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Book Review: Managing Sex in the U.S. Military: Gender, Identity, and Behavior

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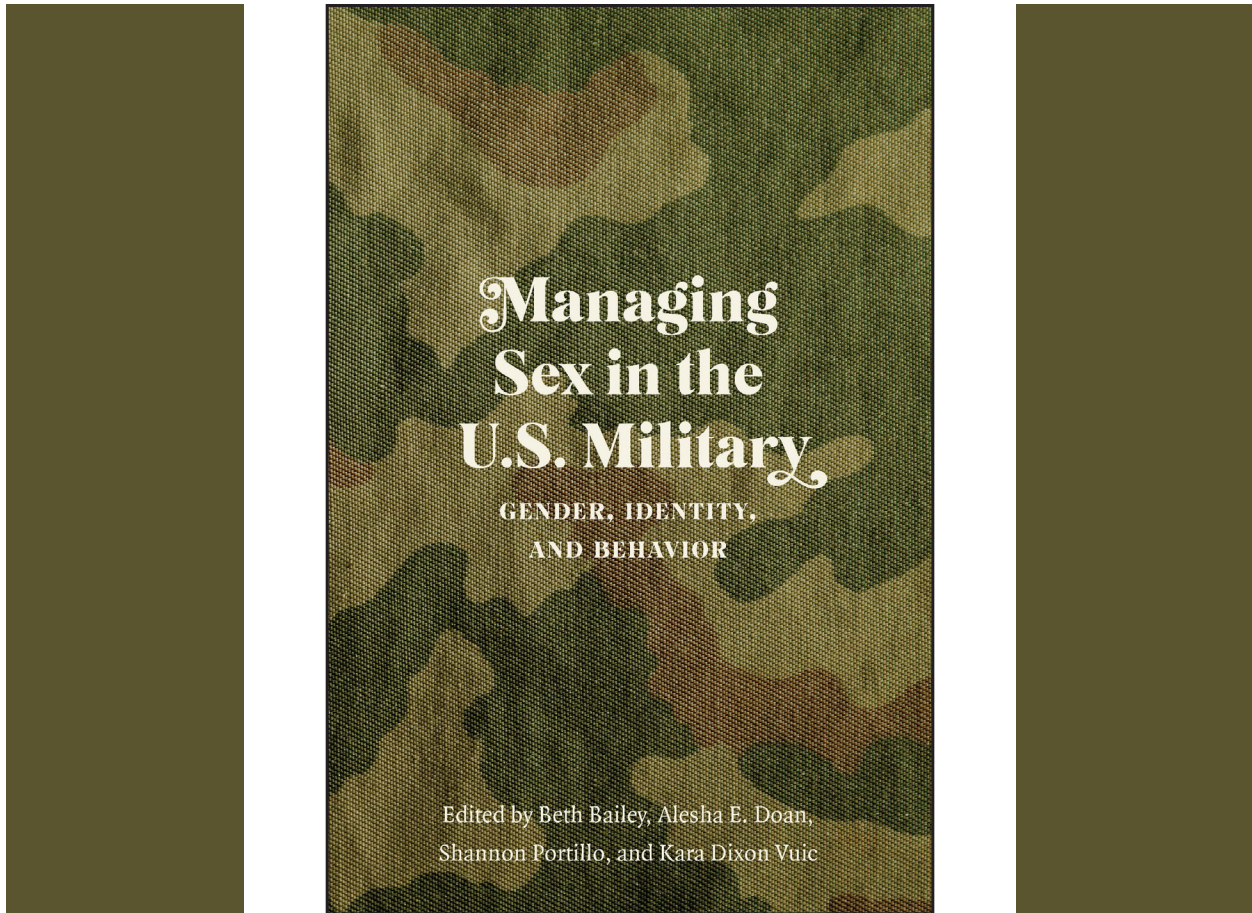
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Sex and gender are topics often approached with anxiety in the security sector, but they are imperative for understanding the sociocultural dynamics in a modern, multidimensional defense establishment. *Managing Sex in the U.S. Military* will be an important addition to the reading lists of those operating across the entire chain of command. Editors Beth Bailey, Alesha E. Doan, Shannon Portillo, and Kara Dixon Vuic have compiled scholarly, practical, and historical writings for anyone searching for greater insight into the complexities of gender issues with direct ties to defense systems. All the authors have utilized a deep research base to support their claims. Service examples are primarily aimed at the Army, but the Navy and Marine Corps also reside in many of the dialogues. Of note is the use

of historical timelines behind the changes relative to many key gender concerns facing the military in the twenty-first century. Intertwined within many of the essays is a running record of events gleaned from research about government policies from the eras of World War II, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and the War in Afghanistan.

The book presents 12 essays divided into five categories: “Behavior,” “Family and Reproduction,” “Orientation and Identity,” “Sexual Assault and Prevention,” and “Gender, Sexuality, and Combat.” Beginning with the theme of family, the authors demonstrate that conceptualizing the individual fighter as part of an extended familial network rather than as an organizational cog helped invigorate a new cultural mantra toward females. Examples from the 1960s through the 1990s

lend credibility to why a conversion occurred. Female personnel and pregnancy are given attention relative to career advancement, readiness, and cohesion.

An essay on twenty-first-century pronouns and the reduction of slurs for nonheterosexual males and females follows the conversation on pregnancy. A pronoun-era dialogue expresses the idea that the move toward a broader valuation and acceptance of diverse sexualities has occurred because these orientations have been metricized. A direct association can be made between sexuality and the negative costs associated with the loss of talented personnel.

Later in the volume, the authors focus on sexual harassment and assault. They address the 1991 Tailhook scandal as the pivotal moment for modifying upper-echelon viewpoints on the treatment of active-duty women, though they neglect to address the bullying of whistleblower Paula Coughlin and miss an opportunity to provide a stronger backstory to this era. The military continues to flounder in its ability to lessen the ostracization and stigmatization of those who come forward when they have suffered promotional, emotional, or bodily harm from superiors or peers. Of note in this content are references to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and policies from the Revolutionary War period and the Civil War era, which are rarely associated with twenty-first-century debates on assault.

The book includes other examinations of the sociocultural side of gender, identity, and behavior and how these arenas sit within the historical context of the armed services. The volume closes with some points regarding rhetorical exclusion

of women as combatants during the Iraq War. Women's authentic experiences in combat while serving as mechanics, supply clerks, and engineers and fighting alongside US Marines during some of the war's bloodiest counterinsurgency battles were erased. In the final chapter, "The Juice Ain't Worth the Squeeze," Doan and Portillo reveal the tendency among both sexes to stereotype women in combat, a tendency toward the binary that has not yet been overcome.

Conclusions are based upon a study among 27 focus groups and a nonrandom sample of 198 participants from five military installations. Within the volume, there are other conversations related to the themes of conjugality, abortion, combat exclusion, the draft, fatherhood, and prostitution, and there is magnanimous referencing of the history of the Women's Army Corps.

Managing Sex in the U.S. Military is one of the strongest overviews of prominent gender studies issues in print and would serve as a valuable addition to any policy, history, or current events program in professional military education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Because of the multiplicity of entries in the work, the book can be used in its entirety or on a case-by-case basis. Its value will not lessen over time due to the high-quality research backing the selected essays.

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Keywords: sex, gender, sexuality, Tailhook, US military history, Women's Army Corps

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