand. During this time the military services had problems recruiting and retaining enough qualified males in the military service and turned their attention to women. Women were restricted from combat roles but not military service. Confusion over a woman’s role in direct land combat operations became apparent in Grenada in 1983 when four women were deployed but promptly returned to the U.S. before combat operations began. Discussions have continued since the adoption of the 1994 Ground Combat Exclusion Policy and during the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

On January 24, 2013, a U.S. Department of Defense press release announced the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which had limited women’s roles in direct land combat operations within the U.S. military. Direct land combat operations are defined as “engaging an enemy on the ground with
individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile forces personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect” (U.S. Department of Defense, The Secretary of Defense, 1994, pp. 1-2). Examples of combat roles include: infantryman, artillery specialist, tank crewman, combat engineer, and scout sniper. Also contained within the press release was a directive for each service – Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines – to submit an implementation plan that would enable full integration of women into previously closed positions by January 1, 2016 (U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, 2013).

Between September 2001 and February 2013, almost 300,000 women have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. While not serving in direct ground combat roles the irregular nature of the battlefield has placed many women into combat with more than 800 being wounded and over 130 deaths. Formally opening ground combat roles to women could cause an increase in the numbers of casualties amongst women in the military. While the military does not set quotas as to how many women they would like to recruit into combat roles, recruiters may encounter problems in convincing qualified women to select the previously closed positions.

The problems that recruiters could face include changing not only women’s perceptions about their role in the military and combat but also that of the American society. The military provides valuable insight into a predominantly male culture that must adapt to the integration of women into combat roles but that in large part rejects the prevailing norms of gender equality within the broader American society. As the policy
of exclusion is lifted, the message that is presented to women during the recruiting process will need to change from rejection to acceptance. Moreover, the military’s messages will not appear in a vacuum; instead, women will see and hear them within a broader environment in which other communicators, such as the media, send their own messages through outlets such as newspaper opinion pieces. I have not found any research that specifically looked at how women in combat roles were depicted in newspaper opinion articles. For this study, I will examine how newspaper opinion articles discuss women in combat roles. Such discussion may shape or be influenced by general public opinion. The findings will help military personnel shape communication messages during the process of recruiting women into the military and specifically combat roles.
Literature Review

Changing policy to remove the barriers for women to serve equally across each branch of service and to serve in every type of unit, combat or combat support, has not been done in the U.S. military. The change in policy to allow women to serve in combat units will change the strategy the military uses in recruiting. Four primary areas of literature were examined in order to gain a better understanding for the concerns the military may encounter before, during, and after the integration process: cultural concerns held by the American society toward women serving in combat roles, military operational concerns about the effect of women serving in combat roles, personal health concerns that could potentially affect women serving in combat roles, and privacy concerns for both men and women serving in combat roles after integration.

Cultural Concerns

The gendered debate about women in the military and women in combat roles is defined by how women’s roles are understood within the American society. Stachowitsch (2013) and Young and Nauta (2013) give us a glimpse of how the American society perceives the role of women through news media portrayals and direct survey techniques. Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) and Brown (2012) demonstrate how the American society’s portrayal of women’s roles can have an impact on how potential women recruits are influenced toward military service. It is crucial to understand that women’s roles are defined by societal beliefs and those beliefs impact women’s choices toward or away from military service.

Stachowitsch (2013), in a discourse-analytical case study, examined news stories on gender integration of the military as reported by The New York Times and The
Washington Post from 1990 to 2010. The New York Times and The Washington Post provided a window into the social norms, values, and ideology on the issue. The information was contextualized in relation to who said it and why they said it from four distinct social, political, and historical eras: 1990-1994 which included the first large-scale military intervention since the inception of the all-volunteer force; 1995-1999 where women’s participation was increasing at the same time the military was downsizing; 2000-2005 during which military expansion and War on Terror mobilization took place; and 2005-2010 which covered the end of major military combat operations and reformation of gender policies within the military. Four broad categories were discovered within the discourses examined: positive statements in reference to women’s service and compatible with traditional feminine roles in society; positive statements about integration and overcoming outdated values; negative statements about women’s service and their inability to perform as well as male counterparts; and negative statements about integration which would inevitably hinder military effectiveness. Positive references toward women’s service and successful integration outweighed negative references by 69% over the entire study period. Positive references outweighed the negative in each time period except during the 1995-1999 era in which negative references outweighed positive references by 60%. This study was limited by the media examined; however, the selected media was a representative sample of social discourse without the intent of being all inclusive.

Young and Nauta (2013) moved beyond focusing on media content and examined sexist beliefs that could impact the attitude military-affiliated college students and civilian college students held toward women in the military and women in combat.
Military-affiliated students were defined as those who currently or previously served as military personnel or were serving in the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC).

Young and Nauta conducted a survey that contained six different scales indicating levels of sexist beliefs. The survey was administered to 316 total students, 115 were males (33%) and 211 were females (67%), and included military-affiliated college students \((n =62)\) and civilian students \((n =254)\). Neither group had an overtly negative attitude toward women serving in the military but military-affiliated students were found to hold a more negative attitude toward women serving in combat roles than their civilian counterparts. The findings of this study are limited by the fact that all survey participants were from one university; therefore, the results may not be able to be generalizable to all civilians and military-affiliated personnel. However, the study is important because it demonstrates that women serving in the military and women serving in combat roles are distinct issues and must be addressed independently from one another.

How women’s roles in the military are perceived in society is one aspect of the integration debate; another aspect is how women are attracted to and recruited for military service. Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) used the data collected from the Monitoring the Future (MtF) survey \((n=17,745)\) conducted by the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research from 1984 to 1991. The data was examined to determine the propensity to enlist in the military service by gender. Segal et al. found that more women would like to serve (8.1%) than expect to serve in the military (6.2%). Factors noted by Segal et al. are the perceived masculinity of the military, limited opportunities for women, and parental concerns. While not directly correlated to the MtF survey data, Segal et al. also noted that women’s enlistment rates seemed to be higher in
areas where there was a greater visibility of military personnel. Due to the timeframe that this study was conducted the findings may be outdated.

The propensity for women to enlist into the military service could be influenced by the type of advertising that is presented to them. Brown (2012) conducted a visual and verbal content analysis of 305 print advertisements developed by the four branches of the U.S. military and evaluated how women were portrayed and what the gendered implications were. Advertisements published from 1970 to 2003 from *Life, Popular Mechanics*, and *Sports Illustrated* magazines were examined; and advertisements published from 1994 to 2003 from *Seventeen* magazine were examined. The four military branches presented women differently in their advertising. Brown found that the Army did the best job at presenting women as regular members of the institution; the Air Force and Navy predominantly depicted men in their advertising with a large focus on their services’ core powers, namely aircraft and ships; and the Marines used men exclusively in their advertising. The results posited the idea that females needed to be depicted more frequently, in both masculine and feminine roles, to overcome the marginalization of women in the military. This study was limited to a time period prior to major combat operations that could influence how women were portrayed in the military while the U.S. was engaged in armed conflict.

These studies demonstrate that the general public holds a favorable attitude toward both women in the military and women in combat roles, but military-affiliated personnel, due to sexism, do not seem to support the idea of women in combat. While the general public holds a favorable attitude towards women’s military service not as many women who are interested in military service choose to serve in the military; this could
be due to advertising that is not inclusive toward women. Since gender integration of formerly closed positions within the military is occurring now it would be prudent to examine the current media coverage. A reinvestigation would fill the gap created from the time that has elapsed since the study samples of media were taken (2004 for advertisements and 2010 for news media). This study will examine newspaper opinion articles following the Department of Defense’s announcement that rescinded the 1994 Ground Combat Exclusion Policy and include a broader range of newspaper outlets.

**Military Operational Concerns**

Military operations are defined by Joint-Publication 3-0 (2011) as “a series of tactical actions with a common purpose or unifying theme” (p. GL-14). These tactical actions with a common purpose are influenced by an innumerable set of variables. The inclusion of women in combat military operations adds a new variable. Silva (2008) looks at how women viewed their performance compared to men and what their perception of women in combat operations could be. Yanovich et al. (2008) provides information about the physical ability of women compared to men. Moving beyond physical abilities Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, and Malone (2010) examined how women influenced team performance and collective intelligence. Haring (2013) acknowledges the physical ability of women but demonstrates that women have the potential to influence the collective intelligence of the military in a positive manner by including women at the highest ranks.

Silva (2008) interviewed 38 Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) cadets (25 women, and 13 men) from two different universities; each participant had completed at least one year of ROTC training. The study’s purpose was to determine how women
adjust their gendered identity into a masculine military institution. Two particular areas of interest from this study related to comparisons between personal performance and that of the opposite gender, and comments related to current combat exclusion policies. One female participant provided insight into the prevailing attitude that women were incapable by stating: “I feel like the guys watched me more critically…people are always gonna have their opinions and some males will always be like, ‘women are weak, women are inferior’” (Silva, 2008, pp. 945-946). While women in this study seemed to be aware of being watched more critically in their performance of tasks, they did not view their gender as a weakness. Rather, many viewed their gendered nature as a means by which they could perform well in combat. One participant spoke of her protective nature as a mother: “Do I think I am capable of combat? Yes. It takes a special breed of person to do that, and if it came down to protecting my base, I would do it, because these people are my Air Force family, my military family, and it’s your duty to take care of them no matter what” (Silva, 2008, p. 952). This study was limited by the small number of universities and ROTC programs that participated in the study; however, this study provides insight about women’s attitudes toward their performance in the military as well as combat operations.

Women’s perception about their performance of duty in the military and how they think they will perform during combat operations provides some valuable insight into how gender could affect military operational concerns. As noted above women can be viewed as weak due to their level of physical fitness. Yanovich et al. (2008) evaluated the gender differences in physical fitness of 137 soldiers (109 women and 28 men) in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) before and after a four-month gender-integrated army basic
training. Participants were evaluated using four different tests: the maximal aerobic capacity (VO$_{2\text{max}}$), the Leonardo Ground Reaction Force Plate, the Wingate Anaerobic Test (WAnT), and the IDF physical fitness test (IDF-PT). Results of this study showed that male achievements in the four evaluated areas before basic training were higher than that of females. After completing basic training female performance improved and the gap between the genders was narrowed by 4% with two exceptions: the gap between genders for push-up repetitions increased by 16.6% in favor of males, and abdominal endurance showed a lack of gender difference. The findings demonstrated that females’ level of physical fitness increased at a greater rate than that of their male counterparts, but still remained behind those of male soldiers. This implies that women have to exert themselves more than their male counterparts in order to achieve the same output during military operations. Some limitations were evident in this study. The physical training regimen was the same for men and women rather than tailored toward the needs of males who had a higher level of fitness at baseline and females who needed to close the gap; such tailoring may have yielded similar results at post-test. Also, the women in this unit were volunteers whereas the men were drafted based upon the needs of the IDF, and this difference could have affected motivation, which would have affected performance at post-test. In addition, IDF physical fitness standards differ from U.S. standards.

Moving past the physical fitness of women as an issue that hinders integration Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, and Malone (2010) examined the effect that collective intelligence had on team performance optimization. Woolley et al. conducted a study comparing the performance of 152 groups ranging from two to five people with 63 individuals to determine the effect collective intelligence had on the performance of a
series of tasks using the McGrath Task Circumplex. The results demonstrated that the collective intelligence of groups outperformed that of individuals. Wooley at al. also found a positive correlation (r = .23, p = .007) between the number of women in a group and collective intelligence. Collective intelligence tended to increase as the number of women in the group increased.

Haring (2010) applied the results of the Woolley et al. study to the upper ranks of the military and compared them with businesses that had three or more female board members. Businesses that had three or more female board members showed greater financial success and overall better quality decisions over contemporaries. At the highest ranks of the military are general officers. At present 7% of generals in the military are women. Since 80% of all promotions to general officer come from combat specialties women do not have an equal chance to attain the highest military ranks as men, until the combat exclusion policy is completely repealed. Haring concludes that increasing the number of women in the upper ranks of the military, equating the upper ranks of the military to business board members, would strengthen the overall ability of the military. Harring’s application of this study is limited due to the nature of comparing the military to business; generalizing the findings from a business to military setting may not be achievable. Evaluating whether decision making could be improved by including more women at higher ranks cannot be determined one way or the other until it is attempted.

These studies show that women were aware that they were being judged more critically than men but believed that when the situation demanded they could perform as well in combat as required. The judgment that women experienced was in large part due to their physical abilities. In general the physical abilities of women did lag behind male
counterparts, but physical abilities of both men and women increased with training and women improved at a faster rate than men. In fact, some women performed as well as men in regard to physical abilities. Maybe most importantly was the look beyond the physical abilities of what women potentially offered in increasing the collective intelligence of the military if included at the highest ranks. The argument over operational concerns about integrating women into combat roles has to be about more than simply physical ability because there are women that can meet the physical demands of combat units. There are valid operational concerns in these studies, but none of the studies looked at how operational concerns were depicted in U.S. media. This study will investigate opinion newspaper articles to determine what operational concerns are being raised and how these concerns can be addressed during the recruiting process.

Personal Health Concerns

Military units have an inherent need to be ready and deployable to anywhere in the world at a moment’s notice. Part of being ready for deployment is the state of health that military members are in, and the availability of healthcare while deployed. The integration of women into combat roles may raise new concerns toward the personal health of women in these units. Concerns include the reproductive health of women as discussed by Manski, Grindlay, Burns, Holt, and Grossman (2014). Tarrasch, Lurie, Yanovich, and Moran (2011) provided insight about the level of stress women faced in combat units, and the number of times women sought out medical care in combat units. Hoglund and Schwartz (2014) conducted a comparative study to determine if serving in combat units had an effect on the mental health of women.
Mansi, Grindlay, Burns, Holt, and Grossman (2014) conducted in-depth interviews about reproductive health experiences during deployment from May 2011 to January 2012 with 22 women in the U.S. military. Participants identified several barriers toward receiving appropriate reproductive healthcare including the following: concerns of confidentiality, a lack of female healthcare providers, and a general stigma about seeking healthcare. The stigma associated with seeking healthcare related to stereotypical depictions of someone shirking responsibility, being weak, or not prioritizing the mission above personal health. Another aspect of reproductive healthcare that participants discussed was pregnancy during deployment. Participants noted that a pregnant service member was immediately sent home placing a void in the unit for other service members to fill. Limitations of this study include the small number of participants and the fact that the participants were recalling experiences from 2002 to 2011 and could therefore be subject to recall bias.

Reproductive health has not been an issue for combat oriented units in the past because women could not serve in these types of roles, but reproductive health will become an issue as units integrate. The overall health of soldiers has always been an issue for combat units; therefore, understanding how women’s personal health is affected as units integrate women into combat roles is imperative. Tarrassch, Lurie, Yanovich, and Moran (2011) conducted a study to determine the factors that enabled women to integrate more efficiently into combat units within the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). There were 450 total participants comprised of 235 combat-women, 80 combat-men, and 135 women serving in a medical (non-combat) unit. The participants were medically screened and administered trait and state personality questionnaires during three time periods over the
course of a four month basic training period. Overall, women displayed higher levels of stress compared to men during all three periods. The level of stress was determined from self-reported information and women have been more predisposed to admit that they were more stressed than male counterparts. Also of interest from this study was the number of times participants sought medical treatment during the evaluation periods; medical treatment was received by 43 combat-women (18.3%), 8 combat-men (10%), and 10 non-combat women (7.4%). Women seemed to seek medical attention at higher rates than male counterparts in combat oriented units and female counterparts in non-combat units. The results of this study were in a country different than the U.S.

Stress levels and the number of women seeking medical treatment provide insights into the personal health of women in combat units. Hoglund and Schwartz (2014) expand from physical health to mental health in a study using data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey. BRFSS data was used from 2010-2012 from states that completed the optional “Veteran’s Health” module providing a sample of 41,903 participants (26,206 women and 15,697 men) to investigate the mental health of veterans. Hoglund and Schwartz found that when male deployed veterans were compared to female deployed veterans the odds of adverse mental health were nearly the same, suggesting an association between serving in a combat zone and poor mental health regardless of gender. This study was possibly limited by selection bias as mentally unhealthy people might be more likely not to complete a survey.

The personal health of women serving in combat units could pose new challenges for the military. Even prior to the integration of women into combat units, the military was challenged to meet the reproductive health needs of women. There were stigmas
relating to seeking healthcare and becoming pregnant while deployed. Moreover, women sought medical treatment more often than men. These issues could lead to potential problems and increased prejudice toward women in combat units. However, women in combat roles do not seem to have worse mental health than their male counterparts. These studies lend credence to personal health concerns as a legitimate argument in the integration of women into combat roles debate; however, none of the studies looked at how these concerns were portrayed in U.S. media. Investigating newspaper opinion articles following the rescission of the combat exclusion policy will help identify what arguments are being made about personal health concerns and if those concerns are in line with the research outlined above. Comparing opinions to established research will provide a resource that can be used during the recruiting process to ease concerns.

**Privacy Concerns**

Privacy concerns may best be summarized by Dietz (2011) who stated:

“Exclusionists argue that the introduction of women into and around direct ground combat units will destroy unit cohesion by leading to sexual tension, inappropriate relationships, and sexual misconduct. Simultaneously, they argue that the military will be unable to provide the personal privacy necessary for basic dignity” (p.119). This statement provides a jump off point to investigate the concerns for personal privacy in the military after women are integrated into combat roles. Rosen and Martin (1997) first introduced a study which examined a possible link between unit cohesion and the problem of sexual harassment. LeardMann et al. (2013) continued to look at the problem of sexual harassment in the military and expanded the study by looking at the effect combat deployment had on sexual harassment and sexual assault. Koeszegi, Zedlacher,
and Hudribusch (2014) took a step away from sexual tension and looked at the overall aggression toward women in the military and how this impacted cohesion within a unit.

Rosen and Martin (1997) conducted the first study that suggested a link between the cohesiveness, readiness, and overall performance of mixed gendered units and the problem of sexual harassment. A series of surveys were administered to 1,361 soldiers from 34 different non-combat, mixed gendered units. The results of the survey showed that sexual harassment correlated negatively with vertical cohesion – defined as the strength of relationships between subordinates and leaders ($r = -.50$, $p < .001$), combat readiness ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$), and the acceptance of women ($r = -.39$, $p < .001$). The survey results imply that poor personnel management, poor leadership, and low mission preparedness rather than the presence of women in the unit are the cause of sexual harassment. This study was conducted a while ago, but it established a baseline of understanding.

This phenomenon could be magnified by combat deployments. LeardMann et al. (2013) conducted a survey to determine the association between combat deployment and sexual harassment and sexual assault as part of the Millennium Cohort Study. A total of 13,262 participants completed the instrument. Roughly 20% of the participants had deployed within the three-year period of the study; of those, 1,193 (44.1%) had combat-like experiences. “Of the 13,262 participants, 1,362 (10.3%) reported at least one sexual stressor…of those, 1,089 (80.0%) reported sexual harassment, 121 (8.9%) reported sexual assault, and 152 (11.2%) reported both sexual harassment and sexual assault” (LeardMann et al., 2013, p. e217). The results suggested that combat deployments with
combat-like experiences do increase the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment. This study was limited due to the self-reporting nature of the surveys.

Moving beyond sexual harassment, Koeszegi, Zedlacher, and Hudribusch (2014) examined the masculine norms of the military, attitudes toward women, and workplace aggression. A survey using the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT) to measure bullying incidents with an additional 17 questions added to determine the general attitude toward women in the military was administered to 443 Austrian armed forces members. The results showed that 6.5% of soldiers in the sample suffered from severe, long-term bullying. Bullying occurred most frequently in training centers and combat units. Training centers are the entry point to military service where service members learn the profession of arms which demonstrates an inherent masculine culture that is carried forward into combat units. In contrast, combat support units, units that are already male-female integrated, demonstrated a much higher rate of task orientation, a positive attitude toward women, and less workplace bullying. Additionally, women appeared vulnerable to bullying with one in two soldiers reporting seeing aggressive acts toward women, and one in 10 soldiers participating in aggressive acts toward women.

This study is limited by the fact that it examined the Austrian armed forces; however, the culture of the Austrian armed forces is similar to that of the U.S. armed forces.

These studies show that there are legitimate concerns about the personal privacy of women in the military, specifically following women’s integration into combat roles. The mere presence of women was not the leading cause of sexual harassment in a unit, but rather sexual harassment could be attributed to poor leadership. While poor leadership could increase sexual harassment in a unit, units with combat deployments
with combat-like experience had a higher rate of sexual harassment and sexual assault than units without combat deployments. While sexual harassment and sexual assault are one aspect of personal privacy, so are cohesion and an expectation of personal dignity. Koeszegi, Zedlacher, and Hudribusch (2014) looked at the attitudes members of the Austrian armed forces had toward women and how that influenced workplace aggression or bullying. Women were vulnerable to bullying especially in combat units. None of the studies examined how privacy concerns were presented by the U.S. media. Using these studies as a basis in examining newspaper opinion articles surrounding concerns for personal privacy will enable recruiters to address real concerns versus perceived concerns.

This literature review provides insight into the concerns that potential recruits may have as women are integrated into combat units. The examination of cultural concerns revealed that the American public is more accepting of women in combat roles than military affiliated personnel, but this acceptance did not counterbalance the fact that more women would like to serve in the military than those who actually serve. A close look at current newspaper opinion articles will shed light on the move toward cultural acceptance of women’s role in combat. Military operational concerns ranged from the physical abilities of women to the possibility that women could increase the collective intelligence within the highest ranks of the military. None of the studies for military operational concerns examined newspaper opinion articles as this study will. Personal health concerns include both physical health and mental health. Research in this area shows that women faced challenges in receiving proper healthcare prior to integration but none of the research in this area examined how opinions about women’s personal health
were perceived. Examining newspaper opinion articles will reveal the perception people have towards women’s personal health concerns as integration continues. Understanding privacy concerns while integrating women into combat roles revolved around three main issues: unit cohesiveness, the potential of sexual harassment, and bullying. Again, none of the studies surrounding privacy concerns focused on newspaper opinion articles which this study will examine. Considering cultural concerns, military operational concerns, personal health concerns, and privacy concerns research seems to demonstrate that women can, without too many hurdles, integrate successfully into combat units. In order to gain an understanding of prevailing opinions on the topic of integrating women into combat roles the following research questions have been developed for this study:

RQ1: What messages related to cultural concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

RQ2: What messages related to military operational concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

RQ3: What messages related to personal health concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

RQ4: What messages related to privacy concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

RQ5: What tone is portrayed in the newspaper opinion articles covering the rescission of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in regard to women serving in combat roles?
Method

I conducted a qualitative content analysis of newspaper opinion articles surrounding the U.S. Department of Defense’s announcement of the policy change toward women serving in combat roles. While there are many definitions for qualitative content analyses I have adapted Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) definition for this research as a subjective interpretation of newspaper articles to identify themes or patterns through a systematic coding and classification process. The objective of the coding and classification process was to identify thoughts newspaper articles raised about women serving in combat roles. Due to the lack of research on this specific topic a qualitative content analysis was the best method to use because it enabled the “search for meaning” as described by Jones and Kottler (2006, p. 84).

Artifact Selection

I conducted a qualitative content analysis of U.S. newspaper opinion articles following the announcement of the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. I included newspaper articles that focused on commentary and opinion published between January 24, 2013, when the Department of Defense announcement was made, and January 23, 2015, to allow enough time for opinions to be developed and published over the course of two years. I chose to focus on commentary and opinion because this study explores thoughts about women assuming combat roles. In addition, as Sommer and Maycroft (2008) point out opinion pieces are “read, used, and cited by lawmakers at every level of government, op-eds create influence far beyond the confines of a single page” (p. 586). The military is directly influenced by lawmakers, and lawmakers are influenced by public opinion, therefore, opinion pieces
related to the rescission of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule could demonstrate how the public views integration and how these views will be addressed by military recruiters.

I used the LexisNexis Academic database to locate newspaper opinion articles. I first selected “All News” in the search by content type feature. Then I selected and used the advanced options of the search feature within the LexisNexis Academic database and selected U.S. newspapers for the source and “editorials & opinions” for article types. I used the search term “women in combat” in the body of articles. This search yielded 95 results, one of which was less than 100 words, and I excluded this article because it would likely not address the concerns proposed in this study in enough depth.

I obtained the sample of 25 newspaper articles by using a simple random sampling procedure. I assigned each newspaper article an identification number between one and 94 and then used a random number generator in Microsoft Excel to select the articles. The resulting 25 newspaper articles came from 15 different U.S. newspapers: Sentinel & Enterprise (2), Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (2), The Philadelphia Inquirer (2), El Paso Times (2), Contra Costa Times (2), Eureka Times Standard (1), The Washington Post (3), The New York Times (3), Austin American Statesman (1), Lowell Sun (2), Daily Camera (1), The Evening Sun (1), San Gabriel Valley Tribune (1), Deming Headlight (1), and Tulsa World (1). See Appendix A for two sample articles.

**Procedures**

Four of my research questions focused on concerns raised in newspaper opinion articles surrounding the U.S. Department of Defense announcement to rescind the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. The fifth research question
focused on the tone of the newspaper opinion articles covering the Department of Defense announcement. I created an analysis sheet (see Appendix B) that served as a systematic guide to enable the deductive process of categorization and identification of thoughts as described by Finfgeld-Connett (2014) and Foss (2009). I used the deductive process because, as a member of the military myself, I had some idea of what categories of concerns could be raised. My observations were based upon the deductive process, but this did not stifle the process of looking for implicit data within the newspaper opinion articles.

The first section of the analysis sheet addressed RQ1. The intent of this section was to identify American cultural concerns related to women serving in combat roles. I made an assumption in the definition of American cultural concerns that traditionally men are viewed as protectors. With this definition I conducted a critical review of the opinion newspaper articles looking for how these opinions were stated and by whom. In addition, I looked for recommendations being made to address concerns about cultural acceptability of women in combat roles.

The next three sections of the analysis sheet addressed RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. The intent of these three sections was to identify how concerns related to military operations, personal health, and privacy were portrayed. Concerns related to military operations were defined as the potential physical or intellectual benefit or risk to complete military missions and or the degradation of mission success after integrating women into combat roles. Concerns referencing personal health were defined as both physical and mental health of women after integrating women into combat roles. RQ4 addressed concerns referencing the privacy of both men and women after integrating women into combat
roles. Privacy can include references to the interruption of the status quo of all male units, how living accommodations would have to change, and sexual harassment and assault of women. After determining how these concerns were portrayed, I looked at who was portraying the opinion and what recommendations, if any, were being conveyed to address the concerns.

The final section of the analysis sheet addressed RQ5. This research question is distinct from the others in that it focused on the overall tone of the opinion newspaper articles, that is, whether the tone was positive or negative and who was portraying the tone. Inclusion of who was portraying the tone provided insight of bias by the author or interviewed subjects of the newspaper opinion articles.

I read each newspaper opinion article in an iterative process as described by Bowen (2009). During the first iteration the intent was to read critically for understanding of the article. During the second reading I used the analysis sheet to match specific sections of the article with the research question and subset questions, making marginal annotations using the analysis sheet designations as markings. During the third reading, I continued with marginal annotations and I highlighted specific passages that demonstrated direct evidence to support the research questions. Throughout the process I was looking for explicit and implicit messages; when I came across one I noted the information and categorized the information using the analysis sheet designations.

Data Analysis

After completing an iterative reading of each newspaper opinion article I began organizing the annotated sections of the articles into thematic groupings that supported each of the research questions. Thematic groupings were identified by observing
commonalities and patterns between various newspaper opinion articles. Once the thematic groupings were established I returned to the newspaper opinion articles and looked for direct quotations that supported the themes that were identified. These quotations provided supporting details to answer the research questions. In addition to direct quotations, I identified the overall tone and any implied messages of the articles to augment the quotations to provide context and credibility to my findings.
Results

The purpose of this study was to explore how opinions of women in combat were portrayed in newspaper opinion articles following the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. The opinion newspaper articles served as a means for people to discuss their views of women in direct land combat roles. Understanding opinions surrounding the topic of women in combat roles could provide information to aid in the development of messages to communicate during military recruiting efforts. The discussion of this issue is very timely since the U.S. military will move to full integration of women into previously closed positions by January 1, 2016.

RQ1: What Messages Related to Cultural Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

The themes that emerged from the various newspaper opinion articles in reference to cultural concerns about women assuming combat roles regarded equality between genders and the true need of a nation to call on its women to fight. There were examples of articles that moved passed traditional cultural and societal norms and accepted progression toward gender equality. Yet there were also some that did not accept the announcement about the rescission and saw the move as unfair to men, politically motivated, and a challenge to military efficiency.

Equality of sexes. Articles in favor of integrating women into combat roles viewed the shift as an acknowledgment of reality. The articles stated that rescinding the combat exclusion policy was “an acknowledgement of reality” (Editorial Board, 2013, p. A18) and brought “military policy in line with reality” (“Women in the battlefield,” 2013, p. 26). Women serving in combat roles were not cultural concerns; Americans had
already accepted the change as evidenced by a Pew Research Center poll that showed Americans “couldn’t decide whether the lifting of the old ban was a major or a minor change” (Shlaes, 2013, p. A8).

In the articles that supported the rescission the discussion moved on to the issue of avoiding gender discrimination. The irregular nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have placed women in combat. After more than a decade of armed conflict Americans have seen their women rise to the occasion. The question then is: “[S]hould the military be able to use spurious exclusionary standards when every other employer in the United States cannot” (Kostrzewa, 2013, p. A14)? For those in favor of the policy change the answer is a simple “no”: “Women soldiers have served bravely and honorably across the military and deserve equal respect, rank, and opportunities” (“U.S. women in combat roles tough to accept,” 2013b, para. 12). Women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan honorably and the rescission of the combat exclusion policy “removes barriers that have impeded them in that work” (Editorial Board, 2013, p. A18). In doing so “the military is showing that categorical discrimination has no place in a society that honors fairness and equal opportunity” (“Women in the battlefield,” 2013, p. 26).

Unfairness toward men. Articles opposing the integration of women in combat roles claimed that it was unfair toward men. The discussion started with the registration for the Selective Service. The Selective Service is the U.S. government agency that would conduct a draft of registered men for military service in the event of a national crisis. At the age of 18 men must register for the Selective Service whereas women do not have to do so. Following the announcement to rescind the combat exclusion policy Coombes (2013) stated that “young women must now be required to register for the
Selective Service…it is a matter of fairness” (para. 1). Another article asked, “[W]here is their push to change draft laws so that both young men and women must register [with the Selective Service]” (Robinson, 2013, para. 3)? If the nation calls “men do not have the option of declining combat. How can the military justify giving women special treatment” (Parker, 2013b)?

Political correctness over military effectiveness. The discussion moved to prioritizing political correctness over the effectiveness of the military. Harmon (2013) cited Diana West, an Internet columnist at WorldNetDaily, as saying “that equal rights do not apply here, but only to make the military and America stronger” (para. 3). Another article stated, “The rules of civil society do not apply to the military…the rules are created to maximize efficiency in killing enemies” (Parker, 2013a, para. 9). Military efficiency and effectiveness were central points that Sherbin (2013) and Stancliff (2013) used as examples to discuss women’s roles in combat during World War II and the Vietnam War. The Soviet Union during World War II and the Southern Vietnamese both used women in combat to fill gaps in the male forces. These countries had an imminent threat against their homelands which created a desperate need for women to serve or possibly face the loss of their homes. The U.S. does not face such an imminent threat and Stancliff (2013) concluded: “So in the name of political correctness we’re going to have women in combat soon” (para. 8).

RQ2: What Messages Related to Military Operational Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

The newspaper opinion articles raised two aspects of the discussion surrounding military operational concerns and the integration of women into combat roles. The
articles acknowledged the physical limitations women had toward military operations, which spurred two different views. Those views were that the physical limitations of women could not be generalized and therefore could not be the barrier for all women, and that existing physical standards for specific jobs in the military could not be changed in order to accommodate the inclusion of women. The second aspect of the discussion argued that the inclusion of women in combat roles could help solve problems and thus increase the overall effectiveness of the military.

**Limitations of physical ability.** In regard to military operational concerns of integrating women into combat roles both sides agreed that women in general are less physically capable than men. The following quotes from the same author illustrate this point: “Ground combat is one area in which women, through quirks of biology and human nature, are not equal to men” (Parker, 2013a, para. 5). “Women have just about half the upper body strength as men” (Parker, 2013b, para. 6). Since both sides agreed on this “the real issue will be whether or not women who wish to apply [to combat related positions] can meet the already-existent standard and whether or not the services can resist arbitrarily establishing new methods of evaluation based on notions of political correctness or social engineering” (Smith, 2013, para. 4).

Assuming an answer of “no” to this question, some articles opposed the integration of women into combat roles, claiming it would deprive deserving men. An example was provided by Anderson (2013), a graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger School, when he stated that the male pass rate for the ranger course was and remains roughly 50%. Anderson (2013) continued, “[I]f current standards are maintained, virtually no women will succeed. But they will be given a chance and therefore deprive a deserving
male of an opportunity” (para. 1). Another example was illustrated by Stancliff (2013) when he stated: “Last year, only two female Marine volunteers took advantage of an opportunity to go to the once male-only Officer Training Course, and both dropped out” (para. 15). A final example provided by Shlaes (2013) expanded the idea of depriving men of opportunities by stating that “when they turn down a man, they can say it’s because that man isn’t qualified. They will hesitate to turn down an unqualified woman for fear of being labeled discriminatory, bigoted or worse” (p. A8).

Other articles supported integration of women into combat roles, asserting that the same standard would apply to both men and women. One article stated that people “believe the existing physical standards for acceptance into elite combat squads should remain as exacting as ever for both men and women” (“U.S. women in combat roles tough to accept,” 2013b, para. 4). Another article stated this point in a broader fashion: “the bottom line must be that women meet the same standards as men for commando, special forces, or any other job” (“Women ready for combat,” 2013, p. D4). General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided assurances to both sides of the argument in a statement that promised “the change will be implemented in a way that won’t sacrifice the military capability” (Editorial Board, 2013, p. A18).

**Strengths of problem solving.** Beyond the physical ability of women, many of the newspaper opinion articles spoke of how women could potentially benefit the military through problem solving. For example, articles stated: “Women may have something to add to the military, such as more dimensions and strengths” (Sherbin, 2013, para. 17); “we need their creativity, insight and empathy, qualities often lacking in male-dominated units” (Denn 2014b, p. B3); and “the result [of integrating women] will be more
diversity, from a deeper pool of talent, and thus a stronger, better military” (“Women in the battlefield,” 2013, p. 26). Denn (2014b), speaking from personal experience from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, stated: “[W]hat the military would gain by including women in combat far outweighs any short-term compromises” (p. B3). Denn (2014b) provided a detailed example of how he could have benefited from having women assigned to his unit:

During my patrols in Iraq from 2007 to 2009, I came to appreciate how much women could have contributed to my mission. Most Iraqi men were reticent to speak with us for fear of retribution from al-Qaida. Iraqi women, often fed up with the violence in their neighborhoods, could be persuaded to provide information, but first we had to bridge the gender gap, build rapport and earn their trust, all of which took valuable time. Having women in our platoon would have dramatically increased our ability to elicit critical intelligence. This could mean the difference between a mission's success or failure, with lives in the balance. Since 2011, U.S. Special Operations forces in Afghanistan have embedded all-female cultural support teams in their units (p. B3).

**RQ3: What Messages Related to Personal Health Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?**

Personal health concerns were discussed in the newspaper opinion articles in a very limited nature. The primary area of discussion revolved around physical health as opposed to mental health.

**Physical.** The newspaper opinion articles discussed how the physical toll women faced, when training to the same standards of men, was great. The discussion went
beyond the physical ability of women as noted above and moved to the rate of injury of
career. Summarizing 30 years of research Professor Gregor of the School of Advanced
Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, concluded that “training women with men
to the same physical standards dramatically increases the skeletal-muscular injury rate
among women” (Stancliff, 2013, para. 6). Another article stated that “stress fractures are
significantly higher among female recruits than among males during basic training”
(Parker, 2013c, para. 6). In a letter to the editor Kimberly Pyle (2013) contested that her
best friend, U.S. Army Captain Linda Bray, “the first American woman to lead troops
into combat, in Panama in 1990,…was medically separated from the Army…[because]
she had stress fractures from years of carrying the same size rucksack as men who
outweighed her by 100 pounds – Linda is 5 feet tall and maybe 100lbs.” (para. 1).

Mental. Compared to physical health concerns, mental health concerns were
discussed in a more limited manner and can be summarized in one statement: “As we
have seen in the number of combat veterans returning home with mental-stress issues,
there will be a price to pay for this historic shift [of integrating women into combat
roles]. Is it fair to subject women to the same hellish environment” (“U.S. women in
combat roles tough to accept,” 2013b, para. 13)? An additional example is provided by
Sherbin (2013) as he discussed the physical and mental challenges Soviet women faced
during World War II. The mental toll women faced included “[u]nending bloodshed,
living for weeks and months in trenches in frigid temperatures, layers of bulky clothing,
hunger, lice, stench, and the constant need to stay vigilant to stay alive” (para. 11). While
conditions have improved in modern warfare, there are still challenges to survival and
good mental health in war that women will have to face after integration.
RQ4: What Messages Related to Privacy Concerns about Women Assuming Combat Roles Do the Newspaper Opinion Articles Communicate?

The newspaper opinion articles provided evidence of two primary themes of concerns related to privacy as women are integrated into combat roles. The first area of concern was expressed in terms of the disruption to unit cohesiveness, and the second was related to the risks of sexual harassment and assault.

Unit cohesion. Unit cohesion was best defined by General Meyer (1980), former U.S. Army Chief of Staff, as “the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress” (p. 4). The concerns toward unit cohesion were first generalized by statements such as the following: “[P]lacing women in some units could jeopardize their cohesiveness and ability to accomplish arduous missions” (“Women ready for combat,” 2013, p. D4). This point was expanded by a Vietnam veteran, Dave Stancliff (2013), when he stated, “I can’t imagine what it would have been like having a woman fighting alongside me in Vietnam. Like most of the young men there I would have done extra macho things to impress a women” (para. 18). Stancliff (2013) went on to say that “both men and women would have to set aside societal norms in frontline actions, like urinating, defecating, and showering in front of the opposite sex. You can’t tell me that wouldn’t upset unit cohesiveness” (para. 13). Parker (2013a) took the discussion even further and talked about what the capture and torture of a female member of a combat unit would do to the morale and cohesion of a unit. Parker contended that the fear of rape and hearing the screams of a female comrade would be unbearable for males due to their protective nature.
**Risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment.** Articles also expressed concern about women experiencing sexual harassment and assault: “Another concern is reflected in a survey just released by the Department of Veterans Affairs which revealed that 49 percent of the women who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or nearby countries say they were sexually harassed there, and 23 percent of these women say they were sexually assaulted” (Stancliff, 2013, February 3, para. 10).

At the same time, the articles said that the problem will likely be rectified with the integration of women into combat roles. One article explained, “General Dempsey said that the change [integrating women into combat roles] will also mitigate the military’s persistent problem of sexual assault and harassment: Having ‘part of the population [of the military] designated as warriors and one as something else’ has ‘in some way led to that environment’” (Editorial Board, 2013, p. A18). General Dempsey was speaking of the environment that enabled sexual harassment and assault through discrimination of genders--males as warriors and women as supporters. Another newspaper opinion article stated that “many female soldiers believe they will get respect and stop being targets for sexual assault when male soldiers learn they can depend on them in combat” (“Women ready for combat,” 2013, p. D4). Another article mentioned that as women are integrated into combat roles more opportunities for leadership will open up and “adding women to the leadership corps will foster a healthier military culture freed from testosterone-soaked abuse and scandal” (“Women in the battlefield,” 2013, p. 26).

**RQ5: What Tone is Portrayed in the Newspaper Opinion Articles Covering the Rescission of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in Regard to Women Serving in Combat Roles?**
Reviewing each article in its entirety provided insight into the overarching tone of the opinion newspaper articles. The policy nature of the discussion created controversy and therefore the opinion newspaper articles tended to support or oppose the integration of women into combat roles. More importantly, tone provided evidence as to whether the factual information provided in the newspaper opinion articles was used in a biased or unbiased manner.

**Positive tone.** Support for the integration of women into combat roles was evident through the praise of women’s military service and through the rejection of opposing viewpoints. Denn (2014b) praised women’s military service when he stated that “our country’s most recent conflicts have demonstrated that the military needs women on the battlefield” (p. B3). The *Washington Post*’s editorial board acknowledged that “[lifting the combat exclusion policy] is a historic move – both sobering and exhilarating – that affirms the importance of women in defending this county” (2013, p. A18). Articles that praised women’s military service accepted that “the decision, albeit controversial, makes sense. It follows a natural trajectory” (“Women ready for combat,” 2013, p. D4).

Articles that had a positive tone also acknowledged that opposing views were unsubstantiated. For example, one article stated that “understandable concern has been expressed by critics…but that’s why the directive gives the service branches three years to evaluate and recommend jobs that should be excluded from the new orders” (“Women ready for combat,” 2013, p. D4). Another article stated that “some right-wing commentators rehashed false stereotypes that women couldn’t hack it” (“Women in the
battlefield,” 2013, p.26). Moreover, Kostrzewa (2013) stated that “it is a pity that she [Parker] used information inappropriately to back her case” (p. A14).

**Negative tone.** A negative tone was established by authors by simply stating that the policy change was a bad idea in general and offering little factual information behind those claims. In one article Parker (2013a) said that “this is a terrible idea for reasons too numerous to list in this space” (para. 3). Stancliff (2013) stated “the idea of putting them in front line combat isn’t a good one” (para. 13). Colburn (2013) provided a final example when he asked and answered his own question: “Will a greater role for women in combat positions benefit our fighting force? I believe the answer is fairly obvious. No” (p. A14), without providing any other argument or factual information.

Another method of opposition directly attacked policy makers with insults such as this statement by Diana West: “[S]ocial engineers and radical feminists’…are the real reason for this decision” (Harmon, 2013, para. 3). Robinson (2013) began her letter to the editor: “Women in combat roles? It is just another fantasy driven along by angry feminists whose concern is not national security but their own noisy agenda” (para. 1). Citing the Center for Military Readiness Stancliff (2013) reported “[a] vocal minority is forcing women who would rather not be fighting to go to war” (para. 16).

Coupled with insults some authors attempted to use fear as a means of opposing the policy shift with comments such as the following: “Is America really ready to see photographs of a foreign battlefield littered with the bodies of its daughters and mothers” (“U.S. women in combat roles tough to accept,” 2013a, para. 6)? “[I]f we are looking to further legitimize war as a national strategy, maybe body bags with mothers, sisters, wives, and friends as occupants will enhance that effort” (Hill, 2013, para. 3). Another
example is evident through women having a choice in serving with a combat unit or not; Parker (2013b) claimed that “if women are given special treatment, [men] will resent them to the endangerment of all” (para. 12).
Discussion

Women in the military and women serving in combat roles have been topics of discussion for more than 100 years. This study serves as an extension to the body of research surrounding the topic of women serving in combat roles. Stachowitsch (2013), through the examination of newspaper articles, provided the most recent example of research focused on the integration of women into combat roles. Yet Stachowitsch only focused on the cultural and societal impacts that the policy change to allow women to serve in combat roles would have on the American society. This research study goes further by incorporating public opinions and perceptions which will likely inform military communication strategies that recruiters could use during the recruiting process.

The concept that newspaper opinion articles could help shape the communication strategies recruiters would use during the recruiting process was presented by Sommer and Maycroft (2008) when they stated that opinion pieces have influence well beyond the confines of the newspapers the opinions were written in. That is to say, public opinions and perceptions must be addressed by recruiters in order for the integration of women into combat roles to be successful.

Comparison with Previous Research Studies

Previous research provided a baseline of information to work from in order to inform the development of effective communication strategies to use during the recruiting process. Adding to this baseline, this examination of public opinion as revealed by the newspaper opinion articles has gone one step further by filling in the gaps of previously conducted research and has provided critical information that could be used to inform the communication strategies that recruiters could use.
Stachowitsch (2013) and Young and Nauta (2013) provided a look into the perceptions that the American society held toward women in the military and women in combat roles. These studies provided evidence that the majority of Americans had positive attitudes toward women serving in the military. Young and Nauta moved beyond the American society as whole and found that military affiliated college students held a more negative attitude toward women serving in combat roles than their civilian counterparts. The positive and negative viewpoints presented in the newspaper opinion articles did more than acknowledge the differing attitudes; they showed how the attitudes were expressed. Those in favor of integration viewed it as a natural next step in the equality of genders. Those in opposition questioned the actual need for the policy change and viewed the change as unfair toward men, politically motivated, and a challenge to military efficiency.

Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) and Brown (2012) focused on another aspect of how the American society was informed of military service – military recruitment advertisements. These studies demonstrated that not as many women enlisted into the military services as would like and that the advertising was not very inclusive toward women. While the newspaper opinion articles did not directly speak of military advertisements they provided insight into the perceptions that the American society holds toward women in combat roles that could be used to ensure new recruiting messages answer expressed cultural concerns.

Moving away from cultural concerns, I looked at military operational concerns. I found that the physical abilities of women was a central argument against women serving in combat. Yanovich et al. (2008) confirmed this argument by concluding that women’s
physical abilities lagged behind men but improved at a faster rate. The fact that women in general have lower physical abilities than men was also acknowledged in the newspaper opinion articles by both supporters of integration and those that oppose it. At the same time, Silva (2008), Haring (2010), and the newspaper opinion articles suggested that women have more to offer toward military operations than just physical abilities, explaining that women could aid in problem solving, breaking through cultural barriers of other countries, and drawing from a deeper pool of talent for the accomplishment of missions and promotions.

Personal health concerns go beyond the physical abilities of women but start in a similar vein, physical health. Tarrasch, Lurie, Yanovich, and Moran (2011) found that women serving in an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) integrated combat unit sought medical treatment more frequently than male counterparts. A potential reason for the increase in medical treatment could be answered by the opinion newspaper articles. When personal health was raised within the newspaper opinion articles the risk of women incurring stress fractures was central to the discussion and could be the reason behind the number of times women sought medical treatment. The reproductive health concerns raised by Manski, Grindlay, Burns, Holt, and Grossman (2014) were not evident in the newspaper opinion articles but remains a valid concern. Mental health concerns of integrating women into combat roles was not discussed in depth in the newspaper opinion articles which could be explained by Hoglund and Schwartz (2014) finding that men and women serving in the military are both equally susceptible to adverse mental health.

Concerns surrounding privacy after integrating women into combat roles were primarily focused on unit cohesion and the risk of sexual assault and harassment. Rosen
and Martin (1997) explored the idea of a link between unit cohesion and sexual harassment. Rosen and Martin found that sexual harassment did not correlate with unit cohesion but with poor personnel management, poor leadership, and low mission preparedness. While poor personnel management, poor leadership, and low mission preparedness would definitely impact unit cohesion the newspaper opinion articles raised other legitimate concerns such as men trying to impress women at the risk of endangering themselves, the potential embarrassment of personal hygiene matters on the front lines, and the effect that screams of a potential female captive would have on the male protective psyche.

LeardMann et al. (2013) explored the association between combat deployment and sexual harassment and sexual assault. LeardMann et al. found that the risk of sexual harassment and assault rises in a combat deployment setting. The newspaper opinion articles presented the idea that sexual assault and sexual harassment will decline after the integration of women into combat roles because this action will eliminate the caste system of warriors and non-warriors created by the current policy.

**Implications of the Findings**

Understanding the cultural, military operational, personal health, and privacy concerns of integrating women into combat roles provides a baseline of information that recruiters need to understand in order to implement a new and effective communication strategy during the recruiting process. While recruiters are the main focus for attracting women to previously closed positions within the military, they will need support from leaders within the military who will be responsible for changing the existing male-dominated culture within the military. In addition, communication efforts must be
focused toward men whose opinions must be swayed in the early stages of integration to enable the current culture to change. Denn (2014) pointed out that “the success of women’s integration into combat units will depend on how quickly and enthusiastically officers and enlisted soldiers embrace it” (p. B3), implying that the entire culture of male-dominance within the military must shift toward a culture that is unbiased toward gender. Therefore, new communication strategies for recruiters focused on the integration of women into combat roles must be augmented by military leadership support and demonstrations of positive change toward gender equality in action.

Military leaders’ actions must seek to counterbalance one of the most profound statements I found during this study. Shlaes (2013) commenting on the idea of depriving men of opportunities stated that “when they turn down a man, they can say it’s because that man isn’t qualified. They will hesitate to turn down an unqualified woman for fear of being labeled discriminatory, bigoted or worse” (p. A8). The implications of this statement are great as it can be applied to the need for change in the current culture of the military and the desire to attract potential female military recruits. The foundation for the acceptance of women in combat roles, therefore, must be set in unbiased standards of qualification regardless of gender. Once standards are established, the message of fair and equal standards must be broadcast to the entire military as well as to every potential recruit. The question then becomes: How do you create a communication strategy to convey this message? This study provides insight as to what might work.

One of the most important factors in appealing to the female identity while integrating women into traditionally male-dominated combat roles is to depict women in more military recruiting advertisements. Brown (2012) stated that when women were
portrayed in advertisements, they generally were not the focus of the advertisement; they were simply corollary to the message and often in the background. Women need to be depicted in more advertisements in both feminine and masculine identities. While it may seem counterintuitive to depict women in both feminine and masculine identities, this will lend itself to the public’s acceptance of women in combat roles. Depicting women in masculine roles will also help eliminate the marginalization that many women face in the U.S. military today and aid in breaking the stereotypical roles discussed by opponents of integration in the newspaper opinion articles.

Depicting more women will help send a positive message about women serving in combat roles, but augmenting those depictions with successful military women’s stories will dramatically increase the evidence based nature people will need to ensure that women are capable of meeting established standards. An example of a powerful story of a successful female military service member was presented in the newspaper opinion articles. The story depicted Cadet Madaline Kenyon who entered the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) with plans to serve in the U.S. Army Medical Corps. As a freshman, Cadet Kenyon completed the indoor obstacle course, a test designed to measure one’s ability to perform in combat, in two minutes and 26 seconds, setting a new female record and scoring higher than most men. Cadet Kenyon was then asked by Lieutenant General Caslen, superintendent of the USMA, “Why not infantry” (Denn, 2014, p. B3)? After Cadet Kenyon pondered the superintendent’s question, she now has her eyes set on being a leader of a tank platoon in the Armor Corps, a male-dominated specialty in the military. Inclusion of personal success stories or testimonials will surely aid in breaking down barriers during the recruiting process.
The inclusion of personal stories will aid in the overall process of recruiting and is in line with changes that have occurred in recruiting. The recruiting process has undergone numerous changes over the years and recruiting personnel have trended away from salesmanship and quotas to a more dynamic leadership and mentorship role. Interpersonal communication remains a staple of the recruiting process. With interpersonal communication comes the need to establish trust. Potential recruits may not trust that they will receive all of the information they need prior to enlisting into positions that were previously closed. Concerns and fears related to the likelihood of injury, reproductive health issues, or any number of other issues outlined in this study will likely be presented to recruiters by potential recruits during the recruiting process. Recruiters will need to be prepared to answer potential recruits’ concerns. One way for recruiters to be prepared is by conducting simulated recruiting training sessions. Simulations could include actors that demonstrate any number of the concerns outlined in this study. This type of training which could open lines of communication that address concerns will be an important aspect of improving trust and ultimately recruiting women into combat roles.

In addition to conducting training to gain trust recruiters must be aware of the growing need to connect with potential recruits using many different media types. Trust can be gained through the strategic use of social and interactive media to highlight the accomplishments of women currently serving in the military. Highlighting women’s achievements will show potential recruits that other women have made it through the rigorous training required for combat roles. One such example was portrayed in the newspaper opinion articles, with the inclusion of all-female cultural support teams that
are embedded with U.S. Special Operations forces. Highlighting such accomplishments will likely improve trust and trustworthiness. In highlighting women’s achievements in the military recruiters must be cognizant of how they frame messages, depicting both drawbacks and advantages of the integration of women into male-dominated combat roles. By presenting both the positive and negative sides of integration the trust relationship between recruiter and potential recruit will be strengthened.

Trust has been challenged in other ways too: By turning on the evening news you would know that there is a growing public awareness of an increase in sexual assault and sexual harassment in the U.S. military which could be seen as a violation of trust for potential female recruits. The newspaper opinion articles that opposed the integration of women into combat roles presented the statistical information of sexual assault and sexual harassment rates as a reason to keep women out of combat roles. Additionally, LeardMann et al. (2013) found that combat deployments could increase the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Those supporting integration saw the policy change as a solution to “mitigate the military’s persistent problem of sexual assault and harassment” (Editorial Board, 2013, p. A18). As the integration of women into traditionally male-dominated combat roles progresses, recruiters will likely be asked about risks in regard to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Recruiters need to be aware of these fears and be able to respond with messages that promote safety, privacy, and advocacy programs available in each service branch. In addition to messages about safety, recruiters will need to highlight General Dempsey’s view that integrating women into combat roles will likely decrease the rate of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military by creating a level playing field for women in the military.
Creating a level playing field for women in the military by integrating women into combat roles is an important task. Several of the newspaper opinion articles were written by former members of the military service. Often these former military service members seemed to be stuck in the mindset that including women in combat roles simply would not work. An example of this mindset was provided by Stancliff (2013) when he stated, “I can’t imagine what it would have been like having a woman fighting alongside me in Vietnam” (para. 18). Recruiting messages can and must counteract this type of belief. In order to do so recruiters must be equipped with stories of how women’s military service has made a positive impact on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Recruiters can use narratives from acts of valor that women have contributed in these recent conflicts.

The contributions women have given to the military have been great over the course of the past decade of war. One final recommendation to capture these contributions and support new recruiting communication strategies is to include more women in the recruiting force. Women serving as recruiters would enable personal stories to be shared with potential recruits and support the concept brought to light by Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) when they noted that women’s enlistment rates seemed to be higher in areas where there was a greater visibility of military personnel. By including more women in the recruiting force, potential recruits would have greater visibility of successful women serving in the military.

Limitations

In every type of research there are inherent limitations. Due to the very nature of qualitative content analyses there are certain amounts of subjectivity in these studies. This study is no exception. While I made every attempt to exclude any personal beliefs
and bias, I am still an active duty service member and I generally support the integration of women into combat roles. Because I am a service member and have been following the discussion surrounding integrating women into combat roles, I already had an idea of what concerns would be brought to light. Knowing some of the concerns that would arise and favoring the integration of women into combat roles could have led to personal bias in the selection and analysis of the newspaper opinion articles.

While personal bias may have led to the selection of a specific set of newspaper opinion articles to examine there were a few other limitations to the sample. I selected a two year time period of newspaper opinion articles, between January 24, 2013, and January 23, 2015. Yet the most recent newspaper article in the sample frame was from June 7, 2014. Almost certainly there have been more recent newspaper opinion articles written on the topic of integrating women into combat roles. I also limited my research to newspaper print editions. Expanding the sample to include online newspaper opinion articles and subsequent comments could have led to a broader range of opinions to draw from.

**Implications for Further Research**

With the onset of the integration of women into combat roles coming in January 2016 additional studies of opinions surrounding the integration of women into combat roles as described above may prove to be untimely. However, new studies that examine military materials could provide the creators of military recruiting communication strategies with more information about the relevancy of current and future recruiting efforts. In particular, a study of current military recruiting materials, services’ recruiting web sites, advertisements, brochures, pamphlets, and videos could reveal if current
material needs to be updated to address the concerns of integrating women into combat roles. A quantitative study could reveal how often women appear in recruiting materials. A qualitative content analysis of recruiting materials could reveal how women are portrayed in the recruiting materials or if women are depicted in traditional masculine or feminine roles.

Studies examining current recruiting material could be an excellent source of information but so could military recruiters and recently recruited female military personnel. Conducting focus groups that examine what recruiting techniques are working toward influencing women to join the military service and what was convincing for recently recruited female military personnel could help to shape future communication strategies for recruiters. Both groups could provide valuable insight into current recruiting efforts if the studies were done now, but waiting to conduct a focus group for recently recruited female personnel until after the integration of women into combat roles in January 2016 could yield greater results. The study could then be limited to recently recruited female personnel that selected a previously closed position within combat units. A focus group of recently recruited female personnel serving in combat units could also reveal how effective integration is progressing and determine if the masculine military culture has changed or is in the process changing. In addition to conducting focus groups, administering surveys to either recruiters or recently recruited female personnel could contribute to quantifying the effectiveness of current recruiting communication efforts.
References


Denn, W. (2014, April 6). Women are ready for combat; and they will strengthen our ability to fight tomorrow’s wars. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, p. B3.


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doi:10.1037/h0094958
Appendix A

Sample Article #1

The Washington Post
**January 25, 2013 Friday**
Regional Edition
**Women in combat**
**BYLINE:** Editorial Board
**SECTION:** EDITORIAL COPY; Pg. A18
**LENGTH:** 437 words

WOMEN IN THE U.S. military have been on the front lines of two wars. They've engaged the enemy, suffered grievous injury and been awarded medals for valor; 152 of them have died. So the Defense Department's decision to lift its official ban on **women in combat** is, in some respects, an acknowledgement of reality. Nonetheless, it is a historic move - both sobering and exhilarating - that affirms the importance of women in defending this country and removes barriers that have impeded them in that work.

"The fact is they have become an integral part of our ability to perform our mission," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said Thursday as he announced an end to a policy that essentially restricted women from serving in the infantry, artillery, special operations and other specialties. The decision to upend a rule in place since 1994 came on the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose chairman, Gen. Martin Dempsey, joined Mr. Panetta in signing an order that will open hundreds of thousands of front-line jobs to female service members.

One result will be a more level playing field for women, who make up about 14 percent of active-duty personnel: As they seek to advance in rank, they will no longer be hobbled by lack of official combat credentials. Gen. Dempsey said that the change will also mitigate the military's persistent problem of sexual assault and harassment: Having "part of the population designated as warriors and one as something else" has "in some way led to that environment."

Neither of those benefits would justify the change if it were to compromise military effectiveness. But most people knowledgeable about the situation believe that won't happen. "American women are already serving in harm's way today all over the world," said Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). "It reflects the reality of 21st-century military operations," said Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), chair of the Armed Services Committee. Gen. Dempsey said that the change will be implemented in a way that won't sacrifice the military's capability.

Each branch of the military is charged with devising its own plan and will be allowed to seek exceptions if officials think there are positions that should remain closed to women. It's important, as Mr. McCain added, that standards not be compromised. But the way in which female service members in Iraq and Afghanistan performed a range of jobs once
thought unimaginable for them - from driving trucks down bomb-strewn roads to serving as gunners on vehicles – is evidence not only of their mettle but also of the military's ability to properly train and deploy its troops.
Sample Article #2

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
April 6, 2014 Sunday  
TWO STAR EDITION  

WOMEN ARE READY FOR COMBAT; AND THEY WILL STRENGTHEN OUR ABILITY TO FIGHT TOMORROW'S WARS  
BYLINE: William Denn  
SECTION: EDITORIAL; Pg. B-3  
LENGTH: 790 words

Since 1944, West Point has required cadets to pass its indoor obstacle course, a test of agility, stamina and strength that is designed to build a warrior ethos and determine whether these future soldiers can meet the physical demands of combat. When freshman Cadet Madaline Kenyon completed the course in 2 minutes 26 seconds in October, she scored the equivalent of an A-plus on the men's scale and set a new female record. It was a stunning achievement.

Cadet Kenyon had planned to become an officer in the Army Medical Corps. After her performance on the obstacle course, the superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen, asked her: Why not the infantry?

As a woman, Cadet Kenyon cannot officially serve in infantry, armor, artillery or other jobs in combat. But her accomplishment comes at an opportune time, as the services have begun removing the last obstacle to women in the military.

In January 2013, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study the feasibility of opening all military jobs to women by 2016. This would include more than 200,000 jobs that make up the core of the ground-level combat force in the Army and the Marine Corps.

The Joint Chiefs have expressed strong support for this transition. But the success of women's integration into combat units will depend on how quickly and enthusiastically officers and enlisted soldiers embrace it. Many servicemen resist the idea, citing studies that suggest including women in combat would imperil unit effectiveness, good order and discipline.

Opponents of women in combat rightly argue that the military's physical standards must not be compromised to expand women's access. The stakes could not be higher: our military's fighting effectiveness. If the Army expects an infantry soldier to walk 20 miles while hauling 50 pounds of equipment, this standard should apply regardless of gender.

Fortunately, the Army and Marine Corps have begun establishing job-specific standards that would apply to men and women - and women like Cadet Kenyon are showing they can meet the bar.
As part of a pilot program last fall, four Marines became the first female graduates of the Corps' enlisted infantry training course. All four passed the most strenuous aspect of the Marines' infantry training: a 12-mile march carrying 80 pounds of gear.

The initial transition is likely to be difficult as our all-male combat units adapt to integration. But my experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have convinced me that what the military would gain by including women in combat far outweighs any short-term compromises. Our country's most recent conflicts have demonstrated that the military needs women on the battlefield. We need their creativity, insight and empathy, qualities often lacking in male-dominated units.

Recent studies from Harvard Business School and MIT show that "group intelligence" of an organization rises when women are on teams. Women bring a unique level of "social sensitivity," the ability to read the emotions of other people. On today's complex battlefields, social sensitivity is a crucial skill for military professionals.

During my patrols in Iraq from 2007 to 2009, I came to appreciate how much women could have contributed to my mission. Most Iraqi men were reticent to speak with us for fear of retribution from al-Qaida. Iraqi women, often fed up with the violence in their neighborhoods, could be persuaded to provide information, but first we had to bridge the gender gap, build rapport and earn their trust, all of which took valuable time.

Having women in our platoon would have dramatically increased our ability to elicit critical intelligence. This could mean the difference between a mission's success or failure, with lives in the balance.

Since 2011, U.S. Special Operations forces in Afghanistan have embedded all-female cultural support teams in their units. The program has been lauded by commanders for gaining access to the 50 percent of the Afghan population who had previously been inaccessible. Commanders are looking to deploy these teams to support operations in Africa. Army operations will probably require the same skill sets needed in Iraq and Afghanistan that women are adept at providing.

Including women in front-line units would be more than an exercise in social equality; it would be a valuable enhancement of military effectiveness and national security.

When Cadet Kenyon graduates from West Point in 2017, she is likely to have the opportunity to serve in a combat unit. She has her eye on the Army's Armor Corps, she told me, because "tanks are the most intimidating thing on the battlefield."

I look forward to a future where I can see troops follow a Lt. Kenyon leading the charge.
NOTES: William Denn, an Army captain and intelligence officer who led soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, is a graduate student in public policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He wrote this for The Washington Post.
Appendix B

Analysis Sheet

Use the following analysis sheet with a deductive approach similar to the process outlined by Finfgeld-Connett (2014). The deductive framework is used to aid in the collection and organization process. Each research question is broken down into subsets below to aid in categorization. Carefully read and reflect on the opinion articles identifying content that can be categorized into one or more of the break out research questions below. After identifying content mark the opinion articles with a marginal annotation of the break out research questions (Foss, 2009).

**RQ1:** What messages related to cultural concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

Definition: American culture and societal norms define the role each gender has in the society. In a traditional sense males have been the protectors of females. The acceptability of female roles in combat is largely a subjective look at opinions that either accept or denounce those of tradition. In denouncement of tradition there is a move toward progression and equality between genders.

RQ1A: How are opinions stated that oppose acceptability of women in combat roles?

RQ1B: How are opinions stated that support acceptability of women in combat roles?

RQ1C: Who is portraying the opinion?

RQ1D: What recommendations are being made to address concerns about cultural acceptability of women in combat roles?

**RQ2:** What messages related to military operational concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?
Definition: The potential risk to complete military missions and or the degradation of mission success after integrating women into combat roles.

RQ2A: How are benefits or risks to the physical aspect of military operations being related in the opinion articles covering women in combat roles?

RQ2B: How are the benefits or risks to the intelligence aspect of military operations being related in the opinion articles covering women in combat roles?

RQ2C: Who is portraying the opinion?

RQ2D: What recommendations are being made to address military operational concerns of women in combat roles?

RQ3: What messages related to personal health concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

Definition: Concerns referencing personal health, both physical and mental, of women after integrating women into combat roles.

RQ3A: How are physical health concerns described?

RQ3B: How are mental health concerns described?

RQ3C: Who is portraying the opinion?

RQ3D: What recommendations are being made to address personal health concerns of women in combat roles?

RQ4: What messages related to privacy concerns about women assuming combat roles do the newspaper opinion articles communicate?

Definition: Concerns referencing the privacy of both men and women after integrating women into combat roles. Privacy can include references to the interruption of the status
quo of all male units, how living accommodations will have to change, and the sexual harassment and assault of women.

RQ4A: What privacy concerns are being related in the opinion articles covering women in combat roles?

RQ4B: How are privacy concerns described?

RQ4C: Who is portraying the opinion?

RQ4D: What recommendations are being made to address privacy concerns of women in combat roles?

RQ5: What tone is portrayed in the newspaper opinion articles covering the rescission of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in regard to women serving in combat roles?

Definition: “Tone, in written composition, is an attitude of a writer toward a subject or an audience. Tone is generally conveyed through the choice of words or the viewpoint of a writer on a particular subject” (“Tone,” 2014).

RQ5A: In what ways is the portrayal positive?

RQ5B: In what ways is the portrayal negative?

RQ5C: Who is portraying the tone of the opinion?
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