

The Exploration of the Meaning Attributed to Their Professional Quality of Life by the Women Officers within the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Anna Baumgartner

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Alessandro Quartiroli, (Psychology)

ABSTRACT

With the repeal of the 1994 Direct Combat Definition and Assignment Rule in 2015, more women are entering the military each year, some in positions that were previously closed to them (Hammelman, 2017). Some research suggests that servicewomen's experiences are not the same as servicemen and they may have additional professional stress in the military. However, many women are and continue to be interested in a military career (Mankoski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). By looking through the lens of the professional quality of life construct, with this study the author aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of what might lead women to continue to join the military, specifically the Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) program. Three female participants, who were formerly, currently, or recently enrolled in the ROTC program, were interviewed about their motives to join the program and what factors they perceived have either aided or hindered their experience as female cadets. Interviews were completed during the fall of 2018 and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes ($M = 31.68$). Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was engaged to develop an in-depth understanding of these experiences. Results suggest that enrolling in ROTC programs might present positive (Leadership) and challenging experiences (time management) for female students. Overall, through the engagement of proactive strategies, the positive experiences seem to outweigh the challenge factors.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been integrating themselves into the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War, and have been slowly gaining rights to join areas in military previously exclusive to men for decades (Holm, 1982). According to the Department of Defense, as of 2017, women currently make up about 16.2% of the U.S. Military active duty members, 15.9% of enlisted military members and 17.7% of military officers (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). In addition, the proportion of servicewomen has increased across all service branches in the military since 2010 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). While women have gained career opportunities in the military, they also face challenges and are in need of additional support as they continue to integrate themselves in the traditionally masculine organization (Hammelman, 2017).

The integration of servicewomen has accentuated potential gender-based unique experiences (Doan & Portillo, 2016). Researchers found that many qualified female soldiers reported that they were oftentimes not taken seriously with their professional advice, while their male counterparts were often referred to for answers. According to these servicewomen, they perceived this treatment based on their gender and the connotations that are associated with different genders (Doan & Portillo, 2016). Silva (2008) conducted research on how female ROTC cadets navigate their female identity within the masculine military environment. They found that female cadets explicitly expressed enjoyment in the program as an escape from traditional gender roles and expressed the program to be "gender blind." However, both female and male cadets perceived their experiences based on their gender. Women felt because of the lower requirements of women physically, that their accomplishments may be seen as inferior to men and that they had to work harder to be seen as equal (Silva, 2008). Similar perceptions were also found in areas of leadership from female cadets (Silva, 2008).

In addition to the concept that women in the military may have to work hard to overcome negative stereotypes, there is evidence to suggest that women may also have to navigate categories into which they are put by practicing gender fluidity (Doan & Portillo, 2016). In a study conducted at West Point Military Academy, when asked about dating other cadets, female cadets discussed how their male counterparts would joke including that they "were not

really girls” (Arbeit, 2017). When asked about femininity, male cadets often did not refer to female cadets and instead to female civilians (Silva, 2008). This is echoed in a study by Toppleberg and Wood looking at how sexual harassment can still be perpetrated, they state that through the formal and informal socialization of military programs such as military academies or ROTC programs, this potentially produces a culture where hyper masculinity is seen as a positive, and most women are perceived in a more negative light as either “too masculine” or “merely feminine” (Wood & Toppleberg, 2017). Similar to results found in the Doan and Potillo study (2016), women in the military tend to be more gender fluid which does not seem to be experienced to the same degree as their male counterparts. Through navigating between femininity and masculinity, this could potentially add additional stressors to the experiences of female soldiers and cadets, and lead to the lack of understanding that there are unique experiences to female servicewomen in an environment that models only looking at differences of rank (Doan & Portillo 2016).

There are also unique experiences of women based on their biology. For women who become pregnant while serving in the military, there are particular difficulties for women through experiences such as additional anxieties of physical test postpartum and trying to meet the physical requirements of the test (Hammelman, 2017). There also seems to be a mental struggle of being a “good mother” and a “good soldier” as they are conceptualized separately and not integrated (Hammelman, 2017). One research study looked at how women were affected about abortions. Due to the military’s policy on abortion, it was not always easy to obtain one, but also not easy to continue a career in the military while pregnant due to the physical and time demands of the job (Grindlay, Seymour, Fix, Reiger, Keefe-Oates, Grossman, 2017).

Because of these unique challenges that women in the military navigate, there are additional potential physical and mental effects of this gender gap. In research looking into the gender differences in mental health in active duty soldiers, researchers found that women had higher levels of military sexual trauma. In addition, researchers found that military sexual trauma was a significant predictor of both PTSD and depression symptoms (Maguen, Luxton, Skopp, & Madden, 2011). While both males and females experience military sexual harassment and assault, this tends to affect more women than men and the rates of sexual assault vary between the different branches of the military (Wood & Toppleberg, 2017). The military has been proactive in the war against military sexual harassment and assault with implementing sexual harassment training programs and taking preventative approaches in areas across the military aimed at building a culture of trust and bystander intervention (Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services [DDACOWITS], 2018). While there have been many proactive approaches, some still brought questions to whether these techniques are sufficiently effective (DDACOWITS, 2018). In research looking into why sexual assault and harassment are continuing in the military, researchers theorized that one reason is because of the organizational structure of the military and the gender roles that are held implicitly within (Wood & Toppleberg, 2017). These gender roles were also found while interviewing cadets at West Point Military Academy. Researchers in this study found that there was often confusion on both sides of what consent entails. (Arbeit, M., 2017). In addition, male cadets oftentimes displayed fear of false sexual harassment or assault accusations and female cadets expressed fear of a stigma that they were “sleeping around” (Arbeit, 2017).

In contrast to the potentially additive stressors for servicewomen and cadets in the military environment, research suggests that there are also positive mental and physical factors perceived from female cadets and servicewomen. Researchers studied female cadets participating in basic combat training in the military before and after completing the program. They found that there were positive changes in both mood and cognitive performance, such as reaction times and correct responses to cognitive tasks, after completing the program even in a stressful environment. Research suggested that having a structured, stressful program, such as basic training, could enhance long-term resilience of soldiers (Lieberman, Karl, Niro, Williams, Farina, Cable, & Mclung, 2014). In addition, research has found that female cadets felt empowered by being in their ROTC program and flourishing in their leadership roles (Silva, 2008).

The professional quality of life is a construct looking at both the challenging and the positive aspects of one’s profession (Stamm, 2010). Looking specifically at helping professionals, Stamm defined these two sides of one’s professional experience respectively compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. Compassion satisfaction is when one feels pleasure and benefit by serving others in their profession. Opposingly, compassion fatigue is made up of burnout and secondary traumatic stress. While the former is characterized by the gradual buildup of feelings of hopelessness impediment in one’s profession, secondary traumatic stress refers to secondhand exposure to others traumatic experience, typically occurring as consequence of personal attachment to the victim of the initial trauma (Stamm, 2010). The construct of professional quality of life has so far been mainly used to understand the professional experience of individuals where they may encounter traumatic experiences such as first response medics or help others who have experienced trauma, for example social workers (Stamm, 2010). While the idea of

positive and negative factors related to one's profession has been applied to many helping professions (e.g., Quartiroli, Etzel, Knight, Zakrajsek, 2018), it has not been expanded to some professions, such as military forces.

Though the military is a challenging environment with potential additional professional stressors for servicewomen, many women have, and continue, to be interested in a military career (Mankoski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). Despite additional stressors and unique experiences of women in a traditionally masculine environment for female soldiers, researchers found that the majority of veterans they interviewed considered their time in the forces to be positive and rewarding while others noted some negative experiences based on their gender (Mankoski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). With the increasing numbers of women in the military over the past decade, it is important to understand the unique experiences of women in the military and how these experiences could affect them both negatively and positively (DoD, 2017; Hammelman, 2017).

To continue to dig deeper into a conversation of the lives of women in the military, qualitative research was conducted on the professional quality of women's experience in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) and their perceptions of their careers. With more opportunities that are offered to servicewomen, female soldiers are also faced with new challenges as they continue to navigate a traditionally masculine environment and find their identity as a woman in that environment. Although female soldiers are a fundamental part of the U.S. military and are now recognized and allowed to be in the same positions as men, women have different experiences than male soldiers, some that may add stressors to their careers. The ROTC offers a sample population of the future of the military and the culture within it. The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning attributed to professional quality of life by three women previously, currently, and recently enrolled in the ROTC program, in the hope to gain an in-depth understanding of what leads women to continue to join the military, and how they perceive their lives within it.

METHODS

Qualitative methods were used in the form of inductive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a process used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report themes in data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This method is beneficial in multiple aspects of qualitative research, one important aspect being flexibility when analyzing data (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the present study, it was used in a "contextualist" method to understand how the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the current participants reflect a context within society (Braun & Clark, 2006). To conduct thematic analysis, researchers must first familiarize themselves with the data they have collected. In the present study, transcriptions were made and actively read through multiple times before moving onto the next steps. Researchers must then code their data, finding interesting features throughout the data in a systematic way. (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the present study, highlighters and different colored pens were used to code the transcriptions. The next step in analysis is that researchers use these codes to find potential themes throughout the data collected. These themes are analyzed subjectively and reported as the results in the paper, often using quotes from the participants throughout to help add examples, evidence, and clarification of themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). Specifically, the analysis that was used to the best of the researcher's abilities was "inductive thematic analysis." This is a more data driven analysis in that during coding, the researcher looks for codes without trying to fit the codes into pre-existing notions of the researcher (Braun & Clark, 2006). While conducting inductive thematic analysis, as well as in all research, it is important to be aware of one's own values, biases, thoughts throughout the process so that the results and themes are not created based on the researcher's thoughts or what they wish to find, but instead shown to the researcher through the data itself (Braun & Clark, 2006).

It is also important to analyze the personal biases of the researcher as this could potentially affect the results unintentionally. Through bracketing about the process and the feelings and thoughts throughout, it was found that before this research project, there was not much knowledge about the military, let alone women in the military. From preliminary research reviewed and modern media through a few undergraduate classes, an analyzed bias was that women in the military had to work harder or that they were at a constant disadvantage being in a male dominated career. However, the researcher was made aware of this bias before conducting interviews and after interviewing the participants and gaining new knowledge and perspectives, there was more information added to this schema and perception which allowed for this bias to be checked against when analyzing the results.

Participants

The population that was sampled from was a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. Many young adults join ROTC programs while attending post-secondary education as they are programs that help to finance college while also giving them leadership skills and training to become officers in the military (Army rotc, 2016). Because these programs are often directed toward the training of young adults for the military, it is a good population of study of the future members of the forces.

Procedures

Three interviews were conducted, between about 20-60 minutes ($M = 31.68$). The participants in this study were currently undergraduate students at a midsized Midwest University. There were three different perspectives used in this qualitative research: someone new to the ROTC program, someone who has long standing experience in the ROTC program, and someone who is no longer in the ROTC program. All in-person interviews were conducted by the first author. The semi-structured protocol used in the interviews was developed based on the existing literature review and the input of an expert in qualitative research. The protocol included questions aimed to explore the experiences of female ROTC cadets through the lens of the professional quality of life with the ability to ask clarifying questions when deemed appropriate. For example, clarifying questions such as “could you explain that more?” and “how did that make you feel?” The flow of the questions was warm up questions pertaining to their experiences in college and then into questions pertaining to their experiences as women in the ROTC program and perceptions of women in the military. A demographic survey was sent out post interviews to collect demographic information, however, due to lack of responses it was omitted from this study.

For clarification, the three separate participants are labeled under pseudonyms as participant one, “Marie;” participant two, “Katherine;” and participant three, “Alice.” All three participants have had different levels of experience in the ROTC program of being a current, past, or recent participant in the program. Therefore, their experiences are through these frames of references. In doing this, one is able to gain greater understanding of perceptions at different levels of experience in the program. In addition, Professional Quality of Life was a very large construct to interview cadets about and after confusion on all three accounts, the construct was broken down into benefits that were perceived of the ROTC program, challenges perceived in the program, and what methods were used to overcome these challenges. Additionally, the interviews were analyzed to see if either the perceived benefits or challenges outweighed the other.

Ethical Institutional Board approval was obtained before the study took place.

RESULTS

Throughout the three interviews, there were four main themes found pertaining to the participants’ experiences and perceptions in the ROTC programs. These themes were their reasons for joining the ROTC program, the unique experiences of being a woman in the ROTC program, their benefits of participating in the program, and their professional quality of life in the ROTC program.

Reasons for Joining the ROTC program

The participants acknowledged that they had been interested in joining the military prior to starting their studies at the university. Marie noted that they had “always wanted to join the military and I wanted to take a look at that potential route.” Katherine mentioned that she was notified of ROTC from her recruiter when she returned from basic training and

got in contact with some of the cadre, and they told me about some of the scholarships, and told me about the overall program, ROTC Reserve Officer Training. So essentially, throughout the remaining time in your academic career as a student, you’re also taking military science classes and learning how to be a leader, and learning how to be an officer in the military. And it absolutely sparked my interest right off the bat.

Alice had also never heard of ROTC before starting her studies at the university and saw that there was a table with information at orientation. Alice mentioned “I have always had in the back of my mind that I wanted to do something with the military.” It was mentioned across the three participants how the ROTC program sparked their interest as it pertained to the military, as a potential career route.

When discussing motivations to join the military, Katherine noted that she had considered joining the military in high school and she had decided “If I attend college, I’m going to pay for it myself. It’s my higher education, I’m going to pay for it with my own money,” so joining the military was a financial benefit. But also mentioned if one was to join the ROTC program

don’t get distracted by the numbers. If you want to join the program, it’s because you genuinely believe in its value and in its beliefs and you want to be an officer in the U.S. military. Because otherwise, if you come in it for the wrong reasons, you’re not going to succeed and you’re going to do more harm than good as an officer.

Unique experiences of being a woman in the ROTC program

When asked about any potential unique experiences as being women in the ROTC program, the participants responded in saying that they did not find many, if any, unique experiences. Alice mentioned that they “think that it

is very uniform throughout. Everyone was treated the same. Everyone's at the same level in your level." At each level of the program there was identified different responsibilities and unique experiences but not so much in each level when it came to gender. Marie found that she sometimes experienced a lack of respect, but noted that this was not due to gender and instead rank. Katherine perceived that there were not many unique experiences as a woman potentially because the ROTC program takes place on a university campus, that it is possibly a more liberal environment than the military, but also went on to state that

in the ROTC program you're taught: you're going to be leading soldiers throughout your career, and all of these soldiers are going to be coming from all different backgrounds, all different areas, sometimes different countries and you have to be able to gauge and accept and understand those differences.

Marie mentioned how "most of the women in my battalion were nursing students. I was the only female that was pre-med, so I guess that's unique." When asked about how this made them feel, Marie mentioned "I don't know. I have gotten it my entire life, so it doesn't matter to me. Just like 'oh, okay yeah. Women can be doctors too thanks.'" This could show that there were not many perceived unique experiences of women in the ROTC program and experiences that were perceived as potentially unique were not pertaining to the program itself but to their major as compared to majors of other females around them in that environment.

However, Katherine did mention that because the military is traditionally a male dominated area, "it can still be embedded in those original values and beliefs. So the military has definitely taken a lot more time to come around in accepting women in the military." Katherine mentions how this is one more exciting aspect of training to be an officer because she has the opportunity to "show my soldiers I'm here to train just as much as they are." By being a woman in the military, however, Katherine noted how this adds a sense of accomplishment. She mentions that women have to

work that much harder, if not more, compared to a lot of the guys. Because it's just understood that a majority of the men are physically fit in the military, versus a woman. If you want to achieve the same physical fitness standards as a guy, you have to work that much harder in the gym. You have to run that much more and that much faster.

It is significant to note that during her first drill, she was the only woman and there were sergeants intimidated to talk to her which Katherine perceived was because she was a girl. She noted that when she walked over to a group of sergeants and told "my dirtiest, most inappropriate joke" she was "adopted as one of the guys" and in turn, when she was adopted by the guys, she expressed that it was a lot easier to interact with them.

While the ROTC program was looked at as overall not a gendered experience, there were different perceptions of how recent military policy changes may affect women's military careers. The overall theme across the three participants was that their perceptions of the policy changes were overall positive. As Katherine stated, "honestly I think it's exciting. It's about time that the military has come around and realized women can kick [butt] just as much as men can." And Alice mentioned that "that's a really good thing, 'cause I feel like we should be able to do all the same things, ya know? As long as we meet the same requirements and everything." While the overall theme was positive, there were also some perceived potential challenges as Katherine recognized that

I'm also very strong willed and very independent and not afraid to stand up for myself, my soldiers, or speak my mind. Versus someone who's more on the quiet side; shy, introverted qualities may feel as if they're being walked all over, because the military is a very 'type A' organization.

Marie also stated that there were perceived benefits of more opportunities for women now with the policy changes but also recognized that she perceived there were some challenges in this because of her perceptions that there are jobs that women should not be able to do. When prompted, Marie elaborated by stating,

Like to be a ranger. Women are not built biologically to be able to handle that. Yes, they can still probably lift and do a lot of the same things men can, because they need a certain level of hygiene because women get a lovely little gift once a month.

Similarly, Marie expressed how she thought that there would be benefits and challenges in regards to higher standards for women with future implications of these policy changes as well. An example that was provided was the physical training exam; right now men's standards are higher. "I can just see it going towards more of an even pace, which can be a good thing or a bad thing."

In contrast, Katherine mentioned that in her perceptions of the policy changes, that the military is changing slowly over time with examples of how two women graduating from ranger school is "pretty much showing women are just as strong as men." She mentioned that as time has passed since these policy changes, Katherine has perceived a lot more acceptance between the genders in the military but notes that

Personally, I don't think you're really going to see complete acceptance until you have female officers who are also high-ranking in combat positions, versus now they're still low-ranking. They're still the "one"... It will take time, but I think we'll get there eventually.

With these policy changes in place and allowing women into combat positions, in Katherine's perceptions, that is a positive step for equality.

Benefits of Enrolling in the Program

There were many different benefits of many different areas of the ROTC program that were reported and discussed, however the most repeated reward that was talked about was leadership. Marie stated that "the whole point of the program is to be able to lead eventually." Participants had similar feelings and perceptions that their leadership had grown stronger or that they could see strong leadership potential in the program. Along with leadership, there were other personal attributes that the participants noted as rewards. Katherine mentioned how they are "a lot more outgoing, a lot more assertive. My leadership attributes have definitely expanded quite a bit." Marie mentioned how they are "a stronger person, a stronger individual in my personal life. And I know it will help me in the future with all the training for leadership." Katherine states that "it's held me to higher standards compared to, I guess, a lot of my friends who aren't in the program. My aspirations, ambitions, and passions are a lot more determined." Alice stated that "there's a really strong leadership with the upper levels, and they really show a lot of care for the program, and that is a good role model for me, I guess, that makes me excited for what's to come." In addition Katherine and Alice mentioned how they have enjoyed being more active around the community and campus through serving others in the program.

Another benefit that was acknowledged was the physical aspect of the program, where cadets have physical training three days a week from 6:00 a.m.-7:00 a.m. Alice mentioned how "it's really hard, but I enjoy it because it gets me out of bed in the morning. It's a good workout." Whereas Marie noted "as much as I didn't like doing PT in the morning I liked doing PT in the morning."

In addition, when asked about their perceptions on what piece of advice they would give to a young female interested in joining the military, Alice stated that they would tell the young female to "do it. You might be a little nervous at first with everything that's going on it does seem kind of overwhelming. But I think it's definitely rewarding. The rewards way overshadow any challenge."

This could show that the benefits of the program may outweigh the perceived challenges of being enrolled in the program.

Professional Quality of Life

Low Burnout. While there were common rewards perceived between the three participants with the main echo of leadership, there was one common challenge they perceived in the program which was time management and heavy work load. There were different stresses perceived in balancing time and Marie mentioned that "the balance with school and then work. Because you're not contracted. You're not making a stipend. So like, I had bills so I still had to work." While Katherine saw that the "increased workload academically, as well as increase the roles and responsibilities in the ROTC program, can definitely be very stressful." Alice found that in addition to having multiple time commitments, they experienced an additional challenge with becoming acclimated to the program and juggling these multiple facets in a day.

However, while there was a heavy workload, there was also a common theme for overcoming their challenges by keeping their mind on their future goals. Marie explained this by saying "I mean, it wasn't easy going to school, ROTC, and work, but [I] just didn't really dwell on it and just worked through it." And Alice mentioned "when I get worried that it's too much to handle, [that] I'm not going to be able to do it all, I just remember that it is all for a goal. It's not just for nothing." Another common echoing theme in overcoming challenges was support. While Alice talked about when they felt overwhelmed at the beginning of their training and how that everyone in the program was very inviting and would explain everything multiple times, and were very open to answering questions, Katherine talked about the support of their cadre. "They're very, very open and they're very accepting. If you're struggling with something, they're always willing to sit down and talk to you and work through it." And when asked about the piece of advice they would give a young female interested in joining the ROTC program, Marie said simply "have a good support system."

Participants also noted family support. When asked about reactions of family members, the participants elaborated on the different reactions of family members both immediate and distant. Katherine mentioned how "[I] called my parents, and they're like 'yeah, we figured you would end up joining sooner or later.'" And while reactions Katherine's distant family members were different than her immediate family. She explains that

My grandma was a little leery with the whole ‘female in the military’ thing. It doesn’t have the greatest rep, but I promised her, I was like ‘No, I’ll be fine.’ My parents raised me to be very independent and very strong willed, so I made sure to let her know I can take care of myself.

Similarly, Katherine found that by explaining the process and what she would be doing, it relieved some of the nervousness of distant family members who overall had pleasant reactions. Alice’s parents, who did not have many connections or vast knowledge of the military, had a similar reaction to Katherine’s extended family. Alice mentioned how

they were a little nervous. But, I think they’re both proud and I think my dad especially [because I think that] the army is something he’s always wanted to do and he never did. And I think he kind of regrets that. So I think he’s really happy that someone is doing that. But yeah, I think they’re both a little nervous about it because just they don’t know.

Contradictory to the other two participants, Marie mentions how her father is in the military and “my family told me not to, but I did it anyways.” When asked to elaborate on why this is, Marie responds “because I’m his little girl, because he is totally okay with females in the military. He just wasn’t okay with me in the military.”

While there are a variety of responses from families, this could show a potential relationship between knowledge of the military through personal experience and the perceptions of females in the military.

Compassion Satisfaction. There were recurring notes of positive feelings when discussing serving those around them and their country. Alice mentioned that being a cadet fit into her ideal self and that “any time I thought about it just gave me this really warm feeling and just people willing to literally lay down their lives for their country was just really amazing to me.” Katherine echoes this thought by noting that “my whole entire life I’ve always loved helping people and taking care of people, so then being a soldier in the Army, I get to do that for my whole entire country.” This could show that these female cadets experience a sense of compassion satisfaction by participating in a program that is directed to serving others.

With the high-work load, but the feelings of support and purpose, when asked about their perceptions on their future in 10 years, they had future aspirations to be in the military and finished with their degrees. Participants were interested in “helping careers” in their future plans as well. Alice stated that she “would like to be a certified athletic trainer and an army officer” and Marie saw themselves as “hopefully see myself done with school, hopefully in my residency, if not done with that too. Still in the military.” Katherine mentioned how they would like in 10 years to have a masters in recreational therapy and stated that she wanted to hit her “20-plus years. I always tell people I want to stay in the military until they kick me out because I am too old.” In addition to wanting to continue a career in the military, Alice responded “yes, yes. Oh, also hopefully with a family.”

DISCUSSION

Compassion satisfaction is defined as when one feels satisfaction and gratification when serving others in their profession. In the current study, participants noted how they feel satisfaction when not only serving those around them but also serving their country. Where burnout is often associated with a non-supportive work environment and a high work load (Stamm, 2010). In the present study, participants note that they do have a high workload, but also mention their support from their families, cadre and fellow cadets. In accordance with the findings of Silva, ROTC cadets in the present study explicitly perceived not to have many, if any, unique experiences identifying as women in the program (Silva, 2008). In the present study, benefits of being in the program include leadership and how their leadership has been fostered and developed throughout the course of their participation in the program. This supports the literature that there was enrichment in the leadership roles that the ROTC program had to offer (Silva, 2008). Further support of literature is seen through Marie’s ideas on how women’s biological bodies are not always seen as conducive to the military environment. This can be supported through previous literature that has found that servicewomen perceive that the military environment was not always a conducive one to continuing a pregnancy and career, or having an abortion (Grindlay, et al, 2017; Hammelan, 2017). It is interesting to note that there was no mention of a “third gender” or the feeling of being categorized as servicewomen and cadets have perceived in literature (Doan & Portillo, 2016). This could potentially be due to the fact that as pointed out in the present study, ROTC programs are held on University Campuses and therefore may be more liberal than the military. However, similarly to how both cadets and servicewomen reported that they found they fit in best with being gender fluid, it was mentioned in the current study how once Katherine presented as “one of the guys” it was perceived as a less awkward environment. While there was noted different perceived and predicted gendered treatment in the military setting as seen in previous literature, there were not many noted negative implications and affects and the few negative perceptions there were, were also accompanied by positive counter notes as well.

There are implications that can be looked at from the themes above and used to further research into the lives of women in the military. One implication is that the reason women decide to join programs such as the ROTC are because of future aspirations of joining the military. Another implication that could be pulled from the analysis is that overall, the policy changes allowing women into more combat roles in the military is perceived as a positive; however, there could be potential challenges associated with these changes as well. Another implication of the research could also be that there were no perceived unique experiences of being women in the ROTC program which could agree with the idea of being seen as a soldier rather than by gender, as mentioned in previous literature of one way female cadets feel empowered (Silva, 2008). The idea of this could impact the lives of women in these programs and how it could affect their positions in the military in the future. The challenges and rewards perceived in the ROTC also did not seem to have gendered implications to them as well. Finally, it could be implied from the analysis above that the participants came into the program with the idea of the potential career in the military, and being in the program helped them grow into that path or did not deter them from their aspirations of joining the military for their long-term careers. Additionally, the careers that were separate interests from their military careers were “helping careers” which could be an implication of their interests in the army as well.

Through bracketing in this paper, the researcher was able to become aware of some biases and values they hold about the research topic. The effects of how bracketing affected this project were available to see in a very dramatic way through a revisiting of previous articles read and new articles discovered. While the protocol was reviewed for potential biases and purposely crafted to avoid leading information, personal perceptions and biases shown through in preliminary writings. This was pointed out to the researcher before the interview process, and therefore the interviews were handled in a way as to avoid leading information or asking additional questions that could be potentially leading as well. After sitting down and bracketing the experiences so far encountered, previous classes, perceptions of women in the military, potential biases and values that could be held by the researcher, it was then that the transcriptions were read and the analysis began. The bracketing process allowed for a more critical look on the analysis portion with potential codes and themes understood separate from preconceived notions of the researcher. When previous literature was revisited and new articles were found, the researcher was able to recognize their biases and values within their past writings and worked to find a more rounded view and deeper meaning in literature.

LIMITATIONS

There are, however, limitations that may have affected this research. The first limitation was that there were only three participants, and therefore while there were themes throughout these three participants, the sample size is very small and might not have led to the full saturation of their experiences. In addition, while a strength of this research was that there were a variety of different perceptions, an interview can only account for the perceptions that were shared aloud and does not account for the values and implicit biases behind their thoughts. Finally, a potential limitation was that professional quality of life was a difficult construct to conceptualize and hence may not have been uniform throughout as a construct but instead what the construct was perceived as.

As this was preliminary research to gain insight in the perceptions and experiences of women in the ROTC program in a mid-size American institution for higher education, there are many different areas that these findings could aid in future research. One of these potential areas would be to look into the perceptions of the military from the views of people who have connections to the military and of people who do not have any connections, as potentially seen through the reactions of family members and through previous literature (Southwell, MacDermond Wadsworth, 2016). Other future research could look into how programs such as the ROTC affect leadership styles and views of women in the military as policy changes continue to affect the careers of servicewomen joining the military. Additional research that could be utilized would be productivity levels of females in male dominated majors or clubs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Department at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse. Many thanks to the participants who took time out of their day to interview and a special thanks to Dr. Quartiroli for the continual guidance through the research process.

The opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and do not reflect those of the U.S. Military.

REFERENCES

- Arbeit, M. (2017). "Make sure you're not getting yourself in trouble:" Building sexual relationships and preventing sexual violence at the u.s. military academy at west point. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 54, 949-961. doi: 10.1080.00224499.2016.1207055.
- Army rotc. (2016). In *U.S. Army*. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <https://www.goarmy.com/rotc/ways-to-attend.html>.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Braun, V. & Clark, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26: 120-123. ISSN 0952-8229.
- Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. (2018). Quarterly meeting minutes 2-3 March 2018.
- Doan, A. & Portillo, S. (2017). Not a woman, but a soldier: Exploring identity through translocational positionality. *Sex Roles*, 76, 236-249. doi: 10.1007/s11199-016-0661-7.
- Grindlay, K., Seymour, J., Fix, L., Reiger, S., Keefe-Oates, B., Grossman, D. (2017). Abortion knowledge and experiences among U.S. servicewomen: A qualitative study. *Perspective on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 49, 245-252, doi:10.1363/psrh.12044.
- Hammelman, J. (2017). Women in the military. In Kendall-Tacket, K. & Ruglass, L. (Eds.), *Women's mental health across a lifespan: Challenges, vulnerabilities, and strengths* (pp. 141-155). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Holm, J. (1982). In molly's wake: The early years. In *Women in the military: An unfinished revolution*. (pp. 3-15). Novato, CA: Presido Press.
- Lieberman, H., Karl, P., Niro, P., Williams, K., Farina, E., Cable, S., & McClung, J. (2014). Positive effects of basic training on cognitive performance and mood for adult females. *Human Factors*, 56, 1113-1123. doi: 10.1177/0018720913519472.
- Maguen, S., Luxton, D., Skopp, N., Madden, E. (2011). Gender differences in traumatic experiences and mental health in active duty soldiers redeployed from iraq and afghanistan. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 46, 311-316. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychires.2011.11.007.
- Mankowski, M., Tower, L., Brandt, C., & Mattocks, K. (2015). Why women join the military: Enlistment decisions and post deployment experiences of service members and veterans. *Social Work*, 60, 315-323. doi:10.1093/sw/swv035.
- Silva, J. (2008). A new generation of women? How female rotc cadets negotiate the tension between masculine military culture and traditional femininity. *Social Forces*, 87, 937-960. doi: 10.1353/sof.0.0138.
- Southwell, K., MacDermind Wadsworth, S. (2016). The many faces of military families: Unique features of the lives of female service members. *Military Medicine*, 181, 70-79. doi: 10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00193.
- Stamm, B.H. (2002). Measuring compassion satisfaction as well as fatigue: Developmental history of compassion satisfaction and fatigue test. In R. Figley (Ed.), *Treating compassion fatigue* (pp. 107-120). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stamm, B.H. (2010). *The concise PROQOL manual (2nd ed.)*.jpo.wrlc.org.
- Wood, E. & Toppelberg, N. (2017) The persistence of sexual assault within the u.s. military. *Journal of Peace Research*, 54, 620-633. doi: 10.1177/0022343317720487.
- U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. (2017). 2017 demographics: Profile of the military community. *Department of Defense Military OneSource Network*. Retrieved from <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/reports-and-surveys>.