CLOSING THE GENDER GAP – AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE RETENTION IN COMBAT ARMS BRANCHES

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Art of War Scholars

by

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For five years, the Army has implemented policies and initiatives to support gender integration into historically male-dominated environments, yet the overall numbers remain low. Recruiting efforts have moderately increased the total number of active-duty women in the Army. However, a 2020 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report stated that women are 28% more likely to leave the armed services than men. The GAO also reports that the Department of Defense (DOD) does not have a specified plan to address retention. If unaddressed, this problem could perpetuate future gender underrepresentation in senior combat arms positions. The problem of minority underrepresentation in senior leadership positions remains a DOD priority. This thesis examines the state of active-duty female retention and attrition in United States Army combat arms branches–specifically Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. Data collected through online surveys with current and former active-duty combat arms females will explore if factors unique to women in combat arms contribute to their decisions to continue or end military service. In addition, this thesis will determine if the Department of Defense should develop unique retention strategies to retain women in combat arms.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP – AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE RETENTION IN COMBAT ARMS BRANCHES, by Major Kimberly G. Brutsche, 132 pages.

For five years, the Army has implemented policies and initiatives to support gender integration into historically male-dominated environments, yet the overall numbers remain low. Recruiting efforts have moderately increased the total number of active-duty women in the Army. However, a 2020 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report stated that women are 28% more likely to leave the armed services than men. The GAO also reports that the Department of Defense (DOD) does not have a specified plan to address retention. If unaddressed, this problem could perpetuate future gender underrepresentation in senior combat arms positions. The problem of minority underrepresentation in senior leadership positions remains a DOD priority. This thesis examines the state of active-duty female retention and attrition in United States Army combat arms branches–specifically Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. Data collected through online surveys with current and former active-duty combat arms females will explore if factors unique to women in combat arms contribute to their decisions to continue or end military service. In addition, this thesis will determine if the Department of Defense should develop unique retention strategies to retain women in combat arms.

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ACRONYMS

1LT	First Lieutenant
2LT	Second Lieutenant
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
BN	Battalion
BDE	Brigade
CO	Commanding Officer/Company
COL	Colonel
CPT	Captain
DACES	Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey
DACOWITS	Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
EO	Equal Opportunity
FM	Field Manuel
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HQDA	Headquarters Department of the Army
KD	Key Development
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
MAJ	Major
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MQ	Most Qualified

NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OER	Officer Evaluation Report
PLT	Platoon
QAO	Quality Assurance Office
SHARP	Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention
WO1	Warrant Officer 1

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PREFACE

This thesis introduces an important and often misunderstood phenomenon of serving as one of the *first*, *only*, or *few* in an Army organization, with its intended audience being leaders, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) representatives, and decision-makers within the Department of Defense. It is a subject of personal interest, as my Army career contains several first-hand experiences of this phenomenon. This preface serves as a reflection of my personal career experiences in underrepresented Army environments, so that readers may better understand the inspiration behind this research. It is not an egotistic attempt at self-gratification, but an attempt to explain the significance of this study and contextualize my strategies to mitigate potential research biases in Chapter 3.

I was commissioned into Field Artillery in 2009, before the lift of the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule. People warned me of the risks of commissioning into combat arms ahead of policy change, as I could not serve in certain key developmental positions, such as a platoon leader in a cannon unit. Personal risks included warnings of sexual harassment and off-putting, sexist comments, both of which happened on a regular occurrence. Concerned more so with limited career progression, I sought creative opportunities to remain competitive with my peers. This led to my selection and training in the experimental Cultural Support Team (CST) Specialist program in 2011 and my subsequent deployment to Afghanistan with 3d Special Forces Group (A).

I conducted over 60 combat patrols with over six Operational Detachment Alphas and one Seal Air and Land team, in which my personal interactions were contingent on

the culture of each individual team and how the team leaders and team sergeants messaged our value as combat enablers, gender regardless. The program was controversial, and my fellow cultural support specialists and I received both criticism and praise from the Army and civilian communities. A notable observation of the program was that most of my fellow CSTs did not volunteer to seek glory or praise as a *trailblazer*. They saw a unique and challenging opportunity to do something different in filling a critical operational gap in Afghanistan. Despite these gender-neutral perspectives, the program was a catalytic moment in the dialogue for future combat gender integration, and shortly after our return from Afghanistan, Secretary of Defense Panetta rescinded the exclusionary rule (SecDef 2013). I left Special Operations and returned to Field Artillery.

As I returned to the conventional Army, I assumed that an elite combat deployment, combined with the rescindment of the combat exclusionary rule, would solve any reservations I had with continued service in combat arms. However, I realized I lacked mentorship in what my next professional career steps should be. I received generic career coaching or advice in group settings. Still, it did not consider my unique challenges or path as one of the few female officers serving in Field Artillery. I did not feel like many influential leaders cared enough to try and understand my experiences enough to give me genuine, helpful advice. Career fatigue set in. I was unmotivated to overcome the continuous pressure of being one of the *first* or *few* in my organization, as I wanted leaders to view me as any other officer with the potential to command and lead Soldiers. As a result, I left Field Artillery and continued my career in Air Defense Artillery.

Initially thinking I let the future Army down by not staying the course and blazing a trail, I was surprised that my decision was not out of the norm for Army women, let alone combat arms. Of the three female lieutenants I personally mentored from the first female graduates of the Armor Basic Officer Leaders Course, only one stayed beyond their initial service obligation. I remain in close contact with the 32 cultural support team women from my time in Special Operations. Of those 32, only seven remain on active duty. Like myself, these women were committed to equal opportunities for ambitious and qualified personnel, regardless of demographic.

These observations, including my firsthand experiences, sparked an interest to investigate the unique challenges of the *trailblazing* female. In this thesis, I explore the experiences of female officers who have served in combat arms occupations. I hope to discern any patterns in why females continue or end military service. There may be recognizable factors that contribute to a shiftable mindset from "why I signed up" to "why I stayed (or left)." Analyzing the experiences of women who broke barriers at the cusp of significant social change may help inform what the Army can do to better understand the challenges minorities have with serving in underrepresented fields. In doing so, leaders can better develop subordinate ambitions and help them stay the course and continue to be some of the *first* or *few*–something I was not willing to do myself.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> People are the starting point for all that we do. Today, the total Army is more diverse—the most talented and lethal force in our nation's history…We want our Army to look like our nation, and to reflect what's best of our citizens.
>
> —LTG Thomas Seamands, Testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, 2019

Chapter Introduction

The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* states, "Retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success" (SecDef 2018, 7). Nested within this strategy, *The Army People Strategy* connects retention to "Total Army readiness" (DA 2019, 3). This is because, quantitatively, retention allows the Army to maintain force strength through numbers. However, it is more than just numbers. Retention is also conducive to keeping a diverse pool of talented professionals. "Diversity" and "talent" are two critical words within the Army People Strategy's mission (DA 2019, 3). This strategy also states that it is "incumbent upon the Army to institute policies and systems" to retain "exceptional" talent and ensure leadership diversity for the future. This is especially important to consider in Army organizations that still have a perceived lack of diversity within their formations. Such formations include combat arms branches–specifically Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery. There are gaps in gender diversity in their cases, with women making up only about 1% of their military occupational specialties (MOS). This chapter introduces the current state of female retention in the armed services and how it helps define the problem of future underrepresentation of senior female leaders in combat arms branches.

Background

It has been less than ten years since the armed services officially allowed women to fill combat arms roles. In January 2013, former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta rescinded the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which outlined restrictions that excluded women from assignments within "direct ground combat units" (SecDef 1994). What immediately followed were the Military Departments' efforts to develop implementation plans that fully integrated women into all units by the prescribed deadline of January 1st, 2016 (SecDef 2013). The Department of the Army followed this guidance and, with Army Directive 2016, opened 125,318 conventional and 7,475 Special Operations positions to women (SECARMY 2016). With policy supporting the change, the Army now needed to fill the ranks with interested and qualified females.

The Army implemented the "Leaders First" approach, which assigned female officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) into combat arms units first, before their junior enlisted counterparts (Sick and Moore 2018). Each company would require two female officers or NCOs of the same combat arms MOS before units could integrate junior enlisted females. This policy intended to give junior enlisted females a role model and mentor to support their integration into these uncharted fields. However, the Army modified this approach several times since, receiving criticism that the policy, in fact, harmed gender integration (ACLU 2017). Gender integration efforts progressed slowly as fewer females were willing to commission or re-classify and transfer into combat arms roles. Major Melissa Comiskey, Command Policy Chief for the Army's Chief of Staff for Personnel, stated the reason was that "the inventory of Infantry and Armor women leaders is not as high as we have junior soldiers" (Rempfer 2020). The Army modified

“Leaders First” so that any female, E-5 or above, of any MOS could serve as a mentor. This modification would allow more junior enlisted females of combat arms-specific occupations to serve in more units.

It was clear that the Army saw professional development and mentorship as critical to the success of gender diversity and integration in combat arms. This aligns with conclusions made in 2020 by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Both reports concluded that a lack of female mentors, role models, and leader support for personal or career advancement negatively affects female servicemember retention. Despite the “Leaders First” policy’s *formal* attempt to establish female-to-female mentor relationships, the Army’s current view of mentoring is based “solely on *informal* relationships” (MLDC 2010, 1). This is a shift from pre-2005 Army doctrine, which emphasized mentoring as an inclusive action for every subordinate “under a leader’s charge” (HQDA 1999, 5-16).

Current doctrine, despite using the *verb* mentoring, more so describes the concept of the mentor as a *noun*. The mentor is one of greater experience who serves as a wise counselor for selected individuals (Thomas and Thomas 2015, 1). The word *selected* supports how Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 currently defines mentorship, which is the “voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and one of lesser experience” (HQDA 2019, 6-11). This lack of doctrinal distinction between mentoring as an *inclusive* action and the mentor as an *exclusive* individual supported criticisms of the “Leaders First” policy. The Service Women’s Action Network argued that the policy negatively messaged to leaders that the Army could relieve men of the responsibility to mentor women, or that women were the only ones qualified to

mentor other women (ACLU 2017). In either case, what was at risk was the development of women in combat arms, and the potentiality for their departure from military service.

Problem Statement

There is a gap between the Army's ability to recruit females and the Army's ability to retain them. This highlights the problem of female underrepresentation in senior leadership positions across the Army, despite their marginal success in increasing the overall force strength of women. This especially affects combat arms branches, which are now approximately seven years into their female integration efforts. Combat arms is now at a point where initially integrated women are beginning to compete for and serve in more senior positions. This introduces the main problem of this study, which is that the high turnover of women across the Army may have a drastic negative impact on the representation of women in future senior leadership positions in combat arms branches. This problem undermines current Department of Defense and Army DEI guidance.

For five years, the Army has put forth a sizeable effort to support gender integration into historically male-dominated environments, yet the numbers remain overall very low. As of 2020, there were 680 enlisted females and 260 female officers serving in Infantry or Armor slots. Comparatively, in 2020 there were 83,000 total enlisted male and male officers serving in the same capacity. In December 2020, 74,695 total women were serving in the active-duty Army. Of those women, 16,950 were officers (DMDC 2020). This means that women in Armor and Infantry were approximately 1.2% of the total female force and 1.1% of combat arms (Beynon 2020).

Despite this stark gap in representation within combat arms, the overall force strength of active-duty Army women has remained steady and increased by 6% between

2018 and 2021 (DMDC 2018; DMDC 2021). These steady numbers are due to successful Army recruiting efforts, in which women recruits increased from 17.1% to 18.1% between 2018 and 2020. However, Emma Moore, a researcher at the Center for a New American Security, said, “it’s all well and good to recruit women. But whether or not they can keep them in the service is another big question” (Britzky 2020).

A 2020 GAO report stated that women are 28% more likely to leave the armed services than men and cited it as a significant concern. Another concern the GAO noted was that the Department of Defense does not have a specified plan to address retention.

If female retention in the overall Army remains comparatively lower than males, female force strength in combat arms branches will be at risk for continued underrepresentation, as their numbers are already low compared to other branches. While the Army is still collecting data on female retention within combat arms branches, this is a problem that the Department of Defense must remain proactive on. The Military Leadership Diversity Commission has stated that lower retention of midlevel female enlisted and officer servicemembers is a major explanation for a lack of female representation in senior leader positions (MLDC 2011, XVI). If left unaddressed, this potential problem could lead to a lack of female representation in senior Infantry, Armor, and Field Artillery leader positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenological experiences of women who have served in combat arms occupations and how those experiences informed their decisions to either leave or continue military service. The phenomenon driving these experiences was Army Directive 2016-01, which fully integrated women

into combat arms and subsequently led them to be amongst the “first” in their fields (SECARMY 2016). Personal perspective was essential in understanding intangible, “human” elements, as Department of Defense exit survey data cannot capture it as quickly. Extracting patterns can inform how specific factors connect individual experiences to organizational retention (Cresswell and Poth 2016, 87).

This phenomenologically-based research was conducted through open-ended, online surveys. The survey asked participants to answer retention-based questions using a Likert scale, with companion open-ended questions to allow the participants an opportunity to further elaborate on their experiences. The study participants consisted of 85 females, from Warrant Officer 1 to Colonel, who either currently serve or have previously served in combat arms roles. These roles encompassed military occupational specialties within Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. Convenience and snowball sampling were the methods to recruit survey participants. The researcher preferred a critical case sampling method, as the overall population of women in combat arms, while limited in number, was very rich in knowledge and experience regarding their shared phenomenon (Palinkas et al. 2015, 534). Snowball sampling assisted in increasing the sample, as the overall population of females in combat arms is small. In addition, limited time and resources made it difficult to reach a larger population for recruitment opportunities.

This phenomenological study sought to describe, not explain, the experiences of combat arms women and how they related to service retention (Lester 1999, 1). Bracketing through journaling was implemented to ensure any preconceptions did not taint the research process (Tufford and Newman 2010, 80). The researcher conducted

reflexivity by documenting data collection methods and how interpretations of that data affected the researcher and the overall research process (Mackieson, Shlonsky and Connolly 2018, 967).

Primary Research Question

Participants shared how their unique experiences in combat arms informed their decisions to continue or end military service through an online survey. The research question that drove the conduct of this study was: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations?

Although close-ended, the primary research question did not limit the exploratory nature of this research study. Although a phenomenological study, its intent was not to serve as a compilation of the general experiences of females in combat arms professions. This study's design was to address Army retention. Upon completion of the research, the answer to the primary research question is no, the Army does not require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations. Chapter 5 further explains how the research led to that conclusion.

Secondary Research Questions

The online survey design considered the secondary research questions, which drove towards answering the primary question. The secondary research questions were:

1. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue service?
2. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to terminate service?

3. How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service?

This study did not pre-suppose that the Army should implement a retention approach for women in combat arms beyond what is already in place. Chapter 4 presents the data, which answered the primary question through the secondary research questions.

Hypotheses

When the Army developed the "Leaders First" approach, they believed that female officers and NCOs were essential in supporting and integrating junior enlisted females into combat arms roles. However, the Army was unable to fully realize this theory, due to the limited number of female combat arms leaders filling the ranks. In addition, criticisms that the "Leaders First" approach indirectly segregated women and relieved men of the responsibility to mentor made the idea less palatable, which led to its modification.

Studies of nonmilitary workplaces posit that increased representation decreases collective employee turnover (Maurer and Qureshi 2019, 17). The turnover of women in the Army is the defining problem in this study that results in a lack of gender representation, especially in senior-level positions. Thus, this study introduced four hypotheses:

1. More active-duty women in Army leadership positions increase female Soldier retention.

2. If a female active-duty officer or NCO is present in a female subordinate's chain of command, the subordinate is more willing to continue service.

3. If a female active-duty Soldier in combat arms knows another female employed in a similar occupation, they are more willing to continue service.

4. The less female active-duty Soldiers feel mentored, the more likely they will terminate their Army service.

These were simple hypotheses in which the dependent variables were all related to Soldier retention. They relied on female presence and mentorship as independent variables. Hypothesis 1 was more general in introducing any female leader in any Army leadership position. Hypothesis 2 was specific to the female Soldier's chain of command. Hypothesis 3 removed the leader from the independent variable and instead broadened the scope to include any female with the same combat arms occupation as the dependent variable. Hypothesis 4 introduced general mentorship from anyone as a contributing variable that manipulates retention outcomes.

With female integration into combat arms only seven years into its execution, there is no expectation that many combat arms females have advanced into senior leadership ranks and positions. There is not enough research to indicate a connection between a lack of female leader representation and retention. This study seeks to contribute to that research.

Assumptions

Due to limited information available on this topic, this study accepted a few assumptions as valid to continue the investigation. The first research assumption was that the 28% higher attrition rate for female service members compared to males equally affects all military service branches and Army-specific branches, as the researcher does not have access to comparative retention data between branches. This especially

considers that female retention issues are also proportionally similar between Army combat arms and non-combat arms branches. The research could not validate whether there was a significant retention problem for women in combat arms roles. Still, this assumption was necessary to shape recommendations for the Army to consider if it was to be proactive in its diversity and retention efforts. There may not be enough time passed since the lift of the ground combat exclusion policy to gather the data on long-term retention for women in combat arms. But to meet current Department of Defense guidance, it is a potential problem to stay ahead of. As a result, the recommendations in Chapter 5 focused on maintaining force strength and nurturing its diversity rather than solving an issue this research cannot confirm exists.

A second assumption was that female attrition occurs upon the expiration of their initial contractual obligation. Reviewing total female force strength by rank between 2018-2021 revealed that the highest concentration of females serve in O3 (Captain) and E4 (Specialist/Corporal) positions (DoD n.d.). After these ranks, the overall numbers decrease. Captain and Specialist/Corporal are the last achievable ranks for an average enlisted or officer service contract, ranging from four to five years of service. This assumption was necessary to continue examining gender underrepresentation of senior-level positions and why women who choose to leave the service do so after completing one service contract. Chapter 2 explores the literature explaining why this decrease may occur.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, there was a research assumption that the study participants would answer truthfully to the best of their recollection. The second assumption was that the online survey responses to the open-ended questions would

reveal connections to the retention factors the participants scaled, therefore providing additional context to the Likert Scale results. There is already literature on issues women servicemembers face in the Army that result in higher attrition rates as compared to males. Whether or not the participant responses can validate this assumption affected how this research's conclusions answered the primary research question.

Definition of Terms

This study uses terms that are familiar to those employed in military environments. The following definitions will provide an easier understanding of the presented research.

Combat arms. Field Manual 3-90, *Tactics* defines combat arms as "soldiers who close with and destroy enemy forces or provide firepower and destructive capabilities on the battlefield" (HQDA 2001, A-2). Although combat arms is a legacy term replaced by Operations Division branches in Army doctrine, its traditional association with direct fires in combat makes it an easily recognizable term and aids in the ease of understanding in this study. Combat arms encompass several branches. But for this study, only Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations will define combat arms.

Counseling. The process used by leaders to guide subordinates to improve performance and develop their potential (HQDA 2019, 6-10).

Diversity. "All attributes, experiences, cultures, characteristics, and backgrounds of the total force" (HQDA 2019, 4).

Equity. "The fair treatment, access, opportunity, choice, and advancement for all soldiers" (HQDA 2019, 4).

Glass ceiling. When referring to the glass ceiling, this study refers to the invisible barriers women face that prevent their ability to advance in their careers or rise to leadership positions past a certain point (Alwis 2013, 6).

Inclusion. "The process of valuing and integrating each individual's perspectives, ideas, and contributions into how an organization functions and makes decisions" (HQDA 2019, 4).

Junior enlisted Soldiers. Soldiers in the ranks of private to specialist learn, apply, and develop their technical and leadership skills in their assigned military occupation specialties (Bajza n.d.).

Mentoring. The voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect. The developing leader often initiates the relationship and seeks counsel from the mentor (HQDA 2019, 6-11).

Non-combat arms. Any Army branches that are not Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. For this study, traditionally defined combat arms branches, such as Aviation or Air Defense Artillery, will fall under non-combat arms.

Non-commissioned officers. Serving in ranks from corporal to Sergeant Major of the Army, NCOs are responsible for "conducting daily operations, executing small unit tactical operations, and making commander's intent-driven decisions" (HQDA 2019, 1-20).

Officers. Officers hold the ranks of second lieutenant to general officer. The term officers will also include warrant officers in this study. The President of the United States

or Secretary of the Army maintains the authority to commission or appoint officers to "command units, establish policy, and manage resources" (HQDA 2019, 1-20).

Readiness. The capability to support national strategy by synchronizing personnel, equipment, and weapons, so that forces can "fight and meet the demands of assigned missions" (Herrera 2020).

Retention. Retention is "the rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to stay in the military after their obligated term of service has ended" (Herrera 2021, 1).

Trailblazer. "A pioneer; a person who makes, does, or discovers something new and makes it acceptable or popular" (Merriam-Webster n.d.).

Underrepresented. When the total number of minorities employed within an organization is a lower percentage than the total number of general population employees (DoD 2020, 25).

Scope

This study aimed to describe the experiences of women who serve in combat arms occupations and how their experiences affect their decisions to either continue or terminate their military service. The sample is comprised of active-duty officers who currently or previously served in combat arms occupations, namely Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. This research narrowed the scope of combat arms to these branches due to their specification in Army Directive 2016-01, the document that lifted the combat exclusion policy (SECARMY 2016). Online surveys through Verint used both a descriptive and phenomenological approach to remain within the parameters outlined through the research questions. Research topics included the following:

1. Motivations to serve in the active-duty Army

2. Reasons for choosing to serve in combat arms

3. If the participant is a branch transfer, compare combat and non-combat arms roles

4. Positive and negative aspects of serving as a woman in combat arms

5. Reasons for choosing to continue or terminate service

6. Mentorship and how it can affect retention

7. Role modeling and how it can affect retention

Research and publication deadlines constrained the duration of this study to four months. These boundaries kept the study focused on female service in combat arms professions and how their individual experiences influence their retention decisions. However, despite the narrowed scope of this research, the Army may consider this study's findings and recommendations for broader long-term diversity and retention strategies.

Limitations

Some limitations concerned potential weaknesses out of the researcher's control (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2019). These limitations influenced the research methodology and scope. The first limitation was time. Due to research and publication deadlines, there was limited time to conduct deep statistical analysis over a larger population of women, including expanded definitions of combat arms. It constrained the study to qualitatively draw on the experiences of a smaller participant pool. Therefore, the insights drawn from these experiences will only present general recommendations for the Army to consider. The subjects provide insight into the population of combat arms women but are not representative of all of them.

Another limitation was the lack of long-term research on female retention in combat arms. Gender integration into combat arms is only seven years into its execution, and the DOD's Defense Management Data Center did not start deliberately tracking women-specific data until 2018 (DMDC 2018). There is literature on gender integration into combat arms. However, it primarily addresses general leadership, individual challenges, and recruiting data. There has not been enough time to extract definitive conclusions on female retention in combat arms.

Delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed restrictions concerned with the narrow scope of this study (Miles 2019). This study only describes the experiences of female officers employed in combat arms roles within Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. This is due to their specification in Army Directive 2016-01, the document that lifted the combat exclusion policy (SECARMY 2016). These branches were also the focus of effort for the Army's "Leader's First" initiative. In addition, time limitations and lacking access to the greater female population of the Army delimited this study's focus to officers. This study will also not consider women involuntarily separated from the Army. It is not to invalidate their experiences. However, this focuses on choices and how individual experiences inform said choices. This study also delimits itself to gender-specific issues and does not cover intersectional topics, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. Chapter 5 recommends that the Army study these topics in the future to better understand even more nuanced perspectives regarding diversity and retention.

Significance of the Study

The Department of Defense recognizes that diversity and inclusion are "fundamental necessities to force readiness and mission success" (DoD 2020, 4). This study does not argue for or against the potential adverse or advantageous effects of women serving in combat arms positions. Gender integration is a well-established policy that aligns with DOD guidance to build DEI into the organizations (SecDef 2021). However, the DOD also observes "persistent underrepresentation" of minority populations in senior leader positions (DoD 2020, viii). A gap between the current and desired end state is evident in the ongoing higher attrition rate for female service members than males.

For women to rise to influential leadership positions in combat arms branches, they must continue service and be resilient through potential barriers. Retaining and nurturing diverse talent to overcome proverbial "glass ceilings" is how the Army can fill the gap between representation and underrepresentation. The benefit of doing so is creating a smarter and more lethal team (Grinston 2021). Also, it creates an institution that, as Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley says, "is a place where all Americans see themselves represented and have equal opportunity to succeed, especially in leadership positions" (Brook 2020). This is a strategic imperative (DoD 2020).

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the current state of female retention in the armed services and how it helps define the problem of future underrepresentation of senior female leaders in combat arms branches. Through the topics outlined in the scope of this study, this qualitative, phenomenological approach describes the experiences of women who

have served as some of the *first* or *few* in combat arms; and, subsequently, how those experiences affected their desire to serve in the Army. The secondary research questions provided the qualitative data necessary to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? This study intended to provide a concrete recommendation to the Department of the Army as they develop their diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies beyond 2025. Chapter 2 examines the current literature on female combat arms integration and female servicemember retention to create a framework that will shape Chapter 3's methodologies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

Combat arms gender integration is only seven years into its execution. This leads to a limitation of available literature that explicitly addresses female service retention in these branches. As a result of this limitation, this literature review uses the secondary research questions as a framework to study related topics, such as the current state of female representation in the Army, factors that influence female retention in the armed services, and the phenomenon of being a *trailblazer* or minority. This study does not attempt to explain the effects of gender integration on Army readiness or combat effectiveness. Instead, this study explores the impact of current integration on Army combat arms retention and attrition. As a result, it provides the context necessary to answer the primary research question in Chapter 5: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations?

Current State of Female Representation in the United States Army

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness published a 2019 demographics and service report with data pulled from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). The report concluded that in fiscal year (FY) 2019, female active-duty representation in the Army reached 18% of the total force (Table 1). Also, female active-duty enlisted representation across the Department of the Defense reached its 12th year of consecutive growth. It was the 11th consecutive year for officer ranks (USD (P&R) 2019a, 6). The Population and Representation report credits DOD recruiting

efforts as the primary reason for female representation in the military trending upwards. However, despite these increases in female representation across the DOD over the last 11-12 years, there is an overrepresentation of female junior officer paygrades (O1-O3), while there is a consistent underrepresentation of mid-level (O4-O6) and senior (O7+) grades (USD (P&R) 2019,a 41). In 2019, 305 service members held general officer ranks. Of those 305 general officers, 23 (7.5%) were women (USD (P&R) 2019a).

Table 1 Active Component Enlisted Members FY 19

Table B-36. Active Component Enlisted Members, FY19: by Paygrade, Service, and Gender

Number

	PAYGRADE										
GENDER	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	Unknown	TOTAL
ARMY											
Males	22,214	22,403	41,681	93,059	57,875	48,693	31,387	9,798	3,180	0	330,290
Females	4,154	4,323	7,947	17,119	10,200	7,055	4,195	1,448	344	0	56,785
Total	**26,368**	**26,726**	**49,628**	**110,178**	**68,075**	**55,748**	**35,582**	**11,246**	**3,524**	**0**	**387,075**
Percent Females	15.75	16.18	16.01	15.54	14.98	12.66	11.79	12.88	9.76	-----	14.67

Table B-38. Active Component Commissioned Officer Corps, FY19: by Paygrade, Service, and Gender

Number

	PAY GRADE											
GENDER	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6	O7	O8	O9	O10	Unknown	TOTAL
ARMY												
Males	7,945	8,764	22,787	12,528	7,414	3,536	117	110	42	13	0	63,256
Females	2,285	2,275	5,714	2,978	1,405	487	13	8	2	0	0	15,167
Total	**10,230**	**11,039**	**28,501**	**15,506**	**8,819**	**4,023**	**130**	**118**	**44**	**13**	**0**	**78,423**

Source: USD (P&R) 2019a, 57, 76.

The growth in female representation spans all occupational areas for all service components. This includes direct combat-related positions, which the DMDC encompasses under the titles “Infantry, Gun Crews, & Seamanship” for enlisted Soldiers and “Tactical Operations” for officers. Compared to the total number of service members within combat arms-related occupations (both male and female), women have marginally increased their total representation between FY14 and FY19 (Figure 1). The highest

percentage increase within a single year was between FY15 to FY16 (0.74%) for officers and FY16 to FY17 (0.57%). In this report, these combat arms-related categories are the least represented occupational categories for females. Conversely, health care and administration-related occupations are the most represented. In 2019, enlisted females comprised 33.32% of the total force of administrators in the military. Female officers comprised 38.6% of the total force of health care professionals in the military (USD (P&R) 2019a, 55, 75).

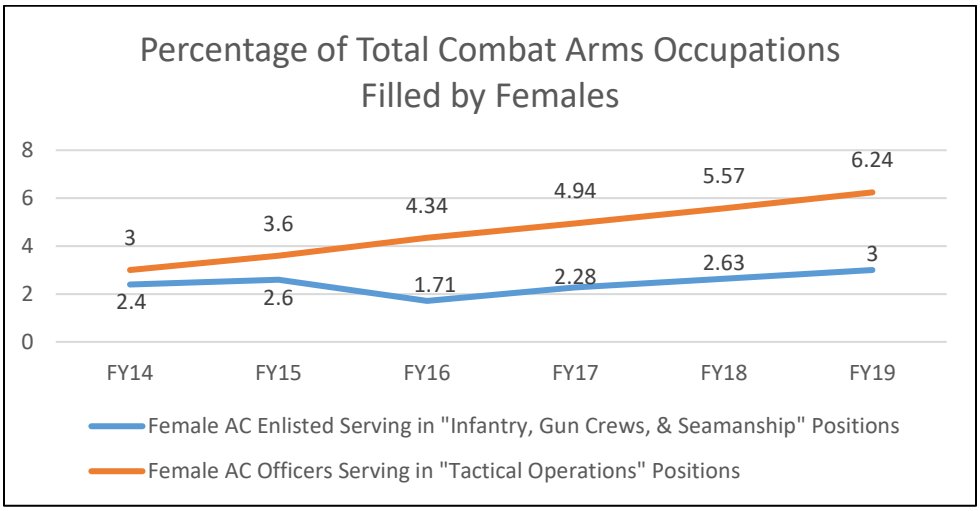

Figure 1 Percentage of Total Combat Arms Occupations Filled by Females

Source: Created by author based on USD (P&R) 2019a, Tables 19-B, 18-B, 17-B, 16-B, 15-B, 14-B for FY14-FY19.

In 2014, prior to the lift of the direct combat exclusion policy, the Army surveyed female Soldiers to gauge their interest in joining direct combat jobs. Survey results showed that 7.5% of the 30,000 female participants said they would want an Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, or Combat Engineer job (Baldor 2014). In 2016, former Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey wrote a memo to the force asking female NCOs and

officers to voluntarily transfer into combat arms, stating, “As young soldiers do, they will look for leadership and mentorship from their superiors. Unfortunately, we have not had a sufficient number of serving female soldiers and [noncommissioned officers] volunteer to transfer into these mentorship and leadership roles” (Portillo 2021).

The HQDA gender integration implementation plan specifies that talent management comprises recruiting, retaining, and advancing. Every year, HQDA would report a detailed description of recruiting and retention efforts to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (HQDA 2016, 13). However, the Talent Management Annex within this order focuses solely on recruiting and accessions (HQDA 2016, C-22). In 2020, the GAO reported on this DOD gap, stating that “services do not have plans that include goals, performance measures, or timeframes to guide and monitor current or future efforts to recruit and retain female active-duty servicemembers” (GAO 2020).

Factors That Could Influence Females’ Decisions to Leave Military Service

Despite the Government Accountability Office reporting that females maintained higher attrition rates than males, there is limited literature addressing the specific factors that influence women to leave military service. The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) reported that service branches are inconsistent with collecting, analyzing, and reporting “meaningful and accurate” data on female retention (DACOWITS 2020, 22). Military Services’ exit surveys employ different methodologies and, as a result, are difficult to compare. This leads to a lack of identifiable trends or patterns that could develop actionable steps to improve retention (DACOWITS 2020, 22). This literature review relies heavily on qualitative data to assess potential factors influencing females’ decisions to terminate military service.

Female Army officers were more likely than males to separate immediately after completing their initial service obligation (DACOWITS 2017, 21). Three themes drawn from interviews and survey data have remained consistent over the last 30 years. These themes are discrimination, career limitations, and family considerations. There are two pieces of literature reviewed that heavily addressed these topics. The first is a 1992 study by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, which studied female captains promotable to major. The second is the 2020 Government Accountability Office report that details guidance and plans needed for female active-duty retention efforts.

Female officers discussed career-specific difficulties as a reason why they chose to leave the service. Such difficulties include "glass ceiling limitations" of career-advancing jobs and assignments, poor evaluations, and being passed over for promotions or Command and General Staff College (Steinberg, Harris and Scarville 1993, 1, 9). The studies also discuss general work schedule issues and how they cause disproportionate work-life balance problems. Family considerations are another dominant factor influencing female attrition, exacerbating career limitations as a concern.

Family considerations are the most prevalent reasons influencing women to leave military service; 67% of captains who participated in the 1992 study credited conflict between their family and their career as a reason they wanted to leave the military (Steinberg, Harris and Scarville 1993, 9-10). In a focus group of 54 female officers, 94% stated that deployments negatively affected their spouses and children, while 85% mentioned the negative career impacts of poorly timed pregnancies (GAO 2020, 29). In addition, with nearly "half of married active-duty female service members (44.9

percent)" having a spouse also in the military, co-location policies have a significant impact on servicewomen, who, compared to male servicemembers, feel they have to shoulder the burden of parenthood and family care plans (DACOWITS 2017, 13).

Unsupportive leaders who undermine or dismiss family needs exemplify how toxic organizational climates affect retention. Gender discrimination or sexism inside an "old boy's network" are additional examples explaining organizational climate as the third reason why women choose to leave military service (DACOWITS 2020, 28). In the 1992 study, 46% of officers cited gender discrimination, and 13% cited sexual harassment as one of several factors for their choice to separate from the Army. Female service members noted unequal treatment based on their gender, even though they felt they were working harder to prove themselves (GAO 2020, 29). In addition to discriminatory actions or behaviors by individuals within their organizations, women also discussed institutional discrimination. For example, the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 applied only to civilians (Seck 2020). Also, the first version of the Army Combat Fitness Test sought gender neutrality, but its criticisms included the Army's inability to account for physiological differences between men and women (DACOWITS 2017, 30).

Overall, career limitations, family considerations, and personal and institutional discrimination affect female retention in the military. In addition, both past and current female servicemembers feel that a lack of leadership support and mentorship exacerbated these challenges and made them much more challenging to navigate. Compounding this desire for understanding leadership is the lack of female mentors, role models, and

leaders available to female servicemembers (GAO 2020, 29). An interviewed female Air Force officer stated in a RAND study,

> My O-6 is the first female I've seen at that level with a family. Most are divorced or single or don't have kids. It's sending a message. If you want to be Gen Grosso, what do you have to give up to get there? It's hard for us or me to say I can be in that position and still have a happy husband and a family when I don't see that reflected. I haven't seen a female group commander like me; I don't think, ever! (Keller et al. 2018, 29)

This anecdote is an example of self-stereotyping, in which tokens may stereotype their own demographic and, as a result, highlight how starkly different they are from the in-group. This Air Force officer believes that a woman who prioritizes a husband and family cannot easily climb the ranks of a general officer, as there is a self-developed "prototype" of the kinds of people qualified to hold those positions. Without current support or exposure to a visible representation of a future career path, women may choose not to pursue career-advancing opportunities. They may also be more inclined to leave military service.

Factors That Could Influence Females' Decisions to Continue Military Service

As was the case for why women leave the military, there is limited research directly related to the reasons why women continue to serve. This section will use a DACOWITS study to examine female propensity for career continuation. Two studies that use Air Force data to address the topic of female retention factors will subsequently follow. In addition to examining female officer attrition, the 1992 U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences study also surveyed what could have influenced the participants to continue service. A 2019 study of Air Force officers made connections between family support, career satisfaction, and retention. Factors that could

positively influence women to continue military service are categorically similar to the themes that motivate them to terminate service. Career-enhancing opportunities, command support of family considerations, and accountability to identify and eliminate discrimination are all factors that affect females' retention decisions.

Studies show that travel, education, and helping others and their communities were more likely to motivate women than men. These are common reasons for women to enter military service (Dicter 2014, 190). A 2019 Air Force survey study reported thematically similar results, listing patriotism, GI Bill benefits, tuition assistance, and choice of job assignments/locations in the top eight of 20 factors. Other career-related factors for female officer retention included command opportunities, promotions, and career flexibility, such as branch transfers or sabbaticals (Steinberg, Harris and Scarville 1993, 11).

Organizational and command support of servicemember needs were contributing factors to military retention. In "Retaining Women Air Force Officers: Work, Family, Career Satisfaction, and Intentions," King et al. observe that the greater command support one receives, the more satisfied the service member is with the "Air Force way of life." This increases one's intention to continue military service (King et al. 2020, 689). One participant in a 2018 RAND study described her thoughts on a leader's influence on servicemember retention as the following, "Really good leadership that's supportive. If you have good leadership, you're more likely to stay in, and crappy leadership, more likely to get out. If it's a toxic environment, that could be the tipping point" (Keller et al. 2018, 28). Command support incorporates leaders from the lowest to the highest echelons

and encompasses specific elements, such as mentorship, accountability, and understanding of family or career needs.

Mentorship and visible female role models positively affect motivation, with female officers stating that mentorship is an essential factor in career success (Keller et al. 2018, xi). In potentially hostile or toxic environments, maintaining accountability and enforcing policy are how organizations can demonstrate support to their service members. For example, in a 1992 Army Research Institute study, officers stated they might have been convinced to continue service if their command handled sexual harassment issues fairly and not victim-blamed. With family considerations being a principal reason why women choose to get out, improved childcare facilities, approving career intermission requests, and homesteading support are examples of how commands can make family life compatible with military life (King et al. 2020, 689). Exiting Army officers from the 1992 study suggested that if the Army is to retain women, then they must not be hypocritical and "do something about the issues," and not just surveys (Steinberg, Harris and Scarville 1993, 11). Overall, following through on policy and guidance that espouses inclusivity and leader development of diverse talent is an important form of command support that can influence women to want to stay in the military.

Impacts of Being One of the First Females in a Military Organization

This study sought to understand if there are significant differences in female experiences in the military, depending on the level of representation of their organizations and how long those organizations have been gender-integrated. In 1977, Rosabeth Kanter wrote about her theory of tokenism in the *American Journal of*

Sociology, in which a *token* is a member of a specific demographic population that comprises 15% or less of an entire group. The word *token* describes underrepresented groups "because they are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals" (Kanter 1977, 966). Females comprise 23.9% of the total number of Army officers across the entire Army, thereby passing the *token* criteria. However, only 8.6% of total Armor and Infantry officers are women, meaning they still fall within the *token* threshold. What are the experiences of women who serve as *trailblazers* within their professional careers, and how may those experiences inform their decisions to continue or terminate service?

There is a lack of academic studies on the career impacts of being a *trailblazer* woman within male-dominated professions in the armed services. This is especially the case for females serving in Army combat arms branches. News articles and first-person anecdotes from women are the primary sources of literature describing this phenomenon. To provide context to shape the research methodology, this study expanded the definition of combat arms for this section of the literature. This section will include anecdotes of trailblazing women from military branches that historically employed women in a direct combat capacity. These include aviation and the Marine Corps.

In Kanter's study, she notes "visibility" as a phenomenon that generates male perceptions when they are the dominant gender demographic in a group. This means that tokens have higher visibility, capturing a larger awareness due to their rarity (Kanter 1977, 971). Women are subject to their acts serving as "symbolic consequences" that "could affect the prospects for other women (Kanter 1977, 973)." These women are not

individuals but rather are a general representation of women in the workforce. As such, they must work harder to prove their competence.

Several anecdotes of female military trailblazers support the visibility phenomenon. Major (Retired) Lisa Clark was the Air Force's first female B-52 Bomber navigator in 1996. She stated that she just wanted to "blend in" and "not draw attention" to herself. She felt pressure to do well to combat the stereotype that women are a distraction (Kennedy 2018). Likewise, in a 2021 study of female fighter pilots, participants stated that they had to achieve a higher standard due to their only status, as they could not afford to make the same mistakes the males could. They were subject to more scrutiny because they did not have the luxury of blending in. One female pilot stated, "…Not everybody that gets to fighters is meant to be a fighter pilot. But if you have five girls that have bad experiences because they struggle flying—I mean 5 out of 10 is 50%..." (Engel 2021). Major Nargis Kabiri, the first female Field Artillery commander for the 3rd Infantry Division, stated, "I thought that if I messed up, not only would that mistake be magnified because of my gender but also that I would ruin the opportunity for other females to be in artillery" (Garbarino 2017). In these three examples, these female *trailblazers* felt pressure to perform to a higher standard, as they represented more than just themselves. They felt as if they represented all women.

Stereotyped role induction is a subset of the interaction dynamics of assimilation; a second phenomenon Kanter theorizes influences male perceptions of female tokens. In this case, males categorize females into roles they can understand. The first role is the nurturing, emotional *mother*. The second is the attractive *seductress* that seeks favors or male competition for her attention. The third role is the cute *pet* accompanying the group

that does not have a meaningful part in the work. The *iron maiden* is the last stereotypical role, which categorizes "strong" women. Suppose a woman displayed behavior that deliberately contradicts the formerly mentioned typecasts, such as refusing to flirt or confronting unequal treatment. In that case, males may consider her a problem they should keep distance from (Kanter 1977, 982-984). If the males cannot maintain their distance from the "problematic" female, they must eliminate her to maintain order. Elimination strategies may come in the form of wage inequality, harassment, or career hindrance (Kurt and Sürgevil 2020, 88).

A woman recounts how she was typecasted as the first female officer in her Marine Corps unit. She shared that while planning a physical fitness event, someone suggested she could be the "cheerleader," thus confirming Kanter's *pet* stereotype. She confronted the offending party about the inappropriateness of the behavior. This same officer shared that at a future unit event, a male peer and his wife said that, despite that initial *confrontation*, she was not a "bitch" after all (Katzenberg 2019). The second part of this anecdote confirms the *iron maiden* stereotype, as the male officer and his wife negatively perceived her as problematic for correcting sexist behavior.

Overall, these conditions indicate implications for serving as a token within a group. Gauen et al. discuss social attraction theory, which argues that visible commonalities in groups influence their social identity, which establishes the evaluation criteria for their organization. For example, a male-dominated organization may shape norms and practices that make communication, conflict management, organizational values, and leader prototypes favor men over women (van Vianen and Fischer 2002, 316). Therefore, tokens are subject to more scrutiny and disproportionate expectations

than dominants. To preserve this dominant proportion, men may block women from either entering or promoting within the group (Seo, Huang and Han 2017, 40). An additional impact of this group dynamic is that to assimilate, tokens can become self-deprecating, self-loathing, or even hostile to other tokens (Kanter 1977, 988). Other literature describes this phenomenon as "queen bee behavior," in which women resort to misogynistic behavior so male dominants recognize them as equals, thus improving their standing in a male-dominated organization. Therefore, they strive to set themselves apart from other women by evaluating each other harshly and negatively (Rones and Steder 2019, 32).

At a leadership panel, a higher-ranking female fighter pilot shared her disdain for females that poison the overall perspective of females (Engel 2021, 90). Another female fighter pilot in the audience identified with this behavior, stating the following:

> Like, if I see a female airman-- I'm way harder on a female Airman than I am like a male Airman. I definitely think like there's a stereotype… So, I've had to like release myself of that. I'm always doing my best. But it shouldn't be because I'm trying to like change somebody's opinion of females in their squadron. And I get caught up in that. (Engel 2021, 90)

Captain Kristen Griest, one of the first women to graduate from Army Ranger School and the first female Infantry officer, has recently been active in advocating for women to train and perform in the previously gender-neutral version of the Army Combat Fitness Test. However, her opinion pieces have come under heavy scrutiny. Female veterans have criticized Griest for her "internalized misogyny" and fear of being "that girl" or not "tough enough" (Lamothe 2021; Beum 2021). Whether these criticisms are valid or not, these authors' perspectives support the theory of the queen bee phenomenon. To survive

and thrive as a token female in a male-dominated environment means potentially positioning oneself to harshly judge or criticize other women.

There is minimal academic research on the physical or psychological impacts of being a trailblazer. However, the tokenism theory provides a foundation to introduce some potential factors to consider, supported by the anecdotal experiences of trailblazing women who have publicly shared their stories. Regardless of specific phenomena, military women find themselves in a stressful environment to perform in and, as a result, bear the burden of compensating for the proportional imbalances within their units' social demographics through their performance or attitude. Kanter argues that these dynamics "perpetuate the system that keeps members of the token's category in short supply; the presence of a few tokens does not necessarily pave the way for others–in many cases, it has the opposite effect." (Kanter 1977, 988)

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to addressing the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? The literature provides context to answer secondary research questions about what factors contribute to the decisions of combat arms females to continue or terminate service, as well as the potential impacts of serving in a *token* status. Recent quantitative data about female force strength numbers indicate continued underrepresentation of females both in combat arms-related occupations and senior Army leader ranks and positions. This underrepresentation continues to make women in the military services appear as "rare" and, according to the theory of tokenism, susceptible to scrutiny, discrimination, or ostracization from the leading group. Several pieces of

literature attempt to identify and explain why women chose to leave military service. For example, family planning factors and a lack of female role models or mentors can contribute to attrition. Inversely, females might choose to continue military service when incentivized through career opportunities, career flexibility, or command support. Interviews with women considered trailblazers in their respective fields shared that their experiences in male-dominated environments influenced their career aspirations. Some chose not to pursue promotions or relegate themselves to "women's work."

Former Secretary of Defense Carter stated that talent management is a key concern in gender integration. Acknowledging the challenges for female aspirations to pursue careers in an underrepresented environment, he says the Army must balance a merit-based system that deliberately retains advancing women (Carter 2018). This literature review more directly discusses these potential challenges affecting female aspiration and, in doing so, contextualizes the problem of ongoing military mid-grade female retention. These issues could negatively affect Army combat arms branches and their abilities to have female representation in senior leader positions – thereby not meeting the vision of *The Army People Strategy*. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed overview of the research methodology that will enable this study to examine this potential problem further.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

Chapter 2 summarized literature on the status of women serving in combat-related occupations, the potential impacts of general underrepresentation within a large group, and how those impacts affect whether women choose to stay or leave an organization. The following research methodology analyzed the individual experiences of combat arms women to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? This study sought to contribute to the topic of career continuation for females in combat arms, which is an area still lacking in research. The secondary research questions provided the data needed to answer the primary question:

1. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue service?
2. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to terminate service?
3. How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service?

Qualitative Methodology

This research used open-ended online surveys to collect data on the phenomenological experiences of women previously or currently serving in combat arms occupations. The phenomenon that connects the study's participants is serving as one of

the first or few women in combat arms in the wake of the Army's gender integration and its degree of success in retaining women (Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989, 262). The small population of women serving in combat arms branches, relative to female service in the overall Army, was the main factor in implementing a qualitative methodology. The online survey utilized a combination of Likert scale and open-ended questions to give participants an opportunity to express their perspectives on the state of their military service.

This methodology's benefit was it allowed for the exploration of diverse perspectives within a homogenous pool of participants, yielding more nuanced information that is not suited to epistemic theoretic construction (Choy 2014, 102; Flyvbjerg 2006, 221). The questions or response options did not presuppose what topics the subjects should have considered. There were opportunities within the online survey for participants to discuss matters most important to them (Yauch and Studel 2003, 470). Participants had the option to give extraneous detail in every open-ended comment block. They equally had the opportunity to only answer the Likert-based questions and provide no additional feedback. This created enough flexibility for the subjects to answer the questions to their level of comfortability and their time available. This study hoped that their input revealed how possible underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions of combat arms organizations influenced retention or attrition decisions. Such insights may validate this study's hypotheses or construct new ones for future research. Additionally, conclusions drawn from this research will be helpful in informing policy, evaluating programs, and "playing an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base" (Reis n.d.).

A constrained publication timeline was this study's predominant research limitation. Utilizing structured, open-ended online surveys was a strategy to give the study enough qualitative data to analyze the phenomenon without overwhelming the research. However, this meant that the research was dependent on quality survey responses. A potential weakness with using an open-ended online survey was the risk of nonresponses. Research suggests that open-ended questions within online surveys have higher rates of nonresponses than other survey questions (Miller and Lambert 2014, 1). The use of Likert Scale questions provided an opportunity to still obtain data from participants that may have lacked the motivation to write long responses. The voluntary nature of the study also mitigated the risk of participants not answering questions, as those who participated chose to of their own volition.

Another weakness of this qualitative approach was that the data was not "objectively verifiable." As biases can affect data manipulation and results, the study was subject to the researcher's integrity (ACAPS 2012). This study cannot objectively prove that the data collected from a homogenous group can genuinely represent the expanded population (McLeod 2019). Maxwell (2004) agrees that qualitative inquiry cannot capture reality. The dependence on context makes the research's validity "a goal rather than a product," as "it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted" (Maxwell 2004, 105). This assertion, combined with the limited study population, resulted in outcomes that this study could not generalize to a greater population of women serving in combat arms. However, the study's outcomes provided insight into individual experiences and identified potential trends for continued future research.

Participants

The study required a relatively homogenous participant pool. Using convenience sampling, the following criteria screened participants to be eligible for the study:

1. Female (as stated on Army records)
2. Current or former active-duty U.S. Army officer (with a rank from Warrant Officer 1 to Colonel)
3. Held/Holds employment in a combat arms occupation (Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Special Operations)
4. If separated from the Army, it must have been done voluntarily

The limited overall population of female officers serving in combat arms roles constrained the total number of participants eligible for this study. A closed social media group, comprised of only current and female Army officers, was the primary venue to conduct convenience and snowball sampling. Women who knew of the study or volunteered to participate were welcome to share the recruiting message (Appendix B) within their own communities, thereby also reaching additional subjects that met the criteria, but may not use social media (QuestionPro n.d.).

Data Collection

The use of open-ended online surveys was the primary method to explore the individual, phenomenological experiences of the study participants. The Combined Arms Center Quality Assurance Office (QAO) approved Verint, a secure website approved for survey research, for use in this study. QAO inputted the online survey questions into the Verint program and provided the researcher with a website link for distribution.

Subjects received instructions prior to beginning the online survey that included an informed consent statement. The informed consent statement included the purpose and scope of the study, a warning that the questions could potentially trigger upsetting memories, an assurance of confidentiality, and the website for mental health services through Military OneSource. The consent statement required participants to review its content prior to beginning the online survey, in which clicking the "begin" button served as both the acknowledgment of the survey's conditions and an agreement to its terms (Appendix C). The online survey took an estimated one hour to complete.

The online survey included a combination of open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and questions using the Likert Scale (Appendix D). The questions' designs considered survey bias, an example of which would be consistently asking about experiences from a negative perspective. There were no time limits or limits on how much the participants could write. The first section asked demographical, multiple-choice questions that addressed participant eligibility and the respondent's general nature of service. The questions branched into different routes, depending on the provided answers. For example, question number one asked the subject if she is still serving in the active-duty Army. If the participant answered yes, subsequent questions asked her about her continuation of military service. If the participant responded no, follow-up questions were asked about her termination of military service.

The second section asked questions utilizing the Likert Scale from one to five, ranging from "extremely not important" to "extremely important." These questions directly addressed secondary research questions one and two, as the questions asked why the subject chose to continue or end military service. Participants selected a response that

reflected the importance of several factors on their decisions to continue or end military service. The survey's retention factors referenced varied sources from the literature review and covered topics such as patriotism, education, mentorship, health, evaluations, and other workplace factors. Retention factors outlined in the 2021 Department of the Army Career Engagement survey shaped most of the factors used in this survey (U.S. Army n.d.). In doing so, this study has a direct parallel to ongoing Army retention efforts.

The third section utilized the Likert Scale from one to five, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These questions directly addressed secondary research question three, as the questions asked for answers specific to the phenomenological experience of being one of the *first* or *only* women in their combat arms occupation (i.e., a trailblazer). The survey defines the term *trailblazer* in the same way this study defines it, to ensure every participant approached the question with a shared definition. The questions then asked about their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences about serving in combat arms, ensuring the questions varied between both positive and negative experiences to reduce question bias. An open-ended comment box accompanied each Likert Scale question and requested the subject to expound upon their answer. For example, a question asked if the Army should implement strategies specific to retaining women in combat arms. The accompanying comment box requested that if the subject agrees, to list any recommended strategies or factors the Army should consider. If she disagreed, the subject had the opportunity to explain why.

The fourth section was an open comment box that requested the subjects to write any stories, thoughts, or ideas they were willing to share that did not fit within the scope of the questions already asked. This served as an opportunity for the subjects to address

topics the research may not have considered. There was an additional statement in this section that assured the subject that the researcher would de-identify any personally identifiable information before the publication of the research.

The Quality Assurance Office and the researcher conducted a "pilot survey" prior to the release of the live survey, to test "both the instrument and the survey procedures" (Levy and Lemeshow 1999, 7). An Instructional Systems Specialist with the QAO monitored the online survey's activity.

Data Evaluation and Analysis

This study relied on the researcher to be the primary instrument for data analysis. QAO downloaded the completed survey results from Verint and redacted any personally identifiable information, such as phone numbers or e-mails participants offered. The research followed a descriptive statistical strategy that assessed the measures of central tendency for the subjects' responses to the Likert Scale questions. For responses to the open-ended questions, a phenomenological approach made meaning of the subjects' lived experiences and their perceptions of the phenomenon of being a combat arms female (Qutoshi 2008). These strategies followed LeCompte's method of doing analysis (LeCompte 2000, 148).

The Quality Assurance Office first extracted the data into several outputs, organized categorically by response for subsequent coding. Second, text queried responses analyzed overall keyword frequency. Based on the retention factors participants scaled in section two of the survey, qualitative answers, such as thematic responses, words, or phrases, were calculated using pre-coded structures. Researcher-generated tables organized both qualitative and quantitative responses into groups,

assembling similar items into taxonomies. An example taxonomy was “Equal Opportunity,” which included topics about policy, discrimination response, career progression perceptions, or feelings of inclusion and exclusion. This process was done in three steps. The first step was to query for the exact wording of pre-coded phrases. The second step expanded the query to include stemmed words, synonyms, and specializations. The third step was a manual review of the data relevant to the taxonomies. The researcher grouped taxonomies into themes that revealed potential patterns based on the demographic information provided in section one of the survey.

The thematic analysis provided a systematic framework for inductive reasoning with the large data set. Potentially identified variables could have influenced the participants’ diverse phenomenological experiences (Alhojailan 2012, 40), although not frequently enough to infer a generalization to the overall population. Inductive thematic analysis was well-suited for “examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (Nowell et al. 2017, 2). This flexibility is advantageous given the diversity of the subjects’ perspectives.

However, the flexibility in the analytic approach produced concerns of potential incoherence or bias in data interpretation, both of which risk the study’s empirical claims or epistemological position (Nowell et al. 2017, 2). Content and construct validity were the two primary methods to establish trustworthiness in the data analysis (Roberts, Dowell and Nie 2019, 2), and detailed, reflexive accounts maintained study integrity, rigor, and validity. The following chart (Figure 2) uses Lincoln and Guba’s trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to

outline the process of this study's data analysis and how it maintained analytic integrity (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 301-327).

Thematic Analysis Process

Data Analysis Step	Means to Maintain Analytic Integrity
1. Survey responses are counted for the frequency in which certain responses appear. Highlight the content for future coding.	- Document reflective thoughts and potential themes; do not make any interpretations of raw data - Prolong data engagement - Referential adequacy (archiving)
2. Create initial taxonomies that sum up the meaning of highlighted content.	- Peer debriefing - Coding framework - Triangulation (sources, methods, investigators) - Dependability audit - Reflexive journal
3. Cluster repeated taxonomies into patterned themes.	- Triangulation - Visual diagramming of theme connections - Reflexive journal
4. For responses to open-ended responses, narrate themes with direct quotations from transcribed response.	- Peer debriefing - Committee consensus on themes - Confirmability audit
5. Produce the report with themes from "across-participants" analysis.	- Peer debriefing - Reflexive journal - Document report on dependability and confirmability audit

Figure 2 Thematic Analysis Process

Source: Created by author based on collective research from Nowell et. al. 2017, 4; Lincoln and Guba 1985, 301-327; Capella University n.d.

Ethical Considerations

As this study required human research, it also required adherence to the following three basic ethical principles prescribed in the Belmont Report: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (NCPHS 1978). The researcher maintained the responsibility to "safeguard the interests of those involved or affected by this work" (British Sociological Association 2002, 2).

Data collection that requires subjects to recount past experiences can potentially subject them to psychological harm. There can be consequences of having subjects talk about potentially sensitive topics related to their personal experiences, such as sexual harassment, discrimination, or other circumstances that trigger undesired thoughts or emotions (UCI n.d.). Divulging personal information about their experiences may also cause emotional distress, embarrassment, or frustration. It was the ethical duty of the researcher to proactively identify and mitigate as many potential risks as possible and disclose the potential risks to the study subjects.

The survey required every participant to review an informed consent statement that disclosed that the study might include questions or topics that stimulate unwanted feelings or emotions, such as frustration, sadness, anxiety, or irritability (TC Columbia n.d.). The consent statement and recruiting message also explicitly stated that the study was 100% voluntary, and at any time, the subject could terminate the survey without prejudice. The researcher would safeguard the participants from an invasion of privacy with a confidentiality statement, stating the researcher would de-identify any potentially identifiable information. In addition, the researcher would carefully and securely archive all sensitive research material. Third parties would not have access to the survey's data and results, except the agencies that enforce the legal and ethical guidelines for research. The final statement was an acknowledgment that the subject had read the form, understood its contents, and by clicking the "begin" button, they would consent to the terms of the research.

This research methodology's approval and the approval for the use of human subjects for data collection were subject to the guidance and recommendations of the Thesis Committee Chair and Human Protections Director.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the study's research methodology of using an online survey to collect data through a descriptive and phenomenological approach. The survey screened volunteers based on a list of selection criteria to ensure the responses fell within this study's scope. Academic integrity, trustworthiness, and ethical safeguarding of the study subjects served as the cornerstone of this research methodology. Thematic analysis of key survey responses will begin to answer this study's research questions. Chapter 4 will present the data collected and its subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Chapter Introduction

This study examined the phenomenon of serving as a female in selected combat arms branches and how those experiences informed their decisions to continue or leave military service. Chapter 1 proposed a potential problem of underrepresentation of senior female leaders in combat arms, which is a problem the GAO reports as a continuing trend (GAO 2020). The research seeks to understand the circumstances that could exacerbate this potential problem, in the hope of proposing solutions or mitigations. Chapter 2 contextualized this topic further. It provided an overview of the current state of female representation in the Army, their state of retention, and the possible impacts of serving as a *token* in a gender-underrepresented environment. Chapter 3 discussed the qualitative methodology used to answer the primary research question. This chapter will discuss the research survey results and present the findings to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations?

The chapter presents the data's results in three sections. The first section will discuss the demographics of the study sample. The second section addresses the results that answer secondary research questions numbers one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate service? Section three takes the findings from section two to analyze the phenomenological experiences of the participants that address secondary research question number three: How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional

feelings about continuing military service? Inductive, thematic analysis of all qualitative data gleaned from the responses to the open-ended questions resulted in three major recurring themes: 1) Organizational Culture/Climate, 2) Equal Opportunity, 3) A Sense of purpose.

Summary of Research Process

This study utilized an anonymous, open-ended survey to conduct its phenomenological study (Appendix D). The first section focused on demographic questions to screen subjects for eligibility. The second section contained Likert Scale questions about the level of influence 40 retention factors have on the subjects' decisions to continue or leave military service. There was an open-ended comment box at the end of this section that asked subjects to share any stories or additional factors related to the topic of retention. The third section contained Likert Scale questions about the subjects' experiences serving in combat arms. Open-ended comment boxes accompanied each Likert Scale question to allow subjects an opportunity to explain their responses. Over a period of two weeks, the researcher conducted convenience sampling by recruiting volunteers from a private social media network containing over 10,000 current and former female Army officers. The request included the following screening criteria (Appendix B):

1. Female (as stated on Army records)
2. Current or former active-duty U.S. Army officer (with a rank from Warrant Officer 1 to Colonel)
3. Held/Holds employment in a combat arms occupation (Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Special Operations)

4. If separated from the Army, it must have been done voluntarily

The QAO redacted any personally identifiable information from the final survey results, submitting 120 pages and over 45,000 words of qualitative data to the researcher for analysis. The researcher inputted the submitted survey responses into a text analysis tool for First Cycle Provisional Coding (Onwuegbuzie, Frels and Hwang 2016, 138). Retention factors identified during the literature review, most specifically the Department of the Army's 2021 Career Engagement Survey (DACES), defined the preset codes (DCS G-1 and People Analytics 2021). The survey asked participants to scale the level of importance these factors have on their decisions to continue or leave military service. The researcher queried the open-ended comments for keywords suitable for categorization into the applicable preset codes, following a three-step process: 1) Keyword text match 2) Stemmed words, synonyms, and specialization matches to code 3) Manual phrase categorization into codes. The researcher inputted the results of the initial coding into a data journal for future analysis.

Second Cycle Axial and Eclectic Coding (Onwuegbuzie, Frels and Hwang 2016, 134) further prioritized and consolidated the total number of codes the first cycle generated. A matrix coding query identified comments that intersected among several codes. Cross-tabulation identified similarities between the most frequently referenced codes and which retention factors the participants scaled as the most important. As a result, the researcher refined the coding framework to eight codes, corresponding to the top eight retention factors subjects rated as the most important in influencing their retention decisions: *Sense of Purpose, Personal Morale, How the Chain of Command Handles Sexual Harassment/Assault and Response and Prevention, Overall Quality of*

Life, Competence of Chain of Command, How the Chain of Command Handles Discrimination/Equal Opportunity, Culture/Climate, and *Work-Life Balance*. The researcher extracted the top three most referenced codes for subsequent analysis.

Third Cycle Pattern Coding identified meta-codes within each of the three primary codes. Identifying meta-codes supported identifying patterns and themes within the most frequently referenced codes: *Culture/Climate, How the Chain of Command Handles Discrimination/Equal Opportunity,* and *Sense of Purpose*. The researcher re-categorized *How the Chain of Command Handles Discrimination/Equal Opportunity* to *Equal Opportunity*. The research findings were journaled, reviewed, and triangulated.

Trustworthiness of Data

Figure 6 in Chapter 3 displays the data analysis process and the primary techniques to maintain the study's trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba's four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: 1) Credibility, 2) Dependability, 3) Confirmability, 4) Transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Participant response analysis required subjective researcher interpretations. However, the study can maintain credibility, or data truth, if the accounts of individual experiences are recognizable to others experiencing the same phenomenon (Sandelowski 1986). The researcher reviewed subject comments against coding taxonomies, as well as existing literature, to assess any potential deviations. The retention factors in part two of the survey served as the codes for data analysis to minimize potential biases influencing interpretations of qualitative comments. This chapter's data presentation frequently displays direct subject quotes to serve as additional evidence and support for this analysis' emerging themes. The researcher carefully archived all major decisions in a reflexive data journal and

questioned its findings upon every review. These methods also supported the data's conformability, or the neutrality or consistency of the findings, to the point the researcher could repeat the study (Connelly 2016, 435).

To ensure the findings were consistent, according to Lincoln and Guba's dependability criteria, the Thesis Committee Chair and researcher conducted an audit of the analysis to ascertain feedback and concurrence with major decisions on findings. The research maintained transferability, or the ability for findings to apply to other settings, through analyzing non-personally identifiable subject demographics (Houghton et al. 2013). However, this study does not intend its readers to transfer these findings across other settings or groups.

Using a limiting platform like social media to recruit the study's sample introduced potential recruitment bias. Snowball sampling through participant word-of-mouth was the primary method to expand recruitment beyond the single social media group. However, without snowball sampling, this study excluded women who do not use social media or choose to be involved with this specific social media network. This further narrowed the studied population to women that, in addition to the screening criteria, were also social media users. As a result, this chapter's findings cannot lead to generalizable conclusions applicable to the entire female population serving in combat arms. This analysis instead introduces themes that suggest potential patterns for further research.

Participant Demographics

Of the 100 total survey responses, 85 participants met the eligibility criteria. 56 participants were still serving on active duty. Twenty-nine (29) participants were no longer serving in combat arms, with the nature of their separation described in Figure 3.

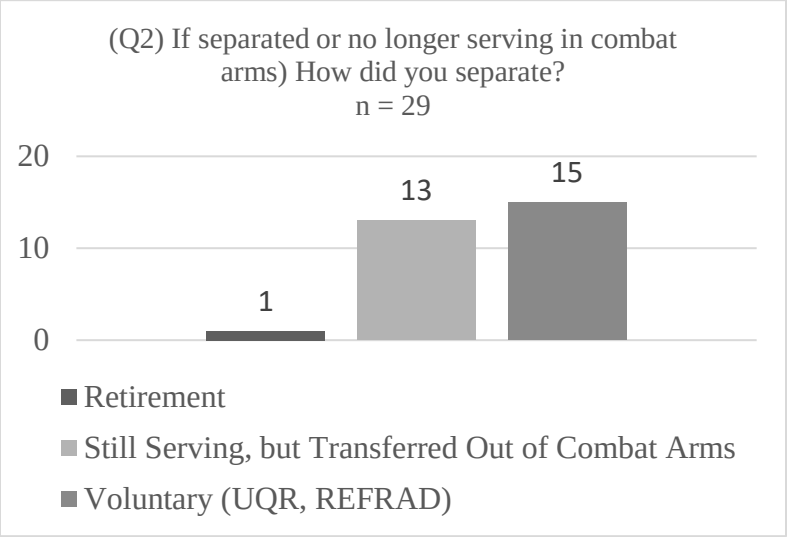

Figure 3 Status of Service Separation

Source: Created by author.

Of the 85 participants, 26 served in Field Artillery, 24 in Armor, 22 in Special Operations, and 13 in Infantry (Figure 4). When asked if they deployed while serving in combat arms, 47 participants answered yes, and 38 answered no. The majority of respondents served three or four years in combat arms, with a decline at five years and beyond (Figure 5), supporting the Military Leadership and Diversity Commission's findings that lower retention of midlevel female service members contributes to poor representation of women in senior ranks (Daniel 2011).

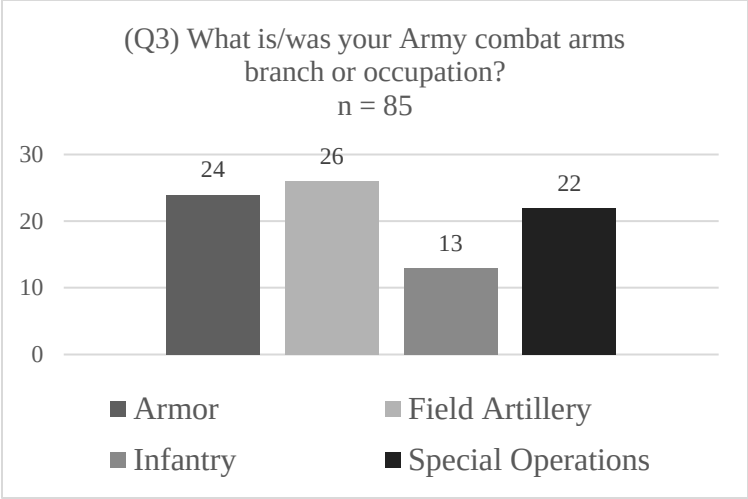

Figure 4 Breakdown of Survey Participants by Combat Arms Branch

Source: Created by author.

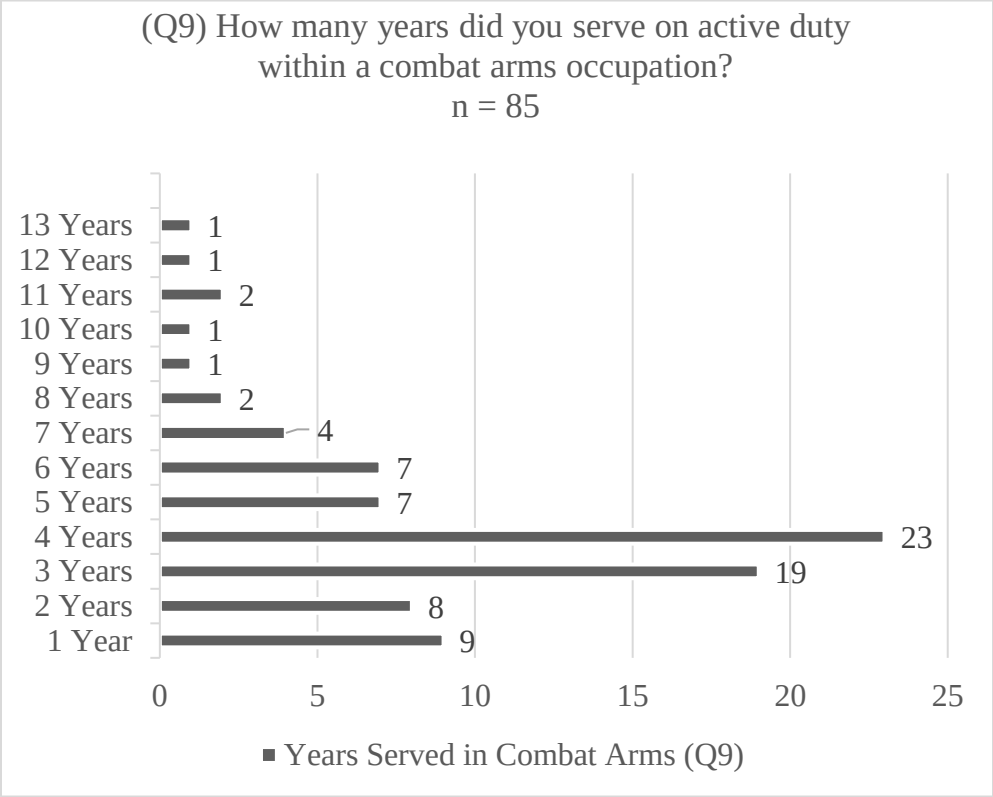

Figure 5 Breakdown of Survey Participants by Years Served

Source: Created by author.

Influence of Factors on Retention Decisions

This section uses Likert Scale data to potentially answer secondary research questions one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue/terminate service? The survey asked participants to scale the level of importance 39 different factors had on their decisions to continue or end military service, ranging from *5 - very important* to *1 - extremely not important* (Appendix A). With a score of 4.47, *A Sense of Purpose* was the most influential factor (Figure 9). With an average score of 2.21, *Military Housing* was the least influential factor (Figure 12). Examining the top eight factors (Figure 17) developed connections and themes. *Sense of Purpose*, *Personal Morale*, *Overall Quality of Life*, and *Work-Life Balance* emerge as intangible concepts that serve as "intrinsic motivators" (Singh 2016, 204), with each having the ability to affect one another. For example, a 2020 study on job morale in healthcare staff posited a connection between morale and a sense of purpose (Sabitova, Hickling and Priebe 2020). The remaining four factors (*How the COC handles SHARP; Competence of the COC; How the COC handles EO; Culture/Climate)* are extrinsic influences that relate to the actions of others, specifically the chain of command (COC).

Question 26 immediately followed the Likert Scale as an open-ended comment box that asked participants to share any additional explanations or factors affecting retention. The shared comments, labeled by participant numbers, suggest a relationship between how the top eight intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect each other. For example, Participant 34 shared, "The biggest factor for me is the lack of support, competency, and overall integrity seen in my chain of command…I think I would find greater job satisfaction and sense of purpose elsewhere." In this case, an extrinsic factor (*competence*

of the chain of command) could negatively affect this officer's *sense of purpose*, suggesting this officer may consider leaving military service. Exploring a positive relationship, Participant 36 commented, "My battalion is full of strong female Lieutenants/Captains and it is extremely refreshing and motivating…Not what I expected when I chose to branch FA…I love being surrounded by likeminded highly motivated people…I'll stay as long as I feel I'm making a difference." In this case, there is a suggested connection between this officer's perceptions of their organization's culture and the Field Artillery branch. Both perceptions positively affect their *morale* and *sense of purpose*, thus supporting their decision to continue serving. The quantitative nature of the Likert Scale data introduced a ranked order to several connected retention factors, which also saw a relationship with the frequency in which these topics emerged in the first cycle of coding.

Results of Female Reflections on Phenomenon of Serving in Combat Arms

This section analyzes findings that potentially answer secondary research question number three: How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service? There were three open-ended questions with responses most related to the topic of retention. The researcher applied these comments to the second cycle coding framework in three steps to identify the frequency in which specific topics appeared (Figure 6). Question 26 asked respondents to share any stories or additional factors that affected their decision to continue or end military service. Questions 29 and 31 asked respondents to share any key negative and positive experiences, respectively. First, a frequency text query using the specific verbiage of the top eight identified retention factors provided initial results. Second, the

frequency text query expanded to include stemmed words, synonyms, and specializations. An example of this expanded word query was expanding *Competence of the Chain of Command* to include words like *leadership, guidance, rater, supervisor, order, CO, battery commander, troop commander,* etc. The last step was a manual review of every comment to ensure the accuracy of the text query results, as well as adding additional responses that the query did not identify. The researcher made no interpretations of these inquiries until the Third Cycle Pattern Coding process (Onwuegbuzie, Frels and Hwang 2016, 135).

The overall most frequently discussed code from the subjects' open-ended comments was *Culture/Climate*, followed by *How the Chain of Command Handles Discrimination/Equal Opportunity* and a *Sense of Purpose.* As such, these codes address secondary research questions numbers one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate service? *Culture/Climate* was the most consistently referenced topic among all comments, whether subject experiences were negative or positive. *How the Chain of Command Handles Discrimination/Equal Opportunity* and *Competence of the Chain of Command* were the most frequently discussed topics when subjects reflected on negative experiences. A *Sense of Purpose* and *Morale* were the most frequently discussed topics when subjects reflected on positive experiences.

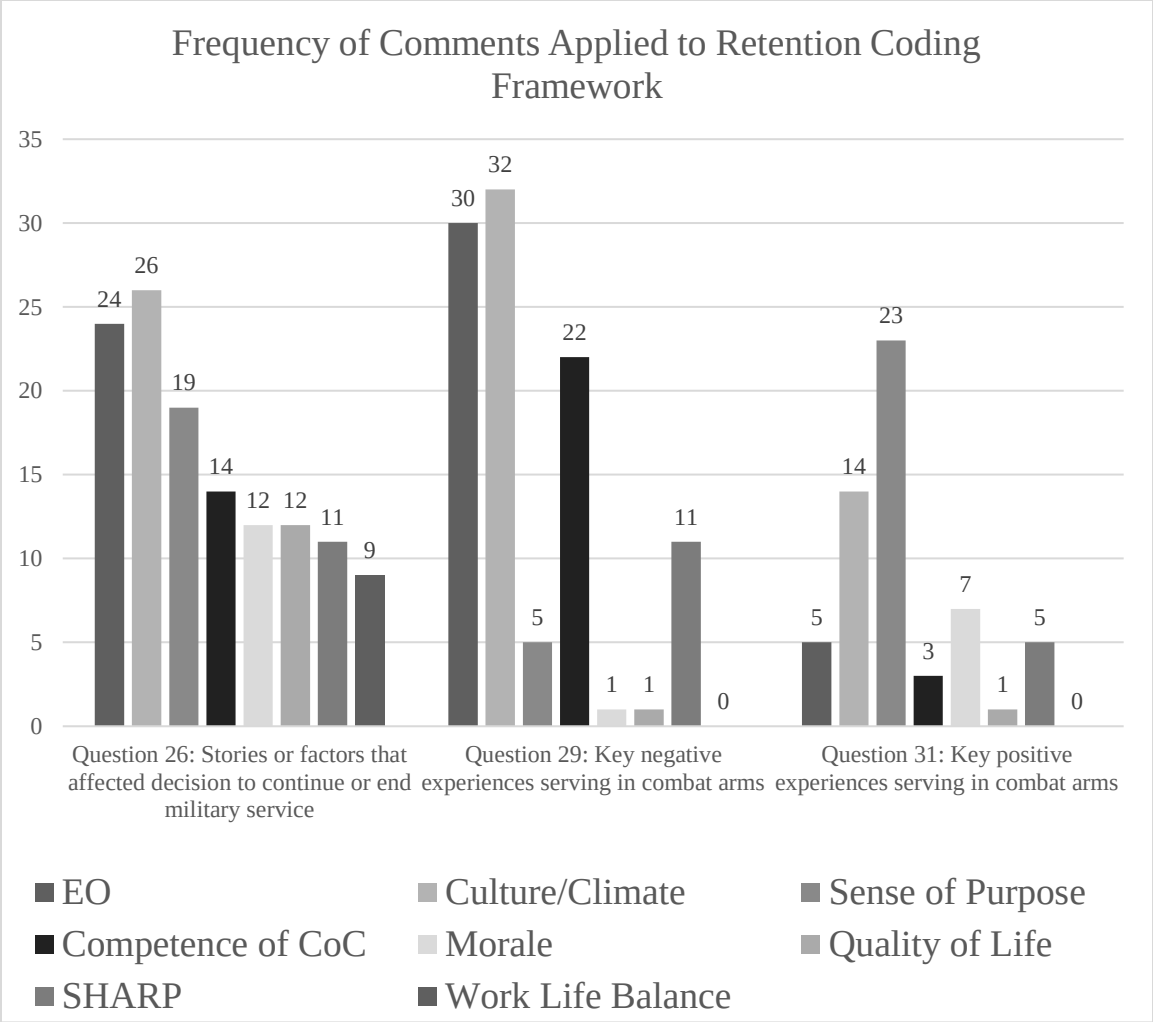

Figure 6 Frequency of Comments Applied to Retention Coding Framework

Source: Created by author.

Comments included under *Culture/Climate* encompassed thoughts surrounding "the shared meaning organizational members attach to the events, policies, practices, and procedures they experience and the behaviors they see being rewarded, supported, and expected" (Ehrhart, Schneider and Macey 2014, 69). More specifically, recurring themes emerged involving how their organizations integrated females, the perceived equality of evaluations of their performance or behavior, and inclusion. *Culture/Climate* was the

most common topic respondents discussed in Question 29 when the survey asked them to share key negative experiences or stories about their time serving in combat arms. Participant 1, who is no longer serving on active duty in combat arms, shared the following on organizational inclusion and how it affected her opportunities to lead,

> When I was [redacted], the E7 who was supposed to be my [enlisted counterpart] refused to work with me because "women don't belong on the line." My chain of command had a closed door conversation with the other male [redacted] (not me) and they decided to support the [NCO] and they moved me to a different company.

This officer is among several who discuss the idea of a "boys club" that they feel excluded from, which in Participant 1's words, made it hard for her "not to feel like an 'other.'" Another similar comment came from Participant 60, who replied,

> One thing that scares me the most about career progression is that I will never be in the "good ole boys club". When it comes down to me and another guy for MQs [most qualified evaluation] they are going to pick him if he is in the club…Explicitly I know that at the end of the day I will most likely end up with the short end of the stick when it comes down to because I am not a part of the club… By the time I am KD [key development] complete as an CPT I think at that point I am going to be burned out from constantly breaking down walls.

Kanter's stereotyped role induction and visibility phenomenon (Kanter 1977, 88) appear in the reflections of several officers. A female who has retired from serving in Special Operations compared walking into the unit and meetings to "walking naked into the lion's den covered in raw meat." Participant 70 shared,

> Women are getting out because being combat arms is like taking on a gale force wind on a daily basis. Constantly having to prove that your achievements are not "because you're a girl" but because you earned them. I have been accused of flirting…for a better gunnery score when the reality is you can't flirt a target down. If you hit 10/10 targets it's solely based on my ability to command my track. When my male counterparts are hailed as phenomenal leaders and I am seen and called just a good mom, who takes care of my guys and they're recognized for things I have also done it make the job even more thankless and heart breaking.

Participant 75 has submitted her paperwork to separate from the Army and reflected on how the organizational response to serving in combat arms differs between men and women,

> I am constantly asked "did you choose the Infantry?," "are you straight or branch detailed??," "why the Infantry?"- questions I have never seen anyone ask a male Infantry LT. I think if I were to stay in, my sex would never stop being the first thing people noticed about me. Not my competence, not my physical fitness, not my intelligence…just the fact that I am a walking talking pair of ovaries. I want to be in a job where my sex is not constantly discussed and commented on.

On the topic of inclusion, there were several discussions on how organizations reacted to women in their previously all-male organizations. A common theme within this topic involved segregated sleeping or changing areas, which exacerbated perceptions of exclusion. Explicitly discussing the difference between her service in Armor and her service in a non-combat arms branch, Participant 50 commented,

> The culture of combat arms is different, especially for a woman. There is more segregation of women in combat arms units in barracks/the field, et cetera for fears of sexual assault. But that separation creates a very unwelcome climate for the women in these units, especially women in combat arms MOSs that are oftentimes somehow expected to lead the Soldiers they're separated from.

Participant 63 shares that her unit treated her "like a 'glass ball' that couldn't be broken." They made the women feel "ostracized and made it EXCEPTIONALLY difficult to become part of a cohesive team." In a similar tone, Participant 77, a former Armor officer who is now serving in a different branch, shared, "It was dysfunctional, sexist, unfair. The older officers were awkward about overemphasizing my gender. The Soldiers would be subtly disrespectful and they wouldn't be reprimanded for their subtle disrespect. There was a lot of BS I had to deal with."

Participant 63 provided more specific examples of disrespectful behavior she has encountered, especially as a trailblazer,

> I have faced adversity at all of these firsts. I have faced individuals that have despised me because of my goals alone and nothing else. I have been called a squat pisser, a bitch, and worse. And i have felt the scrutiny at each of these places to not just meet the standard, but exceed it. i dont like performances, and I felt like i was constantly under a spot light.

Of note, there are several negative reflections that the researcher considered gender-neutral and do not directly relate to the phenomenon of serving as a female in combat arms. This supports the neutral Likert response when subjects responded to whether they felt their negative experiences directly resulted from serving as a female in combat arms. Participant 34 shared that COVID-19 exacerbated structure issues within her unit, affecting its climate. Participant 60 expressed concerns that the unit's culture emphasizes "being liked" over leadership. Participant 47 shared that the command climate is negative, as "they take, take, and give nothing…It's not a healthy situation."

Culture/Climate was the second most frequently discussed topic for Question 31, which asked respondents to share key positive experiences or stories. Participant 5 is an officer who is still serving, but no longer in Special Operations. She shared that she sees a "generational shift of the service being accepting of women more than older generations. It's becoming the norm…and that's so promising." Participant 10 shared a similar sentiment, saying that while the culture "is not there yet," every year since she's entered the Army [2018] "has been better than the last."

A common theme among the positive comments is that subjects did not feel as singled out, nor excluded, as multiple women previously served in the unit. Participant 10 reflected that "there were already high-performing female enlisted and officers before I

arrived. No one batted an eye when I took my PLT because they had already had 3 female Platoon Leaders before me." Participant 40 responded, "in my battalion there were more female combat arms junior officers than male and our leadership at the battalion level was outstanding and actually made the decision to leave more difficult." Participant 36 shared that her battalion is "full of strong female Lieutenants/Captains and it is extremely refreshing and motivating."

Additional positive comments about culture relate to a welcoming environment. In these environments, subjects felt like they had a fair chance to lead and earn respect, regardless of gender. One such comment comes from Participant 71, who stated,

> All of my guys have been super awesome really…At the end of the day, they just want someone they can trust with their life. And if you meet the standards and they know they can trust you (no matter what gender you are), that's all they're looking for. My guys have also been open to all sorts of conversations on women in the Army and specifically combat arms and Infantry and they are always interested to hear me out and they all look out for me and want to see me succeed.

The second most frequently referenced code across the data was *Equal Opportunity*. It was the most discussed topic in Question 26, which requested stories or additional factors that contributed to subjects' decisions to continue or end military service. It ranked a close second to *Culture/Climate* in reflections on negative experiences and was the third-least commented topic from reflections on positive experiences. Topics under this code include adherence to U.S. Army Equal Opportunity and related diversity and inclusion policies, perceptions of fairness in career opportunities, and inclusionary or exclusionary comments.

There were not as many reflections of command support in positive experiences as there were in negative experiences. However, some noteworthy reflections relate to a

theme of perceived genuine command support to diversity and inclusion policies, as well as subjects rising to the occasion once given the opportunity. Participant 40 commented that she was pregnant and still given an early command. Participant 49 shared that having opportunities to prove her worth makes "life easier as a female leader." Additionally, Participant 37 boasted about her extremely supportive chain of command. She stated, "My boss has sat down with me to try to understand my experiences and has been looking to shift his unit culture to increase diversity and make it welcoming to all." Participant 46 shared that the unique opportunities presented to her are based on her performance and not just because she is a woman. Participant 10's command gave her a chance to "spearhead" a major initiative and believed that being a woman was a strength, as she was "the only woman in the room with a different perspective than the men."

In the reflections of negative experiences, a distinct theme contrasts the command support seen in the positive responses. Participant 25 stated, "I survived suicidal ideations and depression/anxiety from the pressure and bullsh** toxicity that was directed towards me on a daily basis up and down the chain of command, sexist and marginalizing comments from all echelons up to the BDE level…" Participant 4 shared that women who "bust their ass get passed over so that mediocre men would have career development opportunities because 'you'll all just get out when you have babies' regardless of whether or not a woman had plans to start a family." Along the theme of perceived discriminatory comments, Participant 1 shared that a leader within her organization "singled" her out of a group of men and asked why her "face looked 'like that,'" and if she was always 'so serious.'" Participant 77 provided a detailed response related to both major themes of *command support* and *exclusionary language*. She shared,

> I have so many stories. My [redacted] Commander constantly said he would never let his wife do the job I was doing. My [redacted] said his wife didn't want me in the office alone with him. My [redacted] [NCO] introduced me to all the other [NCOs] the week I got there. I didn't know it was because they were secretly rating my "hotness" until a few months later when one of my peers told me. It was extremely difficult and isolating. I grew up in a very gender neutral environment. I never felt like I was a minority for being a woman until I got to my first [redacted (unit)]. These men were bigots. My parents were very concerned because they went to great lengths to raise me in a society of equal opportunity for men and women. I almost felt embarrassed telling my parents stories of how I was being treated as a platoon leader.

Another theme that emerged related to equal opportunity within negative comments was perceptions of unfairness in encouragement to seek career-enhancing opportunities. This aligns with theories posited by Seo, Huang and Han (2017) and presented in chapter 2, in which group dominants may block *tokens* from promoting within the group. When considering a potential combat-related opportunity, Participant 1 shared her experience with her company commander, who encouraged her to talk to her husband about how the opportunity would impact her children. She stated, "I have no children and no desire to have children. This condescending and patriarchal attitude ensured I never returned…" Participant 64, a former Special Operations officer no longer serving, shared that when pursuing a high-profile opportunity, her command told her that she was not selected because she "was a single, attractive female, and a male was selected instead."

Several comments discussed the dynamics of equal opportunity and discrimination from the perspective of female hostility to other females. Rones and Steder described this as "queen bee behavior" (Rones and Steder 2019, 32), with Kanter arguing that it is a survival mechanism to assimilate into the group. Participant 63 described it as "internalized misogyny," of which she was once guilty. She admitted to

succumbing to the perceived pressure from the cultural mindset that believed when one female Soldier is "average," then "all women suck." Participant 11 stated, "I usually despised working with other females because I assumed they were incompetent. I bought in to the narrative that surrounded me." Participant 61 shared,

> There wasn't really a sense of camaraderie or kinship among the women in my BN. We were friendly with each other but I don't recall many close and enduring friends amongst the combat arms women in my unit… I felt it was everyone for themselves, and we could either try to break into one of the male "groups" or remain a loner.

Looking at this phenomenon from an opposite perspective, Participant 61's unit reprimanded her for equal opportunity violations due to her perceived "favoritism towards women." She admitted that she did indeed "champion women." Several women maintained their gender neutrality when managing the expectations of those around them, with Participant 71 stating, "Just uphold the standards of the duty description."

The third most frequent code referenced across the data was a *Sense of Purpose*. It was the most frequently discussed topic in Question 31, which was the request to share key positive experiences while serving in combat arms. In striking contrast, Question 29, which asked for reflections on negative experiences, received very few comments related to a *Sense of Purpose*. One negative comment came from Participant 34, who, while still serving, feels she "would find greater job satisfaction and sense of purpose elsewhere." A potentially neutral comment came from Participant 25, who stated, "I've already passed the torch in many aspects…I'm tired, time for these younger gals to take it to the next level!" This illustrates a potential relationship between an individual's sense of purpose and motivation, and how they view an organization. Berg explores this relationship, finding that "personal purpose and goals, when aligned to a company vision, appear to

impact motivation and engagement" (Berg 2015, 442). Topics under the code of a *Sense of Purpose* include drive, motivation, ambition, and meaning.

The most poignant theme that emerged from comments about a sense of purpose is the resolve to continue serving to effect positive change in the Army through normalizing the presence of women in combat arms occupations and inspiring women who will follow them. For example, Participant 60 shared,

> One of my motivations for staying combat arms…is that I open the door for the women that come behind me. I may not be perfect but I want to open more minds so that way the woman behind me has more of an opportunity to shine because everyone is over the shock of her being female and focus more on what she can bring to the platoon or company. So when I have a hard day based on something I feel is not because of me but because of my gender I think about that and I pick my head up and soldier on.

This same officer continued to reflect on her sense of purpose as a mechanism to overcome the negative aspects of her experiences in combat arms,

> …Even if I don't always get the MQs [most qualified evaluations], respect, and awards I deserve it's the small things that keep me going. When I finally earned my soldiers' trust on even the smallest things that would normally be automatically given to a man (example: not falsely SHARPing them. Yes that is a real fear). My Commander being surprised that my guys actually are taking to me quite well when he thought it was going to be a massive issue. My Platoon Sergent telling me without me having to say something that he can see that I am experiencing sexism and it is not right. I like to think of those moments as something that won't hinder the next woman behind me. Now my old Soldiers are more likely to accept a new female PL the same way they would a male. That when a woman is having a bad experience because of sexism they will be more likely to be believed. That my PLs now when they become Commanders will have less reservations about picking a female XO because they had one when they were a PL. That to me is what makes it worth it.

While not as detailed as the above reflection, the comments supporting the theme of a *Sense of Purpose* are similar in sentiment and are the most consistent among all the

codes within the coding framework. The following are ten comments that further emphasize this theme:

1. Participant 11: I hope that more trailblazing women stay because the Army is changing for the better.

2. Participant 25: Even now, my motivation to stay in for another post assignment is to change the stigma against being an empathetic, human leader, look out for my Soldiers, and raise a middle finger to the ones that said I'd never amount to anything in combat arms.

3. Participant 10: I might make it to MAJ and not be selected for LTC but at least I will be seen by younger women behind me who will hopefully exceed my career. If not me, then who will do it?

4. Participant 37: All the seats at "the table" are held by combat arms. If I give up, we have one less person in the fight to get to that table to help make change. I continue my service because it might not be me who gets there, but odds are better for all of us with one more in the fight.

5. Participant 49: Representation as a Female senior leader greatly motivates me to continue to serve. I hope my presence as a leader allows me to ensure fellow leaders follow sharp/EO/legal processes correctly and treat Soldiers with dignity and respect. That is my biggest motivation to continue to serve.

6. Participant 25: I would not let the same people that treated me so poorly turn around and treat every woman so poorly. If I had any chance at having an effect on their shitty perspectives and bigotry, I would do everything I could to dig my knife a little deeper and chip away, one person at a time.

7. Participant 35: As the only woman in my BN that was a combat arms officer, I was the first they had seen. I felt pressure to do well to represent my gender and prove that we can do this.

8. Participant 63: I am resilient. I felt that I couldn't change people's minds with integration briefs and words but could only action. Performance was the greatest weapon I had in this fight. As a result, I turned to the relentless pursuit of excellence, and have truly internalized that mentality. While I'm not there and will never reach it, I strive for it every day.

9. Participant 70: I'm driven by the need to show these men that women are their equals in this profession so that the women after me don't have to and they can just serve.

10. Participant 78: I wanted to prove to others that they couldn't automatically discount a female officer in combat arms before they even had a chance to work with her. I wanted to do my job well because my Soldiers deserved that, but I wanted to also be a good role model for younger Soldiers, male and female, to look up to, regardless of my gender.

Despite the *trailblazing* nature of these previous comments, when asked if the idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in their decisions to join combat arms, most subjects disagreed. On the Likert Scale, the average respondent score was 2.38, falling into the *Disagree* category (Figure 7). This study infers that the subjects did not join combat arms to be a *trailblazer*. However, they found a purpose in being a *trailblazer*, and the thought of *trailblazing* motivates them to continue serving.

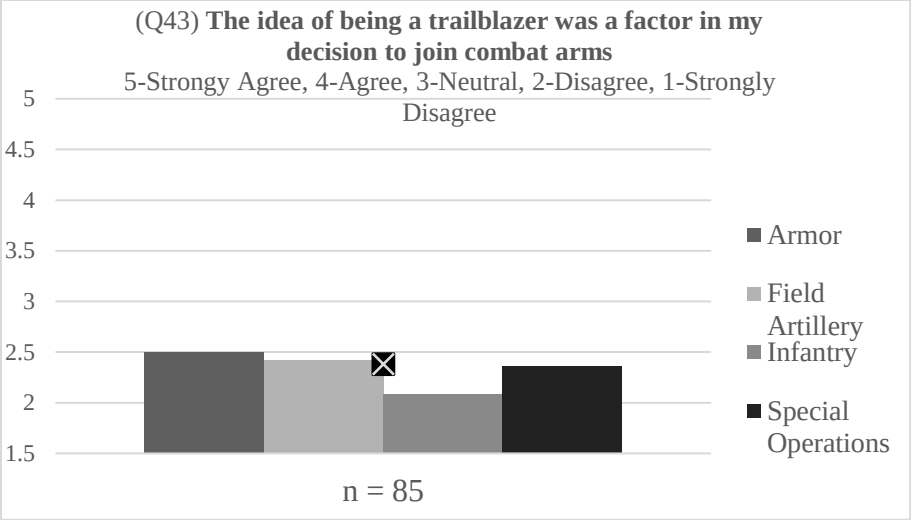

Figure 7 Participant Response to Whether Being a Trailblazer

Source: Created by author.

Discussion of Findings

Each of the three major retention categories (*Culture/Climate, Sense of Purpose, Equal Opportunity*) organized comments that supported the emergence of several themes. Figure 2 illustrates the themes that connect each major retention category. Between *Equal Opportunity* and *Culture/Climate*, there were several similar comments about how leaders and Soldiers in their organizations demonstrated inclusionary or exclusionary behavior, the latter of which Gerson and Peiss suggest is a result of male informal group behavior that subconsciously serves to marginalize women (Gerson and Peiss 1985). Several comments in the findings affirm this theory. Words such as “sexism,” “threatened,” “gossip,” “jokes,” “sexualized,” and “bitch” were common words from females who felt their units saw them as an “other” or “less than” in their organizations. Participant 66 shared, “I recall a MAJ asking me, “what are women in the Army good

for? After commenting I didn't know, he stated, "F*cking and sweeping the floor, he shoved a broom in my face and told me to pick one and get to work."

When asked about their perceptions of support from subordinates, it is noteworthy that several comments shared that despite attempts at marginalization or skepticism, being an officer gave them a sense of protection, due to their higher ranks. Their concerns lie more with the female Soldiers who are not in positions of authority. It appears that "proving oneself" is a noticeable catalyst to feeling accepted or included in the group, especially when it comes to support from non-commissioned officers. For example, Participant 78 commented, "I believe I spent a longer time trying to gain the trust of the NCOs and officers that I knew I could perform my job above the standard." The support of non-commissioned officers and proving oneself were additional common discussions with the subjects' positive reflections. For example, Participant 60 shared,

> Many of my peers and senior NCOs I've been able to work with have admitted to me that they were extremely skeptical of the Army allowing women in the Infantry, but after working with me for a few weeks, I changed their perspective and convinced them that there were women who deserved to "play in the mud like the rest of us."

Command support and perceptions of "proper" emphasis on gender issues within the organization also appeared in several comments. For example, Participant 10 shared, "I successfully VTIP'd to stay Armor because my new SQDN Commander was supportive of me. I am thankful that I have had amazing, supportive male mentors in my first unit who encouraged me to stay Armor."

A *Sense of Purpose* and *Equal Opportunity* both relate to the phenomenon of *trailblazing*, affecting how females perceive each other and subsequently how they support and mentor each other. Overall, the Likert data showed that participants

disagreed with the statement that they joined combat arms to become a *trailblazer*. However, their comments demonstrate a desire to *trailblaze* so that they may increase female opportunities in the future, without the challenges they have once faced. These motivations tangibly manifest in female-to-female relations. Intangibly, the idea of *trailblazing* shapes the definition of equal opportunity to mean that gender is an inconsequential factor in assessing a leader's performance. That is the goal of *trailblazing*. From the positive experiences come discussions of female mentorship in the forms of official programs and unofficial relationships. Participant 8 shared that her mentor showed her "exactly what a combat arms female looks like." Several shared that, as the first combat arms female in their organization, they started successful women mentorship programs. Participant 78, who served as a SHARP victim advocate, shared, "While I had many officers and NCOs that made incredible contributions, I believe I was one of the first SHARP reps many of the female Soldiers believed they could talk to who would listen with compassion and not be looked at as a nuisance or 'attention getter.'"

It is important to note that several similar comments to the one made above discussed mentorship and relations as a gender-neutral activity and that participants saw their presence as a female as an opportunity to break down barriers to reporting SHARP and EO concerns from male Soldiers as well. Negative experiences between *Equal Opportunity* and *Sense of Purpose* come from the previously discussed topic of perceived "internalized misogyny," stemming from the pressure that the "few represent the many," which supports Kanter's Tokenism theory.

Between *Sense of Purpose* and *Culture/Climate*, there was a connection between perceptions of how effective units integrated women and how resolved participants felt to

either change or maintain trajectory for the future. When asked about perceptions of their male peers, superiors, and subordinates' support for female integration into combat arms, the average response was neutral. *Change* was the most frequently mentioned word on these topics. From a positive perspective, discussions of *change* came from perceptions that, despite never working with a female before, their units "were both welcoming and accepting of the change." When it came from negative perspectives, discussions of "changing minds" inferred an inflexibility of mindsets in their organization. Participant 38, an Infantry officer who has served as a "first" in many aspects of her organization, shared, "However long I stay in for, the hope is to change minds one by one. Most men I've worked with don't even know how to work with women in the workplace, never mind women in their own profession. Hopefully it becomes more normalized the more women take on the opportunity."

Inclusionary/Exclusionary comments and behavior, *female-to-female relationships and support*, and *how the unit integrates females* are the three major themes that emerge from intersecting relationships between the three most influential retention factors. The overall central theme that connected all three major retention factors was *Command and NCO Support*. Figure 8 illustrates how these themes connect between each retention factor.

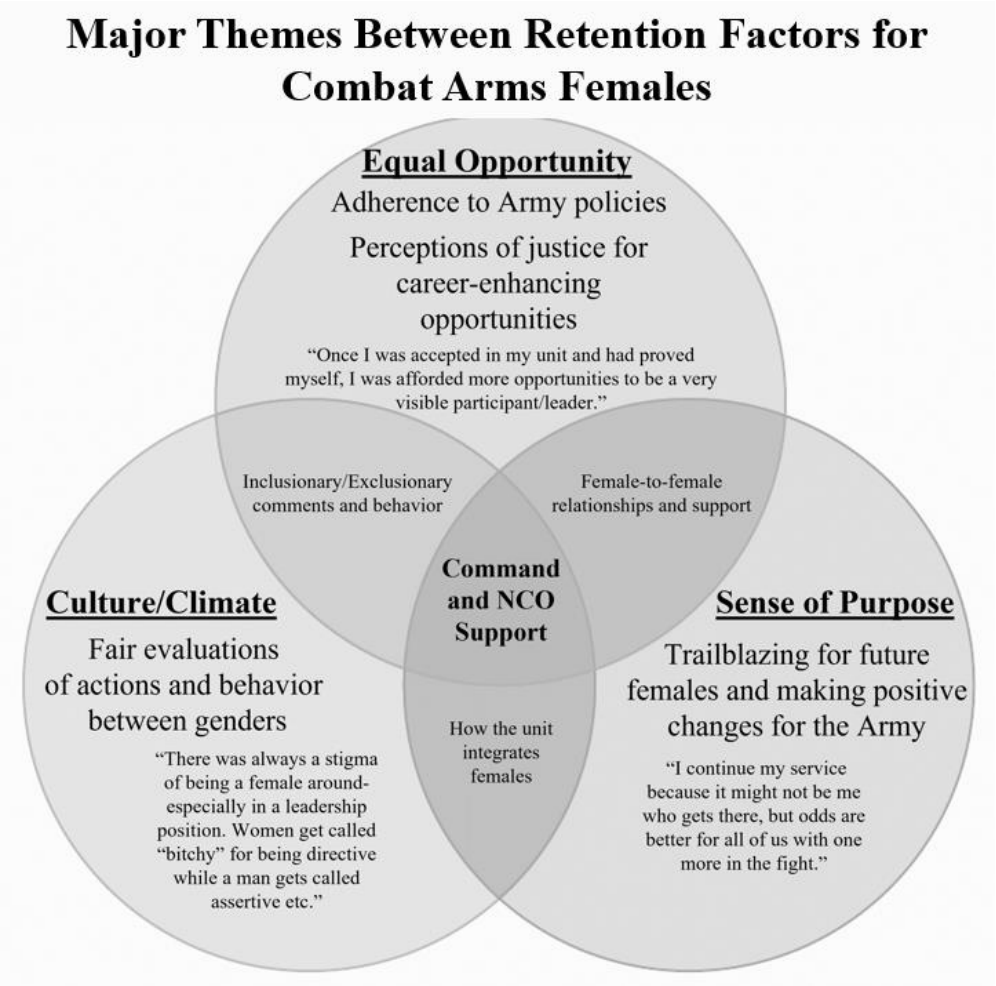

Figure 8 Major Themes Between Retention Factors for Combat Arms Females

Source: Created by author.

There were a total of 161 comments and concepts related to feeling *support* from NCOs and commanders. *Support* manifests into the policies, actions, and reactions of individuals in the chain of command and is related to every retention factor. When negative experiences occurred, there were several strong sentiments of feeling betrayed when the command teams either condoned exclusionary behavior, committed

exclusionary actions, or ignored their concerns. Participant 10 reflected on her thoughts on this topic,

> My [redacted] Commander did not like me. He wouldn't outright say that it was because I was a woman…he didn't treat me the same as my male lieutenant peers. He would create bogus counselings for me to try and create a packet of bad performance. He tried to get me removed from position with a referred OER and after my OER was kicked back by HRC twice for negative comments, he took 8 months to complete it. I worked hard for him as a Platoon Leader and he never gave me a chance or even tried to coach, teach, or mentor me like a Commander is supposed to do with LTs.

This same officer discusses a new future commander who was supportive and who was one of the factors that convinced her to continue serving in combat arms. A lack of confidence in the chain of command was also evident in Participant 66's comment,

> …I was raped in [redacted]…I didn't report it because…a specialist the week before reported a rape. Our command gave an Article 15 to this woman who reported her rape and admitted it occurred while underage drinking. She received punishment, was forced to remain living in the same barracks as her perpetrator who did not receive any punishment. Only a "local" investigation was done by a senior NCO assigned by the CO.

Several positive reflections discussed a negative event in which their chain of command did support them. Participant 9 shared,

> It's not hard to tell when a man doesn't want to listen to a women when she's appointed over him. I can think of two times in my 5 years that it has happened to me. Which I don't think is terrible given the amount of men I've served with that have accepted me as a women. It was frustrating to go through but not a deal breaker. I was able to lean on my 1SG and CDR to back me up so the mission wasn't affected.

Participant 14 also commented on a negative experience, in which she felt supported by her leadership,

> I had someone submit a false report via anonymous email about me after I outperformed them on both an interim counseling and official OER. It made me feel targeted, ostracized, and humiliated. Thankfully, my leadership rallied around

me in support but this incident still made me re-evaluate if I want to continue my service.

Organizational trust results from subordinate feelings of confidence and support in their leadership, thus positively affecting subordinate morale. This reduces employee turnover (Tan and Tan 2000; Rukshani and Senthilnathan 2015, 6). When asked if they felt pressured to join or not join combat arms, participants reflected on warnings they received about the potentially bad things that could happen to them. They also reflected on others' encouragement for the unique opportunity they could pursue.

The responses indicate that the subjects were well-informed and not naïve about the potential challenges they were to face. In these cases, officers and NCOs in their chains of command affected their perceptions of their experiences. Positive comments favorably reflected on commanders who visibly treated gender integration as a non-issue and prioritized equal mentorship for both males and females. For example, Participant 30 wrote, "Battalion leadership publicized their support gender integration." Participant 15 wrote, "I have been lucky to have only support from my direct leadership. Good men make great leaders." Subjects reflected positively on NCOs who "supported without question" and corrected problematic behavior that may have exacerbated any additional personal life challenges they were facing. There were positive responses when leaders explicitly evaluated their performance or presence as Army officers, and not just women. Evaluating performance based on the latter risks leaders falling into the "visibility" trap that treats individual acts as "symbolic consequences" (Kanter 1977, 973).

Inversely, several responses discussed a lack of concern for peer and subordinate opinions and behaviors, as they were either supportive or not influential enough in rank

or position to affect the unit culture. Instead, there were more concerns about captains, majors, and NCOs' thoughts and behaviors, as they were the "most difficult cohort." For example, Participant 2 stated,

> General *** and General *** were always very supportive. But some of the operational level of leadership (COLs/MAJs) weren't as supportive and they expressed their disconnect and explained all their excuses as to why men can't keep it in their pants and girls are somehow a distraction to them from doing their job. Or that it's in the males nature to protect the woman so it could be costly on the battlefield. Yada yada yada blah blah blah. Seem to be more their issue than the females.

Participant 38 similarly reflected on the disconnect between upper and lower levels of leadership,

> Most of my officer leadership was very supportive and were interested in my experiences. The NCO counterparts were trickier and did not handle the transition well as a whole. The NCO leadership we relied on to make this integration work often failed and were the problem of many SHARP related issues and poor retention of the female enlisted soldiers.

Prevalent among the comments were reflections on leaders who made statements that targeted the female population in general, and not an individual's specific performance. For example, Participant 4 shared, "My male superiors (officers…and senior NCOs) sat me down several times to make it clear just how much they did NOT support women serving with them. Even after a [redacted (successful deployment mission)], the response was "it was a fluke, fuck y'all." Participant 77 shared that some male officers felt "threatened" and would make comments like "being a female Armor officer is the easiest way to make General." Other participants criticized the "public" support of female presence in the ranks, accusing the leadership of putting on a "show," and that their "actions proved otherwise."

Chapter Summary

This study explored the phenomenological experiences of women who served in select combat arms branches based on their specifications in Army Directive 2016-01 (SECARMY 2016). First-hand accounts paired with Likert Scale data determined what factors were most influential in participants' decisions to continue or end military service, thereby attempting to answer secondary research questions one, two, and three. Findings determined that *Culture/Climate*, *Equal Opportunity*, and a *Sense of Purpose* were the three most prominent retention factors, as highlighted in Figure 2. When examining the survey's comments, the following themes emerged that connected these retention factors:

1. Adherence to Equal Opportunity policies
2. Fair perceptions in offerings of career-enhancing opportunities
3. Inclusionary/Exclusionary comments and behavior
4. Female-to-female relationships and support
5. Equal perceptions of actions and behavior
6. How the unit integrated women
7. Trailblazing for future women and making positive changes for the Army
8. Command and NCO support

The research found these themes influenced the positive and negative perceptions of participants' experiences serving in combat arms. *Command and NCO Support* was the overall theme that connected the three major retention factors and often served as the determining factor in whether subjects would consider continuing or ending military service in combat arms. For this reason, the answer to the primary research question is no, the Army does not require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat

arms professions. Chapter 5 will further elaborate on this conclusion and provide recommendations for future research and consideration.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Introduction

This thesis examined the state of retention for females serving in combat arms professions to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? After analysis of the research findings, the answer is no. The solution to retaining females in combat arms is not to create new policies. Instead, the Army must look at its current policies, namely how it develops its leaders to consider their formations' unique populations. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and leaders must consider how to adapt their styles to reach every individual Soldier under their charge. In doing so, leaders can foster a positive culture where every member feels respected, empowered to advance professionally, and accountable for behavior that aligns with the Army's values. These are indicators of job satisfaction conducive to retaining talent within the force.

Conclusions

Secondary research questions one and two asked what factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate military service. The research concluded that the three most prominent factors influencing the subjects' retention decisions were *Culture/Climate*, *Equal Opportunity*, and a *Sense of Purpose*, with *Culture/Climate* being the most frequently discussed topic. Secondary research question three, which explored how the experiences of trailblazing women influenced

their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service, supported these themes.

The themes of *Culture/Climate, Equal Opportunity,* and a *Sense of Purpose* align with the Government Accountability Office's findings that o*rganizational culture* significantly impacted females' decisions to end military service (GAO 2020, 28). Further examination of each retention factor determined positive relationships between a *Sense of Purpose* and the phenomenon of *trailblazing*, as well as feeling like a meaningful part of the team. There was a negative relationship between *Equal Opportunity* and the exclusionary comments and behavior of others. In addition, both positive and negative experiences were frequently connected to *Command and NCO Support*, which is a key extension of *Culture/Climate*. In the case of positive experiences, influential leaders in the chain of command voiced support for gender integration, supported the subjects during challenging times, and corrected problematic behavior when subjects brought it to their attention. Inversely, negative experiences involved influential leaders in the chain of command who were poor mentors, condoned or engaged in discriminatory behavior, or demonstrated disingenuous or unsupportive behavior. These conclusions support the assertions that the Army charges its leaders with creating a "positive environment," and they have a direct impact on inspiring an organization's climate and culture that prioritizes inclusivity (HQDA 2019, 6-1, 6-5).

Inclusion, personal and professional support, mentorship, and authentic leadership are not revolutionary concepts in Army leadership studies, nor are they unique to this study's population. As such, the Army does not require unique retention strategies for females in combat arms. However, *unique* remains a keyword. Subject discussions of

trailblazing show that there are unique experiences involved with the phenomenon of being one of the *first* or *only* in a combat arms organization.

While the concept of *trailblazing* remains a significant factor in influencing desires to continue military service, several comments indicate some subjects do not identify as a *trailblazer*, due to several females serving in their units before them. This study is approximately seven years removed from the Army's lift of the direct combat exclusionary policy for women. The fervent ambition to *trailblaze* for future women may have lingering effects as units continue their integration efforts. But as that time continues to pass, there may be a decrease in the potency of *trailblazing* as an influential retention factor. If this hypothesis proves correct, then the Army must explore other factors that contribute to a strong sense of purpose and satisfaction with meaningful service. In the meantime, this conclusion's overarching theme of *Command and NCO Support* will fill a critical, interim gap until further studies can better understand what develops a sense of meaning in long-term military service.

Recommendations for the Army

This study indicates a relationship between a subject's satisfaction with their service and the opportunity to be both a mentor and mentee. To support this conclusion, the Army should evaluate its leadership doctrine and how it specifically defines mentoring and counseling. ADP 6-22 defines counseling as the process in which leaders develop subordinates (HQDA 2019, 6-10). However, its recommended occurrences around events or evaluation timelines infer a short-term, performance-based focus. It lacks an interpersonal tone and long-term commitment to personal and professional development that mentorship seeks to address.

As defined in ADP 6-22, mentorship considers a longer-term approach that focuses on the growth and development of potential. However, doctrine defines mentorship as a voluntary agreement, therefore risking leaders deciding which subordinates are worth investing time in (HQDA 2019, 6-11). It also assumes subordinates understand what to look for in mentors, and risks both parties looking for people that look, think, or act as they do–an idea antithetical to diversity. Given mentorship and support's influence on retention, doctrine should remove *voluntary* from its definition. Instead, its definition should charge leaders with the professional and moral obligation to invest in every member of their formation for long-term growth. An alternative recommendation is to better distinguish between the idea of the mentor as a *noun* and mentoring as a *verb*. The former still maintains the concept of a voluntary agreement between leaders and subordinates based on mutual trust and respect. However, the latter mitigates the risk of creating exclusive mentoring in-groups.

Previous Army doctrine more explicitly highlighted the distinction between mentoring as a *verb* and the mentor as a *noun*. In the case of the latter, the mentor is one who can serve as wise counsel to a selected few due to their greater experience (Thomas and Thomas 2015, 1). However, mentor-mentee selectivity to a few individuals infers a sense of exclusivity, which the idea of mentorship as a voluntary process supports. Conversely, previous Army doctrine defined mentorship as a *verb* that promotes inclusivity. For example, the 1999 publication, FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*, states,

> Mentoring is an inclusive process (not an exclusive one) for everyone under a leader's charge…Mentoring is totally inclusive, real-life leader development for every subordinate. Because leaders don't know which of their subordinates today will be the most significant contributors and leaders in the future, they strive to

> provide all their subordinates with the knowledge and skills necessary to become the best they can be—for the Army and for themselves. (HQDA 1999, 5-16)

Inclusive mentorship is an opportunity to face assumptions, foster curiosity about others' experiences, and address differences productively (Rutgers n.d.). Therefore, the Army should examine how it trains mentorship skills in professional military education. Not only should leaders receive additional formal training on how to mentor effectively, but education should consider the concepts of cross-cultural mentoring. Cross-cultural competency training should extend beyond the "range of missions abroad" and include the Army's own formations (MCCoE 2015). This trains leader skills that can potentially overcome psychological barriers preventing connections between leaders and subordinates who may look or think differently. At its core, mentorship is a reciprocal process where both parties benefit from learning about each other.

In this study, *Culture/Climate*, *Equal Opportunity*, and a *Sense of Purpose* were the three most influential retention factors, with *Command and NCO Support* emerging as a recurrent topic within the subjects' phenomenological experiences. Counseling and mentorship are two concepts that officers and NCOs can use to effectively demonstrate support. They also both support career progression, therefore supporting long-term retention. The Department of Defense emphasizes the value of the unique skills, perspectives, and backgrounds of its armed service members (MLDC 2011). As a result, current paradigms of the counseling and mentoring process must shift to consider an expanded Soldier prototype, so to nurture Soldiers' unique paths to advancement and success. These doctrinal and educational recommendations will not only benefit women in combat arms, but they will universally apply to a greater Army population comprised of individuals exploring their unique purposes in military service.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study delimits its focus specifically to women who served in a narrowed definition of combat arms. However, there are opportunities to further develop and expand this research. The following recommended topics may contribute to a broader and deeper exploration of this study's findings.

During survey recruitment, the researcher received seventy-two e-mails or correspondence from women who were interested in participating in the research survey. However, they did not meet the study's screening criteria, and thus were not considered for this study. These women serve as a strong indicator that there are other populations in the Army who want to contribute their perspectives to the important dialogues of diversity and talent management. As such, future research should study Army retention and attrition factors across expanded study populations, with a particular emphasis on minority populations of multiple demographics. There could be thematic connections between different populations experiencing similar phenomena of minority service in underrepresented environments. Comparative analysis between different populations, including considerations for intersectionality, could further inform current and future Department of Defense and Army DEI initiatives.

This study did not consider Army National Guard and Army Reserve populations, enlisted personnel, and females serving in direct combat occupations within other service branches. The elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule affected the Department of the Defense as a whole, albeit in different ways. For example, in 2018, the Service Women's Action Network sued the Department of Defense, as the "Leaders First" policy prevented 48 states from integrating women into

their combat arms National Guard units. As a result, the National Guard fell behind active duty in integrating women, with the last Brigade Combat Teams fully integrating in 2020–five years after the lift of the combat ban (Sheftik 2020; Swick and Moore 2018). These important populations may uncover additional nuances not discovered within this study. Further research may reveal experiences that influence subject perceptions of how DEI policies affect leader support and thus the organization's culture and climate.

Survey responses to demographic-based questions revealed several niche groups within the subject population. An example group were women who desired to continue military service but wanted to transfer out of combat arms and into a different branch. This shows a unique combination of both continuing and ending military service. Age, relationships, education, commissioning year, children, evaluations, and other factors have the potential to identify trends that influence motivations to serve. For example, family considerations may not be as motivating a factor for women under a certain age or rank, as Department of Defense reports show a notable increase in marriage between company grade and field grade officer ranks (DoD n.d.). These findings could help the Army and its leaders better understand what motivates Soldiers, as well as help them predict when and where potential shifts may happen.

In 2020, the U.S. Army Talent Management Task Force and Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs launched the first Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey to improve incentives and quality of life programs for future retention efforts (U.S. Army n.d.). This is a notable step toward fulfilling the Government Accountability Office's recommendation to "develop a plan, with clearly defined goals, performance measures, and timeframes, to guide and monitor the Army's

female active-duty servicemember recruitment and retention efforts" (GAO 2020, 40). Further efforts to complement this retention effort could include focus groups and sensing sessions with selected populations of Soldiers within their windows of re-enlistment or those transitioning from obligatory to indefinite service statuses. These methods could supplement ongoing efforts by reaching populations who, due to survey burden, may not complete the DACES. It would also capture retention motivations in real-time, as opposed to reflections of prior decisions that may be months or years removed.

These recommendations for future research will provide deeper insight into the phenomenon of minority service in the armed services. This is especially so for women, who were the focus of one of the most significant shifts for social change in the military in recent years. In addition, further exploration into command, NCO, and leader influence on retention may universally benefit the greater Army population. Broad-based solutions for retention strategies may risk trading research and execution convenience for effectiveness. Policy decisions, like the redaction of race, gender, and ethnicity from selection boards promote blind, merit-based advancement. However, demographically blind methods, and initiatives to explore the unique needs of the diverse force, are two different approaches to diversity. These recommendations attempt to address the latter approach. All Soldiers are unique, and their "input matters" (U.S. Army n.d., 5).

Parting Thoughts

General Ann Dunwoody, the first female four-star general, epitomizes this study's definition of *trailblazing*. In a 2013 speech to the Leading Authorities Speakers Bureau, she stated, "I realized I was staying in the Army because I was given opportunities to work hard, tackle interesting and difficult challenges, and make a difference in every

assignment in every organization I was every assigned to" (Dunwoody 2013). This gender-neutral perspective of her unique phenomenological experiences is indicative of this study's conclusions. The women surveyed for this research did not indicate a need for anything special or anything more than their peers. Instead, leader support often shapes their perspectives, and as such, leaders at every echelon should seek to understand and appreciate their unique experiences. There was a diverse span of thoughts and sentiments within the survey responses, even within the scope of the narrowed population. Similar subject experiences could yield different perceptions and thus different decisions about retention. This means there is more to learn from every Soldier, regardless of their demographic. More deliberate training of inclusive, cross-cultural mentorship in both doctrine and professional military education will emphasize to U.S. Army leaders the importance of knowing their people and empower leaders with tangible strategies to help them effectively demonstrate authentic, empathic support. In turn, Army leaders will execute skills and behaviors that genuinely reflect the principles of *The Army People Strategy*.

This paper does not conflate retention-based performance goals or gender-based targets with quotas (GAO 2020, 1). The purpose of this research was to explore how the U.S. Army could better nurture and retain genuine talent, and not lose it to the multitude of factors this study explored. Diversity is not a social experiment. It is about opportunities. It is another "tool in the toolkit" in solving problems and "maintaining a competitive edge" (Garamone 2022). While Army policies underscore the effort, retention starts at the individual unit, and "leaders and leadership make the difference" (Dunwoody 2013).

APPENDIX A

SURVEY RESULTS

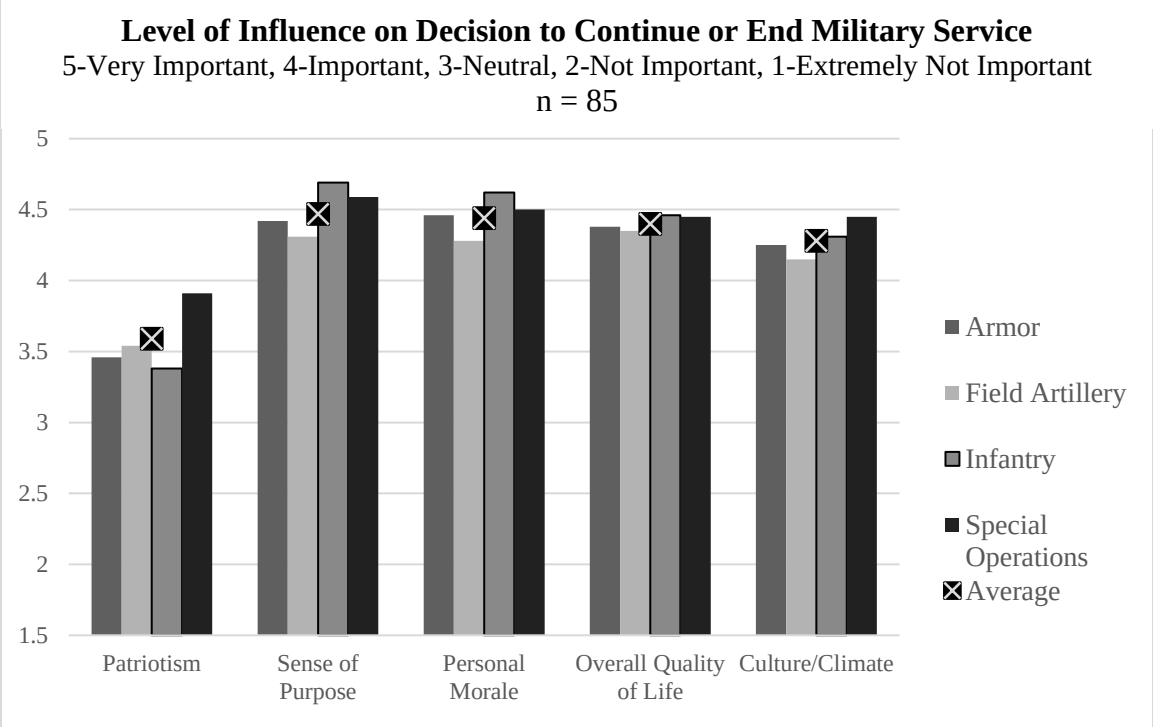

Figure 9 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Patriotism, Sense of Purpose, Personal Morale, Overall Quality of Life, Culture/Climate)

Source: Created by author.

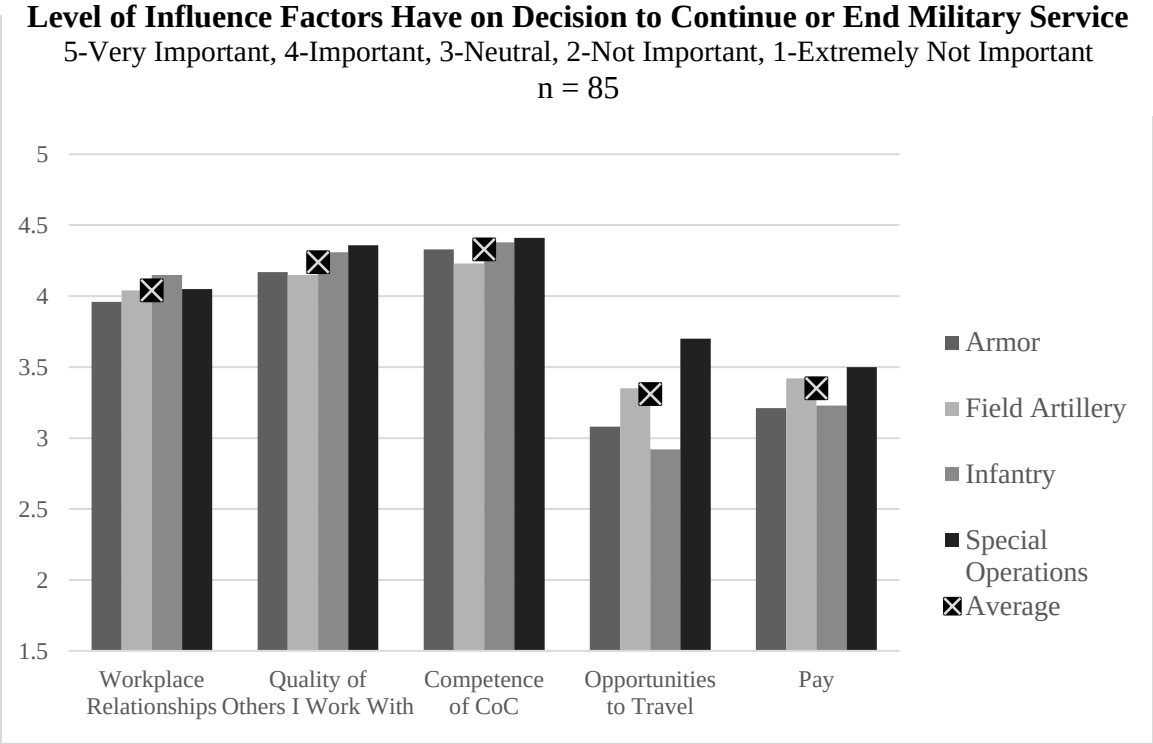

Figure 10 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Work Relationships, Quality of Others I Work With, Competence of CoC, Opportunities to Travel, Pay)

Source: Created by author.

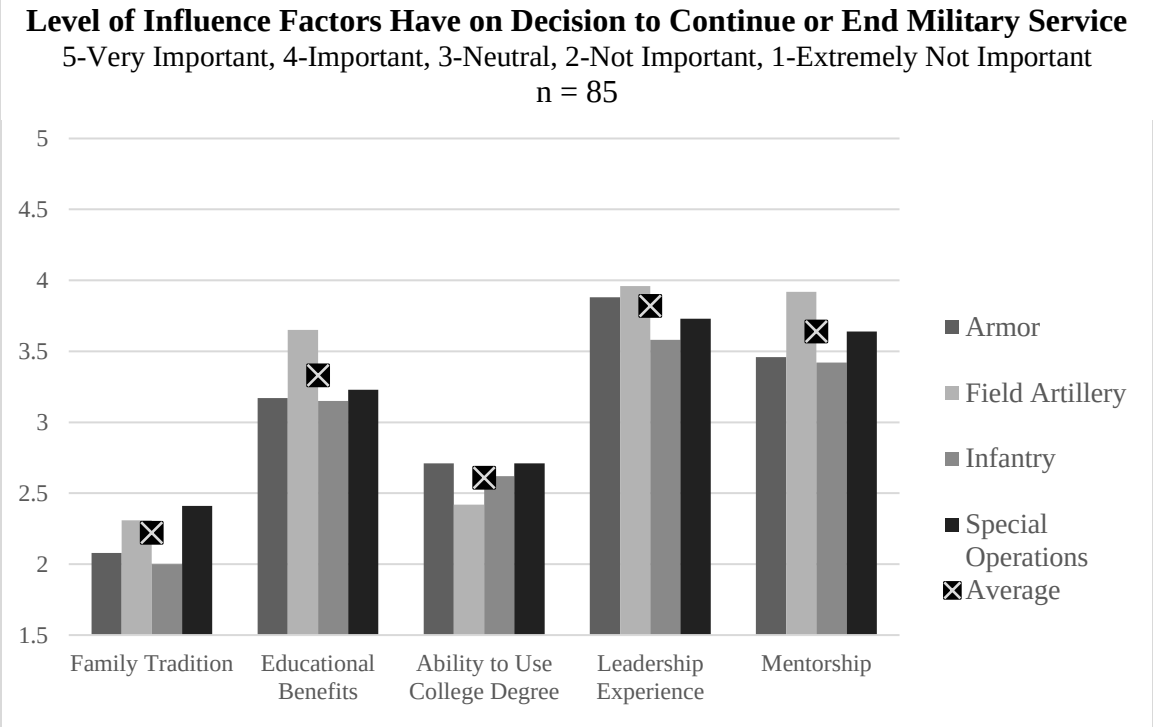

Figure 11 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Family Tradition, Educational Benefits, Ability to Use College Degree, Leadership Experience, Mentorship)

Source: Created by author.

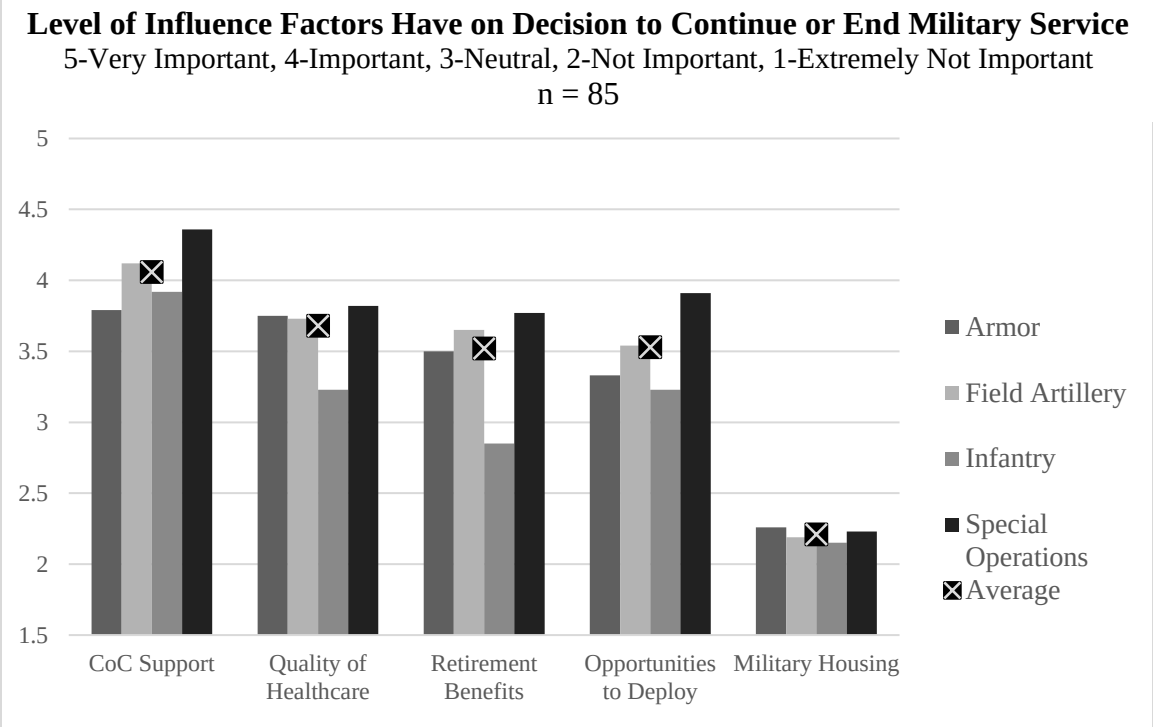

Figure 12 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (CoC Support, Quality of Healthcare, Retirement Benefits, Opportunities to Deploy, Military Housing)

Source: Created by author.

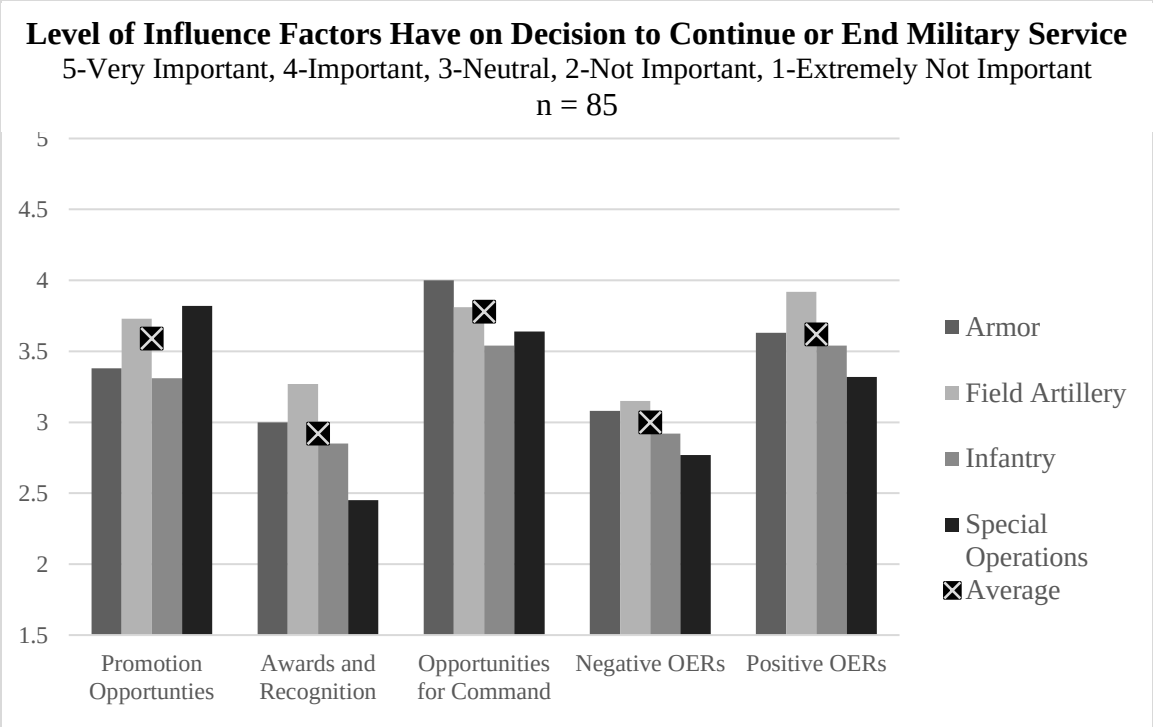

Figure 13 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Promotion Opportunities, Awards and Recognition, Opportunities for Command, Negative OERs, Positive OERs)

Source: Created by author.

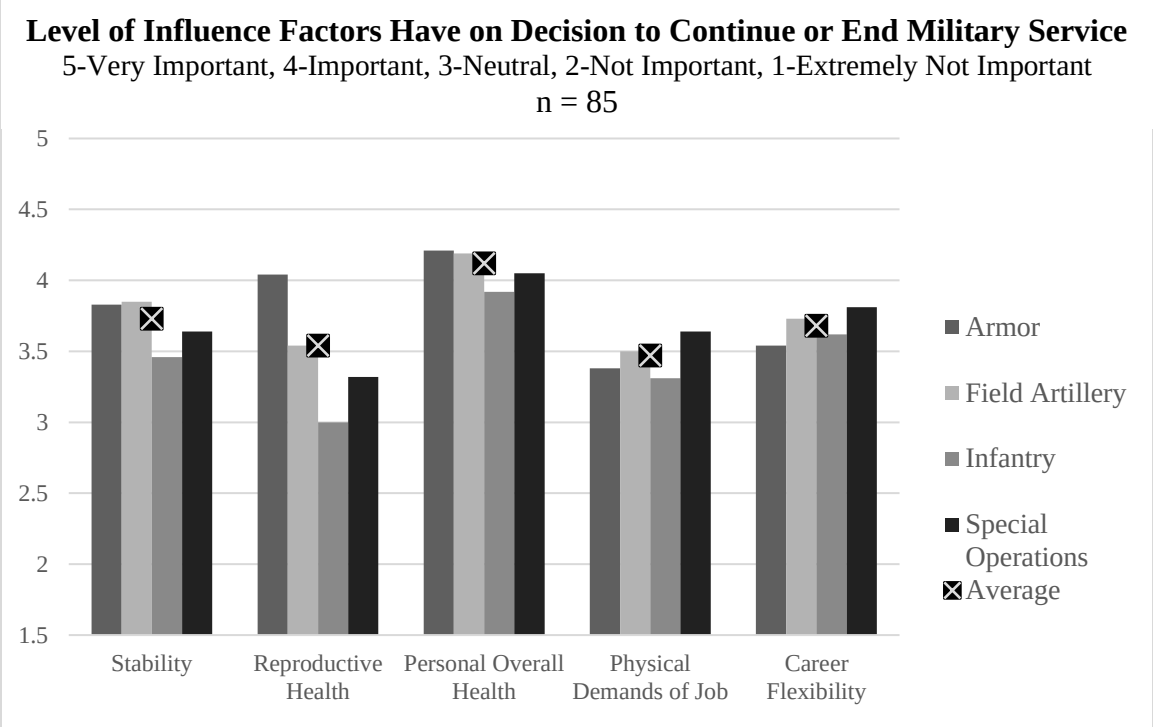

Figure 14 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Stability, Reproductive Health, Personal Overall Health; Physical Demands of Job, Career Flexibility)

Source: Created by author.

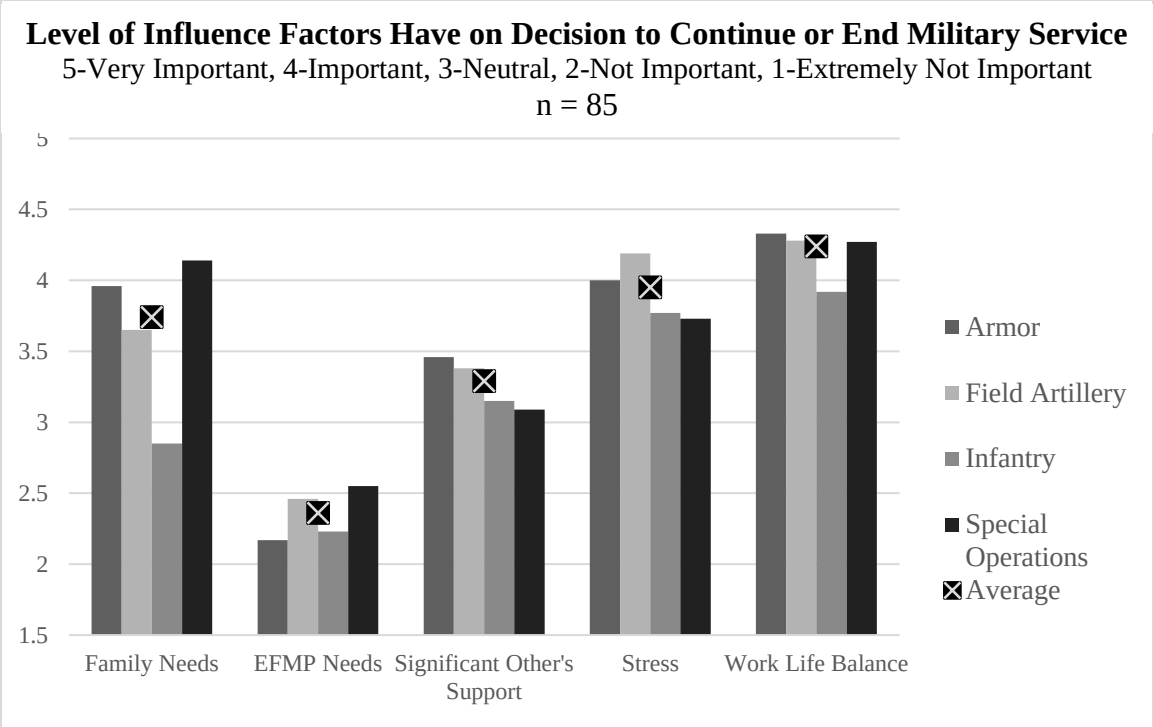

Figure 15 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military Service (Family Needs, Exceptional Family Member Program Needs, Significant Other's Support, Stress, Work Life Balance)

Source: Created by author.

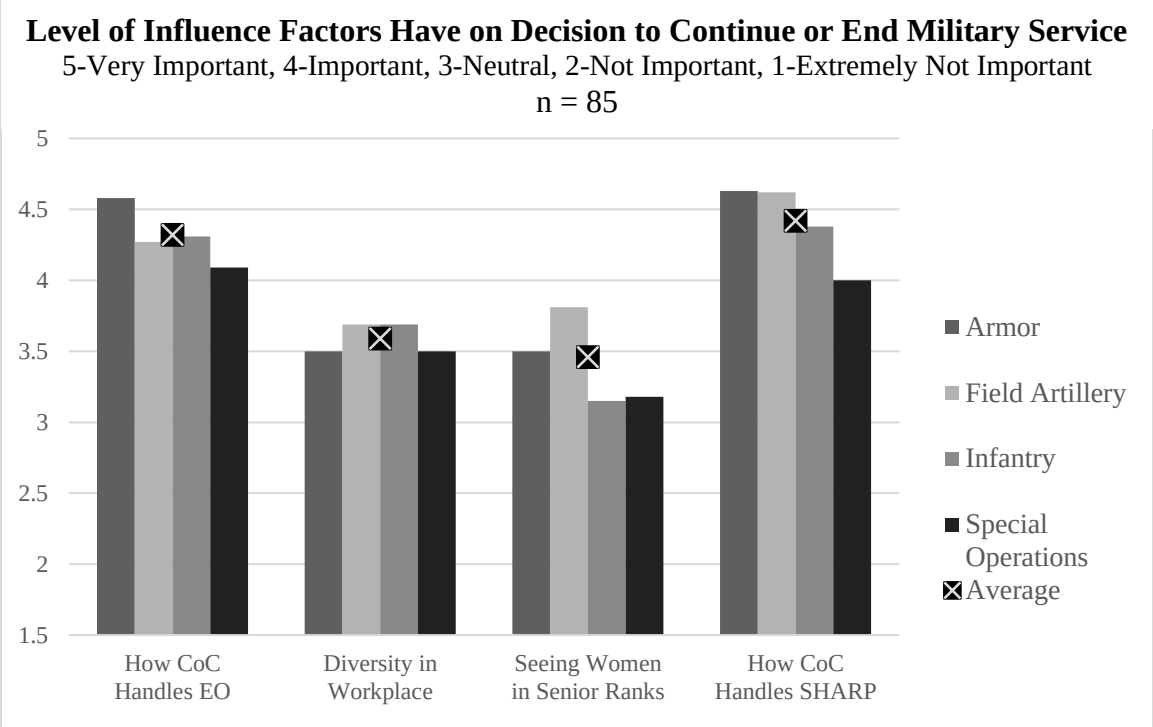

Figure 16 Level of Influence on Decision to Continue or End Military (How CoC Handles EO; Diversity in Workplace, Seeing Women in Senior Ranks, How CoC Handles SHARP)

Source: Created by author.

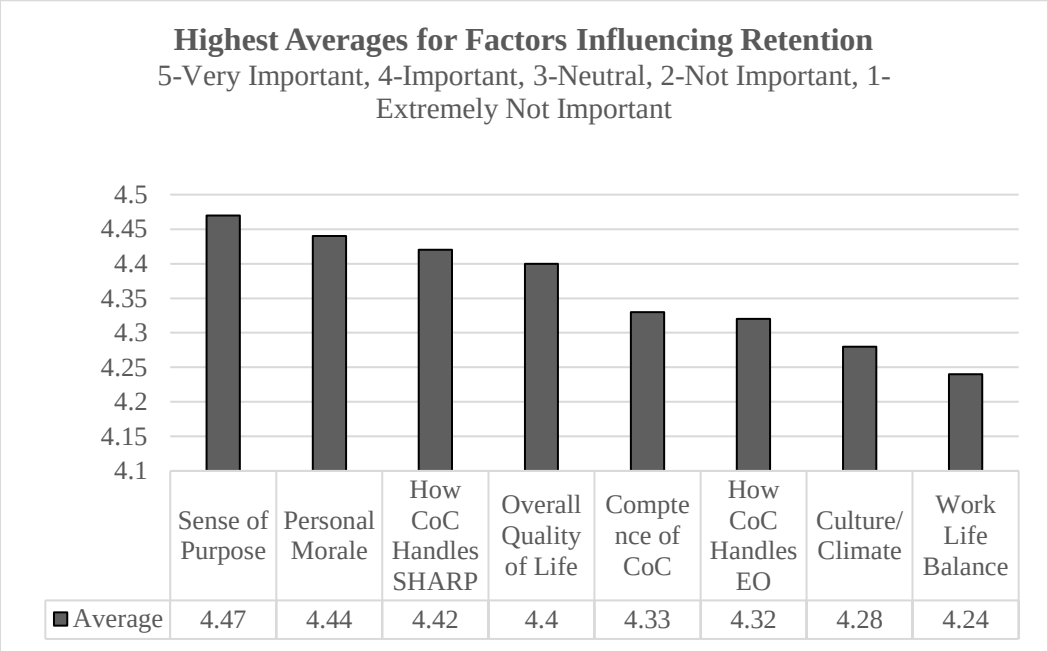

Figure 17 Highest Averages for Factors Influencing Retention

Source: Created by author.

APPENDIX B

REQUEST FOR SURVEY PARTICIPATION FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND E-MAIL

Hello, my name is Major Kimberly Brutsche, and I am currently an Art of War Scholar at the Command and General Staff College. I am conducting research in support of my Master of Military Art and Science thesis on the state of retention for women serving in combat arms branches. If you meet the below eligibility criteria, I request your participation in an online survey about your experiences. This online survey is confidential, with no request of personally identifiable data. It is a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Conclusions drawn from this research will potentially result in recommendations for the Department of the Army to consider in future retention strategies for females. Depending on the level of detail you are willing to provide, the survey will take approximately one hour. Please click the link below to review the informed consent form and conduct the online survey. If you have any questions regarding my research or your rights as a participant, please contact me at kimberly.g.brutsche.mil@army.mil. Thank you!

Eligibility Criteria

Female at your time of military service [as stated on Army records]
U.S. Army Officer [W01 to COL]
Served on active duty in a combat arms occupation [Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Special Operations]
If no longer serving, separation was voluntary

Link: https://survey.tradoc.army.mil/EFM/se/0EE8827F19513108

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PROTECTION

OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Closing the Gender Gap – An Analysis of Female Retention in Combat Arms Branches

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

This is a research study conducted to support the researcher's completion of the Master of Military Studies program at the United States Army Command and General Staff College.

This form provides information on the rights of the research participant in the above-named study and of the responsibilities the researcher has during this study. The Command and General Staff College (CGSC) has approved this study and supports the research.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of women who have served as some of the first or only female officers within combat arms occupations (Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Special Operations) and what factors influence their decisions to either continue or end military service. Conclusions drawn from this research can potentially result in recommendations for the Department of the Army to consider in future strategies for female retention.

There are 4 qualifications to participate in this study:

- Must have served as a female during the time of military service [as stated on Army records].
- U.S. Army Officer [ranks of W01 to COL].
- Must have served on active duty in a combat arms occupation [Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Special Operations].
- If the subject is no longer serving in the military or in a combat arms occupation, the separation must be voluntary. Examples of involuntary separations include officer separation boards, medical boards, disciplinary-related discharges, etc.

Procedures

Expected number of participants - 20

The expected duration of the subject's participation: 1 hour

There are no experimental procedures conducted in this research.

Research procedures:

1. The subject will review the consent form prior to beginning the survey.

2. The subject will agree to the terms outlined in the consent form by clicking the 'Start' button, with guidance to screenshot the consent form for future reference.

3. The subject will complete the survey in three parts. The first part take approximately 20 minutes, and will ask demographic, multiple-choice questions. The second and third parts will take approximately 20 minutes each and ask questions using scales and open comment boxes.

A contact e-mail is provided to subjects if they have questions about the research.

The subject can choose to skip or end the survey at any time without prejudice.

This is an unclassified study and thus no classified information may be discussed, regardless of whether the subject is still serving in the military or not. Potential violations of this guidance subject the violator to administrative action, such as the loss of security clearance or punitive punishment in accordance with the Uniformed Code of Military Justice or criminal law.

Risks

The questions are personal in nature, and discussion of any negative experiences may be triggering or upsetting. There is no pressure to share experiences that makes the subject uncomfortable, and the subject may skip questions or quit the survey at any time. Mental health resources are available through Military OneSource at this link.

Specific details of events or units may increase the risk of a breach of confidentiality. The following measures will be taken to protect the privacy of any subject and the information they provide:

No personally identifiable information is requested.

All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected, encrypted computer, within a password-protected file folder.

If answers are specifically quoted in the research, any information that could potentially link an individual to a specific event, person, or unit will be sanitized. Names will be replaced with pseudonyms. For example, an answer may say, *"During A/1-32's change of command inventories I heard my 1SG say a sexist term."* This answer could be sanitized to instead say, *"During a major unit event a senior NCO in my chain of command made a discriminatory remark."*

As this research requires internet participation, there is always the risk of intrusion by outside agents (i.e., hacking) and therefore the possibility of being identified exists. It is recommended subjects complete this survey on a private or secure network.

Benefits

Subjects will not receive any direct benefit from participation. However, participation benefits future research to examine the state of female retention in the Department of Defense, as well as how to better support women in the armed services.

Compensation
Participants will not be compensated for their participation.

Confidentiality

The online survey is anonymous, with no request of personally identifiable data.

The researcher will have access to all data, as well as agencies that enforce legal and ethical guidelines for research. These agencies include the Human Protections Director and Collaborative Academic Institutional Review Board at the U.S. Combined Arms Center. Other agencies include the Office for the Human Research Protection Program at the Command and General Staff College, as well as other Department of Defense designees. Upon completion of the online surveys and the researcher's consolidation of data, the following steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality for participants:

If subjects provide any personally identifiable information (PII) within their survey responses, the researcher will code the data to categorize it into group analysis. In the event specific passages are quoted in the research, those passages will be de-identified and sanitized of any potential PII or information connecting the subject to a specific unit, event, or person.

The survey data is stored on a secure server on the Verint website. The extracted data will be stored in a password-protected file within the researcher's password-protected, encrypted computer.

All data obtained about the subject, as an individual, will be considered privileged and held in confidence; subjects will not be identified in any presentation of the results unless the subject desires to be identified and expresses written consent.

All data related to this study will remain secured for a period of no less than three years from the approval date for the research study.

Contacts for Additional Assistance
If the subject has questions about the research, their research subject rights, or any research-related injury or issues, contact the following:

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Brutsche, kimberly.g.brutsche.mil@army.mil

CGSC Human Protections Director: Dr. Michelle A. Miller, michelle.a.miller48.civ@army.mil

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Subjects may skip questions or stop at any time without prejudice.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and understand its contents. I agree to be in this research study for the purposes listed above. By clicking 'Start', I consent to the terms of this research.

Please print or save this screen to access this information in the future.

APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONS

MMAS Survey Instrument

Are you still currently serving on active duty in combat arms?
- Yes
- No

(If separated or no longer serving in combat arms) How did you separate from the Army?
- Voluntary (UQR, REFRAD, etc.)
- Involuntary (Medical, OSB, etc.)
- Retirement
- Still serving but transferred out of combat arms into another branch

What is/was your Army combat arms branch or occupation?
- Infantry
- Armor
- Field Artillery
- Special Operations (fill in blank)

What year did you enter a combat arms branch (either commissioned or transferred)?
- Years from 2010 to 2022

Rank(s) you held while serving in a combat arms occupation? (Select all that apply)
- W01
- CW2
- CW3
- CW4
- CW5
- 2LT
- 1LT
- CPT
- MAJ
- LTC
- COL

How many years did you serve on active duty within a combat arms occupation?

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15+

Did you deploy while serving in a combat arms occupation?

Yes
No

(If yes to question 5) How many times did you deploy while serving in a combat arms occupation?

1
2
3
4
5+

Marital status during majority of your combat arms career:

Single
Partnership/Relationship
Married
Separated
Divorced

(If married or in a partnership/relationship) Are you dual military?

Yes
No

Number of children you had during majority of your combat arms career:

0
1
2
3
4
5+

During your time serving in combat arms, did you become pregnant?

Yes
No

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women were in your chain of command (up through Division)?

0
1
2
3
4
5+

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women (of a combat arms occupation) were in your battalion (or battalion equivalent)?

0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10+

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women (of any rank, branch, or occupation) were in your battalion (or battalion equivalent)?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

Did your unit have a female mentorship program?

- Yes
- No

Have you served beyond your initial service obligation?

- Yes
- No

(If still on active-duty service) What are your intentions for continued active-duty service in combat arms?

- Serve until I am eligible for retirement
- Serve for the foreseeable future, but open to separation given the right circumstances
- Submit separation/retirement paperwork within the next 5 years or as soon as my obligation is complete
- Transfer out of combat arms
- Complete separation/retirement process
- Undecided
- N/A (for those separated)

(If separated from active-duty service) What were your initial career plans upon joining the Army?

- Retire
- Complete Obligation
- Undecided

Retention Questions

The following questions apply to those still serving and those who have separated from the service. Please select a response that reflects the level of importance the following factors would have or have had on your decision to continue or end military service.

Extremely NOT Important	**Not Important**	**Neutral**	**Important**	**Extremely Important**
1	2	3	4	5

Patriotism
Sense of purpose
Personal morale
Overall quality of life
Unit culture/climate
Workplace relationships
Quality of others I work with
Competence of my chain of command
Opportunities to travel
Pay
Family tradition
Educational benefits
Ability to use college degree
Leadership experience
Mentorship
Chain of command support
Quality of healthcare
Retirement benefits
Opportunities to deploy
Military housing
Promotion opportunities
Awards and recognition
Opportunities for command/key development positions
Negative officer evaluations
Positive officer evaluations
Stability/PCS cycle
Reproductive health
Personal overall health
Physical demands of the job
Career flexibility
Family needs or support
Exceptional Family Member Program needs
Significant other's support of service

Stress
Work life balance
How chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity issues (race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, pregnancy, genetic information)
Diversity in the workplace
Seeing women in senior officer ranks
How chain of command handles sexual harassment/sexual assault issues
Open Comment Box: Please use this space to share any stories or list any other factors that affect or have affected your decision to continue or end military service. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

Trailblazer Questions

For the purpose of this survey, the definition of "trailblazer" is sourced from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the following: "A pioneer; a person who makes, does, or discovers something new and makes it acceptable or popular."

Please respond by selecting an option that reflects the degree to which you agree or disagree. Some questions have accompanying open-ended questions to add additional detail. These are optional but appreciated. Please give as much detail as you are able. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**N/A**
1	2	3	4	5	N/A

I feel that some of my negative experiences in my unit were a direct result of me being a female in combat arms.
(OPEN-ENDED) Please share any key negative experiences or stories of your time serving in combat arms.
I feel that some of my positive experiences in my unit were a result of me being a female in combat arms.
(OPEN-ENDED) Share any key positive experiences or stories of your time serving in combat arms.
As a woman serving or who has served in combat arms, I consider myself to be a trailblazer.
(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why you consider or do not consider yourself to be a trailblazer.
As a woman serving or who has served in combat arms, others have considered or called me a trailblazer.

The idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in my decision to join combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly list the factors that influenced your decision to join a combat arms branch over another occupation.

(If no longer serving in combat arms) The idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in my decision to leave combat arms or military service.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly how being a trailblazer affected your decision to leave combat arms.

I was advised NOT TO join a combat arms branch or occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly explain why you were advised to not join combat arms.

I was pressured TO join a combat arms branch or occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly explain how you were pressured to join combat arms.

(If transferred into combat arms from another branch) Serving as a woman in combat arms feels the same as serving as a woman in my previous branch/occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I felt personal pressure to perform equal to or better than my male counterparts.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

I felt pressure from others to perform equal to or better than my male counterparts.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

The female integration process for my combat arms unit was efficient.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

My male peers supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

My male superiors supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

My male subordinates supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

As a female in combat arms, I felt integrated into my unit and part of the team.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

I was treated differently in my unit due to being a female.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

I was not concerned with discrimination while serving in my unit.

My unit would take reports of discrimination seriously.

My unit would take reports of sexual harassment or assault seriously.

I received mentorship from males while serving in combat arms.

I received mentorship from females while serving in combat arms.

I feel like I had the same career opportunities as my male peers.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I feel like I am/was harder on other females serving in my unit or in the Army.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

Serving in combat arms affected my decisions on marriage or starting a family.

I believe it would be easier for me to be pregnant or start a family in branches that are not combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

To this date, I have met all my personal goals while serving in a combat arms branch.

To this date, I have met all my professional goals while serving in a combat arms branch.

I feel like my Army career would be easier if I were not serving in a combat arms branch.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

Serving in combat arms is exactly what I thought it would be.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I am happy with my decision to join a combat arms branch.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

If I could go back in time, I would choose a different branch to serve in.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, what branch would you choose to serve in and why?

The Army should implement strategies specific to retaining women in combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, list any recommended strategies or factors for the Army to consider in retaining women in combat arms. If you do not agree, explain why.

Additional Open-Ended Retention Questions

Please use this comment box to write any stories, thoughts, or ideas you would like to share that did not fit within the scope of the above questions. Please give as much detail as you are able. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

For questions or further elaboration of survey responses, contact Major Kimberly Brutsche at kimberly.g.brutsche.mil@army.mil.

APPENDIX D

APPROVAL TO CONDUCT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY COMBINED ARMS CENTER
U.S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE
100 STIMSON AVENUE
FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027-2301

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

ATZL-LSA-H January 27, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJ Kimberly G. Brutsche, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027

SUBJECT: Approval to Conduct Human Subjects Research

1. Your protocol to research, CA-2022-84 "*Closing the Gender Gap – An Analysis of Female Retention in Combat Arms Branches*" dated 27 January 2022 was reviewed on 27 January 2022 and determined to be exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. As your proposal involves an online survey of the "phenomenological experiences of women who have served in combat arms occupations and how those experiences informed their decisions to either leave or continue military service", you meet *Exemption #2.(i) of 32 CFR 219.104(d)*: "Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording)" and that "the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects."

2. Your protocol is approved with no required modifications. You have been assigned protocol approval number 22-84. Reference this number when submitting any additional documentation or requesting information from the CGSC Human Protections Director concerning your research proposal.

3. Your proposal is approved for data collection with the following (5) stipulations:

(1) You are approved to recruit the number of participants (not to exceed 30) as indicated in your protocol. Any modifications to this study (including, but not limited to, changes in recruitment materials or procedures, investigators, inclusion/exclusion criteria, interview/survey questions, or data collection procedures, or increases in the number of participants enrolled) must be submitted as a written amendment for review and approval prior to implementing the change.

(2) You are expected to securely maintain all research documents and data collected for three (3) years.

(3) Allegations of non-compliance during this study will be investigated by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), Human Protections Director (HPD).

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY COMBINED ARMS CENTER
U.S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE
100 STIMSON AVENUE
FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027-2301

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

ATZL-LSA-H

February 28, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJ Kimberly G. Brutsche, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027

SUBJECT: Modification of Exempt Research Approval (Brutsche)

1. Following careful review of your request for modification of CA-2022-84 "*Closing the Gender Gap – An Analysis of Female Retention in Combat Arms Branches*" dated 27 February 2022, I have determined the requested change does not alter its exempt status. The study remains exempt under 32 CFR 219.104(d)(2)(i.). The requested modification involves an increase of the number of subjects from 30 to 100.

2. The modification has been approved to increase the number of subjects to 100. This modification is in effect on 28 FEB 2022. The study has been assessed as "No Greater Than Minimal Risk".

3. You are expected to comply with all conditions indicated in this memorandum and to follow your approved protocol. You are subject to auditing by the CGSC Human Protections Director (HPD) to ensure compliance. Failure to follow these guidelines could result in the termination of the approval for your research. Any further modifications to this study (including, but not limited to changes in recruitment materials or procedures, investigators, inclusion/exclusion criteria, interview/survey questions, data collection procedures, or increases in the number of participants enrolled) must be submitted as a written modification for review and approval prior to implementing the change. Allegations of non-compliance will be investigated by the CGSC HPD.

4. You are responsible for the conduct of this study and for fulfilling the reporting requirements of 32 CFR 219, DoDI 3216.02, and submitting a Study Closure Report to the CGSC HPD upon completion of your study. POC is the undersigned at michelle.a.miller48.civ@army.mil at (913) 684-7311 or (913) 682-1185.

MILLER.MICHELLE.ANN.1123931048
Digitally signed by MILLER.MICHELLE.ANN.1123931048
Date: 2022.02.28 09:22:23 -06'00'
MICHELLE A. MILLER, PhD
Human Protections Director
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

REFERENCE LIST

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