

**Event-based transitional narratives of female officers in the Finnish Defence Forces: A gender-nuanced approach to military organizations and identities**

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May 2020

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Faculty of Social Sciences		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Master’s Programme in Contemporary Societies	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Carolyn M. Kehn			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Event-based transitional narratives of female officers in the Finnish Defence Forces: A gender-nuanced approach to military organizations and identities			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track Sociology			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master’s Thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year May 2020	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 69 (84)	
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract  Gender in the military is a critical yet controversial topic both socially and scholastically. However, in review of the literature regarding servicemembers’ transitions out of the military organization, the experience of women is often excluded or generalized from the experience of their male peers. This thesis applies a gender constructivist lens to military sociology and explores the narratives of women officers who have served in the Finnish Defence Forces. It adapted the Critical Incident Technique, as well as graphic elicitation, to conduct qualitative interviews with five respondents. Subsequent analysis revealed four types of critical events that illustrate entry into and exit from the Finnish Defence Forces during a career: prompting, retaining, bridging, and affirming events. These events, as well as participants’ descriptions of identity work, cannot be understood merely through factors relating to the Institutional/Occupational Thesis, but necessitate an understanding of the negotiation of gender throughout a career in the Finnish Defence Forces. The conclusions of this work refute the simplified perspective of gender equality in Finland and demand a gender-nuanced approach to future theoretical conceptualizations of military organizations, as well as the identities of individual servicemembers.			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Gender, military, officership, Institutional/Occupational Thesis, Finnish Defence Forces, Critical Incident Technique, organizations, identities, professionalization			
Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors David Inglis, Professor of Sociology at the University of Helsinki Suvi Kouri, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Jyväskylä			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited Online deposit at <a href="https://ethesis.helsinki.fi">https://ethesis.helsinki.fi</a>			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information There was some ambiguity on the guidelines for the format, style, and page length of this thesis. I chose to follow the most recent APA style guide, with 1.5 line spacing throughout the work and one line between paragraphs. Although this thesis is grounded in qualitative methods and the analysis includes lengthy quotations from respondents, the total content was kept under the maximum limit at 69 pages. However, with the reference list and appendices, the total page count is 84.			

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## 1. Introduction

When I decided to join the military, the masculine assumptions of the organization<sup>1</sup> played no conscious role in my choice. Above all, I desired to serve my country, to be a member of a team, and to develop a national sense of identity. Yet, my decision was often interpreted by others as political—an individual stance against the patriarchy or traditional family values. I quickly learned the extra burden that women servicemembers bear through the interrogation of their service by family, friends, and even complete strangers. The subtle implications in a statement as simple as, “You don’t look like an army officer,” reverberate as we carry out daily tasks and encourage a distinct tension underlying personal identities. In considering an exit from the profession of arms, we face questions not only unique to the military, but explicitly related to our status as gendered minorities: How will my actions reflect on the future opportunities afforded to my gender? If I leave before a traditional career retirement, have I failed? Can I succeed in the civilian sector, when all I have known is military work? This study showcases the voices of five respondents as they construct unique narratives surrounding their military experience and current identities and negotiate the gendered nuance of contemporary theoretical conceptualizations of military organizations. Its value lies not in one succinct conclusion, but in the presentation of female military service as complex, contested, and distinct from the experience of their male peers.

This thesis occupies the intersection between gender and the military, specifically the career transitions of female officers as studied through interviews with those who served in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF). As such, it is the first study in Finland of this population

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<sup>1</sup>This thesis will primarily rely on US English practices of grammar and spelling. However, given the breadth of international literature included and the English translation preferred by Finland, it will utilize the UK English version when describing a proper noun (i.e. Finnish ‘Defence’ Forces rather than Finnish ‘Defense’ Forces) or in reference to the conclusions of a specific empirical study.

and one of few studies globally that centers the narratives of women veterans.<sup>2</sup> I was initially interested in how this group resolved their identities as both women and warriors throughout their careers. This focus necessarily included their navigation of the work-life balance indicative to military organizations and the effect of the Nordic welfare state's policies on purportedly mitigating their decisions to enter and exit this restrictive profession. Yet, through the course of research, another perspective emerged: gender as a negotiated backdrop to not only the respondents' individual life choices, but also to the categorization of military organizations as occupations or institutions. Guided by the critical events in each participant's narrative, as well as thematic content analysis, this thesis will prove the necessity of diverse perspectives informing summative theory and the persistent effect of gender on social decision-making.

The standards and practices of any military around the world speak to the culture within that organization, in addition to the state of affairs for that particular country. The options available to citizens of every background to exercise civic duty and serve their country, as well as their treatment during that service, illustrate the extent to which patriotism is expected by or even afforded to different population groups in a society. Thus, the sociological significance of this topic is multi-faceted, beginning with the FDF itself, but also reflecting the dynamics of Finland culturally and socially. The 1995 decision to open all forms of military service to women citizens was not the end of a long struggle for equality, but merely a historic milestone along the path towards egalitarian work and home lives in Finland for all populations. The narratives of women officers recorded and analyzed in this thesis documents the process by which all of these respondents, within the first decade of this generational change, chose to volunteer for military service,

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<sup>2</sup>The term 'veteran' occupies a range of meaning across languages and cultures. Most significantly, in countries that primarily engage in peace-keeping operations, such as Finland, the strict translation refers to the surviving citizens who served in the Winter War, the Continuation War, and the Lapland War. While this research will not rely on this term exclusively, when it does make use of the label it will utilize the general, global definition of veteran: a former member of the armed forces, regardless of whether their service included deployment to zones engaged in armed conflict. This choice facilitates comparative cross-cultural research with previous literature and in future empirical research.

professionalize as officers, and resign their commission prior to retirement age. Its results inform the body of knowledge for male-dominated industries, work-life balance, and gendered professionalization. Furthermore, it addresses critical misconceptions of Nordic countries through its in-depth exploration of the Finnish context.

**Research Questions.** As detailed in the methodology section of this thesis, I had a significant interest in allowing my research participants to have equal status within the interview rather than assume a traditional subordinate position. This open-ended approach meant that experiences corroborated by several respondents were brought up organically, yet it was balanced with less control over the direction of each interview than traditionally asserted by a researcher. Through my consideration of previous literature, two primary research questions emerged which fit both the methodological choice to empower my participants in steering their narratives and the empirical focus on identities informed through career decision-making. These were:

1. What were the key events that described entry and exit of female officers during a career in the FDF?
2. How do former female officers in the FDF make sense of their transitional experiences and identities?

The first research question reflects the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), chosen for its utility in exploratory research, as well as the shared responsibility between respondent and interviewer in recording the initial narrative, whereas the second question informs the direction of follow-on discussion and reflections. As displayed in both research questions, the ontological orientation of this thesis takes a constructivist perspective on gender, rather than the pragmatist philosophy more common to military sociology. This departure was necessary in order to fully engage with the scope of data produced through the interviews and to align this thesis with much of the literature produced on women in Nordic militaries (see Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012; Rones, 2015; Persson, 2011). Each section of this work will engage with what it means to understand gender as an individually and

organizationally informed identity, as well as a principle around which we orient our lives both consciously and unconsciously.

In her recent collection of essays, *The Mother of All Questions*, US author and activist Rebecca Solnit writes, “Who has been heard we know; they are the well-mapped islands, the rest are the unmappable sea of unheard, unrecorded humanity” (2017). Rather than merely be content within the bounds of established literature, my research strives to record and investigate the lives of a group often said to be insignificant, too much of a minority to have an impact on the whole, and too inaccessible to suit the requirements of scholarship today. However, through collecting the stories of a population often silenced by virtue of their minority status within the organization, the forthcoming results also create challenges to contemporary theory in military sociology. Ultimately, a desire to map the expanse of overlooked lives has proven fruitful, just as it has shown that academic tendencies to generalize and simplify military organizations have detrimentally impacted our understanding of the complexity of gender within all professions—even those classified as primarily masculine.

As a woman and military officer, myself, many of the reflections and experiences of my respondents were familiar and even identical to my own career. I have done my utmost to recognize the privilege of being entrusted with the life stories of my respondents, from formulation to data collection to analysis. I am indebted to the Fulbright Finland Foundation, as well as my advisors David Inglis and Suvi Kouri, the University of Helsinki, and the GODESS Institute at the Hanken School of Economics for supporting me in the process of crafting this thesis. It is my hope that these conclusions are able to recognize the decisions that uniquely confront women professionals and, ultimately, to broaden how scholars approach the subject of military organizations to include gender as a necessary component of sociological analysis.



## 2. Literature Review

This thesis situates itself within the fields of both gender studies and military sociology. Ontologically, the most relevant theory to my study is the social construction of gender and its corresponding influence on identity and career decisions. However, in terms of subject matter, this thesis is grounded first and foremost in the sociological exploration of the military profession. It primarily intends to expand the ongoing discussion of the military organization to encourage a more nuanced perspective regarding gender.

The subject material within these converging areas is justifiably vast. Therefore, this literature review will concern itself only with the information necessary to understand the origins and construction of this study, as well as its main contributions to the field. Where necessary, it will provide alternate references that more thoroughly elucidate these topics. It will first seek to explain the basic disciplinary grounding in military sociology and its operationalization of gender, then move to cover military organizations and identity work as experienced by servicemembers, and lastly conclude with the negotiated processes of gender in the military as a workplace. Additionally, this literature review will include a final section to further contextualize this study within the national policies and socio-economic structure of Finland. Ultimately, the purpose of this section is to prepare the reader to grapple with the methodological design and results collected from this study by proving that there is an essential gap in the current literature in military sociology: the unrecorded experiences of women officers who exit before retirement. These missing narratives speak to gender as a critical and often misunderstood aspect of military organizations and the narratives of their servicemembers.

**Overview of Military Sociology.** Historical tradition and the prevalence of research from the United States in contemporary sociology generally privilege Samuel A. Stouffer's *The American Soldier*, a study that surveyed the attitudes of over half a million US soldiers from 1941-1945, as the origin of applied military sociology in 1949 (Ryan, 2010).

However, though its English translation was completed relatively recently, a lesser-known study by Knut Pipping, a Finnish sociologist, entitled *Infantry Company as a Society* was also conducted during the Second World War and published first in 1947 (Pipping, 1947/2008). Indeed, both of these studies, driven by the urgent needs of countries at war, were informed by the continual intertwining of military strategy and philosophy, as well as increasing historical observations of combat and militarization globally (Segal & Ender, 2008). Academically, the field of military sociology thus formalized and continued to grow throughout the Cold War era, albeit in a somewhat disorganized fashion. Foundational works during this time period include *The Soldier and the State* (Huntington, 1957), *The Professional Soldier* (Janowitz, 1960), and *The American Enlisted Man* (Moskos, 1970).

As Siebold (2001) argues, empirical work and policy recommendations overlap heavily in military sociology with studies often diverging to either explore civil-military relations and the military as a profession, such as in the work of Samuel P. Huntington or Morris Janowitz, or to delve into the lived military experience, in the manner of Stouffer, Pipping, and Charles C. Moskos. Research in recent years has expanded to include a variety of topically linked sub-fields from veterans and external agencies to the military as a social institution and the experience of minority groups. Yet, it also lacks a clear theoretical orientation (Siebold, 2001). This permeability was noted as early as 1976 by Moskos, when he wrote, “few substantive areas in sociology have such diffuse constituency as does the study of armed forces and society” (p. 55). Essentially, any study that explores the internal social structure or external social impacts of the armed forces belonging to a nation state can ground itself in military sociology as a subject area without necessarily incurring any methodological or theoretical requirements. While some might criticize this aspect of the disciplinary structure as unsystematic, in the case of this thesis it allows for a response to ongoing dialogue that comes from a relatively underutilized perspective in this field: the social construction of gender.

*Operationalization of Gender.* Gender in military sociology is often understood as a demographic variable linked to biological sex, with clear categorical distinctions between male and female servicemembers that do not allow for gender outside of the binary (Winslow, 2010). This conceptual understanding is modelled by the structures of military organizations themselves. While this agreement provides for a straightforward approach to scholarship, it limits inquiry primarily into the integration of women in the military and military families, as well as lacks a critical perspective on how gender is created and maintained as an influential social construct (Levy, 2015). This thesis defines gender as “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.128). This perspective, commonly referred to as ‘doing gender,’ highlights the ongoing, processual nature of gender as a social construct informed by individual action and institutional arrangements (West & Zimmerman 1987; West & Zimmerman, 2009). Operationalizing gender in this fashion creates an analytical focus on how gender is constituted and claimed within military organizations as informed by the narratives of respondents, with attention to the power relations between masculinities, femininities, and military policies labelled as gender blind. Furthermore, it falls in line with previous research conducted on the Finnish Defence Forces (Kouri, 2018) and agrees with the constructivist theory of gender employed by feminist international relations scholars focused on the defense sector (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012). Although this theoretical approach stands in contrast to the historical and contemporary research conducted in military sociology, it ultimately supports this thesis’s call for greater attention to gender in this field.

**The Nature of Military Organizations.** One of the foremost discussions with visible parameters in military sociology is the debate surrounding the Institutional/Occupational (I/O) Thesis, which is concerned with whether the nature of the military is becoming more institutional or occupational and what effect policy developments have on its growth in either direction. Prompted by the recent transition of the US military from a draft to an all-volunteer force in 1973, these concepts were presented by Charles Moskos at a regional

conference of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society in 1976. His hypothesis, “that the American military is moving from an institutional format to one more and more resembling that of an occupation” was formally published in *Armed Forces and Society* the following year (Moskos, 1977, p. 42). These remarks and their subsequent updates have been met with both consensus and criticism in the social science community, to include a rapid rebuttal in defense of the military profession’s permanency by colleague Morris Janowitz in 1977. This literature review will concern itself with Moskos’ formulations and definitions before noting its key responders and modern applications.

Moskos first defines both institutions and occupations as distinct models for military organizations which represent either end of a social spectrum. Regarding the former, he writes:

*An institution* is legitimated in terms of values and norms, i.e., a purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good. Members of an institution are often viewed as following a calling; they generally regard themselves as being different or apart from the broader society and are so regarded by others. To the degree one’s institutional membership is congruent with notions of self-sacrifice and dedication, it will usually enjoy esteem from the larger community. Although remuneration may not be comparable to what one might expect in the economy of the marketplace, this is often compensated for by an array of social benefits associated with institutional format as well as psychic income. When grievances are felt, members of an institution do not organize themselves into interest groups. Rather, if redress is sought it takes the form of “one-on-one” recourse to superiors, with its implications of trust in the paternalism of the institution to take care of its own (Moskos, 1977, p. 42).

Similarly, Moskos orients the latter oppositely:

*An occupation* is legitimated in terms of the marketplace, i.e., prevailing monetary rewards for equivalent competencies. In a modern industrial society employees usually enjoy some voice in the determination of appropriate salary and work conditions. Such rights are counterbalanced by responsibilities to meet contractual obligations. The occupational model implies priority of self-interest rather than that of the employing organization. A common form of interest articulation in industrial—and increasingly governmental—occupations is the trade union (1977, p. 43).

In subsequent work Moskos clarifies the purpose of the I/O approach as beyond mere categorization, but rather as a nuanced examination that measures and compares institutional and occupational characteristics in their separate and joint manifestations (1986, p. 382). To support that perspective, he provides a list of variables and their interpretations on either end of that spectrum which aid in dissecting individual aspects of a military organization (Moskos, 1981; Moskos, 1986). His final summation has been reproduced in Table 1 (Moskos, 1986, p. 378) below:

Table 1

*Military Social Organization: Institutional vs. Occupational*<sup>3</sup>

Variable	Institutional	Occupational
Legitimacy	Normative values	Marketplace economy
Role commitments	Diffuse	Specific
Basis of compensation	Rank and seniority	Skill level and manpower
Mode of compensation	Much in non-cash form or deferred	Salary and bonuses
Level of compensation	Decompressed; low recruit pay	Compressed; high recruit pay
Residence	Adjacency of work and residence locales	Separation of work and residence locales
Spouse	Integral part of military community	Removed from military community
Societal regard	Esteem based on notion of service	Prestige based on level of compensation
Reference groups	“Vertical”—within organization	“Horizontal”—external to organization
Evaluation of performance	Holistic and qualitative	Segmented and quantitative
Legal system	Military justice	Civilian jurisprudence
Post-service status	Veterans’ benefits and preference	Same as civilian

<sup>3</sup>Reprinted from “Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update,” by Moskos, C., 1986, *Armed Forces and Society*, 12, p. 378.

The academic response through theoretical critique, as well as adaptation of the I/O Thesis to other Western militaries, has proven the utility of inquiry into the nature of military organizations, if not the specific value of the I/O Thesis itself. As noted earlier, Janowitz responded promptly by affirming the ongoing and converging professionalization of the US military that he termed ‘civilianization’ (1977, p. 53). This disagreement between Moskos and Janowitz is interpreted further by Sørensen (1994) as largely conceptual rather than factual. Aside from the issues of unionization and trend reversal, both scholars agree in a significant shift in the US military caused by external factors, such as increased civilian penetration (Sørensen, 1994). While proposing how to evaluate the change thesis methodologically, Segal (1986) turns to a model he defines as pragmatic professionalism, which holds that officers are dually motivated by basic economics and mission success. Although these propositions offer valuable critique from the veritable founders of military sociology, none carry the same clarity nor universal applicability as Moskos’ original model.

Of course, discussion over the I/O Thesis has not been limited to an exchange of theoretical models as its implications for policy have thoroughly been considered, most explicitly in regard to the need for recruitment to an all-volunteer military force. While affirming the influence of Moskos’ model, Segal and Segal capture the worrying rationalization of the military, if viewed as an occupation, with the following question: “Should fighting wars be left to those who need the work?” (1983, p. 152). Rather than advocate for neoclassical economics in response, such as rationalism or occupationalism, Shields (1993) offers socioeconomics as a contrasting mechanism to coordinate recruitment and retention policies. These considerations, as well as the historical example of the US Armed Forces, hold significant weight for other militaries either in maintaining or transitioning patterns of conscription.

Thus, a key application of the I/O Thesis in empirical work is to analyze transitions from conscription to all-volunteer forces and irregularities between those systems across a range

of militaries and nations. For example, providing one of the clearest guidelines to this thesis, Shields (1988) uses the categorization to explain the problematic experience of women in the US Armed Forces, as well as to suggest key programs to build further institutional attachment. Additionally, Battistelli (1997) critically expanded on the I/O model in his analysis of the dual motivations of Italian soldiers on peacekeeping missions in Albania and Somalia. More recently, Roness (2015) linked Moskos' concept of institutions to the nature of the Norwegian military as shown through the normative roles expected of male and female officers. This thesis will similarly utilize certain variables of military organizations and their requisite categorization as institutional or occupational (see Table 1) to analyze the entry and exit of female officers in the FDF.

**Identity Work for Servicemembers.** The nature of the military organization necessarily pertains to the identity construction of its members: how they perceive their service informs how they define themselves. Although this generalization can be made of any work, the institutional characteristics of a given military can, in particular, extend a certain sense of ownership over an individual that surpasses traditional boundaries. As Segal remarks,

A characteristic of the occupational military is that it doesn't circumscribe the life of the service person to the degree that an institutional military might. The latter approximates a total institution, in which the service member lives, eats, works, socializes, and spends his or her leisure time. The occupational military, on the other hand, is simply a workplace, and important elements of the nonwork life transcend its boundaries (1986, p. 362).

While this point is valid, the majority of international research does not clarify whether the studied military is an occupation or an institution, nor, given Moskos' qualifier in 1986, is this label necessary as no one military occupies either extreme perfectly. Rather, despite trends towards more occupational or civilianized militaries, scholars continue to highlight the military as an example of a total institution, in the Goffmanian sense, with authority, structure, and rules dictated singularly by the organization in a manner which separates its members from society as a whole (Higate, 2001; Naphan & Elliot, 2015). This literature review will consider how identity work is performed by servicemembers across a variety of military organizations in order to frame the specific context of the population under study.

Most scholars agree that immersion in the military community and lifestyle leads to a distinct identification with the military, one that may persist past the service period itself. As it is informed by a constructivist approach, this thesis concurs with a perspective of military identities as “constructed through the deeds and activities of soldiering” (Woodward & Jenkins, 2011, p.253), yet also maintains that once formed this identity is no longer necessarily contingent on those practices alone. Daley (1999), for example, compares the military identity to ethnicity in its similar capacity to provide a broad framework for everyday life. Huntington (1957) would argue further that this identity is even deeper for members who occupy a professional capacity, such as military officers in contrast to enlisted soldiers. The maintenance of identity can be considered not only a byproduct of military work, but also an enabling factor of occupational success. In their study of Norwegian military academy cadets Johansen, Laberg, and Martinussen (2014) found that military identity can be a multidimensional predictor of military competence. The depth and persistence of a military identity does not negate potential conflict on an individual or organizational level, especially given its situated and variable nature. This thesis will review two relevant forms of identity conflict for its studied population: identities in transition and gendered identities.

*Transitional Identities.* Previous studies examining the transition between military and civilian work have been primarily concerned with skill transferability and the subsequent impacts of force escalation and de-escalation on the overall labor market. From this point of view, Mangum and Ball describe the US Armed Forces as “the largest vocational training institution in the country” and strove to measure the functional preparation for employment transitions (1987, p. 425). Routon (2014) conducted a similar study focused on US servicemembers during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with comparably positive findings for how veteran status can increase employment, wages, and educational opportunities. However, a military identity carries more meaning than a mere paycheck or skill acquisition; both Higate (2001) and Walker (2012) speak to the unique individual



effort required to manage an exit from the armed forces. For example, in his analysis of interviews with 28 servicemembers from the United Kingdom in their final year of service Walker (2012) notes that reconciling identity anticipatorily, although somewhat unattainable, is a necessary consideration given the magnitude of an exit from this level of socializing institution. Higate (2001) acknowledges similar foundations but adds further that the trauma of a military to civilian transition can be softened when former servicemembers seek the familiarity of occupations which confirm the traditional military-masculine gender typology. Of course, this specific typology can also be problematic for certain populations, especially women and transgender servicemembers, providing a source of identity conflict even prior to transition.

*Gendered Identities.* Woodward and Jenkins (2011) aptly describe how constructivist studies of military identities have been largely concerned with gender—both masculinities and femininities—in the face of relative analytical silence regarding other demographic identities such as race, class, and ethnicity. These range from contemporary analyses of the intersections between gender and power to the practical integration of women in global armed forces over the past 50 years and generally ground themselves in the supposition that military service is explicitly gendered as a masculine domain. However, as Woodward and Winter (2004, pp. 282-283) point out, the abundance of topical literature does not negate novel research as studies that are explicitly contextual to a given location and timeframe are still warranted. Rather, given this breadth, one can be selective both in designating theoretical framework and in considering previous research.

Regarding the global military system itself, “the unequal character of gendered violence (it is predominantly men who do the killing and the maiming)” and “the contingent and sometimes paradoxical status of this situation (women kill and maim too, and the content of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ varies significantly over time, space and context)” are common working assumptions in the field of feminist international relations (Kirby & Henry, 2012, p. 445). This thesis further embraces a nuanced perspective of military identity by adopting

Belkin's assertion that "the production of masculine warriors has required those who embody masculinity to enter into intimate relationships with femininity, queerness, and other unmasculine foils, not just to disavow them" (2012, p. 4). These contradictions manifest in the requirement for servicemembers to contextually embrace the dichotomies of dirtiness and cleanliness or authority and submission which ultimately attempts to singularly premise their identities on the organization's stringent and generally unachievable standards. In terms of identity work, Monahan and Fisher's conceptualization of sacrificial labor is especially relevant in this context to describe how servicemembers often submit their identities to the needs of the organization rather than focus on self-actualization (2019, p. 3).

Although this paradox is experienced by those at any standpoint on the gender spectrum, this thesis agrees with Kronsell and Svedberg (2012) that both the lived reality and the perception of male and female service are starkly different. This assumption is further confirmed by Koeszegi, Zedlacher, and Hudribush (2014) in their study of the Austrian Armed Forces, which found that, while workplace aggression is experienced by many employees in masculine cultures, women are overwhelmingly vulnerable targets to aggressive actions and comments. In concurrence with Rones (2015), who applied Belkin's theories to a Norwegian military context, this thesis denies the oversimplified hypothesis that military masculinities require an absolute rejection of the feminine and rather seeks to gather locally situated knowledge about the FDF from a group of women officers following their exit. A more thorough historical and theoretical grounding for these theoretical assumptions can be found in *Making Gender, Making War* (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012) and *Bring Me Men* (Belkin, 2012). Although Finland is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an exhaustive discussion of women's historical roles and their relationship with war, as explored in the context of Western democracies, can be found in *Gender and the Military* (Carreiras, 2006).

In terms of exploring the specific positionality and identity conflict experienced by women in the military, this thesis is also guided by several previous case studies. For example, Baaz and Stern's (2012) analysis of women soldiers in the Congolese national armed forces and Persson's (2011) dissertation on gendered occupational boundaries in the Swedish Armed Forces both speak to the ambiguous and malleable nature of military identities. While Woodward and Winter (2004) focus on defense policy debates in the United Kingdom surrounding women's participation rather than respondent interviews, they raise similar concerns about how the social construction of gender frames individual decision-making capacities and organizational claims to equality. Additionally, in her consideration of US servicemembers' motivations upon entry and the socializing impact of the military during and following service, Shields (1988) combines the I/O Thesis with the unique experience of women in a key example for this thesis. The discussion section will critically revisit their findings in light of its own results.

**The Finnish Context.** Qualitative studies exclusively focused on women veterans are rare. More often than not, generalizations on transitional identities completely exclude the perspective of servicewomen due to data accessibility or because they comprise such a small proportion of the military (Higate, 2001). This characterization is acutely present in Finnish military sociology, where a study like this thesis has never been conducted. However, I argue that the exclusivity of this perspective garners interest in itself. What is unknown about the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF) because these narratives have been left unexplored? What is undeveloped in military sociology's theoretical frameworks because they are based on one-sided accounts? Further, the particular Finnish context, as a Nordic welfare state with male conscription as a national policy, presents a compelling intersection of working life and gender for a military organization. This section of the literature review will present research related to the latter point through a discussion of the general social and military structure in Finland, relevant conclusions on Finnish work-life balance, and previous studies that also center a gendered perspective of the FDF.

An agrarian society for much of its history, the Republic of Finland rapidly industrialized and adopted welfare state arrangements following World War II (Sippola & Alasoini, 2019). This political orientation is typical of the Nordic region<sup>4</sup> and has been theorized most significantly by Gøsta Esping-Andersen, a contemporary Danish social scientist. Nordic welfare states, or social democracies as he labels them, take an active role in reordering social relations to privilege the primacy of the state, extend universal social benefits, and guarantee the equality of all citizens (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, this system for entitlements is partially dependent on the completion of mandatory military service, with selective conscription in Norway and Sweden and universal male conscription in Finland and Denmark (Cronberg, 2006). Thus, the military state and welfare state go hand in hand.

In Finland, all male citizens from the age of 18 until 60 are required to complete military service, to include a basic conscript training lasting 6-12 months and subsequent courses in the reserve forces, though non-military service is also a viable possibility (Salo & Siebold, 2005). This national rite of passage is performed by about 80% of eligible men and has been considered both a form of production for Finnish manhood and evidential proof of masculinity for trans and non-heterosexual citizens (Ahlbäck, 2010; Lehtonen, 2015). Historically, Finnish women have joined voluntary, civilian organizations that support the military, such as the Lotta Svärd, during war periods (Ollila, 1995), but military service was officially opened to them in 1995 (Lehtonen, 2015). Today, the FDF comprises 12,000 permanent personnel, 4,000 of whom are civilians, and trains 22,000 conscripts annually (The Finnish Defence Forces, 2020). The rate of women volunteers has increased steadily since 2015, with a record high of 1,100 volunteer conscripts in 2019 (Statistics Finland, 2020). However, the number of women applicants to the National Defence University, the necessary hurdle to obtain an officer's commission, has remained around 61 for the past 5 years, with approximately 4-10 applicants accepted annually (The Finnish Defence Forces,

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<sup>4</sup>The Nordic region is understood here as Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and their associated territories.

2018). In 2018, 3.7% of conscripts and 4.9% of students at the National Defence University were women (The Finnish Defence Forces, 2018). Currently, approximately 2% (70/2900) of active duty military officers are women (Kouri, 2018). These statistics prove that implicit, gendered barriers to the profession of arms in Finland remain.

In general, the state of affairs for working women in Finland are not as egalitarian as one would expect given the welfare state provision with regard to education, childcare, and parental leave. Though Jyrkinen and McKie (2012) point out the much higher mobilization rate of women in full-time jobs in Finland, they also note that the gender pay gap and gender segregated labor market are comparable to the European Union writ large and ultimately reproduce the same gendered trends in organizational management and individual career trajectories. In 2017, the employment rate of Finnish women was 68.5% in comparison to men at 70.7%, yet these two populations are almost inversely related occupationally with over two-thirds of Finnish women working in the public sector and dominating care work industries, such as nursing and basic education, while a similar rate of men work in the private sector (Statistics Finland, 2018). The gender pay gap is approximately 84 cents to the euro (Statistics Finland, 2018). Korvajärvi (2011) refers often to this gender segregated reality as a key organizational context in which the Nordic egalitarian narrative is denied on the macro-level while gender issues are simultaneously silenced on the micro-level. Subsequent, gender-tailored approaches have become a hallmark of the sociology of work in Finland yet have left the status quo largely unchanged (Sippola & Alasoini, 2019).

While these conclusions affirm the gendered experience of professionalization in all work sectors for women across the world (see Bolt & Muzio, 2008; Haynes, 2012), it is also important to distinguish the military organization as specific work and to conceptualize these factors as the economic context from which female servicemembers in Finland enter, exit, and comparatively reflect on their narratives. Furthermore, it is critical to consider the experience of military officers as a specifically indoctrinated population within that

organization. For women officers, the gendered realities of working life in and out of the military organization may heighten identity conflict, role transitions, and the negotiation of gender to an unmatched level.

Although a qualitative analysis of women officers after their exit from the FDF is unprecedented, this thesis was informed by several studies of gender and the military in Finland. For example, Tallberg (2009) used ethnographic case studies to analyze the male-dominated defense sector with regard to gendered organizations. His conclusions support the necessity of diversity within crisis management operations, as well as routine divisions of power, though he asserts that the FDF relies on a rhetoric of masculine cohesion (Tallberg, 2009). From the opposite perspective, both Häyrynen (2017) and Kouri (2018) have explored the experience of women servicemembers. Häyrynen (2017) used reflexive interviews to examine the meaning of military leadership instruction for women cadets and found that this training can work positively against gender discrimination through certification and legitimizing competency. Kouri (2018) analyzed her interviews of female military officers within a doing gender framework and found that respondents' ways of doing gender enable an individual sense of belonging, as well as organizationally alter the stereotypical view of soldiers, albeit much more gradually. In terms of organizational culture, multiple studies have been conducted that discuss the civilian-military and gendered hierarchy in the FDF which structures how employees experience organizational change, as well as daily work (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2015; Leinonen et al., 2018). Additionally, peacekeeping missions, the primary international deployment capacity of the FDF, have also garnered their share of articles which largely explore how gender is constructed and contested by the principles of these missions overseas, especially given the low participation of Finnish women (Jukarainen, 2012; Valenius, 2007). Collectively, these establish a baseline knowledge of the FDF, as well as attest to the necessity of studying the transitional narratives of female officers.

**Contribution to the Literature.** The military organization is often characterized as a total social institution. Its undeniable impact shaping the formation, behaviors, and identities of its members is both justified and magnified by the weighty responsibility of upholding the defense of their nation at home and abroad. Sociological inquiry into the relationship between armed forces and their societies bears relevance to the individual, organizational, and cultural levels of knowledge, especially when service is considered a decision-making point for volunteers. Scholars generally agree that the military follows a gendered hierarchy that has grudgingly acquiesced to female integration, often without providing the means to level barriers along the pathway of traditional military careers. Finland offers a unique contextual study given its controversial claim to gender equality in working life, the total integration of women into all areas of the military in 1995—in contrast to the gradual stepwise measures preferred by other western democracies—and the policy of universal, male conscription. Although it is not surprising that women officers exit the FDF, or any military, prior to retirement, their narratives are critical to understanding organizational culture and the gendered dynamics of identities in transition. This thesis fills a gap in the literature of military sociology in Finland by interviewing a novel and largely inaccessible group of respondents. Furthermore, it contributes to the ongoing conversation of the I/O Thesis by encouraging an increased attentiveness to gender as a factor in the categorization of military organizations.

### 3. Methodology

This thesis adapted the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) in conjunction with graphic elicitation via a timeline interview in order to qualitatively explore the career narratives of female officers who had left the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF). Following the feminist tradition, this research choice sought to openly acknowledge the co-construction of knowledge within each interview in order to empower the participants to share the full complexity of their experience. While this departure towards a more interactive, individual interview was modeled in several similar studies, a combination of factors generated data more reminiscent of life stories in a narrative interview, rather than a series of singular events. Thus, thematic content analysis was utilized in addition to the analytical methods prescribed by the CIT. These methodological turns represent an innovative combination within military sociology, thereby demanding their own reflective analysis. However, this section will first concern itself with the historical usage and specific adaptation of these methods, along with the ethical provisions accompanying this decision, and their contributions to the orientation of this thesis.

**Historical Usage.** The CIT is rooted in organizational and industrial psychology and can be traced back to John C. Flanagan's seminal article in 1954. Initially, it was developed as a means to study the task requirements of various activities, emphasizing both qualified observers and factual incidents that contributed either positively or negatively to the activity in question (Flanagan, 1954). In that regard, the method has five distinct stages: general aims of the study, plans and specifications regarding participants, data collection, data analysis, interpretation and reporting of results (Flanagan, 1954). Since that publication, the CIT has evolved as a flexible qualitative tool used chiefly in exploratory research across a variety of disciplines (Butterfield et al., 2005). The primary changes in the technique consist of the expansion of data from solely observations of human behavior to include experiences and emotions, the addition of reflexive self-reports, the development of analysis beyond mere categorization, and the creation of new methods to establish data



inter-reliability (Butterfield et al., 2005). These developments address the positivist assumptions of objectivity that prove problematic in Flanagan's original conceptualization yet also contribute to the sprawling and disorganized growth of this technique (Byrne, 2001; Chell, 1998). Before outlining the specific application of the CIT to this thesis, this paper will justify its selection in general.

Outside of its original intended use, the CIT has been most commonly adapted within the fields of counseling psychology and education research. Researchers in these fields have emphasized the advantages of this method in empowering respondents, exploring understudied populations, and gathering holistic experiential data, with an overall character of cultural neutrality (Gremler, 2004; Hughes 2007). Naturally, its limitations include the time required to conduct these in-depth interviews, the confidentiality regarding respondents, and the innate subjectivity generated by participant recall (Gremler, 2004; Hettlage & Steinlin, 2006; Chell & Pittaway, 1998). These drawbacks will be further addressed in the specific design of this study. In allowing respondents to self-select the incidents they deem most relevant to the experience in question, the CIT upsets the traditional power dynamic between researcher and researched, in which the former solely steers data collection and analysis. Additionally, this trait naturally predisposes the CIT to aid in the development of theoretical structures rather than the verification of established hypotheses in a manner reminiscent of Grounded Theory methodology (Chell, 1998). Given the positionality of the research participants as former minority members of the FDF and the exploratory nature of this topic, this thesis intends to analyze the raw experiences of these officers from a feminist perspective. In this capacity, feminist research refers to the intentional structure of this work in examining the lives of traditionally silenced women in order to unveil institutionalized power dynamics surrounding gender with an ultimate goal of creating social change (Thompson & Gitlin, 1995; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Methodologically, the CIT both fits these intentions and provides a culturally nuanced approach that addresses the limitations I face as a non-Finnish researcher in this environment.

**Current Usage.** The specific application of the CIT to this thesis follows the five original steps from Flanagan (1954) while theoretically asserting the appropriateness of subjectivism (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). Thus, ontologically, this method affirms the social construction of knowledge in general and the specific co-construction of knowledge that takes place within these interviews. This methodological formulation takes its guiding cues from similar applications in a descriptive study of the experience of unemployment (Borgen & Amundson, 1987), self-reflection on critical incidents in teaching (Tripp, 1994), and a study regarding turning points for doctoral students in Finland (Vekkaila, 2014).

The first step in the CIT is to determine the studied aims. This thesis intends to capture the key events that prompted entering and exiting the FDF from the perspective of female officers. This aim necessarily includes the choice to volunteer in the FDF as a conscript, the decision to pursue officership as a career, the formal exit from the institution, as well as the simultaneous identity transformations.

The second step of the CIT develops a plan for data collection regarding the identification of participants and critical incidents. Participants in my study were gathered on a voluntary basis from online forums and through relational networks via snowball sampling (Berg & Lune, 2012). Their categorization as women who have served as military officers in the FDF qualified them for the study though their participation was dependent on personal interest and availability. In its greatest deviation from Flanagan's (1954) original guidelines, rather than delegate the types of critical incidents applicable to the study aim, this methodology allowed participants to self-select the positive or negative experiences relevant to their decisions to enter and exit the FDF. This choice imitates more recent studies that utilize this methodology (Borgen & Amundson, 1987; Vekkaila, 2014). All incidents were recorded and analyzed equally.

The third step, data collection, took place through audio-recorded interviews assisted by timelines drawn by respondents (Vekkaila, 2014; Borgen & Amundson, 1987). The use of

graphic elicitation to accompany the interview process spoke into the multi-dimensional lived experience by recalling diverse incidents across time, thereby providing for a more holistic narrative (Bagnoli, 2009). Furthermore, it encouraged the interviewee's ownership of the collected data and creates a physical product emphasizing the co-construction of knowledge (Adriansen, 2012). Of note, though Borgen and Amundson (1987) introduce the timeline at the end of each interview to synthesize critical events, this thesis chose to begin data collection with the graphic annotation, similar to Vekkaila's study (2014) in the interest of timely efficiency and to alleviate any linguistic barriers.

The fourth step of the CIT covers both classification of critical incidents and identification of critical behaviors. Following transcription of the interviews, incidents were sorted into categories common to all participants, with accompanying behavioral descriptions. In this step, the research question: "What were the key events that describe entry and exit of female officers during a career in the FDF?" actualized to create common events and their corresponding ways of acting. While specificity was desirable, this study remained open to irregular and counter-narrative experiences, following the feminist tradition. Due to the small number of respondents and the degree of ownership they were given within the interview to steer the discussion, the final transcripts often resembled the output from a biographical method, such as the life story of a military career, rather than a compilation of key events. In this regard, I found the most similarity between my adaptation of CIT and the biographical interpretative method developed by Fritz Schütze, a contemporary German sociologist (Bornat 2008; Kaźmierska 2004; Corbally & O'Neill, 2014). However, as explained in the data management and analysis section, I ultimately chose to complement the CIT analysis with thematic content analysis.

The fifth and final step of the CIT covers the interpretation and reporting of results. These not only consisted of key behaviors and events but provide justification for further research and problem-solving with regard to gender dynamics in this working life context. Additionally, there were a number of themes that emerged during respondents' narratives

that complement current research in military sociology, professionalization, and identity construction.

**Ethical Concerns.** As this study included human subjects, informed consent was a necessary condition of research. Practically, I disclosed all general information about the study's topics and goals in the first informational email to interested participants, then again at the start of each individual interview. I also shared my privacy policy notice that outlines my practices for secure data management in accordance with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (2016). Each subject was required to sign a physical consent form restating this information and releasing the data content to me for use in this thesis prior to the interview (see Appendix 1). As the participants were no longer a part of the military institution, no formal research permissions were necessary from the FDF. Though this aspect may have altered the legitimacy of the project to prospective interviewees, it could have also given them greater liberty to voice their narratives without fear of any organizational repercussions.

Anonymity and confidentiality were two of my highest concerns with this project, only heightened by the small sample size and the small population of potential respondents. As a researcher, I guaranteed to my interviewees that their identities would not be revealed to any other person. The official report notes my use of aliases, while the recordings and transcripts (including a code sheet) remain on my personal laptop, which is password protected. Interviews were renamed according to distributed participant number and referenced accordingly during the data analysis. These methods ensure that I am the only individual who ever hears or reads these interviews, a consideration magnified by the impact these narratives could have on any of my participants' future careers or personal lives.

As the interviews largely revolved around issues of gender and work, the topic had the potential to bring forth sensitive and emotional experiences. Additionally, my obligation to

'do no harm' to my participants extended from the interview itself to include its aftermath. Therefore, within the interview, I attempted to establish a rapport with my interviewees and through that relationship used "mindful ethics" to assess their reaction to certain questions or experiences (González-López, 2011). This rapport intended to reassure respondents of their full right to not answer certain questions or terminate the interview at any time, though none of my interviewees chose to do so. Thus, my awareness of the dialogue combined with the method of semi-structured interviewing and the additional visualization guidance was a key strategy in support of research sensitivity (Downing et al., 2013; Rose, 2007).

Similar to Birch and Miller (2000), I found that my interviews, conducted in the tradition of feminist research, created a space for respondents to reflect on their transitional narratives in new ways. Several participants thanked me for the opportunity to describe their experiences and it was not uncommon during the course of the interaction for a respondent to remark, "Oh, I had never thought about it that way," in response to my own reflection. These conclusions speak dually to the construction of knowledge within the interview, where together the participant and I explored their career narrative, as well as the therapeutic benefits of qualitative interviews. With the obligation to steward this responsibility appropriately and given that I have no prior training in psychotherapy or counselling, I took precautions to conduct my research proactively along trauma-informed principles such as safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment (Birch & Miller, 2000; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015; Namrow, 2020). In my follow-up electronic correspondence with each participant, I also offered to assist them in getting mental health services if our interview did unwittingly trigger any emotional or traumatic experiences, though none of the women responded to that offer affirmatively.

Following the data collection, my top priority became guarding the anonymity and confidentiality of my participants. This included the security of both recordings and transcripts. In this area, my extensive research history during my undergraduate degree, as well as my ethical certification through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

(CITI) program for human subject research provided a greater level of assurance to my practices.

**Validity and Trustworthiness Checks.** In their discussion of the CIT's evolution over the past 50 years, Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, and Maglio (2005) raise a variety of means to check for credibility during data collection and analysis, especially regarding studies outside the original quantitative, behavioral scope of this method described by Flanagan (1954). Due to limited numbers of interviewees and the significance of anonymity and confidentiality, a number of these processes were not viable in this thesis. However, this project did transcribe interviews to preserve data reliability, submit initial categories of incidents to subject matter experts (thesis advisors), search for inconsistencies across social theory, and calculate the rate of participation for various critical events. These four validity checks prove the cogency of results despite the trend away from objective behaviors towards experiential and emotional knowledge. With regard to the thematic content analysis, trustworthiness was asserted through the same means as transcriptions and subject matter experts provide credibility and reflexivity through an audit trail, whereas social theory and rates of participation provide readers with a transparent perspective on the findings' transferability and dependability (Nowell et al., 2017). Further elaboration is provided in the results section of this thesis.

**Research Logistics.** The recruitment aspect of the thesis was perhaps the most delicate and time intensive. As the population under study did not include any current members of the organization (the FDF) itself, participants were recruited via posts on an online forum of female military officers in Finland and informal inquiries along relational networks. In that regard, I am indebted to my thesis adviser, Suvi Kouri, for bridging many of the introductions as a respected and well-known member of the military community. I followed up with interview participants through emails that provided my research brief and privacy policy for secure data management. Given their continued interest, we then scheduled the interview logistics.

*Instructions to the Participant.* Participants were given the same instructions via email prior to the interviews as in the individual interviews themselves. They were told not to do any writing or drawing in advance, but to reflect on incidents leading to the outcomes under study (entry and exit). This decision was driven by a desire to fully prepare participants to share their career narrative in the interview, especially as some had exited the military several years ago and others were not as comfortable speaking in English as in their native tongue (Finnish or Swedish). Of note, this choice departs from the spontaneous and unprepared life story prompted in a traditional narrative interview using the biographical interpretative method (Kaźmierska 2004). However, as the data required in this case was specific to recruitment and study participation, advance notice seemed necessary to gathering a holistic account. Furthermore, at the time of methodological conceptualization, biographical methods were a yet unconsidered avenue of approach, only gaining relevance once the analysis stage was reached.

The following instructional script was modeled from similar adaptations of the CIT in Borgen and Amundson (1987) and Vekkaila (2014) and used in this study:

*In this interview we will examine the narrative of your military career and its different critical events or turning points. Please visualize your career, as a kind of line or map, in terms of how you see it holistically. This visualization will help us reflect on critical events that cannot be easily verbalized or that you may have forgotten. Specifically, in terms of your experience in the Finnish Defence Forces, these events should explain how you came to volunteer as a conscript, your decision to become an officer, and your choice to leave the military. These events can happen before you officially entered the military, even from childhood. They could also be events outside the military institution, such as personal life. Mark clearly the key events and turning points on the visualization and the year, if possible. We will go event by event and see what happened in each event and which other*

*persons or groups have had some role in those events. You may choose where you would like to start.*

Further elaborative questions were used, as needed. These included: Can you tell me what happened in the event? Where did this happen? When did this happen? Why do you think this happened? What did you think in this situation? What happened next? Did this have some effect on you? Were there some persons or groups who had a role in the event? What kind of effect did they have? For further information, see Appendix 2 for a complete description of the interview guide utilized in this study.

*Data Sample.* Five women officers participated in my study, all of which had begun serving in the FDF prior to 2004. The average length of service was 14 years, while the minimum and maximum service periods were 8 and 22 years, respectively. Their military occupations ranged from combat (i.e. infantry or artillery) to non-combat specialties (i.e. logistics or communications) and across branches from the Finnish Army, Navy, and Air Force. Of note, as each participant served as a conscript and as a commissioned officer, they were able to change their branches and specialties between these two service periods. At the time of interview, all respondents reported being in a marriage or long-term partnership and the majority had children. While motherhood emerged as an important theme in interviews, further details remain undisclosed due to anonymity provisions. The average interview length was 73 minutes, with the shortest and longest interview taking 62 and 88 minutes respectively. English is a commonly spoken language in Finland and in the FDF's joint multi-national military exercises. Although one participant expressed concern over her language capabilities, I noticed no significant issues while conducting the interviews in English.

*Location of Research.* I carried out my interviews in various locations approved by the individual interviewees. My only prerequisite was a relatively isolated room, so that the tape recorder could pick out the discourse. A majority of my interviews took place in



reserved rooms in the university library (Kaisa-talo), while one also took place in the respondents' workplace. Additionally, one interview took place over Skype, as the respondent was limited geographically for the foreseeable future due to work constraints. I did not perceive any difference between the rapport in the in-person interviews and the one over Skype. As my priority was the most holistic narrative of the subject's experience in the military—including positive and negative events—I tried to ensure the privacy and comfort of the interviews as much as possible. In terms of ethical requirements, this condition worked closely with ensuring anonymity.

*Research Time Period.* The interviews were carried out over a two-month period from late October to early December 2019.

**Data Analysis and Management.** Following each interview, I personally transcribed the data from the tape recorder to an electronic document. I estimated that each transcription would probably take at least two or three times the length of the interview itself. This lengthy demand on time was partially mitigated by taking minor notes throughout the interview, though that technique was contingent on the comfort of the participant. Holistic recording of the interview was also assisted by the timeline visualization of their career narrative. I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible following each meeting in order to fully record both the verbal communication and nonverbal expressions communicated through voice tone or physical gestures (Berg & Lune, 2012). Once I had completed all five interview transcriptions, I proofread each transcript while listening to the interview again. These choices created a sense of data immersion which also began an initial mental analysis of each interview.

Next, I utilized the fourth step of the CIT to classify each incident and identify forthcoming critical behaviors with response to the research question: "What were the key events that describe entry and exit of female officers during a career in the FDF?" Following classification, incidents were transferred onto individual notecards and then sorted into

categories as possible, with accompanying behavioral descriptions. This method of content analysis ultimately generated a number of commonalities along the participants' career narratives. However, it also began to reveal that the vast amount of data could not be summarized into individual incidents and more resembled the output generated from biographical methods utilizing narrative interviews, such as the biographical interpretative method.

Though my interview process similarly divided the time into a preliminary section focused on constructing a narrative composed of critical incidents and a latter section revisiting key themes and questions, my methodology did not have the strict separation delineated by Bornat (2008) or Kaźmierska (2004) as necessary for biographical interpretation. Rather, I actively engaged with my participants in co-constructing knowledge within the interview process. Additionally, my respondents had access to the interview question ahead of time in order to familiarize themselves and to aid in recall, which disrupted any requirement for a naturally occurring narrative. Finally, the sociolinguistic analysis required to look for hidden meanings or hypothetical narratives appeared unreliable given the language parity between interviewer (myself as a native English speaker) and participant (using English to varying degrees of comfort). Thus, it would have also been inappropriate to apply biographical interpretation or narrative analysis due to both data collection procedures and the overall context. Therefore, I turned to thematic content analysis as another way to rigorously explore the qualitative data available due to its strengths in comparative research.

In conducting the thematic content analysis phase, I followed the six phases of trustworthiness outlined by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017, p. 4): familiarization, initial code generation, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Additionally, I also relied heavily on the guide to content analysis offered by Berg and Lune (2012). As the transcription and CIT analysis sufficed for data familiarity, I began coding the interviews inductively from the

raw data in order to generate initial codes at the line unit of analysis. My focus was manifest content, with consideration to the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample size. Berg and Lune (2012) suggest Strauss' guidelines for conducting coding in order to sufficiently ground the data. In that regard, I used the following research question to focus my coding: "How do former female officers in the FDF make sense of their transitional experiences and identities?" This line-by-line coding eventually led to the establishment of themes from which data could be sorted into after the initial pass, although I did not hesitate to create new categories if necessary. While reviewing, defining, and naming themes, I included data excerpts up to a paragraph in length. Throughout the process, I kept detailed notes in my research diary about thematic development, including relationships between concepts and correspondence with traditional theory in military sociology as an internal audit. While defining and naming the themes, I checked the resultant formation with my thesis advisor (Suvi Kouri) as an external audit and a subject matter expert. At this time, I was also able to review my initial incidents from the CIT analysis with her and begin the structure of my final report.

**Methodological Reflections and Limitations.** As with any sociological study, there were multiple limitations or problems I encountered in the course of carrying out my methodology. These include the development of the interview outside the bounds of the CIT, the study sample size and profile, my own reflexivity and identity, and linguistic difficulties. With each issue, I strove to negate its constraints on my findings. Yet, I also leave the determination of my efforts in the hands of the reader.

Though I conducted a pilot interview with a current officer in the FDF, as well as two pilot interviews with civilian volunteers using the CIT, I did not anticipate that the respondents in this study would generate narratives rather than series of events. However, the CIT still offered a way to both steer the interview in the direction of my research questions, while empowering the participant to share their story. While access to the script ahead of the interview could have caused collaboration with others or decision-making about which

stories to include, these narratives ultimately belong to my respondents and my intention was to use them with respect and integrity, not attempt to trick participants into sharing personal information unwillingly. This perspective similarly applies to the critique that respondents' knowledge of this study's focus could have skewed their narratives to center or decenter gender-related information. As a researcher, I offered my interviewees the most agency possible in constructing their narratives and I must take their responses in good faith. Ultimately, through thematic content analysis, I was able to use the entirety of data generated from the interview, even the reflections that did not fit into events or that produced surprising conclusions.

The variety of data was necessarily influenced by the small, diverse sample size. For example, given more participants perhaps I would have only conducted a singular analysis of events. Yet, as the results portion will discuss, the similarities across narratives are particularly striking considering their service in different branches and overlapping time periods. Additionally, I originally intended to only conduct interviews face-to-face, but given the limited availability of the respondents, halfway through my recruitment period I did begin to offer video interviews as a possibility. Thus, the fifth interview was conducted over Skype. However, I did not detect any difference in that participant's responses or our ability to co-construct knowledge due to the electronic collaboration. While five interviews are not a remarkable unit of measurement, given the number of currently serving female officers in the FDF (70) and the estimated number of officers who have left before retirement (50), it represents a significant percentage (10%) and thus becomes a viable authority to ground this study's conclusions. However, as with any in-depth qualitative study, these findings are not generalizable, but rather provide a rich, contextually specific understanding of transitional experiences for women officers in the FDF.

Although the participants and methodological transformation bear due consideration, the study was also necessarily influenced by my own background as a researcher. I am a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman, raised in the United States and conducted these interviews

in my native language (English). These identities carry privilege and weight that unavoidably appear in how I approached this study, interacted with my participants, and analyzed their data, only sufficiently checked by the measures I set forward regarding methodological reliability and trustworthiness. Additionally, I am also an active-duty officer in the US Army with a military background that provided similarities and differences to my respondents. As a currently serving member of a foreign military, I often actualized the notion of being an insider-outsider (Walker, 2016; Higate & Cameron, 2006). On the one hand, I was able to relate to the study participants as military women in their stories of organizational interactions or identity constructions of femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, I was often at a loss to provide anything more than empathy for their decisions to leave the uniform, given that I am still currently serving in a different military organization.

In my first interview, I attempted to suppress my own experiences in order to fully concentrate on my respondent's narrative. However, in my research journal afterward, I reflected on how the atmosphere lacked a rapport to facilitate an open flow of information and often appeared stilted or mistrustful. In the following interviews, I shared more about the study and my own background in the introduction which seemed to put respondents at ease. Although I feared it would establish an unhealthy expectation of certain results, it did not seem to change participants' answers, so much as encourage them to openly share more of their ideas and reflections. Despite this study's focus on one country, the initial reluctance to speak at length about one's experiences might also be reflective of a cultural shyness and tendency toward quietude typical of Finnish people (Carbaugh et al., 2006; Sallinen-Kuparinen et al., 1991). Where there is an established expectation of blending in, these respondents had to be encouraged to stand out.

While my access to literature and language within the interview was linguistically constrained to English, I did not run into any significant issues while conducting the study or writing this thesis. Fortunately, the majority of Finnish research published internationally

is translated or initially conducted in English. The FDF also uses English as a training language for coalition purposes and Finnish citizens are generally quite articulate in English, which meant my respondents were able to express themselves fairly well. Finally, through Suvi Kouri, my thesis advisor, I was able to access or check into sources and studies conducted in Finnish and verify that my literature review sufficiently represented the Finnish context. Any errors in that regard are mine alone.

## 4. Results

The results portion of this thesis is broken into three parts. First, it will describe the general narrative arc displayed across the life histories of all five respondents. Next, it will move on to report the results from the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) analysis, which formalize as events and behaviors. These largely address the first research question, which explores the key events of military careers for these women officers in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF). Finally, given the abundance of data that could not be analyzed through the CIT, this thesis also utilizes thematic content analysis to consider entry and exit factors within and outside of the framework of the Institutional/Occupational (I/O) Thesis. These results will be further incorporated into previous research in the forthcoming discussion section.

Given the sensitive nature of the respondents' work as military officers and the small potential population from which this sample was drawn, anonymity and confidentiality were considered absolute imperatives in the reporting process. To that end, I selected and utilized five random pseudonyms to personalize the participants' perspectives: Nelli, Sara, Emma, Olivia, and Matilda. However, this thesis omits any further accompanying details such as geographic location, branch of service, age, rank, and marital status, aside from the generalized information on the data sample in the methodology chapter. While there is potential value lost by excluding comparisons between these characteristics and their impact on each respondent's narrative, the potential harm for their careers and personal lives, should their identities be uncovered, far outweighs any scholastic gain. Furthermore, even with this information, given the diversity of background and military experience, it would be difficult to ascertain trends aside from the overarching similarities across interviews. As discussed in the section regarding implications for future research, this thesis anticipates the opportunity to more thoroughly investigate correlated variables in any future study with a much larger sample size.

**Narrative Arc.** As noted earlier, one of the key contributions of this thesis is the recorded narratives of women who were formerly officers in the FDF—an overlooked population in previous national and international study. Given the diversity of specialty, service lengths, and life events among the respondents in this study, the common narrative arc that emerges gives credence to the conforming effects of the military organization even as it substantiates the conclusions and theorizing capacities of this work.

All of the women, as is required of all officers in the FDF, began their service as volunteer conscripts. They continued as warrant officers or sergeants for a transitional amount of time (generally less than one year) before matriculating to the National Defence University and graduating as commissioned officers. During their military service, all of the women ventured outside of the organization, either through adjacent work as entrepreneurs, maternity leave, or enrollment at civilian universities. These experiences, in combination with a bridging event, such as the transition of a friend or spouse from the military, taught the respondents that they could function well in a civilian work environment. This realization, along with specific frustrations associated with military work, ultimately led each of the women to resign their commission. Notably, all women moved directly to employment upon exit from the military, which both counters the ‘homeless veteran’ narrative exemplified in Higate’s (2001) study in the United Kingdom and speaks to the mobilization of women in the Finnish labor force.

**Critical Incident Technique.** This stage of the analysis responded to the research question: “What were the key events that described entry and exit of female officers during a career in the FDF?” While each narrative was unique, the common events and their corresponding ways of acting can be used to discuss the realities of professional transitions and military service as experienced by these women. This study will reflect on similarities between events that prompted volunteering for conscription, the decision to pursue officership, and the decision to resign from the military. In this regard, four common types were found and will be discussed: prompting, retaining, bridging, and affirming events.



*Prompting Events.* As cited in the literature review, the FDF operates on a gendered split whereby male citizens have obligatory conscription and female citizens are allowed the opportunity to volunteer for conscript service. Therefore, for each woman, there was a prompting event that initiated their desire to volunteer, their choice to deviate outside of the social gender norm, and their entry into military service.

Motivations are a difficult, multi-faceted concept to decipher, even in self-reflection. For some women there was an actual event where they remember considering the idea of military service, as Olivia describes:

“I actually remember in high school there was a presentation concerning special forces conscript service. There were some guys, two guys who came to tell, basically for, for men, ‘That these are not so bad. You have to get in. It’s a very interesting year to spend.’ And I was the only woman there [...] Yeah. And they were like, ‘Oh, you are coming here, as well?’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, I am coming there, as well, because it is possible for us now.’ ‘Oh, yeah, come on, of course,’ and they were just laughing, ‘Okay, we’ll see. And you want to do special forces?’ But I wanted to go to [another branch] and I did. But that was the first, the first time when I heard a presentation concerning conscript service.”

For others, the opportunity that materialized was prompted by timing, as several participants recount:

“I was just the age when I graduated from *lukio*.<sup>5</sup> [high school graduation year], so I was like ‘Okay, maybe I try that.’ Because I played [sports] and I knew kind of this team playing and something like that. So, I think those were the triggers for me to join.” —Nelli

“And I think that was my biggest reason to choose the military, because I still had no idea what I am going to do when I grow big. Here, I was... how old was I? I was 19 years.” —Emma

Many of the participants also spoke to internal values, such as patriotic duty that attracted them to military service, even as these often overlapped with events or interactions with other people.

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<sup>5</sup>*Lukio* refers to high school in Finland.

“So, it was a very natural thing to go as a conscript and do that. And I had always like visualized it as like a national thing.” —Matilda

“So, in high school, I just got, got the thing to my mind that I would like to go and see if I could make it, because I am small and not that kind of typical soldier. So, it was very, I was very interested about the service and I just wanted to try.” —Sara

I felt like it’s my... I have to do it, as a duty. Even though I wouldn’t be forced to do it at this point, but I just wanted to. I was very, very interested in, in these defence questions and defence policy, as well.” —Olivia

When considering the reasons why these women chose to volunteer as conscripts in the FDF, it may seem that there is no common pattern. In a certain sense this is true, as without a national, inclusive conscription policy those who volunteer will come from a variety of backgrounds and motivations. However, it is not as important why these women joined the FDF, but rather that they had to be prompted to do so, which set a unique standard from the beginning of their military careers. Furthermore, in light of the organizational aspects of the military, which are also multi-faceted, a specific attraction towards women who present themselves as exceptional emerges. Volunteers must be both available and willing to challenge social norms in order to enter the military. This pull is furthered by the retaining events discussed in the following section.

*Retaining Events.* In terms of professionalization, the FDF could be viewed as gender blind as neither men nor women are given preference nor are required to participate in officership. However, the population available to apply to the National Defence University and earn a commission must validate their willingness through conscript service and is thereby already a pool limited by gender, given that men compose the majority of conscripts. Though a greater proportion of female conscripts continue on to leadership positions and officership, they are still underrepresented with regard to the general population as so few women volunteer for conscript service in the first place.

Each of the participants described reasons to remain in the military and continue toward a professional career, these usually related to both organizational characteristics and personal

development that they viewed as distinct from other work environments. For example, Matilda describes the secure atmosphere as such:

“So, I found that the military was a really home-like place for me. And I think this is quite usual for children that have some kind of, like, insecurities in their childhood, as well. Because when they get into an environment where there are like the same rules every day, for everyone, and there is the agreement on who is the leader and what tasks they have to do.”

Others pronounce the overall job security of a military career as particularly attractive:

“And then also because like it’s easy, easy to go to work because everybody who graduates gets the job.” —Nelli

“It was not ever made that somebody leaves. Because if you get a, if you get a... because when you graduate, you can retire because you have a, you have a... What is a word for the job, that officers are in the duty as long as they retire? So, it doesn’t belong to the system that you resign from a ‘safe’ job that you had once gotten.” —Emma

While still others spoke to the liberation of military work during their conscript year and how they learned to test themselves in competition and collaboration with their male peers.

“That [conscript] year was just amazing. It was really different. Nothing felt too, too difficult or, at least, not physically too different. I had no big challenges, even though I am very small. It was very encouraging to realize that I can do everything that men can do, as well. So, I felt it was very, very interesting.” —Olivia

“And I feel really really really sorry for women not going to the army, that they never experience it. They never get that. Another thing that I feel really sorry for them is that you never get to test your own limits, nobody forces you to test your limits. If I would go to say to any man in Finland that we will now ski 30 kilometers in that direction, they would say, ‘Oh, do we have to?’ Knowing that it would not be happy, and it would take a long time and so on, but they would know that we would make it. It’s just going to be slow. But the women are like, ‘Are you kidding? That’s impossible. I mean, I could never do it. I would die on the way,’ and so on. Because they never have been forced to do something that they didn’t believe that they could.” —Matilda

Although they sometimes encountered resistance from their families or individuals in the military who were resistant to gender integration, the respondents all chose to pursue a military career, often influenced by what the FDF had to offer: a stable future with the opportunity for challenges and self-development. During this initial term of service, the

interest sparked by prompting events was validated which encouraged the women to continue into a career in the profession of arms.

*Bridging Events.* All of the participants listed reasons why they exited the FDF through resignation rather than continuing in their career until the term required for military retirement. For all of the respondents, this rationale was paired with a bridging experience that seemed to garner confidence in their working abilities in the civilian sector. While the necessity of both a “why” (rationale) and a “how” (bridging event) speaks to the organizational nature of the FDF, it is also reflective of the inherent characteristics of career transitions for women workers. Though all of the women experienced frustration with regard to gender in the military environment, none of them cited it as their primary reason for resignation. Rather, the women spoke of salary differentials, balance with care responsibilities, and pursuing their individual interests. Though not explicitly labelled as gendered, these reasons within a constructivist framework are intimately related to the position of women in the workplace, labor market, and responsibilities towards care. The constructed story of gender and identity in professional choices here affirms the concept of exceptional women and will be revisited in the thematic discourse.

Several respondents referenced the boredom of military life as their reason for exit and looked to a new civilian occupation to provide interesting work. For example, Nelli states:

“So, and then, after a couple of years, I was sort of tired, like, ‘Okay, same thing all the time.’ And then my next boss was going to be like, well I was like, ‘Okay, the next boss is all the time coming, like I am kinda in the trap.’ ‘Like I can’t go forward, because all the time somebody else is coming and takes the leadership of that structure.’ And I was like, ‘Okay, I am so tired of this.’”

As the FDF is primarily concerned with training conscripts annually and creating a large reserve force, this repetitive work is especially frustrating for those who remain permanently on active duty.

“I was so bored just doing the same things again and again. They never change when new conscripts come in and come out. Things never change. And the higher

you go, the more like the routine or administrative work you are going to have.”  
—Olivia

“I mean, conscript training... Many times, we compared it to building a house of cards and then every five, every six months we just folded it up and started again (laughs) because it was just repeating itself all the time, all the time. It’s... I can’t do that for a whole career.” —Matilda

In that same vein, these women sought greater autonomy over their careers, both in terms of geographic mobility and work-life balance. Their efforts were often met with organizational resistance.

“You can’t say that ‘I am not going.’ Because if someone says you’re going to go over there, then, you can say that ‘I won’t go,’ but they won’t like... It doesn’t matter. It’s quite common that you are just put somewhere even when you don’t want to go.” —Sara

“And also, also the possibility to affect your own future. Like I said, you get just sent to different bases whenever it suits someone... When my husband was going to (name of country), he applied to go, wasn’t able to go, because he was so important. Then, one week later, they called and said, ‘You’ll go.’ So, how do you plan? How do you live that kind of life, when you don’t have any effect on it?” —Matilda

When looking ahead at the expected career timeline, the respondents saw a future that did not fit into the lifestyle they wanted to pursue, and they deviated from that trajectory. Nelli describes the current freedom in her civilian career as follows:

“And now I have like, like I can stay here as long as I want. No one is going to move me some other places. Because if you are... if you do the general officer’s school—2 years—then you do 1 year there, then you do 1 year over there, then you move, you move all around Finland, you go abroad, you go back, you go abroad again. It’s like totally like they’re moving you all the time.”

Another aspect of the decision to exit, while certainly not the holistic reason itself, is the potential to earn more in a civilian occupation. Several participants reference this perspective below:

“But compared to the officers’ salaries, our civilian specialists can earn much more. It’s different.” —Olivia

“Well, it’s very cold, cold to say that salary is one thing, but then like the position is very interesting and it’s like much, like I don’t know, higher-level, that I could create, like put it down on a like officer’s degree.” —Nelli

These reasons to resign from officership present an occupational perspective of the decision-making process as the respondents were primarily concerned with salaries, autonomy, and pursuing individual interest. It seems that when comparing the FDF to other employers by the same qualifications, it came up short. However, by no means was this an easy or unemotional choice, as the next two paragraphs will attest. Although they presented a relatively gender-blind account, given that social structures remain gendered, decisions to work or not work remain implicitly gendered. The thematic content analysis will explore this point further.

Although most respondents did not come from military families, they all became accustomed to the military organization over the years to the extent that they had trouble envisioning themselves working in any capacity outside of it. Every interviewee referred to a coworker, friend, or spouse who exemplified civilian careers to them personally and made their exit from the military a possibility. Two such experiences are recounted below:

“So, he [other servicemember] left before me and then when I was... I had talked to him, ‘I’m thinking about leaving,’ and he said after, well he remembered it, and when I was at home with my [number] child, he called me and asked me that, ‘Oh, well, would you like to come here? Are you still leaving? Would you like to come here?’ Because they had an open position there (his company).” —Sara

“Somehow, it opened up a totally new world for me. ‘Okay, working as a civilian is like that.’ He was working as a consult, which is a very different branch compared to ours, so, it was very interesting to hear how different a view he had in all kinds of topics.” —Olivia

It is notable that all participants referenced a man who helped provide this bridging experience to them. While this gendered aspect is perhaps influenced by the structure of marriages in the sample population, it is also explicitly related to the overwhelming

majority of men in the FDF. Even when the bridging event was facilitated by a civilian man, it is probable that he had the same guiding frame of reference from similar military service given the universal male conscription policy in Finland. While civilian careers were demonstrated by many of the women in these respondents' lives, it was men that they listened to and used as models when conceptualizing an exit strategy.

Despite citing ungendered, practical reasons to exit the military organization and the positive influence of civilian colleagues and relationships, several of the participants characterized the decision to resign as courageous. For example, Nelli recounts:

“And actually, I feel kinda good that I made my decision. This was something that was probably very difficult for somebody else. Well, I feel a bit, quite brave decision. Just to decide differently.”

Emma further describes how the courage from finding herself during her military career also gave her courage later to exit when it was no longer a good fit:

“I said that I was quite shy when I came, so, I think this journey gave me a lot of courage and I also found that when you are your true self you are a very charismatic leader also and you don't have to pretend anything. And that came to me really strongly during these years. And also, maybe I... just to say so, maybe it gave me courage to do the hard decision to leave. It was a hard decision.”

This emotional aspect of the transition process is critical to note as it speaks to the nature of the FDF as a military organization, specifically with regard to women's service. Although their rationale to exit appears straightforward and they had sufficient social support, this decision was not taken lightly by any of the respondents, nor is the military identity taken off as simply as the uniform.

*Affirming Events.* Aside from the presence of a bridging event, the other common event that rose organically from the interviews was how the respondents sought activities or interactions to affirm and uphold their military identity after they exited the organization, either through formal work and organizational ties or through informal conversations with those around them. Unprompted, these events fostered an identity retention that confirms

the continued impact of military service on the individual and its value within Finnish society writ large.

For example, Sara describes her continued participation in an alumni group as a way to not completely exit the organization:

“But we have this officers’... it’s not like a union, but... union is not the right word, but, well you can check it out [cadet group]. But I am in part of the [board] over there...So, I haven’t closed all the doors behind me.”

Other interviewees describe how their military experience helps them feel a national kinship or prove themselves to an unknown group:

“And you can also tell by the fact that it doesn’t matter which kind of strangers I meet, Finnish strangers I meet, male ones. If I said that I am [military], we would always have a discussion. We would always be friends. So, it gives this kind of connection that you just can’t get anywhere else.” —Matilda

“It helps me to get in on the group sometimes. When they are talking about something, I am like, ‘Okay, I know what you are talking about. You don’t have to talk to me like a child. I have done this.’” —Olivia

These continued bonds attest to the ongoing military identity even after a formal exit from the organization. As the following respondents both characterize this permanence in their own words:

“It was a big part of my identity. It was never a job. I think it was more.” —Emma

“The identity of it is totally separate from doing the work. The identity will never leave me. I feel very much at home in the environment.” —Matilda

Ultimately, this personal identity retention helps to sooth any internal conflict from resignation. As Emma frames her decision:

“Also, serving to country, because I found that that is a big value for me, so, that was also a hard decision: do I choose? So, to say, do I abandon one of my basic values of life?”

Through laying continued claim to a military identity and affirming it in casual conversation, as well as civilian career choices, these women do not have to choose



between their basic life values. Rather, they can retain their patriotic ideals and reflect positively on their decision to both enter and exit the FDF.

**Thematic Content Analysis.** Picking up where the CIT analysis leaves off, thematic content analysis is used to further explore the depth of the collected narratives and to respond to the secondary research question: “How do former female officers in the FDF make sense of their transitional experiences and identities?” The codes that emerged from this stage correlate well with the event categorization and largely fall into two categories: institutional and occupational factors accompanying each respondent’s transition into and out of the military. Moskos notes, “Indeed it is the tension and interplay between institutional and occupational tendencies that characterize organizational developments within the armed forces” (1980, p.16). This thesis adds that such tension also characterizes career choices of individuals as the organizational categorization affects, or even determines, the attitudes of servicemembers themselves through the options it presents. Thus, it will take the Institutional/Occupational Thesis’s orientation to briefly describe their journey here, with further comparison and categorization put forth in the discussion section.

A third thematic category also emerged that bore significant overlap and relevance to both the institutional and occupational traits: the negotiation of gender as experienced throughout the lifetime. While the respondents seldom labelled gendered events as such, the persistent impact of gender and gender-blindness to their careers, decision-making, and identities was clearly woven into their narratives and set the framework for both entry and exit. After all, their experience as women officers in the FDF created their individual qualification for this study and the scholarly interest in their narratives. To a certain extent, these factors can then be generalized to the experiences of women servicemembers in military occupations, yet it is also critical to maintain a sense of contextuality informed specifically by the FDF as an organization and Finland as a national and cultural environment. The social norms surrounding gender and work remain influential, especially

given the gender-segregated labor trends in Finland. These manifest as a structural inability for individual workers to mitigate conflict between personal identities and career choices.

*Institutional Factors.* This thesis confers with Moskos' definition of institution as cited in the literature review. In summary, it considers an institution validated through normative legitimation, distinctness from other professions, social status in addition to economic compensation, and internal patterns of trust and paternalism within the organization. Many of the individual factors that first fit into the prompting and retaining events confirm an institutional representation of the FDF. For example, the sense of patriotism and duty, the opportunity to test oneself in meaningful work, and the stability and security that a vertical organization provides were significant reasons the participants entered the FDF and pursued officership following their conscript service. This conclusion does not necessarily mean the respondents fully conceptualized institutional careers for themselves, but rather that they sought careers that fit their individual values and preferences which were institutionally oriented. To a certain extent, given the pattern of affirming events, these institutional benefits continued following individual exits from the military, in terms of community, cultural respect, and national identity. Therefore, on either end of a military career in the FDF, institutional aspects are understood and discussed positively. Key considerations for the discussion will include whether these institutional motivations are honored, as well as implications for present and future rates of volunteerism.

*Occupational Factors.* Moskos' definition of occupation is adapted for this section, as well. This thesis characterizes an occupation as dependent on marketplace legitimation, privileging the perspective and rights of employees, and striking a contractual balance with the organization. Many of the respondents did not specifically bring up an event that precipitated their exit from the FDF, but rather referenced factors such as pay, personal autonomy, geographic mobility, or individual interest. These all correlate to both marketplace legitimation, as the FDF was compared to civilian employers, and a contractual understanding of their employment as officers. Although the institutional

aspects of the FDF provided the initial attraction to military service and officership, the working culture of the organization only fit their preferences for a short period of time. As one interviewee, Matilda, describes the dawning realization: “I mean, in many ways it was this very traditional thinking, that the work would be something else than it actually is.” At some point, the respondents each decided a primary commitment to the institution was not in the best interests of themselves or their families. This decision was facilitated by adjacent work, either pursuing civilian degrees or entrepreneurship similar to moonlighting. Through this lens, in contrast to the prompting, retaining, and affirming events, the bridging events fit into an occupational understanding of the FDF as an organization, which is further confirmed by the results: positive transitions to other (civilian) work. The discussion section will further explore the tension of individual transitions from institution to occupation, as well as the probable impact of welfare state policies on security and social provisions.

*Gendered Negotiation.* Although the respondents seldom labeled a particular event as sexist or even gendered, the overtones of the conflict between profession and personal identity were clearly visible in many descriptions of themselves and their military service. How these women negotiated gendered in their entry and exit from the FDF proves that gender is a critical backdrop that defines the rules and roles of working life, even in egalitarian societies, like Finland. As their approach to the FDF as an institution or occupation was gendered, it also proves additive to the extant literature on the I/O Thesis. This section will summarize the negotiation of gender in three of the most prominent categories from the data: identification as exceptional women, the ongoing contestation of military identity and choice feminism within a gendered social order.

While none of the women labelled themselves as ‘exceptional women’ specifically, they noted how well they got along with men and that they did not experience the obstacles expected of women in a masculine-dominated profession. For example, Sara describes the difference between working with men and working with women as follows:

“Men are more straight[forward]; they are not talking behind your back. And because men say to you if something’s wrong, they say it. But women are no like, ‘No, well...Mmhm.’ It’s very different. And I have always gotten along very well with men.”

While explaining why they fit in so well, many participants set themselves apart from other, hypothetical women, as if in opposition to their narratives:

“But I don’t know how to explain it better than this. I mean, if I could go to the ones who come as conscripts and give them the secret formula, I would, but... Many of them, I think, ‘Did you need to be that difficult for other people? Couldn’t you just go along?’ or something like this. But they are not just the ‘go along’ people.”  
—Matilda

“I feel that the other women have more experience about... that they were treated badly, because they were women. But I haven’t felt that. It’s not the reason I left or, or even I haven’t ever felt that way.” —Sara

These professions of personal exceptionalism often meant strict, meritocratic standards in training and evaluation, superimposed by a higher degree of motivation than expected from their peers. As two interviewees describe these perspectives:

“At least in my case, because you have to always defend your own rights. Not depending on what gender, you represent. I have always been requiring the same considerations for me, as for men. I don’t accept any kind of special measures concerning gender issues.” —Olivia

“But I don’t see any specific reasons why women, all women don’t want to [serve]? But it’s probably because it’s not mandatory. And many women who do the military service are very motivated. They want to be officers and they really want to do it.”  
—Nelli

This narrative of an unproblematic term of service comes into contrast with the witnessed contestation of military identity during the same time period. Although it is a common feature in previous literature on newly integrated populations, negotiating gender on the individual level, by classifying oneself as an exceptional woman, is an unsatisfactory strategy to change organizational culture.

The contested nature of military identity for these women was a near constant experience throughout their military careers and even following their exit from the formal

organization. Their military identities were never assumed and rarely recognized unless explicitly introduced into the conversation. However, these assumptions seemed natural to some respondents, as Olivia states:

“If they don’t know me, then, of course they assume that I have always been civilian.”

On the other hand, others expressed a personal struggle with the masculine assumptions of military service and the requirement for women to prove their identity:

“Yeah, I think it’s always like, ‘Okay, she’s a good leader.’ And if you are a female officer you really have to fit to all the forms of man.” —Nelli

“And you feel that you always need to do more to show that ‘I can do this, I know this, this is my specialty. I have done this before.’ But, if, if only you go there and someone sees you and if that’s the first time then they just look at you and, ‘Oh you are so small and young and a woman and stuff like that.’” —Sara

Some respondents believed that this treatment would pass as female service normalizes, while others remarked that time seemed to have little effect on cultural attitudes. Emma describes this perspective here:

“It has been over 20 years that it has been possible for women to work in the military, but it is still a ‘new’ thing, I think, for many people.”

The status quo is left unassisted by a military tradition that prioritizes conformity. Emma goes on to reflect on the publicity difference for women working in civilian fields:

“For example, comparing the civilian, female leaders, many high-ranked civilian, female leaders in the big companies, they speak freely about their gender and what it’s like to be in executive groups as the only woman. I don’t see any difference in that, in that my point of view. So, I have thought a lot, ‘Why is it so hard?’ And I think it is the pressure to be the same as the men, to be normal... But, you cannot, cannot be normal if you are a woman, the only one.”

This theme of self-reliance and the necessity to advocate for one’s own identity creates constant tension between the individual and the organization as dictated by social norms surrounding gender. In turn, participants’ narratives often fell into a rhetoric best classified as choice feminism.

Choice feminism responds to a gendered social order by fostering a perspective that embraces any choice a woman makes as just and refrains from applying any moral imperatives to the experience of womanhood. While this level of tolerance is contemporarily relevant, one of its primary theoretical critiques is that this stance encourages individualism at the cost of collective social action (Thwaites, 2017). For example, respondents recognized that modern society is structured to preference male workers, especially in the military organization, as Matilda describes:

“I think it comes really down to... not gender issues in the way that ‘if you are this then you automatically cannot,’ but you perhaps like... you are entering a world that is described as a male world. I mean, it has nothing to do with the gender again, but it’s an attribute, that it’s a male world. And then you have to be that if you are going to fit in.”

However, rather than call for structural or cultural change, they described any response at the individual level. In their own narratives and when considering hypothetical scenarios, they affirmed the belief that women officers have to negotiate their entry and success in the FDF through specific choices.

“Many female officers have kids and it seems to be okay, that they don’t have any problems with it. But, yeah, now that you mention it, it could somehow affect their career, if they don’t choose to continue studies which would mean they would have to be able to move for two years to another city and after two years again... Maybe the family would have to stay in the first city or then just move with them. But somehow, I feel that women choose not to do it that easily when they have kids. For men, they normally, do it anyway.” —Olivia

“Don’t complain. You chose it. You knew what you were getting into. You chose it. So, it has to be accepted that you want to do a military job for several reasons. And everyone is as good as the next.” —Matilda

Choice feminism as a response fits neatly into how the women negotiated their contested identities as servicemembers and veterans, as well as their own perspective of themselves as exceptional women—distinct from the general population. While perhaps an essential survival mechanism, the negotiation of gender expressed by these respondents does not encourage a more egalitarian organization, but rather leaves the status quo untouched. This conclusion is compounded by their provided rationale to exit, when the institutional and

occupational aspects of the FDF are taken into consideration, because each individually made the decision to transition rather than attempt to reform the organization into a better employer. By no means does this thesis mean to advocate for self-sacrificial activism. However, it is critical to consider individual perspectives collectively as the discussion moves forward to consider the nature of the FDF in a national and international context.

## 5. Discussion

The discussion will weave together the original research questions, study findings, and relevant extant literature, with the intention of providing grounded conclusions about the nature of military transitions for women in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF), as well as the organizational conceptualization of the FDF. Although the research questions were dually concerned with the key events describing the entry and exit of female officers during their career in the FDF and how these women made sense of their transitional experiences and identities, the results demonstrated that these key events inform the sense-making process within the context of the military organization. Rather than separate critical events and behaviors from identity work, these are understood as intertwined aspects of military transitions and careers for the group of respondents. Given the limits of a qualitative study, the results of this thesis must be understood as significant only with regard to the specific population of respondents and cultural context in which they were gathered. Nevertheless, they can be used additively with regard to ongoing conversations in military sociology that triangulate identity work, organizational categorization, and gender.

This chapter will first comparatively discuss the navigation of military identities in other studies that center women servicemembers. Next, it will revisit the debate on conscription and all-volunteer military forces, as well as the categorization of military organizations with reference to the FDF specifically. The gendered structural nature of defense in Finnish society will then lead to a discussion of the military as a demographic equalizer. Finally, these points will bring further clarity to how gender is studied in military sociology. These five topics comprehensively illustrate the primary contributions this thesis offers to the discipline, as well as to the specific knowledge of the FDF, although its conclusions are not necessarily limited in that regard.

**Navigating Military Identities.** The military identities that the women in this study developed during their time in the FDF comingled with their personal identities. This



occupational norm is accented by three key factors: the socializing effects of military organizations, the fact that the respondents had to be prompted by certain events in order to volunteer as conscripts, and their decision to commission as military officers. While the first is experienced by many servicemembers in military work and often leads to identity confusion upon transition (Higate, 2001; Naphan & Elliot, 2015), the second is specific to women in the FDF. Their choice to enter the military was not made as any citizen would have to choose, but specifically contextualized as women in Finland due to the currently gender-segregated national conscription policy. As reflected in the courage described as necessary to enter the FDF, choose a different path than the majority, and leave its security later on, these decisions were not made lightly. Finally, the third factor points out that the respondents' conscript service was not a mere rite of passage, but rather led to an intentional career choice in the profession of arms. Comparative to Walker's (2013) typology of UK leavers (servicemembers in their final year of short careers), the identities professed by the studied population are most similar to the transformed orientation, which insists on a permanent, positive sense of change from their military service in affirmation of personal values. While none of the narratives were simple, all respondents reflect positively on their decision to serve in the FDF and maintain that their military identities continue despite their current civilian occupations. This orientation is undeniably aided by self-proclamations that they were each distinct from other women and lack the problems endemic to gender.

In implicitly characterizing themselves as exceptional women, the respondents place themselves in a separate category than the general population of women in Finland. This pattern is not exclusive to the studied population, as Kouri (2018) found that this construction of difference is one of the ways female officers currently serving in the FDF do gender. The uniqueness of their identity is emphasized in the particular liberation the respondents felt during the retaining events that encouraged further military work, as well as the elusiveness of completely identifying as one of the men. Several respondents also pointed out that other women in the FDF may have had negative, sexist experiences, but

that they were exempt from such experiences. Similar themes of self-reliance and personal advocacy are clearly illustrated as the participants frequently set themselves apart from male peers and highlight their high degree of motivation and career aspirations. Yet, no matter how long their term of service or how many missions they completed, strangers automatically assume civilian identities for the sample group. Essentially, participants refused the stereotypical norm for Finnish women, yet a military identity evaded them within the organization and society writ large, an experience that closely aligns with Monahan and Fisher's development of sacrificial labor as a descriptor of the personal work required to conform to organizational identities (2019). Thus, constant tension between the individual and the organization underlies both narratives and transitions as the respondents occupy an ambiguous third category between the overtly masculinized military and traditional womanhood. This conclusion also falls in line with many other studies of women servicemembers who attempt to escape the confines of gender but ultimately fail as they strive to merely be exceptions to the norm rather than changing that norm (Baaz & Stern, 2012; Rones, 2015).

Though the assumption of military identities is definitively linked to their personal service, the respondents all continued to claim that identity following their exit. This position was best exemplified through the identity affirming events and associations that allow participants to make meaning of being veteran-civilians (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015, p.120). As they actively maintain a military identity throughout the transition process, these women avoid rejecting initial values claims—both personally and organizationally—and can continue to reflect on their military experience positively. This behavior further confirms the importance of military service in Finland, both in the labor market and as a tie to national ethos, allowing the women to bring forth their identity in multiple spheres as a hard-won advantage. Higate (2001) posits that servicemembers in transition should seek continuity in order to facilitate positive outcomes. Though he explicitly points out familiar gendered patterns as an example of this continuity, the link between respondents in this study and their military networks may have fostered the requisite continuous social support

to accompany their transition. In turn, this support could have enabled the favorable outcomes in direct employment and sustained housing that traditionally elude veteran populations. With regard to the FDF specifically, this conclusion confirms findings that randomized compositions of conscript squads and dorm assignments influence future trajectories in terms of education, earnings, and employment (Einiö, 2019). Thus, military identities continue to carry weight long after the uniform is taken off.

**Conscription and Volunteer Forces.** The primary issue that distinguishes the identities of women in the FDF from the gendered nature of work in military organizations globally is the national policies that segregate men as conscripts and women as volunteer-conscripts. From the inception of their military service, women servicemembers have a markedly different experience than their male counterparts, and they are met repeatedly with the realization that their service was a choice made by very few female citizens. This distinction generates immediate and persistent gender inequality, a status quo maintained by military tradition, and renders organizational gestures toward conformity meaningless. Scholars have noted that gender-specific conscription, while not an included component of equality indexes, is an issue that prodigiously defines military organizations and should be measured as such (Heikkilä & Laukkanen, 2019; Persson & Sundevall, 2019).

Though it bears special relevance in Finland, this debate has both international and national significance. For example, Moskos' original formulation of the I/O Thesis was prompted by the transition of the US military from a draft policy (for male citizens) to an all-volunteer force in 1973. In 2019, there was a record 1,100 female volunteers for conscript service in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2020). Nevertheless, several experts, including the conscripts' union, called for a changeover to a new recruitment scheme ("All Points North #54," 2019; "Conscripts' union," 2019). Recommended options range from an all-volunteer force to requiring conscription of men and women if there are not enough volunteers in a given year or even specialized response teams in an overhaul of the entire national defense structure. These opinions drive from a desire to diversify the force, encourage the military service of

more women, and increase the enthusiasm of conscripts through a more egalitarian system. Similarly, in his analysis of the problematic gendered practices of Finnish peacekeepers abroad, Jukarainen states that, “conscription is the key reason behind the gender imbalances in defense and military crisis management in Finland” (2012, pp. 91-92). Given this concurrence of opinion, why does Finland maintain its current male conscription policy?

With regard to a potential policy shift to an all-volunteer force in Finland, two critical hurdles are necessary to negotiate: the urgency of such a transition and the national feasibility with regard to maintaining the requisite fighting force. In an egalitarian sense, this changeover is called for in order to establish a more inclusive, diverse military that accurately represents and takes advantage of the talent in the national population (Heikkilä & Laukkanen, 2019). Yet, elected officials and a survey of the general population still oppose military conscription for women (“Conscripts’ union,” 2019). This attitude confirms Segal and Segal’s summarization of the influence that traditional values carry against logical decisions specifically regarding women’s roles in the armed forces (1983, p. 165). However, it is not only traditional values and overt sexism that stand in the way of this decision, as many opponents also fear that a change in the defense structure would unnecessarily provoke a deficiency in military manpower. In essence, if the FDF moves to an all-volunteer policy, will citizens continue to view military service as national responsibility? While the measured public ‘willingness’ to defend their country, a term often approximated to equate conscription, remains quite high in Finland comparative to other Nordic countries (Cronberg, 2006), any political transition threatens to alter that status quo. The Swedish Armed Forces, which deactivated male-only conscription in its 2010 transition to an all-volunteer force only to introduce gender-neutral conscription in 2017 after failing to recruit enough volunteers, does not offer an enticing example (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). Similarly, the potential for generational attitudinal norms to increasingly preference individualism over community identity present another barrier for recruitment (Johansen et al., 2013, p. 524). Although a shift from the all-male conscription policy would definitively alter the narratives of this study’s respondents, given the

significant obstacles to adopting this view in Finland, this thesis concludes that a more urgent reason than the pursuit of gender equality is required to change public perception of this issue.

**Categorizing the FDF as a Military Organization.** While the I/O Thesis resists a strict categorization of military organizations as either an institution or an occupation, the interplay between institutional and occupational aspects characterize both the nature of the organization, as well as the career transitions of individuals in the military. However, this study finds that the I/O Thesis is not sufficient on its own to fully demonstrate either the nature of the FDF, nor the factors that precipitated entry and exit for the respondents. This thesis proposes a gender-nuanced approach to both organizational approximations and the identities of individual servicemembers in order to comprehensively explore how these notions are constructed socially and independently.

The respondents in this study were attracted initially to the FDF for institutional reasons, such as their patriotic values and the security of meaningful work in a vertical organization. Furthermore, institutional benefits were visible following resignation, through valued military experience in the civilian labor market and the ability to affirm a national identity. In stark contrast, the cited rationale for exit speak overwhelmingly to occupational preferences, namely career autonomy and wages. On either end of each narrative, both prior to and following service, stands the military institution. Yet, when it came down to continued service as a military professional, the participants described their decisions in occupational terms. As Shields (1988) asserts, institutional motivations, while common for women servicemembers in the US military, are not honored accordingly. Rather, this original “institutional attachment” becomes “diluted because the military does not really accommodate women” and this group experiences higher rates of attrition (Shields, 1988, p. 100). Thus, this irregularity in the Finnish context could speak to the gender inequality generated by conscript and volunteer policies, as discussed in the previous section, wherein the subtle message emerges that women do not organically belong in this organization.

However, it could also describe the gendered career decisions experienced by women workers in every field around the globe whether they engage in typically feminine or masculine professions (Bolton & Muzio, 2008). In either regard, this conclusion provokes negative implications for rates of volunteerism in an underutilized recruitment population.

At the same time, one must be contextually specific to the relevant factors in the described narratives. In the group of respondents, the welfare state policies that enable secure transitions to and from various career paths were not enumerated, but rather taken as a baseline assumption. This behavior both enables a feminist choice narrative where Finnish women can ‘have it all’ and disguises the structural differences between Nordic countries and other Western militaries (Thwaites, 2017). While in the United States, social benefits, such as education and healthcare, are tied to occupations like the military, Finland’s social benefits are considered as rights guaranteed to all citizens (Esping-Andersen, 1990). For example, Burkart and Hogan highlight the many unique issues facing US women veterans which are compounded by lack of access to appropriate resources (2015). Therefore, further comparative research along these lines must acknowledge the situatedness of servicemembers’ transitions, not merely with regard to military policies, but in the context of the nation writ large.

While this thesis offers no definitive conclusions on the nature of the FDF as an institution or an occupation, it does insist on a gender-nuanced approach to the I/O Thesis in future theorizations. The respondents in this study did not experience their military service as merely military officers nor as Finnish women, but rather an amalgamation of personal identities superimposed by work identities. Their negotiation of gender invaded and informed every aspect of their career transitions from entry to exit, including their reflections on identity today. This perspective confirms that for servicemembers at every vantage point on the gender spectrum the military organization does not present a neutral occupation or identity (Belkin, 2012; Rones, 2015). It is critical for future studies to take into account the gendered and gendering structures of these organizations for all

servicemembers in order to more accurately discuss the realities of modern military work and respond to the policy developments demanded by their experiences.

**Military Work as an Equalizer.** The armed forces are often seen as an equalizing organization. Following entry, each individual is stripped of their distinctive characteristics as much as possible through uniform and grooming standards, physically and mentally trained to the same performance requirements, and forced to build a sense of group cohesion through shared hardship (Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Kirke, 2010). Success within the military organization is considered within meritocratic terms (Rones, 2015). Furthermore, military status is often perceived to pass benefits into civilian life through government and cultural recognition, as demonstrated by the results of this thesis. While premised on gender-neutrality, this narrative endorses a masculine perspective of the armed forces and servicemembers which denies the historical and ongoing negotiation that gender minorities face. This thesis considers the ‘equalizing’ account to be harmful to the general population of women even while it selectively empowers a few of their members.

An ungendered, meritocratic approach to evaluating military careers is harmful to women because it often leaves gendered structures that preference male servicemembers unacknowledged and forces women to strategically navigate these boundaries on their own. Each of the respondents’ narratives endorsed a specific narrative of entry and exit from the FDF, wherein they negotiated their gendered identity and military service individually rather than with a large cohort of other women or as a part of a national or political movement. This generalization is confirmed by other studies of women servicemembers. For example, Persson (2011) explains how women often initially employ strategies that produce acceptance on a case-by-case basis, such as winning physical fitness contests, which only reaffirm the broad assumption that most women do not belong in the military. Similarly, this study’s respondents describe entering a male world that required certain masculine attributes to achieve standard career trajectories. Success, in this scenario, is ultimately premised upon an ability to conform to ideal (male) worker standards. When

achieved, this produces momentarily empowered women, often held up as an example for others without removing any of the barriers they were required to navigate. Although the ability to serve militarily can be viewed as a form of empowerment (Heikkilä & Laukkanen, 2019), it is more often criticized for disguising the problematic conditions under which women are allowed to serve (Cockburn, 2012; Belkin, 2012). Rather than call for structural or cultural change, these women exited on their own terms, which concurrently left the status quo unchanged for the few women who will follow in their footsteps.

One could argue that as none of the respondents cited gender as their primary reason to exit, their narratives should be considered without regard to their status as women officers. However, in the military specifically, codes of loyalty can often lead to the downplaying of discriminatory or sexist practices within interviews with those outside the organization (Baaz & Stern, 2012; Carreiras, 2006). Furthermore, a gender-neutral perspective does not lend due process to the social norms surrounding gender and work. In a country like Finland where gender-segregated labor trends dominate; no individual can realistically separate their personal identity from career choice. Rather, the decisions of the study participants to pursue greater autonomy of their careers and lives through an exit from the FDF, when considered within a gendered context, unveil the continued social pressure for women to ‘have it all.’ Institutional aspects of military organizations naturally deprive its members of decision-making capacity, which when magnified by gender produced an unacceptable lifestyle to the respondents. Although this study’s participants made use of the strategies available to them and should not be held responsible for the solution to systemic inequality, their departure affirms that the armed forces, and the FDF in particular, are not an equalizing opportunity for women. Indeed, they cannot be in the face of wider social inequality.

**Recommendations for Gender Research in Military Sociology.** The final discussion point of this thesis reflects the overall implications of this study’s results for military



sociology as a discipline. In that regard, it demands a gender-nuanced approach to the discussion of military organizations and military identities. This effect will dually bear influence in how research is conducted and how theories are formulated and tested.

The majority of research in military sociology assumes a gender-blind rather than a gender-nuanced approach. This decision negates both the femininities and masculinities inherent in military organizations as social institutions representative of gendered norms in cultures, as well as states, to the detriment of subsequent theory. This study found the I/O Thesis to be insufficient in describing the factors for women officers' entry and exit from the FDF because that hypothesis generates its conclusions on the experience of male soldiers and the supposed synonymy of war and masculinity. Both Higate (2001) and Woodward and Jenkins (2011) provide unique examples of military studies that generalize from the male perspective either due to the inaccessibility of women respondents or through a quick dismissal of gender as an irrelevant identity. Though my studied population is comprised of all women respondents, and therefore was already centered on this topic, its results prove the dynamic role that gender plays within military organizations. It is in grave error that scholars do not fully consider the gendered structure of the armed forces, contextually specific national policy, and the opportunities available to certain citizens based on identity, when designing research or articulating theories regarding the armed forces and society. This conclusion falls in line with the rapidly growing field that views military organizations, identities, and even concepts of war and peace as intricately tied to gender relations and practices (Persson & Sundevall, 2019; Belkin, 2012; Kronsell & Svedberg, 2012). Additionally, it provides a progressive outlook that appreciates the increasing rates of female participation in militaries around the world. Thus, it is apparent that the gendered nature of social relations, especially military relations, demands more in-depth, diligent, and expansive inquiry than ever before.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to capture the perspective of a historically silenced, yet socially influential population: women military veterans from the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF). It conducted a novel adaptation of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) combined with graphic elicitation to structure an interview process that both empowered respondents to steer the narrative and acknowledged the co-construction of interview data. Its resultant analysis provoked findings that further the constructivist approach to gender and military sociology in general by demanding a gender-nuanced approach to Moskos' Institutional/Occupational (I/O) Thesis, as well as the classification of military identities. While its conclusions can be adapted toward the ongoing discussions of gender integration, conscription and volunteer policies, and the armed forces as form of equal opportunity, they should not be limited in that regard.

**Research Questions Revisited.** Two questions structured the design of this empirical study:

1. What were the key events that described entry and exit of female officers during a career in the FDF?
2. How do former female officers in the FDF make sense of their transitional experiences and identities?

In response to the first question, the events in a female officers' career in the FDF can be understood in four key categories: prompting events that initiated a decision to conscript, retaining events that encouraged the choice to pursue officership and professionalization, bridging events that accompanied a rationale to exit the military, and affirming events that recognize the maintenance of a military identity following resignation. These events manifest in a diversity of forms across each of the respondents' narratives. They contextualize the difficulties of volunteer service amidst national, gendered conscription policies, and the intense socialization that transforms military work into military identities. Furthermore, through the communal tendency to lay claim to these identities, long after

resignation, these events elucidate the ongoing commitment to the military organization despite gender-informed decisions. Collectively, these events demonstrate the unique nature of military service for women officers from entry to exit and call for change within military organizations in order to address the paucity of women volunteers in Finland. If equality truly is a sought-after national value, the means of entrance and service within the FDF should be restructured to preference gender equality rather than masculine norms disguised as gender neutrality.

With regard to the second research question, this study found that its respondents strategically interacted with an institutionalized military partially maintained by a commitment to national conscription, but ultimately explained their own voluntary service with occupational descriptors. Furthermore, their interviews presented the persistent negotiation of gender through their self-presentation as exceptional women, the ongoing contestation of military identities, and their utilization of choice rhetoric to justify their decisions. Despite overt denial of a gendered resignation, the respondents could not escape the influence of gender segregation and expectations present in the Finnish labor market—in both civilian and military sectors. These conclusions brought forth the realization that Moskos's I/O Thesis could not sufficiently accompany their narratives as it does not consider the impact of gender within the military organization and the resultant, unique positionality of women servicemembers. Thus, the information from this research question adds to a growing body of literature which demands greater consideration to gender and identity not only in the structure and operations of national militaries, but in the formulation of theory in military sociology.

**Implications for Future Research.** Through documenting the lived experience of an unrecorded population, this study offers undeniable value to the topical area of military-civilian transitions and women veterans' identities. However, given the research constraints in terms of timeliness, funding, and location, this thesis can also provide several avenues of future research to corroborate, challenge, and contextualize its findings domestically,

internationally, and scholastically in the fields of military sociology and gender studies. Though the implications for future research and debate are manifold, they are not necessarily limited to those outlined in this thesis.

Given the complexity of military identities and organizations, as well as the demand for greater gender-nuance in their investigation, further comparative studies should be conducted regarding military transitions from several standpoints on the gender spectrum. For example, this study only interviewed women officers, but a more inclusive approach would include men, as well as trans and gender-nonconforming officers, to create a more holistic understanding of the FDF as a military organization. Additionally, this study put preference on commissioned officership as a signal for deeper military identities and as a method to narrow the field of participants, but this study could be adapted to evaluate the transitions of conscript soldiers and non-commissioned officers from the FDF. Given a larger sample size of respondents which would provide greater anonymity, these studies also carry the potential to analyze personal characteristics, such as rank, age, and service branch, in their effect on given narratives. Furthermore, as the national policies toward conscription and social benefits played a key role in structuring the narratives described in this study, research approaches should be considered from a diverse range of countries, rather than merely Finland. In this regard, Denmark offers a similar system for comparison (male national conscription with women volunteers) whereas Sweden and Norway illustrate a gender-neutral selective conscription approach, all within the same Nordic welfare state context. Internationally, Israel (gender-neutral, mandatory national conscription) and the United States (gender-neutral volunteer force) present starkly contrasting examples of military organizations. Any study could adapt the methodology and analysis of this thesis with relative ease to test its conclusions with regard to women military officers in a variety of military systems and socio-economic orientations and therefore delineate critical factors.

Methodologically, as the novelty of the CIT was both positively received in empowering respondents, yet also difficult to adapt analytically, these methods should be utilized with

caution and flexibility to future studies. Given that the CIT provides an abundance of data outside of the traditional event structure and that one of its primary utilities is in investigating unexplored phenomena, there is the possibility to incorporate the principles of Grounded Theory. However, with both of these suggestions, I want to emphasize the privilege that sociologists carry in collecting, analyzing, and generalizing across the stories and lives of study participants, often those who have been marginalized in various ways by institutions or society. Researcher ethics and the anonymity of respondents must be of primary concern.

Within military sociology, greater consideration is required to address the full complexity of servicemembers' experiences while still retaining the disciplinary imperative to generate conclusions relevant to military organizations as a whole. It is in the spirit of that effort, that this study hopes to encourage the intricacies and complexities of gender with regard to the armed forces, but a critical stance could be taken with regard to any personal identity assumed to be suppressed by the organization. Race and ethnicity, mother tongue, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation comprise a few suggestions which can be studied in a similar manner. Both the rising trend of immigration and multi-ethnic children point to an ever-evolving, diverse population, even in traditionally homogenous societies, like Finland. Military sociology, as a field, must continue to question the assumptions of its founders in order to adapt to increasingly globalized populations. One response is to continue to foster transdisciplinary work, particularly with researchers in critical studies. As social problems, such as gender inequality, are created and renewed by a multiplicity of influences, so must their analysis and conclusions be derived from a diversity of academic fields. Thus, it is with hopeful expectation that I anticipate a future where sociologists do better by those we study.

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## Appendix 1: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form in Research Interview  
Project: *Entry and Exit of Female Officers in the Finnish Defence Forces*  
Researcher: *Carolyn M. Kehn, University of Helsinki*

I agree to voluntarily participate in the research study conducted by Carolyn M. Kehn as a part of her master's thesis at the University of Helsinki in Finland. The purpose of this document is to stipulate the conditions of my participation:

1. I have been fully informed about the research aims of this study and my requirements as a participant. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and the researcher has satisfactorily answered them.
2. My choice to participate in this study is completely voluntary. There is no implicit or explicit reward or coercion to participate.
3. My participation involves sitting down for one interview with the researcher. The interview will last approximately 80 minutes and utilize both critical incident technique and timeline visualization. I will allow the researcher to take written notes and tape record the interview. I fully understand that if at any time if I do not want the interview taped, I am fully entitled to withdraw from the interview. By signing this form, I release all data created in the interview to the researcher. I permit the use of anonymized quotes in ensuing reports.
4. I have the right to refuse to answer questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I have the right to withdraw my participation.
5. I have been given explicit guarantees that the researcher will not identify me by name or title in any report using the data from these interviews and precautions will be taken to ensure confidentiality. Access to raw data will be limited to the researcher and password-protected. Additionally, all data is subject to the guidelines in the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (2016) as expressed in the Privacy Policy Notice for Scientific Research provided to me by the researcher.

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Participant Name

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Participant Signature

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Date

## **Appendix 2: Interview Questions and Instructions**

### Initial Questions [Family Life/Military Service]:

When did you first conscript?

How long did you serve in the military?

What was your specialty or designation?

Are you married or in a long-term partnership?

Did your spouse serve in the military, as well?

Do you have any children?

Did your family live where you were stationed for duty?

How old are you currently?

### Instructions to the Participant:

*In this interview we will examine the narrative of your military career and its different critical events or turning points. Please visualize your career, as a kind of line or map, in terms of how you see it holistically. This visualization will help us reflect on critical events that cannot be easily verbalized or that you may have forgotten. Specifically, in terms of your experience in the Finnish Defence Forces, these events should explain how you came to volunteer as a conscript, your decision to become an officer, and your choice to leave the military. These events can happen before you officially entered the military, even from childhood. They could also be events outside the military institution, such as personal life. Mark clearly the key events and turning points on the visualization and the year, if possible. We will go event by event and see what happened in each event and which other persons or groups have had some role in those events. You may choose where you would like to start.*

### Elaborative Questions (if needed):

-Tell me what happened in each event? *Tell me everything you remember related to this event.*

-Where did this happen? When did this happen?

- Why do you think this happened? What do you think are the reasons behind this?
- What do you think about this situation? How do you feel about it?
- What happened then? Did this have some effect on your personal development? If so, how?
- Were there some persons or groups who had a role in the event? Were there some persons or groups that had a significant reaction to the event? What kind of effect did they have?
- Do you feel that this turning point is unique to your experience? Or is it common to other women, or other military personnel?
- Do you feel like you have forgotten something or is there still anything you would like to add?
- Are there any questions that you would have wished to be asked about? If so, would you like to answer them?
- Is there something you would like to ask about this interview or the research project in general?