

Good Military Wives Stay in the Closet:

Obstacles to Openly Opposing Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)

Monica K. Henry

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University for Peace
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Gender and Peace Building

*“Good Military Wives” Stay “in the Closet”:
Obstacles to Openly Opposing Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)*

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ABSTRACT

Women and men are socialized to accept and perform certain gendered roles – generally man as warrior/protector and woman as caretaker/protected. The United States Military depends on the wives of servicemen to embrace these gendered roles in order to carry out military operations such as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF.) The conservative nature of the military, its demand for obedience and loyalty, the dependency of military wives on the military community for financial and social support to cope with the hardships of military life contribute to the reluctance of those opposed to OIF to publicly express this opposition and/or contribute to their negative perceptions of the anti-war movement. Although large-scale opposition to OIF among military wives is unlikely, to avoid further alienating military wives and potential allies, members of the anti-war movement should consider the impact that specific methods of protest have on military families and engage in anti-war activities accordingly.

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Chapter One: Overview of Thesis

Statement of Research Topic

Title – *“Good Military Wives” Stay “in the Closet”: Obstacles to Openly Opposing Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)*

The United States military has always been dependent upon military spouses to fulfill gendered patriotic roles and this has only increased due to the changing face of the military over the past twenty years into a volunteer force consisting of 1,419,061 Active Duty and 882,792 National Guard/Reserve members, with just over half being married (693,714 Active Duty and 429,729 Guard/Reserve military spouses)¹. The Department of Defense and Armed Forces are aware that reenlistment rates of servicemembers and ability to successfully carry out missions are strongly influenced by the servicemember’s spouse and have thus increased the number of programs focused on the military family and supporting military spouses while service members are deployed – especially during times of war.²

The relationship between the military and the families of service members has been long and tenuous and became even more complex following the end of conscription and a change to an all-volunteer force in 1973 as the military could no longer depend upon draftees to meet its man-power needs and had to market itself as a worthy career choice with a family friendly environment in order to attract service members (a more thorough discussion on the present military/family programs and relationship can be found in appendix I). The popular adage, “if the military wanted you to have a spouse they would have issued you one,” accurately describes the military’s views and policies concerning military wives throughout most of its history (see appendix II for a discussion on the history of the military / family relationship). Many will argue that despite an increase in family support services in recent years, this attitude continues to prevail and when military wives do not conform to the traditional role assigned to them as unquestioning, undemanding supporters of their husbands, government and military then they are little more than a thorn in the military’s side. What matters to policymakers is the military’s own institutional well-being. Thus, a government’s question

¹ Department of Defense: Military Family Resource Center, “2003 demographics profile of the military community.” Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense: Military Community and Family Policy (2003): i-ii; available from: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/dav/lsn/LSN/BINARY_RESOURCE/BINARY_CONTENT/1869841.swf; Internet; accessed 10 March 2006

² Durand, Doris Briley and Leora N. Rosen. “The Family Factor and Retention among Married Soldiers Deployed in Operation Desert Storm.” *Military Psychology* 7, no.4 (1995): 221-234

is: what marriage strategy best serves the military?”³ When a woman chooses to “marry the military,” it is assumed that she understands what it means to be a “good military wife” or will quickly learn how to become one. Taking second place to the military has been expected of military wives since the American Revolution and despite the women’s liberation movement, what constitutes a “good military wife” has changed little over the years. Military wives continue to sacrifice their own careers, live unpredictable and nomadic lifestyles, and endure long separations in order to follow and support their husbands with the understanding that the “mission comes first.”

The psychological stress of war is immense and the impact that this has on those left behind is often ignored. Military wives whose husbands are serving in OIF are not only expected to provide unconditional support for their husbands, they must bear the burden of long separations – between 6 months to 18 months and many military spouses are going through their third deployment since OIF began operations in March of 2003 - during which spouses are independently running the household. The demands of being a “good military wife,” the conformity required of military families, isolation of wives from family members, dependency upon other military wives for emotional and technical support during deployments, the conservative nature of the military and the influence of spouse behavior and attitudes on a career soldier’s options for promotions all contribute to their reluctance to openly question the war and a tendency to view anti-war protests in a negative light.

I have chosen to focus on the experiences of military wives because only 6.9 percent of Active Duty⁴ and 10.3 percent of the Guard/Reserve⁵ military spouses are male. In this thesis, I will describe the characteristics/qualities that are generally acknowledged as “essential” in successful military wives based on the experiences of spouses from OIF, demonstrate how the military community inhibits spouses opposed to OIF from voicing opposition and show the way in which many anti-war demonstrations alienate military wives.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the gendered role that military wives play in “national defense” as well as the political and social influences on military wives which impact their ability to openly express their political and social views. It is my hope that through an increased understanding of the nature of military life for a spouse, especially during times of war, that we will

³ Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 154.

⁴ Department of Defense: Military Family Resource Center, “2003 demographics profile of the military community.” Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense: Military Community and Family Policy (2003): 42; available from: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/dav/lsn/LSN/BINARY_RESOURCE/BINARY_CONTENT/1869841.swf; Internet; accessed 10 March 2006

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95

gain more insight into the militarization of their lives and perhaps a greater sympathy for the sacrifices they make, the obstacles they face, the reasons behind the “pro-war” attitude openly expressed by military spouses and the possibility for an increase in positive interaction with members of the anti-war movement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I attempted to consult as much literature as possible to give me a more thorough understanding of the history of the military’s relationship (official and unofficial) with military wives, policies concerning families, and the experiences, opinions and expectations of military wives as well as their relationship with the anti-war movement. The literature included in my thesis draws mainly from books and websites written by or for military wives, scholarly articles and military publications or websites.

The resources which I consulted helped me to define, and confirm the relationship between wives and the military community and how this relationship contributes to their reluctance to question or openly oppose OIF and/or hold negative perceptions of anti-war protesters. The overwhelming aspects included in existing literature are; gender, militarism and socialization. Scholars and authors like Cynthia Enloe, Laurie Weinstein and Christie C. White, Bonnie Stone, Betty Alt, and Laura Duhan Kaplan argue that concepts of masculinity and femininity are culturally based and lead to gender socialization while the culture of the military and expectations concerning the way in which a military wife should behave all contribute to her militarization which in turn supports the military system and power politics of the United States. The work of scholars like Bernard M. Bass, Leonie Huddy, Stuart Oskamp and Wesley Schultz suggest that the need for status and acceptance within a group or community encourage conformity, group loyalty, and reinforce cultural norms. Margaret C. Harrell’s dissertation on junior enlisted army wives examines the lifestyle and dilemmas faced by many junior enlisted military wives and studies conducted by RAND (National Defense Research Institute) compare the employment and earnings of military wives and civilian wives demonstrate the impact that the military lifestyle has on these women and how this effects spousal satisfaction and retention rates. More recent studies of military wives conducted by journalists like Tanya Biank and Karen Houppert suggests that while military wives experience a tremendous amount of pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles, a growing number are beginning to question their relationship to the military and voice opposition to these expectations and/or OIF. Books written by former or current military wives like Meredith Leyva, Brenda Pace, Carol McGlothlin, Sherry Hines, P.K. Johnson, Alesia Holliday, Carolyn Quick Tillery, Kristin

Henderson, Lydia Sloan Cline, Sarah Smiley, or compilations such as “Chicken Soup for the Military Wife’s Soul” allowed for me to gain a better understanding of the way in which military wives relate to the military, cope with the hardships of military life, and generally view military wartime deployments. Authors such as Stacy Bannerman, Donna Moreau, Laura Palmer, Barthy Byrd, Peter Goldman, Tony Fuller, Melvin Small, Nancy Zaroulis, Gerald Sullivan, Gerald Nicosia, provided insights into the Vietnam and OIF anti-war movements, the experiences of military wives during Vietnam and OIF, the relationship between these movements and military wives as well as the potential for increased positive interaction between the two.

The literature consulted suggests that the military is dependent upon military wives to function as an organization and carry out its military and political agenda. In “*Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*,”⁶ “*The Morning After: Sexual Politics At The End Of The Cold War*,”⁷ and “*Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*,”⁸ Cynthia Enloe asserts that the international political system is supported by “patriotic wives” who play specific gendered roles and that power relations would be jeopardized should they refuse to conform. Enloe notes that women are considered important due to the military’s perception that spouses have the potential to endanger or augment soldier’s ability to successfully serve the military.

The literature also suggests that women and men are socialized from childhood to adopt specific gender roles – man as warrior/protector, woman as caretaker/supporter. Laura Duhan Kaplan⁹ views caretaking as a gendered feminine role in which women are expected to defer their own needs to those of others. The military’s emphasis on the supportive role expected of a military spouse to the serviceman which is reinforced by the military through policies, memos, handbooks, programs, language and lifestyle, as well as a stress on volunteerism within the military community reinforces this gendered role.¹⁰ In effect, the military socializes women to become good military wives so that they can further the goals of the military. The military has been so successful in part because the military spouse is often insulated from the civilian life and is part of the military community. In “*Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada*,” Laurie Weinstein and Christie C. White explain that the military’s system of relocating soldiers and their

⁶ Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁷ Enloe, Cynthia. *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸ Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁹ Kaplan, Laura Duhan. “Woman as Caretaker: An Archetype That Supports Patriarchal Militarism.” *Hypatia* 9, no.2 (1994): 130

¹⁰ Weinstein, Laurie and Christie C. White. *Wives and Warriors: Women and the Military in the United States and Canada*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997.

families every two- to four-years makes it difficult for spouses to form support systems outside of the military and increases the spouses' economic vulnerability and tendency to engage in unpaid "volunteer" work for the military.¹¹ Betty Alt and Bonnie Stone, both married to retired military men, support this claim in *"Uncle Sam's Brides: The World of Military Wives."* Alt and Stone describe the immense pressures that the military spouse faces to conform through military propaganda, lectures, literature, rules and regulations, loss of identity (attached to husband's rank), difficulty in finding employment and intense peer pressure.¹² Another area of importance that does not receive a great deal of attention in these studies is the role of patriotism and the belief of the military spouse that she/he is serving his/her nation as part of an elite group dedicated to the "American way of life" (see appendix III for a discussion on military wives' views on patriotism).

In *"Conformity and Deviation"* Bernard M. Bass discusses how the human "need for status" is fulfilled by belonging to a specific social group, including "military cliques."¹³ According to Bass, eventually members of the select group will come to believe in the superiority of their group's values and view those whom they seek to exclude as being inferior. It would appear that the armed forces of the United States follows this pattern through recruiting efforts that stress the high standards of the "chosen" deemed good enough to belong, the military's focus on rituals and traditions and the apparent "us vs. them" attitude regarding civilians which includes the exclusion of non-military personnel from military bases and events without proper identification and visitor passes. Bass also claims that elite nature of these social groups lead to conformity in group relations as our self-image is influenced by the opinions and acceptance of members of the "in-group." Members of these groups develop shared values and accepted modes of behavior that influence the social attitude of the individuals within the group. It is the internalization of the "group norm" and membership to the group that provides individuals with a sense of identity and feelings of stability or security. In order to preserve the unity of the group, a fairly narrow range of tolerable behavior is established. Actions or opinions that fall outside these limits are seen as questionable to group loyalty and are most often met with correctives from the membership.

The military is an elite group that has a very low tolerance for digression from the long-held values, traditions, and beliefs – especially if they threaten to disrupt the war machine. Leonie Huddy, *"The Emergence of Group-Based Social Hierarchy,"* explains that the "shared meanings of group

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Alt, Betty and Bonnie Stone. *Uncle Sam's Brides: The World of Military Wives.* (New York: Walker and Company, 1990).

¹³ Bass, Bernard M. and Irwin A. Berg, eds. *Conformity and Deviation.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 419

membership” are also a “precursor to political cohesion”¹⁴ which may explain the fairly uniform political expressions (or lack thereof) among military spouses. Stuart Oskamp and Wesley Schultz, “*Attitudes and Opinions*,”¹⁵ also note the importance of group identity on the development and expression of individual attitudes and behaviors and claim that in addition to groups, major societal events such as wars pressure individuals to conform to a prescribed mode of behavior and that it is difficult for members of a group holding a belief that is in contradiction to the group norm to voice opposition when they lack strong support.

The main controversies I found in research and literature were debates over the amount of support the military provides for the families of servicemen and the success of these programs (military publications generally claim that the level of support is adequate while authors like Houppert, Biank, Stone and Alt disagree), the relationship between the military and wives – whether it is one of appreciation or mere tolerance (again, military publications and many military wife authors like Johnson, Hines, Tillery, Holliday, Cline and McGlothlin, suggest appreciation while authors like Stone, Alt, Biank, Houppert, Weinstein and White express tolerance), the amount of pressure experienced by military wives to conform to certain standards of behavior and the impact that this has on their social relationships and their husband’s career goals (the work of Enloe, Harrell, Leyva, Henderson, Stone, Alt, Weinstein and White suggest that military wives experience pressure to conform while military publications claim ‘independence’ and ‘choice’), whether or not open opposition to a war negatively impacts troop morale, the ability to openly oppose a war and still support members of the military, and the potential for more military wives to join the anti-war movement (military wives like Bannerman feel that military wives and the anti-war movement are compatible while Hines, Henderson and Smiley question this relationship).

Despite these controversies, based on the work of the authors and scholars mentioned in this literature review and the research carried out for this thesis, I believe that the threat of ostracism from the military community - which has been described as a “family” by numerous military spouses – and the conflict between supporting the military or individual service member while openly opposing a war influences the decision of a military spouse to openly oppose military policies or missions.

¹⁴ Huddy, Leonie. “The Emergence of Group-Based Social Hierarchy.” *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. Editors: Robert Jervis and David O. Sears. (New York; Oxford University Press, 2003), 511

¹⁵ Oskamp, Stuart and Wesley Schultz. *Attitudes and Opinions*. (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 173

ASSUMPTIONS

- The demands of being a “good military wife,” the conformity required of military families, isolation of spouses from family members, dependency upon other military spouses for emotional and technical support during deployments, the conservative nature of the military and the influence of spouse behavior and attitudes on a career soldier’s options for promotions all contribute to political socialization and/or a reluctance to openly express opposition to Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or the Bush Administration
- The wives of National Guard and Reserve members do not experience the same amount of pressure to conform to the standards expected of a “good military wife” due to their lack of contact with the military community and lack of dependence upon the military for their livelihood, social relations and support during deployments.
- The level of involvement of the spouse within the military community, whether the spouse lives on the base or in civilian housing, the service member’s career objectives (reservist, national guard, short term enlisted soldier or a military careerist/officer), the service member’s support or opposition to the war and the reasons that the service member choice to enlist all influence whether or not a spouse opposed to a war will openly express opposition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

a) Methods

Overview of methods

I employed qualitative research for my thesis, as my hypothesis was predominantly exploratory and explanatory in nature. I used less structured research instruments than employed in quantitative research with a focus on detail concerning behavior, attitudes and motivation. Due to the more “in-depth” nature of qualitative methods, my sample size was relatively small and is not representative of all military wives. I explored and analyzed the content of various academic scholarship, military publications and testimonies through interviews with military wives, service members and veterans as well as a review of subjects’ letters, diaries, web-blogs, messages posted on web-sites and discussion boards. In order to conduct interviews, I relied on both random and snowball sampling techniques.

- **Random Sampling:** I contacted military wives, service members, and veterans through online military spouse support groups, message boards, web blogs and websites, veterans associations, Anti-war movement websites and contacts at various military bases.

- Snowball Sampling: The majority of spouses that I interviewed referred me to friends, family member and other interested individuals. Several of the military spouse support groups and veterans associations posted my interview request on their website/message boards.

My research consisted of four stages. In stage one, I conducted an analysis of various materials (including preliminary interviews with military wives, service members and veterans) in order to develop the constructs used in this study (“good military wife,” “patriotic,” “anti-war,” and “pro-war”). I also formulated a questionnaire which I disseminated to individuals and organizations concerned with the military or anti-war movement. Once I established indicators and formulated definitions for these constructs, I proceeded to the second stage which consisted of more in-depth interviews with subjects, analysis of those interviews and determining the relationship between the data incurred in stages one and two with my stated assumptions concerning the political orientation and expression of military spouses. The third stage involved gathering and organizing the data and preliminary writing. The fourth stage included writing, editing and final revisions.

Consistent with exploratory research, I attempted to develop insights into a specific “problem” – reluctance of military wives opposed to a specific war to voice their opposition – and determine whether or not the “problem” even exists. The following discussion suggests the “why,” “how,” and “when” this phenomenon occurs but it does not answer the more explanatory questions of “how many” and “how often.” In order to conduct more explanatory research, I would need access to a much larger subject base. However, I feel that I have conducted a sufficient number of interviews and qualitative data analysis of additional sources to provide a possible explanation for the lack of military spouse opposition to OIF.

Research limitations and constraints

I identified a set of limitations and constraints prior to completing my research proposal, these include:

- Length of thesis – Within the framework of 17,000 – 20,000 words, I was unable to include every aspect of the military/family relationship and the relationship between military wives and the anti-war movement.
- Resources and Time Constraints – The location of University For Peace (Costa Rica) and the ten month “Gender and Peace Building” master’s program presented challenges to researching and writing a thesis as it limited the amount of research I was able to undertake and access to resources.

Type of research

As I have mentioned, my research is both exploratory and explanatory. It is both because I explored and explained the lifestyle of and expectations for a “good military wife” as well as how this impacts her ability to openly oppose OIF and/or her relationship with the anti-war movement.

Research variables and constructs

It is essential to state here that most of the following variables are interrelated. None exist independently.

Variables:

- Age
- Gender/Sex
- Ethnicity
- Occupation
- Education
- Marital Status
- Children
- Religion
- Political Orientation
- Base or Civilian Housing
- Number of years as a military spouse
- Number of years of service member’s military service
- Service member’s branch of service and rank (including intention to remain in the military)
- Service member combat service
- Number and length of service member’s deployments
- Number and length of service member’s field trainings or Temporary Duty
- Support or opposition to OIF
- Participation in political protests in opposition to OIF
- Open opposition to OIF while husband was deployed
- Additional family members in the military
- Majority of friends – military or civilian
- Utilization of military spouse programs
- Volunteer in the military community

- Member of military spouse clubs or support groups (military or online)

Constructs

- “Good Military Wife” – Based on scholarly books and articles, interviews with military wives and service members, and an analysis of letters, poetry, and stories written by military wives, I have determined that the most important characteristic of the model military wife is to be supportive. She must also be independent while her husband is deployed but willing to relinquish that independence upon his return. She should be social, patriotic, hospitable, patient, faithful, understanding, mentally strong, flexible, tolerant, and able to run a household on her own without excessive complaining. The “good military wife” has been militarized to accept the hardships of life in the military as simply “part of the job” or her “duty” to the country and to accept the mission of the military without question.
- “Patriotic” - The generally accepted dictionary definition of patriotism is “love for or devotion to one’s country.”¹⁶ However, at present, there are two competing definitions of patriotism that have led to controversy concerning the patriotism of military wives who openly oppose OIF. Those who feel that it is impossible to support your country while questioning its foreign policy or political leaders believe that to voice dissent is unpatriotic. Those who feel that the United States was founded upon dissent believe that questioning the policies and practices of the government is the highest form of patriotism. I have chosen to use the generally accepted dictionary definition of patriotism and allow for military wives quoted in this thesis to express their own competing versions.
- “War”¹⁷ - In this thesis, “war” refers to a state of open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations.
- “Anti-war” – Although this term can be interpreted as being opposed to all war, in this thesis, the term “anti-war” refers to opposition to a specific war (generally OIF).
- “Pro-war” – In this thesis, the term “pro-war” does not suggest that the individual or organization purporting this construct supports or favors all war but favors a specific war (generally OIF).
- “Militarization” – The acceptance or promotion of a set of values that support military activities and enable countries to mobilize for war or carry out military operations.

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster OnLine, “Patriotism,” available from: www.m-w.com/dictionary/patriotism; Internet.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster OnLine, “War,” available from: www.m-w.com/dictionary/war; Internet.

Research subjects and samples

Because I was primarily concerned with the impact that the military community has upon the expression of the political opinions of United States military wives, my study focused on OIF military wives and service members but also included Vietnam Veterans, the wives of Vietnam Veterans, and career military wives whose husbands have not served in OIF.

Research instruments and how they measure the stated variables

- A. Interviews – Questionnaires & Follow-up email and phone discussions
- B. Military Spouse Message Boards and Email Loops
- C. Military Spouse and Service member's blogs and web-sites
- D. Military Spouse Support Groups
- E. Military Spouse Support Group Websites (official and unofficial)
- F. Letters from Military Spouses and the American Public to Service members
- G. Publications by Military Spouses and Service members
- H. Poetry and Stories related to Peace, War, the Military and Gender
- I. Academic Journals, Magazines and Books
- J. Newspaper Articles and Editorials
- K. Military (official) Websites, Publications and Films
- L. Speeches Made by Members of the Bush Administration and the Department of Defense
- M. Military Advertisements and Recruiting Materials
- N. Websites of Anti-war Organizations

Although I utilized all of the above instruments, my questionnaire and follow-up email and phone discussions were my primary research tool. Using these instruments, I looked for themes concerning expectations of military wives and found that the military lifestyle contributes to their dependency upon the military community for their livelihood and support systems and discourages military wives from openly opposing OIF and encourages them to view the anti-war movement in a negative light.

b) Procedures

Research ethics

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, I found it necessary to not only identify ethical standards to guide me in my research but to continuously assess whether or not I was adequately

upholding them. Because I conducted the vast majority of interviews via email, I asked respondents to provide their consent, indicating that they had agreed to participate in the research in order to inform and empower the interviewee. I was open and honest concerning my identity and the nature of the study and made my contact information widely available should the respondent have any questions, comments or complaints concerning my research. I also provided all respondents with the option of remaining anonymous, refraining from answering any questions and withdrawing their support at any point in time with a guarantee to abstain from using any information that they provided.

Design of research materials

The original design of my research materials included responses from my questionnaire and follow-up interviews in addition to literature from web pages, books, reports, and articles.

Contacts with subjects and actual samples attained

I established contacts and built relationships with military wives, service members, veterans and anti-war individuals and organizations early in the course of my research through the use of the internet and email and conducted the following number of interviews or consultations:

- Operation Iraqi Freedom Military Wives
 - Supporters – 22 (8 Army Active Duty enlisted and 1 officer, 6 Marine Active Duty enlisted, 1 Air Force Active Duty enlisted, 2 Army Reserve enlisted , 3 Army National Guard enlisted, 1 Army National Guard Officer)
 - Opposed – 16 (8 Army Active Duty enlisted and 1 Active Duty Officer, 1 Marine Active Duty, 2 Air Force Active Duty, 2 Army National Guard and 1 Army Reserve)
 - Neutral – 3 (1 Army National Guard enlisted, 1 Army National Guard officer and 1 Army Reserve enlisted)
- Operation Iraqi Freedom Military Fiancés – 3 (all opposed to OIF: 2 Army Active Duty enlisted and 1 Active Duty Marine enlisted.)
- Retired Military Wives – 2 Navy Officers Wives/OIF supporters
- Wives of Service members who have served in Afghanistan – 1 Army enlisted opposed to OIF
- Wives of Military Recruiters – 1 Navy enlisted opposed to OIF

- Wives of Service members who have served in Kosovo – 1 Army National Guard enlisted opposed to OIF
- Wives of Vietnam Veterans – 5 married to service member while he served in Vietnam and 5 married to service member after his service
- Vietnam Veterans – 24 (one married at the time of service)
- Operation Iraqi Freedom Conscientious Objector – 1 Army Active Duty enlisted
- Operation Iraqi Freedom Service members – 5 Army Active Duty enlisted, 1 Air Force and 1 Army Reserve enlisted, 1 Army National Guard enlisted (all married)
- World War II Resister - 1
- Children of Vietnam Veterans – 6
- Consulted: 1 volunteer with military programs, 6 members (parents) of the anti-war organization Military Families Speak Out

Data collection – I began the data collection process in November of 2005 and continued to collect data until the beginning of June 2006.

Data storing and coding – Out of consideration for the participants of the study, the collected data was stored on my personal computer as well as on back-up DVDs which were accessible only to me. Email interviews and correspondence of individuals who opted to remain anonymous were stored in separate files from those which had given consent to reveal their identity in this study.

Data analysis – I analyzed data as I conducted interviews and research but did not complete a full analysis until I completed my data collection in June of 2006. After the completion of stage one of my research process, I conducted a data analysis in order to develop the construct variables used in this study. Following this analysis, I proceeded to the second stage of my research which consisted of subject interviews and analysis of written materials. Once both stages were completed, I began the full extent of my analysis in order to determine the relationship between the lifestyle of a military wife and her likelihood of openly opposing OIF. I relied primarily on qualitative modes of data analysis as it provided the means to discern, examine, compare, contrast, and interpret significant patterns or themes. The following forms of analysis were employed through the course of the study:

- **Content Analysis:** I employed this method of qualitative data analysis in order to identify recurrent themes, concepts, patterns, processes and underlying meaning in the data that I collected throughout the study. This type of analysis allowed for me to code the various

documents, newspaper and journal articles, speeches, transcripts, literature (including poems, stories, diaries, web-blogs, songs, etc.) and videos to identify recurrent words, phrases, or word-phrase clusters to develop the construct variables.

- Contextual Analysis: This form of data analysis allowed me to evaluate the elements of narratives based on the understanding that data extracted from narratives vary according to the social contexts from which it was derived. For example, when analyzing narratives from a military wife's website, the content (opinions and emotions expressed), may differ throughout the course of a year depending upon world or life changing events within her life.

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Chapter Two: The Life and Expectations of a “Good Military Wife”

In *Today's Military Wife, 3rd edition*, Lydia Sloan Cline claims, “we are no longer expected to devote ourselves exclusively to our husband’s careers.”¹⁸ The military wives of today may not experience the same pressure to volunteer and promote their husband’s careers as their World War I and II counterparts but this statement is somewhat misleading. Unofficially, military wives, especially those of an officer or Non Commissioned Officer (NCO), are expected to volunteer and participate in the military community, which has the potential to become a full time job in and of itself. The frequent moves required of military families makes it difficult for a military wife to establish a career or work outside the home and the increase in the number and length of deployments since September 11th 2001 are emotionally demanding and time consuming as these wives are generally running a household on their own. All of the above contribute to her dependence upon the military for her livelihood and social support.

As one military wife explained,

“It is a very different life and you have to be willing to adapt to change. It is important to be dependent on the soldier when they are home yet be very independent when they are away...A military spouse is very different from a civilian spouse because she/he has to be willing to uproot her/his life at the drop of a dime to relocate; be willing to be mom, dad, counselor, taxi, mrs./mr. fix-it, and still work!!! They have to be strong yet sensitive, firm and yet flexible. It’s not a job for the weak-hearted or stubborn. It is a very special person who can make it as a military spouse....It is hard to explain the role of a military spouse, but it is the most rewarding position when you love the military life.”¹⁹

The “Good Military Wife”

Cynthia Enloe noted “every institution that relies on employees who are married is prone to send out messages about what the ideal spouse should be” and described the “model military wife”²⁰ (appendix IV). Military wives do not all feel the same pressure to conform to the “good military wife” model but the majority are at least aware of the qualities and characteristics thought to contribute to being a successful military wife as is reflected by statements made by military wives,

¹⁸ Johnson, P.K. *Wings of Our Own: Heroes, Happenings & History of Air Force Spouses*. (Phoenix: Wingspan Publications, 2001), 31

¹⁹ Huguenin, Tamara. (United States Army wife). Personal Email Interview. 2 February 2006.

²⁰ Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 162-165

content posted on military spouses' websites and blogs and advice books for military spouses. Those who live on base, officer's wives and spouses who intend on making the military a career are generally expected to strive to meet these expectations if their husbands are to rise in the ranks.

While there is no "official memo" as to what constitutes a "good military wife," there is a general consensus among military personnel and families that the most important quality is "supportiveness." Exactly what it means to "support" someone varies from person to person but it appears that, for most military wives, supporting their husbands involves accepting the demands made on their families by the military as just "part of the job," generally taking care of the domestic responsibilities (including child rearing), engage in military social and volunteer activities in order to form a favorable impression within the military community and to do all of this with minimal complaining and, if possible, a smile upon her face. Army wife "Love My Tanker" believes that "acceptance is the largest key in being a successful military spouse. If you have that, you can get through just about anything with a smile in your heart."²¹

Although many military wives also work outside the home, the role of these modern camp followers remains strongly gendered in that their primary responsibilities are to take care of the household and support their husbands thus allowing for these warriors to focus on their military duties. Marine Wife Melissa MacNaughton feels that "the role of the military spouse is to be the woman behind the man...you're the one who runs the show but you have to make him feel like he is the one in control. A good military spouse is a woman who is always there no matter what the situation, ready to comfort and support."²² Marine wife Emily Deavers feels that a good military wife is very important to her husband's career and the military because, "...being supportive and keeping the kids, the bills, and the house in order keeps my husband's mind free so that he can put his 'all' into his job." She believes that this has helped her husband's career because "if he was always worrying about how I was handling things at home, it would affect his work which could possibly affect his promotions and career." According to Emily, "a new military spouse must understand they are part of the military too. They have to be supportive, strong, understanding, and organized."²³

Differences Between Civilian and Military Wives

Although two spouses claimed there is little to no difference between being a "good military spouse" and a "good civilian spouse," the majority of wives beg to differ. Army Wife Mary Fassett

²¹ Love My Tanker. (United States Army wife). Personal Interview. 7 January 2006.

²² MacNaughton, Melissa. (United States Marine Corps Wife). Personal Interview. 20 January 2006.

²³ Deavers, Emily (United States Marine Corps Wife). Personal Interview. 14 March 2006

explained, “Having been both a civilian wife and a military wife, it is much more challenging to be a military wife. You end up having to do pretty much everything yourself because your husband is gone so often. Also, you have to lean on others for support more often because you cannot lean on your spouse when he is gone.”²⁴

Heather Addy, a Marine wife, exclaimed,

“It DEFINITELY differs from being a civilian wife!!! There are so many things that we have to deal with that no one else really does. Sure, there are other wives who have to deal with their husbands going places for work and working long hours, but do their husbands go to work and get shot at or have bombs exploding all around them? Not just any woman can do this, it takes a special and a strong woman to handle the things that we do each day!”²⁵

At the very least, coping with or thriving in the military community requires that a woman become properly militarized to accept stresses and overcome challenges that their civilian counterparts can hardly imagine. Military wife, Love My Tanker strongly believes that the demands made of military spouses are much higher than their civilian counterparts and feels that “all spouses or would be spouses of military members should have to go through a ‘Spouse Boot Camp’ before a marriage license is issued or before the spouse is allowed to move with the soldier. Knowing what this life will entail before ‘marring the military’ would save everyone a massive amount of heartache and issues to deal with later.”²⁶

Some military wives have little tolerance for wives who struggle with the challenges of military life and feel that if these women are unable or unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices then they should not have married into the military. On a military spouse discussion board, one Navy wife criticized another spouse who lamented the lack of recognition that military wives receive for their sacrifices.

“I am the spouse of a military member and I really hate to read where ‘wives’ expect special treatment and considerations. If you are the wife of a military member then obviously you agreed to marry the military. If you aren’t willing to make the sacrifices then you should not have married a military member. I think it is outrageous to read wives complaining about the long hours their husband has to work and the invasion into a woman’s ‘personal life’ that many express in regards to the military... Ladies, this is the position you chose when you married

²⁴ Fassett, Mary. (United States Army Wife). Personal Interview 2 April 2006

²⁵ Addy, Heather (United States Marine Corps Wife). Personal Interview. 3 March 2006.

²⁶ Love My Tanker. (United States Army wife). Personal Interview. 7 January 2006

him... Your agreement should have been understood to support him and make the sacrifices.”²⁷

Her belief that military wives should not “waste their energy” on “fighting the command” and should instead accept the military lifestyle suggests that she has been fully militarized and serves as a great asset to the Department of Defense.

Supporting the Military Mission

The role that military wives play in supporting the system has been continuously acknowledged since 1984 when President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation stating that supportive military spouses are a vital component in the success of the U.S. military mission. He explained that spouses contribute to the mission when they have “subordinated their personal and professional aspirations to the greater benefit of the service family.”²⁸

In order to increase institutional commitment and loyalty, the military has spent the past two decades furthering the idea that wives are “part of the team” and, in their own gendered way, serve the military. Numerous family programs like Army Family Team Building²⁹/Marine Family Team Building³⁰ promote this concept as do military statements and presidential speeches. The DoD reaffirmed that military wives contribute to the ability to wage war in a recent statement concerning the War on Terrorism: “Spouses are the ones left ‘holding down the fort’ allowing our military members to successfully complete their missions and not worry about their families at home. We are in a new era where the resiliency of the military spouse is needed more than ever, as concerns about the War on Terrorism pose new challenges for the homeland military spouse and increased risk for those overseas.”³¹ In an October 2005 speech, President Bush noted that “by standing behind their deployed husbands and wives, military spouses are serving as well” and explained, “You miss them and worry about them, and all the while keep things running at home.”³²

²⁷ Military.Com Discussion Board. “*Unwanted dependent Wives in the military.*” Posted Tue 21 December 2004. Available from: <http://forums.military.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/9401977386/m/9041935786>; Internet; accessed 26 April 2006.

²⁸ President Ronald Reagan. “*Proclamation 5184 – Military Spouse Day, 1984.*” Available from: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/41784j.htm>; Internet; accessed on 18 April 2006.

²⁹ Army Family Team Building (AFTB). Available from: www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?Mode=User&ModuleID=8cde2e88-3052-448c-893d-d0b4b14b31c4&ObjectID=14eccf3f-0cd0-4b37-bb05-b2204ba6b249&Action=display_page&AllowSSL=true; Internet.

³⁰ Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB). Available from: www.usmc-mccs.org/mcftb/

³¹ Military Homefront – Department of Defense. “*Military Spouse Day.*” Available from: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/itc/MHF/MHF_DETAIL_1?section_id=20.40.500.90.0.0.0.0.0¤t_id=20.40.500.90.570.0.0.0&content_id=164728; Internet; accessed on 2 May 2006.

³² Gilmore, Gerry J. “Bush: Troops Depend on Families’ Support.” *American Forces Press Service*. 25 (October 2005); available from:

This militarized gender role is not only promoted by the military through family service programs, speeches and spouse appreciation awards, it is espoused by many military wives themselves. In their book, *Medals Above My Heart*, military wives Brenda Pace and Carol McGlothlin, advise military spouses to “never forget that you are doing your part for your country. Don’t think that because your job is behind the scenes, it is any less vital...my husband is a soldier; that is what he does. I am a wife; this is what I do. We both serve our country with love and pride.”³³

Volunteerism & Socializing

With the end of the “hat-and-glove” era following the Vietnam War and an increase in women working outside the home, the military grew concerned as wives were less inclined to devote their time to the day-to-day traditions of military life. Not only does this potentially reduce institutional commitment, the few military family support services offered can not function without the labor of these wives.³⁴ In an effort to encourage continued volunteerism, the military has pushed the idea that their contributions support overall military “readiness” and “effectiveness.” A relatively cost-effective way to encourage women to volunteer has been to increase recognition of their efforts resulting in special awards and ceremonies in the various branches, an annual “Military Spouse Day” and the “Military Spouse of the Year” awards. Many bases have their own version of this award but the most well-known is presented by American Veterans to an Active Duty and National Guard/Reserve spouse that “demonstrates exceptional volunteer work accomplishments, exhibits selfless giving to others in the community, exudes ongoing strength in enduring deployments, family separations and frequent moves and fortitude in generating support of other military spouses and their families while holding down his or her own fort.”³⁵ Basically, the model of a “good military wife.”

Although all wives are encouraged to volunteer, the pressure placed on the wives of officers is much higher than that of an enlisted wife and they are often expected to organize and participate in family support activities³⁶. The *2005 Spouse Battle Book*, written by officer’s wives while their husbands attended the Army War College, appeals to the patriotism and desire of spouses to support

<http://www.americasupportsyounet.com/americasupportsyounet/Content.aspx?ID=44626978&SectionID=1>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2006.

³³ McGlothlin, Carol and Brenda Pace. *Medals Above My Heart: The Rewards of Being a Military Wife*. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2004), 15-17.

³⁴ Aviles, Elaine Staff Sgt. “National Volunteer Week Honors Hidden Heroes.” *Air Force Link*. 15 April 2004. Available from: <http://www.vnis.com/story.cfm?textnewsid=944>; Internet.; accessed on: 13 April 2006.

³⁵ 10th Anniversary of the American Veteran Awards “*A Race to Patriotism – Military Spouse Award Sponsored by Procter & Gamble*.” Available from: <http://www.avashow.com/awards.php>; Internet; accessed on 6 May 2006.

³⁶ Hosek, James and Beth Asch, C. Christine Fair, Craig Martin, Michael Mattock. (*Married to the Military: The Employment and Earnings of Military Wives Compared with Those of Civilian Wives*. Santa Monica: RAND, 2002), pxiv

their husbands as a method of promoting their volunteerism. The authors of the book explain to new officer and NCO wives, “you care because you are married to an officer or NCO who has chosen to serve his country as a profession. That profession is about the defense of the nation. Defense of the nation concerns soldiers. Officially, taking care of soldiers and their families concerns your spouse. Unofficially, caring for soldiers and supporting and helping their families concerns you because of this life you lead.”³⁷

Expectations that a military wife, or at least one who plans on making the military her way of life, for socializing are much the same as those for volunteering. Although the social obligations placed upon military wives are not unique to this profession as the wives of business executives and politicians experience a great deal of pressure to make social appearances, there is generally a higher level of separation between the “personal” and “professional” life within these careers. When a military wife lives on base, she is essentially living under the watchful eyes of her husband’s co-workers and bosses and thus experiences a greater pressure to “perform and please” on a continuous basis.

Air Force Wife Emily K. Wachsman said,

“Within the community we are expected to stay involved and to maintain our spouses’ presence for them while they are gone. We are expected to be involved in activities such as squadron functions and parties, and we are encouraged to take part in support activities such as organizing and donating gifts to be sent overseas. Of course, we are encouraged to do this under normal circumstances but the expectations are even higher when the spouses are deployed....Personally, I think the ‘good’ spouse is someone who volunteers around base, maintains a presence at base functions (or even better, helps organize them), and is someone who projects positively on their spouse. I frequently make an effort to meet people my husband works with, get to know them, and help them out whenever or wherever I can. In the long run, it’s good for his career, which means it’s good for family and me.”³⁸

According to Meredith Leyva, military wife and author of an advice book for military wives,

“Even in today’s world, and despite what others may tell you, socializing is absolutely critical to your servicemember’s career – not to mention the fact that it’s important for quickly meeting new friends and establishing your family in a community....Command officials often view such spouses as a real asset in providing friendship and leadership to other families in the command. This is all very unofficial, of course, and no command is legally permitted to insist that you

³⁷ Spouses of the U.S. Army War College Class of 2005. *2005 Spouse Battle Book*. (2005): leadership-3 Available from: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/dclm/milfam.htm>; Internet; accessed on 6 February 2006.

³⁸ Wachsman, Emily K. (United States Air Force Wife). Personal Email Interview. 22 May 2006.

participate, but this is one of the great unspoken rules to success in the military.”³⁹

Deployments

Military wives are expected to endure lengthy separations during which they are essentially single parents and responsible for running the household on their own. As Army wife Milisa Clark explained,

“Military wives go through so much, there are a lot of civilian spouses that don’t know what military wives go through. We take over both roles of the parents, we give birth without our husbands there to hold our hands or to look at our children for the first time. We have to learn to stay strong when we think we can’t take anymore. We learn that we have to do it ourselves because if we don’t, it won’t get done...We learn that no matter how tired and cranky and depressed we are, we can’t let our husbands know because it will just distract them and they will worry more about us than doing their jobs.”⁴⁰

Milisa was raised in the military and feels that her upbringing has not only given her advantage in understanding military life, it has helped her to succeed as a military spouse because her mother serves as the ideal role model and source of advice.

“I look back on it now and see that some of the things I did when my dad was gone were not fair to my mom. I took my pain, fear, and missing dad out on her. And she never complained. To this day, she has not complained; though she had her fears and that to go through, she was always there. I never saw her side of the picture until I married a soldier and went through a deployment for the first time...Thinking back on it all, my mother was the backbone of our family. She held us all together though; playing mediator, being both mom and dad...Now we have more respect for mom and a better understanding of what she went through and a great awe for not once did we hear her complain about the trials of military life, a very hard life.”⁴¹

Servicemembers are not only separated from their families during times of war, they are also deployed for other military missions, sea duty, unaccompanied tours (which generally last for one year), field exercises and training (ranging for a few days to several weeks). Military personnel must be available for duty at any time and work hours are often long, unpredictable and may involve

³⁹ Leyva, Meredith. *Married to the Military: A Survival Guide for Military Wives, Girlfriends, and Women in Uniform*. (New York: Fireside, 2003): 42-43

⁴⁰ Clark, Milisa. (United States Army Wife). Personal Email Interview. 27 February 2006.

⁴¹ Clark, Milisa. (United States Army Wife). Personal Email Interview. 27 February 2006.