



MISSING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOMAN VETERAN

Research Team | Helen Cho
Executive Mentor | Kari Stoever
Faculty Mentor | Mirjana N. Dedaic

When we celebrate Veteran's Day, why don't we see images of women veterans? This question raises many more about the scarcity of representations of women as soldiers and veterans in popular culture and news media. Although women have been serving in the military since the American Revolution, disguised as male, as auxiliary military members, and now with a permanent place in the military, they have continued to go unnoticed.

If statistics argue that there are over 1.8 million women veterans in the United States, and that women make up 14.3% of active duty members of the military, 17.7% of the Reserves, and 15.1% of the National Guard, why do the dominant images of male soldiers and veterans continue to socialize the public into viewing the military as a male organization? Do the lack of representations of women soldiers and veterans in the media prevent the public, along with women in the military, from identifying as veterans who served their country?

In order to answer these questions, I analyzed the content of newspaper articles from two papers of record, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. The articles spanned from Veteran's Day of 2003 until Veteran's Day of 2009 (November 10-12, 2003 – November 10-12, 2009). By coding for the presence of male and female representations of soldiers and veterans, I was able to obtain statistically significant data about female representations in these two newspapers.

The most significant findings were that representations of male soldiers and veterans were visible in 66% of the articles, while representations of female soldiers and veterans were only visible in 26% of the articles. Also notable was the fact that "hard news" articles had a greater number of male representations (75%) than female representations (18%). However, "soft news" articles conversely contained more representations of female soldiers and veterans (52.2%) than representations of male soldiers and veterans (37.3%).

Although the rate of male and female representations in newspaper articles can be said to largely mirror the ratio of males and females serving in the military, this does not explain why males are represented in higher numbers in hard news stories and females are represented in higher numbers in feature stories. Women are only allowed to embody representations of soldiers and veterans if they take on more feminine, non-combat roles and play an auxiliary or "sidekick" member of the military.

Through this study, we can not only conclude that representations of women soldiers and veterans in the media are lagging behind those of male soldiers and veterans, the data also suggests that the articles that contain female representations are generally "soft news" stories, while male representations are common

in “hard news” stories. When one takes into account political scientists’ and media scholars’ findings about the effects of the media, what are the implications of the lack of legitimate representation of female soldiers and veterans on the public’s perception of women as soldiers and veterans, as well as women soldiers’ willingness to self-identify as veterans?

Despite the role of popular culture and news media in perpetuating representations of soldiers and veterans as male, the Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Washington, D.C. is a reminder that the face of the American veteran is also female. Although the media may lack legitimate representations of female soldiers and veterans, visiting the Women’s Memorial, reminding family and friends that women are serving their country on the frontlines, and writing to your local paper or your paper’s ombudsman about balanced coverage, can help combat the gendered representations of soldiers and veterans in the media today.