

Uniform Identity?

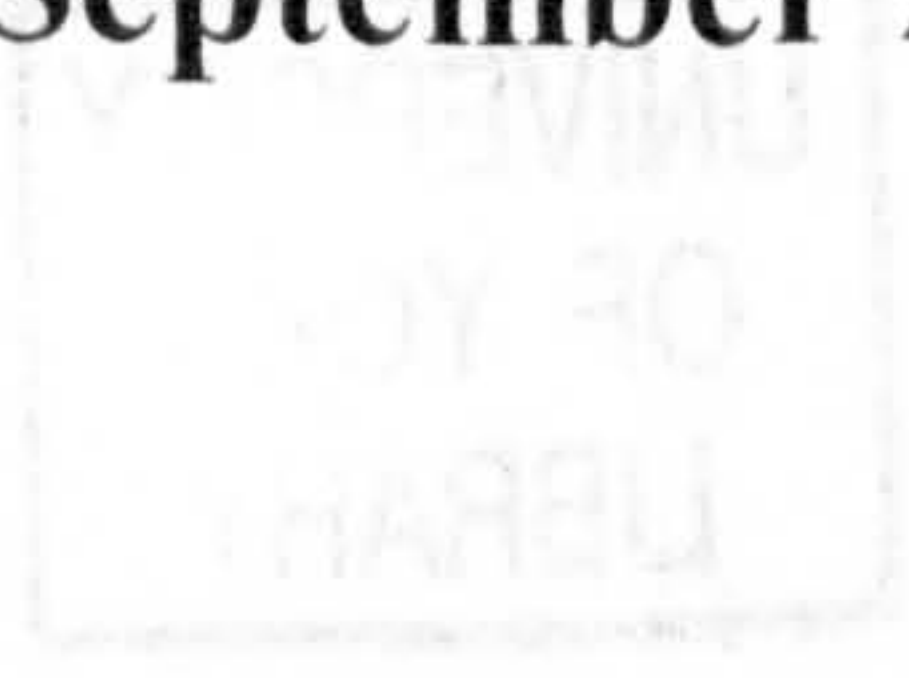
**Lesbians and the Negotiation of Gender & Sexuality in
the British Army Since 1950**

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September 2003

A faint, rectangular stamp from the University of York Library is located at the bottom center of the page. The text within the stamp is mirrored and difficult to read, but it appears to contain the words 'UNIVERSITY OF YORK' and 'LIBRARY'.



*Suaviter in Modo,
Fortiter in Re*

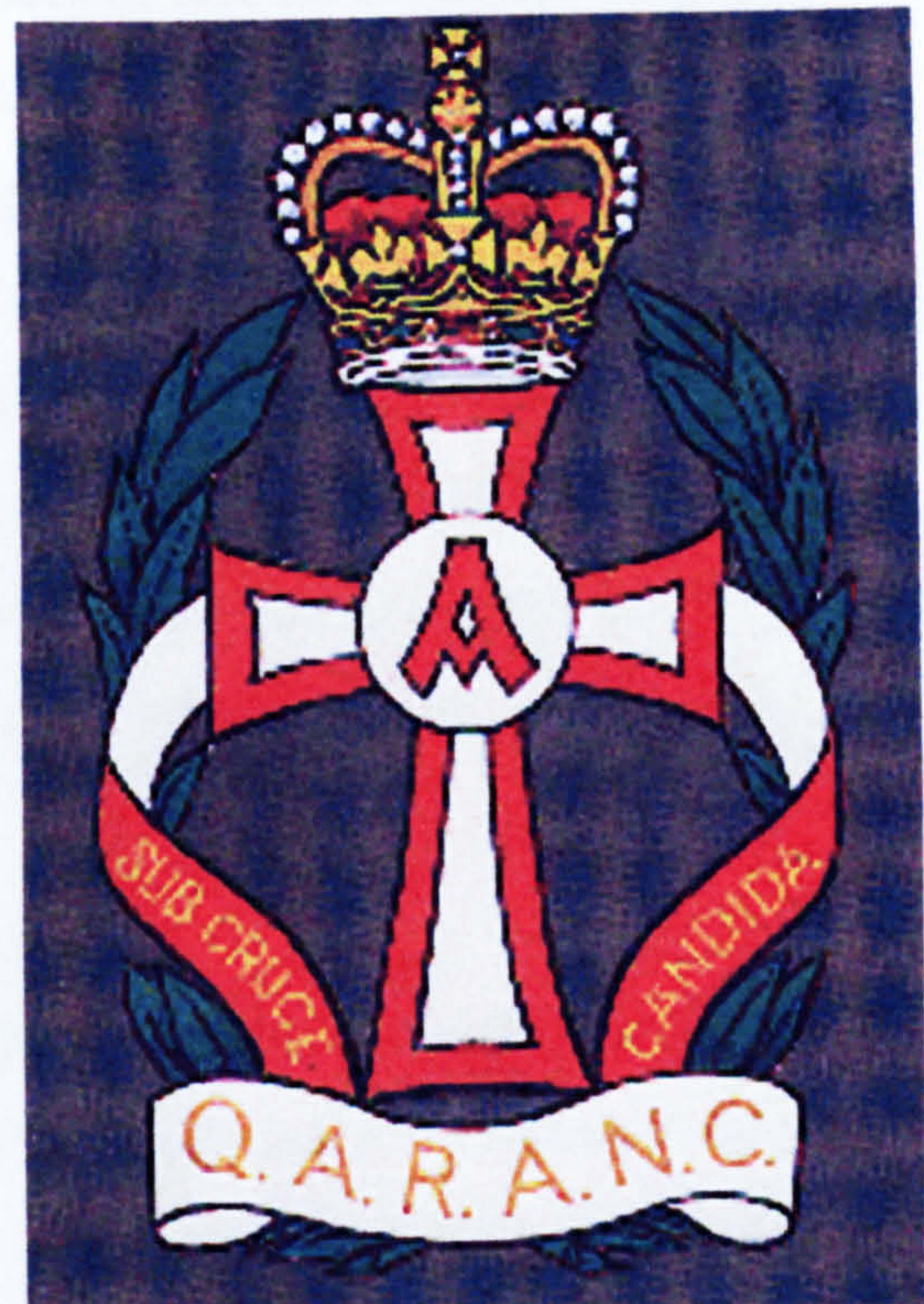
Gentle in Manner, Resolute
in Deed

The Badge and Motto
of the
Women's Royal Army Corps

Sub Cruce Candida

Under the White Cross

The Badge and Motto of
the
Queen Alexandra's Royal
Army Nursing Corps



Abstract

Homosexuality has always been deemed to be incompatible with military service and the British Armed Forces has enforced this policy with some rigour (Ministry of Defence, 1996b; Skidmore, 1998). Statistics for discharges on the grounds of homosexuality show that lesbians in the British Army have been the most targeted group (Ministry of Defence, 1996a: 14). The ban on homosexuality was lifted in January 2000, following a judicial ruling from the European Court of Human Rights (European Court of Human Rights, 1999a; 1999b). The change to military policy means that all gay men and lesbians now have the right to serve in the Armed Forces without fear of persecution.

As an organisation constructed as both masculine and heterosexual, the British Army is a place from which women and gay men have been traditionally excluded. This thesis explores how the British Army acted/acts as the backdrop for the interaction of gender and sexuality within a particular space and time (Goffman, 1977). By exploring the experiences of lesbian soldiers, living and working in the male-dominated environment of the Army, this thesis offers a unique glimpse of how the institutional structures regulate both gender and sexuality by controlling the female military body (Foucault, 1977). Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from lesbian participants through a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. My analyses revealed how lesbians made sense of their everyday lives as women and as soldiers and also made visible the strategies they employed to live as lesbians within their 'uniform identity'.

This research adds to the body of knowledge about women's experiences of military life by exploring the inter-relationships and tensions between three 'identities' – woman, soldier and lesbian – and places these experiences within the context of the British Army since 1950. These findings illustrate the depth and range of potential areas for investigation and opportunities for further research are discussed.

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Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the interest expressed by the fifty-three women who responded to my request for participants. Their comments and suggestions have informed this research and, although I cannot acknowledge them by name, I hope that this thesis in some way repays them for the time and effort taken. Their stories have enriched the research and to each and every one I extend my sincere thanks.

Carrying out this research would have been much more difficult without funding from the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) from whom I received a studentship (Award Number: R00429934189). I am also very grateful for the small research grant I received from the Centre for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM) at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Thanks also to the faculty and associated staff of the Centre for Women's Studies at York for their support, in particular my supervisor, Stevi Jackson and Anne Akeroyd for stepping into the breach. Special thanks must go to my friends Anne Fairbank, Ali Neilson and, above all, Jacqui Gabb. All have offered practical and emotional support, encouragement, laughter and, most importantly, their friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for hanging in there through the good and the bad times and for always believing that I could do this. Without them, this would have been a lonely road indeed. I am especially grateful to Maggie for her encouragement, belief and her friendship during, what was for me, a personal journey. Lastly, I want to offer special thanks to Catherine who never doubted that what I had to say was important and who has been an unfailing source of love, support and encouragement.

Author's Declaration

Earlier versions of some aspects of the work introduced in Chapters 2 and 3 were first presented as conference papers and subsequently published within conference publications as follows:

Heggie, J. K. F. (2000) 'Doing Gender Twice: Lesbians and the Negotiation of Gender and Sexuality in the British Army'. In *Women in Uniform & the Changing World Order Conference*, 30 November - 1 December 2000, Arlington, VA. Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI), Washington D.C.

Heggie, J. K. F. (2001) 'What Progress for Women in a Decade of Change? An Overview of the Current Employment Situation for Women in the British Armed Forces' In G. Lavigne, T. Burke and M. Lemonde (Eds.), *Feminist Definitions of Caring Communities and Healthy Lifestyles: C.R.I.A.W. Conference 1999*. Sudbury, Ontario: Your Scrivener Press, 155-174.

Introduction

‘You’re in the Army Now!’

On the 27th September 1999, something extraordinary happened. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that lesbians and gay men serving in the British Armed Forces were full members of society and therefore entitled to all the rights and protections offered by law. Rights of employment, rights of privacy and the right to serve in the military without fear of persecution (European Court of Human Rights, 1999a; European Court of Human Rights, 1999b). This ruling, ending as it did decades of prejudicial treatment, investigations and dismissals for both men and women, was passed down only days after the commencement of my PhD. Almost before I had even started my research, it seemed that it was going to have a happy ending.

Prior to this European edict, homosexuality was always deemed to be incompatible with military service in Britain (Ministry of Defence, 1992; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1996; 2000; Skidmore, 1998). Men and women found to be homosexual were summarily dismissed from the Services, regardless of ability or circumstance. Statistics show that lesbians in the British Army have been discharged at a rate disproportionate to their numbers, or indeed to women serving in the Royal Air Force (RAF) or Royal Navy (Ministry of Defence, 1996: 14). Despite the policy on homosexuality, lesbians have continued to volunteer to serve their country and have contributed greatly to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the British Armed Forces. Their experiences, however, have been omitted from traditional written accounts of women’s military history. As lesbians, their experience of Army life opens a new window through which to view an under-explored aspect of military life – the control of gender and sexuality through institutional structures. In this thesis, I begin to explore this field of study. My research investigates the inter-relationships and tensions between the three ‘identities’ - woman, soldier and lesbian - and how the participants in my study negotiated gender and sexuality while serving in either

the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) or Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC).

The history of women in British military uniform is relatively short, being just over one hundred years old. Until the end of World War II (WWII), women were called up or enlisted voluntarily in response to national emergencies and then were de-mobbed after the crisis was over. Since 1949, however, women have been employed within a peacetime volunteer force across all three Services which, for many, signified an acceptance that the Armed Forces could be a career for women too. However, a tension has always existed between the concept of soldiering and that of femininity – for example from its inception the WRAC 'was conceived as not only a female organisation, but a feminine one' (Noakes, 2001: 311).

Internationally, there is a substantial amount of published material about women in military service and a smaller amount about lesbians in the military, but most of it pertains to the US military (see for example Holm, 1992; D'Amico and Weinstein, 1999; Herbert, 1998; Stiehm, 1996; Shilts, 1993; Scott and Stanley, 1994; Shawver, 1995; Humphrey, 1990; Herek, 1993; Damiano, 1998-1999; Elshtain, 1995; De Pauw, 1998; Enloe, 1988; Howes and Stevenson, 1993; Meyer, 1996; Stiehm, 1989). There is some work about military women and lesbians in other (white dominated) Commonwealth countries i.e. Canada (Belkin and McNichol, 2000b; Gade et al., 1996; Gouliquer, 1998; Gouliquer, 2000), Australia (Belkin and McNichol, 2000a; Belkin and Bateman, 2003; Speck, 1999) and New Zealand (New Zealand Defence Force and New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 1998). Other research has explored specific issues of women's military service such as physical performance (Brock and Legg, 1997; Williams et al., 1999), health issues (Geary et al., 2002) or women's role in combat (Harries-Jenkins, 2002).

Published work dealing with women's participation in the British Armed Forces during the last half century is very sparse and most available resources deal with women in the Armed Forces as a whole (Muir, 1992; Chandler et al., 1995).

There are only two texts concerning the WRAC (Bidwell, 1977; Terry, 1988). Bidwell's Corps history was published in the mid 1970s and traces the first twenty-five years of the WRAC's existence. Terry's work, *Women in Khaki*, was published in the late 1980s so there remains a seventeen-year gap in the literature covering the time when the most changes were taking place within both the WRAC and the QARANC. Neither Bidwell nor Terry acknowledges their use of gendered terms and their analyses do not examine how military policies have regulated women's bodies, appearance and sexuality. There are no specific publications on lesbians in any of the branches of the British Armed Forces other than postgraduate theses (see for example Bower, 1999). My study addresses these neglected areas and gives voice to some of the many lesbians who have served in the British Armed Forces during the past fifty years in either the WRAC or QARANC. Their stories are interesting, both as personal narratives of individual women living 'a life less ordinary' and as an important aid to understanding how gender and sexuality have been affected by, and have in turn influenced, military policy over this period of time.

My decision to focus on the topics of gender and sexuality in the military is partly due to academic curiosity but, for the most part, it is a consequence of my own personal experience. I served in the WRAC as a Military Policewoman between 1976 and 1984 and was myself discharged for being a lesbian. As an ex-soldier, I have always been committed to acknowledging the importance of women's contributions in the Armed Forces. I consider myself to be a 'feminist militarist', that is, a feminist who supports the right of women in our society to have equal access to all the institutions of the state, including the military. I consider that any institution paid for from public money should be held accountable to the society it serves and should not be able to discriminate against any one group, whether on the grounds of sexuality, race, disability or gender. Where inequalities exist for women and lesbians within the British Army, the reasons for such treatment must be examined and the institutional culture, which underpins and condones such behaviour, critiqued.

Feminism and the military are not natural bedfellows. The association of women with the Peace Movement, CND and Greenham Common during the Cold War period has literally placed feminists on one side of the fence and soldiers on the other (Liddington, 1989; Roseneil, 1995). When the soldiers are women, it calls into question essentialist claims that women are more concerned with peace than are men. Feminism, as a political movement in the UK, has been absent in the struggle for equality for women serving in the military. It seems that support for equal rights stop at the barrack gates and so when women willingly join such a fundamentally patriarchal institution, they tend to be portrayed as either ignorant of the military's purpose, or duped by the lure of a well-paid job, travel and 'independence'. They are rarely seen as political, social and sexual agents in their own right.

I consider the right to serve in the military an issue of citizenship but, like Diane Richardson, recognise that '...claims to citizenship status...are closely associated with the institutionalisation of heterosexual, as well as male, privilege' (1998: 83). As women strive to claim full participation within our society, they must be willing to extend that right to others, even if those others then choose to do things which they do not approve of. Yet sisterhood does not appear to extend this far. In recent times it has been women soldiers who have pushed back the barriers and claimed new roles for themselves in the changing modern military. Since their political beliefs are not known it is unfair to presume that women in uniform do not think about the issues that concern feminists. Being in the military does not mean that every individual agrees with war; for example anecdotal evidence suggests that many will have struggled with the UK government's decision to enter into conflict in Iraq. Furthermore, I would argue that *because* the Armed Forces carries out the role that it does, women's presence as active participants in the military system is crucial. Their status as soldiers in the uniform of the State embodies an authority previously granted only to men and prevents masculinity being used as an excuse for soldierly behaviour.

I come from a family where military service was a normal part of life. My mother's father joined the Army in the 1890s and fought at Atbara and

Omdurman in the Sudan, as well as in the Boer Wars and World War I (WWI). My father joined the RAF in WWII and maintained his links with the Service after demobilisation, becoming involved with training cadets. My father's uniformed presence throughout my childhood was probably one of the reasons I decided to join up myself although, in my desire for independence, I chose the Army. I enlisted when I was sixteen years and ten months old, into the final Junior Leader programme to be run by the WRAC. The WRAC Training Centre in Guildford was a women-only space; from the Commanding Officer down, all officers, permanent staff, recruits and squad instructors were female, a fact that was very empowering to me at the time. At the completion of basic training, I went to Chichester to complete my trade training. I had decided to become a Military Policewoman, a choice in part informed by my qualifications from school and in part by a rather large dose of hero-worship for one of the instructors at Guildford.

It was while at Chichester that I first noticed the impact of gender in the military. In contrast to Guildford, the instructors were men and most of the other recruits were men. The style of training was very different and women were expected to 'measure up' to the men's way of doing things, including marching at a pace four inches longer than the WRAC pace. The tailored skirt of my uniform would not let me stride out, yet the Army had decided that it should be designed in that style (see Illustration 1 below). Being the shortest in height in the squad added to my problems, a fact brought home to me by the Drill Sergeant. After halting the squad for the umpteenth time because my shorter stride was dragging the rear half of the squad out of formation, he stomped over to me in his gleaming boots, pushed his rather red face into mine and screamed at the top of his voice, 'HEGGIE! If you don't open your fucking legs wider and step out, I'll stick this pace-stick up you and make you the biggest lollipop in Chichester!' As time passed, I gradually began to understand that issues such as uniform design or the size of the individual drill stride were not just quirky military traditions but gendered institutional structures which, in some instances, set women up to fail.



Illustration 1: Squad of recruits taking part in a Passing Out Parade. © PA. (Tomiyoshi, 1999).

Although I was never totally happy within the Military Police, I *loved* the Army. I felt as though I belonged there; I liked the structure but also revelled in the need to be adaptable and flexible if the task changed. Between the ages of seventeen to twenty-four years, I was trusted with responsibilities that it is hard to imagine being able to access in civilian life, resulting in promotion to the rank of Sergeant at the age of twenty-one. It is difficult to explain why this way of life inspired me but certainly the independence, the variety of jobs, the responsibility and the opportunities were all aspects which I enjoyed. My years in the Army were also the first time I consciously thought about sexuality, my own as well as others'. I met women who were attracted to other women – lesbians – and observed romances and trysts as friends and acquaintances tried to negotiate the minefield of the military's prejudice against homosexuals. I observed very early on in my career that the word 'dyke' was used as the ultimate insult in order to make women soldiers conform to expected, more feminine, behaviours. It took a long time before I was willing to consider that I was not heterosexual. As a Military Policewoman, I was supposed to 'police' *other* women's behaviour, reporting

suspicious friendships and investigating alleged homosexual behaviour. The pressure to conform therefore, combined with an awareness of the penalties for being found out, made me toe the line for several years. At twenty-one, however, I finally admitted to myself that I was a lesbian.

Several years later, in 1984, an ex-lover handed in my name to the Military Police and an investigation ensued which resulted in my discharge from the WRAC on the grounds of homosexuality. Although I struggled to understand why she did this at the time, in that her 'list' of names resulted in many lost careers, having listened to and read the testimonies of the women in this research, I have a much greater appreciation of the pressure brought to bear on gay women by the Special Investigation Branch (SIB). Being discharged for being a lesbian, an experience which changed the course of my life, personalised the impact of the military's policy on homosexuality. My abilities were not questioned; colleagues did not spurn me or think me incompetent; and my senior officers were, in the main, shocked that the Army would discharge me. I had to cope with the suddenness of the dismissal and get my life back on track. I had to find a new job, home and friendship networks, while at the same time come to terms with having to 'out' myself to others, such as family, friends and potential employers. This event was fundamental in reawakening my concerns about the way that the Army used institutional policies and structures as a means to discriminate against particular groups, especially women and homosexuals. Since then, assisted by my growing awareness of feminism, I have tried to make sense of this type of organisational discrimination, which punishes not only lesbians, but all women in the British Army.

The structure of my research has been greatly informed by Melissa Herbert's timely publication (1998), which considers how gender and sexuality affected women serving in the US military. Herbert tried to establish how women soldiers managed gender and sexuality in the military, an environment '... both structured and defined as "masculine"' (1998: 5). Her sample of 285¹ serving and veteran

¹ Herbert's overall sample was 394 respondents but after logistic regression to screen out those cases with 'missing data', the number was reduced to 285 (1998: 137).

soldiers came from all four branches² of the US military and represented a wide age, rank and length of service range, with the majority identifying as heterosexual. She drew on interactionist theories of gender, in particular those influenced by ethnomethodological traditions where gender is viewed as something that we all have to ‘do’ as individuals within social situations (West and Zimmerman, 1987), rather than being seen as a fixed state of being. Ethnomethodology can be understood as the way that we make sense of our everyday world by ‘treat[ing] as problematic what is taken for granted’ (Wallace and Wolf, 1991: 295 as cited in Herbert, 1998). ‘Doing gender’ in the ethnomethodological sense also means attributing it to others. Gender is something we all ‘do’ and the meaning ascribed to our behaviour by others through interaction is key to the representation of gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Herbert’s work demonstrated the potential for carrying out an exploratory study of women in the British Armed Forces but, after considering the topical and sensitive nature of the ban on homosexuality, I decided to frame the study around the experiences of lesbians in the Army. This was partly in response to an apparent disproportionate dismissal rate of lesbians from the Army³ and the injustices committed against these women, and partly because this focus utilised my own experience and knowledge of Army regulations and traditions. In this thesis I aim to explore how lesbians in the British Army negotiate gender and sexuality through their three ‘identities’ - woman, soldier and lesbian - in order to better understand how they made sense of their everyday world. Linked closely to this aim is a desire to understand the ways in which the institution creates or maintains policies on gender or sexuality which impact upon the individual. I have purposefully used the word ‘negotiate’ instead of ‘managed’ because I consider the meaning to be two-fold – ‘negotiate’ (v.), meaning to agree or settle; and ‘negotiate’ (v.), meaning to get past, navigate or cope with something. As I demonstrate in this thesis, participants negotiated gender and sexuality in certain

² The US military consists of the Navy, the Air Force, the Army and the Marine Corps.

³ Lesbians in the Army have been discharged at a disproportionate rate compared to the lesbians in the Navy or Air Force – see Table 9 in Chapter 2 for further details.

situations by carefully navigating obstacles, displaying an awareness of how gender and sexuality worked in their organisational situation and often resisting or subverting expected behaviours. In other situations, they settled for adhering to, or did not question, the status quo.

Drawing on the idea of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and on the work of Goffman (1959; 1963; 1977), my aim is to demonstrate how the women in my study were 'doing gender' as women in a male-dominated space and in a particular type of institutional space. Within these interactional situations, specific understandings of gender and sexuality have been key in perpetuating a culture of intolerance to women and homosexuals. At first, it seemed logical to allocate one chapter of the thesis to the analysis of the participants' identity as women, another to their identity as soldiers and the final one to their sexual identity. However, this idea was dismissed as unworkable because of the inter-relationship between these three parts of the self. Although in certain circumstances one identity might be more obvious than the others, all are still there. Whether viewed as a woman or as a soldier, all the participants were always lesbians. Structuring the thesis around the main research questions provided a more comfortable framework for each substantive chapter however, during the analysis phase, an additional area of enquiry emerged - how these identities were embodied - which I incorporated into a further research question. Thus this thesis is structured around the following questions:

- What is the military and legal context within which lesbians in the British Army serve?
- What levels of understanding about gender and sexuality did the participants in my study hold and how might this be interpreted with regard to their 'identities' as women, as soldiers and as lesbians?
- Through what means did participants 'embody' their various identities as they negotiated gender and sexuality and how were these influenced by institutional mechanisms and/or policies?

- What strategies did participants employ to live as lesbians in the British Army and how did they evade detection and cope with investigations and/or dismissal?

To answer these questions, I carried out quantitative and qualitative analyses of forty questionnaires returned by lesbians who had served, or were still serving in the British Army at the time of the survey. In addition, I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with four of these participants and abbreviated telephone interviews with a further two⁴. In Chapter 1 – ‘Basic Training: Researching Lesbian Soldiers’ Lives’, I explain my methodological and theoretical approach, the research design and methods employed and how I gathered and analysed the data. Also included in this chapter are some of the basic characteristics of the women in my sample group⁵. It is not possible to talk about ‘all women’ or ‘all lesbians’ in the Army as if they are homogeneous groups. My respondents’ experiences have been, and remain, influenced by a variety of factors, such as when they served, length of service, rank⁶, class, ethnicity and trade. However, while each of the participants related experiences which provide an *individual* glimpse of what their life was/is like in the British Army, together they offer an insight into the *institutional culture* which shaped those experiences.

In Chapter 2 – ‘Military History: Gender and Sexual Politics in the British Army’, I provide the historical, political and social contexts within which women and, in particular, lesbians live and work in the British Army. Additionally I explain the legal position of the military policy on homosexuality and how this policy was applied to lesbians. Additionally, I situate this study in relation to other published and unpublished work of a similar nature. In Chapter 3: ‘Camouflage: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in the British Army’, I explore

⁴ Throughout the thesis I have used a system of coding to inform the reader as to the source of quotations used. The codes are as follows: Q = Questionnaire; I = Interview; SC = Supplementary Correspondence. Summarised data sourced from the telephone interviews are coded TI = Telephone Interview.

⁵ A short biography of each participant can be found at Appendix 1.

⁶ See Appendix 2 for the rank structure of the British Army.

how the lesbians in my study made sense of gender and sexuality in their everyday lives and demonstrate the tensions and contradictions as they negotiated being lesbian *and* a member of the British Armed Forces. In this chapter I also explore what strategies they employed to blend in, not just as women in a male space, but also as gay women in a 'straight' space.

In Chapter 4 – 'A Disciplined Body of Women: Controlling Women's Military Bodies', I consider how the body is disciplined, or made 'docile' (Foucault, 1977) by the military process, including the physical enclosure of the female body through segregation and within the uniform. The uniform emerged as a very important means by which the institution was able to mark the female soldierly body as obviously feminine. My research shows, however, that individual lesbians subverted these meanings and used clothing as a type of uniform to display/mask the lesbian body. Both of these strategies draws attention to the 'body' and the complex socio-cultural rules which govern its performance or display (Goffman, 1959). In Chapter 5 – 'Identity on Parade: Living Lesbian Lives - Managing Sexual Identity in the British Army', I explore what impact the ban on homosexuality had on the forty participants in my study and how they lived as lesbians within the Army. Drawing on the respondents' personal accounts, I examine the ways in which they managed their sexual identity in order to evade detection, investigation and dismissal, while simultaneously making themselves selectively visible to other lesbians (Walker, 2001). I consider, in the light of the lifting of the ban on homosexuality in the military, what impact (if any) this will have for lesbians in military uniform.

A key aim of this research is for the results to be accessible to a wide readership. Often, academic research comes across as remote; the language of academia rendering the words inaccessible to the group of people it purports to represent. Furthermore, the military is no different to the academy in this sense, in that military 'jargon', traditions and policies can be just as alienating to the outsider. Since I want this research to be available to academic colleagues *and* the wider gay and lesbian community (military and non-military), I have endeavoured to avoid the use of either set of exclusionary discourses. I hope my military

background will enable me to blend the military and academic languages into a body of work that meets the academic requirements while remaining accessible to a military audience.

This thesis aims to address the lack of both recent material on women in the British Army and the paucity of any work documenting lesbians' experiences. It offers a critique of the British military institution and the Army's policies regarding gender and sexuality while, at the same time, it accords a rare glimpse of what life was like for lesbian soldiers over the past fifty years. These women, who, I suggest, live the most 'feminist' of lives (independent, financially secure, mobile and powerful), have been marginalised and silenced because of their participation in the military. Their voices are seldom heard within feminist debate and their life choices are often judged. This thesis takes these women's lives seriously and goes a little way towards placing their stories and their experiences as women, as soldiers and as lesbians in the British Army into the public domain. I will illustrate that while their lives are linked by their 'uniform identity', their identities as women, soldiers and lesbians have been anything *but* uniform.

Chapter 1

'Basic training'

Researching Lesbian Soldiers' Lives

'I was immersed in the subject of this study before I began to research it in any systematic way' (Walters, 2000: 268)

Introduction

One of the basic tenets of Women's Studies and feminist research is that women's experiences be placed '...at the centre of analysis' (Robinson, 1997: 2) in order to shift the focus of the lens of knowledge '...from androcentricity to a frame of reference in which women's different and differing ideas, experiences, needs and interests are valid in their own right' (Bowles and Klein, 1983 in Robinson, 1997: 2). In addition, in feminist research, the subjectivity of the researcher has been interrogated. As Rosalind Edwards points out, '...the researcher is not simply a straightforward receptacle for the views of others' but should be considered a 'variable' of the study (Edwards, 1993: 185). Researchers are invested in the process and have often been, in some way or other, impacted by the topic of study. As I have stated in the Introduction to this thesis, I too have lived a life as a lesbian soldier and these experiences have afforded me both an 'insider' and 'outsider' status (Collins, 1991). My identity as a lesbian ex-soldier, discharged from the Army for being gay, has driven the research from the outset, informed the questions I have asked and, at times, is incorporated as data. I structured the study around my academic interest into how lesbians in the British Army made sense of their everyday lives as women, as soldiers and as lesbians, and that interest derives from my previous experiences in the Army as a woman and as a lesbian (compare Gorelick, 1991: 474). I felt it was important to situate myself within the research (Dunne, 1997), not just in the writing up of the findings, but throughout the process of contacting and interacting with participants. I continually 'outed' myself as an ex-soldier, a member of the WRAC, a Military Police Officer and a lesbian who had been discharged from the Army for being gay. Situating myself in this way – as 'one

of them' – facilitated a sense of commonality and even a sense of belonging between potential respondents and myself. Many of us have 'identities' in common – as ex-Army, as WRAC, as Military Police, as lesbians, as lesbians who were thrown out of the Army, as women who served in Northern Ireland; the list is endless. As someone who was aware of the Army's quirks and traditions, I might elicit data which heterosexual civilian researchers may not. I do not assert that my data is better or worse than another researcher's would be, but it is *different* because the process has been fundamentally influenced by my standpoint. My own story and my research approach necessitates the use of the first person pronoun, 'I', throughout this chapter and throughout the thesis.

However, while the respondents and I 'share' a common story, as with all empirical studies, what these women thought would happen to their data might be different from what has actually happened to it. They might or might not approve of the end product, this thesis and, despite being aware of the parameters of the research, I appreciate that they have no power to influence the meaning I derive from their stories (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 157; Back, 2002: 1). As Kelly et al state,

...It is we who have the time, resources and skills to conduct methodical work, to make sense of experience and locate individuals in historic and social contexts...it is an illusion to think that, in anything short of a participatory research project, participants can have anything approaching 'equal' knowledge to the researcher (1994: 37).

While the political underpinnings of feminist research often bring with it a desire by the researcher to give something back, to see the researcher/researched relationship as a reciprocal arrangement (Acker et al., 1991), this is not always achievable. Early feminist scholars spoke of their ambitions to raise consciousness within the researched group, to view the women as active participants rather than research subjects and to fill the gaps in historical accounts by giving voice to women's stories and thereby to women's realities (Oakley, 1981; Acker et al., 1991). Revisiting her earlier work of 1980, Chodorow (1996) found herself frustrated by the apparent lack of awareness

about gender displayed by her highly educated female respondents. This clashed with her own beliefs about the impact of gender as a structure within all women's lives. Looking for an exemplar of oppression she, in fact, discovered resistance to feminism. This reminds us of the need to incorporate the diversity of women's subjectivity. Taking a feminist approach to research requires the analysis of *various* systems of oppression and how they differently affect different women. As Sherry Gorelick states, '...every piece of research must include an analysis of the specific social location of the women involved in the study with respect to these various systems of oppression' (Gorelick, 1991: 473). She submits that Dorothy Smith's (Smith, 1979; 1988) concept of a social science of, by and for women offers the most options for the future.

' To understand the different milieus in which women experience their oppression and to trace their connections with each other, we need a social science produced by women of various social conditions...a social science that reveals the commonalities and structured conflicts of the hidden structures of oppression, both as they are felt and as they are obscured. The quest for such a science confronts and comprises a dynamic tension among the researcher and the researched, struggle and science, action, experience, method and theory (Gorelick, 1991: 474).

This chapter will explain how I gathered and analysed data from questionnaires and interviews and outline some of the basic characteristics of the women in my sample group. For ease of reference, short biographies of each of the women are included in Appendix 1. What I would like to do in this chapter is to weave the theoretical framework around the explanations of research methods used. In this way I will demonstrate how the theory has assisted in the understanding and the interpretation of the data collected. To paraphrase John Berger (1984: 30-31), although the story and the time belong to the women who participated in my research, their words *and the meaning derived from them* have been filtered through a lens of my choosing (my emphasis). The lens, through which I have read my participants' stories, enables me to connect their '... ideas, experience and reality' to produce situated knowledge capable of demonstrating a certain level of credibility and authority (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 9).

Feminist methodology developed in response to the apparent inability of mainstream approaches to satisfactorily make the connections between ideas, the experiences and the realities of women. It has its origins in Western traditions of scientific enquiry and the search for 'truth', but challenges accepted understandings of gender and the disparity in power relationships between men and women (Harding, 1987; Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002). Feminism itself has developed over time and within different communities into an exciting and disparate movement, but it is so diverse that it is almost impossible to generalise about the beliefs within this movement. In different periods of time and in different communities, feminism has been associated with differing political and social objectives. In the UK, for example, these aims have included universal suffrage, equal access to education and parity of pay and conditions in the workplace with male colleagues, as well as making wider challenges to patriarchal dominance and the subjection of women. Most feminist academics agree that the diversity of beliefs confounds any universal feminist methodology, to be used like a recipe for the production of feminist 'knowledge'. However, Nancy Hartsock argues that within feminism there is a common methodology that sets feminism aside from most other social movements (in Western capitalist countries at least). Feminism itself, as an idea, an experience and a reality, '... is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women' (1998: 35). For feminist researchers, therefore, the production of knowledge brings with it an acknowledged responsibility to consider core political and ethical questions about who is doing the knowing, the positioning of the researcher in the research process and the level of accountability the researcher has in the dissemination of the *valid knowledge* (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 1-20).

Epistemology and Feminist Standpoint Theorising

Western epistemological thought is founded upon the philosophical belief that *reason*, when used in a scientific manner, can produce a body of knowledge that represents objective universal truth. However, these truths were positioned as 'dualisms' and associated with particular beliefs about the 'natural' privileging of the male in society. Reason, therefore, became associated with the male and

emotion with the female; men claimed control over the mind while the imperfect and uncontrollable body was considered to be the downfall of women. These polarities, which emphasise the privileged position of men in society, consistently seek to associate women with lesser-valued characteristics and can be seen to have contributed to the oppression of women in most societies (Smith, 1988). Feminist epistemology attempts to challenge these traditional views and proffers alternative epistemological approaches to research. As Mary Maynard succinctly puts it, feminist concerns have been with ‘who knows what, about whom and how is this knowledge legitimized?’ (1994: 18)

In considering my methodological approach, I found Dorothy Smith’s feminist strategy of ‘institutional ethnography’ particularly useful as a means of unravelling,

...the actual social processes and practices organizing people’s everyday experience. This means a sociology in which we do not transform people into objects, but preserve their presence as subjects...A sociology for women must be able to disclose for women how their own social situation, their everyday world is organized and determined by social processes which are not knowable through [the] ordinary means... (1986: 6).

I also found aspects of standpoint theory useful in that, as Bev Skeggs argues, it turns the spotlight onto ‘...the subject at the center of the production of knowledge’ (1997: 26). Taking a feminist standpoint position ‘...requires some theory of gender and power, a conception of feminist knowledge and conceptions of experience and reality’ (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 64). There has been some debate over the years (see for example the discussion between Smith (1997) and Hekman (1997)) about whether feminist standpoint represents a theoretical or an epistemological position and whether scholars using this approach can truly be classified under a common heading of feminist standpoint theorists, as if working to some universal goal. Generally, however, a connection is made between epistemology and politics (see for example Hekman, 1997). In other words, feminism, with its political foundation in the women’s rights movement, influences the way that my knowledge base has been created. Thus,

as a feminist, I cannot separate my political beliefs or truths from the methodology; they are embedded within it.

Ramazanoğlu with Holland (2002: 65-66) identify five main elements of a feminist standpoint from Hekman's critique (1997), which seemed to provide a 'best fit' with my own epistemological approach. In the following section, I list each point (having removed italics) and then discuss these in relation to my own research. First, a 'feminist standpoint explores relations between knowledge and power' (Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 65), in that it uncovers the connectivity between ideas, experiences and reality. Women cannot be presumed to experience life events similarly to men or even to other women. Their experiences must be viewed with the understanding of the power relationships through which women are situated within society, relationships which control women's behaviour, agency, language and speech. In my study, I felt it important to illustrate how lesbians in the British Army are situated within an institution which regulates their behaviour in a variety of ways as women, including through dress codes, language, access to occupations and the maintenance of standards of femininity. Second, a 'feminist standpoint deconstructs the "knowing feminist"' (p. 65). This draws attention to the difference between the scientific model of positioning the researcher within a fixed, supposedly objective, identity and the feminist approach of locating the researcher visibly within a self-identified social context. Since there is no one 'knowledge', there must be many versions of feminist knowledge. I have made a point of locating myself visibly within the research as a lesbian ex-soldier and have discussed the impact of this on my research data.

Third, a 'feminist standpoint is (albeit problematically) grounded in women's experience, including emotions and embodiment' (p. 65). For me to assert a feminist standpoint in my research I must make visible my own experiences and how I consider them to be instrumental in the creation of my knowledge, both while carrying out the research and writing about it. Fourth, a 'feminist standpoint has to take account of diversity in women's experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women' (p. 65). I consider the range of

experience that the women in my research and other lesbians who have served in the Army may have had and how those experiences have been affected or influenced by the power dynamic of the overtly masculine and male-dominated workplace, as well as the individual rank held by each woman. Lastly, '[k]nowledge from a feminist standpoint is always partial knowledge' (p. 66), in that feminist researchers neither claim knowledge to be universal or somehow objective (impartial). By claiming a feminist standpoint, I am recognising that my experiences as a woman, a lesbian and an ex-soldier in the WRAC have influenced my knowledge base. Likewise, the women in my study have experiences in the same or related categories. While I cannot claim that our experiences of Army life, of being a lesbian in the military, or of being British women can be seen as anything other than individual realities, influenced by factors such as time, class, ethnicity, age and education, I *can* state that these realities matter to the formation of truth and knowledge. Likewise, while I would not claim this research to be representative of all lesbians in the British Army, I would argue that there are elements which are transferable beyond the constraints of this study (Willig, 2001: 143).

Theorising Gender and Sexuality

In addition to clarifying my methodological stance, it is also necessary to say something about my conceptual and theoretical position, in particular, my use of the terms gender and sexuality. Drawing on the idea of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987), where gender is accomplished by everyone within everyday social settings, I argue that individuals consciously and/or unconsciously carry out a great deal of interpretative work to make sense of what is happening and to maintain the 'reality' of gender. This everyday interaction reinforces our understandings of what is 'natural', what is the 'norm' and what we take for granted in our everyday lives (Smith, 1988). We are all, therefore, 'doing gender'.

Traditionally there has been a distinction between the term 'sex' and the term 'gender'. Whereas 'sex' was used to designate the 'natural', that is the external

biological characteristics of being male or female, 'gender' was used to explain the 'amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person' (Stoller, 1968: 9). While some feminists appropriated this sex-gender distinction (e.g. Oakley, 1972), later many challenged it, arguing that 'sex' is as social as gender. Jackson and Scott argue that the adoption of the term 'gender' within sociological discourse in the 1970s '...emphasise[d] the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the social ordering of relations between women and men' (2002: 1), thereby challenging beliefs that the differences between men and women were somehow 'natural'.

Kessler and McKenna (1978) were the first to challenge the naturalness of pre-existing sex differences and explore the concept of gender and gender attribution (deciding if someone is male or female), as being created or constructed. They argued, from an ethnomethodological perspective that, far from being '... a simple inspection process... *gender attribution forms the foundation for understanding other components of gender*, such as gender role (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male)' (1978: 2 their emphasis). Kessler and McKenna's work clarifies the ways in which the categories 'male' and 'female' are inter-relational, that is, they have no meaning except in relation to one another (1978: 159). Male characteristics or 'signs' dominate when attributing gender, a process that leads to designating someone as male or 'not male'. To be 'not male', therefore, is to be female (1978: 158). Having made the attribution, the terms 'male' and 'female' in a sense are rendered redundant. The question is no longer whether someone is male, but rather how masculine they are. This idea of being 'not male' is central to my analysis of lesbians and women in the military.

The everyday 'doing' of gender requires both the successful performance of particular gender attributes *and* the (socially) correct interpretation of this performance as valid (Kessler and McKenna, 1978: 161-163; Jackson and Scott, 2002: 16-17). We are routinely able to do gender attribution because we *expect* people to display characteristics, behaviours and language consistent with being either a man or a woman (Goffman, 1959; 1976). Underlying this expectation is

the taken-for-granted assumption that clothing, hairstyle, body shape, tone of voice, language, behaviour and mannerisms all indicate the individual's true 'sex' (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 132). Thus, West and Zimmerman argue, gender is a '...routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction' (1987: 125). Gender helps us make sense of the world around us, a world in which we are practical methodologists, by producing and re-producing the everyday social order through the interpretative work we all engage in. Gender, therefore, is '...an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct' (1987: 126) whereby individuals are located within interactional space, subject to (embedded) institutional methods of societal control. 'Doing gender' in this way, within a gendered social order, allows us to accept the distinctions between men and women as though they were natural, which in turn enables the everyday social interactions to privilege men and all things masculine. It means that we accept that, although men and women in the UK have equal citizenship rights when it comes to voting, they are considered unequal when it comes to many aspects of public life, including military service.

Furthermore, 'doing gender' not only reinforces male/female roles, it also presupposes heterosexuality. Chrys Ingraham argues that the term 'gender' itself is laden with uncritiqued meaning and thereby contributes to the reproduction of 'the heterosexual imaginary...that way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender' (1994: 203). In this way, heterosexuality is depicted as 'taken for granted, naturally-occurring and unquestioned while gender is understood as socially constructed and central to the organization of everyday life' (1994: 204). Ingraham argues that, by failing to challenge heterosexuality as an institutional structure, feminist sociologists fall into the trap of reproducing heteronormativity, '...the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements' (1994: 204). She advocates the renaming of gender as 'heterogender' to make more visible the integral relationship between gender and heterosexuality and argues that, by doing so, the connection between 'institutionalized heterosexuality with the gender division of labour' (1994: 204) can be made.

Ingraham's enforced linkage between gender and heterosexuality extends the work of post-structuralist theorist Judith Butler. Butler's work (1990b; 1993) on the 'performativity' of gender has become central to most contemporary analyses of gender, sexuality and identity. She deconstructs the 'normative' categories of 'sex' and 'gender', characterising them as 'regulatory fictions', as discursive constructs (Butler, 1990a: 339). Butler (1999) summarised her original idea of the performativity of gender as being '...the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself', achieved through '...repetition and ritual...in the context of a body' (1999: xiv-xv). Butler uses 'drag' to draw attention to the performance required to maintain the 'normative', using it as an example of the parodic basis of gender. There is no authentic gender to which drag performance defers – it is 'a parody of a parody' (Hood-Williams and Cealey Harrison, 1998: 74). While aspects of Butler's theorising echo earlier work on gender attribution (Kessler and McKenna, 1978) and gender 'performance' (Goffman, 1959), her analysis remains focused on representation and the spectacular. Thus I considered such earlier work, based as it is in sociological traditions focused on everyday practice and interaction, more suited to explain what was going on in the 'reality' of my participants' day to day lives.

In short, therefore, I have drawn on ethnomethodological and interactional concepts of gender (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Goffman, 1959; 1976; 1977; West and Zimmerman, 1987) because they most fully explain the taken-for-granted ways that gender is accomplished in the everyday interactions between individuals in particular social situations. My participants, like most of us, carry out a great deal of intricate and interpretative work in their day to day interactions with others but only critique such behaviour when either the cycle is disrupted or when asked questions, such as in this research. Ingraham's (1994) work makes visible the way that gender is constructed through heterosexuality as the normative method of social organisation. Her argument has particular resonance within the organisational space of the Army and alerts us to the institutional settings and structural inequalities that constrain the doing of gender.

In my study, participants were negotiating (hetero)gender, including the underlying presumption of heterosexuality, within an organisation which, as I demonstrate in this thesis, institutionalises heterosexuality through policies to control and structure (primarily) women's social and sexual behaviour. The Army has structured policies which justify the traditional division of labour and the continued exclusion of women from combat posts primarily on (hetero)gender grounds, which makes plain '... the hierarchical relation between women and men, and heterosexuality, as a specific institutionalized form of that relation' (Jackson, 1999: 179). In addition, when discussing my participants' negotiation of sexuality I am referring to their *own* sexual identity as non-heterosexual, however defined. In this way, I make visible the ways in which the respondents were required to navigate *both* gender (the heterosexual version as I have explained it) *and* sexuality – their own identity. I feel that by doing so, I politicise their actions (Weeks, 1986); actions which, in part, contributed to the successful legal challenge to the policy on homosexuality.

Gender, as an institutional method of social control, grants authority to the continuation of concepts of difference between the sexes (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126) and privileges both maleness and masculinity as the measuring stick of a 'proper' soldier and heterosexuality as the 'proper' representation of gender. In the military context, I would argue that this is the means by which both the gender segregation of the past and the partial integration of the present day are justified. For a woman to claim the identity of 'soldier' challenges the taken-for-granted assumption that soldiers are men. For women to display abilities, behaviours and attitudes considered normatively masculine blurs the gender boundaries and throws into question the 'sex category' itself. After all, how 'womanly' can a woman be if she actively wants to behave like a man? Likewise, can being a soldier really be a true representation of manliness, if women can do the job just as well as male colleagues? Lesbians in the military add a new dimension to the analysis of gender and sexuality and this thesis represents my initial explorations into this field of study.

Methodological Approach

There is little research available on women's service in the British Armed Forces since the end of WWII; most of the work, including my own MA dissertation (Heggie, 1999), comprises unpublished postgraduate theses, three of which are doctoral studies. Some of this research reflects an interest in women's military history and how gender influenced the construction of the policies surrounding the formation of the Women's Services in Britain (Gould, 1988; Rosenzweig, 1993). Earlier work from the 1970s includes two small attitudinal studies of women in the Armed Forces (Kidd, 1971-72; Keenan, 1978). A further two theses deal with issues of gender and sexuality. The first was concerned with how the press influenced the framing of gender and sexuality policies in the British military (Fisher, 1997) and the second was a small, psychological study of gender and sexuality in the British Army (Bower, 2000). Of all these research projects, Bower's work is the most closely related to my own. Bower also served in the British Army in the 1980s and saw her military service as having provided her with '...both the research opportunity and a further motivation for the thesis' (2000: 15). Although Bower's study is about lesbians in the British Army and how they made sense of gender and sexuality in their everyday lives, her study is principally concerned with an analysis of the discourses that both the military and her research participants used to construct narratives of sexual identity and to convey meaning of the same (2000: 18).

In contrast, my intention in this research is to draw on a range of academic disciplines in order to reflect more fully an interdisciplinary approach to both the collection and interpretation of the data. Although carrying out social research, I felt that using techniques from a range of disciplines would add to the richness of the data and enable me to analyse this material 'from a variety of intellectual standpoints' (Robinson, 1997: 5). The British Army is an institution which is influenced by historical traditions as well as modern day politics and its soldiers are socially located both as members of wider society and of the particular organisation. As an institution, the British Army has been reluctant to view women soldiers as full and equal members of the military and change has come

about slowly and often under pressure from government or wider society. The British Forces have also been resolute in their official opposition to homosexuality - again often out of step with the society they serve. Women soldiers in general and lesbians in particular, as relatively 'recent' additions to the British Army, are therefore also historically and politically located and I felt it was important to explain the context under which they served. To this end, Chapter 2: 'Military History' aims to situate lesbian soldiers within the historical and institutional context of being women within the British Army, while at the same time clarifying how that institution has historically interpreted the law regarding homosexuality and the impact that this has had on these women as lesbians.

Furthermore, as Herbert and others point out, the way that a researcher decides which methodological approach is most appropriate within a particular study is also determined by '...resources, access and expertise' (Herbert, 1998: 131; see also Mason, 1996: 32-33). As a junior researcher with limited experience of the research process, I did not expect that accessing military documentation or currently serving personnel would be simple. I was also cognisant that financial constraints would have an impact on what I could achieve in the time available. When I applied for doctoral funding to carry out this research in 1999, homosexuality in the Armed Forces was a very sensitive, although topical, subject. The ban on homosexuality was still in place and gay men and women were still being thrown out of the military every week. Legal challenges were taking place in the courts and newspapers and documentaries were full of comment and debate. The military was convinced that their attitude towards homosexuality was the right one and was spending thousands of pounds of public money in legal costs to defend their position. The other main topic of discussion regarding the military was the role of women within the organisation. Since I was proposing to examine both of these subjects in the one study, I did not expect the Army to welcome my interest at all. I also realised that I would have to be quite creative in how I gathered information if I did not have access through official military sources. Ironically, a few weeks after I began my PhD, rulings were

passed down from the European Court of Human Rights that the UK Government's policy on homosexuality in the military was illegal.

However, although the ban on homosexuals serving in the military was lifted at the beginning of 2000, I was aware that institutional attitudes were unlikely to change overnight. I considered there was a very good chance that the Ministry of Defence might try to act as a 'gatekeeper' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002: 157), barring access to the potential respondents and/or to documentation which would demonstrate the level of prejudice towards lesbians. To establish the historical perspective on both women in the military and homosexuality, therefore, I used published sources alongside information obtained directly through official channels at the Ministry of Defence (J. K. F. Heggie, personal communication to Historical Branch (Army), Ministry of Defence, 17th March 1999 and The Army Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, personal communication to J. K. F. Heggie, 30th March 1999). I knew, however, that it would be extremely difficult to gain access to any unpublished data from the 1970s to the present day due to the thirty-year rule, applicable to all governmental papers⁷. Another challenge to the assembling of data regarding the historical context was that, with the disbanding of the WRAC in 1992-3, all the archival records held at the WRAC museum in Guildford had been moved to other locations and their whereabouts had not been fully documented. I decided to access archival records where possible, as well as any official documentation provided by the Ministry of Defence and to supplement these sources with contemporaneous information such as newspapers, magazines and films. I established that The Imperial War Museum has a massive Film and Video Archive, which provided a valuable resource of 'recruiting films' about women in all three Services. These films date from the early twentieth century, with silent black and white films espousing the great camaraderie women could enjoy

⁷ Until 1st January 2005 and the implementation of the final part of the Freedom of Information Act (2000), all official government documentation was held for thirty years from the date of origin before being deposited in the [then] Public Records Office (PRO) in Kew, London (known as The National Archives since it merged with the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 2003). Certain documents were held back for longer, depending on their sensitivity. See <http://www.catalogue.nationalarchives.gov.uk/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=357> for further information).

as members of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) in World War I and emphasising women's duty to enrol. The most recent 'recruiting film' was dated 1981, however, which left a twenty-year gap that I was unable to bridge. Although I made extensive enquiries with the Ministry of Defence and various filmmakers around the country, I was unable to establish whether there were any further films made exclusively about the WRAC.

The WRAC archives at the Army Museum in London provided another valuable, albeit limited historical resource, because there was scant documentation and the many photographs and slides were, for the most part, of anonymous faces. Copies of the *Lioness*, the official magazine of the WRAC/ATS Association, were useful in that I was able to make limited searches to establish the 'visibility' of homosexuality within a wider Army context. I searched the specific time periods that were indicated in the questionnaires and initial interviews as being years when 'witch-hunts' were carried out, such as 1983-4, but could find no obvious reference to these events in this magazine. This, in itself, is quite an interesting discovery as the numbers of women involved were not insignificant but the official Corps magazine preferred to keep close-mouthed about these events.

I also examined newspaper archives held on CD-ROM in my local library and personal sources (clippings) dating back to the early 1990s. A visit to the website of the Lesbian & Gay Newsmedia Archive (University of Middlesex) has revealed that indexes have been produced for the period 1932 – 1969 and I used this on-line resource to locate media references to homosexuality in the military during this period. It is most interesting to note that what this resource actually demonstrated is that all such references only cite cases concerning male soldiers (Lesbian & Gay Newsmedia Archive, 2001). The British Library Newspaper Library and especially the Lesbian & Gay Newsmedia Archive are resources that I feel merit a research project of their own in order to gather together a comprehensive understanding of how lesbians, particularly those in the military, have been portrayed in the press during the last eighty years.

To gain access to women who had served or were currently serving in the Army, I decided that using 'multiple research strategies' (Burgess, 1982 as cited in Brannen, 1992: 11) would generate the best result, combining a structured questionnaire (incorporating quantitative and qualitative elements) with semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire enabled me to gather comparable data on a relatively large sample group and the qualitative sections of this form provided insight into the individual experiences of each woman, which in turn was useful in guiding the development of the interview schedule. I was then able to carry out a small number of interviews from within the sample group to gain some further depth of understanding into individual women's lives. In total I received back forty questionnaires and interviewed six women (face-to-face (4); telephone (2)). In designing the questionnaire, I relied heavily on Melissa Herbert's model questionnaire, although I did not replicate it precisely and I adapted many of the questions to take into account cultural differences (1998: 131-186). In addition, Herbert's study had been directed at all branches of the US military and was aimed at women of all sexual identities, whereas my research was concerned with lesbians in the British Army alone.

I deliberately requested demographic data on neither ethnicity nor class because ethnic minorities comprise only a small proportion of Armed Forces personnel, 1.7% as of 1st October 2001. In the Army, 2.3% of the total strength comes from ethnic minority backgrounds but there is no breakdown of this figure by gender (Ministry of Defence, 2003: Table 2.11). Thus it was unlikely that I would have acquired any meaningful data on ethnic difference. (In contrast, in the USA, women of colour form 42.8% of all women serving in the military (Herbert, 1998: 148)). I considered that requesting information on class would also serve very little purpose since I was not intending to analyse my participants' perceptions of their sexual orientation or identity through a class lens. Moreover, the Army, as a hierarchical institution with a traditional rank structure originally defined through class, enforces a class status upon everyone who joins up as either officer or non-officer.

When I wrote my research proposal, I had been ambitious about the number of respondents I hoped would take part in my study. Subsequently, I realised that accessing this type of group was going to be very difficult. This raised many questions, for example: How would I be able to find lesbians if I did not know who they were? Where would I send the questionnaires? I could hardly send fifty questionnaires to every Army barracks around the UK, given the secrecy and risk lesbians faced every day. Women in the military are hard enough to reach because they are mobile, isolated from the wider population and often uninterested in research by outsiders which positions them as 'other'. I could not imagine that lesbians would be easier to access and considered that issues of confidentiality would be of prime concern to them if they were still in the Army. I therefore felt a random sample would be unattainable and decided that an element of self-selection was inevitable. This is a problem that other researchers have also encountered. Herbert states that the US Veterans Administration had to make 526,367 telephone calls in 1985 to achieve a random sample of 3,003 women veterans (1998: 134). Julie Fish (1999) also found it incredibly difficult to find 1,000 lesbians in the UK to complete a health-related questionnaire as part of a national survey, taking a year and expending considerable time, effort and financial resources – resources that I had limited access to. If lesbians in the general population are hard to find, lesbians in the military are a population that is even more 'hidden' (Martin and Dean, 1993). I considered that a purposive sampling strategy was more applicable to this situation '...whereby participants are selected according to criteria of relevance to the research question. This means that the group of participants is *homogeneous* to the extent that they share the experience of a particular condition, event or situation... which they are asked to describe to the researcher' (Willig, 2001: 58).

Data Collection

The initial request for volunteers to participate in my research was made through placing advertisements in such publications as *Dykelife*, a bi-monthly lesbian book mailing list with national and international coverage, and *Shout!*, a regional gay and lesbian free paper covering the north of England. The first advertisement

(see Illustration 2) was placed in Issue 7 (October 2000) of *Dykelife* and the same advertisement was also placed in the November and December issues of *Shout!* The regimental cap badges of the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) were used deliberately in the advertisement. The badges formed a type of subtext in themselves, not only preventing the need for long-winded and clumsy narrative, but also appealing to a sense of common identity (Craik, 2003; Joseph, 1986). In subsequent months, similar advertisements were placed in *Queer Soul* (Manchester) and *Cheshire Cheese*, both publications issued free of charge within specific lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. In addition, I used the snowball method among my own friendship circle. I asked lesbian friends, who had served in the Army or were still serving, to consider taking part in the research by filling out a questionnaire and also to tell *their* network of friends about the project.

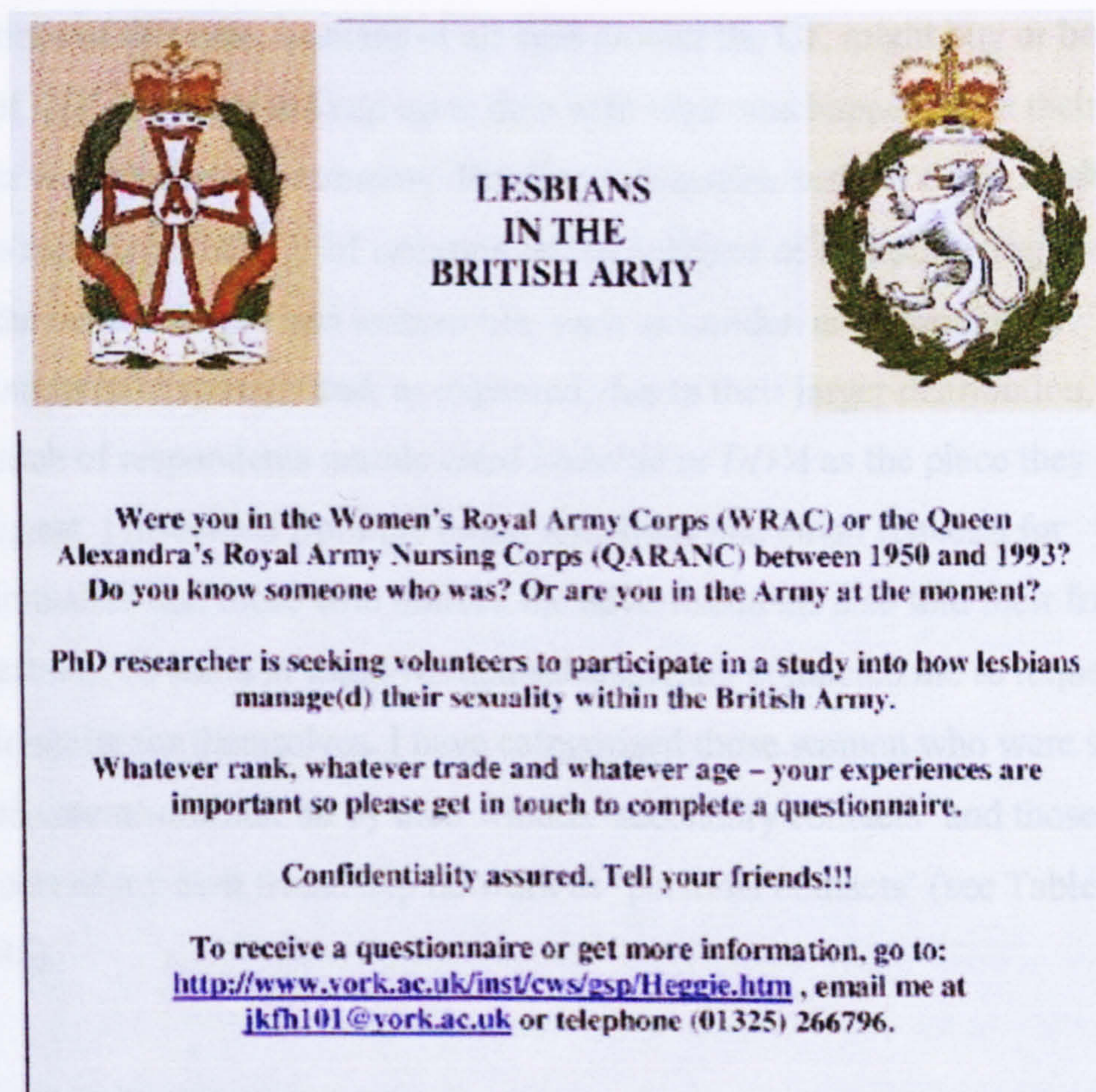


Illustration 2: Advertisement placed in various publications to generate research sample

I also wanted to try and reach women who were still serving in the Army, so that I could ascertain whether there had been any appreciable change since January 2000 when the ban on homosexuality was lifted. The most efficient way to do this is to place an advertisement in the monthly publication *Soldier*, which is sent by the Ministry of Defence to every British Army base. Unfortunately, the cost was prohibitive (over £500 for 1/16th of a page) and thus I could not pursue this research outlet.

DIVA, however, the only mainstream lesbian magazine in the UK, included my research request free of charge (a typed paragraph, not an advertisement) in the December 2000 issue (published in November 2000). First published in 1994, *DIVA* markets itself as a 'glossy' magazine about 'lesbian life & style'⁸.

Although often thought to be targeted at younger lesbians, *DIVA* also provides information about events, local groups and help/support lines which are useful to anyone. I considered that, in the absence of other sources of information or magazines of this type, lesbians of all ages around the UK might buy or borrow a copy of *DIVA* in order to keep up to date with what was happening in their area and the wider lesbian community. Reading a magazine such as *DIVA* might also help to overcome feelings of isolation felt by lesbians of all ages living away from the centres of gay and lesbian life, such as London and Manchester. This was a successful strategy and, as expected, due to their larger distribution, the first batch of respondents mainly cited *Dykelife* or *DIVA* as the place they saw my request. I discerned from the initial telephone and email requests for questionnaires that those who noticed the advertisements also told their friends and partners, as some of these women subsequently contacted me to request a questionnaire for themselves. I have categorised those women who were sent the advertisement/information by their friends 'secondary contacts' and those who were part of my own friendship network as 'personal contacts' (see Table 1 on page 45).

⁸ See <http://www.divamag.co.uk/diva/> for further information.

The conditions for participation in my research were straightforward - the respondent should have joined the British Army between 1950 and the time of the study and should feel that the phrase 'Lesbians in the British Army' applied to them. I did *not* specify that women who identified as bisexual, or women who had had same-sex sexual experiences during their military service but who did not identify as 'lesbian', were included in the survey. This was a deliberate strategy to keep the wording of the advertisements as succinct as possible. I was also targeting a population linked by their readership of LGBT publications and so I felt that I would rely on self-identification by the respondent. I realised that by doing so, I risked a certain degree of non-response but then I did not anticipate that every gay woman who had ever been in the Army was going to reply anyway. Women might not see the advertisement, they might see it and decide not to reply, they might request the questionnaire and then throw it away when they realised it was going to take more than ten minutes to complete – all these reasons and more could contribute to the non-response rate.

The advertisements provided interested respondents with the address of my web page at the University which could be accessed for more information about the research, plus an email address and a contact telephone number to request a questionnaire. I wanted to provide detailed information about the study for those wishing to participate, without revealing the content of the questionnaire or the types of questions to be asked in the interview in case this influenced people's answers. This was also a way of establishing the credibility of the research and I was careful to use my university email address rather than my private one, again to foster confidence in the respondents that the study was a legitimate one. Both of these strategies proved to be successful and quite a few participants mentioned visiting the web page such as Kathleen, who lives abroad. She said in her email, 'Dear Joan, I have visited your web page further to seeing your requests for research info in *DIVA* magazine'. She then proceeded to give a brief synopsis of her time in the WRAC and ended by saying, 'I would be pleased to offer my experiences if you would like to include it in your research. I live in [name of country] but have daily access to the internet & fax etc' [WRAC Military Police, LCpl; 36 – SC].

The telephone number given was a second line installed in my home (subsequently disconnected), so that it was unlikely that people unrelated to the research would accidentally overhear any messages. In addition, I did not want to put my own personal telephone number into the public domain, with all of the risks and potential nuisance which this might incur, so the installation of a second, temporary line ensured both my own safety and respondents' anonymity. I set up an answer phone on this line and respondents were asked to leave their name and address so that I could post the questionnaire out to them and a contact number if they had any questions. Interestingly, the women who emailed a request for the questionnaire were much more likely to give me – unprompted – information about themselves and/or comment on the research than those who phoned in their request. Wilma, for example, wrote:

Since my early teens I had wanted to do nothing else but join the Army and I spent the few years until my 17th birthday, it seemed, marking time. I left in 1977, not my choice, devastated. I had been a good soldier, all my reports had been exemplary, and yet my "services were no longer required". I was never bitter just rejected and my self-esteem took some time to recover. I look back on those years as one of the best periods of my life and I do not regret one minute. I forged friendships that I still have today and I certainly lived life to the full whilst it lasted [WRAC Pay Corps; 46 – SC].

I wanted the questionnaire (see Appendix 3) to be light enough to send, with a stamped addressed envelope (SAE), by first class post and so I restricted its design to five pages of A4 paper, printed on both sides (Bryman, 2001: 133). The use of a postal questionnaire had several benefits; the location of the respondent was not an issue; the respondent had time to think about the issues and complete the questionnaire at their leisure before returning it; and it was relatively cheap to administer. The preamble on the front page, combined with the information about the research project already given in the advertisements and articles, sought to address the concerns I had regarding consent (Bryman, 2001: 481-483; Parry and Mauthner, 2004: 146). I wanted to ensure potential participants knew what the research was about and how the information they gave in the

questionnaire might be used before completing and returning it. The preamble also alerted them to the possibility of further involvement and gave them the choice as to whether they wanted to take part in the interview stage. As can be seen, it was divided into nine sections, with many of the questions in the initial parts requiring the respondents to indicate their answer by ticking a box. Section 5 (Sexuality), Section 6 (Gender) and Section 7 (Lesbian Identity), however, reflected a more qualitative approach, requiring the respondents to give extended answers in their own words. Although some women engaged wholeheartedly in this process, attaching extra pieces of paper where they had obviously run out of room on the questionnaire, many seemed to find some of these questions difficult to answer. For example, in response to question 6(1), ‘What do you understand by the term ‘feminine’?’ Anne, Fiona and twelve others gave very brief responses such as ‘Female gender’ [Anne, WRAC Royal Signals, Cpl; 54 – Q] and ‘Having womanly traits’ [Fiona, RAMC Administrator, Major; 44 – Q]. Julie and twenty-three others were more expansive. Julie wrote, ‘Female qualities, the way you dress e.g. not afraid to wear a dress if need be. Gentle, possibly long hair & nails but I know this is not always the case. Doesn’t drink pints!’ [WRAC (TA) Royal Signals, Cpl; 42 – Q] Two women, Queenie and Meredith, did not answer this question at all. Those who gave brief answers in this section, however, were more expansive in other parts of the questionnaire, leading me to conclude that they had difficulty with this particular type of question.

Section 8 (‘To be completed by those discharged for being homosexual’) was designed to record the experiences of those women who had been *discharged* because of their homosexuality but other participants also completed this section or attached handwritten extra pages to draw my attention to their particular experience. This section included questions about the investigation, how the Army treated them and how the experience of being discharged from the Army affected them. From the questionnaire (Q. 7(9a)), however, I discerned that half of the respondents had been subjected to one or more Special Investigation Branch (SIB) investigations during their career, of which seven had been subsequently discharged from the Army on grounds of homosexuality. Many other women, such as Julie and Davina felt that, although technically not

discharged on these grounds, their exit from the Army had been forced. Julie said, 'They suggested I was gay but could not prove it so they said I should leave of my own request or face probs [sic]' [WRAC Signals, Cpl; 42 – Q]. Julie did not specify the 'probs' she felt she would face but she had been investigated previously and had also been interviewed about a colleague. She was therefore aware of the kind of behaviour to which she might be subjected to again in the future and the need to keep her personal life a secret in case the SIB was watching her. This would have placed her under a considerable amount of stress and strain. It is this type of insidious intimidation that makes it so important that these women's experiences are recorded; their stories are so different and need to be told. Davina's experience was slightly different in that she was within weeks of leaving the Army. She said:

I think, therefore as my service was nearly completed and as they had a signed 'confession' from me, the CO at [name of unit] carried out a damage limitation exercise and stopped the SIB from continuing to investigate. She did however make me sign plenty of forms to say I would not attempt to join any other branch of the services, the TAs or get involved with any cadet forces [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – SC].

The final section of the questionnaire, Section 9 (Further involvement), aimed to encourage future involvement in the interview stage and asked for any comments or suggestions regarding the research. Karen [WRAC Driver, Cpl; 44 – Q] suggested questioning those women who had been investigated by the RMP/SIB but who had managed to remain in the Army as to how they had coped with the 'hassle', while Yvonne said:

It might be worth investigating how lesbians negotiated the 'network' of lesbians within the NC (noncom) ranks as opposed to the commissioned ranks. Also, how did those who crossed the barriers manage this?' [WRAC Administrator, Captain; 43 – Q]

Tanya, who served in the late 1950s to early 1960s, felt that older lesbians '...are experiencing more age discrimination, especially by lesbians who are younger' [WRAC Signals, Private; 59 – Q]; while Claudia [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 40 – Q] felt

I should follow up on experiences of harassment identified in Section 6, Q. 17. All of these suggestions were considered and, where possible and appropriate to my research questions, were incorporated into the interview schedule (see Appendix 6).

Questionnaires were distributed over a fairly lengthy period of time (November 2000 – July 2001). By the end of January 2001, thirty-seven questionnaires had been sent out, of which twenty-three had been returned and the requests appeared to have dried up. Table 1 shows the breakdown of requests for questionnaires by location of advertisement.

Location of Advertisement	1 st Trawl Oct-Dec 2000	2 nd Trawl Jan-Jun 2001
Dykelife	17	0
Shout!	0	
Queer Soul	0	
Cheshire Cheese	1	
DIVA	10	
Breaking Ranks		1
Kenric Newsletter		12
Personal Contact (Own)	5	0
Secondary Contact	5	2
TOTAL	38	15

Table 1: Breakdown of questionnaire requests by location of advertisement

Although I did not have any target response rate in mind, I felt that it was worth trying a second trawl and so I decided to re-advertise for more participants. Colleagues and friends also suggested that writing an article about my research, my military background and my motivations for carrying out this work might be beneficial. They posited that, if submitted to specific LGBT organisations, this

method might be successful in reaching women who had, so far, not come forward. Accordingly, I wrote an article which was published, along with an advertisement, in Issue 24 (February 2001) of *Breaking Ranks*, the quarterly newsletter of *The Armed Forces Lesbian and Gay Association (AFLAGA)*⁹. A similar article was accepted by *Kenric*, a national lesbian organisation, and published in Issue 6 (June 2001). A copy of these submissions can be found in Appendices 4 and 5. These two publications alone generated a further thirteen requests for questionnaires. Another advertisement was placed in *Dykelife* (April 2001), however, in this instance, the response was disappointing. It is interesting to note the number of enquiries generated by 'snowball' contact (n=12), which demonstrates the wider influence of advertising or writing short articles to appeal for respondents.

As requests for the questionnaires started to arrive, I recorded the name and details of each person in a research notebook, together with their method of 'first contact', any information they had given regarding their military service and the date I sent the questionnaire to them. Each questionnaire was coded with a letter and the same letter marked in the book against the person's name. This was so that I could easily trace which questionnaires had been returned, in case respondents chose not to use their names on the questionnaires. In the initial stages, I felt that the code letter could be used as a means to identify specific quotations in the body of the thesis, however that option was unnecessarily cumbersome and I subsequently abandoned it in favour of a pseudonym to ease the flow of the text. The strategy of including a SAE to encourage completion and return appears to have been successful. Of fifty-three questionnaires requested and sent out, forty were returned, a response rate of 75.47%. In some cases, there was some interaction either in writing or by phone before the questionnaire was sent out. I felt this interaction was beneficial, enabling individual women to have an opportunity for further contact before committing to the project. This dialogue afforded me the opportunity to stress the importance and value of their contribution to the research. Where any of this written

⁹ Previously known as *Rank Outsiders* until the ban was lifted in 2000.

correspondence has been used, it has been coded as 'supplementary correspondence' – SC.

Data Handling and Security/Ethical Issues

In the final section of the questionnaire, I requested that those willing to take part in the interview stage of the research indicate their consent by providing their contact details. All forty respondents agreed to participate further and provided the required information. In this way, I continued to address concerns surrounding 'informed consent' although I was aware that I would need to re-iterate to any women selected for interview their rights to confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal (Mason, 1996: 57-59; Parry and Mauthner, 2004: 146-147; Bryman, 2001: 481-483; Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002: 157). However, the protection of the participants' identity was one of my main concerns, especially in the initial stages of the research when the ban on homosexuality was still in place. Therefore I was scrupulous about maintaining the security of respondents' anonymity, having experienced first hand the extremes to which the British Army would go to in their desire to rout out lesbians. Thus, at all stages of writing up, all the names used were pseudonyms. I have also taken further protective measures during the writing up of this thesis such as excluding place names and people's names where I felt that revealing them might assist in the identification of the participant. As Parry and Mauthner state, however, 'Although the removal of key identifying characteristics of research participants may satisfy anonymity requirements, it may compromise the integrity and quality of the data, or even change their meaning' (2004: 144). I decided, therefore, to include accurate data on rank, Corps, trade and age, but to generalise as to when the participants served instead of stating the exact years (see biographical details of participants in Appendix 1). I ensured that the completed questionnaires were stored in a locked cabinet at the University rather than at my home and my research notebook, which was the sole source of the names of the women who had requested the questionnaires, was stored in a location known only to myself. I felt, and still feel, a tremendous responsibility to protect the identity of the research participants and to keep my promise of

confidentiality and anonymity and recognise these emotions as arising from my own experience of being 'outed' to the military authorities (Wilkins, 1993: 94).

Questionnaire Analysis

As the questionnaires were returned, I recorded that fact in my research notebook before entering all the information *as it was written* into an Excel spreadsheet which I designed for that purpose. The spreadsheet contained sequential rows of

	Question	W	DD	KK
		Wendy	Davina	Kathleen
	Section 6 - Gender (for everyone)			
2)	In your experience, does the Army expect, encourage or pressure women soldiers to 'act feminine' in any way? If Yes - give example.	NO	Yes - to dress and act in a way they consider feminine i.e. Skirts, dresses, make-up, longer hair etc. Also to be available to date (if single), not be aggressive, competitive or loud, especially out of uniform.	Yes - Enforced wearing of barrack dress (skirts), encouragement in 'looking' feminine - the wearing of (light) makeup on duty, carrying out 'caring' roles rather than aggressive ones. e.g. unarmed in N. Ireland & on search duties only.
3)	In your experience, can women in the Army demonstrate leadership and exercise power and authority while also being seen as feminine?	YES	No - I think it is not impossible but very rare.	YES
4)	Is it your experience that the Army penalises women who are perceived to be too feminine? If Yes - give an example.	NO	Yes - Those that showed what was perceived to be too much emotion i.e. Crying under pressure, or less determination, or were less forceful & aggressive (when required) were bullied by Senior NCOs/Officers, were given less respect or cooperation and forced out if possible.	No - However these women, in my experience were directed towards certain trades (i.e. QARANC) or rank i.e. Commissioned officer.
5)	In your opinion, do you think that women in the Army should try to suppress attitudes/behaviours that are perceived to be feminine while doing their job?	NO	No - but it might not do their career any good!	NO
6)	Would you describe yourself as feminine?	NO	YES	Yes - in some areas

Table 2: Excerpt from Excel Spreadsheet (1) – Logging and analysis of questionnaire data

questions as they appeared on the questionnaire. I then allocated a separate column to each woman who requested a questionnaire using her personal code letter as the identifier. Later, after making the decision to use pseudonyms in the thesis, I added the appropriate pseudonym to each column (see Table 2 for an example).

The spreadsheet proved to be an invaluable tool in monitoring the return of the questionnaires as well as providing an overview of all the documents, which avoided the time-consuming practice of leafing through the originals over and over again. Another benefit was the means to analyse data both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, different answers to the same question could be compared and themes developed. Likewise, an individual participant's responses could be examined vertically to understand more fully her particular experiences. It was also a useful method, as mentioned previously, of ascertaining if minimal responses were 'normal' for a respondent or if the question had been a difficult one for this particular individual.

Over time, the spreadsheet also added to the analytical process by enabling comparisons of women's experiences using a variety of categories such as rank, trade or age and also making more visible other idiosyncrasies of speech employed by some respondents, such as truncated sentences, the use of humour and especially a reluctance to use personal pronouns. In this way, the spreadsheet evolved into a diagrammatic tool which enabled the sorting and organisation of data in a variety of ways, thereby assisting my critical thinking process (Mason, 1996: 131-133). Table 2 above displays the responses of three military police officers to the same set of questions and demonstrates how all of these analytical strategies have been employed.

As the spreadsheet developed over time, it became the primary analytical tool used to identify and analyse key themes. Some of these key themes were already grounded in the original research questions and had been, to some extent, built into the design of the questionnaire. Section 6 (Gender), for example, examined

lesbians' understanding of how gender impacted on their lives as women, as lesbians and as soldiers in the Army, as well as making visible some of the tactics they employed (if any) to manage these situations. Sections 5 (Sexuality) and 7 (Lesbian Identity) formed the core of the key theme around participants' understanding of their own and others' sexuality and the personal strategies employed as they went about the 'being and doing' (Stanley and Wise, 1993) of lesbian life in the British Army. The decision to log the data in this manner was particularly effective regarding the qualitative data from the open-ended questions. The recording of the exact words written by each participant, regardless of spelling errors or abbreviations, provided rich data. It presented not simply their answer to the question; in many instances, it also revealed the underlying emotions which the participants were able to convey within the allotted space (Wilkins, 1993; Jordan and Deluty, 1998). Table 3, for example, gives four selected answers to the question 'Give a brief description of your feelings when you realised you were being discharged for being a lesbian' (Q. 8(8)).

	Question	L	CC	TT	XX
		Lorna	Claudia	Tanya	Beth
	Section 8 - For those discharged on grounds of homosexuality				
8)	Give a brief description of your feelings when you realised you were being discharged for being a lesbian.	Relief - Glad that my time in the Army was over.	Shame	Extremely upset. Angry & resentful because it was nothing to do with my work. Also many of the investigating authorities were lesbians who covered up their tendencies by punishing others.	Felt like the end of the world; thrown out into cold world with a dishonourable discharge, very little money, no support & a dread of the future.

Table 3: Excerpt from Excel Spreadsheet (2) – Logging and Analysis of Questionnaire Data

Although Excel provided adequate means to display the results through charts and graphs, I did subsequently enter the quantitative element of the questionnaire data (Sections 1-4) into SPSS to assist in the presentation of the data, the majority of which is incorporated within the final section of this chapter. It was the process of entering the data and using the spreadsheet as a visual aid which enabled me to make connections that I feel would have been difficult otherwise. The remainder of the questionnaire, designed to generate more qualitative responses, provided the data which informed the key research questions of how lesbians in the British Army navigate(d) gender and sexuality in their everyday lives as women, as soldiers and as lesbians. Sections 5 (Sexuality) and 6 (Gender) provided data for Chapter 3: 'Camouflage', while Sections 5 (Sexuality), 7 (Lesbian Identity) and 8 (For those discharged on grounds of homosexuality) have widely informed Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade'.

Another benefit of using the worksheet as an analytical tool was the reflexive process involved in reading and re-reading the data on the spreadsheet (Mason, 2002; Mason, 1996; Willig, 2001; Ramazanoğlu with Holland, 2002). As I puzzled over what meaning could be extracted from the participants' responses to the questions, especially to do with their understanding of gender and the ways in which they lived their lives as lesbians, I realised that their responses incorporated two main elements – the use of uniform as clothing to display/mask their female soldierly body and the use of clothing as uniform to display/mask their lesbian body. In both cases, these strategies of using uniform/clothing drew attention to 'the body' and the complex socio-cultural rules which governed its 'performance' or display (Goffman, 1959). I was able to use this to structure Chapter 4: 'A Disciplined Body of Women', which investigates how the body is disciplined, or made 'docile', by the wearing of uniform/clothing (Foucault, 1977) and yet, by being a lesbian body, subverts the rules and manipulates them in order to claim back individuality. Lastly, the spreadsheet proved useful in the selection of potential interview candidates, not just at the demographic stage but also in informing the structure and thematic content of the interview schedule. I was able to see which questions had caused problems in understanding, which

ones had generated the most interest and what gaps in the data, if any, I needed to address during the interviews.

Interviews

The next stage of the research process was to carry out a number of semi-structured interviews. Although the forty respondents had provided a full range of interesting and often complex answers in the qualitative sections of the questionnaire, I wanted to follow up a selection in more depth. The interaction of an interview situation, while limited by the questions and the recall of the interviewee, was crucial to my methodological approach, both ontologically and epistemologically (Mason, 1996: 38-42). I believe that every woman in my research group had ‘...knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions’ (1996: 39) from which I could derive meaning. Before commencing the interview stage of the research, I considered how to deal with any issues arising out of doing feminist research on women who might or might not identify as feminist in their own lives (Millen, 1997; Andrews, 2002). Both as women in a traditionally male space *and* as lesbians, many may consider these women to be ideal banner-carriers for feminism; but I could not, and would not, make that presumption. The Army is an institution that is grounded upon very traditional models, an organisation that relies upon disciplined bodies being willing to conform in order to maintain the status quo. Women serving in the military, therefore, while capable of breaking down the barriers of gender discrimination and proving their capabilities as soldiers, are rarely, if ever, going to go about this process in a revolutionary or radical manner. Rather, they chip away at the institutional foundations from the inside and force change by proving over and over that they can accomplish whatever is asked of them and by progressing into the positions of power that influence policy. As a feminist, I believe that the opportunity to listen to, and take note of, individual women’s accounts of their lives should not be passed up (Mason, 1996: 40). Finally I considered that the interview itself afforded me the chance to ‘tailor’ the schedule to the individual’s situation, following up on their questionnaire narrative and allowing them to have more control over the agenda (1996: 40).

At the time of planning the interviews, April - July 2001, questionnaires were still being sent out and returned but I felt that the selection process needed to begin and appointments made, bearing in mind the approaching holiday period when people might not be available. Although all of the respondents had agreed to be interviewed, there were several issues to consider and challenges to overcome. The first issue to consider was the number and mix of the interviews and to classify them accordingly (Mason, 1996: 86). I felt it was important to try and interview both officers and non-commissioned officers/other ranks and I wanted to try and access both regular soldiers and Territorial Army soldiers. Other factors taken into consideration were: whether women were still in the Army; the present age of the participants; whether they served in the WRAC or QARANC; their job/trade; when (which decade) they had served in; and whether or not they had been discharged for homosexuality. These classifications take into account what Mason describes as the 'multidimensional' ways in which my '...sampling units might be organized, and whether and how these dimensions intersect' (1996: 88). Table 4 illustrates the factors taken into account.

Name	Age	Corps & Trade	Decade	Rank	Homosexuality Discharge?
Davina	43	WRAC Military Police	1970s	Cpl	Not officially
Lorna	42	WRAC Postal & Courier	1970s	LCpl	Yes
Elizabeth	38	WRAC TA Stores	1980s	Captain	Yes – own instigation
Olive	39	WRAC Military Police	1970s- 1980s	Sgt	No
Nancy	39	WRAC Stores	1980s	Pte	No
Frances	20	Royal Signals	1990s to present	Pte	Still serving
Helen	45	QARANC	1970s- 1990s	WO2	No
Fiona	44	QARANC	1970s – 2000	Major	No

Table 4: Breakdown of total interview sample group (prior to withdrawals)

One of the other factors to take into account was the location of the respondents – the questionnaires had been returned from a wide variety of places such as Spain, Belfast, Plymouth and Edinburgh¹⁰. Consequently, another consideration in planning the interviews had to be whether more than one could be carried out in roughly the same geographical area on the same trip. The travel costs alone were quite expensive and overnight accommodation had to be arranged on several occasions. One participant, Davina, invited me to stay at her home overnight due to the long journey time and I accepted. I had known Davina while serving in the Army but had not met her or spoken to her in many years. To avoid personal influence and potential bias, I decided not to interview personal friends even though they might have been more accessible. I felt that they might have known more about the research than other respondents and they might have presumed that I knew a lot about their lives which they might exclude from their accounts. My interview sample reflects the fact that 32 of the 40 respondents served in the WRAC, 7 in the QA/RAMC and 1 in the RAF. Two of the eight originally selected were still in the Army, which was 50% of the Army cohort. One regret that I have is that I did not get a full face-to-face interview with a member of the QARANC, but I may have attributed greater difference to a QA's experience than is actually present, in which case their absence is less significant.

Six interviews were originally set up but two participants had to withdraw at the last minute (Nancy and Frances). Although attempts were made to reschedule, it was not possible in the time available. Frances was serving in Germany and was in the UK on leave for only a few days. Nancy lived in South Wales and the intention had been to combine her interview with that of Elizabeth who also lived in Wales. The interviews had been scheduled for the end of September and I decided a further trip was not practicable in the time left. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews, therefore, were carried out with Davina, Olive, Lorna and Elizabeth between May and September of 2001¹¹. An example of the interview

¹⁰ Five respondents lived outside the UK mainland and were originally left out of the interview pool. One woman (Frances) was subsequently included as I hoped to interview her when she was home on leave but this interview was unfortunately cancelled.

¹¹ Geographically, these were in Wales, Scotland, the South of England and the North East of England.

schedule used can be found at Appendix 6. This schedule was used as a guide and was amended to take account of each participant's answers on the questionnaire. I took each interviewee's original questionnaire with me to remind them of what they had written and this enabled me to focus the interview questions on their personal experiences. I was also able to explore those survey questions which they seemed to have found difficult, or ask them for an example if they had not given one in their questionnaire, which might illustrate their answer. The majority of the interviews lasted between 1-2 hours and were taped with the permission of the participant. Davina was interviewed over two days and was the longest of the four at just over two hours.

Three of the interviews were carried out in the participants' homes, with the fourth taking place in a pub convenient for the respondent. In two of the home interviews (Davina and Olive), I was introduced to their partners and family members, who brought refreshments at regular intervals but otherwise left us alone to talk. The third home interview was more challenging because Elizabeth's children came home from school during the interview, which meant that the interview became somewhat disjointed and, at times, she found it difficult to retain her focus. During the interviews, which took place in the secure environment of the women's homes, I felt comfortable asking questions and the participants appeared relaxed once the introductions were over and the interview had begun. The interview that took place in the pub was more challenging for me as, although the interviewee, Lorna, said she was very happy at the location and indeed had arranged it herself, I was conscious of a growing crowd of customers gathering around our table in the lunchtime rush. I was concerned for the sound quality of the tape recording due to the background noise, as well as the inhibiting influence other people listening in might have had on both Lorna's responses and my questions. It was also quite hard to concentrate and I was concerned that Lorna would be unable to give her full attention to each question. I dealt with this at the time by confirming that Lorna felt comfortable in continuing with the interview and offering to move tables to a more private spot.

After each interview I made field notes about the interview environment, the way the interview had progressed and if I had encountered any problems or difficulties with the interview schedule questions. I noted the types of interruptions and the interaction between the interviewee and myself. I was conscious that my own Army experience influenced the interviews in that all the participants were aware that I had served in the Military Police and that I had been discharged for homosexuality. Much of the language used in the interviews reflects an assumption that I would understand the jargon of the military, which I feel was a bonus to the research process. I also feel that being open about my association with the Army and my own situation did not detract from the interviews, rather it assisted me in connecting to the respondents quickly in the limited time I had to carry out an interview on some very sensitive and emotive subjects.

Both the participant and I used humour in the interviews in a variety of ways. For example, Elizabeth, who served in the TA, used her awareness of my own situation within her narrative as demonstrated in the two following examples:

‘...there was a training camp at Guildford and we ‘Passed Out’ with the regulars and we used to meet them occasionally in the NAAFI and there was one girl sobbing her heart out down the phone...It wasn’t you was it? (Laughing)’; and later she said, ‘...a couple of times we used to hang out with the MPs until you realised that if you hung out with the MPs then you couldn’t hang out with anybody else! Sorry! (Laughing)’ [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]

Although I do not incorporate an analysis of women’s humour in this thesis, I am aware that laughter was used in part as a connection of shared experiences and identity and also as a means to talk about sensitive events. Olsson et al discuss how laughter can be used in different ways – as an exemplar of happiness or connectedness between people (laughing with), but which could also cause difficulties (laughing at). Laughter can be used as ‘weapon/protection’ in certain situations, in that ‘[W]e laugh at what we are most anxious or uneasy about’ (Olsson et al., 2002: 25; see also Fox, 1990; Billig, 2002; Freud, 1966). My decision to include humour, both within my respondents’ accounts and my own

'telling of their tales', was based on my desire to retain an integrity to their original words and the nuances of these stories.

Upon completion, I arranged to have the interviews fully transcribed by an independent transcriber. To protect the anonymity of the interviewees, I used the unique letter that had been used on the questionnaire as the identifier and the transcriber also signed a confidentiality agreement. I checked the transcripts personally and made any necessary amendments before printing them out. Subsequent analysis of the interview transcripts was done by hand on the hard copies using a system of coloured highlighters to differentiate between key themes. The same analytical framework to identify key themes that had been developed from the spreadsheet was also applied to the interviews.

Further to these face-face interviews, I met a potential participant who wanted to find out more about the research before completing a questionnaire. Our meeting in June of 2001 lasted about an hour during which I gave her a questionnaire. I did not record this meeting on tape as it was not an interview, but I did write up some field notes on the way home in the train in case she decided to become a participant. As it happened she did submit her questionnaire (Meredith). I also spoke by telephone to Helen and Fiona, participants whom I was unable to interview face-to-face. I asked Helen specific questions about her years in the Army, especially about her service in the Gulf War of 1991 and noted her responses. Fiona was contacted in a similar manner although the questions were limited even further to her experience as a serving officer and her knowledge of recruiting trends. The notes I made while on the telephone were brief reminders of key points and not full transcriptions of the conversation. The speed and accuracy of my note-taking, as well as my ability to understand clearly what Helen and Fiona were telling me are factors which must be considered here. To that end, I have not used direct quotations from these two women, unless taken from their questionnaire or supplementary correspondence. Where I have used information provided during the telephone interview, I have summarised what they said and attributed it to them.

The questionnaire was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information from the whole sample group. This method proved to be most satisfactory, particularly regarding data from the qualitative elements which, enhanced by the interview data collected, informed the key themes on how gender and sexuality impacts upon gay women in the Army. The interviews were designed to get an in-depth view from a few selected individuals who were representative of the group in a variety of ways. The data within the interview transcripts were analysed thematically and where statements could be used to illustrate more than one theme, I made a decision as to which theme was better served by the quotation. The sample group was from all different regions of the UK and their written and spoken words reflected their regional dialects and idiosyncratic speech patterns. I decided therefore to edit quotations only in so far as they required it (for example, condensing paragraphs to main points) and to leave statements otherwise unaltered. Where a particular phrase requires some translation, I have inserted a footnote so as not to distract from the flow of the text. Throughout the thesis I have used a method of coding respondents' direct speech to inform the reader as to the origin of the quotation¹². This coding system also includes basic details about the woman concerned such as Corps, Trade, Rank and Age. Due to the withdrawal of Nancy and Frances, I was unable to gain more insight into their experiences of Army life at their rank of Private and, in the case of Frances, as a currently serving soldier. However, I have been able to compensate in part for this by using their questionnaires.

Sample Characteristics

The basic information provided by the forty respondents in the first sections of the questionnaire revealed motivations for joining the Army and how these women perceived understandings of homosexuality within this organisation. Since my sample group was quite small, I engaged in only minimal statistical analysis and, as has been mentioned previously, the results should not be viewed as in any way representative of all lesbians in the British Army. The women who

¹² The codes are as follows: Q = Questionnaire; I = Interview; SC = Supplementary Correspondence. Summarised data sourced from the telephone interviews are coded TI = Telephone Interview.

returned the questionnaire represented a wide cross-section of military life and, at the time of completion, the youngest was twenty years old and the oldest, sixty-one. Four were still serving in the Army, (two in the TA) and a further one woman was an officer in the Royal Air Force. Although my study is targeted at women in the Army, I included this participant's data as I felt her individual experience of serving as a gay woman in the RAF could be compared to the individual experiences of women in the Army of a similar age and rank, thereby contributing to the overall understanding of the research. Table 5 below shows the breakdown by rank and trade of all respondents.

Respondents - Analysis by Rank and Trade

Count		Trade													Total		
		Signals	Administration	Medical Orderly	Nurse	Driver	Welfare Assistant	Postal & Courier Operator	Stores Controller	Military Police	Health Care Assistant	Physical Training Instructor	Kennelmaid/Groom	Intelligence Corps		Recruiter	
Rank	Private	4			1	2			1						1		9
	Lance Corporal	1	1			1		1		1			1				6
	Corporal	2		1		1		2		1	1						9
	Sergeant		1				1			2							4
	Staff Sergeant				1					1					1		3
	Warrant Officer 2				1												1
	Warrant Officer 1		1														1
	Lieutenant		1														1
	Captain		1					1									2
	Major		3		1												4
Total		7	8	1	4	4	1	3	2	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	40

Table 5: Respondents – Analysis by Rank and Trade

As can be seen, quite a wide range of jobs and ranks are represented in what is a really quite a small sample. Although Administration is the most common occupation, this has to be understood within the rank structure. Over 50% of those within this occupation hold the rank of WO2 or above. The Army is like any organisation, the higher up the hierarchical ladder you go, the more likely it

is that you will be doing more paperwork and management tasks. Where QARANC personnel were in 'non-nursing' trades, they have been included within the relevant section, such as administration. In the WRAC, Military Police and trades within the Royal Signals¹³ are the most represented within the non-officer respondents. Even allowing for historical differences, I would have been expecting to see musicians, radar operators, pay clerks and stewardesses represented within the sample. Also cooks, clerks, drivers and signals personnel were the most popular trades (in terms of volume of jobs on offer) in the 1970s and 1980s before the integration of the Women's Services opened up more opportunities, but there were no clerks or cooks in the sample group. However, upon reviewing the data from the thirteen non-respondents (those who were sent a questionnaire but did not return it), I was able to discern that there had been a musician, a pay clerk, at least one Military Police officer, a driver and two nurses (QAs) in this group. Women in trades such as Driver or Signals were likely to be posted to a unit with a large WRAC contingent, thereby facilitating a women-only space which, for lesbians, might have been the initial point of contact with other like-minded women. In other trades such as Military Police or Intelligence Corps, female personnel often number less than a handful per unit and are sometimes the only women living in the barracks. Taking all of these factors into account, I concluded that more respondents had served in the Military Police than any other trade, an interesting point to which I will return later in this chapter.

Table 6 below shows the breakdown of the total group by Corps and age (at the time the questionnaire was completed). Five women were still serving in the Army and again, they represent a range of occupations and ranks. One was a Nurse (Private) in the QARANC, one worked as a Recruiter/Office Manager (Staff Sergeant) in the Adjutant General Corps, one was a Driver/Lineman (Signaller) in the Royal Signals, the fourth was an Administrator (Squadron Leader RAF) and the last was a Nursing Officer (Major) in the QARANC (TA).

¹³ Royal Signals is a collective term and includes several different individual trades such as Comcen Operator, Radio/Telecommunications Operator, Switchboard Operator and Driver/Lineman.

	Number of Respondents		Age (at time of questionnaire)					
	No.	%	17-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
WRAC/ARMY	31	77.5	1	2	9	12	6	1
QARANC/RAMC	6	15	0	1	2	3	0	0
WRAC (TA)	1	2.5	0	0	1	0	0	0
QARANC (TA)	1	2.5	0	0	0	1	0	0
RAF	1	2.5	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	40	100	1	3	12	17	6	1

Table 6: Respondents – Analysis by Corps and Age Group

The breakdown of the average age at enlistment, analysed by the highest rank achieved, including those still serving is given in Table 7 below. A number of factors affect the age of enlistment. Nurses who have qualified in civilian hospitals will be, on average, four to five years older at enlistment than those who have joined up straight from school. Many directly commissioned officers are over twenty years of age when joining the Army, as officers are required to have higher qualifications than enlisted personnel and many have completed university degrees or have worked prior to joining up.

Rank	Average Age at enlistment
Major	22 yrs 9 mths
Captain	20 yrs 3 mths
Lieutenant	22 yrs 3 mths
Officers' Average	21 yrs 6 mths
Warrant Officer 1	18 yrs 5 mths
Warrant Officer 2	18 yrs 9 mths
Staff Sergeant	18 yrs 3 mths
Sergeant	18 yrs 2 mths
Corporal	20yrs
Lance Corporal	17 yrs 11 mths
Private	17 yrs 11 mths
Enlisted Average	18 yrs 4 mths

Table 7: Analysis of Average Age of Enlistment by Rank

However, officers commissioned from the ranks, on average, have a lower enlistment age since enlisted personnel tend to join straight from school. When officers (commissioned from the ranks) are calculated as a separate group, the average age at enlistment falls from 21 years and 6 months to 17 years and 11 months.

		Statistics	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Basic secondary school level	13	32.5
	GCE/GCSE/SCE or equivalent	5	12.5
	'O' Level/'O' Grade or equivalent	11	27.5
	'A' Level/'Higher' Grade or equivalent	4	10.0
	Sixth Form/Technical College	4	10.0
	Bachelor's Degree	2	5.0
	Professional qualification	1	2.5
	Total	40	100.0

Table 8: Respondents - Education level at enlistment

As can be seen in Table 8, the educational levels at enlistment follows the identified pattern, as the majority of the sample group joined up straight from school.

I was particularly interested in why women join the Army and I wanted to find out what factors had influenced their decision to enlist. In this section of the questionnaire (Section 4, Q. 1), I listed all the reasons I could think of and requested that the participants tick *all* those that applied. One 'old wife's tale' is that gay women join up to meet other gay women. Now this *may* be true but there is no empirical evidence to 'prove' this issue one way or another. I did include this as one of the options, as I was intrigued as to what my sample group would think of such a statement. As can be seen from Figure 1 below, it did feature in the decision-making of eight women, five of whom identified as lesbian before they joined up, but this reason did not feature as widely as legend suggests. This could be because not all the women identified as lesbians at

enlistment age or it could also be, of course, that there was an element of self-denial going on when the participant was completing the questionnaire – i.e. ‘to get a career’ may be only a partial truth (Willig, 2001: 187).

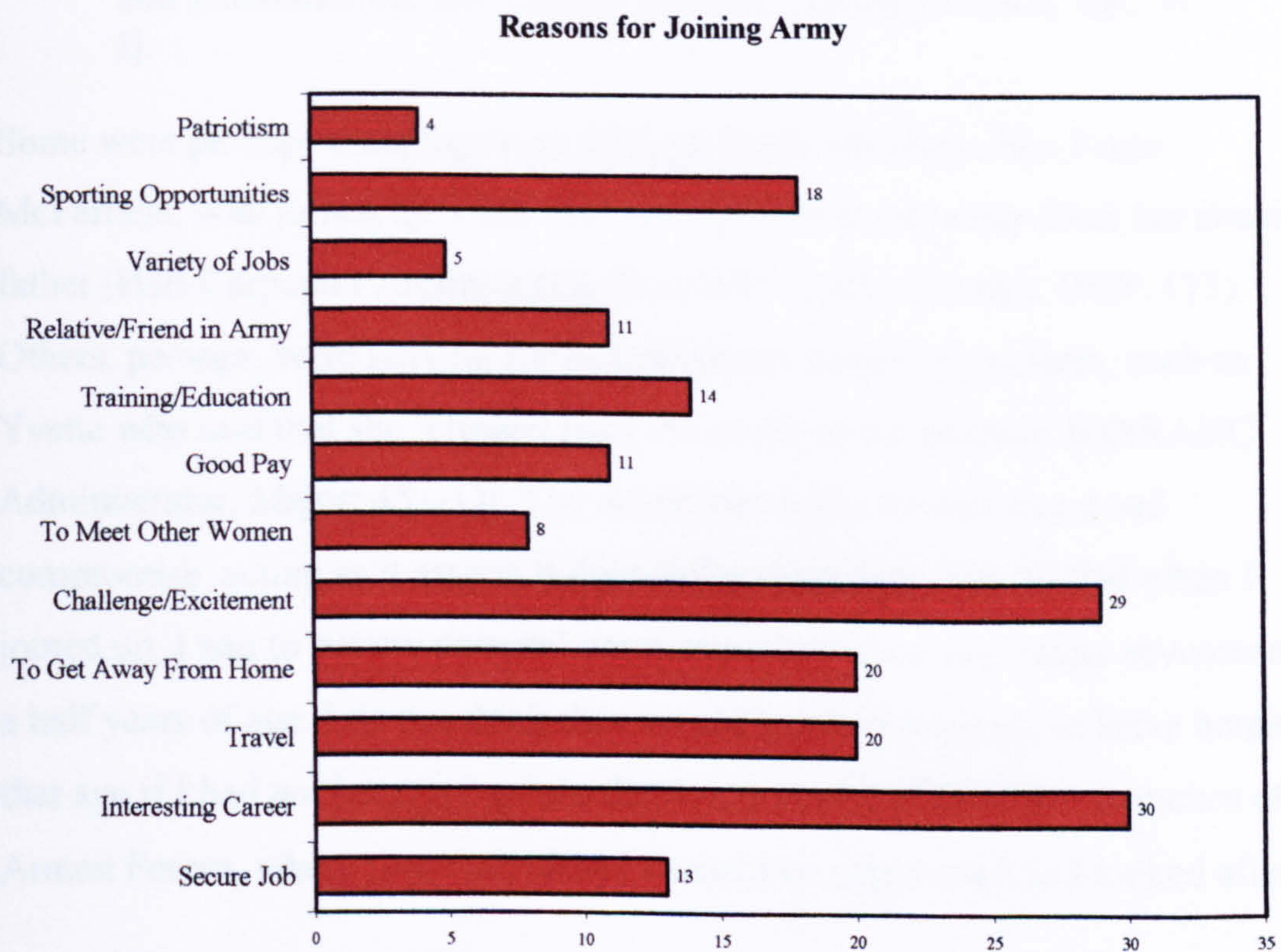


Figure 1: Reasons for Joining the Army

By far the most popular reasons for joining the Army were the enticement of an interesting career coupled with a perception that the job would be challenging and exciting. The opportunities for travel also feature quite highly with half of all respondents citing that as a reason for joining up. Twenty women also stated that they had joined the Army to get away from home. This response, however, can indicate a variety of motivations. Some young women came from ‘broken homes’ and many saw the security the Army offered as a substitute family. Olive joined up to get away from home and recalls that when in basic training she felt that:

...a lot of people in the forces come from broken homes. I hate to use the word because it's a sort of an outdated expression but...my mother was a widow...I think the other three girls, their parents were divorced. I don't know, maybe everybody was looking for a home in a way...like camaraderie, you know the Army will always take care of you because you have everything, you have doctors, you have dentists, you have somewhere to live, you have your food made for you and you've got accommodation and entertainment and clothes [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 39 – I].

Some were perhaps escaping from difficult home situations like Joyce McFarlane, who joined up when she was eighteen to get away from her abusive father (Hall-Carpenter Archives (Lesbian Oral History Group), 1989: 173). Others, perhaps, were striving for independence from their parents, such as Yvette who said that she 'clinged [sic] too much to her parents' [QARANC Administrator, Major; 45 – Q]. The Army was often viewed as a good compromise, acting as it asserts it does *in loco parentis*. I recall that when I joined up, I had to get my parents' permission because I was under seventeen and a half years of age. I do not think they would have allowed me to leave home at that age if I had *not* been going into the Army or one of the other branches of the Armed Forces, where they considered I would be supervised and looked after.

One of the reasons given for joining up was quite surprising. Eighteen women said that the opportunities to participate in sport were influential in their decision to enlist. It is often forgotten that the Armed Forces have a long tradition with both individual and team sporting achievement and encourage soldiers to learn new sports and to aspire to the highest levels of attainment. Kelly Holmes (double 2004 Olympic Gold medallist at 800m and 1500m) and Kris Akabusi (1990 European Gold medallist in 400m Hurdles), both athletes who represent/ed Great Britain at the highest levels of track and field athletics, began their sporting careers as Physical Training Instructors (PTIs) in the Army. There are also chances to access sports that would be outside the financial means of most civilians, such as skiing, bob-sleighbing and lugeing, sailing, horse-riding, polo, skydiving and scuba diving, with equipment provided and maintained by the Army.

The average length of service for the whole group was 109 months (9 years), ranging from 3 months to 324 months (27 years). This figure is an important indicator of how many women had invested in the Army as a career. Many women in the sample group stayed in for more than ten years and five served for over twenty years (see Figure 2). To remain undiscovered in the Army for so long, or at least 'hidden' enough to escape censure, requires both dedication and incredible resolve.

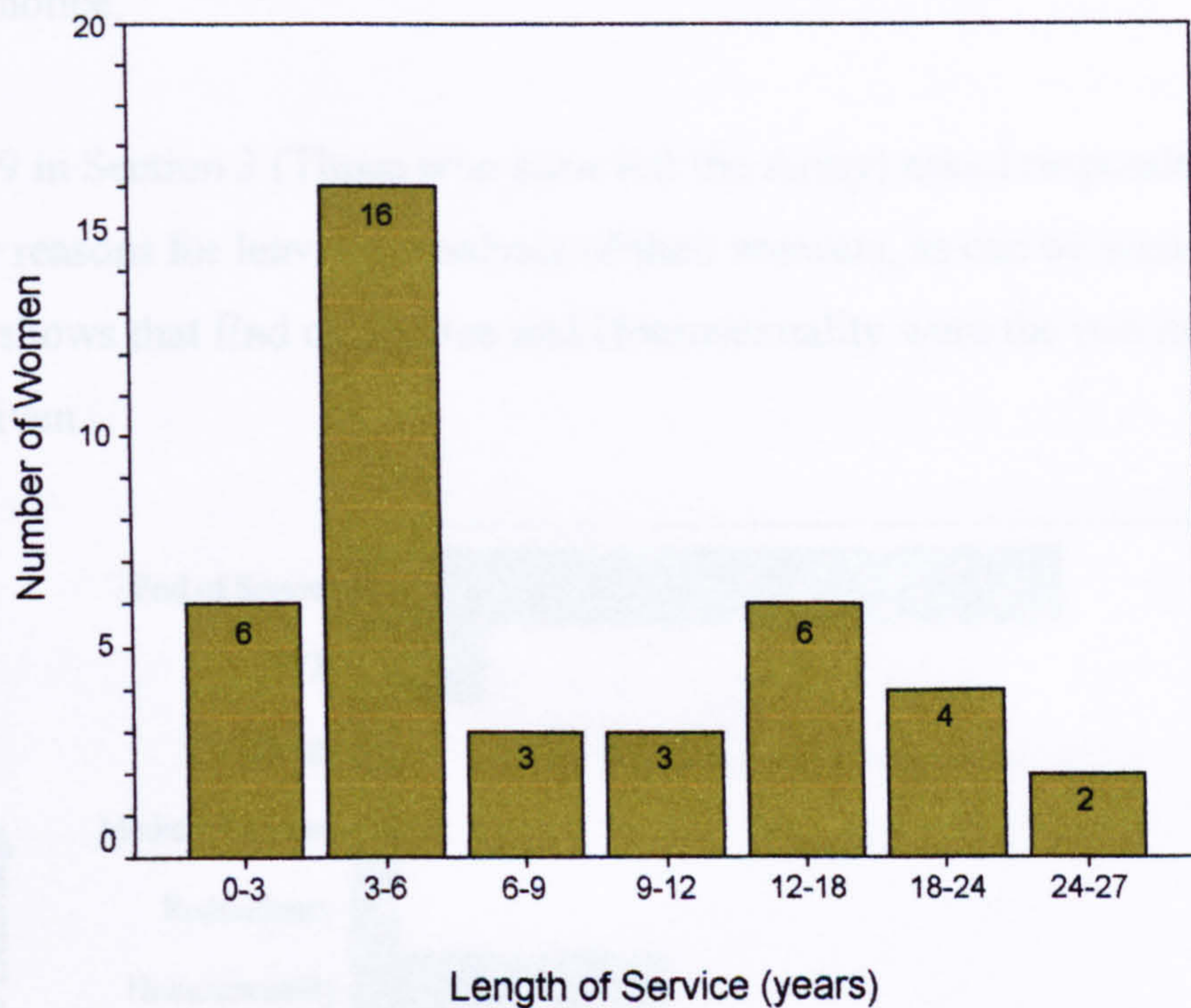


Figure 2: Length of Service (Years)

The normal term of service for a soldier was 22 years with an option to leave after 3 years (officers had different conditions of service¹⁴). What this meant in reality was that a woman signed on for 22 years (effective from the age of seventeen and a half or date of enlistment, whichever was earlier) with the understanding that she could not leave without penalty before three years' service had been completed. To do this she would need to give eighteen months'

¹⁴ Officers commissioned directly were awarded a Short-Service Commission or a Regular Commission. The Short-Service commission worked similarly to a fixed-term contract and was usually for 6 or 9 years. A Regular commission was open-ended until the retirement age of 55 years. Obviously Regular commissions were considered to be more desirable from the perspective of career planning and pension/lump-sum payments.

notice. If she wished to leave beforehand, she would be required to request a Premature Voluntary Release (PVR), which meant paying the Army a sum of money to release her from her contract. Service could also be brought to an end by the military for disciplinary offences or administrative discharges (homosexuality being one example). Should a soldier reach the three-year benchmark then she could put in her eighteen-month notice at any point thereafter. She was also entitled to change her mind and withdraw it within the period of notice.

Question 9 in Section 3 (Those who have left the Army) asked respondents to state their reasons for leaving. Analysis of their answers, as can be seen in the Figure 3, shows that End of Service and Homosexuality were the two main reasons given.

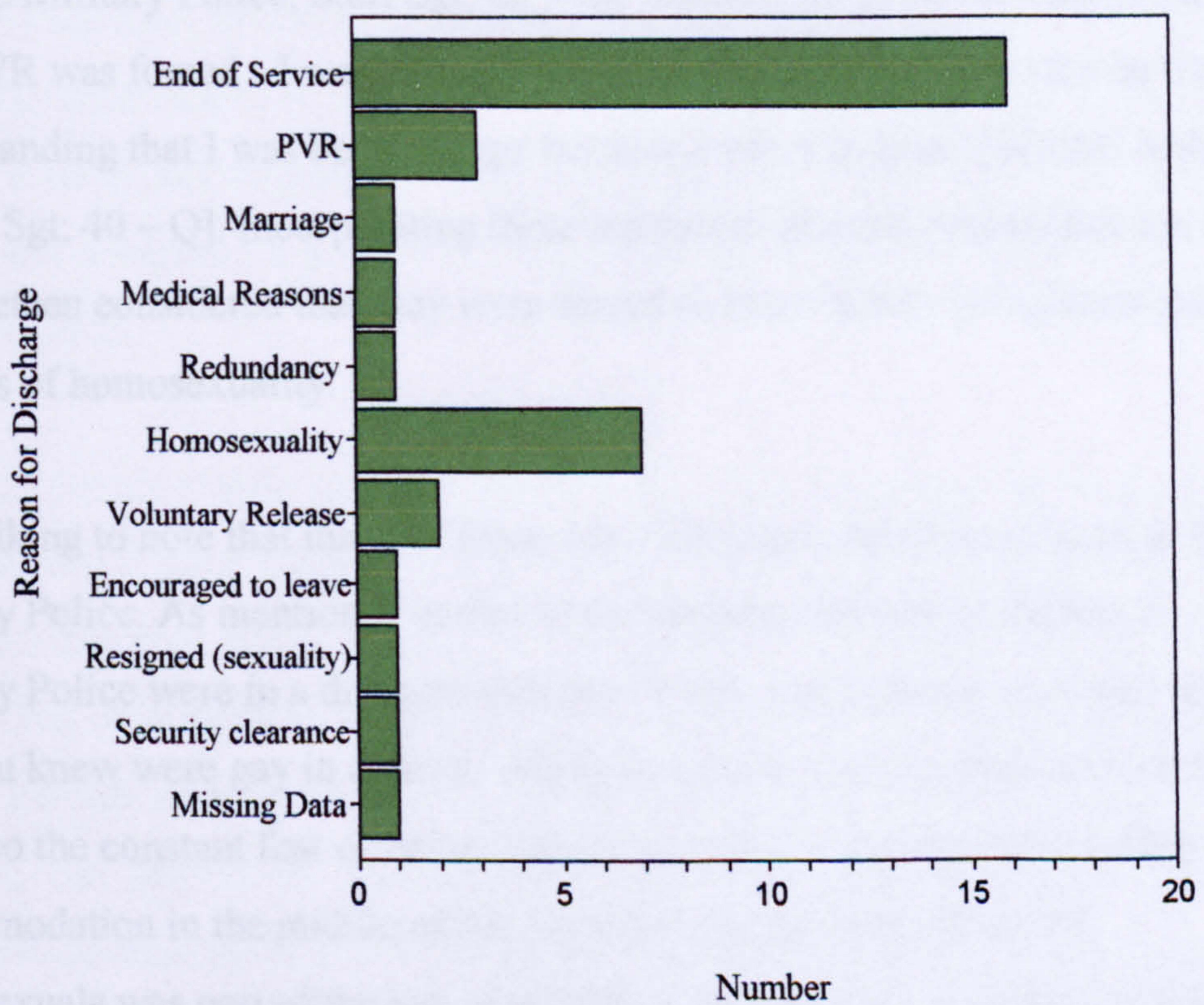


Figure 3: Reasons for Discharge

Where the decision to leave was voluntary, i.e. the woman had decided to 'buy herself out' (PVR) or had put in her notice to leave (End of Service), the respondent was asked to add further information as to the motivation behind her decision.

Although discharges on grounds of homosexuality number only seven (the eighth woman, an officer, resigned her commission and was therefore not discharged), when I examined the reasons given by the nineteen women who either left under PVR terms or by working to the end of their service engagement, it was apparent that many women had felt pressured to leave because of their sexuality. 'I was investigated so many times in my last 3 postings by the RMP/SIB that I felt pressured to leave. If I had been thrown out I would have had a bad employment record' recalls Marilyn [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – SC]. Olive remembers that she '...was being followed by the SIB. [I] knew they would find something sooner rather than later so I bought myself out' [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 39 – Q]. Wendy recalls that '...it was difficult to maintain a gay relationship secretly and I felt I had to leave prior to being 'caught out' and then discharged' [WRAC Military Police, Staff Sgt; 42 – Q]. Claudia noted on the questionnaire, 'My PVR was forced - I was allowed to complete my terms of service on the understanding that I was being 'let go' because I was a lesbian' [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 40 – Q]. Incorporating these indirect dismissals reveals that ten of the nineteen considered that they were forced to leave before being dismissed on grounds of homosexuality.

It is striking to note that many of those who felt pressured to leave were in the Military Police. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, lesbians in the Royal Military Police were in a difficult situation. There was a pressure to 'out' others that you knew were gay in order to defray suspicion from yourself and yet there was also the constant fear of being 'outed' by others. Carrying out searches of accommodation in the middle of the night and questioning suspected homosexuals was part of the job, especially if, as a woman, you were attached to the SIB. Sometimes, female Military Police officers were used as 'bait' to entrap lesbians. Yvette recalls that:

The RMPs used to also sit in their car outside barrack gates to see who came in and out together...whether you can be associated with someone who they have suspicion of being

gay... Occasionally, female RMPs chatted you up in public places to catch you out [QARANC Administrator, Major; 46 – Q].

Olwen remembers the ‘... very mixed emotion from being on both sides of the fence – lesbian and being posted to the dreaded SIB’ [WRAC Military Police, Sergeant – SC]. Working in such an environment as a gay woman could be incredibly stressful and required women to be constantly on their guard. A lot of time and money appears to have been invested in this area of investigation; raids, searches and multiple investigations were not uncommon and I have heard similar reports from many of my respondents. For example, Meredith was serving as an officer in a WRAC unit when a SIB ‘witch-hunt’ took place [WRAC Administrator, Lt; 50 - C]. Because they were often intimately involved in the details of these cases, women in the Military Police knew all too well the consequences of being discovered to be gay. Perhaps these women felt more pressure than most to leave before they were caught and thrown out and therefore avoid the embarrassment and humiliation that would entail. This situation may also, at least in part, explain the number of Military Police who responded to the survey and completed a questionnaire; perhaps they feel a particular connection to the research.

Keeping records of who was associating with whom was known to be common practice even if there was no evidence of misconduct, but the Government did not admit this until forced to do so in 1995. An ex-serviceman had applied for a job and had been refused, supposedly on the grounds that he had a criminal record. He was adamant that he did not have a criminal record and so demanded to see it. The ‘conviction’ was his dismissal from the Navy seventeen years before for homosexuality. That information had been transferred on to the Central and Criminal Records Office (CCRIO) computer in London and could be accessed by the civilian police, as well as other public and private companies. When Claudia [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 40 – Q] accessed her CCRIO record, she discovered that even though she had never been charged with an offence, the words ‘unnatural conduct’ were on this central criminal computer system. The RMP also held information about partners, ex-partners and acquaintances of gay

and lesbian personnel, even though the holding of such data is in contravention of the Data Protection Act 1984¹⁵ (Blackhurst, 1995).

Others who left under PVR or End of Service terms gave other reasons related to their homosexuality. Anne recalled that she was ‘...in a long term relationship and we did not want to be split up by separate postings’ [WRAC Signals, Cpl; 54 – Q] while Isobel was just ‘...tired of living a lie and continual pressure to conform’ [QARANC Nurse, Staff Sgt; 36 – Q]. These issues demonstrate how the desire to lead a more ‘normal life’ and not be continually subjected to harassment or threat of discharge from the Army influenced their decisions to leave the Forces. The background data collected also showed that, like many gay women in civilian life, some lesbians in the military married and had children. Bearing in mind both the very young average enlistment age and the culture of homophobia, it is perhaps not surprising that some women felt pressured or resigned to conform to societal standards of ‘normality’ in the form of heterosexuality. Although I did not ask this question directly, I discerned from four women’s answers (Lorraine, Erica, Elizabeth and Meredith) that they had married and had children. Not everybody realises their sexual orientation at the same point in their life and, even if they were aware of their homosexuality, many women may have felt it more prudent to suppress those feelings. Often for women in military service, the threat of being called a lesbian or investigated for homosexuality was enough to force them to have relationships with men, some of which did lead to marriage. Chapter 3: ‘Camouflage’ and Chapter 5: ‘Identity on Parade’ will expand on these points in more detail.

Since many gay men and women serve undiscovered for many years, the Armed Forces often got rid of the brightest and the best when they discharged them. It is in the best interests of lesbians and gay men to police their own behaviour so that no suspicion falls upon them, so they are often ‘model citizens’. Since the Armed Forces have used as their core argument that homosexuality and homosexual behaviour leads to ‘...a breakdown of good order and discipline’, this should be

¹⁵ The Data Protection Act 1984 has now been repealed by the Data Protection Act 1998.

reflected in the sample group, especially since, at the last count, almost half were discharged for homosexuality. In the British Army, every non-commissioned officer and private soldier is assigned a conduct rating at discharge. The conduct rating and a final testimonial from the Officer Commanding of the soldier's final unit makes up Page 2 of the AF B108 (often known as the 'Red Book'), entitled 'Assessment of Military Conduct and Character' and is intended to act as a guide for any future civilian employer. The possible ratings are as follows: 'Exemplary', 'Very Good', 'Good', 'Fair' and 'Unsatisfactory'. During military service, disciplinary offences are recorded on either a Company Conduct Sheet (minor offences) or a Regimental Conduct Sheet (more serious offences). Only entries on the Regimental Conduct Sheet (RCS) are taken into account when assessing the overall behaviour of a soldier. Only soldiers with a spotless RCS can be awarded an 'Exemplary' rating upon discharge. Likewise, the Long Service and Good Conduct medal (LS &GC) can only be awarded to a soldier with a clean RCS as well as sixteen years adult service. Conduct ratings of this type applied to thirty women in my sample group¹⁶. Of these thirty, eighteen had a rating of 'Exemplary', ten had a rating of 'Very Good' and two were undeclared.

Thirty-eight out of the forty respondents were self-identified lesbians. The remaining two participants identified as bisexual, although one of them, Yvette, described herself as 'bisexual leaning more towards lesbian' [QARANC Admin, Major; 45 – Q]. All of them managed to have sexual encounters and form same-sex relationships while serving in the British Army. Although seven women were discharged because of their homosexuality, this could not affect their conduct rating because legally, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2, they had not committed either a criminal or a military offence and therefore could not be charged. If women could not be charged then no offence could be recorded on either their Company or Regimental Conduct Sheets. So the question must be asked, exactly where is the evidence of the breakdown of good conduct and discipline? The majority of women discharged for homosexuality were dismissed

¹⁶ Five women were still serving and a further five are Officers and therefore subject to a different system.

under administrative regulations citing that their services were no longer required, a type of 'get out' clause that the Armed Forces can use when there is no other means to effect the removal of an 'undesirable'. The tragic irony for both the women involved and the military itself is that, if these sample figures are in any way transferable to the wider population of lesbians leaving the Forces, their conduct and general character could not be faulted and the majority had 'Exemplary' ratings. In other words, the Army was prepared to get rid of some of their best soldiers, whose conduct and character in areas of leadership, job skills and personal qualities were second to none, simply because of their sexual orientation.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained how I accessed my sample group and how I gathered data from them about their experiences of being women, soldiers and lesbians in the Army. It details the analytical processes that I used for the different types of data and introduces the participants through the information collated from the quantitative elements of the questionnaire and the short biographies contained in Appendix 1. The final section of the chapter has provided an overview of the sample group as a whole and the similarities/differences of their experiences during their service in the British Forces. The qualitative data from the questionnaires, together with the material gathered from the interviews and supplementary correspondence, have all informed the key themes in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 regarding gender and sexuality, the embodied identities of woman, lesbian and soldier and living lesbian lives.

Forty individuals came forward to tell their stories to an interested stranger. It is now their time to step into the limelight; to claim the space within which to recount their experiences and have them valued. As *women* in the military, their stories would be interesting enough, but as *lesbians*, their accounts offer rare insight into lives made possible only by the negotiation of gender and sexuality within the institutional culture that is the British Army. Without them there might have been a thesis, but it would have been made thin and dry by the absence of

their lived experiences, experiences which bring vibrancy to the theoretical discussions. In subsequent chapters, it is these individual accounts of Army life that will be examined and which, in turn, will address my research questions. Women's stories of their experiences are structured and organised by societal conditions and those conditions must also be critiqued. This thesis aims to pursue Smith's idea of a feminist social science (Smith, 1986; 1988). It is an exploration not only of women's realities, but the institution, age and culture within which they were experienced.

Chapter 2

‘Military History’

Gender and Sexual Politics in the British Army

Introduction

This chapter provides the historical, political and social contexts within which women and, in particular, lesbians live and work in the British Army. It also serves to situate this research in relation to other published and unpublished works of a similar or related nature. This ‘scene-setting’ serves several purposes, not least being to make clear that this is not a thesis about the British Army, or even women in the British Army, but how this institution acted/acts as the backdrop for the interaction of gender and sexuality within a particular space and time. Less obvious in its institutional solidity, but of equal importance, is the legal structure through which our society’s behaviour is regulated. Members of the Armed Forces in Britain are subject to the laws of the land, as is the rest of the population, but have additional legal controls placed upon them, specifically because of the job they carry out. Behaviour, while in uniform and acting as a *de facto* ‘nation’, must be controlled and above reproach. The influence and power of the Armed Forces, as with any institution holding such authority, has been used to shape policies, which in turn perpetuate the core values of the institution. These policies have the power to include or exclude (able-bodied vs. disabled), to value one ability over another (strength over skill), or to privilege one characteristic above all else (heterosexuality as the ultimate display of masculinity or femininity).

The inter-relationship between the law (especially those laws regulating sexual behaviour), military policy and the lived experiences of homosexuals serving in the Army is therefore an important one. The military has used, and continues to use, the law to claim a special status for the Armed Forces as ‘different’ from the rest of society. This special status has facilitated and legitimated policies which have stigmatised and punished serving gay men and lesbians, treating both groups as criminals and undesirables and ultimately has provided the means to

exclude them from the military. Despite amendments to the criminal law which decriminalised male homosexual acts, the military maintained their exclusionary policies and practices (Moran, 1996; Skidmore, 1998). The legal position regarding homosexuality will be explained in much more detail later in this chapter. I argue, however, that the legal institution, by not holding the Armed Forces to account, has perpetuated the myth that the military stands somehow apart from the rest of society and should therefore be allowed special privileges. It has fallen to the European courts to insist that laws on the statute books in Britain afford the same protection to *all* its citizens, even to those serving in the military. This chapter, therefore, will also demonstrate how these two powerful and influential organisations, the Armed Forces and the law, have acted together throughout the past hundred or so years to create the model of the modern, ideal soldier as male, able-bodied, young, physically strong and, above all, heterosexual.

Military Service and Citizenship

Historically, military service has been seen as a conduit to manhood - it 'makes men', where men are understood to be both adult and male (Boulègue, 1991: 349; Mosse, 1996). Manhood is representative of maturity – the transition from boy to man – embodied through the display of masculine or manly behaviour. The apex of military service is war, the point at which the male warrior becomes the '...avatar of a nation's sanctioned violence' (Elshtain, 1995: 3). War has historically been viewed as an event promulgated by men, in which men participate and in which, until the last century, men were the principal casualties (Stiehm, 1989; Howes and Stevenson, 1993). The invention of modern weaponry has changed that and although the majority of the politicians and soldiers may still be men, the casualties of war are now predominantly non-combatant women and children. Assessing casualties is not just about counting the dead bodies. Modern warfare causes devastation to infrastructure, not just military machines. Shortages of essential items such as food, water, electricity, fuel, proper sanitation and health care can leave a legacy of debilitating injuries and disease, not to mention the problem of unexploded ordnance such as landmines and cluster bombs. Women and children are displaced by wars because of bombing,

ethnic cleansing or because they need to escape the fighting or access food supplies. The education of the children is interrupted which has a knock-on effect on the economic development of the country once the war is over. Connell argues that the absence of women in the male space of the military has assisted in the construction of a form of hegemonic masculinity through the exclusivity of preparing for war (Connell, 1992). This form of masculinity is both overtly misogynistic and homophobic in order to reinforce the symbolic construction of a soldier as both the protector of women and the conqueror of women (Switzer, 1992)¹⁷.

In Aristotle's model of the rational ideal, male citizens served in the military when young in order to prove their worthiness to participate in the ruling of others (Homiak, 2002: 83). Women were one of the groups identified as being unable to achieve citizen status because they were 'incomplete men', lacking the soul which makes man rational (Lloyd, 1996: 150). Military service and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for another, therefore, were seen as the benchmark of a citizen, yet only men were given the opportunity to serve. Some two and a half thousand years later, this argument saw resurgence in the demands for women's suffrage at the beginning of the twentieth century. The First World War interrupted the move towards the enfranchisement of women and caused a split within the main suffrage organisations. Some, such as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), threw their support behind the government and were active in trying to recruit more men into the uniformed services. The National Union worked to alleviate the suffering of injured soldiers, providing ambulances and drivers to the war zones. Many suffragists held more pacifist views which could not be reconciled with support for the war. This resulted in a breakaway group forming called the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Holton, 2001: 257-258). Throughout the war, however, many women were serving in uniform and in quasi-military organisations. Their participation throughout the conflict helped to raise the profile of women as

¹⁷ The interrelationship between understandings of gender and sexuality in the context of the Army will be investigated more fully in Chapter 3: 'Camouflage'.

'doing their bit' for the country and for the 'cause', that is, war. It may be that the widespread participation of women in all aspects of the war effort was instrumental in the granting of the partial franchise of 1918. Although it is a common belief that women in the UK 'got the vote' in 1918, this was limited to married women, university graduates aged over 21 years and women who owned property. Partial enfranchisement was necessary because, due to the millions of young men killed in the war, women would have been the majority in the electorate, something which politicians of the time wanted to avoid. Universal female suffrage was therefore not achieved until the late 1920s. In 1928, the age at which women could vote was reduced to 21 years, granting them equality at last with men in the population (Terry, 1988: 141; Holton, 2001).

Summerfield argues that the extensive mobilisation of both men and women in two World Wars was important in the articulation of British citizenship as being grounded upon military service. During World War II, almost 500,000 women either volunteered for the Women's Services or were conscripted and the increasing polarisation between the 'military citizen' and the 'civilian' led many more women and men to join quasi-military organisations such as the Home Guard (Summerfield, 2000: 119-120). However, military service alone could not afford women the same status as men. The *type* of service carried out was also instrumental in assigning status. For both men and women, the categorisation of their military bodies became an important element in the promulgation of militarised masculinity. As Corinna Peniston-Bird states:

Despite the wartime rhetoric of being 'all in it together', the most significant classification of individuals was the division of the population into combatants and non-combatants. Within the dominant construction of the meaning of the 'militarized body', the primary reference point that had to be negotiated by individual men was physical classification and its implications. And despite the spectrum of fitness that was encompassed in the classification system, it was the binary opposites – combatant/non-combatant; fit/unfit – which had the strongest impact (2003: 34).

One of the most confusing issues about women's role in the British Army has been their status as combatants. Women in the WRAC have been officially classed as combatants since the mid 1970s but were considered to be 'non-belligerent combatants' since they were not expected or trained to bear arms (Terry, 1988: 212-221). As non-belligerent combatants, women soldiers required '...male escorts for protection in lethal or potentially lethal situations' (1988: 213) such as Northern Ireland. Women's role and status within the Army has changed in the last twenty years (as I explain in more detail later in this chapter) but, although all female soldiers are now weapons-trained, they are still excluded from the roles which would place them 'in combat'. This crucial delineation between 'combatant' and 'in combat' has been the justification for women's continued exclusion from the infantry and armoured corps occupations, those jobs which require direct fire or close-order fighting. However, this policy has the effect of reinforcing the perception that women are not capable of making the ultimate sacrifice, that of the selfless act of dying in order to protect others. Women, after all, are life-givers, not life-takers (Addis et al., 1994: 51; Wheelwright, 1994: 112). Elshtain argues that the strong traditions associating women with peace and men with war are themselves a form of gendered construction. War, she says:

...seduces us because we continue to locate ourselves *inside* its prototypical emblems and identities... Thus, in time of war, real men and women – locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have complementary needs and exemplify gender-specific virtues – take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warrior and Beautiful Souls (1995: 3-4).

The power of this binary construct in our society should not be under-estimated. At the present time, even though many thousands of women soldiers are involved in the second Gulf War, the discourse and imagery of this conflict remain located in that of a man's body. Women soldiers' bodies are rarely seen but when they are, the topic of discussion is often the over-riding concern about the violation of that body by the enemy, the ultimate insult to the manhood of the 'protector' (see for example the 'rescue' of Pte Jessica Lynch in 2003 and subsequent debates as 'damsel', 'hero' or 'victim' (Bowser, 2003; Hodieme, 2004)). When Major

Rhonda Cornum, taken prisoner in the first Gulf War in 1991, gave evidence at a United States of America presidential commission in June 1992, she was required to recount in detail the nature of the assault on her person. Her male colleagues, also tortured by their captors, were not asked the same questions. 'While male POWs have traditionally been viewed as heroes, Cornum had become a victim' (Francke, 1997: 252).

The questioner of Major Cornum at the commission was also a woman, one opposed to the deployment of women in combat situations. The gender politics of this incident highlights the ways in which social, political and cultural agendas are used to influence the policies of the military. The woman asking the questions on the commission board, Elaine Donnelly, had much more power to influence military policy than did female officers, the group to which Rhonda Cornum belonged. If women are at risk of sexual assault when captured, the argument goes, then the men on the team will feel pressured to divulge information in order to save her from that ordeal – ergo, women have a negative effect on unit cohesion. The solution? Remove women from the team and men will not be placed in that difficult situation. Of course, this scenario does not pan out in reality. Men could feel just as protective of their male colleagues or men could be subjected to sexual assault themselves. Indeed male and female pilots in the US military go through the same training to learn how to deal with the threat of torture, including all forms of sexual assault. As Captain Rebecca Muggli, US Air Force, says, '... we go through a scenario of what could potentially happen. And we go through it with men. And so, you learn how the dynamics work and how to take care of each other' (Bowser, 2003).

Male-on-male sexual assault is feared throughout Western male culture because it is associated with homosexuality and thereby with the loss of masculinity. The fear is sufficient to ensure that an actual assault does not have to be carried out but, when used as a threat, can be extremely effective. However, men could be just as easily influenced by the sexual assault of a non-combatant, perhaps a western journalist or even a young child – no situation is ever going to eradicate this possibility. Women in the military seem to be more cognisant of these facts

than most. Major Cornum, an Army flight surgeon, herself testified, 'Getting raped or abused or whatever is one more bad thing that can happen to you as a prisoner of war. There's about four hundred bad things I can think of and it's not the worst of them' (Testimony given on 8 June 1992 to presidential commission as cited in Francke, 1997: 253). Certainly, recent information coming out of the Gulf region suggests that female US soldiers are much more likely to be subjected to sexual assault and rape by their own male colleagues than they are of rape and torture by the 'enemy' (The Denver Post, 2004). An extensive investigation by reporters from the Denver Post in 2003 into alleged sexual assaults of US servicewomen in Afghanistan and Iraq has revealed that such behaviour is widespread – 176 reported cases up to July 2004. Yet the US military's response has been poor, indeed some would argue, criminally negligent. As one of the reporters stated:

...women were not receiving proper services, services that they could normally get in the civilian world, and that their attackers were typically given lenient treatment. Instead of criminal punishments, they were facing administrative, job-related discipline, such as reprimands, such as fines, such as rank reductions (Miles Moffiet in Democracy Now!, 2004).

These revelations, coming as they do on the heels of other instances of criminal behaviour by American military men against American military women (such as Tailhook 1991, the Aberdeen Proving Ground 1997 and the recent scandal (2003) at the US Air Force Academy (Herdy and Moffiet, 2003)) illustrate a military culture unable or unwilling to respond in a decisive and appropriate manner. This ineptitude promulgates the impression that this type of behaviour is somehow acceptable, especially in times of war where 'civilian' resources may not be so readily available and that, by placing their bodies in that military space, women soldiers are somehow more culpable. The relationship between the construction of gender and the construction of the gendered military body is a key theme which permeates this thesis. Chapter 3: 'Camouflage', Chapter 4: 'A Disciplined Body of Women' and Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade' all explore how gender and sexuality influence military policy and the ways in which those policies impact on the reality of women soldiers' material lives.

In this chapter, I examine how women 'fit in' to the British Army. I argue that some of the barriers faced by women in the Armed Forces in their struggle for acceptance, full integration and respect can be traced directly to the institutional construction of military women as 'other', that is to say as 'not men'. All women soldiers are faced with this barrier but, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, lesbians also come up against a further challenge. Within the binary constructions of sex and gender that shape our society, lesbians in the military are 'not men' because they are women, but are 'not women' because at the heart of the construction that is 'woman' is an understanding of heterosexuality, of being attracted to the opposite sex. In this way, lesbians are subject to a form of 'double-othering'. With no other acceptable options, the pressure is constant for lesbians to conform, to 'pass' as women or remain as the scorned and disdained 'other'. The following definition of 'passing', although articulated by Garfinkel in 1967, is just as pertinent when applied to lesbians in the present day. Passing is '...the work of achieving and making secure their rights to live in the elected sex status whilst providing for the possibility of detection and ruin carried out within the socially structured conditions in which this work occurred' (Garfinkel quoted in Cealey Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002: 185). Lesbian soldiers have been constrained to 'pass' in order to wear the uniform and to claim the right to serve in the British Armed Forces.

Women in Military Uniform

The use of the uniform as a means of identity, status or authority is not unique to the military (Craik, 2003; Joseph, 1986). As Ewing states, 'Uniformity is not natural to humankind, but everywhere people are in uniform' (1975: 11). Clothing serves a variety of purposes but one of the most important is the demonstration of the inter-relationships that exist within communities. Uniforms have evolved out of this as a type of costume used to 'denote a distinction and a function to be performed' (1975: 12). This distinction sets people apart, makes them visible and assigns to them a status and/or function in relation to their community. It stands to reason, therefore, that '...the history of women in uniform is closely bound up with their position in the community', that their

progress can be traced using this ‘pictorial story’ and that uniforms themselves form an important part of social history (1975: 11). At this point in the thesis, I am using the uniform as an historical reference, as an influencing factor in the construction of the female soldier. In this way, it is symbolic of the laws, values and customs associated with the military and how these are enacted and embodied in everyday life (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993; Joseph, 1986; Craik, 2003). Just as all aspects of life are influenced by gender, the uniform has been constructed to reflect the values deemed appropriate, not just for the function of the clothing but for the gender of the person wearing it. Uniforms are invested with meaning and those meanings regulate the body that wears it. Craik explains this as the ‘...acquisition of ‘not’ statements – that is what to avoid or repress. Uniforms are extremely effective indicators of the codification of appropriate rules of conduct and their internalization’ (2003: 129). Within the context of the historical progression of women in the Army, I am arguing that it is vital to understand what influence the uniform has had on that progression. In Chapter 3 ‘Camouflage’ and Chapter 4 ‘A Disciplined Body of Women’, I explore more fully how the regulation of women’s bodies by military uniforms and equipment affects the understandings of and embodiment of gender and sexuality within the military space.

Women’s official association with military service began at the end of the nineteenth century, when fourteen hundred women were recruited as military nurses during the Boer Wars of 1899-1902. The women who donned the specially provided uniform of grey dresses, white aprons, red capes and white triangular caps and embarked for South Africa were the forerunners for the establishment of the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) in 1902. In time, the QAIMNS evolved into the present day Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) but the uniform, although much updated in style, remains scarlet and grey (Ewing, 1975: 47).

Prior to this time, women’s participation in battles or wars required dressing and acting as men. Most who have written about such women (see for example De Pauw, 1998; Stark, 1998; Terry, 1988; Ewing, 1975) agree that our knowledge is

limited as it is dependent on the discovery that they were, in fact, women. Those who were successful in 'passing' as men and were not subsequently exposed by self-revelation or any other means remain lost to history and their numbers can only be imagined. Discovery was often precipitated by the treatment of an injury, the meting out of punishment, or in some instances was only discovered post-mortem. Some women became famous for their exploits and passed into legend through songs and ballads. Others were rewarded for their service, such as 'Mother Ross' who fought in a Regiment of Foot in Holland and was wounded at Ramillies. Expelled from the regiment upon discovery that she was in fact female, 'Mother Ross' (real name Christian Davies) stayed on as a 'sutler' or cook, before returning to her native Dublin to run a public house with her husband. She was awarded a military pension by Queen Anne and, as a Chelsea pensioner, was buried in the Chelsea hospital cemetery, London, in 1739 (Terry, 1988: 35; Ewing, 1975: 29).

The number of women who became soldiers without trying to disguise their sex is even less. One of the most famous was Flora Sandes, an Englishwoman who, at the age of thirty-nine, volunteered to fight in the Serbian Army during the First World War. Originally, Flora worked as a first-aider, nurse, ambulance driver and, in desperate circumstances, surgeon. Later, anxious to stay with her friends and comrades rather than go to safety, she was accepted into the Serbian Army as a private soldier and participated in many battles and campaigns. She rose to the rank of Sergeant Major and received the highest honour for bravery from Serbia in 1916, the Karadjordj Star. Her contribution was never acknowledged by the British and, although she became a legend in Serbian history, little was known about her here until recently (Bourke, 2000; Terry, 1988).

Women in the World Wars

At the outbreak of World War I, many women volunteered to help the country in any way they could but were restricted in the most part to voluntary organisations. As Trevor Wilson explains, women's volunteering motives were mixed and included '...the impulse of patriotism, or money incentives, or the hope of improving the status of their sex' (1986: 705). However, it must be

pointed out that women had no alternative; conscripting women was considered by the Government of the day but never introduced, even to cover the shortfalls in 'manpower' within industry. In 1916 the War Office faced the fact that there was a desperate need for men at the Western Front as trench warfare was exacting an horrific toll. Large numbers of able-bodied men could be released from tasks such as cooking, cleaning and clerical duties and could be moved to the front line if women were deployed to replace them. In early 1917, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was formed and its members were duly sent to France but although they wore a uniform, in effect they remained a civilian, voluntary organisation. Designated as 'officials' and 'members' rather than officers and other ranks, they were not allowed to use the familiar badges of rank on their uniforms. Instead, badges were created purely for the WAAC, none of which meant anything to the ordinary soldier or officer. No one (other than members of the WAAC) was required to salute the officers or afford them any special courtesy other than within the expected social norms. They were subject to military law when on active service in France but under a section which classified them as mere 'camp followers'. Members of the WAAC in the UK were disciplined under existing criminal law. There was great concern that the uniform should not over-emphasise the female form and the shortening of the skirt so that the ankles were on display caused much debate within the War Office (Terry, 1988: 39-47). It was, however, cut in a military style and Grayzel argues that by the end of the war, '...a woman's appearing in uniform could be read as an especially significant display of her patriotism' (1997: 145).

The public was also involved in debates in the press about the behaviour of the WAAC, so far away from the guidance of families or husbands. Fears were raised as to their morals and rumours started to circulate alleging 'loose conduct and immoral behaviour' (Terry, 1988: 69; Grayzel, 1997). By early 1918 over 22,000 women were serving in the WAAC and about a quarter of these were in France. The WAAC had become the subject of jokes, songs, cartoons and the usual exaggerated stories told and re-told by male soldiers. However, by early 1918, the scandal had reached its peak and a Commission of Inquiry was set up. In the end, the WAAC was fully cleared of any alleged improprieties and the

Commission reported being ‘...impressed by the good discipline and tone of the Corps’ (Terry, 1988: 74). However, in denying the WAAC the status, authority and recognition afforded by including them into the military family, the pattern was set for future generations of women soldiers to be seen as separate, as different and requiring special regulations and policies. The WAAC received Royal approval as a reward for their service at home and abroad in wartime and was renamed Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC). Demobilisation for members of the QMAAC happened in 1919, although the QAIMNS, which saw service during the full four years of WWI, was retained. The segregation of military nursing into a task performed solely by women remained the norm until the 1990s. The social world as well as the military world had been changed by the dreadful years of war. Suffrage for married women, female graduates aged over thirty and women who owned property was achieved in 1918. By 1921, Terry reports that more than seven million women were in full employment in the UK across an increasingly diverse range of occupations (1988: 84).

In the late 1930s, the rumblings of an impending war served as the motivating factor for the War Office to think about mobilising women into khaki again. The Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was created in 1938 to provide an essential body of labour to the Army, able to carry out a variety of tasks, predominantly driving, clerical work and domestic work such as cooking and cleaning. The early days of the service were chaotic and the selection of officers relied heavily on patronage and class rather than the selection of the most qualified, or women demonstrating leadership qualities. Again, the Service was essentially deemed to be a civilian auxiliary in military style uniform, subject to military law when on active duty abroad but criminal law at home. The previous system of ranks and badges was reinstated from the days of the WMAAC, much to the disgust of the driving force behind the ATS, Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan. She had campaigned since the early days of the WAAC for the recognition of women’s service as comparable to that of men (Terry, 1988: 96-97).

As the pressures of war intensified, a turning point in women’s military history was reached – conscription. The National Service Act (No. 2) was introduced to

Parliament at the end of 1941 and conscription began for single women aged twenty to thirty years¹⁸ (Peniston-Bird, 2003: 33). The ATS was the largest of the three Women's Auxiliary Branches of the Armed Forces and by 1943, 214,420 women were in Army uniform, carrying out an ever-greater proportion of tasks, many of which would have been considered to be 'men's jobs' up until that point (1988: 135). 56,000 of these were working on the anti-aircraft batteries, many thousands more were electricians, welders, mechanics and fitters (1988: 148).¹⁹

It is often argued that the mobilisation of 'womanpower' during the war years into the Services and the Land Army, as well as factories and workplaces throughout the country, represented a major turning point for women's progression in the workplace as well as in society in general. From Ewing's perspective, the wearing of such a wide variety of uniforms, from military khaki to the dungarees and work-boots of the munitions factories, visibly demonstrated their shift of position within society (Ewing, 1975: 11-12). The end of the war in 1945, however, brought with it the inevitable de-mobilisation and within six weeks, married women were being released from the ATS. The Women's Services were understood to be an additional or reserve supply of labour, a means to supplement the core military force when the need arose. In times of emergency, when able-bodied men were in much demand, women could step into the breach. However, once the crisis was over, women's roles were expected to revert to their pre-war status. As Segal argues, nations participate in a form of '...cultural amnesia regarding the contributions women made during emergency situations, until a new emergency arises and then history is re-discovered' (1993:83-84).

The long years of military service, however, had made a deep impression on both the country and the government. The capabilities of women had been tested

¹⁸ In 1942, conscription was extended to incorporate single women aged nineteen years.

¹⁹ Women were in a variety of uniformed services during WW II. See the following for more information about their experiences as nurses (McBryde, 1985), fire service personnel (Demarne, 1995), Land Army Girls (Tyrer, 1997), their service in the Royal Navy (Jones, 1995), the Royal Air Force (Pushman, 1989; Stone, 1999), the Home Guard (Summerfield, 2000) and the ATS (Robinson, 1996; DeGroot, 2000).

under the most trying of conditions and had not been found wanting. ATS women, although proud of their achievements in their wartime role, also felt anxious about the future. Would their skills be transferable to other workplaces, especially if men, returning from the war, were to be given priority in the job market? Fortunately, the gradual de-mobilisation process allowed for a stay of execution for the ATS and many officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks were able to remain in uniform for short-term contracts of up to three years. Many men of military age had either been killed in the war or were too sick or disabled to serve in uniform. The demands of the recovering economy also drew a potential pool of male labour away from the military and into the general workforce. In 1948, National Service²⁰ was introduced as one method of making up the shortfall of male military recruits. Women, however, were not only available, but large numbers were already qualified from their war service and familiar with the requirements of the job. The policy to recruit women was also economically viable, demonstrating the most efficient use of an available and trained resource. The wider public, having become used to the increased participation of women in the paid workforce and to seeing women in uniform during the war years, was not opposed to the idea of women remaining in military service.

During this period, therefore, many discussions were held as to the possible reorganisation of the auxiliary forces into a full-time volunteer force. One of the main requests the ATS put forward for the new Service was that the female officers be granted the same rank structure and names as the men, display the same badges of rank and be saluted (Terry, 1988: 173). After years of discussion and arguments about everything from discipline to the design of the uniform, the ATS was renamed the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and, for the first time in British history, women became part of a permanent, peacetime volunteer force and a fully-fledged Corps in the Army. On the 1st of February 1949, serving ATS personnel handed in their insignia and received the shiny new WRAC

²⁰ National Service was in force in the UK between 1948 and 1963 and required all able-bodied male citizens to serve for 730 days (2 years) (The National Army Museum, 2003).

badges and buttons (1988: 177). The next phase of women's military service had begun.

Historical Overview of the WRAC/QARANC

Between the 1950s and the late 1980s, the model for the peacetime volunteer force changed little from that used in wartime. However, there was one major difference – the WRAC and the QARANC were able to offer women a career. Although some of the occupational choices may seem sedate by today's standards, the opportunities seemed boundless to young women of the 1950s who were recovering from the austerity of war. As Terry states:

Many [women] realized that the Army offered them a varied career with the opportunity to gain experience in management and in carrying considerable responsibilities which they might never encounter in civilian life, where many women had to be content with jobs as typists or clerks and where executive positions invariably went to men. Besides, Britain still had an empire and there was always the chance of a posting overseas. At home and abroad the opportunities were there to be grasped (1988: 178).

Women remained segregated in women-only Corps, separated by gender rather than by occupation. Their participation was limited, both numerically via a quota system and by restricting their access to a high percentage of jobs, regardless of qualifications or ability. The QARANC, as the nursing arm of the Army, had very restricted job opportunities in that a woman either entered on a nursing path or a medical administration path. However, women who had already gained a nursing qualification prior to joining up (i.e. Registered General Nurse (RGN)) were automatically channelled for commissions and became Nursing Sisters. In this way, there was a form of breakdown of the traditional class system that persisted for a lot longer in the WRAC. Nursing is a job that working class women have traditionally entered but in the QARANC they found themselves elevated to officer status because of it.

Perhaps because of the association of the QARANC with the nurturing and caring roles, there was a perception that the QAs were more feminine in their

dress and behaviour. There is no empirical evidence to support this but the variety of trades on offer in the WRAC, coupled with the wartime slurs on the reputations of the WAAC in WWI and the ATS in WWII, allowed these perceptions to pass into legend. Certainly there was a perception by some of the women who took part in this research that the differences in portrayals of femininity were associated with commissioned officer/non-commissioned officer status i.e. commissioned officers were expected to display more feminine traits. Helen said that ‘...the QAs encouraged ladylike hairstyles, behaviour and demeanour – i.e. no tattoos, banning of trousers at Mess functions, appropriate dress, no piercings’ [QARANC Nurse (SEN), WO2; 45 – Q] while Kathleen said that she felt that, in her experience, women who were considered ‘too feminine’ were ‘...directed towards certain trades (i.e. QARANC) or rank i.e. commissioned officer’ [WRAC Military Police, LCpl; 36 – Q]. There was definitely an officer/non-officer divide in both the QARANC and the WRAC, originally perhaps based on class but perpetuated through the emphasis on feminine etiquette for female officers through classes in flower-arranging and beauty counselling (Terry, 1988: 191). Yvonne, a Captain in the WRAC in the 1980s recalls, ‘A session in my training dealt with how to correctly apply makeup. It was even suggested we kept our lipstick in our gas-mask case’ [Administrator; 43 – Q]. These training sessions to practice/enforce femininity, although perceived as applicable to officers, were also experienced by non-commissioned officers although mostly in basic training or through the use of dress codes. Catriona recalled that when she first joined the WRAC ‘...it was very much impressed for us to act as ladies – flower arranging classes etc., no football’ [Driver, WO1; 45 – Q]. This emphasis on feminine attributes and behaviours was also part of the training for American servicewomen during the same period (Holm, 1992: 181-182).

In both the QARANC and the WRAC, women received different rates of pay and conditions of service from male colleagues and this, combined with the restricted occupational choices, limited their chances of career advancement. In the Army, all infantry, artillery and armoured corps posts, as well as any other job considered to be ‘combatant’, such as the Royal Engineers, were restricted to

men only. As all the highest-ranking positions required experience of both combat and field command, no women were able to progress further than the rank of Brigadier. Career opportunities, therefore, were severely limited.

During this period, however, women in the Army did indeed serve abroad, for example in Singapore, Malaysia, Jamaica, Cyprus and Egypt. In 1969, in response to the escalation of violence within the province, a small contingent of WRAC Provost (Military Police) were despatched to Northern Ireland, marking the beginning of a long and important period of time in the Corps' history. From that time until the present day, there have been women soldiers from all trades in Northern Ireland. Their principal role was that of 'searchers', frisking women and children at the checkpoints which surrounded most towns and cities in Northern Ireland, as well as operating as part of border patrols with their male colleagues (Terry, 1988: 196-200). For the majority of these thirty-plus years, they were unarmed, other than with a wooden truncheon tucked away inside the armpit of their flak-jacket, a riot helmet and, for Military Policewomen only, a whistle! Women soldiers were required to wear skirts instead of trousers so that they could be identified as female from a distance, even though in most situations a skirt was definitely a liability. Northern Ireland, however, was important because the women there were not doing their normal job – they were out on the streets with male soldiers, getting tired, dirty, suffering the same abuse and hardships and dealing with it. Many suffered injuries during riots or arrest situations and a few were injured more seriously by bombs, gunfire or in vehicle accidents. In several cases, the bravery exhibited by individual women was rewarded with commendations, Mentioned in Dispatches and, in one case, the Military medal for outstanding devotion to duty (1988: 199). I would argue that Northern Ireland had a great influence on policy-makers and ordinary soldiers alike, in that women soldiers were able to demonstrate that they could cope with the task in difficult and trying conditions and, indeed, that the job could not have been achieved without them. Individually, women were able to learn new skills, both practical and managerial, which stood them in good stead for progression on return to their units. The next opportunity to demonstrate their collective abilities under pressure did not occur until the Gulf War of 1991.

Although the deployment changes of the 1970s affected women's careers and day-to-day jobs, nothing obvious was happening regarding policy. It is sometimes hard to discern when the seeds of change started to germinate, but the 1970s should be recognised as the time when the modifications, which were to follow in the early 1980s, began to develop. In the early 1970s, the feminist movement in the UK, the USA and Europe was finding its voice and was influencing debate around societal practices and norms, especially regarding women's participation in the labour market. The Equal Pay Act became legislation in 1970, but the military managed to claim exemption from implementing it. Britain was also in the process of applying to join the European Community and the debates about 'equal pay for equal work of equal value' were current in the lives of recruits joining up at that time and many of these women expected greater opportunities. Men were paid more than women, ostensibly to compensate them for their 'combat readiness' - their weapons handling ability and 'deployability' to the front line. This was regardless of whether the male soldier was in the infantry or the catering corps. The US military had already started to incorporate weapons training into the basic training of female recruits but women in the UK were not required to be weapons-trained at that time. Thereby, the justification for the pay disparity was reinforced.

At the same time, the American military was discovering that its female members were not going to accept the type of sex discrimination that had been considered normal until that point. Jeanne Holm argues that apart from minor changes affecting forces' strength, '...it was as if women did not exist or did not count' (1992: 261). This perception changed rather speedily in 1969, when women were omitted from a widely-published Department of Defense document, apparently espousing the desire to make the military '...a model of equal opportunity for all regardless of race, creed, or national origin' (1992: 262). The document was eventually amended and published in December 1970. This was one of the pivotal moments in US military history as far as the integration of women into the mainstream military is concerned. Inspired by the Civil Rights

Movement of the 1960s and the growing critique of society by the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, America began the process of full integration.

Indeed, 1970 was a watershed year for women in the armed forces, the year in which important national events converged to force the issue: President Nixon decided to go for the all-volunteer force and Congress debated the Equal Rights Amendment. This was also the year when women began to attack military sex discrimination in the courts for the first time. During the next decade, Congress, the courts, and a succession of administrations constantly pressured the services to bring policies and regulations into line with contemporary concepts of equal opportunity and personnel management (Holm, 1992: 262).

By the end of the decade, Britain, now a member of the European Community had also accepted various laws onto the statute books intended to enhance equality of opportunity within employment for women and ethnic minorities²¹. Legislation to protect disabled people against discrimination in employment had been brought into law in 1944²² as a protection for the large numbers of disabled servicemen returning from the war. The military, however, had always claimed that the *special nature* of service life should render it partially or fully exempt from such legal constraints. Although the situation regarding sex and race has changed in the last fifteen years, the military still claims special status regarding disability legislation²³, even if the disability occurs as a result of military activity.

There are no longer any exemptions allowed under the Race Relations Act 1976. The Armed Forces, however, continues to implement 'combat exclusion' clauses under Section 85(4) of the SDA 1975 (amended 1995) to infantry and armoured posts across all three Services (Ministry of Defence, 1996a: 21; Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002: 3, paragraph 11). The legal justification for the exclusion of women is based on '...evidence that [it] was

²¹ The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) and the Race Relations Act 1976.

²² The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944.

²³ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, amended 2003, is the most up to date legislation regarding disability. The Disability Discrimination Bill was introduced to Parliament in November 2004 but has not yet been enacted.

adopted for the purposes of ensuring combat effectiveness' (Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002: 3, paragraph 11-12). The military must make every effort to implement the Equal Treatment Directive (ETD)²⁴ and is only allowed to resort to the exclusion clauses of Section 85(4) of the SDA 1976 if it can show that '...such derogation must be necessary and appropriate' (2002: Ibid.). In the case of *Mrs Sirdar v the Army Board and SofS for Defence*²⁵, Mrs Sirdar was a serving member of the Forces, trained as a cook. She applied for a post as a cook attached to the Royal Marines and was refused on the grounds that all personnel in the Royal Marines, regardless of their trade, are required to be 'interoperable' in order to ensure combat effectiveness. In other words, the cooks are also trained as infantrymen and may be required to throw away their frying pans and pick up their weapons to operate effectively at a high intensity level in a combat situation. In Mrs Sirdar's²⁶ case, she could not be interoperable because the Royal Marines are classed as front-line infantry combat troops and women are not allowed to join the infantry. One of the main reasons for barring women is based on '...gender and bio-medical aspects of performance assessed as relevant to the performance of military tasks'. Another is '...the impact of gender on group task performance' (2002: 3, paragraph 13). In essence, this becomes a circular argument – assist women to reach the required standards of infantry selection, allow them to do the training, to become part of the team and, if they are successful, automatically render them interoperable. If they do not pass the training, then the possibility of a grievance is invalidated, as they have been given a fair opportunity but have failed to meet the challenge. I would argue that these exclusions have a greater impact on women in the Army than in the Navy or Air Force because the Army is principally concerned with the deployment of ground troops into conflict situations. Furthermore, allowing the military to treat women employees differently has helped to reinforce the polarisation between male and female

²⁴ EC Council Directive 76/207 EEC dated 9th February 1976 (Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002: 3 para 11).

²⁵ European Court of Justice Judgement C-273/97 dated 26th October 1999 and ET 29410/95 dated 28th April 1997.

²⁶ It is interesting that this female soldier is referred to as Mrs Sirdar rather than her military rank. It may be, however, that she had left the Forces by the time the case came to court.

soldiers and encouraged the association between a particular form of 'macho' masculinity and military service. Combat exclusion is a subject that will be returned to in Chapter 3: 'Camouflage'.

Female/Maternal Sexuality

Marriage and pregnancy have been the other traditional means through which women have been polarised as the 'other'. There has never been any formal legislation for female soldiers to leave the Forces upon marriage, however, in the 1950s it was still a social and cultural expectation that women would marry, give up work and have their children. Statistics for 1951 show that 731 out of every 1000 women aged between 20 and 39 years were married and the birth-rate had peaked at 20.5 per 1000 in 1947 (Terry, 1988: 167). Women in the Army were no different from women in the wider society in that respect and many considered military service to be incompatible with marriage and/or motherhood, especially if their future husband was a civilian. Although it was expected that civilian wives would follow their military husbands around the world, it was almost inconceivable that civilian men would do the same to be with their military wives. Where both parties were in the military, effort was made to post them to the same or nearby locations but, given the restrictions on women's military employment, this was not always possible. In these cases, more often than not, it was the woman's career that was sacrificed. Discharges because of marriage meant a lot of work for the planners in the posting and deployment sections as their forecasts of available 'womanpower' were constantly undermined by announcements of impending nuptials and intentions to leave the military. There were other, more indirect, penalties. The cost of training personnel for specialist posts represented a considerable investment by the military and often women were denied opportunities because senior (male) officers presumed that they would soon leave to get married and the Forces would not get value for money (Terry, 1988). In civilian life, this was just the sort of behaviour covered by the legislation contained within the SDA 1975, but these laws, of course, did not affect the military.

Women who wanted to leave upon marriage could request a Premature Voluntary Release (PVR) without financial penalty. Since PVRs normally required the soldier to pay a lump sum of money as a symbolic compensation payment to the military for the investment in the training now lost, this ‘freebie’ has to be viewed as an exception and the motivation behind this ‘gesture’ subjected to critique. Why would the Armed Forces be willing to forego the normal payment in these cases? One possible argument is that, even though the military had no objection in principle to married women continuing in their employment, the institution itself did not consider that they *should* continue and therefore it was made as easy as possible for women to leave. In the earlier decades of the WRAC’s existence, this view was in line with the general population’s views and patterns of behaviour, but as time passed and trends changed, the Armed Forces soon came to be out of touch. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that women who decided to stay in the Forces after marriage found it almost impossible to obtain a married quarter in their own name. The practice of granting married quarters to male soldiers had been successfully challenged in the USA in 1970 by First Lieutenant Sharron Frontiero, whose landmark case resulted in a ruling that women in the military ‘... were to be treated equally with men in all matters of dependency and entitlements, and the word ‘spouse’ in such matters was to replace ‘wife’ or ‘husband’ (Terry, 1988: 205; Holm, 1992: 290). However, it would take until 1979 for the rules to be changed in the UK.

Traditionally in the British Armed Forces, spouses and children are viewed as ‘dependants’ and there were real conceptual barriers to overcome within the institution before it could be believed that any red-blooded British man would be willing to be classed as such. Also, if he was not in the military himself, he would be required to follow his wife from posting to posting every two to three years and subsume his career for that of his spouse. The ‘military wife’ serves the Armed Forces well (Macmillan, 1984). Due to the frequent postings, house moves and the often-isolated locations, ‘military wives’ seldom find it easy to find work. If they do get a job, they cannot rely on their partner to be there for the children and may have to pay for childcare as well as transport to work. If

their spouse is deployed for long periods of time away from the home base they become, in effect, single parents but with an added emotional burden of worrying about the safety of their loved one. As 'military wives' (see Enloe, 2000; D'Amico and Weinstein, 1999), they are often remote from their own family and friendship networks, yet they are expected to provide emotional and physical support to the soldier, their children and to the other 'wives'. They cook and clean in military housing, manage household finances, bring up their children almost single-handedly and have no choice but to put up with the unsociable hours their spouse has to work or long periods of time when their partner is deployed without them. As a wife, they could be called upon to listen to their husband's experiences of war, conflict and humanitarian crisis without the training or support network to deal with it.

As an employer, the military has relied upon the 'wives' to provide free childcare, free labour at regimental and corps events, to wear the required standard of dress at appropriate functions and to join the 'military family' in order to protect and further their spouse's career. They have also had to accept an ever-increasing deployment of women soldiers working alongside their husbands. These situations are often the cause of marital tension and jealousy (Carr, 1984; Hertz, 1996). It is understandable that the institutional psyche cringes at the thought of all of these tasks being done by men in the role of 'military wife'.

Although marriage is not a *de facto* end to a woman's career in the Army, pregnancy has been, for the majority of the twentieth century, a certain and speedy route to discharge. Officers were expected to do the female equivalent of falling on their swords and to resign, while NCOs and other ranks were discharged with no penalty at the 16-week point. Pregnant women were not granted maternity leave and subsequently were not afforded the same rights and protections as civilian women – the right to have their job held open for them for a given period of time after the birth and the right to return to that job, or a job of equal rank and status. Technically, the new mothers were allowed to re-enlist when the baby was six months old if they could prove adequate provision for

childcare had been made, but this was a rare event. In 1988, Roy Terry reported that there were only two women in the WRAC who were mothers²⁷. Again, the failure of the Armed Forces to enforce legislation commonplace in civilian life, the SDA 1975, enabled this overt discrimination against pregnant women and affected the demographics and gendered identity of the WRAC and QARANC. The most able soldiers were not likely to remain in the Army if they knew they could get married but not have children. They might delay starting their family in order to gain experience, promotion and financial stability but would eventually have to leave. The logical end-point of this argument is simple. Those women who remain to reach the highest levels of the military will be a) those who are married but who do not want children, b) those who are married and cannot have children and c) unmarried women, both heterosexual and lesbian, whose options for having children are limited by the heterosexist policies of their employer. In their attempt to maintain the gendered norms of heterosexual femininity that is motherhood, military policy endangered the future of the Corps by expelling very able and experienced soldiers from its ranks.

Overturing the regulations and attitudes on pregnancy was a long struggle and required a ruling from the High Court in London to do so. In 1994, the Ministry of Defence admitted that it was unaware that the SDA 1975 applied to the military, but accepted that ‘...the policy of compulsorily discharging Servicewomen on grounds of pregnancy was discriminatory and a breach of European Community directive 76/207 on the equal treatment of men and women in their conditions of employment’ (Ministry of Defence, 1994: paragraph 519). The MoD was ordered to compensate financially *all* women who had been discharged from the Forces in this way between 1978, when the Directive came into force, and 1990, when the policy was abandoned. This compensation was to be paid regardless of whether the woman had intended to leave the Forces or not. It was an expensive mistake. By the end of 1996, 98% of

²⁷ One woman was a widow whose husband had been killed in Northern Ireland and the other was a divorcee whose children had not been living with her at the date of her enlistment (Terry, 1988: 222).

all claims submitted had been paid out and the final cost to the taxpayer was circa £55 million (Ministry of Defence, 1996b: paragraph 519). This ruling also led to the introduction of proper maternity conditions and has had a direct impact on the retention rates of women soldiers. In 1990/1991, the number of female trained other ranks leaving the Services on the grounds of marriage was 545. In 1998/99, there were no discharges under this category (see Table 2.12 Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA), 1999). The changes in the regulations could be a mixed blessing, however, and women have experienced many difficulties. Although Danielle qualified for maternity leave to have her child, she was not given enough time to get fit again and subsequently suffered an injury which required surgery. She was a single mother and encountered several problems with the authorities, such as being told that she was not ‘...entitled to a [married] quarter. Then I was posted to Germany and over there I was told [that] even if I got civvi [*sic*] accommodation she (my daughter) wouldn’t be entitled to any medical care. Even though she was my dependant’ [WRAC Signals, Pte; 27 – SC].

Seeds of Change: 1980 – 2000

The seeds of change, which had been planted and nurtured during the 1970s, began to bear fruit in the early 1980s. A small contingent of women was deployed to the Falklands Islands in 1983. Senior female officers were finally making inroads into the higher echelons of male dominance such as the Royal College of Defence Studies. A major turning point, however, came in 1981, when the then Secretary of Defence, Francis Pym, finally announced that *all* members of the WRAC were to receive small arms weapons training forthwith (Terry, 1988: 201, 211 & 217-218). The role of the WRAC had fundamentally changed from that of providing replacements for male soldiers, to that of being valued as ‘...an integral part of the army, to carry out those tasks for which its members are best suited and qualified so that it will contribute to the maximum efficiency of the Army as a whole’ (1988: 213). Women were to be trained to use the weapons for their own protection, as well as the protection of those in their immediate vicinity in times of attack. This would relieve male colleagues from having to be assigned as their ‘protector’.

Other conditions for women began to change at the end of the 1980s due, in part, to a manpower shortage. Demographic predictions forecast progressive shortfalls in the numbers of young men available from which to recruit the soldiers of the 1990s (Muir, 1992: 45). One of the ways in which this problem was addressed was not only to recruit more women, but also to open up previously off-limits occupations to them. In this way, the government felt certain that the ability of the British Armed Forces to carry out their commitments would not be compromised. Those commitments, however, were changing in the climate of post Cold War international politics. Almost overnight, Britain's military presence in West Germany became untenable. A review of military requirements for the next decade became vital. The role of Britain's Armed Forces in Europe had fundamentally changed, as had organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Inevitably, as part of the review, it appeared that budgets would have to be cut and troop strengths reduced. There appeared to be no longer any justification for funding a military force of over 300,000 personnel (Ministry of Defence, 1989).

In spite of the drastic cuts to personnel strength during the 1990s, the overall number of women in all three Services increased, both in percentage terms and in total numbers (Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA), 1999 Table 2.19). The majority of cutbacks were directed to the very areas that women had been excluded from, the front-line fighting troops such as the infantry regiments, the artillery and the armoured corps. Another influential factor affecting recruitment and retention rates was the integration of women into the 'malestream' and the subsequent disbanding of the separate Women's Services, completed by 1993. Paradoxically, integration was not received with open arms by all servicewomen. The loss of the sense of identity associated with serving in the WRAC was the last straw for some. Yvonne said she resigned her commission because of 'The abolition of the WRAC & integration of women into the rest of the Army, together with the threat of being found out' [Administrator, Captain; 43 – Q]. The dissolution of the WRAC and the integration of women into the mainstream Army have provided them with pay, pension and conditions of service on par

with male colleagues of similar rank doing the same job. Maternity leave is now an accepted condition of service. Competition for promotion and opportunities for career advancement have become less restrictive. What has been lost perhaps is a sense of identity with a Women's Corps, a feeling of association and kinship with another woman in uniform even if she is a stranger. The separateness, although restrictive in many ways, also generated feelings of belonging and uniqueness and a collectivity of identity (Joseph, 1986; Craik, 2003).

Disbandment and integration meant that the military itself removed the means by which servicewomen had been previously targeted as an identifiable, auxiliary, segregated body of labour, surplus to the main fighting force. Integration affected the QARANC too but with an interesting twist. While their female colleagues in the WRAC were being integrated into the more male-dominated occupations, the QARANC absorbed all male nurses, who had previously been part of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and despatched all the female non-nursing staff over to the RAMC. The WRAC, however, was not to survive. It passed into the history books in April 1992 as gracefully as it had appeared nearly fifty years before but not before many hundreds of its members, together with their colleagues from the QARANC had served with great composure in the Gulf War of 1991.

There had never been a situation like the Gulf War before – where women soldiers were such a necessary and integral part of the war machine that they *had* to go to the war zone too. The integration process had blurred the lines between female and male roles in the UK Armed Forces and as Muir states:

...if the female troops had not been with the units they had served with for years in peacetime, the already-stretched allied forces would have been like a piece of bad knitting. A dropped stitch here, a hole there, and eventually the lot would have started to unravel (1992: 9).

About 1,000 British women were deployed in all, about 4% of the total. There were also 33,000²⁸ American women troops representing about 6% of their country's total deployment. The situation was not straightforward, as there was still much opposition in the military to sending women into a fighting zone. Many of the traditional gendered arguments about women's role were debated *ad nauseum*. Women were meant to be 'beautiful souls', naturally peaceful and there was great disquiet, in the USA especially, that mothers were being sent into a combat zone. The University of California's Women, Men and Media group carried out a study during the war to analyse how women soldiers were represented in four major US newspapers. They discovered that coverage was particularly biased. Stories about male soldiers tended to concentrate on pictures of their weapons or equipment and gave space to their opinions about the conflict. Stories about female soldiers focused on those they were leaving behind and they were seldom quoted. Women were rarely photographed with their weapons or equipment and there were many articles on the impact of mothers leaving their child/ren behind to go to war. Similar articles regarding male parents were not found (Muir, 1992: 178-179; Wheelwright, 1994).

The location of the conflict also threw up its own unique set of problems. Most of the troops were assembled and deployed from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait and Iraq, all Muslim countries. Their religious and cultural customs prohibited women from doing certain tasks and wearing particular clothes. Military planners had to walk a fine line between supporting their female troops in the execution of their jobs and being respectful of their hosts' customs (Muir, 1992: 10). The usual debates raged on about what was combat and what was not in the ever-changing technological war that was unfolding, in an attempt to retain women soldiers' gendered status within the category of 'non-combatant'. Similar arguments are taking place at the moment as women serve, are injured and are killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. The recent events in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq (Hersch, 2004) and the portrayal of US women soldiers as both abusers (the

²⁸ According to another source, this figure could have been as high as 37,000 (Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002: 61).

three women in the pictures shown around the world) and incompetent (Brigadier General Karpinski, commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade, responsible for the prison, subsequently relieved of duty) represent an interesting contrast to the 'story' of Jessica Lynch who was captured earlier in the war. Private Lynch was portrayed as the 'damsel' requiring rescue which, as mentioned previously, has been the traditional concern. The capture and abuse of female soldiers, especially the possibility of sexual assault and rape on a Western/Christian woman by Iraqi/Muslim men is the latest version of an argument as old as warfare itself – the rape of women being used as a means of demoralising the enemy and a symbolic means of raping the nation²⁹. There is also the added possibility of the woman being rejected by her family and country(men) as having shamed them. When this is analysed through the gender-specific lens of military masculinity, the shame is really that of failed masculinity – the failure to protect the defenceless. The woman must be cast out because for her to remain acts as a constant reminder of the men's failure.

In a way, the events of Abu Ghraib have slightly overtaken this thesis in that they have raised a second concern not previously considered – that of the potential de-feminising of women in a war zone. Although the soldiers themselves are in the US military, their behaviour impinges on British women soldiers too, as the closest ally of the USA in this conflict. The images of the three female soldiers, especially that of Pte Lynndie England, have been viewed as the evidence of how the exposure to war can de-feminise women to the point where they can dehumanise others and inflict abuse, indeed torture. Somehow the treatment of these prisoners has been seen as *more* shocking and *more* abusive because the torturers are women. There is an underlying essentialist gendered presumption of women being non-violent, of being unable to perpetrate such crimes. As a feminist militarist, I have also struggled to make sense of my feelings and

²⁹ The use of this tactic has become more and more obvious with the increased media coverage of wars and the type of investigative journalism that is common at the moment. It came to the public's attention especially during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where several of those responsible for both the rape of women and the ordering of their troops to rape and impregnate women as a tactic of war have been successfully prosecuted (Stiglmayer, 1994).

reactions to these events. Even though I do believe that men *and* women can be and are violent in all sorts of different situations, it is hard to face the fact that these women chose to take that route. As an ex-soldier and a person with some basic common sense, I know that the treatment of these prisoners was fundamentally wrong and totally against normal rules of engagement. I have had to admit to myself that I wanted these women to have been better than this – both as women and as soldiers. I concur with Barbara Ehrenreich who succinctly says, ‘The photos did something else to me, as a feminist: They broke my heart. I had no illusions about the U.S. mission in Iraq -- whatever exactly it is -- but it turns out that I did have some illusions about women’ (2004). As the trials of the soldiers begin in the United States, the embodiment of Pte England as torturer and abuser (and even soldier) is challenged again as she is now heavily pregnant. Her maternal outline radiates potential motherhood, as nurturer and as carer, and this clashes with what is known about her. If she can torture and abuse Iraqi prisoners, should she be allowed to be a mother? Who is she really? Was it really war that enabled or created these people or the sum total of their past combined with the irresponsibility and incompetence of their leaders? This has now become a core question in the discussion about women’s role in combat and one which I will return to in subsequent chapters.

It is easy to lose sight of the advancements in women’s employment opportunities in the Armed Forces amongst the furore that accompanies individual women’s stories. There has been significant progression made recently and these should be noted and celebrated. In 1993, the Ministry of Defence announced the intention to develop plans to introduce ‘... gender-free physical testing so that in future physical capacity rather than sex will determine an individual’s eligibility for a particular specialisation’ (1993: para 754). In 1995, new opportunities opened up for women to train as Ammunition Technical Officers, leading to the possibility of qualifying as Improvised Explosive Device Disposal officers (bomb disposal) (Ministry of Defence, 1995: paragraph 506). In 1997, the MoD announced that they were at last increasing the amount of posts available to women in the Army from 43% to 70%. Occupations within the Royal Artillery (RA), the Royal Engineers (RE) and the Royal Electrical and

Mechanical Engineers (REME) are now an option for women (Ministry of Defence, 1997). Job specifications have been drawn up for each trade, incorporating the required level of physical fitness. In theory, the introduction of 'gender-free' physical selection tests in 1998 should enable further integration of women into the British Armed Forces in those occupational areas where they are permitted to serve.

Women soldiers are also participating in ever-increasing numbers in United Nations/NATO missions. Since 1995, women have been deployed in 'peacekeeping'³⁰ roles in Cyprus, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Indonesia, as well as Afghanistan. There are still inequalities of course and much still to be done to improve the working life of women who choose the Army as their career. However, all of these changes have been instrumental in fundamentally changing the role of women in the British military from that of passive observer to active participant. These changes have been influenced by the ways in which the institution has viewed gender and how the category of woman soldier has been constructed in gendered and sexualised terms. In turn, the institution has been affected by the political, legal, economic and social changes happening around it, which have forced it to embrace limited change.

Homosexuality in the Military – The British Policy

The situation regarding homosexuality in the military until January 2000 is both refreshingly simple and irritatingly complex. The complexity, prior to the lifting of the ban, arose from the position of women under criminal and military law. Lesbianism is not, and never has been, an offence under British criminal law. The homosexual to which the law refers is not a universal human body, however. As Moran argues, the homosexual body in legal terms has already been sexed and gendered. It is a 'genital body' – and it is definitely male (Moran, 1996: 12). Since military law is based upon criminal law, in essence no offence exists under which to prosecute women soldiers. Yet, as statistics and testimony show, many

³⁰ I am using 'peacekeeping' here as a loose term to incorporate all the UN mission possibilities of peace enforcing, peace maintaining and humanitarian relief.

lesbians have been discharged from the Armed Forces for being gay (Bower, 1999; Skidmore, 1998; Harries-Jenkins and Dandeker, 1994; Crane, 1982; Muir, 1992; Ministry of Defence, 1996a). Between 1990 and 1995 alone (see Table 9), 30 officers and 331 other ranks were discharged from the three branches of the British Armed Forces on grounds of homosexuality. Of these, 5 officers and 113 other ranks were women. Only one female officer was discharged from the Army, one from the Royal Navy and three from the RAF. The figures in the table below were extracted from the Ministry of Defence Report of the Homosexuality Assessment Team (1996a: 13-14) and show the breakdown of the 331 other ranks according to Service and gender.

Year	Army		Royal Navy		Royal Air Force		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1990	20	19	11	1	14	5	45	25
1991	21	16	5	1	4	1	30	18
1992	13	15	12	3	6	4	31	22
1993	18	15	12	1	9	3	39	19
1994	17	12	7	6	5	3	29	21
1995	20	6	13	1	11	1	44	8
Total Males	109		60		49		218	
Total		83		13		17		113
Total	192		73		66		331	

Table 9: Dismissals from the British Armed Forces on Grounds of Homosexuality (1990-1995) – Other Ranks (Ministry of Defence, 1996a: 14).

Statistically, these figures show that, over a five year period, the number of women discharged on grounds of homosexuality was 34.13% of the total number of other ranks' dismissals, yet women as a group represented approximately 6% of Armed Forces strength at that time (see Chapter 2 in Ministry of Defence, 1999). In other words, on average over this period, for every woman in the Forces, there were fifteen men. Yet for every woman discharged for homosexuality, only three men were dismissed. Another disturbing statistic, of particular importance to this thesis, is that 83 of the 113 women discharged were in the Army. These 83 women represent 73.45% of the total female dismissals for homosexuality; almost three out of every four women discharged were from the Army.

These figures suggest that the three branches of the Armed Forces approached the issue of homosexuality, and in particular lesbianism, differently. All the women were discharged under administrative procedures, via a section of the regulations that states that their services are no longer required. All would have been subject to investigation, search and arrest by the Special Investigation Branch of the Military Police. However, due to the fact that they had not been charged with a criminal offence, lesbians had no recourse to legal assistance, either through military courts martial or civilian lawyers.

Homosexuality has never been accepted or allowed for either men or women serving in the Armed Forces and has always been dealt with severely, yet homosexuality is actually not named as a specific offence in military law. The offence that is punished is the *conduct* of the individual, which is then dealt with under one of the following sections of the Army Act 1955 (or similar legislation contained within the Air Force Act 1955 or the Naval Discipline Act 1957). Section 64 – Scandalous conduct by officers; Section 66 – Disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind or; Section 69 – Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline (Bower, 1999: 3; Skidmore, 1998). Before the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 1967 came into force, Section 70 (1) of the Army Act 1955 had also been in use. This section allowed the Army to court-martial anyone found to be in breach of criminal law. After the SOA changed, however, section

70 (1) could only be invoked if either of the (male) persons involved was under age or non-consenting. Regardless of the context under criminal law, however, the military still felt justified in punishing men for behaviour, which in civilian life would *not* be considered criminal and indeed, would be considered to be part of private life. This was justified under the *special nature* of military service. The 1957 Wolfenden Report, the precursor to the 1967 SOA, recommended the adoption of special circumstances for military personnel, stating that ‘...it may be necessary, for the sake of good management and the preservation of discipline and for the protection of those of subordinate rank or position, to regard homosexual behaviour, even by consenting adults in private, as an offence’ (1957).

The interpretation and extrapolation of the criminal law into the working practices of military policy is not simple to understand. The legal status of lesbianism is particularly confusing and, as I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, applied inconsistently. Both the Armed Forces and the legal system appear to agree on one thing – lesbianism has *never* been considered to be an offence under criminal law and therefore could not be affected by the SOA 1967 (Ministry of Defence, 1996a: 8, paragraph 3; Moran, 1996: 12-14). However, if it was not included within the meaning or interpretation of the 1967 SOA, then lesbianism *also* falls outside the remit of the special exemption for military personnel and therefore cannot be considered to be a military offence either. How then, have the military been able to include lesbians within their policies? In their 1996 report, the Ministry of Defence made the following statements:

Lesbianism has never been a civilian offence in the UK... Any Service personnel suspected of involvement in homosexual practices were *cautioned* by the appropriate Service investigators and Service police criminal investigations were initiated. Due to the *criminal* status of the homosexual act, it was necessary for the investigators to find supporting evidence; this was essential in cases when the accusation of involvement in homosexual conduct was denied or when doubts existed as to the validity of, or rationale behind, the admission of homosexuality. These *criminal*

investigations were, by nature of the subject matter, usually stressful for the individuals concerned (1996a: 8 my emphasis).

It appears therefore, that despite their position under both criminal and military law, women in the military have been placed in the same category as gay male colleagues when it comes being disciplined for homosexual conduct. Women were cautioned, something that should only happen if it is suspected an offence of a military or criminal nature has been committed; women were categorised as criminals throughout the process, yet denied recourse to legal advice; and the punishment for women was as serious as the equivalent offence for men. All these points highlight one of the most fundamental injustices to have taken place over the history of women's service in the military. The actions taken by the military to identify and rout out lesbians have been indefensible under the law and have resulted in a disproportionate rate of discharges compared with gay men.

The women in my survey, similar to many military lesbians world-wide, experienced 'witch hunts' - the systematic targeting, investigating and in some cases, the entrapment of lesbians serving in uniform (Parker, 1982; Benecke and Dodge, 1992; Thomas and Thomas, 1996). Many experienced extreme levels of harassment, such as searches of accommodation in the middle of the night, physical searches, intrusive questioning, the interception and/or reading of private mail and the confiscation of property (Parker, 1982: 155-175; Muir, 1992). Marilyn was the subject of several SIB investigations and eventually left the Army [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – Q and SC], Olive, herself a Military Police officer who had to participate in a night search of WRAC accommodation, said that she had been followed. 'I don't know if there was something found in that raid, either letters or photographs or if anybody who was interviewed later had said something, but the following week the SIB started following me' [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 39 – Q and I]. Despite these trying and often intimidating conditions, the women were able to cling on to, and indeed embrace, their identity as lesbians. Chapter 5 – 'Identity on Parade' contains some of these women's stories and experiences of life as a lesbian in the British Army.

Only in the Armed Forces has lesbianism ever been deemed to be illegal in the UK (Skidmore, 1998: 48). The military has been one of the few contexts in which individual women and men have been overtly deprived of their citizenship rights, purely on the grounds of their sexuality. In 1995, during a legal challenge in Divisional Court, the Ministry of Defence, in the form of Sir John Willis, Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, gave four reasons as to the need to exclude homosexuals from the military. They were: national security, communal living, *in loco parentis* and morale and discipline (1998: 48). This was just one of a series of legal challenges by several individual claimants and the MoD was eventually unable to defend their policy of total intolerance. The legal procedure lasted several years, however, as the cases had to go through the entire British legal system before ending up in the European Court of Human Rights. In 1999, the European Court of Human Rights passed down their judgements in the two lawsuits brought against the UK government. In both cases, the Court found that the ban on homosexuality was in breach of several different articles of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms and therefore illegal (European Court of Human Rights, 1999a; European Court of Human Rights, 1999b). This landmark ruling resulted in the ban on homosexuality being over-turned and a new Code of Social Conduct was introduced, applicable to the whole of the Armed Forces (Ministry of Defence, 2000b). A number of other cases have followed in the last few years and some are still awaiting a legal decision. Unfortunately, each case has to be considered individually and none, so far, has afforded a collective ruling for compensation purposes. Some recent cases have gone to Industrial Tribunal, the first time this has been possible for members of the British Armed Forces. Although the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act came into force in the UK in 1978, military personnel were denied recourse to this legal protection until 1999 (Ministry of Defence, 1996a; Ministry of Defence, 2000a). I would argue that all of these legal challenges, whether successful in terms of changing legislation or not, have been of vital importance. They all have contributed to the undermining of the culture of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980), one of the main institutional

structures of the Armed Forces , as well as fuelling debates about sexual citizenship (Skidmore, 1998: 46).

There is little literature available that analyses the British policy on homosexuality in any great detail, although in recent years this situation has improved slightly as the subject has been increasingly in the public arena. One of the shortcomings of most of this work, however, is the consistent failure to separate the experiences and consequences of this policy on lesbians from that of gay men. Even though most authors make a point of spelling out the fact that the position for lesbians and gay men *was* different under the law, there has been little attempt to explain why the punishment for both has been broadly the same. Likewise, no attempt is made to explain the fact that lesbians, despite the small numbers of women in the Services, were much more likely to be discharged for homosexuality. In 1994 for example, several years before the ban was overturned (and also before the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act lowered the age of consent for male homosexuals to 18 years), Harries-Jenkins and Dandeker set out to ‘...look critically at the current position of gays and lesbians in the British armed forces by considering three basic questions of policies, practices, and problems’ (1994: 191). On setting out the details of the policy, the authors state that the British military’s position regarding homosexuals has always been that military law should mirror civil and statute law. However, they then go on to say that, ‘...Effectively, this meant that homosexual acts were a criminal offence. In the military, their commission and detection led to the court-martial of the offender; in civil society the full panoply of the law was equally exercised’ (1994: 192). This statement is used in effect to set the scene but is, in fact, entirely misleading, indeed inaccurate. As previously explained, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act pertained *only* to homosexual acts committed between men. This act changed the law, as it stood at that time, so that homosexual acts, taking place in private between two consenting men, both aged over 21 years of age, would no longer be considered criminal behaviour. Acts taking place in public or between men under 21 years or non-consenting men remained offences under criminal law. The authors *do* go on to point out that since ‘...lesbian acts had never been a criminal offence, their commission was not affected by the reforms

of the 1967 act' (1994: 192). These statements are therefore in direct conflict with one another and the shortcoming of this article is that the differing legal positions of lesbians and gay men under both criminal and military law were left unexplained. This discrepant legal position has contributed directly to the creation of particular policies by the military, which have affected women in different ways from their male colleagues.

Paul Skidmore (1998) offers the most comprehensive overview of the legal position regarding homosexuality in the British Armed Forces. He lays bare the way in which all of the four arguments for retention of the ban put forward in 1995 by the Ministry of Defence are based on prejudice against homosexuals – homophobia. He argues that ‘...the ‘presumed heterosexual’ construction of societal relations was used to justify the MoD’s policy of prejudice, relying on the prejudice of others to validate their own’ (Skidmore, 1998:48). On the first point regarding national security, the MoD withdrew their argument in court. The policy, which viewed homosexual behaviour by those serving in the highest echelons of government and the intelligence services to be a national security risk, had been overturned in 1991. However, an argument was posed that even if homosexuals in the military were not at risk of blackmail, they would not want anyone else, such as close family and friends to know. This demonstrated the military’s willingness to use the prejudice and fear of others to control the behaviour of their soldiers. Their argument on communal living likewise shows their ignorance of sexuality *per se* in that they equate sexuality with sexual behaviour and reinforce the myth of the homosexual predator. Sharing a room or using the same bed as a homosexual does not mean that everybody in that room is gay. The Royal Navy has a practice of ‘hot-bunking’ where one sailor goes on duty and the sailor coming off duty gets into the recently vacated bed. The MoD was at pains to explain that it would be difficult for the heterosexual sailor in these circumstances. It is hard to understand why, since the homosexual sailor would not be actually *in* the bed at the time but this may be based on a fear of contamination through the ‘sharing’ of bodily fluids (Longhurst, 2001). The MoD presumed that all military personnel would think the same as them and

therefore banked on their prejudice in the maintenance and perpetuation of their policy.

The coercion of young soldiers less than eighteen years of age into homosexual acts and lifestyles was used as a particularly emotive argument. The MoD considered that it had a 'duty of care' to protect these young people from predatory homosexuals. The legal age of consent for male homosexual acts (at the time of the court case, the legal age of consent was eighteen years) allowed the military to argue that those below that age were particularly vulnerable. No evidence was produced to back up this argument in any way. Again, the presumption was that parents and (heterosexual) recruits would be equally horrified. As Skidmore points out, no consideration was made as to how their policy on homosexuality might affect 16 and 17-year-old lesbians and gay men (1998:48-49). These were the same 16 and 17-year-olds that were being trained to kill people, handle weapons of mass destruction and protect themselves against harm. The last objection was the catchall argument of morale and discipline. Known or 'out' homosexuals would cause loss of unit cohesion, the argument went, especially in combat situations where it was of the utmost importance. Homosexual officers would not be able to command respect from his/her troops if it was known or suspected that the officer was gay. Again, the MoD failed to produce any evidence to substantiate their claim. Given that many lesbians and gay men served successfully without discovery for many years, their sexuality does not appear to have impacted upon their effectiveness as soldiers and members of teams, large or small. In the MoD's eyes, it was the *knowledge* that a person is gay that changes the perception of the others around them, a classic demonstration of prejudice, indeed homophobia (1998: 48-49). Warren Blumenfeld would define such practice as 'institutionalised homophobia' – the creation of policies to systematically discriminate against a particular group, in this case lesbians and gay men, but which equally discriminates against those who oppose such discrimination (1992: 5).

Literature regarding military policy on homosexuality has been sought to compare and contrast the differing positions various countries have taken over

the years, as well as their justification for changing the policy or retaining a ban. The volume of literature available varies greatly from country to country and this has obviously had an effect on the way in which my research has been carried out. Among the member countries of NATO, the United States of America and Turkey are the only countries that maintain a ban on homosexuality within the military. The USA's current policy of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue, Don't Harass' (Halley, 1999; Belkin and Bateman, 2003) has garnered much critique over the years and there is much more published literature on the US policy than on any other country. The available US literature includes a wide variety of texts as to the situation before the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue, Don't Harass' policy and the differences, if any, it has made, including the effects on the lives of service personnel (Humphrey, 1990; Herek, 1993; Ralston, 1998; Britton and Williams, 1995; Shawver, 1995; Damiano, 1998-1999; Owens, 1999; Weinstein et al., 1999; Borch, 2000). Some of these sources, along with others such as Herbert's research, also comment on the inter-relationship between gender and sexuality, the importance of femininity in the reinforcement of heterosexual norms and the ways in which the treatment of lesbians has differed in practice from that of gay men, even though the policy is, unlike the UK, the same for both (Herbert, 1998; Enloe, 1988; Francke, 1997).

Some literature is available regarding Canada's past and present policy on homosexuality in the military (Gade et al., 1996; Gouliquer, 2000). Similar literature exists for Israel (Izraeli, 2000; Gade et al., 1996). Studies have also been published by the Centre for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM) on the position in Canada, Israel, Australia and Britain (Belkin and McNichol, 2000b; Belkin and McNichol, 2000a; Belkin and Levitt, 2000; Belkin and Evans, 2000). The Report of the Gender Integration Audit of the New Zealand Defence Force, published in 1998, also gives details of how the New Zealand government dealt with issues of gender and sexuality within the Armed Forces and the steps they took to break down stereotypical attitudes (New Zealand Defence Force and New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 1998).

Conclusion

As mentioned, little research exists about British women soldiers and, in particular, lesbians in the military and this thesis offers a means of addressing that shortfall. The intention of this chapter has been to provide the historical, political and social contexts within which lesbians, as women soldiers, live and work in the British Army. Changing social trends, perhaps more apparent in civilian society, often take many years to filter through to the military institution and are often greeted with disdain and scepticism as evidence of social experimentation. As women's roles have evolved during the past fifty years, the changes have impacted on male soldiers' core duties (i.e. weapons training, de-segregation of women-only space) and have been resisted. Additionally, I have explained the legal position as to military policy regarding homosexuality and how this has been applied to lesbians. The most important function of this chapter has been to provide the backdrop against which the performances of gender and sexuality are acted out.

Chapter 3

'Camouflage'

Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in the British Army

It seems that *beliefs* about gender, about masculinity-femininity, and about sexuality are in close interaction with actual gender behaviour...Discoveries about gender and about sexuality, whether well or badly grounded, are selectively assimilated to normative understandings regarding masculinity-femininity...and thus empowered can have a self-fulfilling effect on objective gender behaviour (Goffman, 1977: 304).

Being female in the Army is lose/lose – too masculine and [the] men are threatened; too feminine and you shouldn't be in the Army at all [Barbara, QARANC Nurse, Pte; 28 – Q].

Introduction

Feminists have demonstrated the inter-relationship of gender and sexuality in women's lives (see for example Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Ingraham, 1994; Jackson, 1999; Jackson and Scott, 2002). In this chapter I explore how lesbians in the British Army experience their gender and sexuality, demonstrating the tensions and contradictions which exist in these women's lives as they negotiate being lesbian and a member of the British Armed Forces. As the chapter title, 'Camouflage', implies, this part of the thesis will also deal with blending in and with hiding or concealment, not just as women in a male space, but as gay women in a 'straight' space.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, uniforms have been the source of much angst over the last fifty years. It could be assumed that women should have been issued with the male uniform because the military had already considered it to be appropriate for the task. However, rather than draw attention to the 'sexual zones', the breasts and crotch, by allowing women soldiers to wear the same uniform as male colleagues, the military elected to forego practical concerns and instead accentuate women's femininity and therefore their differences from men (Muir,

1992: 176-189; Ewing, 1975; Terry, 1988). Another issue for debate has been the length of women's hair. Women have always been allowed to retain long hair as long as it was pinned up to the regulation length i.e. not lying lower than the bottom of the collar. The same length on a man is unacceptable. Women have also been encouraged not to cut it so short as to appear masculine – in other words, no shaven heads. Again the same standard is not applied to men. Rather than insist on women conforming to the male standard, the military have gone out of their way to put in place policies which control femininity and thereby obviate any threat to masculinity.

Living and working in a space that is constructed as masculine and heterosexual means that life for gay women in any military force is often even more complicated because gender and sexuality are so interwoven (D'Amico, 1996; D'Amico and Weinstein, 1999; Herbert, 1998; Shawver, 1995). The blending in and/or the concealment for the women in my study was about masking their gender in order to fit into the male workplace, passing as straight in order to avoid suspicion of being gay, using makeup and fashion to emphasise their femininity and adopting characteristics or behaviours normally classified as masculine to appear more authoritative. These are just a few illustrations of 'camouflage'. This chapter illustrates how the participants made sense of and manipulated gender behaviours and attributes in order to both fit in as women in a male space *and* disguise their homosexuality. While I explore ideas of embodiment and the 'disciplined' body in Chapter 4: 'A Disciplined Body of Women', in this chapter I demonstrate how the body becomes the location where gender interaction takes place, thereby setting in place the patterns by which we behave. By observing how these patterns have changed over history, we can assess how understandings of gender have also evolved. I analyse participants' understandings, experiences and management of their sexual identity in Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade' and some of the consequences of living a lesbian life in the British Army.

In this chapter I draw on data not only from the interviews but also from Sections 5 and 6 of the questionnaire, which asked respondents about their understandings

of sexuality and gender and how institutional expectations influenced their behaviour either in and/or out of the workplace. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to give examples to illustrate their answers and this qualitative data will be used, where appropriate, to show what the women themselves experienced or observed during their military service. Some of the women openly acknowledged that they were thinking about these issues consciously for the first time and some struggled with the terminology. However, irrespective of their level of familiarity with the debates and understanding of the concepts, the majority made great efforts to try and answer my questions, outlining their experiences of gender and sexuality in the Army. Catriona said, 'I found Section 6 difficult to answer' [WRAC Recruiter, WO1; 45 – Q] but in fact she went on to give quite detailed responses on extra sheets of paper. Xandra felt she would have had fewer problems with this section if she had been given the questionnaire when she was serving in the Army. She said, '[I] really found this a diff[icult] question to define. Wouldn't have in the 60s when everything was Butch and Femme' [WRAC PTI, Cpl; 61 – Q]. Xandra's comments are interesting in that she highlights not only the issues (which I analyse in detail later on) but also the shifting cultural and linguistic parameters of lesbian sexuality in general. 'Butch' and 'femme' identities are less widespread and/or fashionable than they once were and individuals who were familiar with such terms, such as Xandra, struggle to put their earlier experiences into contemporary language.

Gendering the Military

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, a military force, in its various historical forms, has been one of the means by which to measure manhood and, in many instances, worthiness to be a citizen in most cultures around the world (Lloyd, 1996; Homiak, 2002). Within the term 'manhood' lie complicated discourses on masculinity, focusing not just on the physicality of men's bodies but also including concepts of bravery, honour, self-sacrifice, heroism and loyalty. Bob Connell argues that to talk of one single form of masculinity is no longer acceptable, as recent social research has shown that different understandings of masculinity exist (Connell, 1992; 2000). He argues that factors such as ethnicity

or historical period affect the way in which gender is constructed within any given society and that different forms of masculinity can exist alongside one another. There may be a hegemonic, or favoured form of represented masculinity, but many men may not feel they fit within it and therefore, while it may be the dominant form of masculinity within the culture, it may not be the one adopted by the majority. Differences may also exist within communities. As he states, 'Within the one school, or workplace, or ethnic group, there will be different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body' (2000: 10-11). Other scholars have questioned the existence of a single hegemonic form of *military* masculinity (see for example Barrett, 1996; Higate, 2003).

The structure of a military force is primarily hierarchical but is also, or has been in the past, stratified according to class (income), race, religion, education, physical ability, age, sexual orientation and, above all, gender. A hierarchical institution has a very rigid system of controlling power - who gets to wield it and who must react to it - and the sub-stratifications of difference assist in the distribution of power to those who epitomise the ideals of the institution. In any organisation which claims an exclusive space for its members purely on the grounds of their sex class³¹, there remains an intrinsic belief that only *that* sex can carry out the objectives properly. Within a military model, only men can be 'real' soldiers.

The nursing profession, as an organisation, has been no different to the military in this sense. Of course men can be nurses, but cultural norms have associated nursing with women because of the need for caring and nurturing skills - skills traditionally ascribed to women. Military nursing was originally the province of men, as the battlefield was considered to be too brutal a place for women. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the changing nature of war, weaponry,

³¹ Goffman defines the term sex class thus: '...all infants at birth are placed in one or in the other of two *sex classes*, the placement accomplished by inspection of the infant's naked person, specifically its genitalia, these being visibly dimorphic... This placement by physical configuration allows a sex-linked label of identification' (Goffman, 1977: 302).

transportation and medicine, as well as acts of individual women such as Florence Nightingale³² and Mary Seacole³³ all contributed to the shift in ideas and nursing practices (Summers, 1988)³⁴. Delineated levels of nursing care were established. Those associated with primary care - immediate first aid, battlefield surgery and the retrieval of the injured remained the task of men. Injured soldiers were brought for treatment to field hospitals at the rear of the battlefield. As their condition stabilised, they were sent further back in the lines to hospitals where they could be nursed to recovery or cared for in more humane surroundings until death. These secondary care establishments were the places where women were originally assigned, first as civilian carers and then as military nurses and doctors. In the main, there is an understanding that these locations, being further to the rear and 'protected' by the badges of universal non-violence (the red cross) will be safer from enemy attack, but of course this is not always so³⁵. Over time, military nurses and doctors were deployed to field hospitals but it is only in recent years, since the Gulf War of 1991 and the integration of women within the British Armed Forces, that military women have started to enter those trades associated with primary battlefield care, that of combat medic and stretcher bearer³⁶. However, while women's active involvement in the field of battle may have shifted towards the central role of their male colleagues, this does not signify a lessening of gender and sexuality as markers of difference within the patriarchal culture of contemporary military life.

³² See the Florence Nightingale Museum at <http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk> for further information.

³³ Mary Seacole also nursed soldiers in the Crimea. See <http://www.maryseacole.com/maryseacole/biography/index.asp> for further information.

³⁴ Further information about the history of nursing in the Army can be found at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~nmhuk/forces/army/armhome.html> or at the QARANC Museum at Keogh Barracks, Aldershot, Hants.

³⁵ Commonwealth nurses were killed, injured and/or taken as prisoners of war during World War II, especially in the Far East (McBryde, 1985) and US nursing staff were often at the receiving end of incoming fire in both Korea and, especially, Vietnam (Holm, 1992: 205-229).

³⁶ Small numbers of nursing staff were deployed to the Falklands in 1982 on hospital ships where, due to the high incidence of attacks on support vessels, they were equally at risk from the enemy. However, I have not been able to find any testimony from the women who were deployed there.

Negotiating Gender

Getting women to talk about their experiences in the Army was relatively straightforward. However, I was also interested in women's wider *understandings* of key concepts – such as gender, masculinity and femininity. It was in this area of the questionnaire that some of my participants struggled. Like Herbert in her research on women in the US military (1998), I structured my questionnaire to ask basic questions (or sets of questions) about the pressures and encouragements that military institutions may apply which force, or at best coerce women to 'act' feminine or masculine. My intention was to clarify whether the Army made particular demands on women to display either femininity or masculinity in their duties and identities as soldiers. Given that the military is such a masculine organisation, it could be presumed that any soldier, female or male, would be expected to display such characteristics in order to reinforce the overall masculinity of the organisation. Conversely, the military might expect women to display feminine behaviours and mannerisms, in order to emphasise – through contrast - the masculinity of the men and also to reinforce traditional ideas of gender 'appropriateness'. This places women soldiers in a double-bind; they may be required to display *both* masculine *and* feminine traits, a request that is unlikely to be made of their male colleagues. Alternatively, perhaps the ideal is to exhibit as little gender as possible? As Herbert states, 'If the military sees *both* femininity and masculinity in women as undesirable, then it might exert little pressure in either direction' (1998: 35). Nonetheless, what is considered to be 'un-gendered' and 'unproblematic' remains male defined.

Several themes emerged from the data collected. It quickly became apparent that different levels of awareness around the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' affected how women interpreted their experience and thus it has proven difficult for me to compare women's accounts of military life. The respondents were able to clarify their understanding of the penalties meted against women who did not adhere to acceptable levels of masculinity and femininity, such as Patricia who said, 'During cadet training women were expected to be as "tough" as the men. One woman tried to get around this by playing the feminine card and was heavily criticised and failed' [RAF Administrator, Squadron Leader; 48 – Q]. In this

instance the ‘feminine card’ was played in the wrong institutional space – in the ‘workspace’ of masculinity, women must appear to be as capable as the men, to be ‘tough’. This woman failed in her attempt to gain special treatment and lost her potential career because of it. It also appears from Patricia’s answer that she had lost respect for this woman, perhaps because she felt all women would be judged similarly. Respondents were also asked to state how they viewed themselves and to give examples of the ways in which they conformed or fought against the pressure of stereotypical gender expectations. However it was not always possible to discern from the response why the woman felt it necessary to conform or why it was important to resist. In the next two sections I want to focus on how respondents answered questions about gender and how they negotiated femininity and masculinity in the Army.

Negotiating Femininity

Understandings of the word ‘feminine’ seemed to separate my respondents into three distinct groups - those who struggled to answer, those who defined feminine in terms of image, outward appearance and behaviour and those who considered it to be more of a societal expectation concerning a gender role. Those who struggled to answer included Ivy who said, ‘The term feminine to myself is the other side of masculine’ [WRAC Driver, Pte; 49 – Q] and Tracy who said, ‘Looking like a woman/acting womanly’ [WRAC Signals, LCpl; 49 – Q]. The majority of the respondents fell into the group that were concerned with image, appearance and behaviour, such as Grace who said, ‘Womanly demeanour, smart appearance, takes care of their appearance, polite, soft-spoken, sensual, indirectly assertive’ [WRAC Administrator, LCpl; 31 – Q]. Also Zara who said, ‘Long hair, walking differently, wearing skirts, dresses, makeup’ [WRAC Intelligence Corps, Pte; 27 – Q] and Frances who said, ‘A woman who looks extremely pretty or tries her best to make herself look pretty. Wears revealing clothes, dresses, lots of makeup, nail polish etc!’ [WRAC Signals, Pte; 20 – Q]. A few women in my sample group, however, felt that the image, body language and behaviour associated with being feminine were the consequence of a deeper expectation, that of a particular gender role or place in society. Davina [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – Q], Kathleen [WRAC RMP, LCpl; 36 – Q] and Helen

[QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45] all mentioned ‘nurturing’ and ‘caring’ as key components of society’s expectations of femininity while Elizabeth added, ‘Language, trade/jobs, place in family i.e. gender roles, power & position’ [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – Q]. These responses demonstrate the complexity of taken-for-granted terms that are used in everyday life to assign or claim gender identity for ourselves and/or others. Such words as feminine, woman, female and girl have cultural values attached to them and by using them in a particular way, a person can signify their acceptance or rejection of those identity labels. For example, several women including Barbara understood the word feminine to be about ‘behaving “girly” and pathetic’ [QARANC Nurse, Pte; 28 – Q]. To be ‘girly’ therefore was not viewed as a positive, sought-after characteristic for women in the Army; to be ‘girly’ was perceived as not measuring up in some way.

Analysis of the data revealed, however, that 62% believed that the British Army expects, encourages or pressures women to act feminine in some way and when these results were examined, the majority of the reasons stated concerned the enforcing of dress codes, both in an out of uniform, control of hairstyles and makeup and the policing of what was deemed to be feminine behaviour. Anne said, ‘Cutting hair too short was a chargeable offence. Certain dress codes were adhered to’ [WRAC Signals, Cpl; 54 – Q]. Davina felt that the Army encouraged women ‘to dress and act in a way they consider feminine i.e. Skirts, dresses, make-up, longer hair etc. Also to be available to date (if single), not be aggressive, competitive or loud, especially out of uniform’ [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – Q]. The paradox of being a woman in the Army was clearly evident in how soldiers are expected to look and behave in and out of the workplace. Feminine looks and behaviour were often deemed irrelevant in the male-dominated work environment but appropriate (feminine) dress codes and image were advocated at all social or official Mess functions. Sometimes women who felt comfortable in one identity struggled to ‘fit in’ when in a different institutional space. Elizabeth, for example, demonstrated the struggle she had with negotiating between her identities as soldier, as woman and as lesbian. She said:

Out in the field when you're in your combats and you've got your webbing on and you're being all Army like, that was fine, I could be myself... whether I hid behind the combats I don't know – that was *my proper self*. In the Mess – I'm never comfortable in skirts and dresses so it was a real conscious *act* to try and act comfortably in this *strange clothing*...being careful with how I moved in my skirts and my dresses...It was like acting straight...trying to *cut out* the sort of “butchness” to make myself seem a bit more feminine so nobody would *guess* that I was sort of macho or butch or whatever, that I must be a dyke [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I].

Although the respondents were conscious of this expectation to conform to feminine stereotypical behaviour and dress, 75% of them felt that women's ability to demonstrate leadership qualities and exercise power and authority would not be compromised. A few respondents, however, qualified this by saying that this was conditional on the individual woman in question.

Respondents suggested that women were required to either continually ‘prove’ their abilities or were required to become *more* feminine out of the workplace, thereby demonstrating that masculine qualities were temporary, situational interactions, necessary for the job but ultimately unthreatening. I also asked participants to comment on whether they thought women would be penalised for displaying behaviour which was considered to be *too* feminine. A third of the group thought that women would be penalised in some way including Cathy, a Recruiter in an Army Careers Office. She said, ‘If feminine is taken to mean soft, girly and lacking in strength, on interview I have known women to be turned down for a job because they are perceived as being too weak (without being tested)’ [AGC, Recruiter, Staff Sergeant; 46 – Q]. Yvette, an Officer in the QARANC, felt that any penalties were tied to qualities associated with leadership. She said:

The Army is mostly about leadership and you can be a good leader with a tender nature but if this nature also possesses a submissive, too amenable, too soft, too delicate characteristic, this will clash with [the] qualities of a leader, therefore you may have limited progression or promotion [Administrator, Major; 45 – Q].

Helen recalls in the 1991 Gulf War that when women colleagues showed their emotions it was seen as unprofessional. One female colleague insisted on

wearing full makeup and nail polish in the heat of the desert, which was viewed as bizarre by most around her, male and female alike. Helen considers, however, that this was her colleague's way of retaining control, of maintaining her personal standard of femininity and identity in a situation where everything was so uncertain [QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45 – Q & TI]. Helen does not appear threatened by such behaviour; indeed she is empathetic with her colleague's choice of behaviour in the circumstances. However, Frances remembers that women who displayed characteristics deemed to be too feminine were called names, such as 'Doris', 'Bint' or 'Flossie' in an effort to pull their behaviour back into line [AGC Signals, Pte; 20 – Q].

Other interviewees found overt displays of femininity by women colleagues difficult because they marked them out as non-feminine. For example, Elizabeth repeatedly referred to the fact that she felt more comfortable within the Army space in her 'soldierly' role and, by comparing other women's behaviour to hers, she also made it apparent that she felt that these feminine women did not quite 'measure up' to *being* a soldier. She said:

I was one of the few female Officers that actually liked going out on exercise and getting muddy. I did not take my makeup out with me on exercise, which [names of women] did...and they're in their sleeping bags putting makeup on in the morning and I'm putting on cam-cream you know?' [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]

Later she said, 'I lived and breathed tactics and I quite *liked* it...I was actually happier doing fieldwork than sat in a barracks doing *tame* stuff' [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]. Elizabeth acknowledges that the 'tame stuff' – paperwork and such like as part of the 'proper job' of being an officer in the Army but finds it hard to enjoy those aspects of the role because she views those tasks as somehow less important or exciting than the role of soldier where she feels the most comfortable. Just as some of her colleagues might have felt threatened by her capabilities in the field, Elizabeth felt threatened by their ability to cope in the institutional space where she felt least accomplished – the

social arena. Although threatened, however, Elizabeth relied on these others to help her out in the Mess as she had done for them on exercise. She said:

My Captain said that I was a bit of a rough diamond and if I didn't brush up on *social* skills I'd fail Sandhurst and at the cocktail evening they would be watching me and I had to show that I could circulate and talk and make mindless gossip to various dignitaries...but all you did was tell your mates and they just kept you covered. You know, I covered their backs on things they were struggling on and they covered mine at the cocktail evening. So I passed [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I].

Within the questionnaire's section on femininity, I asked participants to consider whether they had consciously modified their behaviour in any way in order to ensure that others thought of them as feminine. The majority (67%) did not consider that they had done this but a third of the group agreed that they had. Of those, Julie's example demonstrates the complexity of what she felt she had to do, incorporating many of the points mentioned above.

[I] would dress very feminine when going to [a] bar at night, even though this made me very uncomfortable. Just so they could see the woman inside the uniform and also to think I was not gay. I sometimes would ask for help from male colleagues just to give them the wrong impression. Also flirt with male colleagues just to keep them guessing [WRAC Signals, Cpl; 42 – Q].

This statement makes plain the underlying understanding held by Julie and many of the participants that, by displaying (heterogender) feminine qualities and appearance, others would presume that they were heterosexual (Ingraham, 1994). Most women had made this connection which enabled them to manipulate gender expectations, thereby protecting themselves (temporarily) against the penalties for being homosexual in the Army, or at least being able to deflect suspicion. The strategies they employed will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter in the section on Negotiating Sexuality.

Negotiating Masculinity

Asking for respondents' definitions of the term 'masculine' elicited a variety of answers. Several found it a difficult concept to unpack. Predictably, the women who had struggled with the term 'feminine' gave similar responses to this question, such as Amy who said simply, 'To be male' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 38 – Q] and Wendy, who said, 'Manly – of the male gender – showing characteristics generally expected of being a man' [WRAC RMP, Staff Sergeant; 42 – Q]. It is frustrating that these respondents did not go on to explain what those characteristics might be. I feel that this was due in part to their presumption that I would know what they meant; that, like Xandra's comment about being 'butch' (see page 116) or the women who struggled to define 'feminine', substituting another taken-for-granted term would be sufficient explanation. Alternatively, it may be that I was asking too much from my respondents. Asking them to demonstrate their *understanding* of complex terms, such as masculine and feminine, went beyond their comprehension and presupposed a reflective and/or analytical knowledge which they may not have previously encountered. It was neither my intention to 'show them up' as unknowing, nor did I expect others to do the theoretical work for me. Instead I wanted to explore how familiar women in the military were with ideas of masculinity and femininity and whether they knowingly or unknowingly *used gender attributes* within their everyday experiences as lesbian soldiers.

When respondents did answer, whether through reflection or 'thinking on their feet', their answers were fascinating and add another – non-academic – contribution to the debate on gender. Whereas respondents' predominant understanding of 'feminine' related to dress and appearance, the balance of responses to questions on masculinity fell almost equally into two groups – those describing characteristics and qualities associated with the term masculine and those who clearly defined masculine as it pertained to *women*. These latter answers demonstrate how some respondents separated 'being' a gender (feminine – woman, masculine – man) from cultural ascriptions of gendered behaviour. Most interestingly, no one had attempted to make connections between femininity and men in the previous questions. Masculine qualities that

were highlighted included those from Davina who said, 'A more aggressive person, competitive, ambitious, forceful, argumentative & compulsive. Less willing to compromise, more controlling and likely to want to "take charge". Logical thought processes' [WRAC, RMP, Cpl; 43 – Q].

One of the points made by Davina in her questionnaire response was that the RMP expected women to display masculine qualities by being 'unemotional', a point that I followed up in her interview. She felt that the reasons for this were twofold. Firstly it was to do with the job of being a Military Police officer; there was a need to demonstrate authority to the outside world, what Davina describes as putting on 'an attitude'. She said:

... when you put on the uniform then you had to put on the attitude to go with it which, in the Military Police was, "I am a Military Policewoman, get out of my face" or "I'm gonna nick you" sort of thing...not a soft attitude, quite strict...very authoritarian...you couldn't be giggly' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Her second reason was to do with self-protection. Projecting an unemotional demeanour enabled her to survive the harassment and, what were often, personal attacks on an individual's self esteem. She recalls that this was common in RMP training and, whilst directed at both men and women, the comments to women were often particularly gendered, personal attacks in order to get the women '...to keep up with the men. If you can't keep up with the men, you're no good to the Military Police...you had to be as hard as them, you had to be better than them really. As good as if not better than them, it was expected of you' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Davina and I went through Military Police training together and she remembered the 'pace-stick' incident (see Introduction) without prompting, an incident she felt was particularly gendered. She said:

You know, we'd all been shouted at by Sergeants before that but not quite in that sort of manner, not quite in such a graphic way...I mean they were equally rude to the boys but I can't remember ever hearing them say they were gonna stick a pace-stick up their arse or any other orifice for that matter. It was the

girls that got that sort of abuse, which was a bit of an eye-opener [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Davina considered that surviving required the ability to ‘blank them out’ and the woman who could not do that was the one who dropped out of training. She remembered that this woman ‘... was a bigger built girl, she was softer than the rest of us’. She said:

...the one person who didn’t make it through was the one who couldn’t take, couldn’t switch off from the personal side of that. You had to switch off if they were getting in your face and being personal. You just had to switch off and think “it’s not about me, it’s just him doing his thing, it’s not really personal” but she, I think, found it difficult to do that and took it all very personally. I mean we all took some of it personal and got very upset about it at the time but we would do it with our friends and then have a cry or kick your hat around the room...scream or whatever, but we wouldn’t do it in front of them because we understood that is what they were just waiting for...a chink in the armour...any sign of weakness [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Interestingly, unlike the respondents who mentioned physical strength as a characteristic of masculinity, such as Nancy, Patricia and Julie, Davina’s responses stress the importance of women displaying mental toughness - an ability to take (verbal and physical) abuse and to cope. This mental toughness was a necessary survival strategy for women in this male environment but contributed to their ability to project an unemotional demeanour, a masculine quality valued by the Military Police.

For the purposes of my research, the group that was the most interesting was the one which considered how ideas of masculinity related to women. Cathy and Catriona had similar views in that they saw it as a term used to describe women who didn’t ‘fit in’ to society’s expectations of femininity. Other participants perceived that some women may be mistaken (physically) for men such as Erica, who said ‘ A woman who has very strong male traits, who dresses in a masculine way and may even be [mis]taken for a man’ [WRAC, Medic, Cpl; 52 – Q] and Grace, who said ‘Broadly built, deep voice, harsh mannerisms i.e. uses bad language, wears trousers/jeans, never skirts etc. Directly assertive’ [WRAC

Administrator, LCpl; 31 – Q]. Other women felt it was more to do with demonstrating the qualities usually ascribed to men that would set such ‘masculine’ women apart. Beth said, ‘Masculinity in women to me means toughness, assertiveness though not aggression – independent, able to cope on your own – not particularly needing others to “back you up” or promote your self esteem’ [WRAC Kennel Maid, LCpl; 52 – Q]. Several women used the terms ‘butch’ or ‘mannish’ to describe how women might be defined as masculine, such as Robyn and Tanya. Tanya, however, went on to explain what she meant by the term by saying, ‘Being “butch”. Short hair, wearing trousers, imitating mannish behaviour. “Playing a role”. In my time in the Army, “role-playing” was the norm’ [WRAC Signals, Pte; 59 – Q]. Ironically, the descriptors which Tanya used pertain more to masculine lesbians than to masculinity *per se*, however, Tanya served in the late 1950s into the early 1960s before what Lisa Walker describes as ‘...the lesbian-feminist redefinition of butch and femme styles as an anachronism and an embarrassment’ (2001: 193). Walker argues that in the 1970s with the rise of feminism ‘...the conventions of “role-play” within the bar culture of the fifties and sixties were suppressed in favor of a more androgynous lesbian–feminist chic which, theoretically at least, refused the heterosexual roles that butch and femme styles were said to imitate’ (2001: 193).

Twenty women in my sample group thought that there was an expectation, encouragement or pressure to ‘act masculine’ when serving in the Army. For women, masculinity was mostly achieved through clothing; wearing camouflage clothing, boots and packs while on exercise or when carrying out a particular job. Many women felt that when they donned the male clothing, they were expected to adopt what they perceived as masculine characteristics and body language as well in order to demonstrate their capabilities to do the job. As Helen explained, ‘Leadership qualities, confidence, self-assured etc. – seen as male qualities but encouraged in military women in order to do a professional job [QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45 - Q]. Professionalism in the Army then is about displaying masculine qualities – qualities traditionally valued *in* men and *by* men. Queenie considered that being successful in the Army was to do with ‘attitude mostly and awareness of threatening situations i.e. conflict’ [QARANC Health Care

Assistant, Cpl; 36 – Q]. Olive and Elizabeth recall ‘mucking in’ and getting on with it – becoming ‘one of the boys’. Olive was one of the few women trained as a motorcycle despatch rider in the RMP in the 1980s and recalled that it was much easier to demonstrate that she ‘belonged’ on exercise when her function was visibly important. However, she felt she was one of the lads because:

...you went three days without changing your socks which I would never dream of doing and the thought of wearing your underwear for more than a few hours at a time, you know, it’s just an anathema, but you done [*sic*] it because the lads done [*sic*] it. You know, they were wearing the same shreddies for a week at a time and therefore you wore your underwear for a week at a time. You didn’t worry about niceties such as hot showers or a flushing toilet and such – you just mucked in and did what you had to do [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 39 – I].

To be seen to be enduring the same conditions as the men and coping with them, not complaining about them, was seen as an important part of ‘being one of the lads’. Complaining was femininity, enduring was masculinity. Olive was so successful at *being* ‘one of the lads’ that she was typically mistaken *as* one of them:

...Several times, you know, I would pull up at a unit and I would have the despatches for the CO and I would take off my helmet and they’d go “It’s a bird!” But you had that much crap and filth and sweat on your face that I’m surprised they knew what you were [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 39 - I].

The soldiers expected to see a man riding the motorcycle and nothing in Olive’s appearance, her clothing, size or mannerisms challenged that assumption. It was only when she took her helmet off that masculinist assumptions were challenged and the men were able to say with authority, ‘It’s a bird!’

Women in the Army are also required to be trained to a higher physical standard than the average civilian and much of this training is done in operational kit, carrying weapons and packs alongside their male colleagues. Claudia remembers that she was ‘beasted along with the guys’ [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 40 – Q] and Catriona said that ‘BFTs (Basic Fitness Tests), CFTs (Combat Fitness Tests) in full kit – encourage masculinity’ [WRAC Recruiter, WO1; 45 – Q]. Grace recalls

that she received weapons training in the 1980s when women were just being introduced to it and often the male trainers resented including women in the control/use of a weapon. She said:

I'd just turned 18 then and you get a gun for the first time and (laughs) you're just crapping yourself aren't you and they just don't teach you properly...I certainly wasn't confident with shooting or anything...I just felt as if I was treated as a young girl and that I wasn't supposed to be on the ranges, or in the Army sometimes [WRAC Admin Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I].

Given that masculinity is such a prized commodity in the military and despite the potential risks in being perceived as too masculine, I was also interested in learning whether any of my participants had consciously modified their behaviour in any way in order to ensure that others thought of them as masculine or more masculine. Although 75% said they did not, others gave a variety of examples which detailed how they became 'one of the lads', drinking pints and swearing more often in order to enhance their masculine status. As Marilyn remembers, 'I used to try and drink the men under the table, swear like them, act and dress like a man and when I did wear a dress to a Xmas 'do', I was asked if I was in drag!' [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – Q] Again clothing played an important part in displaying particular gendered characteristics. Danielle recalls that her civilian clothing consisted of '...jeans, boots, T-shirts and sports clothes' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 27 – Q]. For others, it was more of an attitudinal shift. Davina felt she became more aggressive and competitive at work as she '...perceived these attitudes would be good for my career as a Military Policewoman' [WRAC Military Police, Cpl; 43 – Q]. Gabrielle said that she 'tended to wear masculine clothes, drank beer, smoked, swore, even walked with a swagger (as my mother put it!!) [WRAC Postal & Courier Operator, Cpl; 44 – Q]. Helen recalled that she was the only woman on a Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) course with eighty men. She felt that she could not 'wimp out', as she did not want to be seen as the 'helpless female' [QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45 – Q & TI]. Julie also felt the need to struggle on to prove something '...instead of asking for help as my male colleagues would have' [WRAC

Signals, Cpl; 42 – Q]. Olive felt that to appear confident even when she was not was her way of displaying more masculine traits. She also felt that she was more arrogant and ‘...did not accept excuses for others’ failure’ as she might have done normally [WRAC Military Police, Sgt; 39 – Q].

The vast majority of respondents thought that women in the Army demonstrated leadership and exercised power and authority without having to become too masculine in order to succeed. However, whether through design or default, when women’s behaviour became *too* masculine, things got difficult. In these instances it was all too common for suspicion to fall on the individual’s sexuality. 55% of participants felt that the Army penalised women who were too masculine and 36% of this group considered that one of the penalties was being labelled a ‘dyke’. Even if you were heterosexual, strong women were perceived as threatening to men. As Danielle said, ‘[You] get labelled a dyke, you become a threat to the guys if you’re capable of doing everything they do’ [WRAC Signals, Pte; 27 – Q] and Isobel felt that ‘If you were seen as being too masculine, the men automatically labelled you a lesbian’ [QARANC Nurse, Staff Sergeant; 36 – Q]. Some women mentioned that their punishment was to be reminded of their obligation to be feminine such as Helen, who said, ‘In certain situations, especially the social side of military life, [they] want the girly side to come out – back into the prescribed role of women’ [QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45 – Q]. As before, when discussing femininity, the participants recognised the consequences of being labelled ‘masculine’ and employed certain strategies to deal with this at the time. This will be discussed in detail in the next section on ‘Negotiating Sexuality’.

My participants’ accounts demonstrate how women tried to fit in to the impossible role of the female soldier. Thus, when I asked them whether they viewed their own ‘gendered’ identity as either feminine or masculine, the result was quite revealing in that many resisted the terms completely. Nine women said they considered themselves to be feminine and seven to be masculine but another nine women considered they were both, using terms such as ‘half and half’ and ‘sometimes’ on the questionnaire. The remainder, by far the largest group at

fifteen women, considered themselves to be outside these terms, neither feminine *nor* masculine. The diversity among these answers and my respondents' reluctance and/or inability to label themselves within traditional gender categories, illustrates the evident contradictions within the female soldiering role. For lesbian soldiers, who frequently question cultural norms of ideal femininity/masculinity, the task of being a good female soldier is all the more difficult.

Negotiating Sexuality

In this section, I want to demonstrate how these women were forced and/or coerced to *do gender twice*, firstly and most obviously as women and secondly as lesbians. As women they stand out from the 'malestream' and as lesbians, in the homophobic culture of the military, their (real) sexuality was only selectively visible. In the Army, women's sexual behaviour, whether heterosexual or not, is controlled via the enforcement of a stylised form of femininity which is situational (Goffman, 1959; 1976). All the respondents were required and/or elected to blend in and appear to be heterosexual women.

Twenty-six of the forty respondents felt there were expectations, encouragement or pressure to 'act feminine' in some way. In the main, this was done through the wearing of feminine clothing, especially dresses and the wearing of makeup and nail polish. On their own, however, these outward signs were perceived not to be enough. Davina remembers that, as well as wearing dresses and makeup, she was more 'passive' in male company [WRAC Military Police, Cpl; 43 – Q]. Sylvia made sure she '...crossed [her] legs at the knee' [WRAC Driver, Pte; 48 – Q]. Some women, such as Cathy, talked about 'fancying' certain male television stars in order that colleagues might think she was straight [WRAC Recruiter, Staff Sgt; 46 – Q]. Others invented boyfriends or talked of their female lover as though 'she' were a 'he'. Many women dated men, sometimes to defray suspicion as Helen did, but flirting with men, going on dates with them and having occasional sex was a tactic described by only a small minority of the women surveyed, such as Claudia and Barbara. Many lesbians tried to police other women's behaviour so that possible investigations could be diverted. Olive

remembers trying to protect one woman with whom she was serving in Northern Ireland. She recalls that she went into one of the barrack rooms and the woman was:

...sitting there bulling her shoes...in her PT kit, shorts and khaki vest with her dog-tags hanging out and I said to her, "What's your block job? It's meant to be such and such" and she said, "I'm not very good at cleaning and women's stuff but I'm really good at bulling my boots and marching" and I said, "Well you're gonna have to learn...for your own protection"...It was like a subliminal message I was trying to give her without spelling it out. "For your own protection, basically, don't be so butch because you're out of here pal". So I actually made a point of trying to femme her up a wee bit...you know, live and let live is my attitude now but at the time I was actually ordering her to let her hair grow a wee bit and stop going round with a fag hanging out of her mouth and stop sitting there bulling her boots for hours on end [WRAC Military Police, Cpl; 39 – I].

From the data collected, I consider that my participants had a good basic understanding of how, as lesbians within a male-dominated, overtly heterosexual space, gender and sexuality impacted upon their work and social spaces. They were aware of the ways in which they could influence others' perceptions of their gender (non)conformity and the institutional penalties for non-compliance. While they might have struggled with terminology, they were able to explain, in other ways, how they understood gender and sexuality to impact on their lives. This observation concurs with much of the work done by researchers in the area of sexuality, especially homosexuality (see for example Whisman, 1996; Ponse, 1978; Plummer, 1995; Herek, 1998; Jordan and Deluty, 1998), in that those 'sexual outsiders' who feel they do not fit within the 'norm' of society do a lot more thinking about gender, sexuality and sexual behaviours than those who fit comfortably within the (heterosexual) norm. Also, the 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963) of homosexuality acts as a controlling mechanism for lesbians in other occupations, such as teaching or the police force, where research has shown that these women also control and monitor their behaviour and often lead double lives in order to escape scrutiny and/or punishment (see for example Woods and Harbeck, 1992; Burke, 1993). Other research has shown that for some

heterosexual women, the fear of being *thought* to be lesbian has led them to adopt deliberate strategies in order to manage their body image and appearance (Rudd and Lennon, 2000). What all of these studies demonstrate in different ways are that women, across age group, culture and occupation, perceive some sort of pressure to conform to gendered and sexually appropriate behaviour within spaces where they have little power, especially when they do not fit within the dominant group.

Herbert (1998) highlights how the responsibility for being 'appropriate' and fitting in does not rest with the individual employee, rather it is a fundamental question to do with the responsibilities of the employer. As she says, 'What does it mean if half of one's "employees" believe that they are pressured to act in accordance with a particular set of ideas about gender-appropriate characteristics?' (1998: 41) Would organisational and personal performance not improve if women were not under the (real or imagined) pressure to manage their gender in the workplace? Scholars in the field of organisational culture also argue that structural pressures to conform to expectations of gendered behaviour in the workplace are placed on both male and female employees alike, however, because the structures are not acknowledged, women's behaviour is often policed more rigorously. Women's dress and appearance, language and professional style, even when similar to successful male colleagues, is sometimes 'not enough' or, conversely, it is considered to be 'too much' – a dangerous and misplaced excess of femininity. Too masculine and they are not feminine enough, too professional and they are not caring enough or too efficient and they are not emotional enough (Acker, 1992; Acker, 1998; Gheradi, 1996; Halford and Leonard, 2001). It is a 'no-win' situation.

Military Masculinity

Rather than simply query the impossibility of women's lot in the male world of work, it is important to explore why masculinity poses problems for women in the military. Using Connell's model of 'multiple masculinities' (2000: 10, 216), I want to explore the possibility of a particular form of military masculinity within the UK. I want to consider how military masculinity is represented within the

institution and explore whether there are multiple masculinities within the military or just one dominant form. I will examine how understandings of masculinity affect gender relations within the institution of the military and the impact which military masculinity has within the context of wider societal gender relations.

Masculinity as a concept is ‘...inherently relational. “Masculinity” does not exist except in contrast to “femininity”’ (Connell, 1995: 68). What this means is that if our society did not invest so heavily in the belief that men and women are demonstrably different, not just biologically but in manner and behaviour, then terms such as masculinity and femininity would become irrelevant. The meanings behind the words are to do with the characteristics, mannerisms and behaviours thought to be demonstrative of the category ‘man’ and ‘woman’. As Connell says, to even to talk of masculinity or femininity within the military setting means that I too am ‘doing gender’ (1995: 68). As with male-female and man-woman, the problem with the masculinity-femininity distinction is that it is set up as an opposing relationship, a polarity. To be within the female-woman-feminine grouping is to be not male-man-masculine. That kind of relationship results in a disproportional amount of power resting with the ‘dominant’ group; against which all others are measured. Having power allows the dominant group to promulgate ideas and beliefs through institutions that, in turn, epitomise the right for that group to hold power; and so the relationship between gender and power is reinforced. For one group to be dominant another must be subordinate. The military (and war) represents the ultimate demonstration of male power and to understand the reasons why is to perhaps make sense of the difficulties encountered by women as they attempt to be included within such a patriarchal organisation.

As an institution, a military force has a vested interest in promoting a hegemonic form of masculinity. Ultimately, the military represents the State; it stands as a visible symbol of power. The values it promotes and epitomises, both as an institution and for its individual members, are understood to be ones that underlie the State’s ideology. As Connell explains:

Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life... True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs the action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women...), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority) (1995:45).

The common assumption about why men are soldiers and women are not rests on the essentialist notion of men's superior physical strength and 'natural' aggression, together with notions of women as life givers, not life takers. General Robert Barrow, a former commandant of the US Marine Corps, speaking after 1991 Gulf War said that women should not be permitted to go into combat. The environment was 'brutal' and 'extreme'. He said:

[The] women can't do it! Nor should they even be thought of as doing it. The requirements for strength and endurance render them unable to do it. And I may be old-fashioned, but I think the very nature of women disqualifies them from doing it. Women give life. Sustain life. Nurture life. They don't take it (as cited in Muir, 1992: 3).

However, physical strength is not universal among men and indeed differs widely according to body size, age and training. Soldiers in the Ghurkha regiments are smaller in stature than Western male soldiers yet this has not stopped them from being deployed into danger zones, indeed they are often the first soldiers deployed as part of a rapid reaction force. Average body size in British male soldiers has not always been the same as it is now. At the end of the nineteenth century and in WWI, due to poor diet and health care in working class Britain, the average height requirement had to be reduced as low as 5 feet 0 inches in order to recruit enough men³⁷. Women too can be violent; there is no 'natural' passivity, just a smaller amount of testosterone hormone and hundreds of years of social conditioning. Men's so-called 'natural' aggression has also changed with time and it could be argued that in modern times has had to be

³⁷ See <http://www.regiments.org/biography/ranks.htm> for more information.

encouraged through contact sports and competition to counter its routine absence in men's daily existence.

Although the lack of physical strength and 'natural' aggression have been, and still are, used to exclude women from the role of soldier, these are not the only criteria considered to be of value to the military. As with most belief systems, the ideal characteristics of a soldier are a mish-mash of differing concepts, some considered to be natural, such as strength, some a result of an historical gender role assignment within our society (men are soldiers, women are mothers) and some constructed through philosophical thought to assign desirable characteristics to the elite of the society. In this way, the ideal citizen becomes the one prepared to lay down his own life for others – the ultimate sacrifice. Yet the only reason for the ideal citizen to be a 'he' and not a 'she' is because of the gendered power dynamic. If the dominant group, men, have adopted all the characteristics such as strong, rational, brave, honourable, self-sacrificing for themselves, then under this model women are, by default, not men and so are relegated to being weak, emotional, cowardly, dishonourable and selfish; not the sort of characteristics desirable in the elite citizen.

The primary function of a military force is to demonstrate the State's power by threatening or using violence to control others. However, if the single requirement of a soldier were to demonstrate the capability for violence, all that would be necessary would be to turn up, fight and kill - controlled institutionalised aggression on a massive scale. This model disregards other requirements of a soldier - qualities such as discipline, courage, bravery, loyalty, self-sacrifice, duty and service. I would argue that these are the characteristics upon which the *modern* military masculinity is founded. Rather than 'Join the Army and Kill as Many People as We Tell You To!' being the wording on the recruitment poster, it is through the discourses of patriotism and masculinity that the military has encouraged male recruits to enlist. 'Your Country Needs You!' cried one recruitment poster in World War I; 'Be A Man!' shouted another. On the one hand, this was an appeal to the feelings of loyalty to one's country, in that in time of need personal desires and ambitions will be sacrificed to fight for

the values and indeed the very survival of the country. The other poster taps into the close association with the military as a rite of passage to manhood. That somehow, exposure to the military environment and discipline will expose teenage boys to the kinds of tests that, if manly enough, they will pass, thereby demonstrating their masculinity and becoming 'real men'. The compulsory term of National Service for all able-bodied men, introduced after World War 2, reinforced this association of a transition to manhood through military service. A similar term of service was not required of women; womanhood was not to be gained through such efforts – instead it is maternity, the antithesis of militarism, which denotes female maturity³⁸.

Military service in wartime is constructed in a particular way; in peacetime and with changing demands on the modern Armed Forces, a different kind of requirement is placed on military recruiters (see for example Woodward and Winter, 2003). Over the past hundred years more inventive reasons have been required to attract young, fit and healthy men into an organisation whose main purpose is to use them as sacrificial lambs. For the greater good, the story goes, it is better that the few die in order that the many can live. All the stages of the process have become idealised and romanticised in order to create an acceptable image that both the individual soldier and the society as a whole can identify with, aspire to, emulate or can accept as heroic. Comrades are valorised; fellow soldiers become the substitute family, the ones young men will fight for, even die for. The bonds formed with their 'buddies' while in the military are encouraged to thrive through regimental and veterans associations, even when soldiers subsequently leave the organisation.

For the individual soldier, the increasing reliance on technology and the desire to do what they have trained so long and hard for often offsets the reality of dying a very horrible death. However, there is a paradox here. Technological warfare undermines part of the rationale for the exclusion of women since 'combat' no longer requires seeing the whites of your enemy's eyes at the end of a bayonet,

³⁸ I have discussed in Chapter 2: 'Military History' how the Army have (mis)managed women's maternity.

just a finger on an ever-remote button. At the same time, it exposes the hypocrisy of the supposed 'sanctity' of women as life givers, as more women than ever before fall under modern warfare's heading of 'collateral damage'. Through the medium of television and the ubiquitous war correspondent, recent conflicts have been brought into our homes in ever-increasing detail. Politicians and generals alike patiently explain time and time again, as if to children and with lots of pictures, that 'smart bombs' and superior technology and training will limit the casualties to soldiers – the more deserving victims of war. 'The public won't accept another Vietnam', a phrase often heard in the run up to any conflict involving the deployment of US troops, alludes to the unwillingness of the American public to see countless body bags being unloaded from aircraft as a result of war in a distant land and has become the motto of recent conflicts – to avoid casualties at all cost. To avoid the casualties, however, is to embrace a military strategy of 'overkill'. What is blatantly missing from this rhetoric is an acknowledgement that, if these weapons are so devastating, other military and civilian bodies, including women and children, will not have such protection. One of the 'unfortunate' consequences of waging war without soldiers is mass destruction.

British society (and indeed most Commonwealth countries, linked to Britain through imperialism) has at its core a visible, national pride in its armed forces. There is a deep appreciation of past sacrifices in war by so many of its young men (and women) and a tourist industry that depends upon the perpetuation of the traditions and history associated with the troops of today. War memorials from World War I and II abound throughout the UK. Many a tear is shed when the poppies fall from the ceiling of the Albert Hall at The Festival of Remembrance, religious leaders talk of the bravery of the fallen, the words on the Cenotaph in London read 'The Glorious Dead' and the catchwords of the military are 'duty and service'. Truly, '...At the going down of the sun, we will remember them'. But who or what exactly are we being encouraged to remember?

I would argue that these memories are layered with meaning, idealising the *qualities* which military masculinity purports to stand for, which in turn reinforces their necessity as a benchmark of manhood. The memorials are for the fallen *men*; there are no official war memorials in Britain to the women who were killed in the World Wars. There has been a recent drive to garner support for a 'women's memorial' – a plaque or a statue to commemorate the years of similar service and sacrifice made by the women of this country in World War II. After many years of campaigning, the memorial is near to becoming reality (Greenock Telegraph Online, 2004). This invisibility of military women tells us a lot about how women in military uniform are viewed. I would argue that, by denying the inclusion of women both physically and figuratively from military service, our society promulgates the idea that soldiering is a masculine occupation or vocation, a test of manhood and the preserve of men. Women's contributions, although tacitly acknowledged, will not be placed in the same historical context as that of men. Approximately one hundred years after the end of Boer Wars, eighty-five years after the end of World War I and sixty years since World War II, the proportion of the population who participated in these conflicts, or was close to someone who did, is getting smaller. Conflicts since the 1950s, to which British soldiers were deployed, have certainly not been on the same scale, neither in deployment numbers nor in casualties and, with few exceptions, have not been in defence of home soil. I would argue, therefore, that the memories are less and less about specific individuals and more targeted to the perpetuation of a myth - a self-sacrificing male citizen who is honoured within our society. Military masculinity is therefore hegemonic - honoured and favoured - but is not 'natural', common practice throughout society. Indeed, if it were the 'natural' consequence of masculinity then there would be no need to constantly remind the population of this ideal through cultural ceremonies, film and media images.

Women in Combat

Despite the recent advances of women into the majority of military occupations in the British Armed Forces, a core belief regarding women's rightful place remains. Very few state military forces extend full equality to women soldiers

and, of those that do, few have international influence³⁹. The UK, like the USA, while extending partial integration, remain steadfast in their belief that women serving in the military should not be in an occupation that would place them in direct combat with the enemy. Regardless of ability, regardless of training, regardless of willingness and, in direct opposition to viewing a woman as an equal citizen under the law, women are denied equal status to that of men. The most recent review of the UK policy was completed in 2002. The resultant report suggested that the present exclusion zone around infantry and armoured corps posts should continue. The main two reasons cited for exclusionary policies are the gap in physical performance⁴⁰ between male and female soldiers and the perceived effect of women's presence on 'combat effectiveness' – defined as '...the ability of a unit/formation/ship, weapon system or equipment to carry out its assigned mission, role or function. The cohesion of a unit is a vital factor in its combat effectiveness.' (Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002: 1-13). The report allowed that there are extremely few female recruits coming forward each year with the required physical capabilities needed for 'male roles' and that, although in the future an 'elite' core of women may be able to prove themselves capable, both physically and mentally, of completing the training required to do the job, they are unlikely to get the chance. When such women do get the chance and manage to succeed, to complete the same training courses as the men, they are then categorised as 'exceptional' and therefore not representative of women as a group. When Captain Pip Tattersall completed the Royal Marines course in 2002, she became the first woman ever to do so. It had taken her fifteen months and three attempts but she had been determined to

³⁹ Canada, Belgium and Norway, for example, extend the full range of occupations to women, including those in the combat arms. Women can also be submariners and mine-clearance divers (The Office on Women in the NATO Forces, 2000: 7-9, 10-13 & 41-43). These countries are not 'big players' on the international military scene and their example of what could happen is not seen as universally applicable. The USA and the UK in particular, maintain that their military forces are 'different' and that this level of integration would not work.

⁴⁰ The physical performance of women has been more closely monitored since the introduction of the 'gender-free' physical testing in April 1998. The test aims to '...match recruits potential with an appropriate trade' (Committee on Women in NATO Forces, 2002). For more information about physical testing and its impact on the health of women, see (Brock and Legg, 1997; Geary et al., 2002; Williams et al., 1999). See (Harries-Jenkins, 2002) for the legal issues posed by the increasing integration of women.

succeed. Nevertheless, as at August 2002, unlike all her male colleagues on the same course, she had not been posted to a Commando Brigade. She remained philosophical about her chances in the future, committed to a career in the military regardless and encouraged other women to '... go all the way' as well. For one male officer, however, her achievement on the course '...devalued the kudos of the Marines' green beret' (Rayment, 2002). For this officer, for a woman to succeed, rather than adding something to the Royal Marines, instead took something away - something which up until that point had been exclusively male. Through her achievements, she has un-manned the men.

Another consequence that women sometimes face, once they have equalled their male colleagues' achievements, is that they are somehow no longer considered to be truly female, as if the encroachment into 'malespace' has in some way de-womanised them. In our society, where gender and sexuality constantly overlap, many women are kept within the 'gender line' through fear of becoming unattractive to men if they overstep the (feminine) mark. Women 'police' their behaviour, checking and rechecking as though '... a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness' (Bartky, 1988: 72). How they appear and behave designates women as the 'object and prey' of institutionalised heterosexuality. Heterosexuality, the institutional structure within which concepts of both masculinity and femininity help reinforce gender in society, requires that gender and sexuality maintain certain boundaries. The perception is often that for every step forward by women into new (male) territory, a corresponding step must be taken backward by men, retracting from masculinity, as demonstrated in the case of Captain Tattersall (cited above).

The common theme that can be identified across the American, the Canadian and the British Armed Forces over concerns about the integration of women (Winslow and Dunn, 2002; Thomas and Thomas, 1996; Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002; Campbell and D'Amico, 1999) is how the segregation or non-segregation of women from men during training and their placement into different occupations will affect the male status quo. The question has not just been about how new people will affect the running of a unit

– it involves a direct gender bias. Simply stated, the concern is - how will the introduction of women in to an exclusively male environment affect *male* efficiency, *male* bonding and *male* aggressiveness? The introduction of women and gay men into the military challenges the prevailing masculinist (macho) system. The traditional answer has been to segregate one group (women) and ban the other (gay men) in order to keep the bastion of (real) masculinity intact. As the reviews on homosexuality (1991) and gender integration (2002) indicated (see Chapter 2), the prevalent assumption was that full equality for gays or women would be detrimental to men's morale.

For women working in the military, especially lesbians, negotiating the boundaries of what is considered appropriate behaviour to do the job and what is seen as appropriate as a woman, becomes a minefield of conscious and sub-conscious observation and interaction. Not getting it right, either in the workplace or in the military social sphere can result in consequences ranging from the annoying to the criminal. As was shown in Figure 3 in Chapter 1, some of the lesbians in this study were able to evade detection for their whole career while others found themselves in situations where they had to choose between their career and their lover. Some women were 'caught' and punished for being outside the norm, for not being heterosexual. Another group of women felt pressured to resign from the Army because, while they were thought to be or known to be lesbians, there was either not enough 'evidence' or not enough desire by the authorities to push for dismissal. Their 'known' status, however, made their presence untenable. By making their position in the unit unpleasant, or appearing to block promotion and career advancement, the Army was able to manipulate some women into requesting their own discharge, often having to pay the military a sum of money to leave before the official end of their service. To evade such penalties, the next section in this chapter will explore in more detail how the women in my survey attempted to 'pass' as straight.

Doing Gender – Playing it Straight

The British Army has been, until very recently, a predominantly white, exclusively male preserve and has been segregated along traditional class lines.

The introduction of women and non-white men in larger numbers in the last century has challenged the status quo and their 'difference' is the visual stigma through which they can be treated differently. However, it is only within the *social setting* of the military that they can be treated differently. Goffman argues that the displaying of an undesirable attribute, not considered worthy of the social setting, becomes a 'stigma', a means by which the individual is discredited within society but points out that the discrediting of one individual reinforces the 'usualness' of another (1963: 3). Being female is an attribute which is incongruous in the military social setting of masculinity which is representative of the nation's (white) manhood. This incongruity enables discriminatory behaviour and gives rise to an '...ideology to explain [her]...inferiority and account for the danger [s]he represents' (Goffman, 1963: 5).

During the past century, as women's presence in the military has increased, the establishment has been quick to elaborate on the stigma of femininity: women's lack of physical strength, their lack of emotional control, their ability to tempt the male soldiers sexually, their ability to be tempted by other female soldiers into 'unnatural acts' and their capacity to put in jeopardy the 'male bonding' necessary for any fighting force to be successful. All these attributes are used to justify women's exclusion from full integration or to substantiate reasons for discriminatory treatment against them (Employment of Women in the Armed Forces Steering Group, 2002).

The situation is similar with regard to any threat to the male, heterosexual ideal of the military soldier. Unlike gender or race, there are no visible signs of male homosexuality. Gay male soldiers are unlikely to engage in 'camp' behaviour but will attempt to 'pass' as 'normal' in order to be fully accepted and not be the subject of harassment or discriminatory behaviour. For gay men, this often requires them to display overtly heterosexual masculine or 'macho' behaviours and mannerisms to prove membership of the social group. Gay men are required to 'pass' as straight men; for lesbians the task of 'passing' is far more complex. As I stated earlier, lesbians are required to 'do gender' not once, but twice. They are required to pass as heterosexual *and* feminine. It is not enough just to display

an interest, however false, in the opposite sex. Lesbians are required to also display overtly stereotypical feminine characteristics, incongruous in the military setting, such as helplessness, physical weakness, dependence and a desire to attract men by dressing in a particular way. Olive recalls that some women, in their quest to deflect attention from themselves, displayed these types of behaviour.

You did get people 'femming up' and teetering around on stiletto heels and...even being seen with a variety of guys...people tried to create a smoke screen...it would fool anybody who gave it a cursory glance, it was only the people who stopped and looked who actually knew that the whole lot didn't quite gel together as it should [WRAC Military Police, Cpl; 39 – I].

Most single (heterosexual and homosexual) soldiers live in military accommodation on bases where their social behaviour is 'policed' on and off duty. Unlike civilian life, soldiers rarely have the luxury of conducting a 'private life'; they do not leave work at the end of a day and go home to another, unscrutinised, life. Before the ban on homosexuality was lifted, the military mindset and the knowledge of what would happen to them if their secret was discovered and/or if their ability to 'pass' failed, constantly haunted individual lesbians and gay men. Meredith remembers it was easier to pass as straight when engaged and then married but recalls she still took 'extreme care' in the Army because she feared discovery. Even the cloak of acceptability afforded by marriage could not take away the fear that she would be 'found out' [WRAC Admin, Lt; 50 – Q]. Those respondents who mentioned dating men in order to defray suspicion, or marrying and having children to try and suppress their feelings of attraction for other women were ultimately unsuccessful. Their marriages have subsequently broken down and they all now identify as lesbian or bisexual. The punishment for disclosure was so severe – expulsion – and the stigma so great, that many were prepared to try and fit in to the dominant group rather than risk disgrace (Goffman, 1963: 9). Loss of income, home, financial status and security, as well as the loss of friends, peer groups and future education and career prospects are powerful incentives to successfully 'pass'. I

return to this subject in more detail in Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade' when my respondents' experiences of living lesbian lives are examined.

Lesbians and gays are now able to join up and serve within the military but this does not guarantee acceptance. Goffman (1963) argues that even though the 'normative' group may grant entry, as in the case of homosexuals being allowed to serve openly in the military (Ministry of Defence, 2000a), their *acceptance* into the group is not guaranteed by their admission. This is borne out by the treatment of women within the military. While granted admission, they are still not fully accepted and have been, and still are, subject to direct and indirect discrimination. Therefore, even though the policy has changed and a new code of conduct (Ministry of Defence, 2000b) has been put in place, many gay men and women may opt to continue to 'pass' as heterosexual rather than risk the discriminatory treatment associated with being gay in the military.

Conclusion

'Acceptance' of homosexuality in the UK military is still a long way off because, even if legally permissible, the policy change does not accommodate 'out' expressions of lesbian and gay (homo)sexuality. For lesbians who are currently serving in the Army, there remains a need to be simultaneously invisible within the institution and selectively visible to others like them. The majority of my sample group no longer serve in the Army and were employed while the outright ban on homosexuality was in place. They negotiated the boundaries of gender and sexuality in order to pass as heterosexual, with varying degrees of success. The strategies they employed to achieve this often involved manipulating their image, behaviours and body language which required a consciously crafted physical and emotional embodiment of (hetero)gender (Ingraham, 1994) within the institutionalised heterosexual space of military life. The body, as one of the most crucial markers of gender, is heavily regulated, especially in spaces that have been institutionally constructed within normative parameters of heterosexual (masculine) culture such as the Army. Within such a space, the body is inscribed with meaning and purpose and the institution, concerned about the 'proper' place of women's military bodies, has created mechanisms and

policies to control not only the display of appropriate feminine behaviours, but also overt displays of masculine behaviour. As uncertainty about the purpose of women's military bodies has increased, so too have the ways in which their bodies are regulated.

Chapter 4

‘A Disciplined Body of Women’

Controlling Women’s Military Bodies

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I explored what level of understanding my participants had of gender and sexuality and how they made sense of these terms in their day-to-day lives as women, as soldiers and as lesbians. By doing so, I was able to ascertain how individual women adapted their behaviour to conform to, or to subvert, military expectations of gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I turn my attention to exploring the mechanisms employed by the British Army to control or regulate women’s military bodies. As bodies situated within a particular type of organisation, they are ‘gendered’ in ways which are often unacknowledged, and/or seen as ‘natural’ (Acker, 1990). The institutional gendering of female military bodies is achieved and maintained through various means, including discipline, segregation, dress regulations and the supervision of women’s appearance and sexual behaviour through institutional policies. All of these issues will be explored in this chapter.

Höpfl (2003: 13), argues that ‘...incorporation into the military body is achieved via a cancellation of the feminine. Women... can either be playthings or else quasi men’. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that women’s adoption of (so-called) masculine attributes and qualities were accepted only in certain situations and in the belief that they were not permanent. Accordingly, I would argue that the British Army’s emphasis on the feminine has not been intended to position women in uniform as ‘playthings’ but as ‘not (real) soldiers’. In this chapter I illustrate how the Army, in direct contrast to Höpfl’s argument, has not ‘cancelled’ the feminine but indeed has embraced and emphasised it. By doing so, the Army positions women’s military bodies as ‘useful’ organisational bodies but fundamentally different from those of male soldiers.

Words like sex, gender, male, female, homosexual, heterosexual, masculine, feminine, fat, thin, black, white and so on have no meaning without the body upon which to write these terms. For example, it is the *body* we understand to be male or female symbolised through particular genitalia and it is the *body* that is taught the language of what being male or female means in our society.

Embodiment can therefore be understood as the 'lived body' (Nettleton and Watson, 1998), the way in which the self embodies everyday experience (Giddens, 1991). The words we use to describe who we are serve the same purpose as clothing, dressing the physical mass that is the body in descriptive uniforms of understanding. These understandings are not universal but vary according to time period, culture and situation (space). In this chapter I consider how the body is disciplined, or made 'docile' (Foucault, 1977) by the military process, which transforms the unruly body into a trained, useful and controlled 'machine'. Women's military bodies, however, are located within a space which turns an institutional 'gaze' upon them, exerting '... many forms of control, surveillance and discipline' on the body and '... constantly forming and reforming what are considered to be the appropriate "norms" of behaviour and presentation' (Butler, 2001: 227). Institutional surveillance is not sufficient, however. Foucault (1977) argues that it is through individual self-surveillance that bodies are most effectively disciplined..

Historically, women soldiers have been physically segregated into the women-only space of the WRAC and the QARANC and thereafter into separate accommodation from men. Such physical enclosure (Foucault, 1977) helps to mark women as different from their male colleagues. The uniform is another form of physical enclosure and one which, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, has been incredibly important in controlling women's military bodies. The uniform is one of the most obvious ways in which the military body is identifiable as a soldier, but it also bestows upon it a certain level of *uniformity* or sameness. Viewing military bodies from a distance, it is difficult to tell age, ethnicity or physical attributes such as hair colour. What it *has* been possible to identify is gender, as women's bodies have been separated by their uniform

design (men in trousers, women in skirts) and colour (men in khaki, women in green or grey). Even since the reorganisation of the WRAC and QARANC in the 1990s, the uniform serves to identify women as different and the embodiment of a woman soldier, a 'not (real) soldier'. In this chapter I focus on the importance of the uniform in signifying gendered embodied institutional identity, as well as examining how the uniform serves to embody meanings invested in it by individuals, such as pride, national identity and professionalism. It would be incorrect, however, to imply that military policy and the regulation of women's body remained unchanged over time. As women's roles have changed within the Army and they have increasingly been deployed into conflict areas, their bodies have challenged the restrictions placed upon them by inappropriate dress or equipment.

The variety of data provided by my participants illustrates how much of an impact their uniform and regulations about appropriate dress had on their lives while serving in the Army. The regulation of women's bodies extended into their private lives as well, as the Army attempted to control not just their gendered behaviour but also their sexual behaviour. The lesbian body is one that is both obviously gendered as woman and yet desires to be divorced from the presumption of heterosexuality included in the gendering of 'woman' (Ingraham, 1994). She is a woman, yet sometimes 'mannish' (Enloe, 2000), occasionally masculine but required to be obviously feminine, a soldier who is not allowed in direct combat and a lesbian who is required to be straight. To understand how lesbians in the British Army 'embody' their identities, I demonstrate how these identities are manipulated by prescribed institutional meaning. I contend that women's bodies are viewed as disruptive within the masculine space of the military and require regulating through policies which emphasise their difference from men. These policies have been influenced by cultural and historical ideas about gender and sexuality and, in turn, have been dominant in the 'embodiment' of a woman soldier as obviously female and overtly feminine. Drawing on my own experiences of military life, as well as that of my participants, I explore what happens when lesbians subvert the controls placed upon their bodies and

how these potentially disruptive women's bodies are managed within the military setting of the British Army.

Organisational Bodies

Women in the Army are organisational bodies. Hierarchical organisations have at their foundation a mechanism which is particularly gendered (Acker, 1990; 1998). The gendering of bodies within organisations facilitates and reproduces the privileging and dominance of men's status over women's and '...helps to explain the persistence of male dominance and female disadvantage, in spite of years of attempts to implement gender equity policies' (1998: 197). Tyler & Hancock argue that the 'organizational body' is one that is spatially and temporally located and where the means of embodiment is facilitated via the '...manipulation of the presentation and performance of the body, which must be maintained in order to become and remain an employee of a particular organization and to "embody" that organization' (2001: 25). Much work has been published about gender and gender segregation in the workplace, (see for example Halford et al., 1997; Walby, 1988; Bradley, 1989; Cockburn, 1991), however few analyses deal specifically with the military as an institution, and fewer still with the British Armed Forces post World War II. To examine the effects of the gendered aspects of organisational embodiment on women in the British Army, therefore, I have drawn on work about military women worldwide, including Herbert (1998), Holm (1992), DeGroot & Peniston-Bird (2000), Hong (2002) and Enloe (1988; 2000). The lack of specific research on British military women has also encouraged me to look at a wider variety of uniformed and quasi-uniformed occupations in order to establish if women in other employment encounter similar experiences. Occupations researched include those where women enter uniformed, male-dominated workforces such as the police (Jones, 1986; Prokos and Padavic, 2002; Carson, 1993), the fire service (Chetkovich, 1997), prison service (Zimmer, 1987) or train driver (Swerdlow, 1989). Some occupations, such as nursing (Davies, 1995; Halford et al., 1997) or flight attendants (Tyler and Hancock, 2001) have been stereotyped as

'women's work'. Even though these conventions are being challenged, the polarisation of thought which categorises all women as nurturing, caring and maternal enables this kind of occupational segregation. Similarly, these same conventions have led to the association of manliness, masculinity and physical strength with soldiering, which is therefore seen as the sole preserve of men. Hochschild's (1983) important work on the 'emotional labour' female employees carry out on behalf of the company and the reliance corporations place in this has been instrumental in aiding my understanding of how gender stereotypes have been incorporated into occupational and organisational cultures, including the military.

A military force is representative of a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1960). A 'total institution' is one where the same authority controls all aspects of the individual's life, the official aims of the institution are paramount and real or symbolic barriers are placed between the institution and society to reinforce the idea that the institution stands separate from society (1960). I consider that the British Army fulfils this role in that the medical, financial, material and even spiritual needs of its employees are met by the organisation, institutional goals are always placed above individual needs and the whole ethos of military service rests on the premise that those in uniform are prepared to do what civilians are not and are therefore held to a higher standard of behaviour. As I established in Chapter 3, the body is a site of interaction – relying upon both situation and audience to facilitate the performance of a self (Goffman, 1959). This performance, because it is situational, is dependant upon visible signs such as the clothing, body language and behaviour of those present to gain meaning. As Nathan Joseph argues: 'In interacting with others, we take for granted our ability to anticipate their reaction to our clothing and conversely we may infer others' opinions of us by the way they dress in our presence' (1986: 31-32). In certain situations uniforms, however defined, facilitate interaction by short-cutting conversation and providing reassurance that the situation and audience match. For example, the sight of the ambulance and the uniformed paramedic arriving at the door shortly after dialling 999 provides the reassurance to the patient that

their injuries will be dealt with. Arriving at a building, the patient establishes that he or she is indeed in a hospital by recognising the uniform of the nurse and the white coat and stethoscope of the doctor. In this way, we manage the interactions of everyday life.

The Docile, Disciplined Body

I am drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of a 'docile body', as elaborated in *Discipline and Punish* (1977: 135-169), as a means of examining the 'uniformity' of military bodies. Although Foucault's text is primarily concerned with tracing and explaining the ways in which the penal system evolved, he uses schools, hospitals and the military as models in his argument. All of these organisations function by instigating regimes of set and acceptable behaviours, or *disciplines*, behaviours that are enforced not just through threat of punishment but through repetition of task. According to Foucault, it is not solely the fear of reprisal that keeps people in line but that their bodies have been made docile, 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1977: 136). The body becomes more efficient by the enforcement of economical movement. These disciplines form the basis of systemic methods of coercion, making possible '... the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility' (1977: 137). Although the primary purpose is to render the docile body useful, the maintenance of this usefulness must be achieved with the minimum of supervision. Each individual, having been made aware of the appropriate behaviour for each situation and the punishment for non-compliance, self-regulates his or her behaviour. By using appropriate behaviour for the circumstances and by not stepping over those boundaries, a level of mass social control is achieved.

Few people would disagree with the statement that a military force, such as an army, is a disciplined unit, but many would balk at saying that the unit consisted of 'docile bodies'. Docility invokes understandings of passivity and of

submissiveness but armies are meant to be instruments of aggression and activity. 'Docile' actually means teachable, malleable, obedient, amenable to training, submissive (to another's authority) and easily managed⁴¹. These are all terms perfectly suited to an army and so it could be argued that the concept of 'docile bodies' is ideal, were it not for that troublesome issue of aggression. Soldiers are not supposed to be seen as passive or submissive, but as potential killing machines, yet when the role and function of the soldier is dissected, it becomes apparent that docile is *exactly* the right term. However, it is, as Foucault points out, a relationship of 'docility - utility'. There is a purpose to the docility - 'usefulness':

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely...Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection (1977: 137-138).

Soldiers are trained, drilled and practised in the art of obedience. Every movement is broken down into smaller movements; every part of their day is sectioned and controlled. Each individual soldier is trained in the same way in order to create a 'uniformity' of action, a 'sameness' of design, a 'unity' of power. Individually and collectively, soldiers embody institutional discipline and state power. This institutional cohesion presupposes that the uniformed body is male, a point I will return to later in the chapter. For the moment I want to consider how the military achieves this disciplined uniformity.

⁴¹As defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 6th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, Encyclopedic Edition (Florida: J. G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1999).

Enclosed Bodies

Foucault argues that discipline 'proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' (1977: 141). Individuals are *enclosed*, in specific locations or buildings, such as barracks. Within this physical space, individual space is *partitioned* so that movement, conduct and communication can be controlled and supervised. The Army does this by forming regiments and corps (or bodies of men, originating from the Latin word *corpus*, meaning body) to foster common identities and then into brigades and divisions, to promote the idea of common goals. Particular spaces are then deemed *functional*, such as military hospitals, headquarter buildings or guard rooms, thereby controlling what occurs in that space, how that space is used and how individuals behave within that space. The allocation of trades or jobs, each with its own responsibility within the system over all is the means by which the Army controls this space. Lastly, individuals must occupy a distinct space from one another, in order to be efficiently supervised and controlled. In the military, the method used is that of *rank*, each one having certain responsibilities and functions and being controlled by those above, who are, in turn, controlled in the same manner. Each rank is shown by symbols or identifying marks which, when placed upon the uniform, separate it from others. Each branch of the British Armed Forces uses a particular colour of uniform to act as a quick method of knowing whether a person is in the Navy (dark blue), the Air Force (light blue) or the Army (khaki and/or green). Each regiment and corps in the Army uses different cap badges as well as other means of identification. Cap design, buttons, plumes, emblems, colours, materials, style of uniform - all of these are used to delineate difference within the unit that is the Army. In this way, the individual unit of one has its own space but feeds into the collective unit of one military body, a docile, useful body (1977: 141-149).

Discipline in the military takes the power of the individual and translates it into the power of the whole. One person acting alone has little power but many acting as one have much. But this power cannot be wielded as and when someone feels like it - this would be in defiance of the 'relation of subjection' (1977: 138).

Even the aggressive acts of an army, when the unit of ‘docile bodies’ becomes the ‘killing machine’, are submissive acts carried out under the authority of another (ultimately the State) and set within the rules and disciplines of the scenario of war. There are expected behaviours here too. The purpose behind all the training allows the expectation that the individual bodies within the killing machine will control themselves, that they will obey the rules and behave in a manner that is acceptable. If they do not, there is a belief that the unity of the group will police the behaviour of those individuals who step over the line. Failure by the individual or the group to control errant behaviour means that the institution must take responsibility for punishment⁴².

Many would view this relationship of discipline over the individual as one of domination rather than power. However, Foucault argues that there is *always* the chance for resistance and reversal within a power relationship (Sawicki, 1991: 122, Note 4 to Chapter 2). Yet the very docility of a military force makes subversive acts or wilful disobedience even more difficult and rare. The training is so physically and psychologically thorough, filtering into every aspect of a soldier's life, from what to wear to how to behave, on or off duty, that the punishments for non-compliance are often also well-known. Acts of resistance, however, do happen and the very existence of a lesbian ‘subculture’ in the Armed Forces can be seen as one form of wilful disobedience. As was established in Chapter 2, the regulations regarding homosexuality in the British Armed Forces is one of the few areas where the institution has treated men and women as equal, despite there being no equal legal basis upon which to do so. The gay body has been institutionally constructed as *persona non grata*, as distasteful, as unstable (psychologically and emotionally) and as disruptive. Disruptive because the homosexual body undermines the uniformity of gendered

⁴² Evidence from conflict zones, such as the former Yugoslavia, indicates that in some cases the institution itself has sanctioned aberrant behaviour or incorporated it into military strategy (for example the mass rape of women by soldiers and other uniformed personnel). In these circumstances, it falls to international institutions, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) to invoke discipline and punish those responsible (see for example Stiglmeier, 1994; Reynolds, 1998).

military bodies as masculine/feminine and because, by claiming the agency to think and act gay or lesbian, there is inevitably a break down in discipline. The gay body must be got rid of, it must be expelled in order to demonstrate how *not* to behave, how *not* to be. Yet in banning homosexuality, I would argue that the military created the perfect climate for a lesbian subculture to exist, thereby illustrating Foucault's point that power creates opportunities for resistance. For lesbians to live lesbian lives, they have had to live double lives. Their very existence relied on secrecy yet they had to have a means of communication with other gay women to identify themselves as lesbians. This selective visibility left them vulnerable to the power and authority of the military, but these acts of resistance were the only way of establishing and retaining a sexual identity. Being a lesbian in the Army and living a lesbian lifestyle, therefore, requires individuals to go against the dominant culture and military discipline. Standing up against the expectations of docility, disobeying, becoming an individual again even for a moment requires that the unit(y) and the codes of discipline be subverted *knowingly*. The subversive act needs an active mind as well as an active body in order to resist.

Knowing that secrecy would be required, however, does not prevent lesbians from seeking a career in the military. Of the forty respondents to my questionnaire, eighteen knew that homosexuality was unacceptable *before* they joined up. Most of this group, as can be seen in Table 10, had been informed by friends or relatives prior to enlistment or had learned of its unacceptability via the media. Those who were *unaware* of the unacceptability of homosexual behaviour at enlistment tended to find out through barrack room gossip, discussion among their peer group or by observing what happened to those that were 'caught'.

	Frequency
Heresay	1
Friend already serving	1
Told by friends but thought they were kidding	1
Media	6
Told by relatives/friends	7
Upbringing	1
During induction prior to enlistment	1
Total	18

Table 10: Homosexuality unacceptable: means of awareness

However, only eleven women actually understood what the penalties for being discovered were. Furthermore, although the Armed Forces insist that they routinely informed recruits that homosexuality was incompatible with military life, only twelve of my respondents recall being told this and only eleven recall being made aware of the penalties.

Women in the military have traditionally been enclosed by the segregation of their bodies to women-only space. The creation of the WRAC and QARANC served the purpose of making obvious their difference from men. In the early days of women's service, their barracks were also often separate from men's. In later years, women soldiers were accommodated in separate buildings within a mixed barracks but large notices were placed at each entrance declaring 'Out of Bounds to Male Personnel'. When Davina was sent on an NBC Course, she recalled that she was the only woman on the course. She said:

I ended up in Winterbourne Gunner with forty-nine men and me. I was the only female there. They used to lock me in on a nighttime you know. I was there for three weeks doing this course. It was great. Actually, I quite enjoyed it – a bit scary but it was quite good. But it was just the fact they used to lock me in on nighttime [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Male soldiers, by entering the accommodation illegally, were symbolically entering the forbidden territory of the woman herself. It was often the woman

who was punished, however, if men were found to be in the female accommodation, not the male soldier for breaking the rules. Olive recalled that during a RMP raid on WRAC accommodation in Germany in the early 1980s, the men who were out of bounds were ignored. 'They were just told to get dressed and get back to their units... Nobody was interested in half-naked guys, they just wanted the women' [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I]. The 'women' being referred to here were 'lesbians'. The raid was targeted at catching lesbians in compromising or suspicious circumstances and although straight women were also technically breaking regulations by having their boyfriends in the accommodation, this was viewed differently. Their 'offence' was evidence of their 'normality'. This spatial policing of sexuality epitomises Foucaultian ideas on enclosure, whereby army barracks or camps were used to separate soldiers physically from civilians – and men from women (Foucault, 1977). However, women's bodies are further enclosed within the British Army through their attire.

The most basic form of enclosure that the military body experiences is by covering it with a uniform and regulating the wearing of it. The uniform itself and the policies which govern its existence are products of a military institution which, when examined, reflect the underlying values and ideologies of the wider social and political system which it serves. Nathan Joseph argues that the uniform performs the function of marking the military body as different from the 'other', the non-warrior civilian. However, to be effective, there must be recognition by society of the existence and function of the organisation, in this case the military, within the whole society. Not all societies delineate their 'warrior class' in this manner but in those that do, the uniform allows the body to be *read* as a member of a military force (1986). In short, the use of the uniform is symbolic, its design and structure totally decided upon by others. As Lurie states, 'No matter what sort of uniform it is – military, civil, or religious... to put on such livery is to give up one's right to act as an individual... What one does, as well as what one wears, will be determined by external authorities' (1992: 18).

The uniform's meaning is two-fold: '...it asserts control and it conveys identity' (Pratt and Rafaeli, 1997: 865). It is the means by which the organisation reinforces its control over the individual as well as granting the individual the authority to control the masses. This is particularly true of institutions such as the military or the police where the uniform not only represents the organisation but the *state* and therefore the ultimate power. Bank tellers, supermarket cashiers and bus drivers may be brimming with corporate identity but their authority over the individual is limited. The government requires that any institution granted the authority and power to act as proxy must appear to be representative of that identity. Many academics are agreed that dress, and in this case the uniform, functions as a very strong representation of the central beliefs and traditional values of the organisation (see for example Goffman, 1959; Joseph, 1986; Lurie, 1992). It can therefore be argued that the behaviour and deportment of the wearer is seen as representative of the organisation as a whole. When this behaviour appears to be in conflict with these values, such as when a soldier is drunk or gets involved in a brawl, the organisation must respond by punishing the individual to send the message that such behaviour is unacceptable.

Historically, issuing the same uniform to all soldiers was seen as a mechanism to '...instill discipline by training the body and mind in specified ways' (Craik, 2003: 131), thereby contributing to the body's docility. As Roche argues:

The need to shape minds and bodies finds in uniforms a valuable aid: it is a training, an element in the education of controlled individual power... It is an instrument in a process designed to shape the physique and the bearing of [an] individual, whose autonomy conditions his docility and whose obedience transforms individual strength into collective power (Roche, 1996: 228-9 as cited in Craik, 2003).

The uniform and symbolic accessories, such as regimental insignia, selected by the State to represent it are all culturally specific and therefore require a level of organisational awareness to interpret their meaning. For example, medal ribbons may be interpreted by the unknowing as representations of bravery, yet the

ribbons may be nothing more than a symbol of longevity in the service, good conduct or skills proficiency. Depending on the cultural context, therefore, a chest full of colourful medal ribbons is no guarantee of bravery, but serves as a set of embodied symbols.

Wearing a military uniform can also contribute to an individual's sense of identity. Jennifer Craik argues:

Uniforms – and the enforcement of rules about them – are imprinted on our techniques of selfhood through techniques of the body (sociological, psychological, and biological). There is a disjunction between the ostensible meanings of uniforms – as embodying sameness, unity, regulation, hierarchy, status, roles – and the experience of uniforms. Very often, anecdotes about uniforms involve formative moments of selfhood, especially associated with breaking out or away from normative codes, rebellion or subversion, about individual interpretation or difference in sameness (Craik, 2003: 128).

Some of my participants recalled being issued with their uniforms when they first joined up. Grace talked of feeling embarrassed at the procedure:

When you are actually queuing up to get your uniform, that was a bit degrading because you are stood there in pants and tights and a pair of shoes. You don't know what to expect... they don't tell you, they just say you are going over to collect your uniform. They don't tell you that you've gotta strip and be sized up and everything like that so that was a bit degrading [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I].

Grace's experience raises the impact of communal life on personal attitudes about modesty (Shawver, 1995). Earlier in the interview she alluded to the difference between sharing a room with her sisters and sharing a room with three strangers during the initial stages of basic training. She said, '...you've got bathrooms haven't you? You just go and get changed in there' [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I]. Lois Shawver argues that some people find bodily exposure more embarrassing than others but that these feelings can be mitigated if '...other people seemed to feel it was

appropriate' and carried on '...without signs of curiosity, interest, or self-consciousness' (Shawver, 1995: 36). Although Grace felt a level of personal embarrassment from being so exposed, she was surrounded by other recruits in a similar state of undress. While some may have felt as Grace did, others, such as the recruit instructors and the staff working in the Quartermaster Store, would have considered this event to be unremarkable in that context.

Davina, on the other hand, considered that the Army's policy of making female recruits wear gym skirts during basic training while their No. 2 dress uniform skirts were tailored might be a strategy employed to humiliate recruits.

We were doing drill with our gym kit on. That was awful that was...the skirts took forever to come back from the tailors, I don't know why. So we had our gym skirts and I thought "This is just madness. If war breaks out now, what am I gonna wear? I can't stand there directing tanks with this on!" You know, they were probably done in a day but they left them for weeks just to get us back down to that level of complete embarrassment and mortification [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

This strategy of dressing women recruits in gym skirts with tights, blouses and berets during training instead of lightweight or combat trousers is interesting. Male recruits would have worn such trousers while waiting for their dress uniform trousers to be tailored; they would have donned gym kit only for PT and would never have been marched around camp 'cross-dressed' in a mixture of boots, shorts, shirts and ties with their hats on. It is difficult to assess whether this was done to keep women in an obvious symbol of femininity (the skirt) because *any* skirt would be better than trousers, or whether it was indeed a mechanism to humiliate and therefore bond the recruits together in their common experience. What is certain is that the uniforms worn by British women soldiers connote *embodied* dominant ideals of appropriate feminine appearance and behaviour for women in the Army, simultaneously concealing while emphasising their gendered difference from male soldiers.

Through this analysis of women's military uniform it has become apparent that it

is not the clothing that is the problem – the real issue is the woman’s body inside the uniform. Throughout the history of women’s service, the most problematic aspect for the military has been that women’s bodies are perceived as deviant bodies. Their presence in barracks or workplaces dominated by the most masculine of men – soldiers – has required that women’s bodies be controlled and, most importantly, that their sexual conduct be regulated in order to prevent the male soldiers’ behaviour getting out of hand. For those familiar with debates around sexual and domestic violence, it will come as no surprise that women are required to police *their* behaviour so as not to be blamed for tempting *men* into losing control of themselves. Foucault is often criticised for not including the gender or the sexuality of the docile body into his analysis (see for example Bartky, 1990; Hekman, 1992 in Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 1993). Sandra Lee Bartky’s criticism of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, while acknowledging it as ‘...genuine *tour de force*’, stems from his (apparent) inability to recognise that male bodies and female bodies are subject to different processes of embodiment. As Bartky argues:

Where is the account of disciplinary practices that engender the ‘docile bodies’ of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to the disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed (1990: 65).

The ‘forms of subjection’ that Bartky is talking about are those which socially differentiate men from women. These learned behaviours are indicators of socially significant differences and hierarchies through which individual behaviour is ordered and regulated. They may include concepts of acceptable body size and shape for a woman, appropriate behaviours, gestures and movements and how best to utilise these attributes in order to attract men by using the body as a means of display (1988: 64-71). Foucault’s ‘gender blindness’ ‘...reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory’ (Bartky, 1990: 65) and ‘...does not account for the different

ways the female body may be positioned in relation to the generalization of a military technology of the body' (McNay, 1992: 35). The soldiering aspect of citizenship which, in Foucaultian terms, '...invests the male body as a productive and obedient citizen/worker... is an indication of how the role is implicitly masculine... women can occupy the role of citizen only with some conceptual uneasiness' (McNay, 1992: 35-36).

It has been my intention to investigate how gender and sexuality affect the embodied experience of a female soldier. By incorporating the 'gender blindness' criticisms onto Foucault's concept of docile bodies, my research indicates that in the Army, women represent not just a deviant body but also a 'doubly docile' body, in that their femininity underlies their role as soldier. They are already wearing a uniform of sorts as women - in their style of dress, the wearing of makeup, hairstyles and in the display of femininity. Women are already 'gendered' prior to their adoption of the characteristics and behaviours of a soldier and my research has supported Herbert's (1998) argument that women in a military force are often expected to be both obviously a soldier *and* obviously a woman. Furthermore, the size and design of various items of equipment also serves to regulate the female military body. The successful completion of a task often depends on the safe and competent use of equipment. In many cases since women first entered the Armed Forces, and especially since the integration of women into more male-dominated trades, it has been the women who were often deemed incapable of the task rather than the equipment being gendered in its design. By analysing women's uniform and examining the gendered design of specific equipment, gender and sexuality, often missing from traditional studies of the military, can be brought into the equation and critiqued. The majority of the remainder of this chapter will focus on these areas to demonstrate how the uniform and equipment has been and is used to regulate women soldiers' bodies, their behaviour, their femininity and their sexuality, in and out of the workplace.

If the docile military body is, as Foucault argues, a useful body, trained for maximum efficiency of task, it could be argued that the uniform worn to carry out these tasks should enable, or indeed assist, the wearer to carry it out. It certainly should not hinder or harm the body. Yet although the task remains the same, the body within the uniform is not a universal size or weight and is not capable of universal levels of physical and mental output. Although everyone in the military wears a uniform, there are particular differences between the uniforms worn by male and female soldiers in most military forces. I now want to explore the ways in which those differences regulate the body within. Using photographs from newspapers, books, the Internet and private collections, I will illustrate how, for military women, the uniform has been disconnected from the function of the job and has become the means by which they are measured as feminine.

I aim to demonstrate that women's uniforms have been conceived as fashion items rather than as items of equipment, clothes designed primarily to accessorise the body and thereby render the female body itself as an accessory in the male military space. The ill-thought-out design of women's uniforms often restrict their ability to carry out certain tasks, enabling male colleagues and policy makers alike to persevere in their belief that women are inherently less capable. Even in the TA, where women are rarely issued dress uniforms, the kit designed for female soldiers has not been up to the task. When Elizabeth first joined the TA in 1980, women were not issued combats like their male colleagues, but a feminised version considered to be more in line with fashion.

We had what we were told were Driver Boots and they were smooth soled. Trousers – I'm sure they had a zip up the side so they had a smooth front [fly] and a 'batwing' jacket. So you couldn't go any further than that [demonstrating the limits of where the jacket would allow her to raise her arms]. No wonder you couldn't carry your ammo! The boots meant that when we were doing things like assault courses we had no grip. "Poor little girls can't get up there!" That's what we used to get. I remember running up this plank and sliding backwards down it [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I].

For the majority of the WRAC research participants, the uniform they remember the most was the version designed and introduced in the early 1960s (see Illustration 1 on page 15 and Illustration 3 below). The No. 2 dress uniform of the WRAC was described in the following manner:

The new uniform was in Lovat green, and, updated in accordance with fashion, it is the uniform which the WRAC still wears on almost all occasions⁴³. The classic suit has a single-breasted jacket with cut-away fronts, neat epaulettes and flat, slip hip pockets... The skirt is slim and a white shirt and collar and tie complete the outfit. For warm weather there is a short-sleeved casual shirt. The cap is becomingly high-crowned, with a patent leather peak (Ewing, 1975: 136).

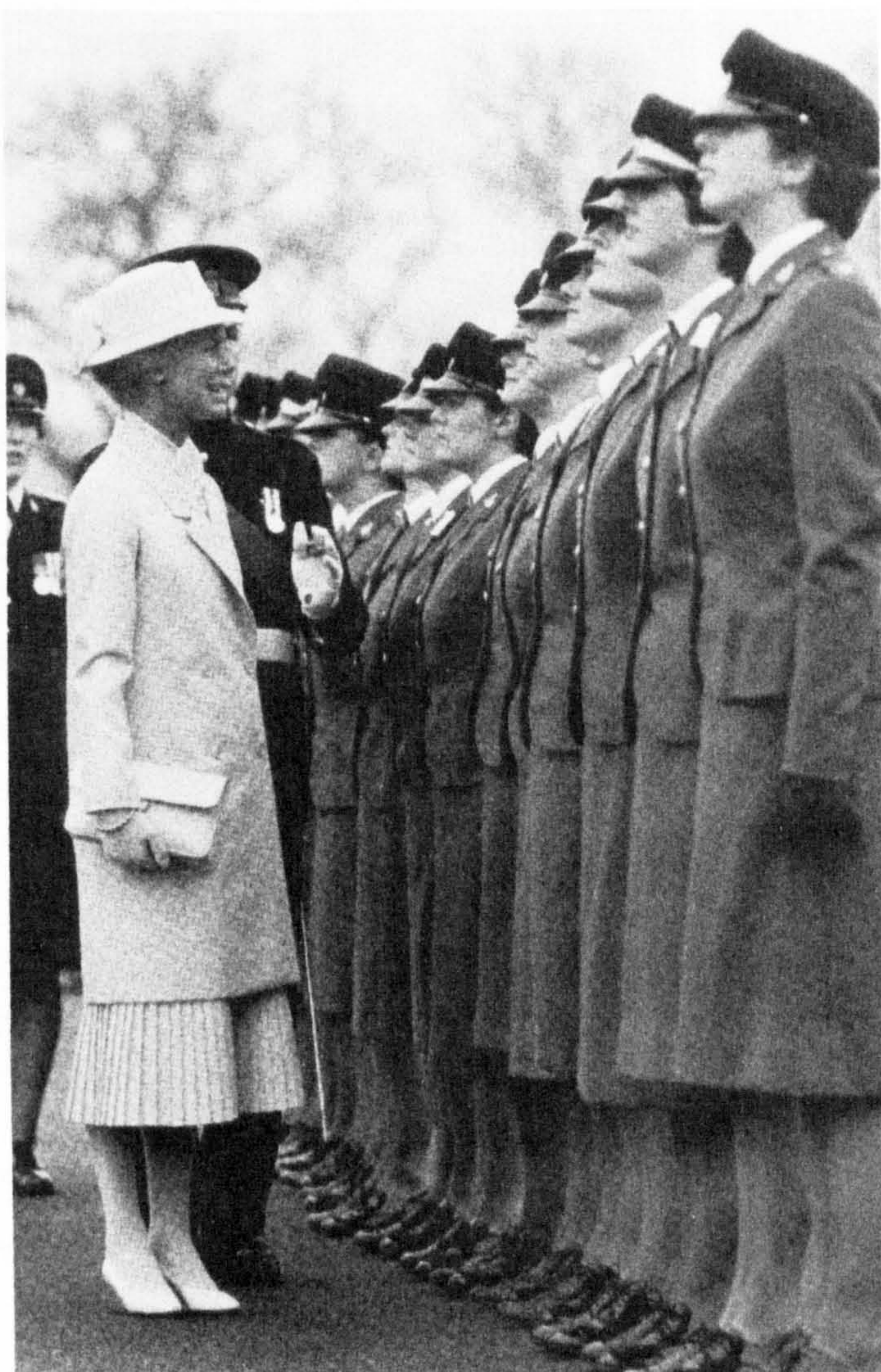


Illustration 3: HRH The Duchess of Kent inspecting WRAC officer cadets at Sandhurst, 1984 (Terry, 1988: 2). This photograph shows the No. 2 dress uniform and cap as well as the ‘bulled’ flat shoes worn by officers on parade.

⁴³ This uniform design was superseded in 1991.

The QARANC No. 2 dress uniform was of a similar design but in grey with scarlet trimmed epaulettes and a grey cap.

In 1965, Sir Norman Hartnell⁴⁴ designed the more formal, dark green No. 1 dress uniform for the WRAC but this was issued only to senior officers, members of the WRAC military band and female members of the military police. This uniform (see Illustration 4) was slightly more militaristic in style with the belt at the waist mimicking the men's white belt.



Illustration 4: Author in No. 1 dress, fitted blouse and 'tab' at the RMP Training Centre, Chichester, 1977.

As a Military Policewoman, Davina was issued with No. 1 dress and, when wearing it, was able to overcome her ambivalence about wearing a skirt. She said:

44 Designer to Queen Elizabeth II.

Number 1s were smart, it's just I've never been comfortable wearing a skirt...I liked getting dressed up in the uniform and I suppose when I was all dressed up it made me feel good.

When asked why she felt good, even in a uniform with a skirt, she replied:

[P]robably because I thought I looked good in the uniform and I had spent a lot of time doing it and I looked smart...I suppose I was proud to wear it and it used to make me feel good [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

She indicates that the pride she felt when wearing this uniform may have been fuelled by the effort she put in 'doing it' – ironing and starching her shirt, pressing the uniform, buffing her shoes, putting sharp creases in the sleeves of the jacket and polishing the peak of her cap. Although she felt uncomfortable in a skirt, looking smart enabled her to feel good and to think that she also looked good (to others).

The uniform design changed little in the 1970s but the shirts with starched, detachable collars, affectionately called 'grand-dad' shirts were phased out in favour of a tailored blouse with a floppy collar. This more 'modern' look was influenced by the American Women's Services fitted blouse and 'tab', which attached to the collar with Velcro, introduced in the early 1970s. This shirt was hated because the collar did not retain its shape and it was felt to be less smart than the traditional collar and tie and by the early 1980s had been replaced by a more acceptable alternative. Some women in my research, such as Davina and Olive, equated smartness with authority. However, their trade of Military Police might have influenced this as authority often had to be conveyed visually. Overall, in the design of women's uniforms, the emphasis was on women looking feminine, with skirts, high-heeled shoes, tight jackets and 'cheeky caps' (Muir, 1992: 154). Ewing states that, 'The WRAC stress that all their uniform is planned to be "fashionable, smartly cut yet efficient and military in style"' (1975: 137). In this way, the Army acknowledges that the primary purpose of women's uniforms is to be fashionable rather than practical, emphasising the 'female'

body within rather than the body of the 'soldier'. It could be argued that such attitudes about the design and purpose of women's uniforms are understandable given the era in which they were expressed and as time has passed and women's roles expanded, things will have changed. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

Shoes have been an obstacle course of the practical versus the fashionable. Although two pairs of flat shoes and one pair of court shoes are the normal issue to every female soldier, officers are issued only one pair of flat shoes as it is expected that they will be wearing court shoes for normal duties. This underlying differentiation of status ascribed to officers is part of the embodying of class mentioned in Chapter 1. Officers, regardless of their background and accent are *presumed* to be in a different social class from non-commissioned officers and other ranks. Part of the creation of that social class is to dress the officer's body in a different quality (or class) of material and assign to them the supervisory or leadership role. Leaders delegate or, in military terms, 'command' and others do the 'dirty' work. Female officers, in theory if not in practise, are supposed to epitomise the qualities of the Corps⁴⁵ in which they serve and until the early 1990s, the Corps in question were exclusively female. One of the main qualities they are supposed to represent is femininity and femininity is displayed through clothing, shoes, hairstyle, makeup, jewellery and mannerisms. Although flat shoes are more practical in that it is easier to run in them if required to do so and easier on the feet and ankles than high heels, they do not exhibit the appropriate image of a female officer. Flat shoes may be safer and more practical for the majority of situations that women soldiers find themselves in, but the down side is that they require 'bulling' – a means of highly polishing the whole shoe until like glass. Soldiers are able to choose between their issued pair of court shoes or their flat shoes if they work in an office or are not on parade.

45 See WRAC Corps motto on page 2 of this thesis.

The other main item of uniform which above all others places the female military body front and centre is the 'mess dress', worn by officers and senior ranks only. Until the early 1990s, the 'mess dress' was another piece of designer wear, described by Ewing as:

...the ultimate in the apotheosis of uniform into contemporary fashion... Designed by Owen Hyde-Clark, formerly of Worth, it is a slim cream and gold lamé Empire gown⁴⁶, with small sleeves, square neck, a fish-tail pleat at the floor-length hem and a long green silk sash fastened to the shoulder by a single rank-marked epaulette... It is also that most rare and enviable of feminine fashions – a couture creation at less than half couture prices, made by Hilliers Couture (1975: 137).

The following photograph (see Illustration 5) shows the version of the QARANC (officers and senior ranks) mess dress worn during this period.



Illustration 5: QARANC Officers and Senior Ranks attending a Regimental dinner at the QARANC Training Centre, Aldershot, 1980s. Courtesy of M.S. (used with permission).

46 The dress for senior ranks was much simpler with no gold lamé or fish-tail pleat.

The mess dress is grey and scarlet, the QARANC Corps colours and the officers are wearing the dresses with the gauze sleeves. The satin court shoes peeping out from below the hem of the dress, together with the optional accessory of a string of pearls, seem incongruous when juxtaposed next to the miniature badges of rank and medals pinned to the dress. At times the femininity of the female soldier was further accentuated. At a Ladies' Dinner Night in Cyprus, to which all senior ranks *and their wives* were invited, all the women were presented with a flower to pin to their evening gown. As can be seen in Illustration 6, I was 'in uniform' in the WRAC mess dress, complete with sash and badge of rank at this dinner and was also presented with a flower which was placed adjacent to the symbol of my military status.



Illustration 6: Author wearing the WRAC mess dress at a Ladies Dinner Night, Episkopi Cyprus, 1983.

However, irrespective of whether the recipient was the wife of a serving soldier or a serving soldier in her own right, the presentation of the flower indicated that

the female military body, even within the uniform, was to be thought of more as a woman rather than as a soldier.

Olive was able to avoid buying mess dress when she was temporarily promoted to Sergeant. As her substantive rank was still Corporal, she was allowed to wear her No. 1 dress uniform at Mess Dinners instead. For other social events, however, women soldiers were expected to wear dresses or skirts, which she found more difficult to avoid.

When it came to the more informal nights, you know, disco nights, curry nights and all that sort of palaver, they did expect you to be wearing dresses and skirts and make up... so I avoided nights like that like the plague. Unless I was actually ordered by the RSM to attend, then I didn't go and when I did go it was trousers, it wasn't jeans but it was trousers' [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I].

Participants' responses in the questionnaires reinforced this expectation; that particular dress codes which emphasised femininity were *de rigueur* when attending social functions. For example, in response to Q. 6(2) on whether the Army expects, encourages or pressures women soldiers to 'act feminine' in any way, Tracy said: 'Wearing dresses for parties, Mess functions etc.' [WRAC Signals, LCpl; 49 – Q]. Claudia remembers that 'Women recruits were not allowed to wear trousers at functions' [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 40 – Q] and Robyn, who was still serving in the TA when she completed the questionnaire, said: 'In the Officer's Mess we are pressurised to act "correctly" and until recently were not allowed to wear trousers in the Mess' [QARANC (TA) Nursing Officer, Major; 44 – Q]. Barbara summed up the dilemma for women soldiers who are expected to embody 'woman' as well as 'soldier' by saying: 'Women are expected to be "masculine" when at work and then to be feminine outside work. You tend to get hassle if this is not who you are' [QARANC Nurse, Private; 28 – Q].

My participants' responses may refer back to earlier times, but military traditions can be quite intransigent and even though uniforms have been redesigned, institutional attitudes to women in the military remain. In 1991, a range of new uniforms were issued to coincide with the imminent disbanding of the WRAC and the integration of women soldiers into the Army Corps of their trade. However, even in the 1990s it was deemed necessary to 'design' the uniform as if fashion, although in this instance the designers were fashion students as opposed to leading names in *haute couture*. It is also interesting that the Army felt it was necessary to have a 'press launch' of the new range (see Illustration 7) as this seems to suggest that women's uniforms are still first and foremost fashion items, not an integral part of the equipment of a military force.



Illustration 7: The launch of the new Army uniforms for women in 1991. © UPPA (Muir, 1992: between pages 114-115).

Furthermore, the 'fashion parade' falls neatly within the long tradition of putting women in uniform on display (Terry, 1988: 174-176), thereby emphasising women soldiers' supposed attractiveness to concerned potential recruits and parents alike. Although the new uniform is considered to be more practical, with

the return of the collar and tie, wider skirts and even the odd pair of trousers, there is still an emphasis on feminine appearance. The high-heeled shoes remain and, although the Mess Dress has changed to incorporate a much more military jacket in line with the male equivalent of Mess Dress, the evening gown remains underneath.

The increase in the practicality of the uniform is to be welcomed but it is one thing to redesign the uniform and quite another to change the attitudes and behaviours of male *and* female soldiers to the body within it. The Army wanted the design of the uniform to reflect its underlying belief that women soldiers were not the same as male soldiers. It was to emphasise the feminine qualities of the female soldier, delicate, ladylike and groomed. It is no wonder that women soldiers find it hard to prove themselves within such an institution when they are constantly being 'redressed' as female (Muir, 1992: 153-154). Clothes act as signifiers of maleness or femaleness and assist in the communication of gender attributions (Eicher and Roach-Higgins, 1992). 'Investigating the confusion over what a woman soldier should wear can expose deeper anxieties over what a woman soldier is supposed to do and to be in a masculinized institution' (Enloe, 2000: 261). Where women's uniforms are concerned, there have been constant debates about functionality and femininity, comfort and cut and concerns over promiscuousness and propriety. These concerns arise because of the desire to leave unaltered '... what it means to be a soldier, a man and a woman' (Enloe, 1988: 119). Enloe argues that governments have two choices if they recruit women into their military forces. Either they must emphasise the fact that they are women and therefore draw attention to the 'deviance' of their bodies from the norm in such a male institution, or disguise their femininity and, by default, their sexual identity, by making them 'uni-form', literally one form with the men in identical clothing. By doing so, however, the status and privilege afforded to soldiers is wrested from the male grasp and, likewise, the protection women might claim as vulnerable citizens is undermined (Enloe, 1988: 119; Stiehm, 1994).

Comportment, Accessories and Equipment

The Army not only enforces femininity through women soldiers' 'dress', it also requires that these soldiers learn how to *wear* their uniform in a particular way. The design of clothes encourages or discourages body movement. Men are taught, both inside and outside the military, to sit in a particular way – displaying their masculinity in an open stance. Trousers facilitate the occupation of space and the spreading out of the legs (see Illustration 8), whereas skirts restrict the free movement of women in protection of their modesty or dignity.



Illustration 8: Men of the People's Republic of China Army.
© [http:// www.csmonitor.com/durable/ 1998/06/03/p1s2.htm](http://www.csmonitor.com/durable/1998/06/03/p1s2.htm)

Women in the British Army are taught how to sit properly in basic training, with knees and ankles together. Part of the reason for sitting in a particular manner is to emphasise uniformity and to lessen the chances of the skirt being creased unnecessarily. However, the other reasons are to do with decorum and the regulation of women's bodies to reflect an ideal of feminine behaviour (see Illustration 9). The women in this photograph are seated in a much less expansive pose than the men in Illustration 8 and are taking up less space.



Illustration 9: Squad of regular recruits. WRAC Training Centre, Guildford, 1983.

As Colette Guillaumin says, skirts constitute one of the ‘supposedly superficial’ levels of difference that, together with high heels and underwear that grips and encloses, act as constant reminders to women of who they are.

Skirts designed to keep women in a state of permanent sexual availability, making it more embarrassing for us when we fall (or just when we are in awkward positions) and making us more dependent because we are more vulnerable in our balance and movement, which skirts insidiously guarantee. We have to pay special attention to our bodies, because the body is by no means protected by this clever piece of clothing, a kind of shutter hiding our sex organs and fixed to the waist like a lampshade (1987: 65-66).

The significance of the Army’s insistence that women wear uniform skirts even when trousers would be more appropriate to the type of work being undertaken cannot be underestimated. Women soldiers serving in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 80s often came face to face with difficulties caused by inappropriate clothing. In Northern Ireland in 1978, I was dressed in a skirt and carried a wooden truncheon (see Illustration 10 below).



Illustration 10: Author in uniform of WRAC 'searcher', Aldergrove, Northern Ireland, 1978. The truncheon was placed down the inside of the flak jacket with the leather strap laced through the jacket fastening.

Wearing a skirt meant that it was hard to run and the truncheon rendered women dependent upon their male colleagues for protection. The skirt held the whole group back as they could only go at the pace of the slowest member of the team - in most cases, the woman. This situation caused great resentment on both sides yet all calls for women soldiers to be allowed to wear trousers were rejected. The reason given, whether accurate or not, was that the female soldiers might be mistaken for men and become targets of snipers. However, as Olive explains, the uniform made women vulnerable in other ways too:

I was there during the 12 July Marches in 1982, I think it was and you know... all the Protestants and the Orange Lodge are marching down the road provoking the Catholics, despite what your opinions were - but they were provoking these people and it's rent-a-mob and you're standing by letting them and they are sort of throwing petrol bombs and such like. I mean, I got a couple of splashes of petrol on my flak jacket which... sort of the surface caught fire. I never got burnt or anything, but sort of the surface caught fire and you are sort of leaping around in a skirt trying to put this bloody thing out... it was just so crazy because you were constantly aware that if a splash of petrol landed on your tights then you're going up in flames, whereas if it landed on one of the guys' combats it takes several minutes before it gets through

to the skin. But you know, you are scarred for life and I think it was actually the stupid bloody Orange marches that actually brought it home to me how vulnerable we were in skirts [WRAC, RMP, Sgt; 39 – I].

As women's role in the military has changed since the integration of the 1990s, and especially since the Gulf War of 1991, this has become less of a problem. Deploying women in conflict zones has assisted in their embodiment of the 'soldier' and the wearing of the appropriate uniform has assisted in this process. Recently on television (Houldey, 2005), I watched a woman soldier in Iraq. A member of the Royal Horse Artillery, she was on patrol in the streets of Basra with her male colleagues. Compared to my own experience of foot patrols in Northern Ireland, it could not have been more different. She was dressed in desert combats, boots and carried a SA80 weapon. She was an integral part of her small squad of soldiers, equal in role to any of her male colleagues. Thirty years *have* made a difference for women in the British Army.

Women in military uniform must not challenge the underlying ideology of the male soldier as the ultimate in militarised masculinity by either creating the image of Amazonian type warriors or by appearing to condone cross-dressing. As Cynthia Enloe says, '... to be "mannish" is to be a freak, a defiler of femininity, an offender of both respectable women's and respectable men's sensibilities. In short, a mannish woman is a threat to the proper order of things' (2000: 263). The design of women's uniforms as fashion items has therefore enabled the institution to make a clear statement about what role they expect women to play within the organisation - the uniform must be military enough to represent the organisation, but fashionable enough to retain the image of femininity and heterosexuality. To do otherwise, to appear as 'mannish', associates these women with homosexuality. To reject the trappings of femininity is to reject normality, that is, heterosexuality. There may be a connection therefore between the reluctance of the military to consider the full integration of women (as discussed in Chapter 3) and the historical reluctance to equip women with an adequate uniform to do

the job. I am not saying that women's uniforms, especially those incorporating a skirt, serve *no* other purpose other than as a fashion item but I am arguing that their function as an item of military equipment is secondary to their necessity as a means to control the behaviour of women soldiers.

This point is illustrated further by considering the handbag that was issued to all female recruits. The handbag was issued as an essential item of uniform but it also had a social meaning. It was a necessary item since the women's uniform from the 1960s onwards was purposefully designed not to have any useful pockets at all. In order to carry essential items such as an ID card, purse and so on, the handbag was essential. It was a disciplinary offence to be without your ID card. The handbag also served as an outward, obvious symbol of femininity and there were even regulations as to how to carry it. Women were required to hold it in the left hand on a short strap or wear it over the left shoulder on the long strap, leaving the right hand free to salute. However, in recruit training there were many hours of drill instruction where no one was allowed to march in squad formation with handbags, which meant the majority of recruits and drill instructors found it difficult to access essential items. Thus the ID card was often placed inside the hat along with a pound note for emergencies and the handbag – as an item of military equipment – was rendered unnecessary.

Women's military uniform, unlike the male uniform, performs a function that is not primarily related to the needs of the job. Its function is to reinforce the underlying military ideology that the quintessential soldier is a man and the ideal soldierly body is male. By controlling the design of the uniform and the circumstances in which the uniform is worn, the military is able to regulate the pace of change and the rate of acceptance of women in the military as valued members of equal worth. The female uniform becomes a way to display the womanly characteristics of the feminine body. Skirts and high heeled shoes draw attention to the legs and hips, as well as having the added benefit of restricting the stride to one considered 'ladylike'; fitted jackets accentuate the breasts and

waist. Regardless of whether the left hand holds a handbag or a rifle (see Illustration 1 on page 15), the woman's military body is visibly different.

The military, by emphasising the fashion element of the uniform, is also trying to play on the stereotypical perceptions of women as 'fashion victims', constantly shopping for clothes and worried about what to wear and how they look. They are saying that they know women would be concerned if the uniform made them appear frumpy and dowdy. After all, the main pool of 'talent' for young women joining the Forces is the huge pool of fit young men already there! I examine the 'sexual body' of the female soldier later in this chapter. By over-emphasising the uniform as fashion, the services essentially achieve two main aims. First, women are set apart physically as occupying a different 'space' from men, a space where their mission is to support the male soldier's role as fighter rather than challenge him for it. Second, by emphasising the femininity of women, the Army seeks to render women soldiers 'impotent' in an attempt to prevent them from displaying the characteristics and abilities required to do the job. To display such characteristics would be to challenge the autonomy of the male soldier and shift him from the position of the 'protector' to the 'protected' (Stiehm, 1994).

The gendered organisational culture operates by controlling all areas of women soldiers' lives but this regulation permeates much further than just the allocation of 'appropriate' uniform and equipment and segregated accommodation. As will be illustrated in the rest of this chapter, the regulation of the female body is all encompassing; the clothing of the outer shell is only one part of the process. Language is controlled, emotional displays are discouraged yet expected and then used to bolster arguments as to the inappropriateness of women in the military. There are regulations about hair length, colour and style, about what jewellery can be worn and how much make-up is appropriate. For women there are additional regulations as to whether their temporary military body can be pierced or tattooed. Weight is monitored and soldiers' bodies can be forcibly put on diets. Through these kind of controls, the British Army '... demands of its employees a presentation of self through which the lived body is scripted, staged

and performed in accordance with a prescribed role in so far as employees' bodies are required to conform to a predetermined organizational ideal in terms of uniformity of bodily appearance' (Tyler and Hancock, 2001: 30).

The Deployed Body

The number of images showing women in 'male' uniform or their equivalent has been much, much higher in recent years. This obviously reflects the increase in the range of deployments for women over the past ten to fifteen years. Women have been sent into war zones where war correspondents and photographers are just as likely to be there as another soldier. It also could be that the military has recognised the futility and falseness of using images that, on the one hand emphasised the danger of the situation and on the other, portrayed women as more concerned with makeup and appearance than dealing with the emergency. Such images would come across as staged and might bring the military under scrutiny. In the past twenty years, as the recruitment crisis becomes ever more pressing, the display of women in operational roles could also bring in a new group of recruits. There is also the point that in times of war, governments have often used images of women in uniform 'doing their bit' to reinforce the need for everyone to make sacrifices and rally round the cause. In these scenarios, however, they have often been regarded as 'replacement men' which perhaps makes their 'masculine' appearance more acceptable.

As I mentioned earlier, when women soldiers are deployed into battle zones, their presence raises other issues and problems concerning uniform and equipment. In the first Gulf War of 1991, when the women in Illustrations 11 and 12 (below) were deployed as part of Operation Desert Storm, the uniforms appear to be the practical working dress that was needed to do the job efficiently in the hot and inhospitable climate of the Middle East.



Illustration 11: Members of 22 Field Hospital Squadron, Saudi Arabia, 1991. Photograph courtesy of M.S. (used with permission).

However, it should be noted that many of the women in these photographs are wearing black, leather boots which in the heat of the desert often melted.

According to Helen, who served in the Gulf War of 1991 with 22 Field Hospital Squadron, ‘desert boots’ were not issued *at all*; those that are wearing them bought them with their own money prior to deployment. The desert camouflage lightweight combats were issued late and many women did not receive the necessary uniform until they arrived in the desert [QARANC, Nurse, WO2; 45 – TI]. While many of the women in these pictures could not be held up as the epitome of femininity, they *do* project an aura of capability. They also appear to be comfortable in their clothing and with their bodies, bodies made efficient by the disciplines of Army life. The combination of comfort and capability enables a sense of belonging and conveys an authority – these women ‘fit in’, both to their surroundings and to the wider group of soldiers.



Illustration 12: British women truck drivers from 68 Squadron RCT, Saudi Arabia, 1991. © Stuart Reed, Ministry of Defence (Muir, 1992: between 114-115).

It is too early to tell how the women in the present Gulf conflict are coping with the uniform and equipment provided to do their jobs efficiently and to keep themselves healthy. The heat alone will cause much hardship as British soldiers will be unlikely to have access to air-conditioning units in tented accommodation. Prior to deployment, there were several interesting articles in various British newspapers highlighting the fact that the Ministry of Defence was sending troops off to war ill equipped. Many soldiers were rejecting the issued kit as untrustworthy or, having not received essential items in time, were

spending considerable amounts of their own money to buy kit from private companies. Despite months of planning, the MoD appears to have been unprepared for war regarding the most basic of equipment. Emergency orders had to be placed for 20,000 pairs of desert boots and 90,000 sets of lightweight desert combats. *Scotland on Sunday* reported that, according to an internal poll carried out by the MoD, more than half the British soldiers deployed to the Gulf have bought items of their own uniform or equipment such as boots, gloves or Global Positioning Satellite hardware (GPS). Tanks were sent to the desert still painted in the green and black European camouflage because the Army ran out of the correct desert camouflage paint (Fraser, 2003). It seems hard to believe that these mistakes could be made considering the amount of time the build up to this war took.

It also seems hard to believe that the lessons of the last Gulf War of 1991 were not learned. The assembling of British troops and equipment for deployment for that conflict took upwards of 6 months and the planning appears to have been less than satisfactory. Many soldiers were begging for items to be sent out from home or scrounging off other troops in the area (Muir, 1992: 9-35). For the military authorities in the UK, this was the first deployment of women soldiers in any numbers to a 'war zone' and they appear to have been unprepared. No military force would forget to pack the toilet paper but in some camps, no supplies of sanitary items were available at all. Once the women ran out of what supplies they had been able to bring with them, they had to revert to 'scrounging' from other troops in the area, usually the Americans who had many more women in the Middle East (33,000 as opposed to just over 1,000 from the UK), or they had to rely on family and/or the general public sending out boxes of tampax and the like to keep them supplied [Helen, QARANC Nurse, WO2; 45 – TI].

'Hygiene' was the word of the moment – the 'powers that be' talked of 'the hygiene problem' as though it were a disease. Of the female troops deployed in the Middle East, the vast majority were in the prime menstruating age-group therefore the question must be asked as to whether this was simply bad planning or indicative of a wider problem in the Army's inability to control women's

leaky, uncontrollable bodies. Many young women were encouraged to have injections to suppress their periods for up to six months on the basis that dealing with such an event in the desert would be inconvenient and messy (Muir, 1992: 19). Inconvenient and messy for whom? Of course a happy side effect of mass contraception for the military is that it reduces the chances of pregnancy, accidental or otherwise. However, in the light of the information now known about the quantities of drugs administered to all soldiers prior and during deployment, such as anthrax, plague, smallpox and pertussis vaccinations as well as nerve agent tablets, the question to be asked is whether any studies had been done as to how these would react with high amounts of birth control medication taken on a long-term basis. It seems doubtful, since the military had not even done tests to assess the long-term effects of the cocktail of drugs administered in 1990 & 1991⁴⁷.

Toilet facilities are another example of where the military's desire to regulate the female military body sometimes goes a bit too far.



Illustration 13: A 'Desert Rose' – for liquid waste only! Courtesy of M.S. (used with permission).

47 Over 600 male and female British soldiers have died as a result of the after-effects of the Gulf War since 1991 (Ministry of Defence, 2003a), including Major Hillary Jones, Nursing Sister in the QARANC (Chambers, 2001).

In the Gulf in 1991, toilet facilities in 22 Field Hospital Squadron and many other British camps consisted of two separate constructions, not for men and women as you might think – but for liquid and solid waste. Helen [QARANC, Nurse, WO2; 45 – TI] recalls that the former were nicknamed ‘desert roses’ and were designed so that the user could stand in front of it and urinate into the funnel. The other facility, located several yards away in a separate enclosure, was delicately called a ‘thunder box’ and was to be used only for solid waste. All human waste had to be burned on site or transported out of the desert for disposal. As can be seen from the photograph, hessian windbreaks surrounded these two facilities, intended to shield delicate areas from straying eyes but which unfortunately left heads in full view above the hessian for all to see. The interesting aspect of this scenario is the presumption that women and men go to the toilet in the same manner. Apart from the obvious problem of urinating standing up, there was no option to sit down onto the funnel; women would have to perch above it. Another presumption of the creators of these contraptions was that it was possible for women to stop mid flow, pull up their combat trousers and lurch off to another location to finish off, all the while clutching their gas mask, NBC suit and weapon in case of attack! Needless to say, the women who were in this camp managed to ‘persuade’ the men that a different system would be more efficient.

Toilet facilities seem to be causing problems for women in the US military too. The *World Tribune* (2002) recently reported on an Air Force study which showed that the lack of segregated latrines is one reason for an increase in urinary tract infections and dehydration in female troops deployed in the Middle East in the past decade. Another problem is the lack of female physicians deployed to the Gulf region. The report states that women aircrew were reducing their water consumption in order to avoid having to use latrines in front of their male colleagues. Aircrew required to wear an all-in-one flight suit had to strip down in order to go to the toilet and women were reluctant to undergo this fiddly and embarrassing procedure more times than was absolutely necessary (Shawver, 1995). The reduction in water consumption combined with the limited usage of

latrine facilities caused dehydration and urinary tract infections. The report also stated that many women delayed getting medical treatment until they could see a female physician (World Tribune.com, 2002).

Another issue which came to light during the Gulf War(s) is how the Armed Forces have been willing to accede to other cultures' view of femininity over the need for female soldiers to do a job while in a foreign country. In Saudi Arabia in 1991 and in the decade since, women soldiers have been expected to cover their arms and remain fully clothed in accordance with Islamic tradition, even in the sweltering heat of the Middle East (Muir, 1992: 16 & 20). For many women soldiers this control of their bodies by both the patriarchy of the military and the patriarchy of a religious state is hard to bear. If the body in the uniform is an American or British body, with all the rights afforded such a citizen and if that body is prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for its country – to die, then it seems little to ask that your rights be protected so that you are defined as a soldier first and a woman second.

Continuous wearing of full field uniform in accordance with Islamic custom can cause skin infections because of the heat (World Tribune.com, 2002). In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the US Central Command made mandatory a policy requiring all female military staff to cover themselves from head to toe with an 'abaya'⁴⁸. Civilian women employed at the US Embassy in Riyadh, however, were not subject to the same policy. Lieutenant Colonel Martha McSally, the highest-ranking combat pilot in the USAF, challenged the Department of Defense in federal court over this policy and succeeded in having it overturned. She felt that, '...the dress code was unconstitutional because it discriminated against women and violated their religious freedom by forcing them to wear clothing and follow customs mandated by a religion other than their own.' She also felt that the policy '...undermined her authority as an officer and required her to send the false message that she believes women are

48 A long black robe and headscarf.

subservient to men' (Alliance for National Defense: A Voice for Military Women, 2003). The full integration of women into the Armed Forces of any nation requires that the policies in place reflect a fair and equitable response to any given situation. Policies like this can only emphasise that the military, however much it may say that it considers women to be full and valued members of the team, appears not to believe its own words. Rather than offend the Saudi Arabian government, the USA decided to forfeit its female military citizens' rights and found it acceptable to control their bodies and their freedoms in such a way.

The Sexual Body

Anxieties about women in the military being considered 'loose women' or morally corrupt has concerned the organisation from its earliest days (see Chapter 2). WRAC was often pronounced as RACK and this became synonymous with 'something to be screwed against a wall'. Paradoxically, controlling women's sexual behaviour was important because the military has a 'duty of care' to the families of often very young women, many of whom were leaving home for the first time. There is a very real risk of teenage pregnancy in the Army and so the maternal body is characterised as antithetical to military life. The pregnant body challenges the 'docile' body that the military demands and brings into view the evidence of sexual activity, the very thing which the Armed Forces try to regulate. Controlling access to women soldiers' bodies is an interesting discussion area in that it raises several points of note. First, physical segregation and/or control of access is restricted to accommodation occupied by Junior Ranks and recruits/cadets. Female senior ranks and officers are mainly billeted in mixed accommodation. Perhaps the logic is that senior ranks or officers, being either more mature or at least in a position of more responsibility, should be better able to control the base urges of sexual desire. Also, living as they are in a permanent state of peer supervision, the hope is that they will not risk breaking the regulations because of the likelihood of discovery. Second, the control of access carried out to limit heterosexual behaviour has had little impact

on homosexual behaviour. Indeed it could be classed as a positive boon to lesbians in that their space becomes less open to male invasion. Third, the possibility of homosexual bodies expressing sexual desire within these military spaces has been of critical concern to the Armed Forces for decades and has been predominately controlled through creating a climate of fear: fear of discovery, fear of disciplinary action to control homosexual behaviour and fear of 'association' to control women's behaviour overall. The Army enforced a culture of compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbians in my study used displays of femininity to defray suspicion of homosexuality. Investigations into individual's lives were often carried out on the most tenuous of suspicions or accusation and, at particular periods in time, 'witch hunts' were carried out. These 'witch hunts' consisted of nighttime raids on women's accommodation space, normally carried out by uniformed Military Police and the Special Investigation Branch (SIB), in the hope of catching women with other women in sexual situations. These methods and their resultant effect on women's lives will be the subject of Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade'. Olive recalled how she felt about being required to participate in these raids and the ways that she consciously subverted their intentions. When attached to the Special Investigation Branch (SIB) in the 1980s, she experienced difficulties when ordered to participate in a raid on the WRAC accommodation. She remembers that:

... the Warrant Officer we had there... absolutely hated lesbians. He made no bones about it and *that*, as far as he was concerned, was the reason for the entire existence of the SIB. [It] was to have a witch hunt... we just cordoned the whole area off with men at the end of the blocks and at the back of the blocks and just went right through the WRAC accommodation knocking on everybody's door and there was men outside the windows to stop anybody getting out the windows and it was just... It was just horrendous. I really couldn't find the words to describe that night to be honest, it was like something out of Nazi Germany. You do what you're told, much to my shame. As far as I'm aware nobody spoke up, certainly not in the group. I suppose it's an incident that will always play on my conscience but the only thing I can say in my defence was that every room I checked was clear, whether it was clear or not was another matter, but it was clear! If there happened to be somebody in the wardrobe then I never seen [*sic*] them. But there was so much

activity and so much panic and so many women running around terrified out of their wits because that was their career gone that it was easy to get lost in the crowd and nobody could actually point the finger at me and say, "well that's funny, you never found anybody and everybody else found at least one person" [WRAC, RMP, Sgt; 39 – I].

As time has passed and rules regarding homosexuality have changed, this type of behaviour would now be unacceptable. The military has encountered another problem however – how to achieve the required recruitment levels and retain those young men and women already trained against the lure of other careers which allow much more personal freedom. The Armed Forces have recognised that they are out of step with the expectations of young people regarding the extent to which they are willing to let the military control their private lives and have started to make an effort to address some of these issues⁴⁹. In 2002, the Guardian reported that the Army was looking at ways to retain soldiers who are increasingly critical of the tight controls the Armed Forces exert on individual space and their private life. Single men amount to about 50% of the Army's total strength and, in the article 'Army opens up barracks for sex', they were described by a senior army officer as 'increasingly pissed off because of silly rules and regulations'. The head of the Army at that time, General Sir Michael Walker, was 'encouraging commanding officers to be flexible towards in-barrack regimes' but was quick to insist that the Army was 'not setting up knocking shops' (Norton-Taylor, 2002). However, in the same article, it was made clear that these arrangements were only being looked at in relation to the UK and implied that women soldiers' bodies remained off limits (whether to civilians or other military personnel is up for debate).

The Lesbian Body

So far in this chapter I have explored how the enclosure of the female body is

49 As at 1 April 2002, the Armed Forces were understrength by 610 Officers and 8,430 Other Ranks. Of these statistics, the Army requires 270 Officers and 5800 Other Ranks (Ministry of Defence, 2003b: Table 2.10). This shortfall is made more pressing by the demand for ground troops in Iraq at the present time.

achieved through segregated gendered training (WRAC & QARANC), uniform design and policies regarding appropriate behaviour for women in the Army. In this, the final section of the chapter, I will examine how the *lesbian* body is constituted and experienced in the Army. The embodiment of the lesbian identity was one which, strangely enough, was hard to tease out of the data from my participants. Although participants were identifying as lesbians, much of what they wrote about their experiences of living as lesbians in the Army concerned the falsification of their identity – of masking their sexuality to pass as straight. However, from the questionnaire, I was able to ascertain that at least fifteen women used their dress and/or appearance to identify themselves as a lesbian to other women. In the interviews, I followed up this area of interest and I was able to gain an insight into how the lesbian body became visible to others. I asked Elizabeth, for example, how she recognised other gay women. She felt that this changed over time but that stereotypes still had meaning even in the current time of supposed ‘fluidity’ of identity. She said of herself: ‘Apparently I’m a very obvious dyke – I mean my hair has got shorter over the past five or six years... So yeah, I look the part, vaguely butch dyke’ [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]. Elizabeth feels that there was a definite visual embodiment of a lesbian, more obvious for ‘butch’ lesbians than for ‘femme’ lesbians, where the association with femininity and heterosexuality could lead to uncertainty. When asked about the possibility of being gay and not fitting a stereotype, she felt that although things had changed, people were still surprised if gay women did not conform to their idea of what a lesbian should look like (Walker, 2001). She explained:

Some people still don’t accept women with long hair to be *proper lesbians*. And there are some very ‘girly’ girls. I met two that were obviously a couple, with the most amazing long sheer dresses with long hair and they were also going out with each other! A woman with a tie had no look-in, you know? [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]

Elizabeth’s account demonstrates the expectation that more feminine gay women are expected to be attracted to more butch gay women and it is still seen as quite interesting that two feminine women would be together.

Davina also talked about how she and others dressed to go out to lesbian bars and clubs. At that time, in the late 1970s and early 1980s:

... people used to dress butch – more manly, short haircut, not always but invariably a short haircut... didn't wear make-up, didn't always shave their legs, wore pinkie rings, always wore trousers when they were out of uniform... That was how you knew. So if you teetered along on your stilettos and wore a mini skirt when you were out of uniform, definitely not a dyke. If you came along and had your brogues on, your nice shiny polished up brogues, your crisp trousers with a nice 'cut yourself' crease in your jeans...you definitely probably were. No, you definitely were, no probably about it [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

How women dressed when in civilian clothes was also important, although I personally consider this was as much to do with available alternatives to feminine clothing, such as skirts and dresses, as it was to do with wanting to have a particular style of design with which to be identified as gay. Since the wearing of jeans was not permitted on or off Army camps, there were not many fashionable options left. Many women smuggled their best jeans out of camp and changed on the train on the way to London to go clubbing. One of the main alternatives to having to wear male clothing in the period up to the mid 1980s, was to wear sportswear, such as tracksuits or shellsuits. Davina thinks that, back in the 1980s, '...it was accepted [that] it was part of your uniform as a lesbian to be more masculine to a certain extent, whereas now people tend to be... more interested in your interests as opposed to the way you dress or the way you look necessarily' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. When I asked Davina why she felt she dressed in a more masculine way she replied, 'I think it was a way of setting you apart from the majority of women... a way to say we are not passive, we are not here to serve you. We are strong, we are women but we are in your face and we are not gonna go away' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. When not in uniform, dressing in an obvious and, inevitably, identifiable fashion brought with it its own risks but many felt the gamble was worth it in order to communicate both their sexual identity to other women *and* their unavailability to men. To Davina,

this was 'hiding in plain sight', a point I will return to in Chapter 5: 'Identity on Parade'.

Most of the women I spoke to felt very strongly about how they felt when they were dressed in their military uniform. They expressed feelings of pride, of confidence, of self-esteem and of belonging. One or two even felt it was an interesting way to 'pull' - to attract other women. Olive, for example, told me that she '... found that the red cap and the [military police] arm-band was a magnet for the women in [name of unit]' and recalled attending a regimental dinner in full No.1 dress and then going into the town afterwards with friends. '...Everybody was drunk and somehow I got separated and ended up in [name of gay bar] and I remember telling a girl that two stripes on my arm meant that I was actually a General in the British Army!' {WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I}

Lesbians undermine the societal understandings of what it means to be feminine. Barbara Creed considers that:

...historically and culturally, the lesbian body - although indistinguishable in reality from the female body itself - has been represented as a body in extreme: the pseudo male, animalistic and narcissistic body. Although all of these deviant tendencies are present in the female body, it is the ideological function of the lesbian body to warn the 'normal' woman about the dangers of undoing or rejecting her own bodily socialization. This is why the culture points with most hypocritical concern at the mannish lesbian...while deliberately ignoring the femme lesbian...To function properly as the ideological litmus paper, the lesbian body must be instantly recognizable (1999: 122).

Tanya recalls that when she was serving in the Army in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was the 'mannish' or 'butch' lesbian who was punished. As she explained, '[In] Any relationship discovered, the "butch" was always penalised whereas "femmes" had always been seduced!' [WRAC, Signals, Pte; 59 – Q] The 'mannish' lesbian, as a threat to the military status quo, is not a new concept. In the United States as in the UK, as more and more women were needed in the military during the Second World War, there was concern that the type of

woman drawn to military service would be those wishing to reject feminine values '...for the embrace of the masculine'. Meyer argues that '...masculine appearance and behaviour, not only sexual acts between women, were the key criteria for defining the "lesbian threat" within the [US] WAC' (Meyer, 1996: 149). Clothing, and in particular the adoption of male dress by women (i.e. the military uniform), plays a large part in the construction of the 'mannish woman' as the 'freak', the target of institutionalised discrimination. It explains, at least in part, the extremes of policy where the designs of women's military uniforms have been concerned. As Enloe explains, these policies must achieve four objectives: women in military uniform should not be mistaken for male soldiers; the uniform should be sufficiently military in style as not to be mistaken for another uniformed occupation, such as a flight attendant; there should be no mistaking military women as anything other than representatives of the state military force; and the uniform should allow them to do their job effectively (Enloe, 2000: 263). I argue that the British Army has made every attempt to ignore this final point in the past and, by enforcing policies which reinforce gender stereotypes, has contributed to the belief that women cannot be effective soldiers.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that women's bodies within the military space are docile, deviant and subversive. It is a docile body because it is, in the Foucaultian model, both disciplined and useful. It is trained for efficiency of movement and achievement of task, even though the task has often been 'gendered' and deemed appropriate for women soldiers. Enclosed within its uniform, it is representative of the useful purpose to which it is being put (Foucault, 1977: 135-169). It is also 'doubly docile' in its subservient position within society to men (Bartky, 1990). The desire of the military institution to have a uniform purely to enclose the female body and to set them apart from the masculine body - the 'real' soldier - renders the female body 'deviant'. The emphasis on femininity reflects the desire that women in the military should demonstrate heterosexual behaviour, partly in order to defray concerns about homosexuality that are often associated with

strong, capable women in masculine occupations but also to reinforce the masculinity of the male soldiers. By doing so, however, the female body is disempowered and the 'docility-utility' relationship changes. Rather than utilising the useful body of the soldier to most efficiently complete the task, the Army shifts the 'docility-utility' relationship to the reinforcement of gender 'norms'. The female military body is considered to be *more* useful in its gendered embodiment than its soldierly one.

'Changes to the uniform over the last fifty years, especially to the 'working dress' that women wear day-to-day, has been instrumental in demonstrating women's capabilities in the workplace and may have helped to ease the integration of the women into the Services since the early 1990s. The increase in operational deployments has also assisted in demonstrating the wide range of women's abilities if properly trained, as well as their willingness to take on a more integrated and equal role. British women soldiers have proven themselves in war and in peace, in comfort and in difficult and testing conditions in the field, at home and abroad. However, as long as there are female soldiers within the uniform, and that uniform expresses femininity, I contend that women's bodies in the military will always be considered as 'deviant'. Societal understandings of gender and sexuality link masculinity and femininity with heterosexuality. To be non-heterosexual is understood to mean that gay men must be effeminate and women must be butch. Examination of these assumptions can undermine them very quickly but, nevertheless, they persist. Effeminate men cannot be brave, macho and physically strong, all attributes of the ideal soldier. Butch women might be ideal soldier material but they still have a deviant body and therefore are still 'not men' – and, moreover, they are no longer proper women either.

Lastly, women's bodies are subversive bodies in that they are capable of carrying out acts of resistance to challenge the power relationship within the military institution. Women's embodied experience has led them to be critical of equipment, to find it wanting (Richman-Loo and Weber, 1996). It has led them to challenge policy on pregnancy and homosexuality as well as highlighting the

danger of inappropriate footwear. The subversive body is also a sexual body, one that expresses desire. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, the sexual body of the subversive woman has fought against the controls and regulations which policed it. By protecting the heterosexual 'good girls' from unscrupulous squaddies by enclosing them in segregated space, however, the 'good girls' were left vulnerable to the 'predatory lesbian'. This led to the demonising of the lesbian body within the military space and the routing out of women who were known to be or suspected of being gay.

Although the abstract lesbian body is demonised, I would argue that the sexualised body of the gay woman in the military is the most subversive body. The docile (male) body of Foucault's theory is not the asexual or the celibate body; it is the heterosexual body. The military's version of the docile body includes male and female heterosexual bodies and it lays down acceptable behaviour for both. However, it also condones certain unacceptable behaviours. Sexually promiscuous behaviour is frowned upon, more for women than for men, but sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are treated through military medical services. A soldier contracting a STD may be disciplined but rarely, if ever, discharged from the service. Indeed, militaries have often provided sexual opportunity as a 'reward' to male soldiers (Wheelwright, 1994: 121-122). Until 1991, it was women in the British Armed Forces, regardless of whether or not they were married, who were either discharged or offered an abortion when the visible sign of their sexual activity, pregnancy, became obvious. However, the homosexual body has provided a different challenge.

The policy of associating femininity with heterosexuality, when applied within the British Army and indeed the British Forces as a whole, has been instrumental in targeting women who display behaviours, clothing and attributes considered to be 'mannish' as a means of identifying them as lesbians. Women were often well aware of these tactics and would try and circumvent the perception by consciously 'femming up'. The punishments for having the homosexual body in the docile, heterosexual space of the military have been severe - banishment

from that space and abandonment by the very institution that defined your identity (Ministry of Defence, 1996; Parker, 1982; Harries-Jenkins and Dandeker, 1994; Muir, 1992; Herbert, 1998). The way to survive was to reclaim some of your individuality, to assert some agency and become a subversive body.

To succeed, the subversive body needs two things, the knowledge of what identifies someone as 'straight' to other heterosexuals and what identifies someone as gay to other homosexuals. In our society and for women in the Army, if you look and act feminine, you are presumed to be heterosexual. Conversely, if you don't fit the stereotype, you are thought to be gay. Neither of these situations may be true but many will judge on these surface appearances. As my data illustrates (in this and other chapters), gay women in the military know how to get the message across that they are 'one of the girls'. They also know that identifying themselves as gay is risky (even after the ban was lifted in January 2000) and many, as protection against discovery and dismissal, discipline their private lives and spaces. Many socialised well away from the barracks, called partners 'he' in conversation and were cautious about opening up to new colleagues. Some moved into private accommodation. Most of the forty respondents mentioned destroying all photographs, correspondence and personal items that might be linked to a lover.

In the Army, the lesbian body had to create strategies to negotiate the minefield of being homosexual in a compulsorily heterosexual space. These strategies became the identifiers by which a lesbian was recognisable to others like her, a way of being selectively visible, but also of fitting in. Just as the uniform of the military identifies the rank, job, regiment or corps in a very obvious way, the 'uniform' of the lesbian community, while more subtle, is obvious to one who is looking for it. It could be argued, however, that the subversive body of the gay woman - by its very actions ill-disciplined - has created its own form of disciplined body. The un-forming of the docile body has created another form of docility, where the body fits in to the regimens of the gay identity and conforms to the uniformity of *its* codes. The agency required to reclaim the individuality to

be subversive may have lead to a new form of docility. In the next chapter, I explore my respondents' accounts of living lesbians lives in the Army. Some of the women were thrown out because their homosexuality was discovered, others left because they felt they were about to get caught and still more left with pensions and pride intact. All served 'subversively' for many years, challenging the docility imposed by the British Army to the end.

Chapter 5

'Identity on Parade'

Living Lesbian Lives: Managing Sexual Identity in the Military

Introduction

Lesbians have been dismissed from the British Army at a higher rate than lesbians or gay men from any other Service. During this thesis I have built up a picture of the historical and legal context within which lesbians in the British Army served until January 2000 and have explained the background to the military's policy on homosexuality. In Chapter 1, I posited that, due to the legal challenges of the early 1990s, the Ministry of Defence was required, for the first time since 1967, to develop a cogent argument to defend their ban on homosexuality. Having relied upon parliamentary 'rubber-stamping' of the five-yearly Armed Forces Bill to defend their position, the military was forced to focus on the reasons behind their policy. The result did not make pretty reading (Ministry of Defence, 1996). Underlying the whole policy ran a seam of fear of, and prejudice against, homosexual men and women. This fear, I believe, was not just concerned with the undisciplined, unruly body of the homosexual, whose behaviour could subvert the controls in place to monitor 'normal' sexual attraction (such as segregated accommodation), but was grounded in the belief that homosexual behaviour would undermine the hegemonic place of soldiering as the ultimate demonstration of masculinity.

This theme was explored further in Chapter 3: 'Camouflage' and Chapter 4: 'A Disciplined Body of Women', where I demonstrated how the gendered and sexualised institutional space impacts upon the lives of lesbians in the British Army and how they negotiate these boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour as women, as soldiers and as lesbians. In this final substantive chapter, I return to my participants' data to illustrate how the ban on homosexuality affected the forty women in this study. I examine the impact of the policy on their everyday behaviour and how they managed to live as lesbians within the military. Drawing on the qualitative data from the questionnaires,

supplementary correspondence and interviews, I explore such themes as the strategies my participants used to try and find out if other women were gay, where they went to meet other lesbians and how they coped with having no private space and therefore no privacy. I have already discussed the ways in which individuals 'embodied' their lesbian identity through the use of dress or clothing (see Chapter 4) but in this chapter I examine how women used other identifying symbols to make their sexual identity visible and how these changed over time.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this study came about, at least in part, because of my own dismissal from the Army for being a lesbian. In this chapter, therefore, I have also focused on the impact of the SIB investigation process on my participants and, if applicable, the effect of dismissal from the Army. By doing so, I make visible the machinery of organisational prejudice and the extent to which the Army were prepared to go in their efforts to enforce the policy on homosexuality. Finally I reflect on how things might have changed for lesbians in the British Army since 2000 and consider whether the lifting of the ban will make any material difference in lesbian's day-to-day lives as they manage their sexual identity.

Sexual Identity and Sexual Citizenship

In 1980, Adrienne Rich posited that heterosexuality is an institutionalised construction, something that '...has had to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandised, and maintained by force' (1980: 648). She argues that if heterosexual sex is 'natural', then why is so much time and effort spent on persuading women that it is normal? Social and cultural behaviour which seeks to control women's bodies (for example, clitoridectomy, marital rape) and manage their reproductive and sexual behaviour (for example, through marriage or restricted access to contraception or abortion) is deemed acceptable, even necessary, to promulgate a system of oppression and subordination. Rich puts forward an alternative model for all women, that of living a 'lesbian existence' and through a 'lesbian continuum' (1980: 648-649). Interestingly, she sees the need for lesbians to divorce themselves from the collectivity of male

homosexuality, as this relationship smothers the female experience and denies their political and historical voice. She argues that lesbians need to shake off the patriarchal constraints which have defined them as somehow 'asexual' – their relationships perceived as being grounded in friendships with other women rather than on sexual desire. Women need to '...deepen and broaden the range of what we define as lesbian existence, as we delineate a lesbian, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined...an energy' (1980: 650). Vera Whisman does not feel that lesbians are best served by widening their 'lesbian existence' to embrace other women. She considers that, '...aligning lesbians with gay men...portrays lesbians in a way that alignment with heterosexual women fails to do' (1996: 117). Deborah Cameron, in her re-evaluation of Rich's statement in the early 1990s, finds that the changes to the cultural context within which it is read allows a different interpretation. She argues that many (lesbian?) feminists, made silent by what I would term 'institutional homophobia' such as Section 28⁵⁰, have found it more and more difficult to take a radical stance and have retreated into what Rich describes 'banal' or minority politics: '...please tolerate us, we're just different, we can't help it, of course we won't proselytise' (1993: 246).

In previous chapters, I touched upon the idea that military service has been understood historically to be an important element of male citizenship identity and, that by serving in military uniform, women were able to lay claim to certain citizenship rights previously denied them (Summerfield, 2000; Heggie, 1999; Grayzel, 1997). Perceptions of citizenship in the UK are grounded in the work of T. H. Marshall, who considered citizenship to be made up of a type of legal contract between the citizen and the community. He considered that all those who fulfilled the status of citizen should have equal access to the rights and equal responsibility for the duties (Marshall, 1950). These rights include civil, political and social rights. Many feminists and social science scholars, however, view the Marshallian model of citizenship as being particularly blind to both gender and sexuality (see for example Lister, 1997; Voet, 1998; Walby, 1994; Richardson,

⁵⁰ Section 28 of the Local Government Act outlawed the 'promotion' of homosexuality in local authority schools (Richardson, 1998: 91).

1998; Richardson, 2000) and it is therefore prone to being associated with ‘... the institutionalisation of heterosexual as well as male privilege’ (Richardson, 1998: 88). It seems to me that the institutional construction of the military as male and heterosexual mirrors the institutional construction of citizenship as male and heterosexual, which brings to the fore the ways in which women soldiers, whatever their sexual identity, have been excluded from full citizenship status.

It is notable that testimony from those groups who bear the brunt of discrimination in the Armed Forces, heterosexual women, gay men and lesbians, is constructed in ways that provide evidence as to their fulfilment of their side of the citizenship contract. Jeanette Smith, dismissed from the RAF for being a lesbian said, ‘The MoD is wrong. Who someone sleeps with has absolutely no bearing on how they do their job. It’s as simple as that’ (Mills, 1995). Wilma recalls, ‘I had been a good soldier, all my reports had been exemplary, and yet my “services were no longer required”’ [WRAC, Pay Corps; 46 – SC]. In other words, they had done all that had been required of them, done their job well, policed their own behaviour (exemplary conduct rating) and held up their side of the bargain but the MoD ignored all these factors when deciding that their sexuality excluded them from the right to serve in the military. The MoD used their sexual orientation to break the contract of citizenship⁵¹.

Diane Richardson points out that, within the Marshallian model of civil, political and social rights, lesbians and gay men are excluded from full citizenship because they are denied legal parity with other (heterosexual) members of the community in such areas as access to employment (the Armed Forces), marriage and ‘...protection in law from discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sexuality’ (1998: 88). She argues that the limited access to citizenship rights that lesbians and gay men have been able to claim has been granted on condition that their demonstration of their sexual identity remains in hidden from public view – a model of citizenship ‘...based on a politics of tolerance and assimilation’ (1998: 89). Displaying behaviour that crosses the public/private line of

⁵¹ For comparative examples from the USA, see (Humphrey, 1990; Shilts, 1993; Shawver, 1995; Herek et al., 1996; Rimmerman, 1996; Scott and Stanley, 1994).

acceptability (as decided upon by the 'full' citizens - heterosexuals) often results in punitive action against lesbians and gay men for daring to suggest that they too belong in public, 'normal' space. Those who 'police' them greet changes to the boundaries with dismay. When the ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces was removed in January 2000, the Ministry of Defence introduced a new Code of Social Conduct for all personnel regardless of sexual orientation. The Code lays out a model for dealing with instances of misconduct within personal relationships involving Service personnel. Commanding Officers (COs) are advised to apply 'The Service Test' before interfering in the personal lives of staff. 'Have the actions or behaviour of an individual adversely impacted or are they likely to impact on the efficiency or operational effectiveness of the Service?' (Ministry of Defence, 2000b). Criteria for assessing these are supplied, together with possible actions to take. In the guidance notes which accompany the new Code of Social Conduct, COs are reminded that '...sexual orientation is regarded as a private matter for the individual' and that '...knowledge of an individual's sexual orientation is not a basis for discrimination' (Ministry of Defence, 2000a). The guidance also contains sample questions and answers to assist decision-making in the event of anticipated new situations. For example, lesbian and gay personnel might want to bring their partners to official functions and might wish to dance together. Would that be allowed? The guidance says:

In general...it would be appropriate to extend to homosexual partners the same arrangements as apply to unmarried heterosexual partners in respect of the particular function. Any guest should be sensitive to the innately conservative attitudes of some Mess members and their partners and be cautious not to cause unnecessary offence...Where partners wish to dance together...this might pass unremarked and cause no difficulty, on other [occasions] it could cause offence...those responsible for the function should intervene as discreetly as possible with a view to minimising any disturbance. It will always be appropriate for couples attending such functions to bear in mind that any overt displays of a partner's affection can cause offence. It would be sensible (and courteous) to consider beforehand whether any intended action or behaviour on their part might cause offence, and if in any doubt to avoid it' (2000a: 5-6).

It is interesting to note that, despite the MoD reminding everyone that sexual orientation is no longer grounds for discrimination, their attitude remains one of expectation that the lesbian and gay personnel will police their behaviour so as not to cause the 'innately conservative' heterosexual soldiers 'offence' or 'disturbance'. Indeed, although the language is dressed up to suggest courtesy and consideration for the 'team', the implication is that homosexual behaviour is likely to cause offence and so should be best left at home - that homosexuals should be glad that they have won the right to 'privacy' and should therefore keep their sex life out of the public gaze. The issue of privacy is considered in more detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

One important issue raised by Richardson is the relationship between citizenship and understandings of self-worth (1998: 96). What effect does exclusion from the full status of citizenship have on lesbians and gays in our community? Is it possible to feel good about yourself if the institutions which control your life, whether legal, political or social, consider you to be 'less than'? I would argue that, for many lesbians in my sample group, their feelings of self-worth were intrinsically linked to their identity as soldier and as a lesbian. Often their identity as soldier had more immediacy than their identity within their trade or their sexual identity. Olive told me: 'I never saw myself as a WRAC...I saw myself as a soldier first and a Police Officer second... That was my primary role' [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I]. For many, their sexuality remained the 'hidden' part of their identity, known only to a select few 'like them', because it was the potential instrument of their downfall. Yet their sexuality also placed them within a community of women and a community of lesbians which, despite the risks of discovery, they often felt unable to leave. When forced to leave the Army, many felt that their *whole* identity had been taken away, not just their occupational identity. I return to this subject later in this chapter when some participants speak of their feelings at the time that they were thrown out of the Army.

I feel that the legal challenges brought against the MoD by ex-Service personnel and their subsequent success in getting the ban on homosexuality removed, has fundamentally changed the status of lesbians and gay men as sexual citizens, not

just for military personnel, but for all 'minority' sexual identities. Their challenge highlighted the need for specific legal protection in the workplace against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The military shifted from being an institution with an overt policy of discrimination to the *only* organisation in the UK with employment protections for lesbian and gay employees bound in law⁵². The lesbians taking part in this research seem to have been able to claim for themselves a form of sexual citizenship, despite the restrictions. They demonstrate through their testimonies a determination to live the life they want to live, as lesbians and as soldiers in the Army. They have not been able to give up or change their sexual identity to make their life easier in the Army and they have not wanted to give up the Army to make their life easier as a lesbian.

My interest in these debates of sexual identity and sexual citizenship stems from a need to try and understand lesbian relationships in all their forms, whether expressing sexual desire or not, and to attempt to make sense of how individuals define their own sexual identity. Within the constrained space of the British Army, women's relationships with other women spanned the whole continuum of Rich's model, from working together and laughing together, from empowering one another to oppressing others, from romantic friendship to desire expressed through promiscuous and risky sexual encounters. Yes, these women were locked into one of the most patriarchal of organisations but they were able to subvert the institutional boundaries and live lesbian lives in some of the fullest forms. How is sexual identity defined anyway? Do you have to have had sex to be sexual; if you have sex with the 'opposite sex' are you straight; if you consider yourself to be gay but never have another sexual encounter, does that make you less gay? What about when you get older or become infirm or perhaps are just tired from a long day at work, does sexual inactivity and a lack of desire make you asexual? Can masturbation be classed as a sexual encounter and if so,

⁵² The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 now offers protection for employees who feel that they have been subject to discriminatory treatment due to their sexual orientation.

can that encounter be defined as gay or straight depending on who you are thinking about at the time? It is these subtleties that I am trying to tease out. It makes no sense to me personally to define my sexuality purely upon sexual encounters. Attraction happens for a variety of reasons and other women will not share my perception of what I find erotic. The diversity of desire, therefore, offers boundless opportunities and one which might incorporate Rich's concept of the 'unconfined' sexual identity, an 'energy' (Rich, 1980: 650)

When I asked Davina where she met her lover and what they did in their time together, she recalled that they met mainly in her room (she had her own room, whereas her lover lived in shared accommodation).

There wasn't really anywhere else to go... [she] would spend quite a lot of time in my room but we never used to lock the doors...there was always the opportunity that people would come in...but I mean, we didn't used to do anything *too* drastic [laughs]. We weren't getting too intimate with each other too often because it was just too dangerous [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Davina's time alone with her lover, therefore, was not about expressing sexual desire through the sexual act alone, because they had to consider both the location and the risk of discovery. Locking the door to get some privacy would have raised suspicions if they were discovered to be in a locked room together. Nancy recounted that several of her friends were thrown out of the Army after being the subject of SIB investigations. She said:

One investigation was prompted by correspondence from my friend being found during a search of the possessions of another lesbian under investigation. One of the others was prompted by my friend being found in a locked room with another woman in the early hours of the morning during a SIB raid [WRAC Stores Controller, Pte; 39 – SC].

Other ways were found to demonstrate affection, attraction and desire and perhaps, by doing so, these women began to redefine the erotic. Within their isolated lesbian existence, they could move outside the constraints of heteronormativity and reinvent desire.

Privacy

Stories about military life often emphasise the invasion of personal space by irate Sergeant Majors in white gloves carrying out kit inspections or checking the cleanliness of barrack rooms. Certainly in both basic and trade training, inspections like these are commonplace and the recruit is expected to be in a permanent state of readiness for such events. Often they are just in a permanent state of fear. When I was in training we were not expected to have any dirty washing *at all* in our personal lockers when inspections were carried out, nor were we allowed to have any un-ironed items! The only acceptable option was for the laundered clothes to be hanging in the drying room. I remember in desperation one day soaking my dirty washing (one day's laundry comprising of one shirt, one bra, one pair of tights and a pair of pants) under the tap and hanging it up in the drying room. Then I stood to attention all through the subsequent inspection, inwardly quaking and waiting for my name to be bellowed down the corridor when the Sergeant noticed that the wet items had not actually been washed!

Kit inspections could be ruthless. Their objective was to attain a high standard of kit maintenance throughout the squad and foster teamwork where recruits good at one thing would help others and *vice versa*. The tactics used by instructors, however, could include the ripping apart of one or more person's kit and bed space to instil a feeling of dread in the others, who would then all work harder to avoid similar treatment. Olive recalls that the female instructors at the WRAC training centre had a different approach regarding kit inspections than the male instructors at the Military Police training centre in Chichester. She said:

...there was a fairness about them that you didn't find in Chichester...they actually *wanted* you to succeed...they didn't want to lose recruits...whereas Chichester were quite happy to lose as many as couldn't take the abuse. I think that was the big difference because they [the WRAC instructors] still yelled at you and they still did your kit inspections [but] I don't ever remember my kit [being] thrown out the window at Guildford whereas it happened on a regular basis at Chichester and I don't ever remember having my locker wrecked...you know, just reaching

out and everything goes flying on the floor [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I].

Junior soldiers tended to share barrack rooms with a designated ‘space’ of their own, commonly known as their ‘bed space’. It was not normally much larger than a single bed and included a locker, perhaps a chest of drawers and some shelving above the bed. Although the soldier was responsible for the cleanliness and tidiness of this space – it belonged to them in that context - it was also the Army’s – able and liable to be entered, inspected and/or searched without notice. Even when soldiers progressed up the ranks and moved into single accommodation, they were still subject to inspections and vulnerable to searches by the authorities. How could women have a private life in the Army? Privacy entitles an individual to keep items of personal significance without fear or threat of discovery or beratement. Privacy means that you do not have to burn letters and photographs from friends and lovers. Privacy means that you can buy and read lesbian magazines, lesbian fiction and even erotica without risking your career. Privacy means you can own a vibrator or sex toys and not be considered in need of psychiatric treatment. Privacy means you can have a private life.

The construction of homosexuality as acceptable and tolerated *only* when kept within the boundaries of private space has been one of the ways in which homosexual behaviour has been controlled in society. Within non-military occupational space, lesbians and gay men are often told not to ‘flaunt’ their sexuality (see for example Skidmore, 1999). Flaunting can be considered to be anything from putting a picture of your partner on your desk, to challenging homophobic remarks made by colleagues. The new Code of Social Conduct in the Armed Forces likewise continues to put the onus on lesbian and gay personnel to suppress their sexual identity, to leave it at home, not to flaunt it by daring to dance with your partner at an official function. Flaunting is still viewed as a homosexual characteristic which causes discomfort to the heterosexual majority. As has been demonstrated, however, the military space is not, and never has been, considered to be private space. The attitude of the Armed Forces is that when you join up, you become their property. ‘You’re in the Army now!’

became shorthand for 'we own you'. The body is trained out of bad habits and re-educated and disciplined. The recruit is taught what to say, when to say it and how to behave in all sorts of situations. What each individual soldier does within each type of military space is highly controlled. Privacy, therefore, is something you have to leave the military space to attain.

Although technically, the same rules existed for all sexual behaviour within the military space, accounts show that only homosexual behaviour was consistently punished. Heterosexual behaviour was tolerated, overlooked, or even encouraged in some instances. When individuals were dealt with, the punishment tended to fall along gendered lines. Often men's sexual behaviour was ignored because it reinforced the stereotype of masculinity as sexually active and willing to take risks, but women's behaviour was normally punished. Women who engage in heterosexual relationships with other soldiers have often been constructed as the 'slut', even if the male soldier is of a higher rank and should be aware of issues around favouritism and abuse of power. Interestingly, when the female soldier holds the higher rank, she is often constructed as the 'siren', the lust-crazed 'Delilah' figure who tempts the male soldier, causing him to lose his judgement and sense of responsibility. In this instance, the woman often also receives the more severe punishment. Lieutenant Kat Astley (24) had an extra-marital affair with her male second-in-command, a married Staff Sergeant (33). At first, people seemed prepared to turn a blind eye but their behaviour began to impact upon the day-to-day workings of the unit and it was brought to the attention of senior officers. They considered that because Lt Astley held the higher rank, she should not have become involved and certainly should not have allowed the relationship to impact on the working relationships within the unit. She was instructed to resign her commission and was dismissed from the Army. Her lover, despite being almost ten years older and having many more years service in the Army, escaped with a lighter punishment and was allowed to remain in the Service. An Army spokesman said, 'if it had been an affair between two people in two different regiments then a slap on the wrist might have been in order. But when inappropriate behaviour affects operational effectiveness, it cannot be tolerated' (Kay, 2001: 4).

Restricted as they were within military space, how did lesbians deal with the lack of privacy? A common theme throughout the stories from the women in my sample group was of going to the city to go to gay bars or clubs, of going away for weekends with their lover, or of meeting up with groups of civilian friends off camp to socialise with them. Olive remembers going to clubs and bars away from camp but told of how she had to watch out for covert SIB officers in unmarked vehicles, who were often 'staking out' the known gay venues to see who came and went. She told me:

We used to go to [name of bar]...it was actually up a wee dead-end street...so anyone watching would have to be in a pub across the road and we used to go into all the pubs before we actually went into [name of bar]...people were checked at the door and she didn't let men in so it would have [had] to be a female Corporal, you know RMP or whatever...we would have known the minute she walked in and it would have emptied the place in a blink of an eye! [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I]

Davina also recalls going away from camp to find the privacy to 'be' a lesbian but there were limited choices in the 1980s. She said, 'Sometimes we'd go off site individually and meet up...there was one lesbian and one 'women-only' bar in [name of town] and...more often than not, we used to go up to London' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. Grace talked about how attending the sporting events like the Army 7s (hockey) weekends helped overcome her feelings of isolation as well as addressing the issue of privacy. Meeting up with her friends and other lesbians at these public events fostered feelings of privacy. Grace was able to relax her guard and 'be' herself. As she said: '...when I went up to [name of unit], I didn't really know anyone. Going to the Army 7s...there were a few people from my unit there and it's one of them things isn't it? "Oh I didn't know *she* was". So when I came back they all started talking to me' [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I].

The lack of privacy and of private space on camp meant that many lesbians took incredible risks to express their sexual desire for other women. Some behaviour could be interpreted as quite promiscuous and, with the knowledge of the AIDS

era, unsafe. Davina recalls that, because of the small numbers of gay women in the area, everyone knew one another quite well. As she explained:

...It can get quite incestuous really, all bonking each other, you know [laughs]...I saw something in a lesbian magazine...they had this little cartoony sort of thing saying, "Is there anyone at this party who hasn't slept with Jane?" and it made me roar 'cos it was a bit like that...back in [those] days it was, "Is there anyone here who hasn't slept with so and so? No, we've all slept with her! Twice me! Five times me!" [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]

She mentioned that in her circle of friends, very few were in long-term relationships. Perhaps this reflects the lack of a network of private spaces within which to develop relationships but her experience was that, '...everybody just seemed to go off out discoing, meet somebody, stay with them, do the necessary [in the] back of the car or whatever and then back to camp' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 - I]. Anne and her partner, however, met when both were serving in the Army in the early 1970s. They left the Army in order to avoid being separated by different postings and are still together [WRAC Signals, Cpl; 54 – Q]. Cathy and Catriona also met in the Army and have managed to continue their relationship despite the difficulties of Army life [WRAC AGC, SSgt; 46 – Q and WRAC Administration, WO1; 45 – Q].

There might be a connection between the size of the lesbian community within a camp and sexual behaviour when outside it. In a camp with a larger number of women soldiers and a bigger lesbian community, there is perhaps more opportunity to experiment, to have a series of sexual partners and to feel a sense of belonging even when not in a relationship. For other women, more isolated by their trade or location, or for those who could not access the civilian network of gay bars and discos, a longer-term relationship was perhaps their main means of connecting to the lesbian continuum. Some military space appears to have been viewed as more private and safe for lesbians than others have – the WRAC Training Centre at Guildford for example. It was a women-only barracks and there appears to have been a common understanding among the participants that Guildford had a very high percentage of lesbians on the staff there. This

perception influenced decisions about postings, feelings of safety and expressions of sexual identity (see also Parker, 1982).

Living Lesbian Lives Through the Decades

The forty women in my sample group lived lesbian lives throughout five separate decades in the British Army. Two women enlisted in the late 1950s, five in the 1960s, eighteen during the 1970s, eleven in the 1980s and four in the last decade of the twentieth century.

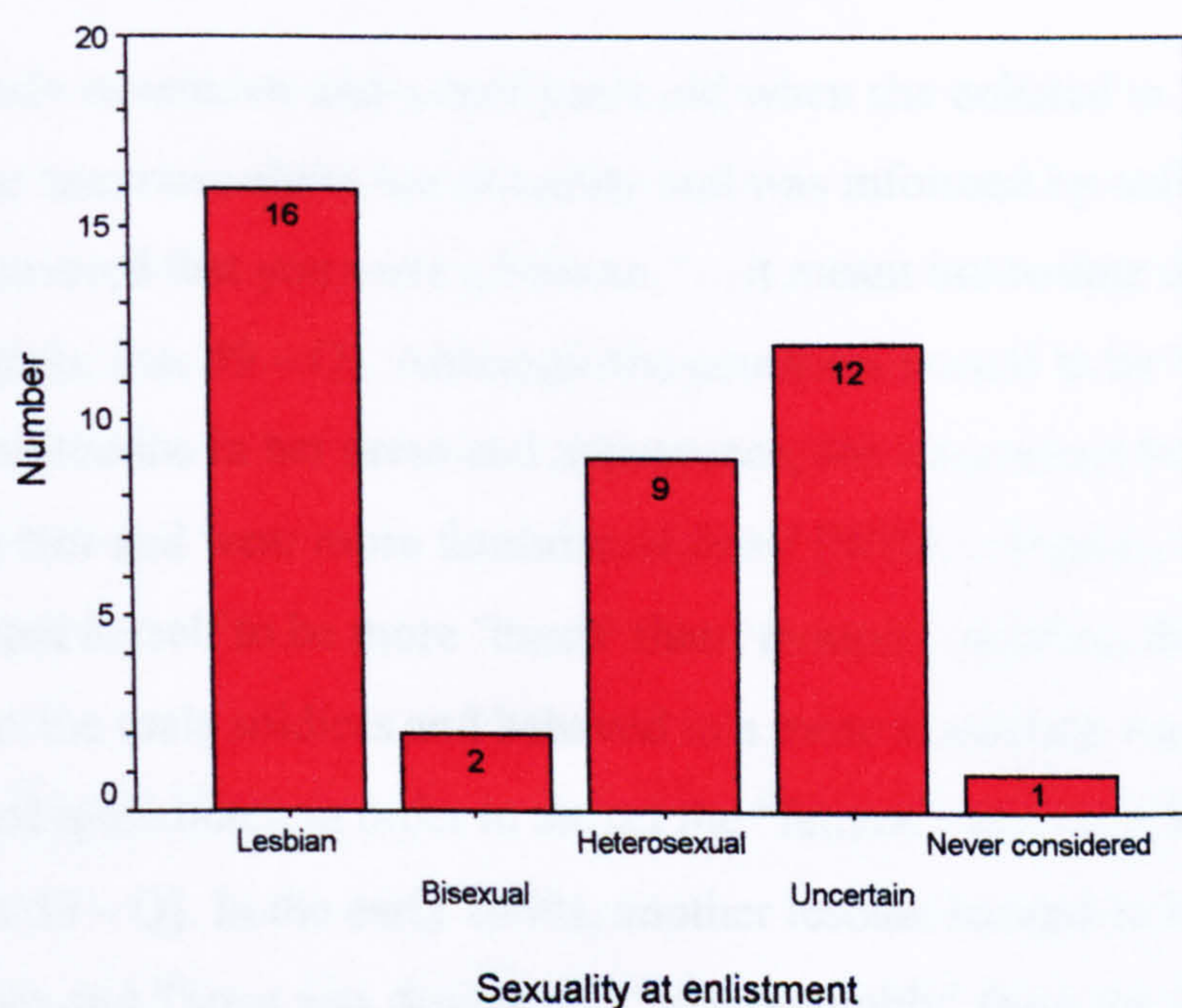


Figure 4: Sexuality (self-defined) at date of enlistment

Although all forty now self-identify as lesbian or bisexual, at the time of enlistment they held different opinions. In the questionnaire, I asked them to think back to when they joined the Army and describe how they perceived their sexuality at that time. Figure 4 shows a broad spread of identities, with over half considering themselves to be either heterosexual or uncertain. Of the two women who joined up in the late 1950s, one identified as lesbian and one as uncertain. Xandra was twenty years old when she joined the Army and trained to be a Physical Training Instructor (PTI). She knew that homosexuality was not allowed in the Army, having been told by a friend in the TA to be ‘very careful’, but was unaware of the penalties. She thought her sexuality had influenced her decision to join up, saying: ‘I was having a relationship with a married woman

and wanted to get out of it, so [I] thought [by] joining the Army I would meet similar women to myself' [WRAC PTI, ASgt; 61 – Q]. She signed on for a three-year period but extended her service by one year, eventually leaving of her own free will at the rank of Acting Sergeant. She felt that dress and appearance was the main way of telling which other women were gay at this time, other than associating with a group of women who were known to be gay. She remembers getting together with other known lesbians and arranging to go to the gay clubs, such as 'Gateways' in London [WRAC PTI, ASgt; 61 – Q].

Tanya was only seventeen-and-a-half years old when she enlisted in 1959. At the time, she was uncertain about her sexuality and was informed by colleagues that if it was discovered that you were a lesbian, '...it meant immediate discharge' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 59 – Q]. Although she considers herself to be 'sporty' rather than masculine in her dress and appearance, she remembers being told to '...grow my hair and wear more feminine clothes' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 59 – Q]. She considered herself to be more 'butch' than 'femme', recalling that she wore her beret like the male soldiers and behaved in a more masculine way '...so as to be considered more butch in order to attract the "femme" women' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 59 – Q]. In the early 1960s, another lesbian handed in her name to the authorities and Tanya was discharged 'dishonourably' from the Army. There is never a 'good' time to be thrown out of the Forces, but in the 1960s, homosexuality was still a taboo subject and society was often just as condemning as the military.

Not much changed for women who joined up in the 1960s such as Erica, Ivy and Sandra, who all mention the 'butch-femme' divide as being expressed by clothing and appearance, as well as behaviour [Q]. More gay bars and clubs were opening up in the main cities and these venues became the main way of associating with other gay women outside of a military camp. Lorraine was the only woman who mentioned having lesbian pen-pals [WRAC Postal & Courier Operator, Cpl; 52 – Q]. There is a suggestion from a couple of women, however, that the sixties was a decade when women could behave in ways that in other decades would not have been tolerated. Beth said that she took no special

precautions to prevent anyone finding out she was gay: 'What you saw was what you got – it was very apparent I was gay' [WRAC Kennelmaid, LCpl; 52 – Q]. Being more open and honest, however, was not a guarantee of different treatment. She recalls that her life was made very difficult because of how she looked and behaved and it was suggested that it would be better for her to 'come clean' so '...I decided to tell the authorities myself that I was a lesbian' [WRAC Kennelmaid, LCpl; 52 – Q]. Beth was discharged in 1969.

From the questionnaires, I was able to discern that the 1970s and 1980s were the decades when jewellery became an identifying symbol of sexuality. Just as the wedding or engagement ring signifies heterosexuality, rings became a method of being selectively visible as gay. Twenty-two of the respondents mentioned jewellery as being a means of identifying other gay women and nineteen of these women enlisted and served during these two decades. The symbolic meaning behind the wearing of particular kinds of rings was not confined to the lesbian community however. Grace said:

...someone once said that people wear black onyx on their pinky [sic] finger or something daft like that and that sort of stuck in my mind when I went to [name of unit]...one of the lads said to me "Are you gay?" and I said "No, why?" and he said "Because you've got a black onyx ring on". It was just that ring there [indicating ring on her finger]. My grandma had bought it for my 18th birthday before I joined the Army and I was like "Oh my God!" It was just so pathetic. But I mean everybody still looks for rings and things but I thought that was so stupid [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I].

Even though Grace did not subscribe herself to the symbolic meanings, she acknowledged that others do and that even in 2001 (the date of the interview), certain types of rings were still considered as identifying markers of sexuality. Although lesbian books and magazines were becoming more accessible, it was still very risky to own such items⁵³. Women serving abroad were limited as to how they could access such items as post could be, and was, intercepted and

⁵³ *Spare Rib* magazine, a British publication, was first published in 1972. One of the first publishers of lesbian novels, *Naiad Press*, was also formed in the early 1970s but it was difficult for British women to access these American publications except through mail order.

there were no lesbian bookshops near British Army camps. Women had to resort to other means to signal their sexuality and their availability. Many mentioned that owning certain records or listening to particular singers or groups was a good indicator.

Legal challenges to the military's control over women's sexual agency started in the 1990s. This was also the decade which brought increased access to personal technology. Personal computers became more commonplace and women were able to ensure a certain degree of privacy because they retained control over the means of communication. Mobile phones have also assisted by reducing the chance of conversations on public phones being overheard, thereby increasing the chances of claiming some sort of private life. Also, since the 1990s, more flexibility regarding accommodation has been permitted, with single women, such as Isobel [QARANC Nurse, SSgt; 36 – Q] and Fiona [QARANC/RAMC Administrator, Major; 44 – Q] taking the opportunity to live in private accommodation off camp. Many women bought their own property which contributed to the feeling of having a life separate from the Army and of having both private space and privacy. Some of these points are explained in more detail in the next section.

Hiding in Plain Sight

'...Jewellery-wise, a lot of the lesbians wore pinkie rings. Oh look! I've got one on now!' said Davina when I asked her about the ways lesbians indicated they were gay to other women [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. 'Oh look! So have I!' I replied. Davina served during the 1970s and 1980s when this trend in jewellery appeared. No one seemed to know how it started but many were aware of it. Both Davina and Olive told me that women were strictly controlled as to what type of jewellery could be worn when in uniform – a wristwatch, wedding and/or engagement rings, studs or hoop earrings but nothing that would show around the neck. Davina posited that it was uncommon for straight women to wear pinkie rings, they tended to wear rings on the middle and third fingers. As she explained: 'It's not the sort of thing that you see women wearing. Men tend to wear pinkie rings. Lesbians wear pinkie rings. And Princess Anne! [laughs]'. She

continued: ‘...it’s probably a terrible generalisation, but it’s just that in the Armed Forces at the time it just seemed to be that if you wore one it was just on your little finger. It meant, “I am part of the sisterhood”’ [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. The pinkie ring was something that could be worn in or out of uniform, thereby retaining the sense of sexual identity even within the military enclosures of uniform and barracks. Olive also remembers rings being significant but, like Grace, recalls that black onyx rings were the ones associated with lesbians. ‘[I]t was one of the first signs that you looked at when you were up the Mess or shopping or whatever and that was almost like sending a message’ [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 39 – I]. Both types of rings seem to have been ‘live’ in the same period. I recall that I had a black onyx ring right at the very beginning of the 1980s which I wore for several years before changing to a pinkie ring. Lesbians in the military were required to find a subtler symbol of the sexuality than civilian women. Elizabeth, who served in the TA and was therefore only temporarily in the military environment, mentioned that lesbians in the civilian community used the labrys or black triangle earrings as signifiers of sexual identity. She said: ‘Where was I the other day and somebody was wearing a labrys – oh a Women’s Aid Conference – and I thought, “Oh, I never knew about *her*”’ [WRAC (TA) Supply, Captain; 38 – I]. In Chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which lesbians used both civilian and military clothing as a signifier of their sexual identity. Dressing in an obvious and, inevitably, identifiable fashion brought with it its own risks but many felt the gamble was worth it in order to communicate both their sexual identity to other women and their unavailability to men. Davina put it like this:

We were hiding in plain sight really because you could go into an Army camp and spot the dykes a mile away because of the way they dressed and because of the way they were...it was a crazy thing really because you were making it sort of more obvious to be that way and dress that way. Maybe we just couldn’t help it, I don’t know. Maybe we just didn’t look at it in that sort of way. We were more interested in...showing other people, the people that we wanted to know, you know, the *women*...[we were] saying, “Here I am, I’m here and I’m the same as you and I’m one of you”. I think it’s a double-edged sword – you wanna make it obvious...but not too obvious because it’s gonna get you into a lot of trouble...But I do think...it was also saying we are definitely

not the sort of feminine female that you are looking for, as a man. We are our own separate sort of group. 'Cos I've never thought of myself as anything other than female, feminine, even in my butchest days [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

This final statement is interesting and demonstrates, as was discussed in Chapter 3: 'Camouflage', the resistance that many women in my study displayed to categorising themselves too rigidly as either masculine or feminine.

SIB Investigations and the Consequences of Dismissal

When lesbian venues became known about and signals that allowed selective 'visibility became obvious, there was more chance that the authorities would act to try and catch lesbians out. Often this resulted in lesbians having to change their behaviour to protect themselves and others. Yvette said: 'I hardly ever socialised with my partner in the same town that we worked in... I tried to keep my social life with my gay associates separate from those who were straight' [QARANC Administrator, Major; 45 – Q]. Wendy said, 'I never spoke about my female partner. Everything I related to was "I" and not "we". I disassociated myself from gay women known to me in mixed company' [WRAC RMP, SSgt; 42 – Q]. Mention has already been made of the SIB using covert means to watch who entered and left certain bars and clubs, as well as monitoring who left the barracks with whom. A few women mentioned that female Military Police officers were often sent 'undercover' (no pun intended) to trick lesbians into revealing themselves as gay. Yvette recalled being 'chatted up' by a female RMP trying to catch her out [QARANC Administrator, Major; 45 – Q] and Jean was investigated as a result of a covert operation involving a female member of the SIB which, although it did not end in her discharge, effectively ended her career ambitions [WRAC Administrator, Sgt; 38 – Q].

Many SIB investigations were carried out over the fifty years from 1950 to 2000 to either rout out lesbians or to investigate allegations made as to an individual's sexuality. An incredible amount of taxpayer's money was used to finance covert operations, to trace phone calls and intercept mail and to transport investigators around the world to interview accusers, suspects and their friendship networks.

In a newspaper report in 1994, an ex-Military Police officer, herself discharged from the Army for being gay, recalled being involved in an investigation to ascertain whether or not an officer serving in Benbecula in the Hebrides was a lesbian. She recalled that:

A big team flew up from Aldershot to join me, and we embarked on a very thorough enquiry. It cost thousands of pounds, and investigators even flew to Cyprus, Germany and Hong Kong. You could understand it for a major murder enquiry but not for a lesbian investigation, based on one person's accusations (Hicklin, 1994).

From the data assembled from my participants, there appear to have been several big investigations or purges that are remembered. Northern Ireland in the mid 1980s was one such period and two of the participants appear to have been caught up in that and discharged as a result. While the investigations themselves are meant to be inconvenient, stressful, intrusive and humiliating, the consequences were often far-reaching and affected not just the job prospects of the individual but also the emotional wellbeing of the women involved. Getting kicked out of the Army did not just mean the loss of a job for lesbians. It meant the loss of employment, training, a good income, pension, health care, accommodation, food and clothing, as well as friendship and support networks and status within a particular community. The consequences included unemployment, the need to retrain, financial difficulties, debt, health and psychological problems, including depression and low self-esteem. When an ex-lover or acquaintance handed in a name which triggered an investigation, many women felt a personal sense of betrayal, which was then magnified to an institutional level when the Army dismissed them, irrespective of their abilities. Sometimes, investigations were carried out as a result of someone confessing her homosexuality and requesting a discharge from the Army. Bizarrely, the military seemed to want to hang on to these people because they considered they might be lying in order to facilitate a speedy discharge, thereby avoiding fulfilling their contract of service or the payment required to buy themselves out. The Ministry of Defence stated that:

...it was necessary for the investigators to find supporting evidence; this was essential in cases when the accusation of involvement in homosexual conduct was denied or when doubts existed as to the validity of, or rationale behind, the admission of homosexuality (1996: 8).

The investigations were not pleasant, nor were they meant to be. The individual concerned was interviewed, often more than once and under trying conditions. Their room or bed space was searched thoroughly and in many instances items, such as address books, letters or photographs were confiscated. These items were often never returned to the individual, whether discharged or not. The interviewers made a point of asking very personal and intimate questions under the auspices of trying to substantiate the homosexuality claim or allegation. The questions were often based upon stereotypes about lesbians and lesbian behaviour.

Jeanette Smith served in the RAF for five years before being discharged in 1994 because she is a lesbian (European Court of Human Rights, 1999: 42-43). She admitted she was a lesbian early on in the investigative process and stated that she was currently in a long-term relationship with a civilian woman. The two women had a foster daughter living with them in their civilian home. During the interview she was asked repeatedly about how she came to realise she was a lesbian and about her previous partners, their names and whether they were in the RAF. She was questioned as to her current relationship and, although she refused to answer questions about their sexual relationship, she had to admit they had a 'full sexual relationship' in order to 'substantiate her homosexuality'. Other questions asked of her included whether she and her partner were having a sexual relationship with their foster daughter, whether she '...had thought about HIV, whether she was being 'careful', what she did in her spare time and whether she was into 'girlie games like hockey and netball'. All these questions appear to be based upon stereotypes, equating homosexuality with paedophilia, with unsafe sexual practice, especially AIDS and with predatory sexual behaviour in order to 'recruit' young people into 'unnatural' sexual practices (Griffin, 1998; Fuss,

1991; Skidmore, 1998). Her partner, a civilian, was also interviewed as 'corroboration' (European Court of Human Rights, 1999: 42-43).

The consequences of dismissal for Tanya were also severe. She said that she was: 'Extremely upset, angry and resentful because it was nothing to do with my work'. She lost several jobs in the years subsequent to her discharge when employers found out about her sexuality. Her family also turned against her. 'I have been disowned by my mother. [I am] unable to see my nephews and nieces because I am the 'shame' of the family' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 59 – Q]. Others like Lorna felt a sense of relief that her time in the Army was over. A subsequent employer, however, upon finding out that she had been dismissed from the Army for homosexuality, demanded that she sign a declaration that she would not allow her private life to impact in her workplace [WRAC Postal & Courier, LCpl; 42 – Q]. Claudia remembers feeling a great sense of shame, which was exacerbated by her discovery that she had a criminal record for 'unnatural conduct', even though she was never charged with this offence. She found it difficult to get work as, '...in order to mitigate it, I had to out myself' [WRAC RMP, Sgt; 40 – Q].

Davina, a Corporal in the Military Police, had been visiting her girlfriend in a different unit and they had been out celebrating together. She recalls,

I was caught, very drunk and very naked, in my girlfriend's bed...I was only interviewed once, by the RSM (RMP)...on the same night [that] I was caught and whilst still being very drunk. He interviewed me alone, having dismissed the female sergeant...he made sure I drank copious amounts of coffee, asked me if I was a lesbian to which I replied "Yes" and he then proceeded to write out a statement to that effect. [I] refused to give him any details of my sex life - I believe we settled on the expression "mutual masturbation" in the end...At some stage, I was informed that a cache of letters from me to my girlfriend had been found in her room. I was not allowed to see her or anyone else during this procedure {WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I}.

Proper interview procedures were not carried out in this case. Two RMP/SIB officers should have interviewed Davina, preferably one of whom was female. She should have been allowed to sober up before being questioned and in no

circumstances should the interviewer have written the statement unless the accused was fully aware of what he or she was signing. Adequate refreshment and toilet breaks are required to be given regularly or as necessary. Davina was entitled to request that a unit representative be present to ensure proper procedures were adhered to. None of these procedures seem to have been applied in Davina's case. Legal representation would not have been allowed because she was not being charged with an offence and there was therefore no recourse to legal assistance (see Chapter 2).

The next day, she was sent back to her own unit and, convinced that the SIB would be hard on her heels to search her accommodation, she burnt all her letters, photographs, her address book and other personal mementoes. She was scared that her personal information would lead the SIB to others, her friends, colleagues and ex-lovers. As luck would have it, the Commanding Officer of her unit (she was not serving with a Military Police company at the time) refused to let the SIB into the barracks, but Davina was forced to leave the Army nevertheless, on the basis of her 'confession' and because she had been caught in another women's bed. At first, she felt '...a little relieved, then defiant, then frightened when I realised I could not go home and had nowhere else to live and no job and I would lose contact with friends' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I & SC]. The isolation was exacerbated by the very destruction of her lesbian history, her memories contained within letters, photographs and other personal items. Almost all of the women in my survey stated that they were very diligent about getting rid of written material, such as Danielle, who 'sent all letters and photos from gay friends and partners back home' [WRAC Signals, Pte; 27 – Q] and Nancy who took similar precautions:

I kept no correspondence on camp that could be misconstrued during an SIB investigation. Also [I was] careful what was said in phone calls between partners during working hours. [I was] wary of new people posted to the accommodation. [I] stayed in hotels away from camp on weekends [WRAC Stores Controller, Pte; 39 – Q].

Seventeen women specifically mentioned destroying letters and photos or sending them to a safe location. Others felt that they were careful about keeping contact addresses and telephone numbers but there was only so much they could do if they wanted to maintain friendships at all.

Davina makes an interesting point (see above) regarding the isolation felt by many lesbians when they were forced to leave the Army. Family networks were often unaware that their relative was a lesbian and therefore the individual had to either 'come out' to them to request financial and practical support such as accommodation, or lie to them and risk them finding out anyway. 'Coming out' might put the relationship under strain or risk of estrangement, as in Tanya's situation. Many women who had been discharged felt an obligation to protect their friendship networks of military lesbians in case, as Davina explains, '... they were accused of being lesbians because of their association with me' [WRAC - RMP, Cpl; 43 - I]. Kathleen was also a Military Policewoman and was serving in Northern Ireland when she was subject to an investigation by the SIB. Her name had been mentioned during a much larger investigation. This appears to have been a well-used tactic of the SIB - to question and/or badger women to reveal names of friends, colleagues and even complete strangers that they knew, thought or suspected were gay. Many women were not able to hold out against the pressure and some were promised better treatment themselves if they 'helped out' the SIB. Kathleen was arrested, placed into 'open arrest' (a method of placing someone under arrest but allowing them to remain in a restricted area, normally their accommodation or the Army camp itself - a form of 'house arrest') and interviewed several times. She was subsequently discharged, her 'services no longer required'. Her feelings at the time included: 'Anger, indignation, betrayal, amusement [and] relief, followed by disbelief that an injustice had been carried out'. She suffered from depression after being discharged from the Army and she has developed a '...mistrust of authority figures'. She also mistrusts the legal institution and the law, perhaps feeling that, because there was no protection in her case, she lost her job, her income and her lifestyle. Kathleen does say, however, that she is much more likely to stand up against bigots, racists, homophobes and '... anyone who fits into these categories,

sometimes at the risk of losing my job' because of this life-changing event [WRAC RMP, LCpl; 38 – Q].

Beth was discharged in the late 1960s after she admitted to being a lesbian. She recalls that it '... felt like the end of the world [being] thrown out into [the] cold world with a dishonourable discharge, very little money, no support and a dread of the future'. She found it extremely frustrating trying to get a job because '...people found it difficult to look beyond the reasons that I had to leave the Army' and she felt she was treated like a criminal [WRAC Kennelmaid, LCpl; 52 – Q]. Zara was only seventeen-and-a-half when she joined the Army and commenced her basic training. She was intending to join the Intelligence Corps and, because of this, was required to pass a security vetting procedure. Although she lied about her sexuality and had destroyed items in case her belongings were searched, the Army discovered she was a lesbian and she was summarily dismissed. In this instance, she was not subjected to an investigation because of her age. Also, because she had not completed her training, she could be discharged forthwith. She was only in the Army for three months [WRAC Intelligence Corps, Pte; 27 – Q]. Julie, who spent nine years in the TA, was devastated by her dismissal from the Army. 'My life was turned upside down. I went into deep depression. The Army was my life, I lived and breathed the TA – it came before anything. I was there days, evenings and three or four weekends a month' [WRAC (TA) Signals, Cpl; 42 – Q].

One of the most distressing situations involved Marilyn, who was a Lance Corporal in the Royal Corps of Transport (RCT). During the 1980s, while serving in Northern Ireland, she had a relationship with another member of the WRAC. Unfortunately, another female soldier (Military Police) found out about the relationship and threatened to report her. Within days she was picked up from her place of work and brought to the SIB offices to be interviewed. Although she was not formally arrested, she was escorted everywhere, the room was guarded and Marilyn felt no doubt that she '... was not free to leave either. It was extremely oppressive and demeaning' [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – SC]. When she was interviewed, the investigators told her that other women soldiers had

confessed to being lesbians and had named her, a popular tactic to gain a confession. As in Davina's case, the proper interview procedures were not implemented. No unit representative was present; she was not cautioned or apprised of her rights. Contemporaneous notes were not taken and the interview was not recorded. Questions, mostly about her sex life, were repeated over and over again and the investigators took it in turns to lose their temper. Marilyn denied all the allegations and eventually was released.

Not long afterwards, she was posted back to the UK and the SIB carried out another investigation, searching her room and interviewing her regarding allegations of homosexuality. Having taken the initiative to find out exactly what her rights were, she requested that her choice of representative be provided. The SIB investigator refused. After informing her Officer Commanding of these events, the SIB investigator was forced to allow a representative to be present for all subsequent interviews, where notes were taken. The investigations would finish and then the SIB would return weeks later and start the process all over again. By this time, Marilyn felt she '... would never escape this oppressive conduct and that wherever I was posted to in the Army, this will always be following me' [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – SC]. She lost weight, was physically sick, had problems eating and sleeping and was feeling very stressed. She remembers this time as '... the most awful time of my life' [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – SC]. Eventually she was discharged. She was told to sign a form admitting that she was a homosexual so that she could be discharged on voluntary grounds. She was told that if she did not sign it, her conduct rating might be affected, which would affect her job prospects for the future. Forced to choose, she signed the form and was dismissed from the Army. These investigations were carried out over about a three year period and certainly caused Marilyn a great deal of upset, stress and uncertainty. Remarkably, she did not want to leave the Army – she had applied to join up when she was only sixteen and had only ever wanted to be in the Forces. Like many other women in my sample group, Marilyn did not hate her job, the environment, or the Army – just the treatment meted out to her in the quest to purge all lesbians from the military. She told me that a further ramification of her discharge was that she got married. 'I thought I never wanted

to see another lesbian again – however, I have since separated and am getting divorced!’ [WRAC Driver, LCpl; 36 – Q] In subjecting her to the type of harassment that they did, the Army succeeded in getting Marilyn, even temporarily, to suppress her feeling about, and attraction to, other women.

Several women, such as Sylvia, were ordered to go and see either the Medical Officer and/or a Psychiatrist [WRAC Driver, Pte; 48 – Q]. Unlike in civilian life, military doctors can be ordered to divulge details of a patient’s file to a Commanding Officer and the point of these visits was to establish whether the individual was displaying any signs of ‘deviant’ behaviour or was likely to consider harming herself. Homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s list of psychiatric disorders in 1974 (Wellings et al., 1994: 178) but women in the British military were still being referred to a psychiatrist in the late 1980s. The medical reports added weight to the request for administrative discharge, in effect, because they assisted in the classification of the soldier as another form of ‘undesirable’, another unruly body.

A final consequence of dismissal from the Army because of homosexuality was the speed at which the bureaucratic machine turned. While the SIB investigations could drag on for months or even years, it only took a few days, or perhaps a few weeks if an appeal had been lodged, for the discharge paperwork to be processed. Women were normally returned to the WRAC Training Centre in Guildford pending discharge which afforded little time to organise alternative accommodation and employment. When a soldier is discharged under ‘end of service’ terms, he or she receives resettlement training including skills training, advice about applying for jobs, help in finding accommodation and often a financial grant to ease them through the transition to civilian life. None of these benefits are made available to a soldier discharged because of homosexuality, even though his or her conduct rating might be better than some of those who do receive it.

Telling Sexual Stories

The construction of sexual identity almost always involves the construction of some sort of sexual story or 'script'. This story assists people to explain to themselves and to others the basis of their understanding as to their subjectivity. It is an area of academic interest that spans several decades but has been gathering momentum in the past ten to fifteen years (Gagnon and Simon, 1974; Jackson, 1998; Plummer, 1995). Vera Whisman (1996) and Lorene Gottschalk (2003) offer differing approaches to a similar theoretical concept, that of establishing how gay men and lesbians make sense of their sexual identity and how they construct their sexual stories around their beliefs as to its origins. Whisman considers there are three basic types of stories: determined, chosen and mixed. Determined stories are grounded in beliefs of having been born that way, chosen stories are based on understandings of having made a conscious choice and mixed accounts combine aspects of both models (Whisman, 1996: 69-106). Gottschalk's recent study:

...examined the dominant cultural beliefs about the aetiology of lesbian sexual orientation and identity over three historical periods and sought to establish the relationship between such dominant beliefs and women's perceptions and understandings about how they became lesbians (2003: 221).

Gottschalk considers that there are three dominant accounts which are related to specific periods in time. The biological basis (determinist model) was the dominant account during the 1950s and 1960s within sexual stories. In the 1970s and 1980s, choice became the most popular and since the 1990s, she has established that there is a swing back towards biological explanation, allowing for a mix of belief systems to co-exist (2003: 221).

During the face-to-face interviews, all participants were asked about when they realised that they were lesbians and how they dealt with it. Elizabeth served in the TA and had much more of a 'private life' since she was only required to be in military uniform for several weeks a year. She feels that everyone else knew that she was gay before she did. Her mother asked her if she was a lesbian when she was in her teens but Elizabeth had not even considered it. At college, people

would comment on her style of dress and mistake her for a man but she said that these things did not bother her. Rumours circulated that she was gay but Elizabeth said: 'I didn't mind being labelled as a lesbian but I never thought it to myself...It never bothered me 'cos I saw myself as straight' [WRAC (TA) Stores, Captain; 38 – I]. At one point she considered that she might be bisexual but it was only when she was trying to work out why she was so unhappy in her marriage that she faced the possibility that she might be a lesbian.

I went through everything – kids, job, house – every single scenario. And basically when I got to the bottom of the heap I was thinking, "Well, actually I don't fancy this bloke, I don't want to be with him". And it was more and more women that I was fancying and I suddenly thought, "Well, maybe I've got to think about this" and after a week I thought, "Okay, I'm quite happy with fancying women more than men" [WRAC (TA) Stores, Captain; 38 – I].

Once she had come to terms with it herself, Elizabeth felt no need to hide her sexual identity and, since she presumed her family and friends would not be surprised with her revelation, she wanted to 'come out' quickly.

This town's only got about two main streets and I think everybody knew within two weeks. I went to a friend and I told her and then she said, "I won't tell anybody" and I said, "No, no, no! I want you to. I want to get it over with; I can't deal with this drip-feeding. Just get it over with 'cos then it will be last week's news". So that's what you do. You find the biggest gossip and you let them tell [WRAC (TA) Stores, Captain; 38 – I].

Although Elizabeth did not see the point in being secretive about it in her 'real' life – her civilian life – she did take precautions when she was within the TA space. She said that she worried about receiving letters from her lover when on exercise and even went as far as asking her lover not to put anything extra to the address on the envelope 'just in case' [WRAC (TA) Stores, Captain; 38 – I].

Grace also thought she was straight when she joined the Army and admits to joining in with her peers in mocking lesbians during basic training, never considering that she might, herself, be a lesbian.

Then I came out of basic training and I was in the NAAFI one night and somebody came on to me and that was it. That was it from then on really. So I sort of fell into it...but I must have had the feeling, do you know what I mean? I just don't go too deep into it [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I].

Both Elizabeth's and Grace's 'coming out' stories have common elements, such as other people seeing something in them that made them think that they were gay. They both acknowledge that they had feelings for women, however much they were suppressed. Of the sexual stories I was told, however, Davina's in particular exemplifies Whisman's 'mixed' model. 'Mixed' respondents, according to Whisman, experience a period of continuity - of always knowing that they are gay, or discontinuity - where there is a recognised period 'before they were gay'. In Whisman's 'mixed' group, discontinuous homosexuality was more likely to happen to women. All of her study participants explained it in the same way:

...by invoking an underlying, continuous, and previously unknown homosexual orientation: They were always homosexual but didn't always know it. None believe that they became homosexual at the same time that they discovered it. They gather evidence for this belief via retrospective interpretation (Schur, 1979), a re-reading of their pre-homosexual pasts in terms of their present sexual identities (1996: 84-86).

As Davina talked to me within the context of the interview and related her memories of being in the Army and of coming to realise that she is gay, she was telling her sexual story, the story of her 'coming out' to herself. Although drawing on her memories of her feelings at the time, her story must be understood as having been constructed as a type of 'script' to explain her actions, her feelings and, above all, her decision to redefine her sexual identity and live as a lesbian. Davina is telling her story from the perspective of a gay identity and, as she remembers the past, she has reinterpreted it in the light of her shift in sexual identity.

Davina was almost twenty when she joined the Army and trained to be a Military Policewoman. She describes her realisation that she was gay as a 'bolt out of the blue'. She says of her upbringing:

I was probably very naïve. I'd never really had any sort of information about lesbians or had any dealings with lesbians or anything. The only information I'd ever had about sort of people being gay, homosexuals, was men. I mean, I knew what a poof was that sort of thing but I'd never really had any information about women. It never even crossed my mind. How naïve is that? [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]

She told me that it was not until she was posted to Northern Ireland, about a year after joining the Army that she realised she was gay. In a previous posting, she was involved in a relationship with a male colleague. Although she had become aware when she went to Guildford for her basic training that some women were attracted to other women, she says she did not, at that point in time, consider it a possibility for herself. She said that she understood it in a way because she remembered having crushes on her school friends and equated what she was seeing at Guildford in a similar light. She recalled:

I had terrible crushes on friends and things and I used to always have one particular friend that I was particularly fond of and if they got...when they started [to] get boyfriends, I used to get really jealous and I never really twigged why. I used to think, "Oh why won't they come out with me instead of him!" That sort of thing. I thought it was teenage angst, you know, a stupid teenage sort of thing [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

When she went to her first posting after finishing her trade training, she went out with a couple of men and got quite deeply involved in one relationship. It was not very sexually satisfying, however, but she thought it was her fault because he was a lot more experienced sexually. '... There's something wrong with me, there's definitely something wrong with me and I just assumed that's what it was and that was it' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

In Northern Ireland, she got caught up in a SIB investigation which resulted in being interviewed several times herself. Being under suspicion was not a pleasant experience but eventually the authorities decided that she was not gay after all. She said:

They all knew that I'd had an affair with a man before this...at the end of the last interview they took great delight in explaining that they had known all along...they basically said that it was just a bit of a laugh because "we know you're not queer" [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

The fact that she had been involved with another RMP colleague provided all the evidence the SIB needed of her heterosexuality and they considered that she could not possibly be gay. When I asked her how she felt about their decision, she said: 'I was a bit relieved at the time to be honest with you but...but then I thought, "well, you know"' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. Davina's verbal clue here made me think that this was where she started to think about homosexuality in relation to herself. She started to wonder what it was that others had seen in her that made them think she was gay and why she had been investigated if they knew all along that she was obviously heterosexual. Was there something that other people were seeing that she had not?

Davina relates how she tried to make sense of her feelings, comparing her disillusionment about her relationships with men to her pleasure of being in other women's company:

I still had these sorts of feelings that I couldn't really articulate about women. I much preferred to be in women's company and everything. I mean, that's what I liked about the Army. I liked being the females together and everything...I felt much closer to women, I felt that I could talk to them about a lot of things. Blokes would just...sit there drinking...you know, personal relationships weren't much cop really [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

She turned to another lesbian for help, a woman that she now recalls being drawn to. 'I don't know what it was about her, but something about her sort of intrigued me' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. When someone else told her that the woman was gay, she thought:

...maybe I can talk to her about how I feel and see how it goes...I don't know why *her*...I just felt free to talk to her about it and express those feelings...maybe I thought she wouldn't laugh at me if I talked to her. 'Cos she's sort of been there before. I don't

know why – I just thought she was a safer bet than going up to the squad Sergeant {WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I}.

At first glance, this part of her story appears to be about making sense of her feelings of realising she is a lesbian and thinking that perhaps another lesbian's perspective will help her clarify these emotions. However, in the next part of her story, following on immediately after the text highlighted above, Davina said, '... So I did [talk to her] but it was very much a two-edged sword... I really liked her and she seemed to like me' [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]. Here, I believe, is where Davina realises that her recognition of her homosexuality and her attraction for this woman become intertwined. She was drawn to this woman anyway, 'intrigued' by her, but her need to speak about her feelings afforded her the opportunity to be in the company of this woman. Once there, she acknowledges the 'two-edged sword' – her feelings can no longer be understood as abstract or random, directed to no one in particular; talking about her attraction to women in general highlights that she is really talking about her attraction to one woman in particular, the one sitting in front of her. The acknowledgement of her desire for another woman and her judgement that this would be reciprocated helped Davina make her decision.

I got drunk one night and I jumped on her bones basically! I mean the poor cow didn't stand a chance really because I was determined I was gonna chase round till she gave up and she did... And the rest, they say, is history, because once I had actually slept with her I thought "Oh, so *this* is what I've been missing all these years, what a waste!" [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]

For Davina, everything started to make sense from that point on. She could look back and reinterpret events in the light of her new understanding of who she really was:

And that was it really... everything just clicked after that, everything. All the angst that I'd had as a teenager and these sort of personal relationship problems that I'd had with guys and everything, it all just clicked and I thought, "Well, no bloody wonder, no wonder". You know, how naïve can you get, you don't even know. I mean, there was I, what was I, nearly twenty-one [WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I].

Looking back to that event, a turning point in her life, Davina's story revealed her inner fears about her lack of sexual fulfilment to that point and her relief at having finally made sense of her feelings. She said: '... so basically once I knew, I was quite happy about it. I wasn't shocked or thinking, "I'm going to throw myself off a bus". It was like "Hoorah! I'm not a nutcracker after all and I'm not frigid, oh no!" I was really pleased about that!!' {WRAC RMP, Cpl; 43 – I]

In Davina's sexual story, she saw herself as probably always having been gay but just unaware of it. She put that down to her background, her 'naivety'. However, when faced with the possibility that others were seeing or recognising something in her that made them think she could be a lesbian, she revisited the confused feelings of youth and her attraction to the company of women. When she acknowledged her attraction for a particular woman, everything else fell into place. Davina did not, however, claim she became a lesbian at the point of expressing her desire. She reinterpreted her past teenage crushes, unsatisfying relationships with men and her preference for women's company through the lens of her 'new' identity. Through telling her sexual story, Davina made sense of her 'coming out'.

How 'Out' is 'Out'?

Five years have now passed since the ban on homosexuality in the Armed Forces was lifted. At the time, there were dire predictions that granting homosexual soldiers the right to serve openly would cause the breakdown of unit cohesion and operational effectiveness. Changing a policy is but the initial step in transforming behaviour and attitudes towards gay personnel. Six months after the introduction of the new Code of Social Conduct, the MoD carried out a confidential review, questioning personnel from all three Services, to ascertain what effect the lifting of the ban had had on morale. The report concluded, rather embarrassingly for all the Service Chiefs, senior officers and politicians who had fought to retain the ban, that '...the revised policy... had no discernible impact, either positive or negative on recruitment... there is widespread acceptance of the policy... there has been a mature, pragmatic approach [and it] has been hailed as

a solid achievement' (Ministry of Defence, 2000 as cited in Belkin and Evans, 2000; see also Summerskill, 2000). In May 2000 Richard Young, the last person to be dismissed from the Royal Navy because of his sexual identity, was reinstated '...to his former seniority, rank and pay scale' (The Pink Paper, 2000). Other servicemen have also applied to be reinstated and have been successful (for example Nunn, 2001). I have, however, been unable to find any reports of women applying to go back into the Forces.

With regard to serving openly, there are stories of men 'coming out', such as Lieutenant Commander Craig Jones (Royal Navy), who informed his colleagues that he was gay and that he had a civilian partner of some years standing. Since that time, the couple has attended Mess dinners together and been open about their relationship. He allowed that it had been more difficult for his partner than for him but that they were proud to have made the effort. As he said in 2001, 'It requires somebody to take the plunge and being in a settled relationship, we were in a good position to do that'(Edge, 2001). The reaction has been muted from women and it is interesting to think of why that might be. Although initial reactions were positive, women were still cautious about being 'too' out. The Pink Paper interviewed 'Karen', an officer in the Army, in early 2000. She was delighted at the removal of the ban and said:

For the first time in three years I can sign my name at the bottom of a letter to my girlfriend. I can invite my partner to mess functions where before I used to have to go alone. I can now say to my commanding officer that I'm gay and no one can do anything about it. For me and some of my friends that are still serving... it is absolutely fantastic (Garrett, 2000).

She still had reservations, however, and at the time of being interviewed by the paper, 'Karen' still felt it safer to request that her name be changed to protect her identity. She felt she would wait and see what the atmosphere and reaction to others was like before 'coming out'. Her memories of SIB investigations and the sort of precautions she and her friends were forced to take are obviously still in the forefront of her mind. She also makes an important point about gender which gives an inkling as to how lesbians may react to the change in policy. 'Karen'

says, 'If you are a woman in the Armed Forces, you work 110% to get the same recognition as a bloke. As a female gay officer you have an extra hurdle to get over'. Although Grace had left the Army before 2000, she still had friends who were serving and said: 'Yeah, the ban's lifted but they're still wary, very wary. They would not be openly gay because [they'll] still get hounded by the homophobics [sic] or whatever. I mean you always had the stigma of being a woman in the Army - that to get a promotion you [had] usually slept with somebody... so I suppose they'll say "Oh you got promotion because you're gay and they don't want to seem to be discriminating"' [WRAC Administrative Assistant, LCpl; 31 – I]. Another interesting point that 'Karen' mentions is the community, or 'underground allegiance' that lesbians in the military form with other gay women. Gay men tend to lead a more solitary existence and she said that '...the only time you would hear about gay men in the army was when they were being discharged' (2000). Perhaps this is the reason there is little information about 'out' military lesbians. Their support network and the community they identify with were already there. The majority of the lesbians in my survey stated that they thought most people in their unit *thought* they were gay even if they did not *know* it for certain. 'Coming out' in those circumstances, therefore, serves only a limited purpose.

That purpose might be to claim partnership rights and benefits such as naming a partner as the beneficiary of an Army pension or living in military accommodation together. At the moment, the whole of the Army pension system is under review because it is considered to be so out of date with society in failing to recognise modern relationships. Heterosexual couples would also like to be eligible for the benefits mentioned rather than be 'forced' into marriage in order to protect their relationship from financial disadvantage. The military is also in the process of reviewing whether to extend 'full married benefits' to gay personnel (Burke, 2001). Even when those rights are extended, however, it is no guarantee that lesbians and gay men will take up the offer. In order to do so, they would need to 'come out' officially – declare it openly so that the military can complete the documentation require to register their partner, as they would do for a married couple. For many, this may be too risky – the benefits of coming out

may be outweighed by perceived disadvantages. The person may not be confident as to the treatment he or she will receive from colleagues, regardless of the new policy. Junior personnel may be more wary than more senior, more established soldiers. Women may be the least likely to take advantage of these extended benefits because, for many, it provides another means of making life difficult for women soldiers.

Lesbians serving in the Canadian Armed Forces wishing to claim same-sex status have been able to do so since 1996 and have been eligible to claim same-sex benefits for their partner since 1997 (Gouliquer, 2000). However, the same-sex status declaration requires them to 'come out' officially and there is a requirement that the person must have been in a relationship for at least one year. The declaration of status is required before benefits, such as travel costs to pay for the partner to move with the serving soldier to a new posting, can be claimed. Lynne Gouliquer's research showed that few women took advantages of this change to the policy and none of her research sample had signed a declaration. To these women, the declaration signified '...that the military is still interested in their sexuality to the point of documenting it'. Others think it significant that the official term for their partner on the documentation is 'dependent' rather than 'spouse' and feel that the military is '... guarding the sanctity of 'spouse' for heterosexuals' (Gouliquer, 2000: 263-264). Many fear being disadvantaged through indirect means, such as being denied the opportunity for training or to extend their service. Since women already have to cope with gender issues within the male space of the military, many feel that such institutionalised attitudes and behaviour towards both women's presence and homosexuality will take a long time to change. How 'out' is 'out', therefore, appears to be affected by the gender of the soldier, their status and longevity in the Service and lesbians' decision to 'come out' is more likely to be balanced against the existing disadvantages experienced by being a woman in a male-dominated organisation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to put a human face on those most affected by the ban on homosexuality in the British Army. For the women who took part in this

study, their day-to-day lives were filled with carrying out conscious and unconscious strategies to simultaneously hide and make visible their sexual identity. The strategies of visibility included using clothing, jewellery and other items as identifiers and learning to recognise similar symbols displayed by others. Limited access to privacy and therefore a truly 'private' life had an impact on how these women lived their lives as lesbians. Often they were forced to take huge risks to meet other gay women or to be able to have relationships. Their personal accounts of 'coming out' are reflective of their age at the time - often in their late teens or early twenties - and of the struggles they had to go through in coming to terms with their sexual identity. Because of the culture of fear and the attitudes towards homosexuality in the Army, these young women had to work out what to do on their own, unlike young women in civilian life who might have had access to a counsellor, their GP or some other source of advice. The lack of privacy was further exacerbated by intrusive SIB investigations which often dragged on for months, keeping the individual concerned in a permanent state of fear about what might happen to her in the future. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, lesbians coped with the institutional controls placed upon them in a variety of ways, navigating some hurdles by acquiescing to the expected behaviours and others by challenging and subverting the regulations to carve out an identity for themselves. Regardless of their choices or circumstances, all forty participants lived lesbian lives.

Conclusion

‘Stand Easy’

This thesis has explored how lesbians in the British Army experienced and negotiated gender and sexuality while serving in the WRAC or the QARANC over the past fifty years. In this chapter I provide a short overview of how the study addressed the research questions before drawing together the main findings and discussing the implications emerging from them. I also reflect on the lessons learned from carrying out this research and consider the directions that future research might take.

Lesbians in the British Army occupy a unique place in the history of the military in the UK. As women, they are included within the recorded history (Bidwell, 1977; Terry, 1988; Muir, 1992) but as lesbians, they do not exist. Military policies banned homosexuality in the Armed Forces until the end of 1999, which explains, in part, lesbians’ absence from official (published) history. However, exploring unpublished documents and reports has revealed that not only were lesbians *in* the Army, their presence was viewed as a considerable problem (Ministry of Defence, 1996) and all efforts were employed to expel them from the institution. These efforts necessarily focused on women’s presence in the Army and the tension between stereotypical constructs of a ‘soldier’ and the role of women in military uniform. This thesis aimed to explore this under-researched aspect of military life, that of the control of gender and sexuality through institutional structures and policies, by examining the various ways in which they impacted upon the lives of lesbians in the Army. I was particularly interested in how lesbians made sense of gender and sexuality in their everyday lives (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and what strategies they employed to negotiate institutional barriers in a space ‘...structured and defined as “masculine”’ (Herbert, 1998: 5), and, by default, heterosexual. Given the paucity of research on women in the British Armed Forces in general, and on lesbians in particular, my research adds to the body of knowledge about women’s experiences of military life by exploring the inter-relationships and tensions between the three

‘identities’ – woman, soldier and lesbian – and places these experiences within the context of the British Army since 1950. This study also contributes to the wider academic literature about the impact of gender and sexuality on women in military uniform, which has been dominated by US research (see for example Holm, 1992; Meyer, 1996; D’Amico and Weinstein, 1999; Herbert, 1998) and gives an insight into the similarities and/or differences of British women’s experiences.

I was inspired by Herbert’s work (1998) from the outset and used her questionnaire as a model for my own. The most significant difference between the two studies was the cultural context (USA/UK) and the time period covered. Herbert’s research concentrated on the period since 1976, while my study covered the fifty years since the creation of the WRAC. My research supports Herbert’s findings that women in the military develop a variety of strategies to manage or negotiate gender and sexuality in their day-to-day interactions. Likewise my study demonstrates that the military uses particular mechanisms including discourses on masculinity to position women as ‘other’ within the military. Unlike Herbert, none of my participants identified as heterosexual and my research focused more directly on the strategies used by lesbians to negotiate their identities as women, as soldiers and as lesbians and on the penalties for non-compliance.

I employed an interdisciplinary approach to the research in order to gain insight into the everyday lives of lesbians in the Army. The focus of this study was not solely on the individual’s experience of negotiating gender and sexuality but also on the institutional mechanisms in place through which these experiences were ‘lived’ (Grosz, 1990 as cited in Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 1993: 251). The methodology (see Chapter 1 - ‘Basic Training: Researching Lesbian Soldiers’ Lives’) combined archival methods with quantitative and qualitative analyses of questionnaires and interview transcripts from participants in order to address four main research questions. My methodological approach sought to consider the unique circumstances of potential participants as lesbians who may have encountered discriminatory treatment by the Army because of their sexual

identity. I recognised that locating women to take part in the study would be difficult because of concerns about anonymity, confidentiality and visibility. Incorporating a questionnaire was one method employed to address these issues and this also enabled me to gather a lot of information systematically (Herbert, 1998: 137). As well as outlining the methodological and theoretical approach taken in the research, Chapter 1 contains data about the sample group as a whole. I also demonstrate how the strategies I employed to analyse this data informed the structure and content of each subsequent chapter. In the next section of this chapter, I set out the main research questions and give a brief overview of how each was addressed in the research before summarising the main findings.

Gender and Sexual Politics

- *What is the military and legal context within which lesbians in the British Army serve?*

This research question was addressed in Chapter 2 - 'Military History: Gender and Sexual Politics in the British Army' which was intended to 'set the scene' for the whole thesis. I used archival and other sources to build up a historical, political and social picture of women's presence in the Army, as well as explaining the legal position on homosexuality *and* how the military applied this policy with regard to lesbians. Muir (1992: 168) estimated that about forty women were dismissed or resigned from the Armed Forces every year for being lesbians and official statistics show that, in the period from 1990-1995, 113 women were discharged on grounds of homosexuality (Ministry of Defence, 1996: 14). Closer examination of this data revealed that three out of every four women discharged were in the Army, which reflects a disproportionate level of dismissals. The official statistics, however, do not include those who resigned, put in their notice under duress, or who 'bought themselves out' by gaining a PVR. Data from my own research (see Chapter 1) showed that eight of my participants were formally dismissed or resigned when their homosexuality was discovered by the Army but a further ten participants considered that they had been pressured to leave. These women would not be included within any official

statistics and I conclude that the official number of lesbians dismissed was very much lower than the actual number.

I also drew attention to the ways in which the policy on homosexuality, when applied to lesbians, was confusing and flawed, in that it had no basis in criminal law. By doing so, my research demonstrates the connection between military policies on homosexuality and the emphasis on (expected) gender behaviour. The WRAC and QARANC were intentionally constructed as gendered institutions (Noakes, 2001) but the segregation into female/male was not sufficient – women had to demonstrate their femininity in order to emphasise their difference from male soldiers. Policies regulating dress, uniform, behaviour and sexual activity all contrived to construct women in uniform as obviously female and overtly feminine. Lesbians posed a threat to these ideals and such women had to be routed out. In the late 1980s, in response to the assertion that the WRAC was associated with lesbianism, Lieutenant Colonel Jackie Smith said: ‘I don’t know why we have this image. There was an advertising survey in the eighties which showed a lot of the public had this idea that we were butch or lesbians. Yet all the time, we were trying to emphasise the feminine aspect’ (as cited in Muir, 1992: 168). By making connections between the Army’s desire to ‘emphasise the feminine’ and the consequences for women who did not meet institutional expectations, I was able to explore the ways in which the regulation of gender and sexuality influenced the treatment of women soldiers and lesbians.

Negotiating Gender and Sexuality

- *What levels of understanding about gender and sexuality did the participants in my study hold and how might this be interpreted with regard to their ‘identities’ as women, as soldiers and as lesbians?*

Exploring the participants’ levels of understanding about gender and sexuality was the subject of Chapter 3 – ‘Camouflage: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in the British Army’. I investigated how the lesbians in my study made sense of the ways in which they experienced gender and sexuality in their everyday lives,

by drawing on questionnaire, supplementary correspondence and interview data. I explored how they complied with, challenged or subverted military expectations about women's behaviour. I also explored the tensions and contradictions created by their presence as a lesbian in the British Army by examining the strategies they employed (if any) to blend in or 'pass', both as women in a male space and lesbians in a 'straight' space.

Women's presence in the British Armed Forces has always been regulated and although permitted to serve, they have been traditionally segregated into women-only Corps, thereby making obvious their 'difference' from men. The construction of the ideal soldier as male and heterosexual is promulgated through discourses on masculinity (Connell, 1992; Dawson, 1994), where women are symbolic of what the men are fighting for (Stiehm, 1994). For women to claim the identity of 'soldier', to display the abilities *and* the qualities considered normatively masculine challenges the taken-for-granted assumption that soldiers are men and blurs gender boundaries (Herbert, 1998). The interconnections between gender and sexuality within an institution such as the British Army provide the means by which concepts of difference between the sexes can be justified (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Goffman, 1959; 1977) and women can be positioned as 'other', as 'not male'.

The construction of women as 'other' within the Army requires the 'doing of gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) which enables the acceptance of the differences between men and women as 'natural', which in turn enables the privileging of men and all things masculine. 'Doing gender' also contributes to the reproduction of 'the heterosexual imaginary' (Ingraham, 1994: 203), the way that heterosexuality itself remains unquestioned as an institutional structure underpinning common understandings of gender. Within the context of the Army, therefore, women must work out how to behave in different situations in order to avoid penalties for non-compliance. In certain circumstances behaviour considered to be masculine (e.g. authority, leadership, physical strength) was acceptable in women, whereas in others it was not. Likewise, demonstrating stereotypically feminine behaviour, whilst often expected of women, also had

consequences in that women were often viewed as unprofessional, pathetic or 'girly'.

The women in my study demonstrated differing levels of awareness when considering terms such as 'masculine' or 'feminine' but their responses can be broadly grouped into three main themes: those that struggled to answer; those who equated these terms with outward appearance, image and behaviour and a third group, who considered that they were connected to societal expectations of a gender role. However, an unexpected but fascinating aspect of this part of my research was that many women interpreted the question about masculinity in relation to *women*, demonstrating how some respondents separated 'being' a gender (feminine – woman, masculine – man) from cultural expectations of gendered behaviour.

Over 60% of the sample group felt that women in the Army were expected, encouraged or pressured to act feminine in some way, mainly through the regulation of civilian and military clothing and the policing of appropriate behaviour. 75% of the group, however, did not think that women's ability to demonstrate leadership or authority would be compromised by the enforcement of femininity. Only a fifth of respondents felt the Army expected, encouraged or pressured women to act masculine but over half thought that the Army penalised those who did demonstrate qualities or behaviours considered to be masculine. The main penalty was that of being labelled a 'dyke', a strategy meant to remind women to behave more appropriately and remind them that lesbians would receive the ultimate penalty - rejection.

My respondents demonstrated a high degree of awareness regarding what strategies could be used to navigate their different 'identities'. These ranged from 'femming up' in dress and appearance to 'pass' as heterosexual so that suspicion would not fall on them, deferring to men's authority or asking for help in male company to appear non-threatening, or becoming 'one of the boys'. This latter strategy involved demonstrating the same level of commitment and capability as male colleagues but also involved adopting similar verbal and body language so

as to fit in. Over half of the sample group were reluctant and/or unable to describe themselves using these gender categories which illustrates the evident contradictions for the lesbian soldier. In negotiating their own sexual identity, participants demonstrated the complexity of the strategies that they employed to mask their sexuality to the authorities while making it selectively visible to other lesbians. The fear of discovery (Goffman, 1963) was limited by the need to form friendships and relationships but nevertheless influenced the ways in which women controlled and policed their own behaviour (Foucault, 1977).

I also considered how women's changing role in the Army might be influential in changing the hegemonic masculinity of the Army. Resistance to change is commonplace in traditional organisations but the Army has been particularly intransigent. Although the WRAC has been disbanded and women are integrated within the mainstream Army, particular areas remain closed to them, namely the infantry and the armoured divisions. This appears to be the last bastion of resistance to the concept of women as soldiers. Although they are 'combatant', they are not allowed to be 'in combat', a distinction that retains and maintains the 'uniqueness' of men as 'real soldiers'.

Controlling Women's Military Bodies

- *Through what means did participants 'embody' their various identities as they negotiated gender and sexuality and how were these influenced by institutional mechanisms and/or policies?*

In Chapter 4 – 'A Disciplined Body of Women: Controlling Women's Military Bodies' I addressed the ways in which the institutional mechanisms and policies influenced the embodiment of my participants' identities as women, as soldiers and as lesbians. Using Foucault's concept of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977), I considered how the training and discipline within the military renders the body docile by transforming its usefulness and how this docility might be affected by gender and sexuality. Controlling or regulating the body enables gender patterns

to be understood within the context of space and time (Connell, 2000) but also to be unacknowledged or seen to be 'natural' (Acker, 1990).

I investigated how the Army controls women's military bodies through various means including spatial and uniformed 'enclosure' (Foucault, 1977) and the supervision of women's appearance and sexual behaviour. Data from my participants demonstrated the importance of the uniform design on the construction and maintenance of femininity but my research demonstrates that the Army used other strategies as well to position women's bodies as disruptive. Equipment designed for men was expected to be used as efficiently by women and uniforms were issued to women which were inappropriate to the task and which set them up to fail. Women's comportment, demeanour and behaviour were policed and their bodies 'accessorised' to identify them as (obviously) female. My research shows that the lesbians in my study were aware of many of these strategies which aimed to display or mask the female (feminine) soldierly body and in some cases were able to manipulate them. Military uniform was used as a 'pulling' mechanism to attract other women and smart turn out and pride in appearance were seen as attractive qualities. Some women used their civilian clothing as a type of uniform to identify themselves as lesbians, thereby enhancing their visibility to others (Walker, 2001)

I considered how these regulatory strategies have been influenced by the increased deployment of women's military bodies into conflict zones, where their bodies are enclosed within more 'soldierly' garb. Women's bodies become less noticeable, less obvious within the 'uniformity' of the deployed military body, camouflaged as it is in appropriate clothing, undifferentiated from others. Their military bodies display comfort, authority and capability, rather than femininity.

Finally in this chapter, I explored the mechanisms for controlling women's sexual bodies, including the lesbian body. The female sexual body is considered antithetical to military life given its potential for becoming a maternal body. The military's traditional means of control, that of denying access to women's bodies

through segregated accommodation and/or fear of punishment has largely been unworkable and has facilitated lesbian bodies by situating them in a women-only space. Policies originally introduced to control women's (heterosexual) bodies had to be adapted to police lesbian behaviour. Raids on accommodation often overlooked the men who were 'out of bounds' in favour of catching women in compromising situations. 'Witch-hunts' – large-scale investigations into alleged homosexuality across many different sites were a strategy employed by the British military authorities to control women's behaviour through fear and lesbians managed these situations in a variety of ways. For the lesbians who were also Military Police officers, they made strategic choices as to which identity they would privilege in different situations.

Living Lesbian Lives

- *What strategies did participants employ to live as lesbians in the British Army and how did they evade detection and cope with investigations and/or dismissal?*

The final research question was the subject of Chapter 5 – 'Identity on Parade: Managing Sexual Identity in the British Army'. I explored the impact of the military policy on homosexuality on the forty women in my study. From the data I extrapolated various strategies used by respondents to hide their sexual identity from the authorities while also living lesbian lives. These strategies ranged from destroying personal letters, photographs and documents in order to prevent their use as 'evidence', to dating only civilians to lessen the risk of discovery. My findings show that most of the women in my study used similar methods to manage their situation with varying degrees of success. Many of my research participants 'came out' as lesbians after they joined the Army and I was able to explore how they had constructed their 'sexual story' (Plummer, 1995; Whisman, 1996) in order to make sense of their experiences.

The loss of privacy experienced by the invasion of physical and psychological space during SIB investigations was considered to be the most distressing by my

participants. Some women were investigated many times and felt constantly under surveillance. Being investigated had an impact on women's health and behaviour, regardless of whether they were eventually dismissed for being gay. While the investigation was going on, they felt less able to take risks, to see friends and/or lovers or to socialise off camp. My data also demonstrates that being discharged on grounds of homosexuality was often a life-changing event as dismissal meant loss of income, job, home, friendship networks and, sometimes, family support. Regulating the lesbian body through policies on homosexuality, however, denied those same lesbian bodies legal protection or representation as being a lesbian is not a criminal offence in the UK.

I considered what impact the lifting of the ban on homosexuality in the British Army will have on the everyday interactions of lesbian soldiers. Research from other countries, such as Canada, suggest that there will be little immediate change in behaviour (Gouliquer, 2000). As women, they already must strive for acceptance and many fear indirect retribution if they 'come out'. The lesbians in this study negotiated gender and sexuality in their everyday lives and used different strategies to establish credibility, capability and authority as women soldiers, while also adopting stereotypically feminine qualities to mask their sexuality. At the same time, they were actively resisting the institutional structures by living lesbian lives, developing networks of like-minded women with whom they could live their 'real' identity.

Implications and limitations of research

This research represents one of the first studies to look at gender and sexuality in the British Army in the period since the end of WWII (see also Bower, 2000). Although specifically about lesbians' experiences, it adds to the general understanding about women's military role by setting out the historical, political and social context within which women in Britain have served during the last fifty years. It also demonstrates how gender and sexuality are played out within a specific organisation and the ways that institutional policies have shaped the ways that women identify as soldiers and as lesbians within the military space.

This study has demonstrated what military life was like for lesbians in the British Army, an organisation which prohibited the display of an important part of their identity. My research also illustrates the inventiveness of my participants' strategies as they managed the day-to-day interactions of military life, coping with the expectations of the Army, yet not losing sight of their own 'real' identity as a lesbian. One of the most important contributions this study makes is to focus on how important the uniform has been in the regulation and control of women's military bodies. Furthermore, my research offers clarity as to the legal position of lesbians during the time that the ban was in place and indicates how those serving in the Army were particularly targeted.

This study has implications for any researcher interested in the military in general or the British Army in particular. As a case study of a specific organisation during a set period of time, it makes visible the gendered organisational culture and the mechanisms used to maintain expectations and ideals about the appropriateness of masculine and feminine behaviour. By exploring policies regulating homosexuality, this study puts into sharp relief the problems encountered by lesbians in the past. The inclusion of data about SIB investigations in particular demonstrates how this policy had a lasting impact on women's lives.

Although I limited my study to lesbians in the British Army since 1950, it may be that this time period was too wide. Collecting and analysing such a wide variety of data from even a small group such as this one has generated a volume of information which could be broken down into several other independent studies. I set out to include data from women who had served in every decade since the WRAC and QARANC became volunteer forces offering a career to women in peacetime. However, the years from 1950 to 1976 were very different from those in the latter half of the century. Women's roles in the Army began to change then (Terry, 1988) and eventually the three Women's Services were disbanded and women integrated into the wider military 'body'. I have addressed this point within the thesis by including a 'scene-setting' chapter, which has the

advantage of giving a broad historical overview of how things have changed for women over time.

This was intended to be a small exploratory study and therefore cannot be seen as representative of all lesbians' experiences of the life in the Army. The fact that the forty participants served over five different decades means that I was limited in extrapolating collective meaning from their individual experiences, as there were not enough women in each cohort. I have, however, been able to demonstrate similarities between some accounts with regard to the strategies adopted to negotiate gender and sexuality, illustrating some of the issues experienced by lesbians in the British Army. I was also limited by the lack of resources on both women in the British Army and lesbians in particular, which meant that I had to draw on literature about other uniformed occupations and/or other countries' militaries. Nonetheless, this research has opened up a new area of study investigating the everyday lived experience of being a lesbian in the British Army and can now contribute to this gap in the literature.

Completing the project has been both enlightening and humbling, as I realise just how much more there is to do. I feel satisfied as to the methodological approach taken which was sensitive to the needs and peculiarities of a difficult to reach group and made use of my own Army background. The study was inevitably limited by time, funds and geography (Herbert, 1998) and if doing a similar project in the future, I would make greater use of technology to introduce more innovative methods into the study. Many of these methods can be completed by the individual alone or with the researcher at a distance (e.g. Life Grids (see for example Blane, 1996; Parry et al., 1999) or software which maps personal friendship networks).

Directions for future research

One of the aims of this research was to address the lack of any substantial work on either women or lesbians in the British Army. I was especially concerned at the lack of information available since the end of WWII, a most important period covering, as it does, legislative and social change specific to women. I wanted to

make the women in the Army more visible and I believe this thesis has accomplished that. However, like many other PhD researchers, I feel that this study has raised many more important questions and flagged up new areas for future research. The first and most obvious are the gaps in the history of the WRAC and QARANC which need to be updated to cover the whole period from inception to dissolution. A feminist history of that period needs to be written to illustrate the impact of gender on the Women's Services and must include a thorough critique of how military policies impacted and regulated displays of gender and sexuality.

The history of lesbians in the British Armed Forces also needs to be recorded for future generations of scholars. The women who served in the 1950s are now well over sixty and time is running out if their experiences are to be saved for posterity. Although it is a relatively concise period (1950-present day), my research has demonstrated how much information can be generated but a complete study of this period could add to the understanding of how gender and sexuality were played out over time. A larger scale, better-funded study could explore the ways of knowing and belonging for different cohorts of lesbians, such as the signs and signals used to identify themselves as lesbians and the strategies employed to hide their sexual identity from the authorities.

Five years have now passed since the ban on homosexuality was lifted. Future research could investigate what impact this has had on lesbians still serving in the British Army. Different cohorts of lesbians could be included in the study – those who joined up before 1999 and those who have subsequently enlisted – to explore how they deal with their sexual identity in the workplace and in the wider social context of the military.

Women's changing role in combat and operational situations, especially since the early 1990s, requires much closer study in order to assess what impact (if any) these changes have had on the ways in which the military regulates gender and sexuality. Comparative studies using women from different trades might illustrate the ways in which these situations are filtered through situational

interactions. The change in roles has also meant that more women than ever before are now being deployed into conflict zones and research is needed to assess how the different training required for these extended roles and conditions of service impact upon women's health (see for example Gemmell, 2002; Brock and Legg, 1997; Geary et al., 2002; Williams et al., 1999). Many women returning from the Gulf War of 1991 have suffered ill health and there is no comparative record of the impact of this on women's lives. The present Iraq conflict will have changed women soldiers' role yet again and further research will be needed to investigate what impact this has had on both the military institution and on individual women. While the increased levels of physical ability required by the modern female soldier is being addressed from the point of view of retention, recruitment and deployment, many studies fail to address the different ways that the physiology of women's bodies is gendered throughout the growing up process. Girls are not encouraged to develop their physical strength or to learn how to use their bodies for the completion of tasks (Young, 2005). The extra training that women might need to achieve the standard requirements of physical ability needs to be addressed well before those bodies turn up for basic training.

'Stand Easy' is a drill command used in the British Army to relax the body while positioned in the 'At Ease' position. I used this term in this chapter purposefully in order to convey the end was in sight. However, even after such a command is given, *the body remains alert. It has not been dismissed and can be brought to 'Attention' – the full state of readiness – within seconds.* The end of this thesis, therefore, is not permission to walk away but to remain ready and alert to the possibilities for more research involving lesbians and the military.

Appendix 1

Biographical Details of Participants

Anne, now in her fifties, served in the WRAC during the early 1970s. She worked with the Royal Signals and reached the rank of Corporal. She served for about four years and left after putting in her notice.

Barbara is a nurse in the QARANC, who joined the Army in the early 1990s. She is in her late twenties.

Cathy is a Staff Sergeant who works as an Office Administrator within the Adjutant General Corps (AJC). She is in her forties.

Catriona is in her 40s and served during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. She trained as a Driver but transferred to an administration position. She reached the rank of WO1.

Danielle was a Private in the WRAC who served in the early 1990s for about four years and worked with the Royal Signals. She is in her late twenties.

Erica joined the WRAC in the mid 1960s and trained as a medic, reaching the rank of Corporal. She is now in her fifties and served for three years.

Fiona joined the QARANC in the late 1970s as a Private. She served for over twenty-five years, reaching the rank of Major. She is now in her mid forties.

Grace, now in her early thirties, joined the WRAC in the late 1980s and served for about 5 years as an Administrative Assistant, attaining the rank of Lance Corporal.

Helen is now in her mid forties and served in the QARANC for almost twenty years as a nurse, reaching the rank of WO2 before leaving the Army in the early 1990s.

Ivy joined the WRAC as a Driver in the late 1960s and served for about three years. She is now in her late forties.

Julie joined the WRAC in the early 1990s and worked with the Royal Signals. When she left the Army, she went on to serve for a further nine years with the TA, reaching the rank of Corporal. She is now in her early forties.

Karen joined the WRAC in the early 1970s as a Stewardess but retrained as a Driver. She spent almost twenty years in the Army, leaving with the rank of Corporal. She is now in her mid forties.

Appendix 1

Lorna also joined the WRAC in the 1970s and trained to be a Postal & Courier Operator. She served for about four years, reaching the rank of Lance Corporal. She is now in her early forties.

Marilyn is now in her mid thirties and joined up in the early 1980s. She trained to be a Driver in the WRAC and reached the rank of Lance Corporal. She served for about five years.

Nancy joined the WRAC in the early 1980s and served for about three years. She worked as a Stores Controller and was a Private. She is now in her late thirties.

Olive is now in her late thirties and joined the WRAC in the late 1970s, training as a Military Policewoman. She served for about five years and attained the rank of Sergeant.

Queenie joined the QARANC in the late 1980s and trained as a Health Care Assistant. She reached the rank of Corporal and served for almost ten years. She is now in her mid thirties.

Sandra is now in her early fifties and joined the WRAC in the mid 1960s. She worked in administration and reached the rank of Sergeant during her eight years in the Army.

Tracy is now almost fifty years of age and joined the WRAC in the early 1970s. She trained as a Switchboard Operator in the Royal Signals and served for about four years, reaching the rank of Lance Corporal.

Wendy joined the WRAC in the mid 1970s and trained as a Military Policewoman. She served for over thirteen years, reaching the rank of Staff Sergeant. She is now in her mid forties.

Xandra is the oldest participant and is now in her early sixties. She joined the WRAC in the late 1950s and was trained as a Physical Training Instructor. She served for about four years, reaching the rank of Acting Sergeant.

Yvette joined the QARANC in the 1970s and served for over twenty years, reaching the rank of Major. She joined as a Private but was commissioned from the ranks. She is now in her mid forties.

Amy is now in her late thirties and joined the WRAC in the late 1970s. She served for about five years as a Private and was trained as a Switchboard Operator.

Claudia is now in her early forties and joined the WRAC in the late 1970s, training as a Military Policewoman. She served for over twelve years, reaching the rank of Sergeant.

Appendix 1

Davina joined the WRAC in the late 1970s and also trained as a Military Policewoman. She served for about four years and reached the rank of Corporal. She is now in her early forties.

Elizabeth joined the Territorial Army (TA) in the early 1980s and served for over seventeen years, reaching the rank of Captain and working in Supply. She is now in her late thirties.

Frances joined the Army in the late 1990s into the Royal Signals. She is trained as a Driver/Lineman. She is now in her early twenties.

Gabrielle is now in her mid forties and joined the WRAC in the 1970s, serving for about four years. She re-enlisted in the early 1980s and served a further six years. She was trained as a Postal & Courier Operator and reached the rank of Corporal.

Isabel joined the QARANC as a Nurse in the mid 1980s, serving for about eleven years and reaching the rank of Staff Sergeant. She is now in her mid thirties.

Kathleen joined the WRAC in the early 1980s and served for about three years. She trained as a Military Policewoman and reached the rank of Lance Corporal. She is now in her mid thirties.

Lorraine is now in her fifties and joined the WRAC in the late 1960s. She trained as a Postal & Courier Operator and served for about five years, reaching the rank of Corporal.

Meredith is also in her fifties and joined the WRAC in the 1970s as a commissioned officer, serving for about five years. She reached the rank of Lieutenant.

Patricia is a Squadron Leader in the Royal Air Force and works as an administrator. She joined the RAF in the late 1970s and is now in her late forties.

Jean joined the WRAC in the early 1980s and trained as a Kennelmaid and Groom. During her career of about twelve years, she re-trained as an administrator and reached the rank of Sergeant. She is now in her late thirties.

Robyn joined the Territorial Army in the mid 1980s and is serving as a Nursing Officer in the QARANC (V). She holds the rank of Major and is now in her mid forties.

Sylvia joined the WRAC in the early 1970s and trained as a Driver, serving for about four years. She is now in her late forties.

Appendix 1

Tanya is now in her late fifties and joined the WRAC in the late 1950s. She trained as a Teleprinter Operator and served for about three years, holding the rank of Private.

Beth joined the WRAC in the mid 1960s and trained as a Kennelmaid & Groom, reaching the rank of Lance Corporal. She served for about three years and is now in her early fifties.

Yvonne is in her early forties and entered the WRAC as a commissioned officer in the early 1980s, rising to the rank of Captain. She served as an administrator for about 6 years.

Zara joined the WRAC in the early 1990s, intending to join the Intelligence Corps. She completed her basic training as a Private but failed the security checks that were required for the job she wanted to do and was dismissed from the Army. She served for only three months.

Non-respondents used in thesis (Requested questionnaire but did not return it)

Olwen served in the WRAC during the 1970s and 1980s in the Military Police, reaching the rank of Sergeant.

Wilma served for about five years during the 1970s in the WRAC. She was in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Appendix 2

Rank Structure of the British Army

Officers

General (Gen)
Lieutenant General (Lt Gen)
Major General (Maj Gen)
Brigadier (Brig)
Colonel (Col)
Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col)
Major (Maj)
Captain (Capt)
Lieutenant (Lt)
Second Lieutenant (2Lt)

Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Other Ranks

Warrant Officer Class 1 (WO1)
Warrant Officer Class 2 (WO2)
Staff Sergeant (SSgt)
Sergeant (Sgt)
Corporal (Cpl)
Lance Corporal (LCpl)
Private (Pte)

All ranks are shown in descending order of seniority. The abbreviations most commonly used are in parenthesis. Where 'Acting rank' is held, the letter 'A' is placed before the abbreviation e.g. Acting Sergeant – ASgt.

Appendix 3

Section 2 – For those still serving in the Army.

- 1) Please give your present Rank
Regiment/Corps.....
Trade/Job
- 2) If you are an Officer, were you
commissioned from the ranks?
a direct entrant?
- 3) Are you still in the same Regiment/Corps as when you enlisted?
Yes No
- 4) Are you still in the same trade/job as when you enlisted?
Yes No

If you answered 'No' to either of the above, please give details.

.....
.....

- 5) What year did you join the Army?
- 6) What age were you when you joined the Army?years,months
- 7) Before joining up were you a cadet? Yes No
in the TA? Yes No

Please go to Section 4.

Section 3 – For those who have left the Army.

Service Details

- 1) What year did you join the Army?
- 2) What year did you leave the Army?
- 3) What age were you when you joined the Army? years, months
- 4) What age were you when you left the Army? years, months
- 5) Did you join the: WRAC
QARANC
Other (please give details)
-
- 6) What was your trade/job?
- 7) What rank were you when you left the Army?.....
- 8) If you were an Officer, were you:

Appendix 3

commissioned from the ranks?

a direct entrant?

Discharge Details – Please refer to your ‘Red Book’ or AF B108 if needed

9) Please tick the appropriate box as to why you left the Army.

End of Service (Notice) PVR

Pregnancy Marriage

Medical Reasons Redundancy

Compassionate Disciplinary

Homosexuality (not homosexuality)

Other (please give details).

.....

10) Were you transferred to the Reserve? Yes No

11) What was your conduct assessment at discharge? Exemplary

Very Good

Good

Fair

Unsatisfactory

12) If you left on Notice or PVR, please give reasons for wanting to leave the Army.

.....

.....

13) After you left the Army did you join the TA? Yes No

14) Since leaving the Army have you been active in any of the following organisations? (Please tick all that apply).

British Legion Corps Associations

Stonewall Rank Outsiders

Other veteran organisation (Please give details)

Other gay/lesbian organisation (Please give details)

.....

15) What is your occupation now?.....

Please go to Section 4.

Section 4 – Background

1) Why did you join the Army? (Please tick all that apply).

Secure job Good pay

Appendix 3

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interesting career | <input type="checkbox"/> | Training/Education | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Travel | <input type="checkbox"/> | Relative/Friend in Army | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To get away from home | <input type="checkbox"/> | Variety of jobs/trades | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Challenge/excitement | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sporting Opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To meet other women | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (Please give details) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
-
-

2) What level of education had you achieved when you joined the Army?

- Basic Secondary School education
 - GCE/GCSE/SCE or equivalent
 - 'O' Level/'O' Grade or equivalent
 - 'A' Level/'Higher' Grade or equivalent
 - Sixth Form/Technical College or equivalent
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Master's Degree
 - Other (Please give details)
-

3) Where have you served? (Please tick all that apply).

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| UK | <input type="checkbox"/> | BAOR | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Northern Ireland | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cyprus | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hong Kong | <input type="checkbox"/> | Falkland Islands | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Gulf | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bosnia | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Kosovo | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sierra Leone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brunei | <input type="checkbox"/> | Belize | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Please give details below). | |
-

4) During your service did you serve most often in: (Please tick one only)

- women-only companies/units within a larger garrison area?
- male companies/units where there were very few women?
- units where ratio of men/women was roughly equal?

5a) When you were a junior rank, did you live most often in: (Please tick one only).

- All-female accommodation with large numbers of women
- All-female accommodation with only a few women
- Mixed accommodation
- Private accommodation

Appendix 3

5b) When you were a senior rank/officer, did you live most often in: (Please tick one only).

All female accommodation with large numbers of women

All female accommodation with only a few women

Mixed accommodation

Private accommodation

6) Please list any medals or awards you have received during your service (e.g. GSM 1962 NI or LS & GC).

.....
.....
.....

Please go to Section 5.

Section 5 – Sexuality

1) Thinking about your sexuality/sexual orientation NOW, do you consider yourself to be:

Lesbian Bisexual

Other (Please state what term you would use)

2) Thinking back to when you joined the Army, did you consider yourself to be:

Lesbian Bisexual

Heterosexual Uncertain

Other (Please state what term you would use.....)

3) When you were thinking of joining the Army, were you:

already aware that homosexuality was unacceptable? Yes No

aware of the penalties for being a lesbian in the Army? Yes No

If you answered 'yes' to either of the above, how did you know?

.....

4) When you joined the Army, were you:

informed officially that homosexuality was unacceptable? Yes No

('officially' means by way of leaflets, talks by recruiting/reception staff etc.)

If you answered 'no' to either questions 3) or 4) above, how did you become aware that homosexuality was unacceptable?

.....

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.....
.....
5) If you considered yourself to be a lesbian when you joined the Army, do you think this had an influence on why you joined:

the Armed Forces? Yes No

the Army as opposed to the Navy or Air Force? Yes No

If you answered 'yes' to the above, please give reasons.

.....
.....

Please go to Section 6.

Section 6 – Gender

This section explores concepts and ideas about gender and gender behaviour that are part of everyday life.

1) What do you understand by the term 'feminine'?

.....
.....
.....

2) In your experience, does the Army expect, encourage or pressure women soldiers to 'act feminine'? Yes No

If 'yes', please give an example.

.....
.....
.....

3) In your experience, can women in the Army demonstrate leadership and exercise power and authority without losing their femininity? Yes No

4) Is it your experience that the Army penalises women who are perceived to be too feminine? Yes No

If 'yes' please give an example.

.....
.....
.....

5) In your opinion, do you think that women in the Army should try to suppress attitudes/behaviours that are perceived to be feminine while doing their job? Yes No

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6) Would you describe yourself as feminine? Yes No

7) Do you think that, while serving in the Army, you consciously modified your behaviour in any way(s) to ensure others thought of you as 'feminine'?

Yes No

If 'yes' please give examples.

.....
.....

8) Did you do other things that others would have been unaware of in order to feel more feminine? Yes No

If 'yes' please give examples.

.....
.....

9) What do you understand by the term 'masculine'?

.....
.....
.....

10) In your experience, does the Army expect, encourage or pressure women soldiers to 'act masculine'? Yes No

If 'yes', please give an example.

.....
.....

11) In your experience, can women in the Army demonstrate leadership and exercise power and authority without being perceived as too masculine?

Yes No

12) Is it your experience that the Army penalises women who are perceived to be too masculine? Yes No

If 'yes' please give an example.

.....
.....

13) Would you describe yourself as masculine? Yes No

14) Do you think that, while serving in the Army, you consciously modified your behaviour in any way(s) to ensure others thought of you as 'masculine'?

Yes No

If 'yes' please give examples.

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.....
.....
15) Did you do other things in order to feel more masculine but that others would have been unaware of? Yes No

If 'yes' please give examples.
.....
.....

16) Do you consider that you were treated differently in the Army because you were a woman? Yes No

17) If 'yes', would you class any of that different treatment as harassment? Yes No

Please go to Section 7.

Section 7 – Lesbian Identity

This section deals with how you negotiated your lesbian identity within an organisation that did not accept homosexuality.

1) Did you use any of the following as means of identifying which women were lesbians? (Please tick all that apply).

Jewellery Books/Magazines Records/CDs
Dress/Appearance Sports Interests Posters/Art
TV/Films watched Friends/Associates known to be gay
Frequenting particular bar/disco Other (Please give details).
.....
.....

2) Did you use any of the above tactics or any others to identify yourself as a lesbian? Yes No If so, which ones?
.....
.....

3) While in the Army, have your lesbian relationships been:

only with other servicewomen?
only with civilian women?
with both civilians and servicewomen.

4) In your experience, do you think that most people in your unit knew you were gay? Yes No

Appendix 3

5) In your experience, do you think that most people in your unit thought you were gay? Yes No

6) Do you consider that you modified your behaviour in order 'pass as straight'? Yes No If 'yes' please give an example.

.....

.....

7) What precautions, if any, did you take to prevent the Army discovering that you were a lesbian?

.....

.....

.....

8a) Were you ever investigated by the authorities (RMP/SIB) under the suspicion of being a lesbian? Yes No

8b) If 'yes', did this investigation result in your discharge from the Army?
 Yes (Please go to Section 8). No (Please go to Section 9).

9) If you are still in the Army, do you consider that your behaviours have change since the lifting of the ban on 1st January 2000?
 Yes No Don't know

Section 8 – To be completed by those discharged for being homosexual.

1) Where were you stationed when the investigation took place? (UK, BAOR etc.).....

2) During the RMP/SIB investigation:

- | | | | | |
|--|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| were you interviewed once? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| interviewed more than once? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| was your room/accommodation searched? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| were possessions confiscated? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| were you placed under open/close arrest? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| were you ordered to report to the Medical Officer? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| were you ordered to report to a Psychiatrist? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3) Was the investigation prompted by: (Please tick one only).

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| your name being handed in by an unknown person/colleague? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| your name being handed in by another lesbian in an investigation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| your name being handed in by an ex lover? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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- your decision to tell the authorities yourself that you are a lesbian?
- being found in a compromising situation with another woman?
- unknown
- none of the above (please give details)

.....
.....

4) During the interview(s) by the RMP/SIB, were you placed under caution?

(‘You are not obliged to say anything’ etc.)

Yes No Cannot remember

5) Were you offered any legal advice?

Yes No Cannot remember

6) Were you offered the opportunity to challenge any ‘evidence’?

Yes No Cannot remember

7) If you have access to your ‘Red Book’ (AF B108), please write below the exact wording given as ‘Cause of Discharge’.

.....

8) Please give a brief description of your feelings when you realised you were being discharged for being a lesbian.

.....
.....
.....

9) Please outline the difficulties, if any, you experienced after being discharged because of your sexual orientation.

.....
.....
.....

Section 9 – Further involvement.

Would you be willing to participate further in this research? Yes No

Do you want to be informed when this research is complete? Yes No

Please add any comments/suggestions you feel would be useful to this research (please use extra paper if needed).

.....
.....
.....

FEATURE QUARTER

PHD RESEARCH

A study of lesbians who have served, or who are serving in the Army

Joan Heggie is a research Student at York University. Here she asks for help in her studies about women who have served or who are currently serving. Joan is a member of Rank Outsiders.

I am currently at the University of York carrying out research towards a PhD in Women's Studies and I need your help! My research explores the experiences of lesbians who have served, or who are currently serving, in the British Army. I need volunteers to complete a questionnaire about being a lesbian in the British Army. Before going into too much detail about the research, let me tell you a little about myself. I spent the first 8 years of my working life in the Army as a Military Policewoman. Two years of that time was spent at the WRAC Training Centre in Guildford as a recruit instructor. I joined up in 1976 when I was 16 as a Junior Leader. Joining the Army had been my ambition for several years. In 1983, while serving as a Sergeant in a RMP unit in Cyprus, I was investigated on the suspicion of being gay and, after losing my appeal, was thrown out of the Army in early 1984. This event, as many of you will realise, had a profound impact on my life. I struggled to find another job, a place to live and to come to terms with the realities of being gay in our society. Although I eventually retrained and went on to have a career in another government department, I felt that the Army chapter of my life was unfinished. In 1996, after two years studying part-time, I decided to take the plunge and return to full-time education. Since then I have completed my BA and MA and the consistent theme throughout my research has been Women in the British Armed Forces, their role and contribution. I have been a member of Rank Outsiders for a couple of years.

I want to look at the ways in which the military institution itself and the particular culture of the Army have influenced the construction of their identity as woman, as soldier and as lesbian. The research itself takes a minimum of three years to complete, from the initial proposal to the final writing up of the thesis and I am about a third of the way through. One theme of the research I am carrying out involves putting into context the treatment of lesbians within the overall disciplinary system as it applied (prior to January 2000) to all homosexuals. Another theme concerns issues of equal opportunities for women in the military and how that impacts upon lesbians in particular. Third, within such a predominantly male, heterosexual environment, how have lesbians coped with the demands of having to conform to the military model of woman? How did/do they cope as women in a predominantly male environment and as lesbians in a straight environment? What sort of strategies did gay women adopt in order to make themselves known to other gay women but avoid detection by the authorities?

I would like to include the experiences of gay women who have served since the 1950s up to the present day in order to understand more fully how changes in policy over time have affected individual women. The first stage of gathering these experiences is for gay women who have served, or are still serving, in the Army to complete a questionnaire. If you haven't already been in touch - please contact me now!

It is really important for the credibility of the research that as many women as possible take part in the initial questionnaire stage so don't be shy or think that your experiences are not important! They are to me! It doesn't matter what rank you were/are, how long you served or what job you did/do. For those concerned about security of information - please be assured of my commitment to the confidentiality of data. The second stage will consist of in depth life-history interviews with a small number of women who have completed the questionnaire and who have indicated they would be willing to participate further. The whole process of gathering individual experiences together will take the rest of this year to complete.

More information can be found on my webpage at:
<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/gsp/Heggie.htm>. To request a questionnaire you can email me at jkfh101@york.ac.uk or telephone 01325 266796 and leave a message. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns participants may have. Please get involved if you can and tell your friends about the research - perhaps they know someone who isn't a member of Rank Outsiders!

Thanks!

Joan K. F. Heggie
 Centre for Women's Studies
 University of York
 Heslington
 YORK
 YO10 5DD

Published in *Breaking Ranks*, Issue 26 (Feb 2001), p. 22.

Breaking Ranks is the Quarterly Newsletter of The Armed Forces Lesbian and Gay Association (AFLAGA), formerly known as Rank Outsiders. AFLAGA is a not for profit charitable organisation.

LESBIANS IN THE BRITISH ARMY

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I joined up in 1976 when I was 16 as a junior leader. Joining the Army had been my ambition for several years. In 1983, while serving as a Sergeant in a RMP unit in Cyprus, I was investigated on the suspicion of being gay and, after losing my appeal, was thrown out of the Army in early 1984.

This event, as many of you will have experienced for yourselves, had a profound impact on my life. I struggled to find another job, a place to live and to come to terms with the realities of being gay in our society. Although I eventually retrained and went on to have a career in another government department, I felt that the Army chapter of my life was unfinished.

In 1996, after two years studying part-time, I decided to take the plunge and return to full-time education. Since then I have completed my BA and MA and the consistent theme throughout my research has been Women in the British Armed Forces, their role and contribution. I have been a member of Rank Outsiders for a couple of years and recently joined Kenric.

What I am trying to do within my research is understand how individual women have negotiated gender and sexuality issues in the military in order to construct their identity as woman, as soldier and as lesbian. What influence, if any, has the military institution itself and the particular culture of the Army had?

The research takes a minimum of three years to complete, from the initial proposal to the final writing up of the thesis and I am about a third of the way through.

One theme involves putting into context the treatment of lesbians within the overall disciplinary system as it applied (prior to January 2000) to all homosexuals. Another theme concerns issues of equal opportunities for women in the military and how that impacts upon lesbians in particular. Third, within such a predominantly male, heterosexual environment, how have lesbians coped with the demands of having to conform to the military model of woman? How did they cope as women in a predominantly male environment and as lesbians in a straight environment? What sort of strategies did gay women adopt in order to make themselves known to other gay women but avoid detection by the authorities?

Joan Heggie is at the University of York carrying out research towards a PhD in Women's Studies and needs your help! Her research explores the experiences of lesbians who have served, or who are currently serving, in the British Army. She needs volunteers to complete a questionnaire about being a lesbian in the British Army.



I would like to include the experiences of gay women who have served since the 1950s up to the present day in order to understand more fully how changes in policy over time have affected individual women.

Women of all ages, ranks and trades are needed. It doesn't matter if you served for 20 years or 20 weeks - your experiences are unique and invaluable! The first stage of gathering these experiences is the completion of a questionnaire.

For those concerned about security of information - please be assured of my commitment to the confidentiality of data. Each questionnaire is coded so names are never used. Once the questionnaires are returned to me, the data is logged using only the code. The original contact information and the original questionnaires are kept in a secure location and are not accessible to anyone other than myself. Women who complete the questionnaire stage have to express their willingness to participate further before I would consider contacting them again.

The second stage of the research consists of in-depth life history interviews with a small number of women who have agreed to participate further. These interviews are taped and the interviews transcribed. From the very outset of the interview process, I will be making it clear that copies of the tapes, or the

transcriptions, or both can be given to the interviewee if so requested. Again, precautions will be taken with the security of the tapes and at no time throughout the whole process will names be used anywhere in my research. The gathering of individual experiences through questionnaires and interviews will take the rest of this year to complete.

Why go to all this bother, you might ask? Why would your experiences be important? Who cares about lesbians in the British Army? This research is obviously important to me personally but it has a wider impact too. The vast amount of research available on homosexuality in the military is from the US, yet is used when debating the British Armed Forces

as if there were no differences in law, in policy and in cultural understandings with regard to homosexuality in general and lesbians in particular.

There is a small amount of research available on gays and lesbians in the British Armed Forces but what little there is has focused only on what impact homosexuality may have on the military. No one has asked questions about the influence the military might have had on the way in which we identify as homosexual.

Most research talks about gays and lesbians but then proceeds to give information only

relevant to men. Women number less than 10 per cent of the Armed Forces yet were up to 20 times more likely to be discharged for being gay prior to the ban being lifted. This research is important, therefore, because it changes the emphasis back to Britain, to lesbians and to the ways in which the environment of the military may have had an impact on our understanding and formation of our identity as gay women. For the first time, the experiences of lesbians in the British Army, so often neglected or ignored, will given a voice.

More information can be found on my webpage at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/cws/gsp/Heggie.htm>

To request a questionnaire you can email me at jkfh101@york.ac.uk or telephone 01325 266796 and leave a message. I know that many women will be uncertain about taking part because of concerns reference confidentiality. I am happy to answer any questions or concerns participants may have and would be willing to take any precautions to protect their privacy that I can. Please get involved if you can and tell your friends about the research - perhaps they know someone who isn't a member of Kenric but who would be willing to take part. Thanks!

Joan K. F. Heggie, Centre for Women's Studies, University of York, Heslington, York, O10 5DD.

Appendix 6

Interview Schedule

Before interview begins

- Thank participant for participation
- Explain interview procedure and identifier code (anonymity)
- Explain confidentiality of data and how going to be used
- Confirm questionnaire was completed by individual

Interview questions – guidance only – use questionnaire to tailor to specific participant

Introductory questions

- How did you find out about the research and why did you decide to participate?
- Why did you join the Army?
- Can you tell me a little about your career in the Army? – e.g. postings, responsibilities, rank. (Follow up specific points of interest – e.g. attachments to SIB, reasons for leaving)
- What did you like/dislike about the Army?

Sexuality

- What were the circumstances of your ‘coming out’?
- How did you feel about being a lesbian?
- How did you feel when you realised that homosexuality was unacceptable in the Army?
- Can you tell me a little about finding out what the penalties were for homosexuality?

Appendix 6

Gender

- Clarify any confusion concerning participant's understanding of the terms – 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Ask for examples to flesh out responses.
- What did you think about the uniform? Likes/dislikes – why? Also consider equipment/accessories? Do you think these feelings were affected by the time (e.g. training), rank or trade?
- How did you feel when wearing your uniform? (Different types – investigate if different meanings). (e.g. pride, national identity, authority etc.)
- Can you tell me more about how the Army encouraged feminine/masculine behaviour? (Link to questionnaire and discuss examples given (if any)).
- Can you tell me more about the penalties for being viewed as 'too feminine'/'too masculine'?
- You described yourself as ***** (check on questionnaire). Can you tell me why you describe yourself in this way?
- Follow up all examples given around 'conscious' modifications of behaviours (Q. 6(7) & Q. 6(14)).
- (If applicable) why do you think you were treated differently as a woman? Follow up possibilities of harassment.

Lesbian Identity

- Can you tell me a little bit more about how you coped with being a lesbian in such a controlled space? How did you meet other lesbians? Where did you go when off camp? (Link to Q. 7(1) & (2)).
- Can you tell me more about how you modified your behaviour to pretend that you were not gay? How successful were you? Did this worry you?
- Looking at the precautions that you took – what impact did having to go to such extremes have on you?

Appendix 6

SIB Investigations – gather more data on:

- Experience of investigations.
- Awareness of impact of investigations.
- If RMP – how did you cope with being both ‘police’ and lesbian?
- If discharged – take participant through the circumstances of her dismissal in as much detail as possible.

Close interview & thanks.

Let participant know what will happen next.

Confirm contact details and participant’s right to withdraw information.

List of Abbreviations

AFLAGA	Armed Forces Lesbian & Gay Association
AJC	Adjutant General Corps
ATS	Army Territorial Service
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CO	Commanding Officer
CSSMM	Centre for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military
DASA	Defence Analytical Services Agency
ETD	Equal Treatment Directive
GPS	Global Positioning Satellite
GSM	General Service Medal
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NAAFI	Navy, Army & Air Force Institute
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NBC	Nuclear, Biological & Chemical
POW	Prisoner of War
PRO	Public Record Office
PTI	Physical Training Instructor
PVR	Premature Voluntary Release
QAIMNS	Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service
QARANC	Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps
QMAAC	Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps
RA	Royal Artillery
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAVC	Royal Army Veterinary Corps
RCS	Regimental Conduct Sheet
RCT	Royal Corps of Transport
RE	Royal Engineers
REME	Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers
RGN	Registered General Nurse
RMP	Royal Military Police
SDA	Sex Discrimination Act
SIB	Special Investigation Branch
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TA	Territorial Army
USAF	United States Air Force
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
WAC	Women's Army Corps
WRAC	Women's Royal Army Corps

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