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# **The Invisible Veterans from the Iraq Wars and What Educational Theories May Benefit the Sisterhood Population**

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**Women are a critical resource for military recruitment after their involvement in combat in the Iraq Wars, yet little research has been done on this growing Sisterhood population.**

*Keywords:* Sisterhood, women veteran, Iraq, invisible.

Although women are now authorized to serve in most positions and deploy in combat zones in various combat roles, to include infantry positions, women service members are still fighting to be seen as an equal when it comes to their military service experience or when receiving care as a veteran (Veterans Affairs, 2023b). History has shown us the drastic increase of female veterans after the Iraq Wars (Veterans Affairs, 2023a). The purpose is to discover themes in adult learning on female Iraq War veterans through theorizing from literature to better understand how to serve this population in education.

## **The Current State of Tailored Education for Female Veterans**

The current state of education tailored to women service members or veterans is just beginning. The Veterans Affairs (VA) has just begun to encourage research creating a safe and inclusive environment for women veterans (Veterans Affairs, 2023b). The U.S. military realizes it needs females to fill the ranks of the services. Yet, limited educational focus has come about since the Iraq War phenomenon of producing hundreds of thousands of combat female veterans (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). It is necessary to address this shortage of educational training in this population to keep voluntary enrollment and retention of females in the military to avoid utilization of the draft (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). Understanding this minority population will increase morale, productivity, and a positive reflection of the American value of equity, to its military members (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010; Military Women's Memorial, 2023). Lastly, researching educational theories that assist women service members and veterans will be a future framework in understanding female perspectives in other male dominated industries, and how education can play a role in career pipeline recruitment and training of skills.

## **Educational Theories That May Benefit the Sisterhood Population**

Women Ways of Knowing and Giddens's Structuration Theory regarding power and control were studied through reflection of literature review (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Giddens's Structuration Theory is reflected upon in how women may use motivation, empowerment, and spirituality to overcome difficulties (Callahan, 2009). The aim is to begin to understand what female veterans are needing in education to move beyond survival and begin thriving. The "Invisible Sisterhood" has been a rising theme of a need for representation, health, and encouragement (Holmstedt, 2007; Veterans Affairs, 2023a).

## Women the Fastest Growing Veteran Population

Since women officially began serving as regular members, following World War II, in the U.S. armed forces from the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act, women are now the fastest growing population in the U.S. military (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010, p.1). In 1988 Congress created the "Risk Rule" which limited women service members from risks of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, p. 2). Furthermore, the U.S. Government Accounting Office stated, "In January 1994...The DoD perspective, based on experience with Operation Desert Storm, was that everyone in theater was at risk, and thus a risk-based policy was no longer appropriate" (1998, as cited in Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010, p. 2).

Many know that women serve in the United States Military. Although, 300,000 women veterans served in the Iraq Wars (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023; Veterans Affairs, 2023a). Many still "see" male veterans in movies, advertisements, and stories. Sinnott, Tobin, Chrzanowska, and Hilton point out, "There is not one Truth, but many truths and individuals commit to one set of beliefs knowing that there are many" (2017, as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 348). Therefore, knowing veteran ladies' Truth about their combat experiences is important for our culture, museums, and education.

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