The Showtime special, *A Soldier’s Sweetheart*, is a film that addresses each of the varying points of view of Suzanne Fields, James Dubik and Lou Marano, in their short essays about women in combat. Suzanne Fields’ essay discusses the cultural consequences of women entering combat, stating that such action would result in a switch in gender roles. The film supports this statement through problems that arise between Fossy and Marianne when Marianne becomes intrigued with going on ambushes. James Dubik’s essay, on the other hand, points out that the reason we question a woman’s capability to enter combat is based on stereotypes, and that the characteristics that we tend to categorize as being “male” are, in actuality, “human.” The film supports this argument when the young, stereotypical “pretty girl-type” enters the jungle of Vietnam to kill, and finds that she enjoys the thrill of death. With a different perspective on this topic, Lou Marano argues that in both the best and worst of situations, an army consisting of women will always lose to an army of men, because women, as a whole, are physically weaker than men. The film argues against this by presenting multiple ways in
which a woman can be militarily useful without being physically strong. A strong mental state is argued to be necessary in order to be skilled in war.

*A Soldier’s Sweetheart* is a film that explores the idea of what might happen if a woman were to enter combat. In a small field hospital, one of the soldiers tells the story of a few marines that managed to import beautiful women in from Saigon. Fossy (one of the members of the hospital) takes this idea seriously and decides to have his longtime girlfriend, Marianne, flown over from the states. Marianne, upon arrival, appears to be like any eighteen year-old girl: young, innocent and full of hope. Throughout her days in Vietnam, she comes in contact with many new things, such as a lizard in her bunk, trip wires, wounded soldiers, and so on. Right off, Marianne is interested in learning about tools used in combat. She asks many questions about trip wires, and she’s a natural at shooting an M-16. Her first contact with seeing wounded soldiers is an emotional experience for her, but she is completely comfortable during her second contact. Gradually, Marianne becomes more involved with the reality of Vietnam. She begins wearing military clothing and eventually evolves to going on ambushes with the nearby green berets simply for the thrill of killing. Marianne transforms from a spirited teenage girl to a cold, isolated killing machine.
In part of her essay, *Most Oppose Women in Combat*, Suzanne Fields discusses her belief that allowing women to enter combat will cause men to become vulnerable. The film supports this belief by presenting a spirited young woman who, through her natural charm, wins the hearts of every man in the field hospital. Not only is she the only female, other than the Vietnamese women, that any of them have seen in a long time, but she is confident. When Marianne leaves the hospital to go exploring alone in the jungle, she makes every man worried that something bad has happened to her. When Marianne leaves the final time to permanently join the green berets, her absence leaves the hospital with a sense of death. In addition to the state of depression that Fossy enters, the rest of the men begin bickering and blaming one another for Marianne’s leaving. The loss of any soldier is grieved, but Marianne’s leaving seems to have a greater impact on the men because of the attachment they each have with her. Her spirit and her laughter has charmed each of the men in a different way, making them all emotionally vulnerable to her. To them, she seems to represent life and hope; something that male soldiers do not often represent in the eyes of others. Therefore, by leaving, they each feel a slight sensation of death.

Suzanne Fields’ essay also discusses the notion that women entering
What Training Can’t Do

combat will result in a switch in gender roles. The film supports this belief with Marianne’s going off on ambushes with the greenies. Upon Marianne’s return from her first ambush, Fossy feels threatened as a man. Fossy has been in Vietnam for an unstated period of time, yet he has never been involved in combat. All he knows of combat is the physical affects he has seen through working in the field hospital, and all of the men in the field hospital find themselves asking Marianne for details of the war. Fossy believes that, as the man, he should be the one fighting in a war, not his girlfriend. By Marianne going off with a group of “lean, mean, killing machines,” she makes Fossy feel awkward: he is losing is place as the “man” in the relationship. Fossy attempts to put Marianne back into her “place” as the feminine being she once was by proposing to her. Unfortunately for Fossy, the engagement cannot take away Marianne’s newfound enchantment with killing, and she leaves to be with the greenies permanently, leaving Fossy depressed and crying. Just as many girls do, Fossy spends many days waiting for Marianne to return, while Marianne, on the other hand, moves on with her life. Marianne’s intrigue with going on ambushes and killing is not “natural” in Fossy’s eyes, and he blames himself for her getting involved in warfare.

According to James Dubik’s essay, the reason that Fossy views Marianne’s
behavior as unnatural is because of gender role stereotypes. Dubik states that the characteristics that we primarily think of as “male” are actually “human.” The film supports Dubik’s viewpoint by presenting a teenage girl, with no violent background, who evolves to joining the green berets. Typically, people think of violence as a masculine characteristic, while women are thought to be more nurturing and gentle. Marianne, upon arriving in Vietnam, meets the basic stereotypes of a feminine young woman. As her days in Vietnam become more and more, Marianne is taught how to fire an M-16, and learns about the use of trip wires. Her interest in military warfare increases throughout the film and eventually leads to her joining the green berets. What is key to the film arguing this point is that Marianne is not persuaded, by any means, to get involved in the war. She was never, in the past, a female with more masculine characteristics, nor did she have any resentment to the Vietnamese. Nevertheless, Marianne finds that she takes pleasure in the art of war, and admits to Fossy, after her first ambush, that she has never been happier. Just as every person who becomes a green beret, Marianne came to Vietnam young and innocent, and discovers a different side to herself.

The film consistently supports Dubik’s essay through Rat in his constant talk of human nature. After Marianne’s first swimming experience in the river, in which she approaches a Vietnamese family on the banks of the river, Rat defends her against other men who call her stupid. He says that she came into Vietnam with the same “romantic bullshit” as everyone else; the only difference is that she’s a girl. Rat goes on to say that just like everyone else, she learned quickly. By saying this,
Rat is reminding the men, to whom he is talking, that Marianne is not behaving ignorantly because she is a female but because she just doesn’t know better yet. He is reminding them that they were once just as innocent and ignorant about the reality of Vietnam as Marianne, and just as they did, Marianne learned. In a conversation between himself and Fossy, Rat explains to Fossy that women are no different than men. He tells Fossy that he has “blinders on” when it comes to women about how gentle and peaceful they are. This conversation directly supports Dubik’s essay by stating that just because we tend to think of women as peaceful creatures, that does not mean that that’s what they necessarily are.

In his essay, Lou Marano argues that women are not militarily useful because they are physically weaker than men. The film argues against Marano’s essay by showing that mental strength is equally, if not more, important to fighting a war as physical strength. When Marianne goes exploring through the jungle, chasing a butterfly, she is not nervous, and she is completely aware of her surroundings. She manages to move at a fairly quick rate, but virtually soundless. Although she is looking around for the butterfly, she is still looking all around her, and is able to spot the trip wire along the ground. These details are very significant for the film to make its point. First of all, it is important that a soldier be
comfortable in their environment in order to concentrate on combat. Second, a good soldier needs to be very aware of their surroundings, not only to avoid traps such as trip wires, but also to notice movement by the enemy. Marianne has these skills, and because of them she is able to join the green berets, which is a group of highly skilled soldiers.

A second way in which the film argues against Marano’s essay also deals with the importance of the mental state of the person. At one point in the film, Rat tells Fossy about the reactions some people have at the sight of war. Many people go crazy, and have an emotional breakdown, sometimes without having killed anyone. If a person cannot emotionally stand the act of killing someone, or even the sight of someone being killed, they will not be able to kill in battle, and will, in turn, not be militarily useful on the battlefield. Though the film does not show us Marianne’s behavior during the ambushes, it does show us that when she returns from the first ambush she maintains her composure, and appears to be perfectly normal. She actually tells Fossy that she’s never felt happier. We also see Marianne’s comfort with the sight of death when she goes into a cave during her exploration, and sees the body of a Vietnamese soldier that had been killed. To this corpse, she doesn’t even shudder, but instead remains very calm. It doesn’t matter that Marianne is not physically strong, because she is mentally strong, giving her the ability to be a very skilled in the art of war.

Through the film’s exploration of what it would be like if a woman were to enter combat, many different points of view are addressed. A Soldier’s Sweetheart discusses the cultural consequences of women
entering into combat, in support of Suzanne Fields’ views. These consequences are not necessarily presented as being bad or good, but rather left up to interpretation by the viewer. The film also supports James Dubik’s essay by pointing out stereotypes that are often made about men and women. These stereotypes are outwardly acknowledged and disproved multiple times throughout the movie. The film shows its lack of support for Lou Marano’s views by presenting evidence that mental strength is extremely important in order to be a skilled soldier. Each of these varying viewpoints build up together to transform an innocent young woman into a person who finds happiness in killing others. She is a young woman who defies all stereotypes by joining the green berets out of curiosity, and discovering that she finds happiness in death.