

Camouflaged:



Domestic Violence and the Military Family

Mary H. Porter
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Capstone Professor: Paul Fotsch
Capstone Advisor: Ilene Feinman

“It seems very strange to me that with all the value that is set on the presence of women at the frontier posts, the book of army regulations makes no provision for them, but in fact ignores them entirely!”

Elizabeth Custer, military spouse of General George A. Custer, 1880

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Introduction

- Intimate partner violence is primarily a crime against women. In 1999, women accounted for 85 percent of the victims of intimate partner violence and men accounted for 15 percent of the victims. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim, 1993-99, October 2001.*
- By the most conservative estimate, each year 1 million women suffer nonfatal violence by an intimate. *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey (NCJ- 154348), August 1995, p. 3.*
- By other estimates, 4 million American women experience a serious assault by an intimate partner during an average 12-month period. *American Psychological Association, Violence and the Family: Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family (1996), p. 10.*
- Nearly 1 in 3 adult women experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood. *American Psychological Association, Violence and the Family: Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family (1996), p. 10.*

At one time, I was one of these statistics. While we do not commonly think of marriage as a violent institution, during the first twenty years of my adult life, I had two extremely abusive marriages. During my first marriage, in the 1970s, domestic violence was considered by most people to be a private issue, never acknowledged by family, neighbors, the police, or the courts. In fact, during one particularly abusive evening, after I managed to call the police, my husband was asked by the officer to leave the house for a few hours, to give *me* a chance to cool down. During my second marriage, in the 1980s, police were finally required to respond and react, although the courts never seemed to follow through. By the next day, my husband and I were again residing in the same household, because I had nowhere else to go and he refused to leave.

The reason I mention my personal history is because my abusive marriages were in our civilian society. For the last ten years, I have been married to the military. Some may

say that I am married to a serviceman, but that is not the entire picture. When one is married to a serviceman, one is married to the military, invisible to the American public. Military spouses live under a unique set of rules and regulations that is foreign to a civilian couple. These rules and regulations add to the stress of family responsibilities, including the relatively low pay that results in financial hardship, the uncertainty about job security since the mandatory drawdown following the end of the cold war, and job dissatisfaction; all of which are key factors that contribute to the domestic violence that appears to be rampant in our society. However, over the last 30 years, American society has finally focused increased attention on the causes of domestic violence, and has developed interventions aimed at reducing the violence with treatment for both the victims and the offenders. Unfortunately, it is the military family that has been largely ignored in the process.

Although the rates of domestic violence in the United States have decreased in recent years, statistics and reports state that within military families, domestic violence occurs more often than in civilian families. In fact, some studies state spousal abuse in the military may be more than double the civilian rate, with one particular study claiming domestic violence in military families occurs five times more often than in civilian families. Why is this so?

As a military spouse, and the mother of two sons currently serving in the United States Army, I am concerned over these excessive rates of



violence in military families. My intention in writing this capstone is to critically examine the demographics of age, race, and class of the military population in comparison to the civilian population, and to delve into the problems faced by families exclusively associated with military life, such as the nomadic existence, the isolation, the low pay, and the emphasis placed on aggression in military training. In so doing, I hope to raise the consciousness of both military and civilian peoples to the oppressive nature of the military lifestyle, which I believe is the basis of domestic violence within the military family, and from a feminist perspective, find alternative ways to deal with the frustration and anger that is destroying the military family.

A History of Domestic Violence

The social blight of domestic violence has continued to burden America into the 21st Century. Our homes should be places of safety and comfort. Tragically, domestic violence can and does turn many homes into places of torment.... Domestic violence spills over into schools and places of work; and it affects people from every walk of life. Though abuse may occur in the seclusion of a private residence, its effects scar the face of our Nation.

~George W. Bush, President of the United States of America – October 2, 2001

Since the 1970s, women's advocates and domestic violence researchers have been documenting the high levels of spouse abuse in the United States. Prior to that time, women received little, if any, legal protection. The subordinate status of women allowed physical force and violence within the home to control women in our patriarchal society. But published reports in the 1970s, documenting the extent of the problem, the patterns of violence, and the factors associated with spouse abuse, were quickly seized on by those who believed that domestic violence and the abuse of women deserved a place on the public's agenda for pending legislation. Still, it was a number of years before legislation was enacted. While "a federal Office of Domestic Violence was established in 1979", it was closed in 1981" (Gelles 33) due to society's continued struggle with conflicting attitudes about the rights of husbands and wives. Meanwhile, the criminal justice system often held the attitude

that what happened between married couples is a private matter, and therefore, should be resolved without any governmental involvement. It was not until 1984 that the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence published its first report. Today, nearly every state has legislation that deals specifically with domestic violence issues.

In 1994, when Congress was passing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which included the Violence Against Women Act (Gelles 34), Nicole Brown Simpson was found murdered in her home, allegedly at the hands of her very-famous ex-husband, O.J. Simpson. While Simpson was found innocent of the charges, this much publicized case instituted conversation and public debate about the prevalence of domestic violence in our society. This dialogue raised the consciousness of Americans who finally demanded that the state take a stronger role in curbing the devastating effects of what had been previously a very private matter.

Extraordinary Numbers

For many years, while the problems of domestic violence went unrecognized, victimized spouses suffered in silence as the community failed to protect them or to hold the offender accountable. Now that domestic violence has come out of hiding, it has finally been recognized as a human rights' violation against women in American society. But even while researchers, theorists, medical practitioners, and the media have focused increased attention on violence within a marriage, and we, as a society, now have a better understanding of the scope and dynamics of spouse abuse, there are still no proven treatments or strategies to combat and break patterns of domestic violence. What has been determined from this magnitude of research information is that batterers and victims come from all walks of life. Despite this fact, much research has been dedicated to isolating specific factors commonly associated with domestic violence to determine whether certain groups are more predisposed toward spousal abuse than others. The specific factors that have been identified consist of:

- Specific personality traits associated with the abuser
- Increased number of individual or family stressors
- Social isolation or limited support network, and
- Increased financial pressures

Though it is likely that no single factor causes domestic violence, multiple risk factors, such as those listed above, may increase the risk of abuse. By taking a close look at the demographics and lifestyles of military families, it appears the military family closely parallels that of families predisposed to spousal abuse in the general population of the United

States. Does the Department of Defense recognize this parallel or are they ignoring the information provided by domestic violence researchers?

While American society has been investigating and responding to domestic violence within our society, and the Simpson case has educated the general public, the Department of Defense has also provided guidelines to combat domestic violence within military families. Unfortunately, the military's commanding officers have continually maintained a curtain of silence by refusing to acknowledge that domestic violence in military families under their command exists, or to take responsibility for the exceptional or sensational incidents that do get reported.

- A soldier in Washington State killed his wife, packed her body into a suitcase and threw it off a bridge.
- In Southern California a Marine who was a hero in the Persian Gulf War shot and killed his newly divorced wife and their five-year-old daughter.
- In North Carolina an airman hacked his wife to pieces, wrapped her remains in plastic garbage bags and stored them in the refrigerator.
- A soldier in Germany, angered at his wayward spouse, decapitated her G.I. lover and placed the severed head atop his wife's nightstand. (Thompson 48)

These stories, detailing the "gory evidence of the home front carnage," while both sensational and exceptional, are only the tip of the iceberg. There are still untold thousands of military spouses that suffer in silence.

In past years, while many commanding officers have been lax in investigating and admitting the incidents of domestic violence involving their personnel, the Department of

Defense has tried to organize efforts at identifying and treating cases of spouse abuse in the military. Under the guidance of the Department of Defense, a number of studies have been completed. In actuality, since 1984, there have been a total of 28 published studies and 23 unpublished studies. There are also 14 additional studies currently pending which again address domestic violence within the military family. Unfortunately, due to a difference in methodology for the various studies and a difference in the definition of domestic violence, accurate data has been difficult to obtain and compare (Defense Task 99-100).

In 1994, Behavioral Science Associates in Stony Brook, New York, released some of the findings of their research into domestic violence in the United States Army. Funded by the Army, the researchers questioned more than 55,000 soldiers at 47 bases since 1989. As expected, this study states, “The rates of marital aggression are considerably higher than anticipated” (Thompson 48). In fact, according to the Defense Department’s own records, the number of confirmed spouse abuse cases in 1988 was 12 per thousand military households, but in 1993 that number had climbed to 18.1 per thousand (Enloe 189). By 1996, the rate of military families suffering from domestic violence had grown to 25.6 per thousand (Miles 1).

On the 17th of January, 1999, the television news magazine “60 Minutes” suggested that the rate of spousal abuse in the military is significantly higher than the national average. Moreover, their review of Pentagon records “from 1992 through 1996 ... found that 50,000 military spouses were victims of domestic violence, a rate five times higher than the civilian population when compared to Justice Department records for the same five years” (Mercier 4). While some experts say the increase in cases of domestic violence in the military can be attributed in part to heightened awareness of the problem and to improved reporting

techniques, for the same time period that “60 Minutes” covered, the military claims there had been a decrease of 15 percent. While these figures, both from the military and from the producers of “60 minutes,” remain controversial, this telecast, from a well renowned news magazine program, contributed to an increase in dialogue among those who believe there is a problem and those who do not.

Although the actual rate of domestic violence in military families continues to remain obscure, researchers and the Pentagon confirm an increase and believe that the rise in domestic violence “may be connected to the painful reduction in US fighting forces following the end of the cold war.... Soldiers and sailors who once dreamed of a secure, 20-year career and a handsome pension now find themselves facing a truncated career, no pension and bleak employment prospects in the civilian world” (Thompson 48). In fact, the Army study conducted by Behavioral Science Associates found evidence that abuse tends to escalate at bases scheduled to shut down. In addition to base closures, there is also the correlation between military training and domestic violence. Take the case of Jeromy Willis:

Jeromy Willis, an Air Force enlisted man and an ex-Army marksman, had been trained to kill the enemy. But when the cold war ended and his base faced closure and his career began looking less secure and his marriage came under strain, the enemy started looking a lot like his wife Marie. First he tried to kill her with a flaming propane torch. Weeks later he tried to strangle her. She fled to her mother’s home in Rhode Island, and the Air Force confined Jeromy to his base in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. But when Marie returned there to press charges against her husband, he had somehow learned of her supposedly secret appointment. Outraged that she was ruining his career, Jeromy confronted Marie inside the waiting room of

the base legal office.... He fired a pawnshop pistol into her chest. As horrified witnesses watched her yellow dress turn crimson, she screamed, “Jeromy, no!” And then he fired a second round into her brain (Thompson 48).

Although the case of the Willis family and the incidents stated earlier are more violent than many cases involving domestic violence in military families, according to Murray Straus, a University of New Hampshire family-violence expert, “There is a spillover from what one does in one sphere of life in one role to what one does in other roles. If you’re in an occupation whose business is killing, it legitimizes violence” (qtd. in Thompson 49).

While base closures and military training do contribute to the increase in domestic violence, there is still the question of why the rates of violence continue to exceed that of the civilian population. If we use the specific factors that are commonly associated with domestic abuse in American society and apply them to the United States military, it appears that the demographics of military personnel, such as age and socioeconomic class, are key reasons for the higher rates of domestic violence. The military family’s lifestyle – the nomadic existence, the isolation from family and close friends that civilian families rely on when times get tough, the lengthy and frequent deployments of the military serviceperson, and the low pay which contributes to financial hardship – has also been identified as a specific reason which contributes to the higher rates of domestic violence within the ranks of the United States military.

Demographics: Military versus Civilian Society

Domestic violence occurs in all social, racial, economic, and age groups; however, it does not occur with equal frequency across each group. In May, 2000, the United States Department of Justice issued a Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence. According to this Bureau of Justice report, there are specific categories within the population that contribute to a higher rate of domestic violence. These categories are gender, education, age, race, income, and home ownership. Within the United States military, 75.4 percent of the personnel are less than 35-years-old and 86 percent are male. Only 17 percent, mostly officers, have a college degree (Department/Age/Active/Education). Only a small percentage, mostly commissioned officers, own their own homes. With these statistics, it is imperative that American society recognize and understand that as a subpopulation within our society, military families, who are predominately young with low income and a lack of education, have different characteristics and needs than the civilian sector of the population of the United States, thereby requiring special attention in dealing with the social problems of domestic violence. Their demographics are so vastly different than the general population of the United States, they cannot be ignored.

After the study by Behavioral Science Associates in 1994, the Department of Defense (DoD) renewed its efforts to curtail domestic violence within the military community. They

commissioned a report by the Family Advocacy Council, comprised of seventy civilian professionals specializing in domestic violence. In this report, it was noted that:

In fiscal 1995, there were about 7,500 substantiated spouse abuse cases involving active duty personnel.... This number is down from 9,000 cases in fiscal 1990. About 90 percent of the 1995 cases involved junior enlisted families grades E-1 through E-6. About 74 percent of the abusers were active duty husbands. About 7 percent were active duty wives. About 2 percent were civilian husbands and 17 percent were civilian wives. The vast majority of abusers were male and the victims were female. Alcohol was involved in about 60 percent of the incidents (Kozaryn 2).

The purpose of the commission for the Family Advocacy Council was to discuss the unique problems of military families and to share solutions. What I found extremely interesting in this report is the statistic regarding junior enlisted families. It appears that one of the most important trends over the past thirty years has been the increase in the proportion of enlisted men who are married. While the United States Military usually recruits single people, many marry shortly after enlisting. In the 1998 Current Population Reports, the U.S. Census Bureau states that, in the population of the United States, 37 percent of males aged 18 to 34, the usual ages for junior enlisted personnel, are married (US iv). According to the Directorate for Information, Operations and Reports, 62 percent of all active duty military personnel are ranked as junior enlisted. Of these junior enlisted personnel, 58 percent are married (Department/Families, Jowers 50). As Cynthia Enloe states, “the marital inclinations of enlisted men have brought into ‘the military family’ thousands of young military wives, women in their late teens and early twenties who never have lived away from home before and often have little experience in household management or waged work” (160). This

statement is confirmed by the Family Advocacy Council, which stated that the victims of domestic violence within military families were predominately female spouses. On average they were slightly less than 25 years old, and 78 percent of them had children. More than half of these married couples had been married less than two years and 52 percent of the victims lived off a military installation in civilian housing (Miles 1). This increase in married personnel within the ranks has meant a rise in the sheer numbers of families requiring services, including housing, medical care, and child care: services the United States military is no longer prepared to supply.

Despite the fact that domestic violence occurs at all ages and in all walks of life, there are isolating factors associated with the risk that determine which particular groups of people are more predisposed toward domestic violence than others. It is imperative that we all fully understand the demographics of the men and women who are in the United States Military to assess how risk factors contribute to the excessive rates of domestic violence in military families.

Age: Results of the Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence, prepared by the Bureau of Justice, indicate that domestic violence rates differ to a large degree according to the victim's

age. Generally, the younger the spouses, the greater the chance of aggression: the rate of violence for a couple who are 34-years-old or younger is almost five times that of the 35-year-

Partner Violence By Age	Population involved
<i>= 17</i>	<i>4%</i>
<i>18-34</i>	<i>79%</i>
<i>= 35</i>	<i>17%</i>

old and over group in civilian society (Rennison 4). In the military, 75.4 percent of active duty personnel are 34-years-old or younger (Department/Age) as compared to 23.8 percent

(US iv) of the same age group in the civilian population. For these young, immature military couples, who believe that the family is the centerpiece of American life, becoming a military family places additional burdens on the institution of marriage.

Race and Ethnicity: The relationship between race and ethnicity and domestic violence, as it pertains to a comparison between the civilian population and the military population, appears to be inconsistent. Reporting on the general population of the United States, the United States Department of Justice reports that:

Overall, blacks were victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than persons of any other race between 1993 and 1998. Black females experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35 percent higher than that of white females, and about 2½ times the rate of women of other races. Black males experience intimate partner violence at a rate about 62 percent higher than that of white males and about 2½ times the rate of men of other races.... No difference in intimate partner victimization rates between Hispanic and non-Hispanic persons emerged, regardless of gender (Rennison 4).

Race	Civilian Population	Enlisted Military
<i>White</i>	75.1%	62.5%
<i>Black or African American</i>	12.3%	22.3%
<i>Other</i>	12.6%	15.2%

Unfortunately, the Department of Defense does not keep or publish records of domestic violence by race. However, the racial makeup of the military is significantly different than that of the

civilian society of the United States. While only 12.3 percent of civilian society is African American (US iv), 22.3 percent of enlisted military personnel are (Department/Minorities).

By comparison, Hispanics, who are 12.5 percent of civilian society (US iv), only make up 8.7 percent of enlisted personnel (Department/Minorities).

While it may appear that the high rate of domestic violence in military families may be related to race, this may not be the full picture. In an article in *The Detroit News*, columnist DeWayne Wickman, in his review of the Defense Department's records, states that today's all-volunteer military, as compared to the years when young men were drafted:

is disproportionately made up of Southerners, African Americans and people from middle- and lower-income families.... [One-third] of all first time enlistees during fiscal year 1998 came from the South, the only region of the country from which the number of military volunteers exceeded its proportion of people between the ages of 18 and 24. That same year African Americans, who were just 14 percent of this age group, were 20 percent of new enlistees (1).

Obviously, if there is a relationship between race and domestic violence, race is not the only factor in play. The more important factor that can be discerned from this information is that the young men and women who now serve our country are escaping from the poverty in their lives and in the lives of their families. Therefore, the socioeconomic demographic of this very young sub-population is more important. For many young adults, whether they are Anglo or people of color, enlisting in one of the military branches guarantees a job, a steady paycheck, medical coverage, housing, and the promise of an education, both within the military and with the G.I. Bill upon leaving the military.

Employment and wages: Just as age, lack of education, and possibly, race, appear to affect the frequency of domestic violence, according to David Mercier, a researcher into domestic

violence in military families, “evidence also suggests that families living at lower socioeconomic levels experience higher levels of domestic violence” (Mercier 4). This is confirmed by the United States Department of Justice, which claims that families living in households with lower annual household incomes experience domestic violence at seven times the rate of families in households with higher annual incomes (Rennison 4).

Within the United States Military, service members’ low pay and the financial hardships faced by their families have been long-standing issues. Even with special pay increases in basic pay of 3.7 percent in 2001 and 4.6 percent in 2002 (Defense Finance), more than four thousand military families still qualify for food stamps (Crawley 4).

Monthly Basic Pay*			
Rank/Pay Grade	1993	1997	2002
E-1	\$ 754	\$ 833	\$1,023
E-2	\$ 913	\$1,010	\$1,239
E-3	\$ 949	\$1,050	\$1,304
E-4	\$1,007	\$1,114	\$1,444
E-5	\$1,079	\$1,194	\$1,562
E-6	\$1,231	\$1,361	\$1,701
*Under two years of service Defense Finance and Accounting Service			

Some may question why the military spouse cannot work to compensate for the shortfall in pay. After all, isn’t this a time in American history when more married women expect marriage to be a partnership including the opportunity to obtain a waged job of her own? For a military spouse, it is not the problem of not working:

First, many Army spouses are unable to contribute to the household income to the same extent they would in a civilian circumstance. This is because Army posts are often located in economically depressed areas, where spouses cannot find adequate employment. Frequent moves also exacerbate this problem by denying spouses the

opportunity to develop tenure and experience. Additionally, civilian employers often actively resist hiring military spouses because of the turnover. The irregular schedule of Army soldiers also makes it difficult for spouses to work; they are often unable to depend on their soldiers to watch the children, share the family vehicle, etc. Indeed, while soldiers are deployed, many spouses who have children find it especially difficult to work and care for their families (Harrell 108).

Unfortunately child care services on posts are still unable to meet the demand and still too costly in comparison to the low pay. Therefore, because of the young age of military families, and the lower economic status, the military family appears to be a subpopulation within the United States with a higher risk for domestic violence.

Home ownership: For many, the realization of home ownership means being part of a community and the corresponding sense of belonging. Can the absence of this warmth of being a part of a neighborhood foster domestic violence? In a special report on intimate partner violence, the U. S. Department of Justice reports that rates of domestic violence are significantly higher for persons living in rental housing, regardless of gender. Women who do not own their own homes are victimized at more than three times the rate of women living in owned housing, while men residing in rental housing are victimized by their spouse at more than twice the rate of men living in purchased housing (Rennison 4). One wonders – is it the lack of home ownership, or is it the lack of being in a higher economic bracket whereby one can buy a home?

Due to the low economic bracket of junior enlisted personnel in the military and the frequency of moving from one location to another, owning a home is almost impossible.

Therefore, military housing communities were built for the express purpose to foster military culture and cohesion, accelerate the acculturation of junior personnel, and facilitate support of families of deployed personnel. Unfortunately, most military housing is relatively old, tends to be small, and is usually in less good condition than civilian housing (Buddin 19). Personnel are divided into housing communities by rank/pay grade, fostering a ghetto-like community for the lowest of pay grades, who are usually the youngest and least inexperienced personnel. For young military families who are away from their immediate families and friends for the first time in their lives, the constraints of living in military communities tend to weaken ties, or not to form any ties, with other communities or institutions that make a house a home, thereby separating them even further from the outside world.

Family stressors

While the occurrence of domestic violence is more prevalent in younger, lower-income families, there are additional factors within the military community that are unique to the military lifestyle and appear to affect the frequency of abuse. Frequent moves, long deployments and family separations, and the emphasis placed on aggression in military training can be directly related to the high incidence of domestic violence within military families. Mercier states that “family separations as a result of temporary duty assignments or deployments and financial and work-related pressures associated with low pay grades are stressors which may encourage violence in men who are already at risk of physically expressing anger” (6). The effects of these stressors can be seen at various levels, including the interpersonal relations within the families, the social climate for families on military installations, and in the organizational processes in military family programs.

Frequent moves: Frequent moves are the norm for a military family. For a military spouse, a transfer order means taking the children out of school, surrendering a hard-to-get job, packing the family’s belongings, notifying magazine and newspaper subscriptions, forwarding mail to an unknown address, and arranging bank transfers. Once transferred, she must again try to make housing livable, if the family is lucky enough to be able to move right into military housing, help the children readjust, make new friends, and then find a new job.

While some military spouses joke that home is where the Army/Navy/Air Force/Marines sends you, in her story, *The Women in Blue*, Melinda Smith-Wells puts the nomadic life of a military family in perspective. She states, “During my six-year military

career I have been stationed at three different Air Force bases in the U.S.; ...Florida, ...Washington, and ... California. I have had the opportunity to travel to South Korea and England on temporary duty” (477). This is the norm in every military family. The same holds true for my son and daughter-in-law, Jeff and Sara, who have been apart almost as long as they have been together during the short period of time they have been married. Besides fieldwork and training sessions, Jeff has completed a tour in Bosnia and another tour in Kuwait. These types of assignments are very common in today’s military and families are not allowed to accompany the serviceperson. In the ten years that I have been married to the military, my husband has been stationed in New York, Mississippi, Central California, Illinois, Southern California, and recently was transferred yet again back to Central California. Of course, this does not include the many training exercises that have taken him away from home for two to four weeks at a time, or advanced training schools held in various locations throughout the United States, each which can last up to three months. While I am considered lucky that my husband did all of his overseas tours before our marriage, and has remained stateside since, the financial hardship involved with this mobility puts additional strains on an already stressful way of life.

Long deployments, family separations and isolation: While the specific job of a service member has a great deal of influence over how often he is away from home, sooner or later everyone must go. With today’s reduced total force, each service member now deploys longer and more frequently than in the past. Time away can be a week, a month, even a year. There is also the ever-present possibility of sudden deployment as we have witnessed this past year after the events of September 11th. These deployments, resulting in family



separations, have become the norm in military families, resulting in the feelings of isolation for many spouses. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey state that “Personal and family relationships are central to individual development” (160), but in the military life, personal and family

relationships do not receive the priority they deserve. As Melinda Smith-Wells states, “The military has affected my personal life in two ways. First, I don’t know my own husband as well as I’d like to because I constantly go on temporary assignments to various locations.... Second, I don’t have any ‘true’ friends with whom to socialize” (477). Many will say that she chose the military for a career, but what about the spouse of the serviceperson?

In *Invisible Women ... Junior Enlisted Army Wives*, author Margaret Harrell interviewed many junior enlisted spouses to provide a voice for those who are anonymous and unheard within the military community. This is the same group where the rate of domestic violence is the highest. Although she tells the stories of only three women, they capture the experiences of many who are isolated from their family and friends, living faraway from home. “Dana’s Story” is Chapter 2. Her story reminds me of many of the young wives I met when I was living in military housing. The introduction to the chapter describes her life well.

Dana in many ways is the stereotypical junior enlisted wife. She is recently married, a young wife away from home for the first time, with a toddler and ... a second on the way. Like many junior enlisted wives, she lives off post in the only kind of housing they can afford – a trailer. Employment options are sparse, and the need for childcare

erodes the modest salary she can command in a low paying job market. She has a limited insight into the intricacies of Army organizations, procedures, and even the bureaucracies established with her in mind. Her physical isolation, limited financial means, and lack of knowledge about the insular culture her husband has joined combine to reinforce her own sense of invisibility (Harrell 15).

I understand exactly how Dana feels. Although much older than she and independent from many years of being a single mother, when I became a military spouse my way of life completely changed. Moving far from my family and friends, I tried to make friends at each new station, only to move again and again. The permanence in my life disappeared and I no longer know where I will be from one year to the next. It is a very unsettling way to live.

While frequent moves, long deployments of the service member, and geographical isolation of the military family add to the stress that contributes to domestic violence within the military family, the mandatory drawdown of the armed forces since the end of the Cold War has created increased competition among remaining service members for fewer positions that would allow them to be promoted and complete a successful twenty year career that produces rewarding retirement benefits needed for the transfer to civilian society. For these families, who are considered important for service members' retention and readiness, "the military ethic has always emphasized accomplishment over individual needs" (Mercier 6), thereby, decreasing the inclination, on the part of the soldier, to ask for accommodation of assignments for family needs, even when the system allows such requests.

Masculinity and aggressive training: Military service is not just an occupation. It is a culture which has a great influence over the lives and behavior of its members. In writing

how occupational roles influence violence among Marines, Marshall and McShane explain that, “because of social isolation and withdrawal into their own group for support and approval, [Marines] become subjected to intense peer group influence and control. The peer group can set up and maintain effective subcultural mechanisms of informal control



through occupational socialization including prescribed deviant conduct” (19). Therefore, the intensive aggressive training and indoctrination into a culture that retains common beliefs and attitudes normalizes the violent learned behavior. For the junior enlisted soldier, who holds a subordinate position with repetitive subjection to orders, the learned violent behavior of military training can have devastating effects when he leaves the field and returns home. As Enloe states, there is “something inherent in the process of militarizing a man’s sense of his own masculinity [that] makes him not only more capable of shooting at an enemy, but less able to resist resorting to violence when tensions escalate inside his own home” (190). This masculine nature of military culture, along with the aggressive training, affects families in a number of ways.

Because soldiers, sailors, and airmen are taught that violence is good – it is the most basic way to protect our nation – service members may not feel deterred from using violence in their own homes. In most civilian communities, if an individual is arrested for domestic assault, he is taken to jail, at least for the night, and may face stiff penalties as well as the humiliation of going to jail. However, for many years, if a service member is arrested by military police for domestic assault, he is released to his unit’s commanding officer, who is

responsible for punishment as the commanding officer sees fit. While the commanding officer may recommend the abuser to spend the night in the barracks with the single soldiers, often there is very little additional disciplinary action taken. “This lack of formal prosecution can be viewed from the symbolic interactionist perspective: service members as well as authorities define domestic violence as ‘normal,’ undeserving of intervention and any significant criminal labeling” (Marshall 23).

However, in recent years, with more emphasis placed on mandatory reporting of domestic violence, the commanding officer is now required to take further action. While that procedure is still subject to speculation, this known requirement has placed an additional burden on the victimized spouse. As detailed in the chart below, a military wife, who fears that if her abuser is identified, believes she will face additional consequences, not only at the hands of her military spouse, but by the system itself.

VICTIM’S FEARS OF CONSEQUENCES BY MILITARY SERVICE				
	<i>in percentage</i>			
Victim’s Fear	USMC	ARMY	NAVY	AIR FORCE
Things will get worse at home	52	40	34	31
Spouse will hurt her	47	33	27	22
Spouse will be kicked out of military	63	54	45	54
Spouse will leave her	44	29	25	25
Will not be able to support self/kids	52	41	35	36
Family will think bad about her	33	12	9	13
Friends will think bad about her	32	15	6	7
Too many people will hear about it	57	43	29	40

Source: Caliber Associates (1994). *Analysis of the Marine Corps Spouse Abuse Responses to the Department of Defense Victim Intake Survey*. (Contract No. M00027-04-2658). Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office (Mercier 25).

Conclusion: The Future of the Military Family

While it is unlikely that any one single factor causes domestic violence, multiple factors may increase the risk of domestic violence. Overall, the military lifestyle, with its young population, low pay, frequent family separations, and aggressive military training, to name a few factors, is not conducive for many families to carry on without violent episodes. The pressures are unlike that of many in the civilian sector. Although the DoD has previously made a substantial commitment to addressing domestic violence, as shown in the number of studies instigated by the military branches since 1984, these efforts have not always kept victims safe or batterers accountable and stopped the violence. This is why Congress established the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence to prepare and submit “a long-term plan for establishing means by which the Department of Defense may address more effectively matters relating to domestic violence within the military” (Defense Task 17). Made up of twenty-four members who represent widely diverse viewpoints on dealing with domestic violence, but who also share a common desire to improve domestic violence prevention and intervention programs within the military, the task force has established a framework for accomplishing its main mission of dealing with victim safety, offender accountability, education and training, community collaboration, and special interest items that are more global. This is a beginning to an end for the many families that have suffered in silence while they serve our country.

Personally, I have seen many changes in the way the Army treats families in the years that I have been a military spouse. Although my family has usually lived “on the economy,”

in civilian housing, here, in Monterey, California we moved into military housing. For what is now a small post, the Family Advocacy Program of Army Community Services is there to help troubled families. Awareness and attitudes have changed, and laws are in place to protect and benefit the victims and their children. There are more resources than ever before. Outreach programs, parenting classes, emergency food lockers, and financial emergency relief programs are only a small part of the services they offer. The Family Advocacy Program is also working with outside agencies to include and provide educational materials, shelters, and hotlines. Also, Commanders have been made more aware of the widespread nature of domestic violence within their ranks, its devastating effect on women, men, children, and families, and the tragic consequences of turning away.

Overall, the military has become much smarter about domestic violence and, as a result, much less tolerant of it. And that lower threshold of tolerance is producing a safer world for military families. Although there is still much to do to decrease the pressure and stress in military families – to alleviate some of the cause and effects of domestic violence – there needs to be a beginning. The Task Force has designed many new procedures that are already in effect. Hopefully, in the near future, we can say that there has been a dramatic decrease of domestic violence in the military family.

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Research Prospectus

Section One:

Proposed Working Title: *Camouflaged: Domestic Violence in the Military Family.*

In the United States, statistics and reports state domestic violence within the military family occurs more often than in a civilian family. Although the rates have decreased in recent years, some studies state spousal abuse in the military may be more than double the civilian rate. I wonder why this is so.

The purpose of my capstone is to delve into the problems associated with military life and from a feminist perspective find alternative ways to deal with the frustration and anger that is destroying the military family. My project will critically examine and analyze the power relationships between military culture and domestic culture and the gendered relationship between spouses.

From a feminist perspective, I hope to raise the consciousness of both military and civilian peoples to the oppressive nature of the military lifestyle, which I believe is the basis of domestic violence within the military family, and in so doing, determine ways to decrease the rate of domestic abuse.

Section Two:

MLO 2 – Research Skills: By using personal narratives of military families, interviews with family help organizations, online resources such as military family websites and government documents for statistical data along with relevant books and

magazine articles, I plan to evaluate and interpret the information into a critical analysis and explanation of the underlying causes and effects of domestic violence within the military family.

MLO 5 – Critical Cultural Analysis: As a patriarchal institution, the US military has its own culture in a socio-historical context. Since the service members and their spouses come from various sub-cultures within the United States, I plan to explain how these sub-cultures interact negatively and positively within the traditional relationship of marriage and the power relationships between and within the cultures.

MLO 7 – Historical Analysis: It has been only thirty years since domestic violence has been acknowledged as a social problem within the United States. Since then, great strides have been made in identifying the issues, events, and factors that are commonly associated with this abuse. Unfortunately, within the military community the subject of domestic violence has not been given the attention it deserves. My capstone will identify and evaluate the U.S. military as a patriarchal institution whose history consists of a unique system of beliefs, values, and assumptions which underlie the nature and purpose of military life. In understanding the components of this system, we will be able to understand how today's military life interacts within the family unit and compares with the civilian sector of society in regards to domestic violence.

Section Three:

1. When was domestic violence recognized as a social issue within the civilian sector?
2. When was domestic violence recognized in the military establishment?
3. Is domestic violence less recognized in the military community compared to the civilian sector of the U.S. population?

4. How have race, class, and culture compared and contributed to the high incidence rate of domestic violence in the military family?
5. How does the military lifestyle contribute to this high rate?
6. How does the high rate of domestic violence in military families affect the children within these families as compared to the civilian sector?
7. How does the military culture itself interact with the U.S. subculture from where the serviceperson and the spouse originate?
8. How can the military adjust their training to include the problems that arise from the military lifestyle?
9. What can society do to make the military lifestyle conducive to family life?
10. Why is this subject so important?

Section Four:

See Works Cited.

Section Five:

I began research on this topic for a paper I wrote in HCOM 342 during the Spring, 2001, semester. Although my research went beyond the scope of the paper I was writing then, I found the information to be extensive and extremely interesting.

Recently, my search in the CSUMB library has provided much more information, in the way of books, on my topic that have been added since writing my last paper. These books are now listed in my proposed bibliography and are a mixture consisting of gender issues, cultural studies, personal accounts, and statistical research. I believe that these books in addition to my previous research will be the basis for my paper.

Section Six:

My Capstone Project will primarily be in the form of a research paper. I plan to incorporate current statistics within the military community that deal with domestic family issues with recommendations on how to improve the quality of life for service members and their families. With our university built on a former military base, and a large presence of military families in our community, an understanding of the military lifestyle is crucial.

As a military spouse and a student at the local community college in Monterey and then at California State University – Monterey Bay, I have come in contact with many other military spouses and adult children of active duty or retired military personnel that are also students. It has been apparent to me that there is a resistance within the field of academia that consistently admonishes anything that is related to the military lifestyle. Therefore, I believe that my capstone will be appropriate for both the local chapter of Army Community Services in addressing the need of services for its members in our community and for our university as a whole in understanding the complex issues surrounding the lives of our military neighbors and our military-family students.