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Director's Note
by Mandy Restivo

This is a special edition of the Women's Center newsletter as it is the last newsletter for the 2007 academic year. Inside you will find a tribute to our Women's Center seniors who are graduating and moving on to great things! I know that they will all work to change the world, and it has been an honor to have each and every one of them on staff!

Time certainly flies when you are engaged in such meaningful work. This year has been a busy one, with excellent programs such as Take Back the Night, Words of Choice and a lecture by Jean Kilborne. Please take a look at the wonderful events we have planned for the rest of the semester, I hope you can take time out of your busy end-of-semester schedule to continue to learn and grow from our programming or relax and celebrate with events like Pride Prom.

This edition of the newsletter highlights issues of sexual victimization in the military. In the general population, only one of every seven sexual assaults is reported, in the military, the number of assaults that are reported is significantly less due to the strict hierarchical structure. It is brave to speak out about sexual victimization in any context, but especially brave within the military.

This topic received a lot of attention in 2003 when 4 high ranking officers in the Air Force were removed from their posts at the U.S. Air Force Academy following an investigation of sexual assaults. But this is not just a problem in the Air Force or in the academies. Sexual victimization and militarism are intrinsically linked. A phenomenon that is almost never talked about is the fact that when there is war, there is sexual victimization. No matter the country or the time in history rape has been used as a tool of war, as a tool of "ethnic cleansing" and as a tool of "relaxation" and "release" for military men on leave in the form of prostitution (of course not all men in the military commit these acts, but there are enough for us to talk about a trend).

What can we do about this issue? Equal treatment for women in the armed forces is a must, and this must begin with an ideology change in the military. Women soldiers must receive the same respect as male officers and must be treated with dignity. This work must be done with a multi-faceted approach that includes education, services for victims, policies that allow victims to speak out confidentially, victim advocates that can truly advocate, and accountability for those who commit such acts.

In 2005 a policy known as restricted reporting, would allow sexual assault victims to disclose the incident in secret to certain individuals. A victim can confidentially report an incident to a sexual assault response coordinator, a health care provider or a chaplain. Victims will then be assigned a victim advocate. The policy does not have any protection for victim's advocates to keep commanders from retaliating against them and does not have any provisions for victims who are not in the military but live on military bases (e.g. wives and daughters of military men).

The reality is that military culture is inherently hostile towards women. In order to truly end sexual victimization in this context, we must put an end to war and militarism. When we ask the ultimate feminist question, "where are the women?" and apply it to military and war we see that women are left at home while their husbands go to war, or that women leave their families and homes to join a military that inherently does not believe they are equal. Women are in the sex industry, women are victims of rape and sexual harassment, and women are left to deal with the environmental degradation of weapons of mass destruction.

This approach may seem unrealistic-but the military is the force that protects patriarchy…it is the ultimate institution. An excellent book to read about this subject is Bananas, Beaches, and Bases by Cynthia Enloe - this is the ultimate book if you want to make feminist sense out of international politics.

Please enjoy this edition of the newsletter, and if my statements stirred a response in you—positive or negative, please write us at women@ramapo.edu and we can put your response in our next newsletter!

Happy Reading,

Mandy Restivo
Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month 2007
Crossing Borders, Shifting Identities

Opening Speaker, Arn Chorn Pond
Monday April 2
1:00 pm Pavilion
Arn Chorn Pond, a native of Cambodia, is a survivor of the Khmer Rouge killing fields and an internationally recognized human rights leader. Chorn Pond was sent to a children's work camp after the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975. He escaped death by execution and starvation by playing his flute for the guards and later fled his captors when Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in 1979. He is currently the Director of Youth Programs for the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association in Lowell, Massachusetts. His lecture will link his experience as a survivor of genocide to the plight of the children he works with in the U.S., emphasizing the reality of a global community. Light Refreshments will be served

Embracing the Infidel
Thursday April 5
1:00 pm Pavilion Room 3
Behzad Yaghmaian will discuss his book, Embracing the Infidel, and the current state of thousands of refugees that are fleeing war torn areas of Iraq. According to Yaghmaian, the abundance of refugees in Iraq is a mounting problem that needs to be addressed by the international community.

Chang and Rosal: An Afternoon of Poetry
Monday April 9
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm J. Lee's
Victoria Chang's first book of poetry, Circle, won the Crab Orchard Review Award Series in Poetry. Rosal is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, Uprock Headspin Scramble and Dive, which won the Asian American Writers Workshop Members' Choice Award, and most recently My American Kundiman. Come and enjoy these award winning poets in a relaxed coffee house environment. Refreshments will be served.

Asian Expo
Thursday April 12
8:00 pm H 129
A celebration of Asian cultures through dance, music, and other forms of expression.

Human Trafficking 101
Tuesday April 17
1:00 pm SC 219
Crystal DeBoisse, Managing Coordinator, Center for Human Trafficking Services of the New York Association for New Americans, will discuss the realities of human trafficking and provide attendees with a context for understanding this issue.

My American Karma: Race and the Indian Diaspora
Thursday April 19
3:00 pm SC219
Dr. Sunil Bhatia, Associate Professor of Human Development of Connecticut College, will lead a discussion on how first generation, middle class Indians living in the U.S have been inserted into the racial dynamics of the American society and transformed into “people of color”. In particular, the presentation will specifically focus on how the Indian diaspora acquires the benefits of brown privilege without explicitly acknowledging their racial identity.

FASA Barrio Festival
Saturday April 21, 2007
8:00 pm SC 219 and H 129
A celebration of Filipino culture through food, music, and visual art.

Trip to the Asia Society of New York City and Imaginasian Theater
Sign up at Roadrunner Central.
Sunday April 22
Departs from The Circle at 12:30 pm
This trip includes a guided tour of the Asia Society, an international organization dedicated to strengthening relationships and deepening understanding among the peoples of Asia and the United States. Following the tour, we will eat an early dinner and view a film at the Imaginasian Theater.

The Mystical Arts of Tibet: Sacred Music Sacred Dance
The Monks of Tibet's Drepung Loseling Monastery
Sunday April 29
3:00 pm Sharp Theater
These are the monks made famous by actor Richard Gere, and endorsed by the Dalai Lama. Mystical masked dances, elaborate costumes, traditional instruments and multiphonic singing punctuate a tradition that dates back 2,500 years. This is a unique opportunity to experience the special culture of Tibet “Remarkable . . . the music and dance invoke sacred ecstasy . . .” New York Times
Tickets: Adults: $20/15/12; Children (under 17) $10; Seniors and Ramapo Affiliates: 5% discount off regular ticket prices.

Brought to you by:
The Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Committee
United Asian Association
South Asians at Ramapo
Filipino American Student Association
The East Asian Studies Faculty
The Literature Program
Omega Phi Chi
Sigma Delta Tau
Mu Sigma Upsilon
Tau Delta Phi

For more information or for disability related accommodations, please contact the Women's Center at X7468.
**Women’s Center Events**

**A Day to End Sexual Violence**
**Survivor Art and Poetry**

Thursday, April 5

Art Exhibit 10:00 am - 6:00 pm
Open mic/poetry 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm

J.Lee's

Join us in J.Lee's for a survivor art exhibit sponsored by the YWCA of Bergen County Rape Crisis Center. At 7:00 pm, there will be a poetry reading and an open mic. During the day, there will also be volunteers throughout campus, wearing black, to commemorate the lives and voices lost due to sexual assault.

**Ramapo Pride Prom**

Saturday, April 14
8:00 pm Friends Hall

Ramapo Pride Prom was created to benefit LGBTIQQ people who could not bring someone of the same sex to their high school prom. All sexualities and gender identities are welcome. Whether you are a same-sex couple, a straight couple, or a just individuals looking for a great time, come to Pride Prom! Live DJ, prizes and great food! This year is a black and white theme, so dress to impress! Tickets are free at Roadrunner Central.

**Day of Silence**

Wednesday, April 18
9:00 am - 5:00 pm, campus-wide
Reflected at 5:00 pm Women's Center

The Day of Silence is an annual event held to commemorate and protest anti-LGBTIQQ bullying, harassment and discrimination in schools. Students and teachers nationwide will observe the day in silence to echo the silence that LGBTIQQ and ally students face every day. At Ramapo, we will be wearing t-shirts and silently holding a table to raise donations for a LGBTIQQ charity. After a day of silence, we will meet in the Women's Center at 5:00 pm to reflect on the day. For more information, visit http://www.dayofsilence.org

There will be an interest meeting for the Day of Silence on Wednesday, April 11 at 5 pm.

**“Generating Electricity from Micro-Organisms Found in Soil for Use in Developing Countries”**

Thursday, April 19
3:00 pm H-Wing Auditorium

A lecture by Dr. Helen White, a post-doctoral researcher at Harvard.

**Earth Week Keynote Speaker: Majora Carter from Sustainable South Bronx**

Thursday, April 19
6:00 pm H-Wing Auditorium

Growing up in the South Bronx, says Majora Carter, "it didn't occur to me that what I had here was an environment." Her neighborhood was surrounded by waste treatment plants, garbage dumps and power stations, and she glimpsed nature only when visiting the blueberry patch in her aunt's backyard in New Jersey. Since then, Carter, a Macarthur-winning founder of Sustainable South Bronx (SSBX), an organization dedicated to holistic community development, sponsors projects that create jobs, protect the environment and bring beautiful green space to the inner city.

**Special Meetings**

**Queer Peer Services**

**Peer Support Group**

Every Monday
9:30 pm Women’s Center (C 220)

This peer support group creates a safe space for members of the LGBTIQQ* community to talk about issues faced on campus pertaining to sexuality, relationships, and dealing with homophobia and related issues. All LGBTIQQ people and their allies are welcome!

*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Intersexed, Questioning, Queer

Queer Peer Services website:
http://www.ramapo.edu/studentlife/gaypeer/index.html

**Feminists United**

**Every Thursday**

1 pm Women’s Center (C 220)

Feminists United is a club dedicated to raising awareness about various issues such as reproductive justice, minimum wage, economic justice, womens' rights, racism, sexism, and many more. We want to make a change, but we need your help! Come join our fight for peace!

Feminists United Myspace:
http://www.myspace.com/feministsunitedatramapo

Feminists United group on Facebook:
http://ramapo.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2246655035

**Ramapo Pride**

**Every Monday**

1 pm Women’s Center (C 220)

Ramapo Pride provides a safe environment for LGBTIQQ students and allies. The organization is built around providing activist and educational programming, but also providing a social network for LGBTIQQ students on campus. It organizes social, educational and activist programs for the campus at large.

Ramapo Pride group on Facebook:
http://ramapo.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2227619167

Tell us what you think about the articles in this newsletter by messaging us or leaving a comment on our Myspace:
http://www.myspace.com/rcnjwc
Honoring Our Women’s Center Seniors

The Women’s Center would like to thank Will, Kate, Courtney and Phil for their dedication to their positions over the past few years. We will miss you!

Will Mazur
Academic Queer Peer Services Coordinator

Major: Theater
Minor: Women's Studies

Will has worked at the Women's Center for 3 years!

After graduation, Will is taking a year off. He will then pursue a Masters Degree in Gender Studies and later a Doctorate in Sociology. Will plans to one day teach at an institution of higher education in the field of gender and GLBT studies.

Women's Center Events: Women's Herstory Month 2007, The Vagina Monologues, GLBT History Month, classroom presentations

Other Organizations: Ramapo Pride, Alpha Psi Omega, Feminists United, RCNJ Judicial Board, opinionated copy editor for the Ramapo News

Kate Brown
Program Coordinator for International Women’s Issues

Major: Gender Studies

Kate has worked at the Women's Center for 2 and 1/2 years.

After graduation, she plans to move to Philadelphia and work in the non-profit field.

Women's Center Events: Inga Muscio - author of Cunt, Female Friendly Funk, Volunteer Coordinator

Other Organizations: Feminists United, RCORE, Ramapo Pride

Courtney Tobin
Events Queer Peer Services Coordinator

Major: Psychology
Minor: Literature and Women's Studies

Courtney has worked at the Women's Center for 2 years.

She is currently waiting to hear from Psychology graduate programs. She is planning to obtain a Ph.D in Psychology.

Women's Center Events: Day of Silence, GLBT History Month, World AIDS Day

Other organizations: Ramapo Pride, Peer Facilitation

Phil Harding
Men’s Outreach Coordinator

Major: Communications Writing and Elementary Education

Phil has worked at the Women’s Center for one year.

After graduation, he plans to teach in an elementary school.

Women’s Center Events: Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, Men Against Violence discussion group, National Organization for Men Against Sexism Conference

Other Organizations: RCORE, Vice President of Various Visual Artists
Musings

Four Years at the Women's Center
By Courtney Tobin,
Queer Peer Services Coordinator

When I came to Ramapo as a freshman, I was looking to change the world, but I certainly wasn't looking for a feminist community, and I never thought I would enter a place called “The Women's Center,” never mind work here for two years. However, life is full of surprises - college life especially.

My first conception of the Women's Center was of a terrifying place where everyone has the same radical feminist ideas. I've never been a feminist, but in high school I was decidedly against all the nightmarish (and disgustedly false) descriptions I had heard of feminists. Nor did I put much stock into my being a woman as a significant role in life - it was just something I was, not something I thought about. I've never been raped, abused or harassed because of my sex, nor have I dealt with more positive ordeals of womanhood, such as being in a long term, committed relationship, and I don't want to have children. What would I need the Women's Center for?

I was very wrong.

I first became involved in the Women's Center almost against my will through Ramapo Pride, Ramapo's gay/straight alliance. I may not have been comfortable with gender activism, but I loved queer activism, and I was very involved with Pride from the very beginning.

It was through Pride that I was able to get to know some people from the Women's Center, and get into intense conversations about feminism, gender equality, and oppression. All of my preconceptions about feminists, borne of living in my conservative hometown - the man-haters and the hardened, angry women with no sense of humor and even less sense of humanity - were abandoned when I got to know the people who work here. They laugh a lot, they have friendships and relationships with men, if that's what their preferences are - there are even straight men who comfortably work here to promote gender equality. More importantly, all of them have insightful ideas about things I had never before considered, such as the overlap between my own queer activist interest and feminism. And never once, as I was afraid of, was I ridiculed for my occasional proclivity for more traditionally feminine pursuits or ideas.

My junior year, I became president of Pride, and I also started working at the Women's Center. My true reason for applying was to prove myself before the Gay Peer Service Coordinator (the name has since changed) search happened that winter. I wanted to be - and became - one of the new Gay Peer Services Coordinators in the spring semester. However, I didn't realize how much that single semester as a general Women's Center employee would teach me. Aside from working with the best staff in the world, including several of my best friends, I was given the opportunity to learn more about women and our place in the world. I was encouraged to develop new activist interests, and I was given the freedom to do programming and research pertaining to those interests.

More than that, I was given a comfortable environment in which to talk about these ideas. That, in essence, is what the Women's Center is: a comfortable environment in which to discuss ideas. It's a forum for activist and intellectual debate, and it's filled with some of the most interesting, informed people I have ever met. The interests of these people are not limited to women's studies, but extend to sexuality, gender identity, race, men's studies, class, environmentalism, theology, and just about every other social issue one can think of.

Now, after almost two years of working in the Women's Center, and four years of being a part of this environment, I feel that I'm not ready to leave. I'm a part of one of the best communities on campus, and it's given me the opportunity to grow in ways that I never imagined possible. I encourage every student to visit the Women's Center and to see what we have to offer. You may not find your particular niche in the community here, as I did, but you will find an open, welcoming environment to which you may go for support or conversation anytime.

Volunteering in the Women's Center
By Javier Calderon
Women's Center Volunteer

Volunteering at the Women's Center has given me a unique experience. The Women's Center is a different place from the rest of Ramapo. It is one of the few places that you can go and feel welcomed regardless of your gender, race, or sexual orientation. The Women's Center hosts many events that help people learn about subjects such as women's rights and LGBTIQQ issues that a person might not normally learn anywhere else. This is a much needed breath of fresh air to every day campus life. I am glad that I am able to help to make this campus a better place by supporting the Women's Center's valiant causes.

Recommended Reading

Bananas, Beaches and Bases
Making Feminist Sense of International Politics

Bananas, Beaches and Bases is recommended by Women's Center Director Mandy Restivo for anyone interested in learning more about feminism in international politics.
On the morning of Monday, Jan. 9, 2006, a 21-year-old Army specialist named Suzanne Swift went AWOL. Her unit, the 54th Military Police Company, out of Fort Lewis, Wash., was two days away from leaving for Iraq. Swift and her platoon had been home less than a year, having completed one 12-month tour of duty in February 2005, and now the rumor was that they were headed to Baghdad to run a detention center. The footlockers were packed. The company's 130 soldiers had been granted a weekend leave in order to go where they needed to go, to say whatever goodbyes needed saying. When they reassembled at 7 a.m. that Monday, uniformed and standing in immaculate rows, Specialist Swift, who during the first deployment drove a Humvee on combat patrols near Karbala, was not among them.

Swift would later say that she had every intention of going back to Iraq. But in the weeks leading up to the departure date, she started to feel increasingly anxious. She was irritable, had trouble sleeping at night, picked fights with friends, drank heavily. "I was having a lot of little freakouts," she told me when I went to visit her in Washington State last summer. "But I was also ready to go. I was like, 'O.K., I can do this.'"

The weekend before the deployment was to start, however, Swift drove south to her hometown, Eugene, Ore., to visit with her mother and three younger siblings. The decision to flee, she says, happened in a split second on Sunday night. "All my stuff was in the car," she recalls. "My keys were in my hand, and then I looked at my mom and said: 'I can't do this. I can't go back there.' It wasn't some rational decision. It was a huge, crazy, heart-pounding thing."

For two days after she failed to report, Swift watched her cellphone light up with calls from her commanders. They left concerned messages and a few angry ones too. She listened to the messages but did not return the calls. Then rather abruptly, the phone stopped ringing. The 54th MP Company had left for Iraq. Swift says she understood then the enormity of what she'd just done.

For the remainder of that winter, Swift hid out in the Oregon seaside town of Brookings, staying in a friend's home, uncertain whether the Army was looking for her. "I got all my money out of the bank," she told me. "I never used my credit card, in case they were trying to trace me. It was always hanging over my head." At her mother's urging, she drove back to Eugene every week to see a therapist. In April of last year, she finally moved back into her family's home. Then, on the night of June 11, a pair of local police officers knocked on the door and found Swift inside, painting her toenails with her 19-year-old sister. She was handcuffed, driven away and held in the county jail for two nights before being taken back to Fort Lewis, where military officials threatened to charge her with being absent without leave. As Army officials pondered her fate, Swift was assigned a room in the barracks and an undemanding desk job at Fort Lewis.

Despite the fact that military procedure for dealing with AWOL soldiers is well established - most are promptly court-martialed and, if convicted, reduced in rank and jailed in a military prison - Suzanne Swift's situation raised a seemingly unusual set of issues. She told Army investigators that the reason she did not report for deployment was that she had been sexually harassed repeatedly by three of her supervisors throughout her military service: beginning in Kuwait; through much of her time in Iraq; and following her return to Fort Lewis. She claimed too to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, a highly debilitating condition brought on by an abnormal amount of stress. According to the most recent edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, used by mental-health professionals to establish diagnostic criteria, PTSD symptoms can include, among other things, depression, insomnia or "feeling constantly threatened." It is common for those afflicted to "re-experience" traumatic moments through intrusive, graphic memories and nightmares.

Swift's stress came not just from the war and not just from the supposed harassment, she told the investigators, but from some combination of the two. In a written statement to investigators, Swift asserted that her station, Camp Lima, outside Karbala, was hit by mortar attacks almost nightly for the first two months of her deployment. She reported working 16-hour shifts, experiencing the death of a fellow company member in an incident of friendly fire and having a close friend injured in a car bombing. What Swift said distressed her most, however, was a situation that involved her squad leader, the sergeant to whom she directly reported in Iraq. She claimed that he propositioned her for sex the first day the two of them arrived in Iraq and that she felt coerced into having a sexual relationship with him that lasted four months - the relationship consisting, she said, of his knocking on her door late at night and demanding intercourse. When she finally ended this arrangement, Swift told me, the sergeant retaliated by ordering her to do solitary forced marches from one side of the camp to another at night in full battle gear and by humiliating her in front of her fellow soldiers. (The sergeant could not be reached, but according to an internal Army report, he denied any sexual contact with Swift.)

As it often is with matters involving sex and power, the lines are a little blurry. Swift does not say she was raped, exactly, but rather manipulated into having sex - repeatedly - with a man who was above her in rank and therefore responsible for her health and safety. (Some victims' advocates use the term "command rape" to describe such situations.) Swift says that the other two sergeants- one in Kuwait and one back home in Fort Lewis, both a couple of ranks above her - made comments like "You want to [expletive] me, don't you?" or when Swift asked where she was to report for duty, responded, "On my bed, naked."
In the wake of several sex scandals in the 1990s, the U.S. military has tried to become more sensitive to the presence of women, especially now that they fill 15 percent of the ranks worldwide. There are regular mandated workshops on preventing sexual harassment and assault. Each battalion has a designated Equal Opportunity representative trained to field and respond to complaints. Swift said she initially reported what she characterized as an unwanted relationship with her squad leader in Iraq to her Equal Opportunity representative there, who listened - she claims - but did nothing about it. (According to the internal report, the E.O. representative told investigators that he asked Swift if she had a complaint to make but that she declined at the time.)

Swift made it clear that since enlisting in the Army when she was 19, she'd grown accustomed to hearing sexually loaded remarks from fellow enlisted soldiers. It happened "all the time," she said. But coming from her superiors, especially far away from the support systems of home and against a backdrop of mortar attacks and the general uncertainties of war, the overtones felt more threatening. "You can tell another E-4 to go to hell," she said, referring to the rank of specialist. "But you can't say that to an E-5," she said, referring to a sergeant. "If your sergeant tells you to walk over a minefield, you're supposed to do it."

I went to see Swift last July as I was immersed in a series of interviews with women who'd gone to Iraq and come home with PTSD. I was trying to understand how being a woman fit into both the war and the psychological consequences of war. The story I heard over and over, the dominant narrative really, followed similar lines to Swift's: allegations of sexual trauma, often denied or dismissed by superiors; ensuing demotions or court-martials; and lingering questions about what actually occurred.

Swift and I - along with her mother, Sara Rich - met at a run-down sushi place in Tacoma, Wash., not far from Fort Lewis. Swift has blond hair, milky skin and clear green eyes, which lend her the vague aspect of a Victorian doll - albeit a very tough one. She curses freely, smokes Newports and, when she's not in uniform, favors low-cut shirts that show off an elaborate flower tattoo on her chest. "Suzanne is not some passive little lily," explained her mother. "She's a soldier."

By midsummer of last year, the two women had settled into a ritual: once a week Rich would pick up her daughter at the base and take her out for a meal, and then the two would check into a nearby Holiday Inn, talking and watching television and finally going to sleep. At 6:30 the following morning, Swift would put on her uniform and Rich would drive her back to Fort Lewis in time to report for work. Rich, who is 41, is a social worker who specializes in family therapy and operates with a certain type of mambaturn verve. She was in frequent touch last summer with her daughter's Chicago-based lawyers, who were then negotiating with the Army to get Swift medically discharged for her PTSD so that she could avoid being court-martialed and convicted for going AWOL. In the six weeks since Swift's arrest, Rich marshaled both legal funds and public sympathy for her daughter's defense, largely by tapping into the outrage fuming inside the antiwar movement. One of Rich's friends from Eugene built a Web site devoted to Suzanne, taking both donations and online signatures for a petition to have her released from the Army without punishment. Someone else started selling T-shirts, tote bags and teddy bears that read "Free Suzanne" and "Suzanne's My Hero" to benefit the cause.

At that point, the hullabaloo was doing little good. A week before I arrived in Washington, the Army's investigation determined that Swift's charges against two of her higher-ups, including the one Swift said demanded sex from her, could not be substantiated because of a lack of evidence. (Both men denied Swift's allegations. By the time the investigation began, in June 2006, her squad leader had already finished his military service, which put him beyond the reach of punishment by the military anyway.) There was a third sergeant against whom Swift filed a formal harassment complaint in the spring of 2005, nearly a year before she went AWOL. In it she maintained that immediately following her unit's return from Iraq, he began making frequent suggestive remarks to her and at one point, during the course of a normal workday, "grinded" his body against hers in an inappropriate way. That man received a stridently worded letter of reprimand on May 25, 2005, from a lieutenant colonel and was transferred away from Fort Lewis.

What still remained to be determined was whether Swift would be held accountable for going AWOL or whether the Army would accept the idea that her failure to report was, as she saw it, an instinctive act of psychological self-preservation. Whatever the case, Swift was quickly becoming a symbol - though of what it was hard to say. Among the antiwar crowd, thanks in part to the fiery speeches Swift's mother was delivering at local rallies and antiwar gatherings, she was being painted as a martyr, a rebel and a victim all at once. Meanwhile, others deemed her a traitor, a fraud or simply a whiny female soldier who'd been too lazy or too selfish to return to war.

Swift herself seemed stunned by the attention. "Look at me, a poster child," she told me wryly, making it clear that she was not enjoying it. She did not make the kind of grandiose anti-military statements her mother did but rather seemed to be trying to shrug off what happened to her. She told me she was having nightmares and was sometimes waylaid by fits of hysterical crying. But she described these flatly, seeming almost unwilling or unable to express anger or hurt. Overall, she seemed strikingly detached.

I had read enough about PTSD to know that "emotional numbing" is one of the disorder's primary symptoms, but it made understanding Swift and what she'd been through a more difficult task. "Avoidance" is another commonly recognized symptom in people with PTSD, especially avoidance of those things that bring reminders of the original trauma. If the Iraq war and the men she encountered there and afterward traumatized Swift, then perhaps going AWOL could be seen as a sort of meta-avoidance of all that plagued her.
hat night after dinner, Swift lay on her hotel bed with her shoes kicked off, staring blankly at the ceiling. She was thoughtful and willing to answer questions. A few times, describing her deployment, she hovered close to tears but then seemed promptly to swallow them. She told me that she came home from Iraq feeling demoralized and depressed. She resumed her stateside duties with the Army for the 11 months between deployments and in general "just tried to deal."

She was not, however, formally given a diagnosis of PTSD until after she went AWOL - first by a civilian psychiatrist within days of her failure to report for deployment and later, Swift says, through the Army's mental-health division at Fort Lewis. (The Army could not confirm this, citing privacy issues.) The timing raised a serious question: Was the PTSD a legitimate disability or a hastily crafted excuse for skipping out on the war? Nobody, perhaps not even Swift, could say for sure.

II. The "Double Whammy"

No matter how you look at it, Iraq is a chaotic war in which an unprecedented number of women have been exposed to high levels of stress. So far, more than 160,000 female soldiers have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, as compared to the 7,500 who served in Vietnam and the 41,000 who were dispatched to the gulf war in the early ’90s. Today one of every 10 U.S. soldiers in Iraq is female.

Despite the fact that women are generally limited to combat-support roles in the war, they are arguably witnessing a historic amount of violence. With its baffling sand swirl of roadside bombs and blind ambushes, its civilians who look like insurgents and insurgents who look like civilians, the Iraq war has virtually eliminated the distinction between combat units and support units in the military. "Frankly one of the most dangerous things you can do in Iraq is drive a truck, and that's considered a combat-support role," says Matthew Friedman, executive director of the National Center for PTSD, a research-and-education program financed by the Department of Veterans Affairs. "You've got women that are in harm's way right up there with the men."

There have been few large-scale studies done on the particular psychiatric effects of combat on female soldiers in the United States, mostly because the sample size has heretofore been small. More than one-quarter of female veterans of Vietnam developed PTSD at some point in their lives, according to the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey conducted in the mid-’80s, which included 432 women, most of whom were nurses. (The PTSD rate for women was 4 percent below that of the men.) Two years after deployment to the gulf war, where combat exposure was relatively low, Army data showed that 16 percent of a sample of female soldiers studied met diagnostic criteria for PTSD, as opposed to 8 percent of their male counterparts. The data reflect a larger finding, supported by other research, that women are more likely to be given diagnoses of PTSD, in some cases at twice the rate of men.

Experts are hard pressed to account for the disparity. Is it that women have stronger reactions to trauma? Do they do a better job of describing their symptoms and are therefore given diagnoses more often? Or do men and women tend to experience different types of trauma? Friedman points out that some traumatic experiences have been shown to be more psychologically "toxic" than others. Rape, in particular, is thought to be the most likely to lead to PTSD in women (and in men, in the rarer times it occurs). Participation in combat, though, he says, is not far behind.

Much of what we know about trauma comes primarily from research on two distinct populations - civilian women who have been raped and male combat veterans. But taking into account the large number of women serving in dangerous conditions in Iraq and reports suggesting that women in the military bear a higher risk than civilian women of having been sexually assaulted either before or during their service, it's conceivable that this war may well generate an unfortunate new group to study - women who have experienced sexual assault and combat, many of them before they turn 25.

A 2003 report financed by the Department of Defense revealed that nearly one-third of a nationwide sample of female veterans seeking health care through the V.A. said they experienced rape or attempted rape during their service. Of that group, 37 percent said they were raped multiple times, and 14 percent reported they were gang-raped. Perhaps even more tellingly, a small study financed by the V.A. following the gulf war suggests that rates of both sexual harassment and assault rise during wartime. The researchers who carried out this study also looked at the prevalence of PTSD symptoms - including flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbing and round-the-clock anxiety - and found that women who endured sexual assault were more likely to develop PTSD than those who were exposed to combat.

Patricia Resick, director of the Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for PTSD at the Boston V.A. facility, says she worries that the conflict in Iraq is leaving large numbers of women potentially vulnerable to this "double whammy" of military sexual trauma and combat exposure. "Many of these women," she says, "will have both." She notes that though both men and women who join the military have been shown to have higher rates of sexual and physical abuse in their backgrounds than the general population, women entering the military tend to have more traumas accumulated than men. One way to conceptualize this is to imagine that each one of us has a psychic reservoir for holding life's traumas, but by some indeterminate combination of genetics and socioeconomic factors, some of us appear to have bigger reservoirs than others, making us more resilient.

Women entering the military with abuse in their backgrounds, Resick says, "may be more likely to have that reservoir half full."

Over the last few years, I've spoken at length with more than a dozen trauma specialists, questioning them about the effect this war will have on the psyches of the women who have fought in it. The prevailing answer is "We just
don't know yet." The early reports for both sexes, though, are troubling. The V.A. notes that as of last November, more than one-third of the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan treated at its facilities were given diagnoses of a mental-health disorder, with PTSD being the most common. So far, the V.A. has diagnosed possible PTSD in some 34,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; nearly 3,800 of them are women. Given that PTSD sometimes takes years to surface in a veteran, these numbers are almost assuredly going to grow. With regard to women, nearly every expert I interviewed mentioned the reportedly high rates of sexual harassment and assault in the military as a particular concern.

The Department of Defense in recent years has made policy changes designed to address these issues. In 2005 it established a formal Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program, and trains "Victim Advocates" on major military installations. The rules have also been rewritten so that victims are now able to report sexual assaults confidentially in "restricted reports" that give them access to medical treatment and counseling without setting off an official investigation. The results could be viewed as both encouraging and disturbing: comparing figures from 2005, when the restricted reporting began, to those of 2004, the number of reported assaults across the military jumped 40 percent, to 2,374. While victims may be feeling more empowered to report sexual assault, it appears that the number of assaults are not diminishing.

If Suzanne Swift's why-bother approach to telling her superiors about the harassment in Iraq initially struck me as curious, it began to make more sense as I spoke with a number of other female Iraq veterans. There was a pervasive sense among them that reporting a sexual crime was seldom worthwhile. Department of Defense statistics seem to bear this out: of the 3,038 investigations of military sexual assault charges completed in 2004 and 2005, only 329 - about one-tenth - of them resulted in a court-martial of the perpetrator. More than half were dismissed for lack of evidence or because an offender could not be identified, and another 617 were resolved through milder administrative punishments, like demotions, transfers and letters of admonishment. Unaware of the actual numbers, many of the women I talked to seemed, in any event, to have soaked up a larger message about the male-dominated military culture. "Saying something was looked down upon," says Amorita Randall, who served in Iraq in 2004 with the Navy, explaining why she did not report what she says was a rape by a petty officer at a naval base on Guam shortly before she was deployed to Iraq. "I don't know how to explain it. You just don't expect anything to be done about it anyway, so why even try?"

III. The Pressure of Being a Woman
Many of the women I spoke with said they felt the burden of having to represent their sex - to defy stereotypes about women somehow being too weak for military duty in a war zone by displaying more resiliency and showing less emotion than they otherwise might. There appears to have been little, too, in the way of female bonding in the war zone: most reported that they avoided friendships with other women during the deployment, in part because of the fact that there were fewer women to choose from and in part because of the ridicule that came with having a close friend. "You're one of three things in the military - a bitch, a whore or a dyke," says Abbie Pickett, who is 24 and a combat-support specialist with the Wisconsin Army National Guard. "As a female, you get classified pretty quickly."

Many women mentioned being the subject of crass jokes told by male soldiers. Some said that they used sarcasm to deflect the attention but that privately the ridicule wore them down. Others described warding off sexual advances again and again. "They basically assume that because you're a girl in the Army, you're obligated to have sex with them," Suzanne Swift told me at one point.

There were women, it should be noted, who spoke of feeling at ease among the men in their platoons, who said their male peers treated them respectfully. Anecdotally, this seemed most common among reserve and medical units, where the sex ratios tended to be more even. Several women credited their commanders for establishing and enforcing a more egalitarian climate, where sexual remarks were not tolerated.

This was not the case for Pickett, who arrived in Iraq early in 2003, having been sexually assaulted, she said, during a humanitarian deployment to Nicaragua less than two years earlier, when she was just 19. When I spoke to her by phone in December, she recalled being too afraid to report the incident, particularly given the fact that the supposed perpetrator was an officer who ranked above her. During her 11-month stint in Iraq, stationed mostly outside Tikrit in a company of 19 women and 140 men, Pickett claimed her male peers thought nothing of commenting on her breast size or making sexual jokes about her. She regularly encountered porn magazines sitting in the latrines and in common areas. None of this behavior was particularly new to her; it was life as she knew it in the military. Yet in a war zone the effect seemed more corrosive. "The real difference is that over there, there's never a break from it," Pickett told me. "At home, you can go out with your girlfriends and get a beer and talk about the idiots who were cracking jokes. Over there, you're a minority 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You never get that 10 minutes to relax or even cry. Sometimes you just need to let it all out."

One night in the fall of 2003, Pickett recalled, her unit endured a mortar attack. Trained as a combat lifesaver, she spent part of the night tending to bleeding soldiers by flashlight in a field tent. Once the experience was over, the memory kept replaying in her mind. "For a long time, I wished I had died that night," Pickett told me, adding that she returned to her home in Wisconsin and was "barely functioning" - unable to sleep or concentrate. She spent days alone inside her apartment, not talking to anyone. "I was draining everyone around me," she says. A year after her deployment, a V.A. clinician formally diagnosed PTSD, which Pickett says she thinks stems from the stress of combat, harassment and the earlier sexual assault. If Vietnam became notorious as a war that combined violence
and sex, with Southeast Asian brothels being the destination of choice for soldiers on temporary leave from the war, the sexual politics of the Iraq war are, as of yet, unclear.

Joane Nagel, a sociology professor at the University of Kansas, is studying sex and the military as it pertains to the Iraq war. What she has found, she told me recently, is that "when you take young women and drop them into that hypermasculine environment, the sex stuff just explodes. Some have willing sex. Some get coerced into it. Women are vulnerable sexually." The specter of childhood abuse in military men and women potentially adds another layer of combustibility to gender relations. Tina Lee, a psychiatrist at the V.A. Palo Alto Health Care System in California, works with both male and female PTSD patients. She points out that traumatic experiences in childhood may increase the risk of developing PTSD when exposed to another trauma in adulthood. Experiencing childhood trauma can also produce opposing behaviors in adult men and women. Male survivors of childhood abuse are more likely to act aggressively and angrily, while some women appear to lose their self-protective instincts. A female patient, she says, once offered up an apt description of this tendency to end up in hurtful situations, saying that her "people picker" had been broken.

"So you have young women joining the military who have the profile of being victimized, who don't have boundaries sometimes," Lee went on to say. "And then you have a male population that fits a perpetrator profile. They are mostly under 25, often developmentally adolescent, and you put them together. What do you think will happen? The men do the damage, and the women get damaged."

Being sexually assaulted by a fellow soldier may prove extra-traumatic, as it represents a breach in the hallowed code of military cohesion - a concept that most enlistees have drilled into them from the first day of boot camp. "It's very disconcerting to have someone who is supposed to save your life, who has your back, turn on you and do something like that," says Susan Avila-Smith, the director of Women Organizing Women, an advocacy program designed to help traumatized women navigate the vast V.A. healthcare and benefits system. "You don't want to believe it's real. You don't want to have to deal with it. The family doesn't want to deal with it. Society doesn't want to deal with it."

Pickett, who since returning from Iraq has become active in Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a non-partisan advocacy group, says she believes that the stress of just worrying about this puts a woman in danger. "When I joined the military, a lot of people at home said things like, 'Oh, are you really going to be able to handle it?" she said. "So then you're in Iraq, driving down Highway 1 with an M-16 in your hand. You have those doubts people had about you in the back of your head. You're thinking 5,000 things at once, trying to be everything everybody wants you to be. And you still have to take the crap from the men. You're 20 years old and growing into your own body, having an actual sex drive. But you've got 30 horny guys propositioning you and being really disgusting about it." She added: "Women are set up to fail in a very real way, in an area where they could get killed. If your mind isn't 100 percent on the battlefield, you could die. That's the bottom line."

IV. Flickers of a Larger Fire

Three years ago, while researching an article for this magazine on injured soldiers who fought in Iraq, I happened to have a phone conversation with a woman from Michigan who served as a reservist in the Gulf War. Like many people, she'd been watching coverage of the war in Iraq with concern. At the time, I was focused on the early waves of soldiers returning home with horrendous, debilitating injuries - the amputees, the paraplegics, the brain-injured - but she was worried about something entirely different, equally devastating but far less visible.

She used her own story as an example: While serving in a mostly male reserve unit in Kuwait, she told me, she was sexually assaulted. After returning home to Michigan, she began exhibiting symptoms of PTSD - jumpiness, intrusive thoughts and nightmares - and promptly went to her local V.A. hospital for help. She was then put into group therapy - which has long been shown to be an economical and reasonably effective way of helping trauma survivors process their experiences - but her "group" was made up entirely of male Vietnam vets, some of whom were trying to work through sex crimes they committed during military service. Others came home from war and beat their wives. "I freaked out," the female reservist told me. "It sent me into a complete tailspin."

She began to drink heavily. She lost her job, moved away from her family and toyed with the idea of suicide. Few PTSD stories are happy stories, but this one eventually took a positive turn: a therapist at her local V.A. hospital finally referred her to a 10-bed residential program for women with PTSD located in Menlo Park, Calif. Desperate for help, she spent a number of weeks there, receiving daily therapy and learning coping skills in the company of a small group of other female veterans and a staff of mostly female therapists. The experience, she told me, saved her life.

Following the early coverage of the Iraq war, however, she was feeling her PTSD begin to stir again. Jessica Lynch - who, it was reported, might have been sexually assaulted as a prisoner of war in the first weeks after the invasion - was being celebrated as a hero. TV news reports showed female soldiers bidding farewell to their spouses and children. All this woman in Michigan could think about, though, was what things would look like on the other side, whether the V.A. would know what to do with these women if they later turned up needing help - whether, in particular, sexual-assault victims would be retraumatized trying to find their way in a system that was built almost entirely around the needs of men.

Thomas Berger, national chairman of Vietnam Veterans of America's PTSD-and-substance-abuse committee, told me recently: "I think women are more likely to fall through the cracks."
The fact is, if a woman veteran comes in from Iraq who's been in a combat situation and has also been raped, there are very few clinicians in the V.A. who have been trained to treat her specific needs.

As the Iraq war creates tens of thousands of female war veterans, surely we will begin to know more about the impact of PTSD on the life of a military woman. Female soldiers have flown fighter jets, commanded battalions, lost limbs, survived stints as P.O.W.'s, killed insurgents and also come home in flag-covered caskets. And many, too, have begun to experience the psychic fallout of war, a concept made famous post-Vietnam by a generation of now middle-aged men. "We're much more willing to acknowledge what guys do in combat - both the negative and the heroic," says Erin Solaro, author of the 2006 book "Women in the Line of Fire." "But as a culture, we're not yet willing to do that for women. Female combat vets tend to be very lonely people."

Sexual trauma by itself or in combination with combat stands to isolate a female vet further, says Avila-Smith, the veterans' advocate. "If you're in combat, you can talk about it in group therapy," she told me. "You can say, 'Yeah, I was in this battle and I saw my friends blown up,'" she says. "But nobody raises their hand and says out in the middle of the V.A.: 'Yeah, I was raped in the military, was anybody else? Do we have something in common?'" Avila-Smith herself says she was sexually assaulted while stationed in Texas in 1992 and developed PTSD as a result. For a long time, everyday functioning was a challenge. "For two years I had a list on my bathroom mirror to brush my teeth, brush my hair, wash my face," she said as we sat at a sunny picnic table outside a V.A. hospital in Seattle. "Every morning it was like waking up in a new world. How did I get here? What's going on? Why is my brain not working?"

This kind of bewilderment is something I encountered again and again, talking to more than 30 military women who struggle with PTSD. Whether they had just returned from Iraq or were 25 years past their service, whether they'd been sexually assaulted, seen combat or both, most reported feeling forgetful and unfocused, alienated from their own minds.

Keli Frasier, an Army reservist living in Clifton, Colo., who said she did not experience sexual assault, told me that because of some combination of anxiety and memory loss, she'd been fired from three low-wage jobs and dropped out of college since returning from Iraq in May 2004. Like a few of the others I met, Frasier always kept a notebook close by to jot down things she was afraid she'd forget. "Half the time," she said, sounding genuinely confused, "I don't understand why I lose the jobs." According to her account, while driving a fuel truck in Iraq, she watched her squad leader die in a roadside ambush and another peer have his leg blown off with a grenade. "In all those situations, your mind just goes on autopilot, and you just do what you're trained to do," she said, sitting on a couch in a warmly decorated trailer she and her husband own. She bounced her 8-month-old son on one knee as she talked. "I didn't really start having any mental issues until we got home," she said, adding that it was four or five months before PTSD was diagnosed by a V.A. counselor.

Research has shown that exposure to trauma has the potential to alter brain chemistry, affecting among other things the way memories are processed and stored. To vastly simplify a complex bit of neurology: If the brain can't make sense of a traumatic experience, it may be unable to process it and experience it as a long-term memory. Traumas tend to persist as emotional - or unconscious - memories, encoded by the amygdala, the brain's fear center. A trauma can then resurface unexpectedly when triggered by a sensory cue. The cerebral cortex, where rational thought takes place, is not in control. The fear center rules; the brain is overwhelmed. Small tasks - tooth-brushing, grocery-shopping, feeding your children - start to feel monumental, even frightening.

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