MISSING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOMAN VETERAN

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April 2010
Who are American Veterans?
Women in the military serving:
- Since the American Revolution
- Official service began in 1901
- As WACs, WAVES, WASPs, SPARs and Women Marines
- Women’s Armed Services Act of 1948
- Currently over 1.8 million women veterans
- Make up 14.3% of active duty, 17.7% of U.S. Reserve, and 15.1% of National Guard

Sources: Dept of Veteran Affairs, Department of Defense, the Women’s Research & Education Institute, and Women in the Military by Maj. Gen. Jeanne Holm.
Women In Military Service For America Memorial

Courtesy of Orion Photography, Manassas, VA
With over 1.8 million women veterans in the United States, why are women seemingly invisible in the dominant conception of a U.S. veteran?
Methodology

• **Content analysis** of newspaper articles in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*

• **Time Frame** was **Veterans Day** from 2003 (Iraq War) until 2009

• **Coded for presence of female and male representations**
Findings

Males were mentioned in 66% of the articles, while females mentioned in about 26% of the articles.
Male vs. Female Representation

Representation in Newspaper Articles

- Male soldiers and veterans
- Female soldiers and veterans
- Both
News and commentary (op-ed) pieces ("hard news") mentioned males vs. feature stories ("soft news") mentioned females.
News vs. Feature Stories

- **Feature**
  - Male only: 50%
  - Female only: 50%
  - Both: 0%

- **News**
  - Male only: 75%
  - Female only: 10%
  - Both: 15%
“These moments of private anguish – quietly, often tearfully recalled by the mothers and fathers, wives and siblings who endured them...” – New York Times
[Army Reserve Maj. Jennifer] Snyder’s war has not been a shooting war.” – Washington Post
“In Fallujah, word of men killed in action spread quickly...” – Washington Post
“Iraq and Afghanistan veterans aren’t old white guys.” — Paul Rieckhoff in Washington Post
Conclusions

Representations of women soldiers and veterans in the media are lagging behind those of male soldiers and veterans.
Conclusion

“Soft news” stories contain female representations while “hard news” stories contain male representations.
Women’s Memorial Dedication Ceremony (October 18, 1997)

Photos courtesy of Women’s Memorial Foundation
Yesterday, the face of an American veteran was that of my father.

Tomorrow, the face of an American veteran will be Jo’s.

Today, the face of an American veteran is my own.

I am Robbie Fee-Thomson. I served in the United States Coast Guard from 1985-1994.

Future Research

Do certain publications rely more heavily on male representations?
Do these representations provide the public, and women specifically, with a limited view on opportunities available to women in the military?
Changing Perceptions

- Write to your local paper about giving prominence to female veterans.
- Remind your family and friends that women are fighting on the frontlines.
- Visit the Women’s Memorial and read the oral histories.
THE QUALITIES THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN ALL MILITARY JOBS—THINGS LIKE INTEGRITY, MORAL COURAGE, AND DETERMINATION—HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH GENDER.

-- Rhonda Cornum, Major, US Army Medical Corps, Operation Desert Storm

Thank you!

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Image courtesy of the Women's Memorial Foundation