

This study carried out two complementary research efforts to investigate the career progression of minority and women officers. First, we analyzed personnel data to measure retention and promotion by race/ethnicity and gender at each career stage, denoted by rank. By separating the years of service when retention decisions dominate from years when promotion selections are made, we uncovered differences that are hidden when the data are not structured in this way. Second, we sought out explanations for our quantitative findings and other information about career experiences by talking to officers in interviews and focus groups organized by minority and gender status.

The data analysis was carried out on seven cohorts between 1967 and 1991 and measured outcomes through promotion to O-6 (Colonel or Captain in the Navy). The analysis was structured to estimate differences between each minority/gender group and white males. There were no systematic differences in the patterns of minority and gender differences across services or cohorts. The interviews and focus groups involved midlevel officers chosen to represent all accession sources and occupations at one installation per service. We also interviewed officers who act as career managers to understand the policies and procedures by which assignments, command selections, and promotion boards are handled. Finally, we interviewed groups of senior officers who had recently served on O-5 and O-6 promotion boards to get insights on how the boards operate and what qualifications are considered to be most important.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our early data explorations showed career-progression patterns that differed by race/ethnicity *and* gender. Therefore, unlike other studies, we compared outcomes across four groups—white men, minority men, white women, and minority women—instead of two groups at a time—whites versus minorities or men versus women. For the most part, within the minority groups we focused on blacks; the populations of other minorities proved too small and too diverse to study in the same way. Where we could measure career outcomes for this group, they tended to fall between the career outcomes we measured for whites and blacks.

Overall, black male officers in the cohorts we studied were less likely than white males to be promoted and more likely to remain in service between promotions. There were few exceptions to this pattern in the nine career stages we evaluated. These differences offset one another, so overall about the same fraction of black and white male officers survived to career status at O-4. If, as suggested by most of the white officers we interviewed, blacks leave voluntarily for lucrative civilian jobs, we would have expected to see fewer blacks staying through retention periods. We did not see such a pattern of differences. Further, survey data indicate that similar fractions of black and white men expect to leave service to pursue civilian opportunities. Our data did not allow us to evaluate another explanation advanced by whites in our interviews and focus groups—that blacks enter service less well prepared. Other research suggests that blacks may be less well prepared, but this does not completely explain the gap between white and black promotion rates. However, in our interviews and focus groups, many white men did question the preparation of black officers, who in turn reported feeling a disproportionate need to prove themselves.

Our discussions with officers of both races point to the importance of social factors. Black men often reported that they did not have the peer and mentoring relationships that are important to success and in integrating socially. They also felt they were less likely to get plum assignments. The net result appears to be that black men felt that they have a harder time building competitive performance records to be considered by promotion boards. However, nearly all black male

and black and white female officers believed that, given the materials available for their consideration, the promotion boards are fair.

White female officers were promoted at almost the same rate as their white male peers, but they were more likely to leave voluntarily between promotion periods. Our discussions with officers suggested that there are several reasons why women have left. First, past policies have kept women out of those combat-related occupations and assignments that are thought to lead to high rank. These policies were significantly changed while our research was under way, but the changes had yet to be widely felt. In addition, both men and women disagreed about the ultimate role for women, in particular whether they should serve in ground-combat units. Many women also reported they had experienced some level of sexual or nonsexual harassment and had been tested in ways that men weren't. In sum, many of the midcareer women with whom we talked were frustrated by the lack of clear roles and career paths, the differential treatment they received, and the difficulty in combining career and family. Like women in other demanding careers, some were opting out.

Black female officers were the least likely to be promoted at all stages. They were more likely than black men, but less likely than white women, to leave voluntarily in the years before they are considered for promotion to O-4. Almost the same fraction of black women and white women in a cohort attained the rank of O-4. However, like black men, black women were far more likely to leave at promotion stages than at retention stages. In our discussions with black women, they described themselves as doubly disadvantaged in the same ways as black men *and* white women.

Both white and black women with families found it hard to arrange day care and felt that their jobs interfered unnecessarily with family at times. Similarly, men also reported conflicts between career and family, but our discussions and DoD survey data indicate that these conflicts are more severe for women.

Other minority officers could be assessed only in the earlier career stages and through analysis of their promotion records but not through discussions in focus groups and interviews. Overall, their retention and promotion patterns resembled those of their African American counterparts.

What do these results indicate about the reasons for the “racial gap” and “gender gap” between junior and senior officers shown in the introduction to this report? The finding that about the same number of black and white men reached O-4 implies that racial diversity in the career years has been determined by the racial diversity in the entering cohort and that the current “racial gap” between junior and senior officers largely reflects the increase in black accessions over time. A closer look reveals persistent racial differences (for women as well as men) in promotion. These differences, which are offset by higher voluntary retention between promotions, need to be better understood. In contrast, some of the “gender gap” between junior and senior ranks is a result of retention differences between women and men, not just changes in the gender mix at accession.

In general, minority and female officers described themselves as facing some unique difficulties in building the competitive records of performance needed for promotion, especially to higher ranks. These difficulties result from differences in individual characteristics, social integration, and career-management policies. However, the specific problems minorities and women described to us differed in some respects. Academic preparation, social integration, mentoring, and assignments were seen as problematic for blacks. Family issues, changing roles, social integration, mentoring, harassment, and assignments were mentioned for women. All of these were mentioned for black women.

OFFICERS’ SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

Few of the problems officers described can be easily remedied, and many of them are echoed in the literature on minorities and women in the civilian workplace. Understanding this, the minority and female officers we talked to believed that they would fare no better, and might well be worse off, in a civilian job. Nevertheless, when asked, they did suggest some broad changes that they thought might improve opportunities for minority and female officers in the future. The most common suggestions were:

- Recruit more women and minorities into the officer corps and into underrepresented occupations. The minority and female officers we talked to typically mentioned this first when asked for

suggestions. These officers believed that many of the obstacles they have faced resulted from their standing out in units predominantly staffed with white males. Making the officer corps more diverse is an obvious fix. However, the officers had few suggestions for how to attract more minorities and women. Black officers thought that it would be necessary to reach back into high schools and neighborhood groups to increase the number of black officers.

- Better inform all officers about career-management policies, especially those dealing with race and gender. Very few of the officers in our discussions said that they knew what the policies regarding minorities and women actually were, or how promotion boards work. We found these accurately described in the materials about careers that are now provided to officers, but active outreach may be needed to dispel the myths we encountered about affirmative action policies.¹
- Avoid atypical assignment policies wherever possible. Fitting in all the assignments and education necessary for advancement is difficult, and other assignments make this even more difficult. Disproportionately assigning minorities and women to jobs, such as recruiting or equal opportunity, where diversity is highly valued also removes them from operational units where they can mentor younger officers. To conserve active-duty manpower, the Army is evaluating the use of reserve and retired personnel as ROTC instructors; this would eliminate at least one of the non-occupational demands for minority and female officers.
- Ensure that the criteria for assigning individuals to occupations and assignments are appropriate and applied equally to all officers.

Some of the suggestions focused on women's issues:

- Reevaluate the content and frequency of harassment training. The women we interviewed felt that current training programs were counterproductive because they led their male coworkers

¹A recent article in *Army Times* (Tice, 1997) provides the kind of information needed.

to distance themselves and generally created an uncomfortable working environment for women.

- Develop more effective mechanisms for handling harassment complaints within the chain of command. Very few women are prepared to file formal complaints, for fear of damaging their own or the offender's career. There is a strong preference for working within the chain of command. Suggestions included assigning responsibility for harassment and other complaints within the command and holding commanders responsible for the working environment for minorities and women.
- Encourage practices that better accommodate families. Suggestions included expanding day care hours (as some commercial firms do) and avoiding clearly unnecessary off-hours duties. Although women most often focused on this issue, men also would welcome these changes. Those who suggested changes in time demands were emphatic that they didn't expect or want changes that would interfere with their unit's performance and readiness.
- Settle the role for women in the military. The women we interviewed expressed different views about what the role should be, but they all wanted their role to be settled and accepted.

An evaluation of these suggestions was beyond the scope of this study. We note that, with regard to increasing the numbers of minorities and women, it may also be possible to expand the enlisted commissioning programs in the future. The services are looking for ways to recruit an increasing number of young people with some college education and to provide enlisted personnel with the opportunity to pursue their education in service (Asch and Kilburn, 1999). If successful, these programs would increase the pool of individuals eligible for the commissioning programs.

All of the services have put considerable information about officer career-management policies and practices on the Internet, which most officers have ready access to even if deployed. However, this information still needs to be brought to young officers' attention. One method that appears to have been successful has senior officers who have served on promotion boards brief their commands on the process.

Many of the other suggestions relate to actions taken at the local level or to circumstances that vary across units. For example, with the pace of activity increasing in recent years (Hosek and Totten, 1998), family issues are of increasing concern. However, the impact on families of personnel working long hours at home is different from the impact on families of personnel who face a long deployment. There are programs to lessen these impacts, but to be effective they must be tailored to the needs of the personnel at each location. Similarly, policies for dealing with harassment are only as good as their implementation within the chain of command, where officers thought these problems should be dealt with. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the services can play a valuable role by setting clear objectives for local commanders and periodically monitoring the extent to which these objectives are being met.