From: Anthropology and the *United States Military: Coming of Age in the Twenty-first Century*. Pamela R. Frese and Margaret C. Harrell, editors. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

CHAPTER 1

Peacekeepers and Politics: Experience and Political Representation Among U.S. Military Officers

Robert A. Rubinstein

Introduction

In May 2001 I received a call from a Marine Corps major that went something like this:

> Sir, we're interested in having a political anthropologist join us at a seminar later this month and you were recommended to us. The Marines have been involved in delivering humanitarian aid, and we've not done a very good job of it. But we know we're going to have to do it again. The situation we faced is that we bring humanitarian supplies to refugees. But the crowds are large and when the aid runs out they get unruly and turn on us. All we've been able to do in the past is use lethal force to protect ourselves. This meeting is to consider the cultural appropriateness of nonlethal weapons. It's no secret that we have been experimenting with directed energy and other nonlethal weapons. We know that using loud noises might disorient and knock people down. We're interested in knowing if using such a weapon in a Muslim crowd might cause problems—like if a man were to collapse on top of an unmarried women, would she then be ostracized? You know, things like that.

A couple of months later, I went to help train two Army units that were to be deployed in November as peacekeepers in Kosovo. This was the start of their preparations for that mission, and my colleague and I were working with the units on the negotiation skills they would need to call on as they carried out the myriad tasks to maintain order and civil society in their mission area. The hallways of the headquarters of the first unit with which we worked were festooned with memorabilia of various battles in which the unit had engaged and in which they had particularly distinguished themselves. The walls and display cases were filled with commendations, photographs, historical accounts—all testimony of effectiveness in war fighting.

Later that day, as we were conducting the "practical exercises" designed to give the members of the unit real problems to solve through negotiation, a young lieutenant said: "I'm not going to talk to this guy, I'll just tell him what to do. I've got all the weapons!"

In anthropology, the study of the people and institutions that form the "military-industrial complex" (or the defense community) has been regarded with suspicion. This distrust grew from many sources: In the 1960s anthropologists participated in counterinsurgency work in Southeast Asia, harming the people with whom they worked and the discipline itself. Development of weapons of mass destruction, the development of more effective ways for deploying these arms, and the well-documented ways in which militarism distorts societies all are contrary to anthropological commitments to advance the welfare of people, especially those with whom we work.

There is much anthropological literature critical of various aspects of the military-industrial complex (or the "security community," or the "military," or militarism). For the most part, this work focuses on the consequences of the acts of these people and institutions. In part because of our collective distrust of these institutions and people, little anthropological work engages them from the inside, as we would expect for any other domain of anthropological analysis.[1] Anthropology, for example, has no developed area like military sociology.

Encounters such as those I just described can serve to reinforce images of the defense community as hopelessly macho, obtuse, and one-dimensional in its responses to the world. This reinforces too the disciplinary bias against engaging in the study of these institutions. Yet in failing to treat the military and other components of the defense establishment as sites for serious ethnographic research, we fail ourselves. To members of defense communities, our critical commentaries often seem uninformed and unconnected to their reality; and thus the potential for anthropology to make a difference in that reality is diminished. It need not be that way, especially since serious

ethnographic work with these communities reveals them to be sites of considerable variation and cultural generativity.

The day following the "I've got all the weapons" comment, my colleagues and I worked with the second unit. Although its headquarters was close to the first unit's, no more than half a mile down the road, the attitudinal distance between the two units was immense. The memorabilia that filled its walls and display cases were also commendations, photographs, and historical accounts. The theme of this unit's display was sacrifice in peace support operations. They celebrated its service in support of peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, and elsewhere. To be sure, the unit had no dearth of distinction in war-fighting in its history. Rather, it selected to honor and display its achievements in humanitarian efforts.

Culture, including organizational culture, is carried in a group's symbols and behavioral models (Hofstede 1991:9). The different displays at these two army units suggest that there is a great deal more heterogeneity in the defense community than anthropologists ordinarily suppose. When I began studying peacekeeping nearly twenty years ago, I too supposed that I would find a single military culture, and I suspected that this would work against the ends of peacekeeping. As my work progressed, I learned that these initial suppositions were quite wrong. In the following two sections I discuss first some dimensions of variation among military officers engaged in peacekeeping. Then I discuss some of the challenges that face anthropologists who wish to work with defense communities.

Cultural Variation in Peacekeeping

Military officers participating in peace support operations represent a variety of cultural groups. Not only do national militaries vary, but even within the militaries of a single nation peacekeepers come from different organizational cultures. These cultural differences affect the mission in many areas. How the operation is conducted, what the chances are for its success, and how personnel understand and are changed by the experience are all in part cultural. To illustrate this, I present some observations from my peacekeeping research. I draw only on materials from U.S. military officers, though my ethnographic work includes other nationalities as well.[2]

Motivation for Peacekeeping

Military officers come to peacekeeping for a variety of reasons and with a variety of understandings of the nature and value of such missions. Some of the officers sought out service in the United Nations Truce Supervision

Organization (UNTSO) for reasons consistent with the srereotyped view of the military. They thought it would provide a way to experience combat, or quasi-combat, and to gauge the effect that this would have on them.

> I had two great desires. One was to . . . be shot at to see what my reaction to being shot at was. The second goal was to work with foreign officers.
>
> —U.S. Army major

> As a Marine, you tend to look at that kind of a quasi-combat assignment. So I applied for it a couple of times, because . . . I would much rather have an Overseas Unaccompanied Assignment that was exciting, different, something new.
>
> —U.S. Marine lieutenant colonel

Others, however, sought service in UNTSO for other reasons, such as political education, personal growth, and career management.

> I wanted to come and visit this part of the world. It's a Holy Land tour that was very extensive and also not very expensive for me. It was something I always wanted to do, it's a scriprural thing to me.
>
> —U.S. Air Force major

> Coming to the end of my tour at Fort Ord, it was time for me to be transferred. . . . I could not get a decent troop assignment again. So what I did was, a friend knew about this assignment and gave me the phone number about it and said: "You go to the Middle East for a year and than you go back to a troop post that you desire." So I called based on that. I wanted to go back to soldiers after this assignment.
>
> —U.S. Army major

> Yes, because we were already in Europe. There is a financial advantage for us, seven or eight hundred dollars a month, and the kids at university.
>
> —U.S. Air Force major

Just as officers came to UNTSO fot diverse reasons, some linked to "doing manly things in a manly way," others to the micro-politics of military careers, and others still for highly personal motives, so too do officers on peacekeeping missions assimilate their experiences to different cultural models.

Experience and Political Development

It is an anthropological commonplace to note that culture helps shape how we experience the world and that it is through culture that that experience is made meaningful. The directive aspects of culture are what frame our expectations (d'Andrade 1984), and it is to those frames that our experience gets assimilated (Schön and Rein 1994). What officers expect of their service in peace operations and how they understand their experiences on those operations reflect organizational cultural differences (Rubinstein 2003). The two officers quoted next understand their mission in radically different terms: One sees the mission as a political project, the other as military one.

> Peacekeeping or not, it is a military organization. That might be the key word I would use.
>
> —U.S. Army major

> It's true that you feel a little insecure without a rifle in your hands, but the problem with having a rifle in your hands is that you tend to want to use it, maybe a little more than you should. I look at our mission to be as it were maintaining an international presence.
>
> —U.S. Marine major

And consider the differences evident in what the following two U.S. Army majors say they learned during their time as peacekeepers.

> You know, the realities are different when you're on the ground. Something else I learned here that I suspected, but didn't really know until I got over here, was Americans cannot begin to understand the Islamic mind at all. And that's very difficult.
>
> I came here I was neutral on the Israelis. Originally, way back, I was very pro-Israeli. When I finally got over here I was neutral on the Israelis. . . . Then I became very anti-Israeli. I knew nothing really about the Arabs, so I feel I've become more pro-Arab, so yes, I've changed on the Israelis, I've matured on the Arabs.

Perhaps some of these differences among peacekeepers are accentuated by individual proclivities. Yet the literature suggests that different groups within the military have systematic differences in worldview that relate to organizational culture (Ben-Ari 1998; Katz 1990; Pulliam 1997; Rubinstein 2003; Simons 1997; Winslow 1997). Anthropologists ought to describe and account for these variations, as they provide the points of entry through which we can affect change within those communities.

Challenges to the Anthropological Studies of the Defense Community

Anthropologists who wish to study defense communities face a number of challenges. Some of these derive from the nature of the phenomena. Others are challenges that are self-imposed by the discipline. Here I note three such challenges: access, money, and ethics.

Methodological Challenge of Studying Diffuse Communities: Access

Access is typically the first challenge that anthropologists face. Members of defense communities are used to scholars bothering them with questions. Therefore, there is a role to which an anthropologist seeking to do research among them can be assimilated. The challenge for anthropologists is that most of the researchers with whom the defense communities have had contact with have worked in traditions—such as survey research or international affairs analyses—that involve brief contacts between the researcher and the officers. Some of these researchers come from the staffs of politicians and are viewed with suspicion, as they have produced politically motivated reports that are unremittingly critical of the military and give, in the view of some, unfair portraits of the military. To some degree, anthropologists working in this area need to educate the defense community about ethnography. Once they have done this, the literature on studying these kinds of communities uniformly reports that access to them is much easier than anthropologists tend to assume.

In addition, the defense community challenges traditional ethnographic methods. Often the community is diverse and dispersed. Sometimes the individuals who make up these communities are more transient than ethnographers are used to engaging. These facts require methods that adapt traditional techniques to meet these challenges (Gusterson 1997; Rubinstein 1998a).

Disciplinary Obstacles: Funding

The ability to gain research funding is always critical to the conduct of ethnographic research. The standard sources of support for anthropological work are in principle open to supporting such work yet in practice closed to such studies.

To explore the question of funding, I looked at all of the grants that had been given between 1995 and 2001 by the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support cultural and linguistic anthropological research. I wanted to see first what proportion of these grants had been given to support work

that looked at institutions of power in our own society—in Laura Nader's (1969) now classic term, projects that "studied up." More specifically, I wanted to know what proportion of these grants treated military or defense topics. The grants were reviewed by two raters who independently recorded their evaluation of each grant. Those about which there was disagreement were discussed, resulting in agreement on several grants. But because the numbers were so small, I report here as "studying up" or "military/defense" any grant for which at least one rater gave that score. If anything, this procedure will inflate the number of grants scored as "studying up" or "military/defense."[3]

In the seven years from 1995 through 2001, the National Science Foundation awarded just under $20 million to support cultural and linguistic anthropological research. This money was given to just over 400 research projects. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show that during this seven-year period, just 3.53 percent of grants were made for projects that study up, and these accounted for only $691,751 of the nearly $20 million worth of grants made during the period.

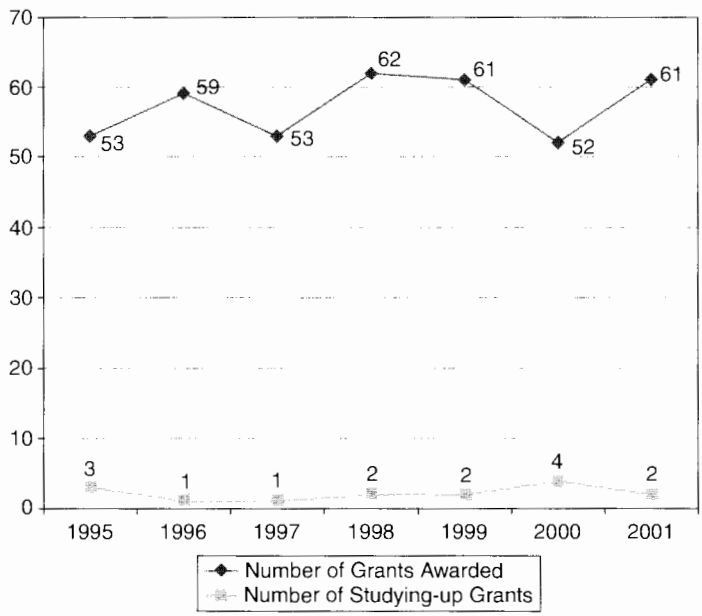


Figure 1.1 NSF Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology Awards, 1995–2001
Number of Grants Awarded: Studying-up versus Total Awards

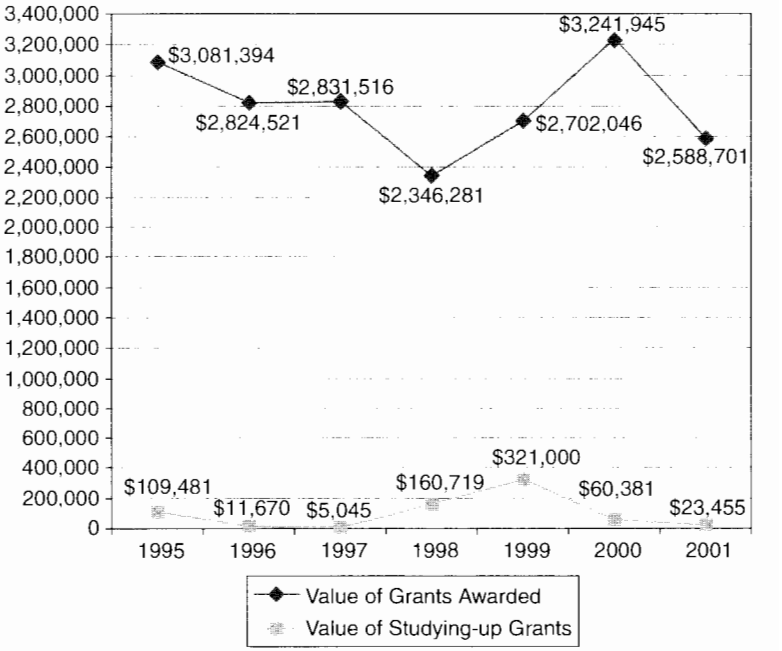


Figure 1.2 NSF Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology Awards, 1995–2001 Value of Grants Awarded: Studying-up Total Awards

The situation regarding support of anthropological research on topics relating to the military or defense is even starker. Figure 1.3 shows that between 1995 and 2001, only six grants were awarded to support research on military or defense topics.

These six grants received a total of $92,630, just one-half of 1 percent of all support given by the National Science Foundation for cultural and linguistic anthropological research during this seven-year period. Figure 1.4 displays the annual relationship of military/defense grants to all grants awarded.

Of course, the National Science Foundation is not the only source of funding for cultural and linguistic anthropological research. But there is little reason to suppose that the situation will be much different when other funders are considered.

During 1999 and 2000, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research awarded just over $2.5 million to support cultural and

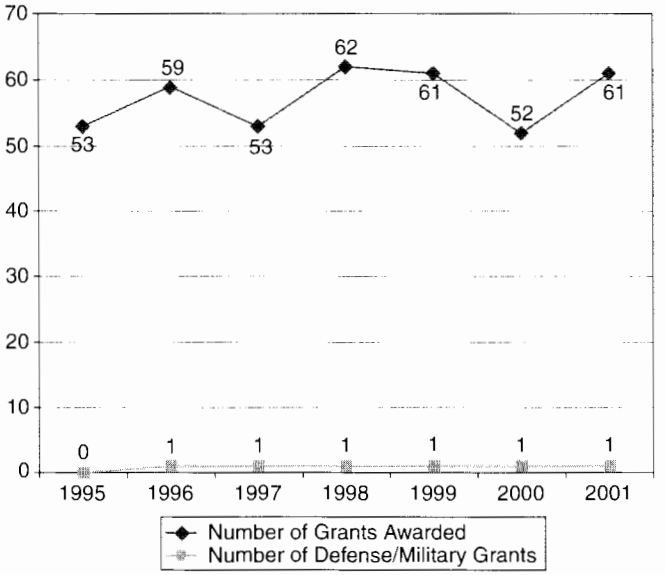


Figure 1.3 NSF Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology Awards, 1995–2001
Number of Grants Awarded: Military/Defense versus Total Awards

linguistic anthropological research. Of that sum, $32,075 was for projects relating to military and defense topics. As figure 1.5 shows, the number of grants relating to military or defense topics for these two years reptesents 1.25 percent of grants awarded.

What factors combine to create this picture are matters of speculation. In part, it seems to me that it is due to the enforcement of different standards for such work. For instance, since defense communities are powerful and regulated, researchers might be asked to demonstrate access in ways that go beyond that asked of scholars going into the field in a non-western country. Yet research permissions in the latter may in fact be more difficult to obtain than access to the defense community.

Ethics

Anthropologists who conduct ethnographic work within the defense community find themselves involved in the kinds of human exchanges that all anthropologists experience, whether their research takes them to a remote village or to the city. Such reciprocal exchanges must be managed so those social obligations are met while the integrity of the research and of the

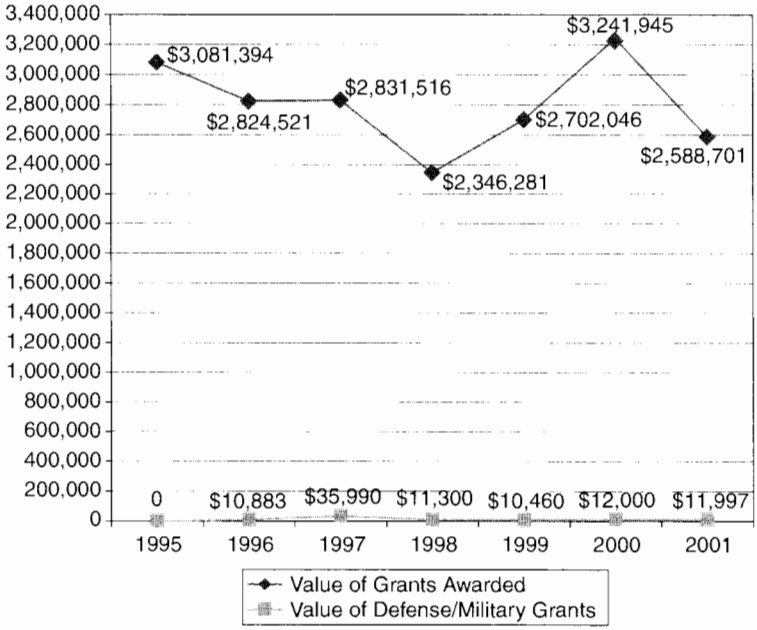


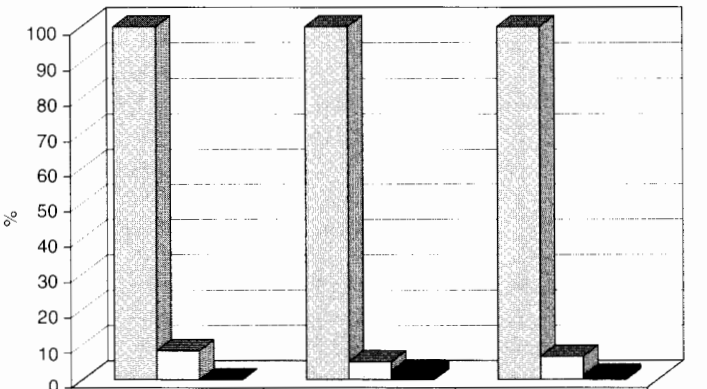
Figure 1.4 NSF Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology Awards, 1995–2001 Value of Grants Awarded: Military/Defense versus Total Awards

researcher are maintained. Because of the suspicion with which anthropologists view the defense community, researchers risk being stigmatized because of those exchanges.

Conclusion

Looking at the consequences of military and other defense community actions, anthropologists have correctly noted that, most frequently, they are detrimental to the communities with which we work. Arguably, one of the ways to effect a change in this circumstance is to change the way that the defense community does business. By identifying and understanding cultural variation within the defense community, anthropologists will find points of entry through which they can affect the actions and activities of defense communities.

Often the people we most need to affect with our work are members of communities that we stigmatize and avoid. The Central Intelligence Agency



	1999	2000	overall
Grants awarded	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Studying up	8.32%	5.14%	6.69%
Military/Defense	0.00%	2.46%	1.25%

Figure 1.5 Wenner-Gren Foundation Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology Awards, 1999–2000 Value of Grants Made for Studying-up and for the Study of Military/Defense Topics as Percent of Total Awards

(CIA) and the military are just two examples. While there are historic reasons for this attitude among anthropologists, the voices from these communities have privileged places in discussions of contemporary affairs. As anthropologists, we will need to find professionally and ethically responsible ways to interact with them if we wish to make a real and meaningful difference in public policy.

Notes

1. There are some notable exceptions to this including (Ben-Ari 1998; Brasset 1997 [1988]; Gusterson 1996; Katz 1990; Pulliam 1997 [1988]; Simons 1997).
2. Examples are drawn from my fieldwork (Rubinstein 1989, 1993, 1998a,b, 2003). The principal site for this work was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, but it includes other missions as well. My work focuses on military officers. This research was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the United States Institute of Peace, and the Ploughshares Fund. That support is gratefully acknowledged.

3. Examples of grants classified as studying-up and those classified as studying military or defense topics are:

Studying-Up

1995 Relational Business Contacts Between U.S. and Foreign Negotiators
1996 Ethnography of a Development Project
1997 Refugee Return-Resettlement and the Social Organization of Political Authority in Mozambique
1998 Worldview of Investment Banks
1998 Global Restructuring and Union Mobilization: An Analysis of Hotel Unionization in San Francisco, California
1999 Field Research on Violence and Healing: The International Construction of Knowledge about Treating Torture Survivors, Copenhagen and New York City
1999 The Reproduction of Knowledge for Regional Policies in the European Commission and Member-State Institutions, Italy, Spain, and Belgium
2000 Manufacturing Models for the Middle Class: Television and Influence in Indonesia
2001 Cultural Analysis of Risk Management in the Korean Venture Capital Industry
2001 Identity and Language in a Catalan Pediatric Unit
2001 Ethnographic Research on Market Culture and Global Free Trade Legislation in Dominica.

Military/Defense Grants

1997 Society and Military Practice in Sepik and Highland New Guinea
1998 Psychological Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Vietnam
1999 The Evolving Gender Roles of Military Spouses, Effects of a Changing Society
2000 Decolonization Activities on Guam at the Nexus of U.S. Colonialism and "Race"
2001 Ethnic Conflict in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa
2001 "The Nuclear Borderlands: The Legacy of the Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico."

References Cited

Ben-Ari, Eyal. 1998. *Mastering Soldiers: Conflict, Emotions, and the Enemy in an Israeli Military Unit*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Brasset, Donna. 1997 [1988]. "Values and the Exercise of Power: Military Elites." In *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict: Culture in International Security*. R. A. Rubinstein and M. L. Foster, eds. Pp. 81–90. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

d'Andrade, Roy G. 1984. "Cultural Meaning Systems." In *Culture Theory. Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Richard Shweder and Robert Levin, eds. Pp. 88–119. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gusterson, Hugh. 1996. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

——. 1997. "Studying Up Revisited." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 20:114–119.

Hofstede, Geert. 1991. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Katz, P. 1990. "Emotional Metaphors, Socialization and Roles of Drill Seargeants." *Ethos*, 18: 449–478.

Nader, Laura. 1969. "Up the Anthropologist—Petspectives Gained from Studying Up." In *Reinventing Anthropology*. D. Hymes, ed. Pp. 284–311. New York: Pantheon.

Pulliam, Linda. 1997 [1988]. "Achieving Social Competence in the Navy Community," In *The Social Dynamics of Peace and Conflict: Culture in International Security*. R. A. Rubinstein and M. L. Foster, eds. Pp. 91–106. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Rubinstein, R. A. 1989. "Culture, International Affairs and Peacekeeping: Confusing Process and Pattern." *Cultural Dynamics*, 2:41–61.

——. 1993. "Cultural Aspects of Peacekeeping: Notes on the Substance of Symbols." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 22:547–562.

——. 1998a. "Methodological Challenges in the Ethnographic Study of Multilateral Peacekeeping." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 21:138–149.

——. 1998b. "Peacekeeping Under Fire: Understanding the Social Construction of the Legitimacy of Multilateral Peacekeeping." *Human Peace*, 11:22–29.

——2003. "Cross-cultural Considerations in Complex Peacekeeping Operations." *Negotiation Journal*. 9 (1): 29–49.

Schön, Donald, and Martin Rein. 1994. *Frame Reflection. Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies*. New York: Basic Books.

Simons, Anna. 1997. *The Company They Keep. Life Inside the U. S. Army Special Forces*. New York: Free Press.

Winslow, Donna. 1997. *The Canadian Airborne Regiment in Somalia: A Socio-cultural Inquiry*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Government Publishing.