In Chapter Three, we documented that women are more likely to leave during retention periods, where separation decisions are most likely to be voluntary. This result is supported by survey data showing that junior women are less likely to anticipate a full 20-year career (Figure 10). In this chapter we present the common perceptions offered by officers as to why career progression differs for women and men. We draw here on the same focus groups and one-on-one interviews with officers described in Chapter Four to explore why such gender differences exist.

Unless otherwise stated, the issues discussed in this chapter apply equally to both black women and white women. As we noted in the last chapter, black women did not raise any issues in our discussion that were also not discussed by either black men or white women. Similarly, unless otherwise stated, those perceptions we represent as “male” are held by both black and white men, and those perceptions represented as “female” are held by both black and white women. Our conversations with black men focused primarily on racial issues; as a consequence, some gender issues were discussed with white men but not black men. Where we had little basis to assert that black men concurred or disagreed with comments by white men, we have attributed the perspective only to white men. Therefore, care must be taken not to assume that black men disagreed with perspectives attributed to white men.

Perceptions represent how members of each group interpret their experiences in the career-management system; they are important...
and telling in and of themselves. As we will discuss, men and women often offer distinct and contradictory explanations for group differences in career progress. Yet as we cautioned in the prior chapter, an individual’s perception of an interaction can be inaccurate if he or she misjudges the motives or assumptions of others. Thus, its meaning needs to be evaluated against broader information about group differences in career experiences. After we present the common explanations offered by each group, we also discuss other evidence from our research and the research of others that supports or refutes these perceptions.

WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE TO LEAVE?

Most officers, men and women, recognized that the services have room for improvement in dealing with gender issues. Most men in our discussions readily expected the career progress of women to be more limited than that of men. While an end goal of equality of opportunity and treatment was taken as a given in the context of race and ethnicity, in our discussions with midcareer officers, there was no consensus on appropriate military roles for women. Not only did men and women disagree on this issue, there was also a diversity of opinion within gender groups about the appropriate military role for women.

Male officers in our discussions offered various reasons why they expected differences in the career development of men and women. They mentioned three primary reasons:

- Women are inherently less capable, physically and mentally, to perform a military job and lead troops.
- Past and ongoing prohibitions on assigning women to combat occupations have kept them out of occupations with the greatest career opportunities.
- The fear among male superiors of finding themselves in a position from which they could not refute an unwarranted charge of sexual harassment interferes with important interactions between male superior officers and their female subordinates.

The first assertion follows the same general theme expressed by whites about minorities and the racial differences in career progres-
sion: women do not have the necessary skills and abilities to make senior ranks. The last assertion, that fear of being charged with sexual harassment interferes with important interactions between men and women, was unique in that a broad group of officers admitted to treating the members of another group differently.

Additionally, as in the discussions regarding racial bias in the career-management system, some white men went a step further and expressed the belief that women are advantaged by the career-management system. Similar to those who perceive an advantage for minorities in the career-management system, officers offered the promotion goals of board precepts and other personnel policies that explicitly treat women differently as proof of this advantage. We address this issue of bias in favor of women near the end of this chapter, but we first wish to fully explore the issues related to bias against women.

Like male officers, women by and large agreed with the premise that performance is the major determinant of an officer’s success; yet they also believed that factors other than one’s skills and abilities influence an officer’s performance. Similar to blacks, women perceived that their opportunities to perform and the recognition they receive are diminished by expectations that they are less capable, have difficulties forming peer and mentor relationships, and receive fewer career-enhancing assignments. Women also expressed several additional reasons for difficulties in their career development:

- Sexual harassment creates an uncomfortable working environment for women who are harassed.
- Male officers’ fears of being charged with sexual harassment have placed a pall on the interactions between men and women.
- The demands of assignments often come into conflict with family responsibilities, sometimes unnecessarily.
- There continues to be no clear consensus among military personnel on the appropriate role for women in the military.

Given the difficulties that women felt they regularly faced and given their sense of a lack of clear roles for women in the institution, a disproportionate number of women officers may be concluding that it is not worthwhile to continue to invest in a military career.
Thus, our separate discussions with men and women raised a common set of issues to explain differences in career experiences: inherent skills and abilities, assignment patterns and available career paths, sexual harassment and social integration, and competing opportunities and obligations. While this set of issues resembles those raised to explain racial differences, the nature of how each issue plays out is sometimes quite different.

INHERENT SKILLS AND ABILITIES

There are a wide variety of occupations and duties in the military. Many are no different from civilian jobs, and some are similar to occupations traditionally dominated by women. However, combat and combat-related occupations and duties traditionally have been viewed as a male domain, with women restricted from serving in all such occupations or duties until quite recently. One assumption made by many men and some women is that women do not have the physical or emotional character to handle the stresses of combat. One male officer offered a particularly colorful observation:

Anyone can do a staff job if you keep your sanity long enough. There’s little difference in men and women on these jobs. Combat jobs are different. I know of a woman who got her fingernail caught in an M16 rifle and threw the gun down and swore about breaking a nail. Men wouldn’t do that . . . . When it came time for low crawls, there was a reticence among the women to do that.

Most men in our discussions readily offered and accepted the contention that women have weaker physical capabilities, so discussions quickly moved toward other aspects such as leadership capabilities. Leadership is considered a particularly important skill for an officer. Men and women told us that the military has tended to favor a physical, aggressive leadership style. “Leadership is equated with aggressive. Supervisors tend to like aggressive leadership styles,” observed a male officer. Some men acknowledged that they find it hard to view women as strong leaders because of the inherent difficulty they believe women have projecting this leadership style.1 One male

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1In civilian settings, where physical capabilities are less of an issue, studies have demonstrated that women are generally less likely to be viewed as capable managers.
board member noted, “There are women that have believability, credibility, and are feminine, but can she really go ahead and be a leader? Will she really be accepted into all levels?” Another commented:

We tend to use ourselves as a yardstick by which we measure others. Women have different leadership styles. . . . There are so many men in leadership, so we tend to favor male styles. We have no preparation for doing anything different, because we don’t have that many females as colleagues or as superiors.

Most women recognized that men view them as inherently less capable. Asked if her gender mattered in how she was treated, one woman responded:

It matters—yes! Gender—very much so, and no doubt I’m not respected as much as males—I’m not a warrior—that stinks. Stereotypes are still in place—subtle but still there. I don’t like that very much. You still have to prove yourself—this summarizes the whole gender problem.

The sense that “you have to prove yourself” was often expressed in our discussions. One woman commented, “For a guy, it is assumed you will be a success until it is proven otherwise, but for a woman, it is assumed that you will be a failure until proven otherwise.” Another commented, “A boss who is not familiar with working with women will always test [a new female subordinate].”

The women in the focus groups agreed that questions of women’s qualifications often surrounded their physical skills and capabilities. In some units, members perform physical training (PT) exercises together at some point in the day. Several women perceived that their superior officers used this as an opportunity to explicitly test their physical capabilities, a test they asserted is generally not given to new male subordinates.2 One woman relayed the following experience:

or leaders (Martin et al., 1983; Schein, 1978; Steckler and Rosenthal, 1985). As for minorities, women find it more difficult to establish their ability (Biernat and Kobrynowicz, 1997).

2None of the men we talked with suggested that they had been tested in this manner.
I showed up for PT the first morning with a terrible head cold. I was
dying out there, but the last thing I would do is admit it. I held on.
There were men falling out behind me, but I was still there. Finally,
some of the guys said to the commander, “Why are we running so
far? We never go this far.” Everyone else shut them up. They didn’t
want me to know they had raised the standard to see if they could
eliminate me.

After relaying a similar story, another woman commented: “My
credibility was judged on that first day based on my physical
prowess, not my intelligence, which is what I really needed to do that
job.”

The women who related such experiences were clearly bothered that
they had been subjected to a test that others had not. “I’ll achieve
any standard that is set . . . but don’t evaluate me on a standard that
isn’t there,” one said. Yet many of these women found that after suc-
cessfully passing the test, they were then treated quite well by their
commanding officer. Another woman who successfully passed such
a test found that “after that, I could do no wrong in that . . . brigade.”

Personal experiences of such explicit tests were offered by a relatively
small number of women. All were officers in either the Army or the
Marine Corps. However, most women, regardless of service, ex-
pressed that at some time they had found it necessary to “educate”
new coworkers, subordinates, or commanders that working with
women need not be any different than working with men. One
woman reported the following experience:

One guy told me he has no use for women. But after we went
through CAS3 together, he came up to me and said, “You taught
me that women do have a role in the Army.” Men need to work with
women in order to be able to judge them and accept them.

Many of the men we interviewed have had female peers or subordi-
nates, but it should be noted that few had ever served under a female
commanding officer. Those who had served under a woman gener-

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3Combined Arms and Service Staff School.
ally spoke well of their experience, but many male officers seemed to prefer to have a male superior.4

For this study we had no means for evaluating actual differences in the skills and abilities of women, yet other research contains little evidence for the contention that women are rated as less capable. Mehay (1995) has found that Navy women officers have been more likely than men to receive recommendations for early promotion on their fitness report (FITREPs). Cymrot and Lawler (1990) have found that women are more likely than their male peers on similar types of ships to attain the Navy’s Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) qualification.5 Augmentation and promotion board outcomes also provide little support for the argument that women officers are less qualified. Our quantitative analysis of women officers in all four services found that women did not have lower chances than men of being promoted, controlling for race. Studies of officer promotion in the Navy and Marine Corps (North et al., 1995, and Mehay, 1995) have found that women were promoted at higher rates than were men.

Finally, one study of Marine women officers contradicts the perception that women are evaluated as less capable leaders. North et al. (1995) have examined the relationship between augmentation, promotion and voluntary separation, and the three skill rankings (leadership, academic, and military) received by officer candidates during TBS between 1985 and 1987. Of the three skill rankings, leadership has the strongest positive relationship with augmentation and promotion chances, and the strongest negative relationship to voluntary separations. Women had nearly equivalent leadership skill rankings as did their male peers. However, women did score slightly lower on academic skill rankings and meaningfully lower on military skill rankings.

The preference for a male superior has been found in some settings among both male and female civilian employees as well (Hansen, 1974; Haccoun et al., 1978; Kanter et al., 1977), yet is absent in others (Rosen and Jerdee, 1973; Bartol, 1975). In a study of semiskilled workers, Trempe et al. (1985) find that the preference for a male supervisor derives primarily from a perception that the supervisor’s gender is seen as a proxy for upward organizational influence.

Until recently, women have only been able to serve as SWO-qualified officers in the combat logistics force (CLF) or on ships other than aircraft carriers, cruisers, or destroyers. Of the women pursuing SWO qualification, 98 percent were serving on one of these other types of ships and 2 percent were in the CLF.
ASSIGNMENT PATTERNS AND AVAILABLE CAREER PATHS

Chapter Two summarized the recent changes in the occupational and assignment restrictions for women. These changes were in an early stage of implementation when we held the focus groups and discussions for this project. However, the attitudes of participants in this study toward combat roles for women are consistent with the attitudes of participants in a recent study of units and occupations that were opened to women by recent policy changes (Harrell and Miller, 1997).

Shifts in societal attitudes have certainly been among the drivers of the recent opening of most occupations and duties previously closed to women; our discussions revealed a lack of consensus for allowing women to serve in combat roles. Most men we talked to still believed that combat remains an inappropriate role for women. These discussions did not distinguish between ground combat and other forms of combat, as current policy does. Participants in our discussions justified the restrictions of women from certain occupations and assignments with a concern over women's abilities and a lack of "social legitimacy" for the role of women in combat. Male officers in our discussions generally found it difficult to distinguish between these two issues. One male officer simply stated, "Women can't and shouldn't serve in combat positions." Another commented, "There is no one in combat arms who really thinks women should be in that MOS [Military Occupational Specialty]. Women can never overcome the stigma of being lesser [officers] because the organization endorses that."

The justifications expressed for restrictions regarding ground combat were not solely based on societal attitudes or the capabilities of women, but also on the effect of women on the men in a combat unit. One male commented, "Unit bonding may be disrupted because some people want to date [women]. I've seen some pretty immature jealousies arise in these situations. It interferes with the combat environment." A female officer offered the experience that during a "meeting of our leadership group . . . one guy came out and said that women degrade the war-fighting spirit."

Some men and most women expressed a belief that women who meet uniform performance standards should be free to pursue any
military occupational specialty or duty assignment that they wish. One officer stated:

I don’t personally care if women are in combat arms, as long as they meet the same standards as men. I expect women to be in combat arms in the future. If the women cannot meet the same physical standards, it will ruin their reputation. A woman cannot fall out on a really hard hike or the respect of their fellow officers and those under their command will collapse. This is true for all officers, not just those in combat arms.

Women also wanted to ensure that the physical standards set for a particular job be truly in line with the demands of that job. Currently, the services can assign men to combat occupations, regardless of their preferences, according to the services’ needs. Women, however, are not assigned to combat occupations against their wishes. Some of the women but few of the men we interviewed felt that both sexes should be treated equally for combat assignments, conditional on service members meeting a uniform physical standard.

The opinions expressed in our interviews are generally consistent with the findings of Harrell and Miller (1997). In their survey, 63 percent of the male officers were satisfied with the present regulations restricting women from ground combat, 14 percent felt that women should be able to volunteer for the restricted occupations and unit assignments, and 22 percent felt that women and men should be treated the same. Among women officers in the survey, 41 percent felt that women should be treated the same as men and another 41 percent felt that women should be able to volunteer for ground combat.

Many officers saw the past and remaining restrictions on combat-related assignments as a significant limiting factor for a woman’s military career. “If you don’t put fire and iron on a target, you’re a

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6Women are currently permitted in most non-ground combat-related occupations.

7GAO (1998) points out that different standards are allowed for general fitness, but not allowed by law for job qualification. The report further concludes that general fitness standards are not scientifically based. Thus, perceptions about the relative difficulty of the male and female standards cannot be evaluated.
second-class officer (or lower),” explained one officer. Another explained that “as they rise higher in the organization, women don’t command the same confidence that they can lead at the highest ranks as men, because they don’t come from the combat arms branch.” Regardless of occupational specialty, some women offered a broader concern that restrictions on their assignments have reinforced a view that women are not the equals of men as military officers. One senior woman officer commented:

There is a climate created when you say you cannot do something because of your gender. By your description you are not up for those things. In my heart of hearts I do not think women should be in the infantry. But I would never say that publicly, because I remember how discouraging that is.

Most men and women we interviewed saw the restrictions on women from holding certain occupations and assignments within occupations as an important factor inhibiting the potential advancement of women. Successful command experience was considered important for advancement to senior ranks. Most officers expected that individuals in noncombat occupations, regardless of gender, have more restricted opportunities to advance beyond O-4 because of the limited command opportunities in the support occupations. Thus, both male and female officers believed that one reason women are less likely to stay is the perception of more limited opportunities in noncombat occupations.

The women we interviewed initiated their careers when many more military occupations and assignments were closed to women. This has made it difficult for women in some occupations, particularly those related to combat, to plan appropriate career moves, as they sometimes found that the logical next career move was not open to them. As one woman commented, “You just aren’t sure of the progression track now.” Another offered, “There is no real defined career path for me—so it’s like looking at a list of 80 or so people in my field and saying ‘What can I shoot for next?’” This has also made it difficult for the commanders of some women to offer appropriate career advice.

Many women officers cited shifts in the implementation of policy in questioning the long-term opportunities for fully advancing their
careers. One woman officer perceived changing practices regarding women in artillery positions:

> It seemed for a while there that one year women were in, then they weren’t the next year, then they were in the year later. It constantly flip-flopped. So women were in a position there of saying, “Now I have a career, now I don’t have a career.” A lot of them were forced out by all of this back and forth. They got out because they knew they would hit a ceiling based on the fact that they hadn’t consistently had the opportunity to perform within the branch and because of all of the uncertainty regarding their status within the branch.

Many women officers questioned whether their service is committed to providing them with full career opportunities and cited this as a reason to separate for alternative opportunities.

Little data are available for testing the perception that differences in promotion and retention between men and women are related to occupation, assignment practices, or selection for professional military education (GAO, 1998). As we reported in Chapter Three, the concentration of women in noncombat occupations explains only a small amount of the greater chances of separation that women experience. Thus, our analyses indicates that the concentration of women in support occupations does not offer a compelling explanation for the scarcity of women in the senior ranks.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Our discussions regarding the social integration and acceptance of women generally centered on the issues of harassment and the current environment deriving from the services’ efforts to address harassment. Women reported that sexual harassment occurs and is often difficult to confront or report. The experiences and perceptions regarding sexual harassment raised by women in our conversations are broadly consistent with the findings of several other studies and surveys of military women.8 By and large, men dismissed the reported relative frequency of harassment incidents. Many men in

8In particular, see GAO (1996), Harrell and Miller (1997), and Bastian et al. (1996).
our conversations felt that incidents are often attributable to misunderstandings. Some men saw women as being too quick to ascribe the cause for any confrontation to gender discrimination or harassment.9

An important dimension of the problem that has often been overlooked in other studies is the effect that the current environment has on relationships beyond those immediately involved in harassment situations. Many men believe that the institution has become over-reactive to accusations of harassment. As a result, these men try to avoid situations where their intentions or motivations might be misinterpreted. The women in our conversations were quite cognizant that some men hold this belief. Most women and men were concerned about the cost of this behavior to women peers and subordinates. This behavior is certain to inhibit women officers’ ability to draw support and assistance from peer and mentor relationships. Worse, it may close off key career-enhancing assignments for women when such an assignment would require a close working relationship with a male officer.

Harassment10

We did not include specific questions about sexual harassment in our interview protocols. Instead, we allowed participants to raise the issue as they deemed appropriate in the context of our broader discussion of problems related to career progression.11

Women raised the issue of sexual harassment in every focus group we conducted. Many women reported that they had been harassed at some point in their career and that they believe harassment con-
tinues to occur with some frequency. The situations related to us included efforts to undermine or sabotage a woman’s work, demeaning or inappropriate comments, inappropriate and persistent unwanted sexual advances, and physical sexual attacks by another service member.  

Most of the harassment situations discussed occurred at an earlier time in the officer’s career, yet some were more recent. In and of itself, this should not be taken as a sign that the frequency of harassment has declined; junior officers may simply be more likely to be victims of harassment. The 1995 Department of Defense Sexual Harassment Survey has documented a substantial decline in the proportion of women who report having been harassed in the past year (Bastian et al., 1996). However, despite the decline, more than half of female service members continue to report having been subjected to unwanted sexual attention in the past year.

In our focus groups, women reported that their options for recourse are seen as fraught with dangers to their own careers. In general, they felt that officers are supposed to be able to take care of problems on their own. Women who complain to their commanders are seen as risking being viewed as weak. Said one woman:

> When the [offender] is of the same rank, you want to deal with them on your own. If you go to your chain of command, they say it is because you are a woman, you can’t hold your own and you need to run and cry to someone.

This woman pointed to a second danger in complaining about harassment: being seen as betraying your peers, undermining the cohesion of your unit, or being viewed as having an independent agenda. One woman commented:

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12 See Miller (1997) for an important discussion on the distinction between sexual and gender harassment.

13 Bastian et al. (1996) have reported that junior enlisted women are more likely than senior enlisted women to be subjected to a harassment incident. Their results for officers are not broken out by junior and senior status. Yet it is reasonable to assume that a similar relationship might hold for officers.
Sometimes people, in this case women, feel like they are holding a “This is offensive to me” card and abuse it because it gives them more power.

Another woman commented:

I chose to let things go because I thought I would suffer more than he would. . . . They would mark me down on loyalty, [that’s] the “velvet hammer.”

The danger of being seen as betraying one’s unit or having an independent agenda is thought to be particularly high if a woman submits a formal complaint that might lead to an outside investigation. One woman concluded that “even now [efforts to deal with] sexual harassment are a joke, because I have seen people’s careers ruined if they reported problems.”

Women reported a number of mechanisms to cope with sexual harassment. The most common approach appeared to be to tolerate the situation and look for a way out. For lesser problems like inappropriate verbal comments, many women employed humor to defuse the situation. One woman told a particularly colorful story:

I really think that one of the most essential tools a junior officer has to develop is comebacks . . . that can be pulled out that allow you to deal with them in a humorous but effective way. I [was to provide] counseling to this platoon sergeant. . . . I get to his tent and tell the private there who I’m looking for and he goes in. Then I hear him say “Tell the [female-specific expletive] I’ll be with her in a minute.” . . . We spent three hours talking about it and finally worked it all out . . . Looking back on it now, I know just how I would have handled it. When he came out I just would have said, “That’s Major [female-specific expletive] to you.” . . . If I had had that comeback, I think the whole thing would have been nipped in the bud.

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14 A recent GAO study of the services’ sexual harassment complaint systems also found that enlisted and junior officer women feared reprisals for filing an EO complaint or doubted that a complaint would be acted on by the chain of command (1996). The 1995 DoD Sexual Harassment Survey found that about 20 percent of women service members did not feel free to report an incidence of sexual harassment without fear of “bad things happening,” and another 30 percent felt some limited concern about reporting sexual harassment (Bastian et al., 1996).
In addition, some women expressed concern about filing a formal complaint. There was a perspective, among both men and women, that when complaints are acted on, they can end the offending officer’s career. For minor transgressions, some women felt this to be an extreme punishment. Thus, they chose to simply suffer the indignity rather than report it, as they did not believe the offense to be significant enough for the possible punishment.15 Some women felt that for many situations, the best approach to dealing with incidents was to directly confront the offender. As one woman commented: “It is really incumbent on you to say something. If it is happening to you, it is happening to soldiers who don’t have the ability you have to do something about it.” Others disagreed:

I would emphasize the importance of not playing the gender card. Being in that minority, you don’t think you are playing that card and you may not be. But the perception out there is that you are.

A few women found that their male peers will confront those who make inappropriate comments. One officer related her experience:

We all had our PT test. I maxed my test, my [boss] failed his. I was the only female in the group that took it. There were a group of officers who failed their test hanging around waiting to get chewed out. I come in and he looks at me and says, “Lieutenant, how did you do? “I maxed!” So he says, “Oh, I heard only dykes max the test.” I went back to him later and said that if you need help, I’ll give it to you, but your comment was inappropriate. He apologized and said that others had chewed him out for it after I had walked away. I really think that confronting this is important.

Another related a discussion of war-fighting spirit:

Research on sexual harassment in civilian and military employment has found that the majority of incidents go unreported. The 1995 DoD Sexual Harassment Survey found that only about one-quarter of those experiencing a harassing incident reported their experience (Bastian et al., 1996). Common reasons given by victims to explain why they did not report their situation are that they took care of it themselves, feared retaliation or humiliation, believed that nothing could or would get done, or desired not to cause problems for the harasser (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Gutke and Koss, 1993; Martindale, 1990; Bastian et al., 1996; GAO, 1996; Harrell and Miller, 1997). Instead, victims reported relying primarily on either avoidance or appeasement of harassers to put them off without direct confrontation (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).
One guy came out and said that women degrade the war-fighting spirit... I’m in a good group. The guy next to me took this guy on. He started talking about how women bring certain kinds of skills, increase the talent pool, comments like that.

Yet few women reported such supportive behavior by their male peers.

Men's Hesitancy in Interactions with Women

Men expressed a very clear sense that the current environment surrounding the enforcement of sexual harassment charges casts a pall on the appropriate and necessary interactions between men and women. It was common for men to believe that a charge of sexual harassment, even if ultimately unproven, could end an officer’s career. Women readily recognized the prevalence of this perception among men, even though many women believed that their command would take little action against someone accused of sexual harassment. Given these high stakes, some men expressed that they have limited or controlled their interactions with women in order to reduce the chances that a harassment charge could be raised.

In its most benign form, the problem dampens social interactions. One male officer commented:

I am guarded right now, because I am worried about saying the wrong thing; whereas before I could make some innocent comments. It’s a killjoy, and camaraderie is reduced. It puts a damper on social interactions with women.

Many women saw this inhibition as increasing the already present barriers to their social acceptance. One woman commented, “The men are scared to death of it. Now they are afraid to have fun.” Yet men and women saw the problem as going considerably further, interfering with the ability to provide necessary performance feedback to women.

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16 The hesitation that men feel in their working relationships with women colleagues that we report here is strikingly similar to that reported by Harrell and Miller (1997).
Less benign are the inhibitions male commanders reported in their interactions with subordinate female officers. One male officer commented, “People worry about confronting someone and being hit with a sexual harassment charge. . . . How do you deal with sub-
par women without losing face when you’re afraid of confronting them?” Another male officer offered the following comment on the current situation:

Enough [men] are so concerned that the allegation [of sexual ha-
rassment] is so bad, that one should go out of their way to avoid being accused. If you’re not there, you’re less likely to be accused, but you’re also less likely to mentor. You are not going to sit in a room mentoring a female, or if you do you are going to make sure that the door is open. You’re sure as hell not going to get in a HUMV and say, “Let’s go talk about the situation.”

In a similar vein, a woman commented, “The fear is there . . . that if they correct females on a professional issue, like the uniform, they will be accused [of sexual harassment].”

This problem may particularly hurt outstanding women, as senior male officers may be more hesitant to select women for key assistant positions in which the senior officer would have substantial private interaction. One senior male officer commented:

You can’t pay too much attention to female officers because of sexual harassment. For instance, if you select an Aide de Camp, you can select any male you want. But if you select a female, that will generate talk. So a lot of male officers will not select women for that job.

The services’ efforts to educate and sensitize officers to what constitutes sexual harassment were seen by some women as problematic in and of themselves. Stated one woman:

The whole Tailhook thing, for instance, that really spun me. It was sexual assault pure and simple and it should have dealt with that head-on. Instead we got a “stand-down.” The mandatory training was sophomoric and simplistic. The whole male Navy walked away from the training with the wrong idea. The Navy went overboard.
Some women saw *any* policies that draw distinctions between men and women as causing more harm than good. One woman commented, “We should really avoid policies that select out based on sex. This is what leads to craziness.” Another commented, “Stop making gender an issue. By not talking and focusing on it, they will look at me as a naval officer only.”

**COMPETING OPPORTUNITIES AND OBLIGATIONS**

Next to the issue of sexual harassment and the environment that the management of it is currently creating, the conflicts between being an officer and caring for your family were the most talked-about topics in our discussions. Women officers make decisions regarding work and family in a substantially different context than do men. The marital status of officers provides a relatively stark illustration of this different context. The overwhelming norm for field-grade male officers is to be married and to have a spouse who is not in the military (see Figure 12). In contrast, only slightly more than half of all field-grade women officers are married. Among men at O-4 or at a higher rank, 79 percent are married and only 3 percent have a spouse who is on active duty; while among women at the same ranks, only 45 percent are married and 28 percent have a spouse on active duty. Focusing on officers with young children at home, Figure 13 shows that far more women are single parents or have working spouses. Thus, women officers are facing different constraints than their male counterparts in their efforts to mix work and family.

Many women said that they had expected certain conflicts between the life of an officer and the responsibilities of caring for a family. Yet even though many of these women were willing to put, as one woman said, “service above self,” they saw conflicts as arising unnecessarily, deriving more from an adherence to tradition than from a requirement for completing one’s assignment. Women spoke most about two particular problem areas: child-care arrangements and military spouse considerations.

The difficulties associated with separations from family, managing two careers, and child-care arrangements are not unique to women officers. The toll of military life on one’s spouse or family was a reason expressed by many men for why they would consider separating from the military. Some men also commented on difficulties juggling
Figure 12—Marital Status of Men and Women at the Rank of O-4 or Higher

their work schedule and child-care arrangements. Yet the careers of women officers are disproportionately affected by these problems because of the greater likelihood that they are married to a working spouse or are raising children on their own.17

Child-Care Arrangements

Every focus group with women officers turned at some point to the difficulties caused by insufficient availability of child care. Women officers are more likely than men to rely on day care for their children. In addition, women officers with children are more likely than their male peers with children to be either unmarried or in a dual-working couple (see Figure 13). Military officers are often expected to work long and atypical hours. Such a work schedule can be incompatible with the rules and regulations of both military and

17Difficulties combining career and family are not unique to military women; women in the civilian labor force also face considerable difficulties. Goldin (1995) studied the patterns of career employment, marriage, and childbearing among a nationally representative sample of married women who were ages 37–47 in 1991. Of these women less than one-fifth were both a parent and employed in career-oriented work.
civilian day care establishments. Laws and day care agency policies often limit the total time that children can spend in day care, and many child-care centers, military and civilian, levy steep fines for picking up one’s child after a designated closing time.

Many women officers found it hard to understand why the services could not ensure the availability of child care for the hours that they are required to work. For example, it is traditional for all officers in some units to participate in PT quite early in the morning, yet often the child-care center does not open until a later time. One woman officer said:

The child-care center opens at 6:30, but that’s when PT starts. Dual [military] spouses or single parents find it is too difficult, because they are working on base. They have commitments, like they have to be at the rifle range at 4:30 a.m., and if your husband is gone TDY\textsuperscript{18} or deployed, what can you do? There should be the availability to child care and flexibility. They need to allow officers to do what they are required to do. Getting a spot in day care on the base is hard; finding outside day care that meets those hours is very difficult.

\textsuperscript{18}Temporary duty.
Typical of our dialogues, this woman did not expect to be released from her duties. Instead, she was looking for the day care that would allow her to fulfill her duty requirements.

Military Spouse Considerations

Frequent reassignments are typical and, by and large, expected for an officer. Officers demonstrate breadth in their careers by accepting assignments that vary both substantively and geographically. The best career moves can require an officer to move across the country or world. As a result, officers or their spouses must either suffer interruptions in their career development or couples must put up with lengthy separations. This burden seems to fall disproportionately on women. One-quarter of all women officers have reported that their spouse’s job interferes with their military job, while only 15 percent of male officers with employed spouses have found their spouse’s job interferes with their military job. This problem is magnified by the fact that women officers are considerably more likely than their male peers to have an employed spouse. Only a small number of married men or women officers are geographically separated from their spouse at a particular point in time, yet married women officers are more than four times as likely as their male peers to be “geographic bachelors” (5.8 percent as opposed to 1.3 percent).

Some women in our study felt that partners who are on active duty are more familiar with and understanding of the demands of military life than are civilian partners. This may be one reason why women officers are more likely to marry other active-duty personnel. Yet

1992 Surveys of Officer and Enlisted Personnel (DMDC, 1993). This is the proportion that report that their spouse’s job interferes “somewhat,” “a great deal,” or “completely” with their military career. Bielby and Bielby (1992) have found that civilian couples are less likely to make geographic moves for a woman’s career opportunities than for a man’s career opportunities even when the relative costs to the spouse’s situation are equivalent. Nevertheless, Marsden et al. (1993) find that there is little difference in organizational commitment between men and women.

While the number of officers who are separated from their spouse at any point in time is quite low, it is likely that the number who have had to be separated at some time is much higher. Unfortunately, the available data do not allow us to measure the incidence of separation from one’s spouse over a longer period.

dual military career marriages can also be particularly stressful as they can also increase the likelihood of facing separations from one’s spouse. The services have instituted policies designed to minimize this difficulty, yet both women and men in dual military couples report that it can be difficult to arrange two career-enhancing positions at the same location. Usually, one partner must accept a less than ideal assignment. Given the up-or-out competitive nature of the officer career-management system, accepting a lesser assignment, especially more than once, may substantially limit an officer’s promotion competitiveness and, ultimately, time in the service. Even when a dual military couple has accepted one partner’s career as dominant, finding co-located opportunities can be difficult.

In a recent survey officers in dual military marriages were asked what they would do if a future assignment required a long separation from their spouse. They were asked to indicate whether they would simply accept the assignment, leave the service, or have their spouse leave the service. Only slightly more men than women said they would accept separate assignments. Among the others, men and women differed in who they said would separate from the service to avoid the assignment. Women officers stated that they were much more likely to separate than have their spouse separate or simply accept the assignment. Male officers were also more likely to state that they would leave rather than cause their spouse to separate, although not by nearly as wide a margin as women did (see Figure 14).

More women than men whom we interviewed had spouses on active duty. Further, more married women than married men in our interviews placed their careers as subordinate to their partners’ careers. It is not surprising, then, that the difficulties driven by dual military career marriages were a more common topic of discussion in our focus groups with women than with men. Similar to other conflicts between career and family responsibilities, many women in dual military marriages felt they were being forced to choose between family and career. “I love the [service] like family, but my decision to stay is now on a day-to-day basis . . . I’ve already spent two and one-

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22This was not universally true, however. Some of the women we interviewed saw their career as dominant, and some of the men saw their career as subordinate.
Advantage in the System

Some white men perceived that women carry an advantage in the career-management system. No black male officers who participated in our discussions agreed with this perception. The advantage, as perceived by some white men, results from personnel policies that explicitly treat women differently, principally the promotion goals in the board precepts. One white male officer stated, “If it’s the male that can’t keep up, he’s gone. If it’s the female, she won’t necessarily be gone.” Another commented, “The boards review the results, and if insufficient women and minorities are promoted, then white males get depromoted. I have noticed that on promotion boards, more incompetent women got promoted.”

Many women recognized that some men believe women to be advantaged in the career-management system. A few women reported incidences where they believed this perception was used to justify not fully recognizing their performance. These women believed that their ranking officer awarded prized rating statuses to white male of-
Officers out of the belief that women would be promoted regardless and that white men needed the competitive boost. One woman offered the following experience:

I got pulled into the office by my CO, who said, “You are augmented and you will be selected for Major, no problem; but we need to get these bubbas promoted. So even though you are the top performer, we will rank them up higher on the scale.

Another woman’s superior told her that “he was going to take a lot of heat for giving both of the top ratings to the only two women in the group.”

A small number of the women whom we interviewed believed that they had at times received an advantage in promotion consideration or in assignment consideration because of their gender. One woman commented:

I have had to work harder to prove myself, but have been given the opportunity to do so perhaps more readily. For example, I think my recent promotion to O-5 has as much to do with being a woman as my performance.

While recognizing that being female may at times offer some advantage, nearly all women rejected outright the premise that overall they are advantaged in the career-management system. After considering all the factors discussed in this chapter, most women concluded that they must work harder than their male peers to receive similar recognition and reward. One female officer succinctly stated: “Women officers must be better than male counterparts to advance.”

THE DOUBLE JEOPARDY OF BEING A BLACK WOMAN

It is apparent from the analysis in Chapter Three that the career progression of black women is the most divergent of the racial/gender groups studied. For the most part, black women did not express any unique issues during our discussions that were not also raised by either other women or other blacks. Further, there were no issues raised by white women or by black men that were not also raised by black women. Yet their experience and difficulties in career development are unique because both their race and gender simultane-
ously affect them. As a result many black women felt that they face a double disadvantage in their career development.

As our discussions with black women came to a close, we generally asked whether they felt their race or their gender had caused greater difficulties in their career. More black women in our discussions answered that being black had caused greater disadvantage than being female. In particular, black women focused on concerns related to social background and mentoring. The dialog in one group discussion reveals this concern:

RAND Discussion Leader: To what extent are the difficulties you are reporting due to being female versus being black?

Respondent 1: I think because of being a minority. My grandparents did not even finish high school. . . . No one told me 15 years ago you need to read certain things, read books, read the paper.

Respondent 2: Or no one tells you how to establish a vision for your job, or about strategic thinking, etc.

Respondent 3: [The majority] are taught that you need a vision. It’s that mentoring. They are told, “You need to study Clausewitz.”

However, the perspective that being a minority caused greater disadvantage than being a woman was not universally shared. One black officer commented: “Gender, to be female, causes more discrimination. Color causes people to prejudge, but not hate.”

One final note on the “double jeopardy” of black women officers: Those white male officers who believed that the career-management system has instituted quotas for awarding promotions and other career advancements see black women as having two extra cards to lay on the table. One white male officer stated, “We’re big boys, call the quota what it is, don’t call it a goal. A black female is worth 50 white guys.”

**SUMMARY**

As pointed out in Chapter Three, the key issue for understanding gender differences in career development and success is to understand why women officers choose to separate from the military at
substantially greater rates than do men. On the basis of both our research and the research of others, we conclude that this difference derives from three broad issues: concentration in certain occupational specialties, lack of consensus among service members on the role for women in the military, and competing family obligations.

Women officers continue to be concentrated in occupations with more limited long-term career opportunities. While the concentration of women in support occupations appears to have little effect on career opportunities through the O-4 level, noncombat occupational specialties were clearly perceived by most officers participating in this study to have limited opportunities to advance to the senior ranks, O-6 and above. As a result many of the women saw their long-term career opportunities as limited. It is too early to tell how these perceptions will be changed by the 1993–94 policy change that opened many occupations and assignments to women, especially in the Navy and Air Force.

Several factors contributed to the belief expressed by many women that their role in the military is not fully accepted. Substantial differences of opinion existed both between and among men and women on whether it is appropriate for women to serve in any combat role, including those currently open to women. Some women perceived that the significant changes over the last decade in the occupational and assignment restrictions for women have made it a particular challenge to shape consistent and competitive career profiles. Some women also saw the continued restrictions of women from certain occupations as an institutional message reinforcing a view that women are inherently less capable officers. Further, the sexual and nonsexual harassment that many women reported adds to a sense that some military personnel would prefer that women had no role in the institution. Many women expressed weariness over their feeling that they had to continually fight to be recognized, rewarded, and respected for their role and accomplishments.

Finally, women officers face considerably different competing obligations from family responsibilities than do men. Married women officers are more likely to have an employed spouse. While this alone makes aggressive pursuit of a military career more difficult, adding children to the equation makes the challenge even greater.
After weighing the questions of long-term career opportunities, the lack of full acceptance of their role by others and the institution, and conflicts with family responsibilities, many women concluded that the rewards of continued military service are less than the costs. That said, most women we interviewed expressed considerable pride in their military service and in the institutions. Most saw their military service as a positive experience, and many who intended to separate expressed regret that they found it necessary to end their military career.