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**EFFECTS OF GENDER INTEGRATION ON MORALE**

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**OVERALL ISSUES THAT AFFECT MORALE**

A 1991 assessment of various definitions and uses of the term *morale* in the military arrived at a useful working definition, and the assessment asserts that the term is really relevant only for individuals who are members of a goal-oriented group (Manning, 1991). That definition focuses on the degree to which group members are enthusiastic about and committed to carrying out the duties of that group. This assessment also noted that research indicates morale is a function of cohesion at both the primary (small) work group level and the secondary (larger) unit level.

The written survey findings suggest that gender is one of many issues that affect morale, but it is not one of the primary factors influencing morale. In the written questionnaire, we asked respondents to rate the morale of their units. These results are shown in Table 5.1. The majority of people ranked their units' morale as medium. Of the remainder, those of higher pay grades tended to evaluate their units' morale as high, whereas more junior personnel tended to perceive morale as low. The responses differed by unit, but there was no apparent pattern among the differences by either the gender ratio of the unit or the relative size of unit. Thus, we attribute the unit differences to unit history and leadership differences.

Besides asking respondents directly about unit morale, as shown above, we also asked a less direct question about how they felt about their units. These responses are shown in Table 5.2. If one interprets the five responses as five measures on a scale of morale, the respon-

**Table 5.1**  
**Responses to the Question “How Would You Rate the Morale of Your Unit?” (by grade, in percent)**

	Officers (N=118)	E7–E9 (N=106)	E5–E6 (N=262)	E1–E4 (N=439)
High	33	27	12	15
Medium	60	61	54	52
Low	7	11	34	33

NOTES: For grade,  $p < 0.001$ . Unit was also significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), but there was no apparent pattern by size or gender ratio. Gender was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in that women were slightly less likely to rate morale as high and slightly more likely to rate morale as low. Service and race were not significant. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

dents tended to have high or very high morale, as over half of the respondents within each grade group responded that they were very proud of their units or that they enjoyed being a part of their units. Officers and higher-ranking enlisted personnel were more likely to feel very positively about their units and less likely to feel very negatively about them.

**Table 5.2**  
**Attitude Toward Unit (by grade, in percent)**

	Officers (N=116)	E7–E9 (N=105)	E5–E6 (N=259)	E1–E4 (N=436)
I am very proud of what my unit does, and I feel honored to be a part of it.	48	47	29	21
I enjoy what my unit does and I enjoy being a part of it.	41	39	34	37
I am indifferent to what my unit does; I can take it or leave it.	5	12	23	26
I don't like what my unit does and I would rather not be a part of it.	4	1	11	10
I intensely dislike what my unit does and I don't want any part of it.	1	1	3	7

NOTES: For grade,  $p < 0.001$ . Unit was also significant,  $p < 0.001$ , but there was no apparent pattern by size or gender ratio. Service, gender, and race were not significant. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

After posing the questions shown in Tables 5.1 and 5.2, the questionnaire asked the respondents why they thought their morale and their units' morales were the way they were. Table 5.3 exhibits the wide range of responses to this question coded into like categories. Clearly, leadership plays a large role in the morale of a unit. Of the 934 questionnaires completed, 261 individuals specifically cited leadership or the chain of command. These comments included positive comments such as "Department head is great; CO is interested in the crew," and "The new CO has made a big difference for the better," as well as negative comments: "Our superiors in the chain of command know very little about leadership and TQL." There were an additional 117 mentions of issues related to leadership. These related comments included references to the treatment of junior personnel, such as "People are spoken to in a very derogatory way and over a period of time it wears them down" and "In boot camp they tear you down and build you back up. Here on the ship, they tear you down and leave you for dead."

Issues relating to the work load in units were also perceived as having an important effect upon morale. These comments included negative comments about the long work hours and the operational tempo, such as one reference to the "strenuous under way schedules." The comments also recognized the effect of the unit's deployment schedule: Whether a ship was new to the shipyard or had been in the shipyard for a long period of time affected morale. "We've just finished 3 years of constant deployment with little to no turnaround time. We are now to have an 18 month turnaround—everyone is happy."

Only eight comments from over 900 completed questionnaires mentioned gender issues as having an effect upon morale, despite the introduction that prompted the respondents to consider gender issues while completing the survey.

### **GENDER ISSUES THAT AFFECT MORALE**

The survey results indicate that gender issues are not perceived to be among the primary issues affecting morale. Nevertheless, the group discussions concentrated upon the ways gender *does* affect morale. The gender issues affecting unit morale that emerged are related to

sexual harassment, a perceived double standard for men and women, and romantic relationships within the unit.

**Table 5.3**  
**Written Comments in Response to “Why Do You Think Your Morale and Your Unit’s Morale Is [Are] the Way It Is [Are]?”**

Categories	Written Responses	Number of Mentions
Leadership	Leadership/chain of command	261
	Way junior personnel are treated	39
	Micromanagement style/ disorganization	33
	Discipline	16
	Degree of fairness perceived/consistent policies	15
	Politics	14
		94
Work load	Operations tempo/deployment schedule	94
	Work hours	51
	Personnel shortage	27
	Personnel tempo	9
Cohesion	Unit cohesion/camaraderie/friendship	38
	Quality of people	14
	Teamwork	13
	Communication	12
	Gender conflicts/issues	8
	Racial conflicts/issues	1
Job satisfaction	Pride in unit	31
	Job satisfaction	18
	Unit mission/successful unit	12
	Difficulty advancing	3
Individual attitudes	Attitude toward work	27
	General attitudes	11
	Self-interest	5
Quality of life	QOL/family life	17
	Fun activities	6
	Living conditions	6
	Pay	6
Materiel/training	Equipment/materiel	7
	Training	6
	Shortage of funds	5

## Sexual Harassment

Within the units we visited, all of which had recently been opened to women or included recently opened occupations, sexual harassment and the threat of sexual harassment charges continue to be morale issues. First of all, there appears to be considerable confusion about the definition of sexual harassment. One commander was horrified to discover that an abnormally large percentage of his women were claiming sexual harassment, but upon further investigation, most of their complaints were about the living and working environment and did not qualify as sexual harassment. For example, some women were unhappy that their male supervisor had access to their barracks. Others objected to swearing, tobacco chewing, or watching sports games or kung fu movies in the workplace or the barracks. These activities tended to be male activities that women either object to or do not enjoy but that do not qualify as sexual harassment. We encountered many individuals, especially junior personnel, who did not understand what does—and does not—constitute harassment.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, some sexual harassment prevention and awareness training programs instituted at units prior to their gender integration seemed to have a negative effect on the transition to an integrated unit in that the training scared the men from interacting on any level with the women. Some men reported that they were told “don’t talk to them, don’t sit near them in the mess, don’t breathe near them.” Not surprisingly, the women in those units reported that the men seemed “scared to death of us.”

Many men acknowledged that they treated women differently in some ways because of the constant perceived threat of a sexual harassment charge. Men were reluctant to push women, especially during physical activities, such as unit runs, because of the fear that the women would retaliate with an unfounded charge of sexual harassment. Most men were also reluctant to counsel women privately, as they would men, because of the innuendo that would accompany them if they were alone together and because of the lack of any wit-

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<sup>1</sup>The Defense Manpower Data Center 1995 Sexual Harassment Survey found that 90 percent of officers, 86 percent of senior enlisted, and 76 percent of junior enlisted personnel indicated that they knew, to a large extent, what constituted sexual harassment.

ness who could speak on their behalf if, for example, the woman were displeased with the counseling and threatened to accuse the man of having harassed her while he was alone with her.

Many men and women we spoke with felt that some women used sexual harassment charges, or the threat thereof, to avoid unpleasant work. We were told that this worked in two ways. First, some supervisors were hesitant to assign unpleasant tasks to a woman because she had a “club” she could threaten him with. Second, if a woman did not like her job, she could complain of harassment. Even if the charges were determined to be unsubstantiated, the woman was generally removed and placed in another work group.

Of all the personnel surveyed, the majority (both men and women) believed that sexual harassment was not happening in their unit, although men were slightly more likely than women to believe some women were being sexually harassed. These views are shown in Table 5.4. The responses of our study participants are significantly different from those reported in a DoD study, shown in Table 5.5, which asked women whether they had been sexually harassed, in any way, in the past year.<sup>2</sup> Given that many of the units we surveyed had recently integrated, one might have expected the reported harassment rates to differ.<sup>3</sup>

Of the women who responded in our survey that they had experienced harassment, the majority said that they did not report the event. This differed slightly by grade, as 78.5 percent of junior enlisted women said they did not report the event, but from 87.5 to 100 percent of women in more senior grades did not report the harassment. Many of the written comments that accompanied these answers stated that the women had confronted the harasser and handled the situation on their own.

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<sup>2</sup>Compart (1996), p. 4. The questions differed slightly. We asked whether women had been harassed since arriving at the unit studied; the DoD study asked whether they had been harassed over the prior year. Additionally, the DoD study reflects 1988 and 1995 data, whereas our study was conducted in 1997.

<sup>3</sup>Our data are not presumed to be representative of the services overall but to be indicative of the environment at the units we visited.

**Table 5.4**  
**Are the Women in Your Unit (Are You) Being Sexually Harassed? (by gender, in percent)**

	Men	Women
No	53	66
Yes, but rarely	29	17
Yes, sometimes	15	11
Yes, frequently	4	6

NOTES: For gender,  $p < 0.001$ . Service, unit, grade and race were not significant.

Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 5.5**  
**DoD Study “Have You Been Sexually Harassed in Any Way Within the Past Year?” (percentage of women who responded positively)**

	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard	Active Force
1988	68	66	75	57	62	64
1995	61	53	64	49	59	55

SOURCE: Compart (1996), p. 4.

Often these women described the events as minor and thus felt they could handle them without command intervention, or that the man involved would be dealt with “too harshly.” Women told us, “After all, he has eighteen years of service,” meaning both that they did not want to destroy his career and also that they did not want to be known as the woman who had destroyed someone’s career. In other cases, women felt they could not report the harassment, for several reasons. First, women felt that such reports would be used to prove that women do not belong in the military. Second, women either felt that nothing would happen or that they would be subject to a backlash of gender harassment by others in the unit.<sup>4</sup> One woman wrote that, if she reported harassment, the result would be that “gossip would increase—making fun of would increase.” Others wrote:

<sup>4</sup>For a definition and example of forms of gender harassment distinct from sexual harassment, see Miller (1997b).

I know I would be believed, however I think I would be treated badly by everyone—alienated, sneered at, etc. Think about it; women have been here for [x] years and no one has had sexual harassment charges—do you honestly think that’s because it doesn’t exist? It’s because there are so few women here we know we would all feel the repercussions

and that “[The harassment] would change from individual to group harassment.”

In addition to these views, many women felt that women who falsely claimed sexual harassment ruined the situation for the rest of the women by crying “Wolf!” too frequently.

Interestingly, the men of these units perceived that women who felt they were being harassed were more likely to report sexual harassment than they actually did. Roughly a third of enlisted personnel in the grades of E1–E6 believed events were being reported, and more than 60 percent of officers believed that the events were being reported. This is consistent with our observation that most commanders felt they had the sexual harassment issue under control, that they did not tolerate unfounded charges, and that they dismissed unsubstantiated charges but kept a watchful eye over those involved. However, the fear of sexual harassment charges appeared to be a constant source of concern for many of the other men we spoke with. Senior enlisted men were the most concerned, as they felt they had invested considerable time in their careers and that a single harassment charge would render them “guilty until proven guilty.” They explained that, even if they were exonerated, such a decision would be too late to repair their reputations and careers. They felt that these were not unfounded fears, as most seemed to know of such occurrences personally.

“Zero tolerance” is a frequently cited policy when the issue of sexual harassment arises. There appear to be two interpretations of the policy. In the first interpretation, zero tolerance means that the command will not tolerate violations of policy and will take swift and serious action when violations do occur. Most people who thought that zero tolerance was a good policy held this interpretation. They thought that publicly chastising violators deterred overt violations.

Others who held this interpretation but thought the policy was wrong complained that it was not right to give unfairly harsh treatment to first offenders to set an example for others. The first interpretation also supported women's concerns about reporting harassment because of the severe reprisals for even "minor" violations. Some felt that their command was not serious about the policy: Command was aware of violations but did not intervene. These people believed the command would only take action if someone were openly caught in flagrant violation.

A second interpretation of the policy is that zero tolerance means "this doesn't happen under this command at all." Everyone with this interpretation thought zero tolerance was a bad idea. Violations do occur, and people who held this interpretation felt that zero tolerance meant the command would not dare to recognize or punish violators because that would be a public admission that the command had failed to prevent violations and that, in so doing, they would risk scandalous media coverage and would hamper their high-level careers.

### **Is There a Double Standard?**

Many study participants asserted that men generally treated women differently from their male peers for several reasons. First, the physical fitness standards demand different levels of performance from men and women. Second, men do not always know the regulations, such as uniform and personal appearance regulations, that apply to women. Third, men treat women differently either because they have been socialized to do so, or because they are afraid of sexual harassment charges if they displease a woman, even (or perhaps especially) a female subordinate.

Men (65.9 percent) and women (74.4 percent) generally agreed that the unit commanders were not treating women differently from men. However, there was disagreement regarding whether other unit personnel treated women differently from men. Table 5.6 indicates the percentages of women who thought they were treated differently from the men. In our sample, junior enlisted women were more likely to report that they were treated differently, whereas the majority of female officers and female senior enlisted personnel did not believe they were treated differently because of their gender.

**Table 5.6**  
**Percentage of Women Who Reported that Their Coworkers Treated Them Differently (by grade, in percent)**

	Officers	E7-E9	E5-E6	E1-E4
Yes	46	40	60	61
No	54	60	40	39

NOTES: For grade,  $p < 0.05$ . Gender was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Service, unit, race were not significant.

The majority of men respondents (from 60 percent of officers to 71 percent of E5-E6) did believe that women were being treated differently by personnel other than the commander. However, men and women surveyed differed in the ways that they thought women were treated differently. Table 5.7 indicates that men surveyed, especially junior male personnel, were considerably more likely to believe that women are given less of the unattractive duties, or “dirty work,” and to believe that less was generally expected of women than of men:

Women are held to lower standards in P.T., marksmanship, work, because they are women and leaders are afraid to do anything about it. Because it will hurt [the leaders'] careers.

Men were also more likely to believe that women were being singled out or receiving special attention.

On the other hand, women were more likely to believe that they were receiving more of the “dirty” work and that more was expected of them than of the men. These results are shown in Table 5.8.

In discussion sessions with women, most women claimed to be working hard to be as successful as the men, and most men acknowledged the existence of particularly hard-working or capable women. In the words of two survey respondents,

I feel there isn't much difference between men and women when it comes to work. I see hard working men and women and I also see lazy men and women. Men usually have more strength but other than that as far as work goes it's just how the individual studies and learns their job.

**Table 5.7**  
**How Are Women Treated Differently? (percentage agreeing with each statement, by grade and gender)**

	Officers		E7-E9		E5-E6		E1-E4	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Women have been given less of the "dirty work." <sup>a</sup>	36	0	41	10	59	9	66	14
Others pay more attention to women/single them out. <sup>b</sup>	32	21	35	10	44	27	45	38
Less is expected of women than the men. <sup>c</sup>	34	3	43	15	64	8	64	17

<sup>a</sup>Grade was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), and gender was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Service, unit, race were not significant.

<sup>b</sup>Grade was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), and gender was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Service, unit, race were not significant.

<sup>c</sup>Grade and gender were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

It's the 10% that gives the rest of the female service people a bad rep. There are many females who are good at their jobs and [in the service], but the 10% seem to get away with anything and get their way.

Women who believed they were treated differently frequently claimed that they had to work twice as hard as the men to receive the same or less credit for their work. For example, one woman wrote "I have to prove myself more than the men do. I feel I'm under a mi-

**Table 5.8**  
**Are Women Treated Differently? (percentage agreeing with each statement, by gender)**

	Male	Female
Women are (I am) given more of the "dirty work"	4	18
More is expected of women (me) than of the men	3	26

NOTES: Gender was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Service, unit, race were not significant.

crosscope. I feel literally hundreds of prying eyes on my body everywhere I go. . . .” They explained that this was partly because some women took advantage of the lower expectations for women. The hardworking and ambitious women were generally annoyed and frustrated with women who put forth less effort, as they felt that the high visibility of all women meant that the poor performance or negative attitudes of some women reflected upon all women in the unit.

This visibility of a potentially small minority of women may have contributed to a perception among the men that women were not contributing as much to the unit, but that they tended to receive better work, more chances to succeed, and inflated performance evaluations.

Men also tended to assert that women demanded equal rights and recognition within the company but that they were not equal in their performance or contribution to the unit. During these discussions, the topic of the physical fitness test frequently arose. Men claimed that the female standards were too easy and that women were not being forced to meet even the lower standards. Although men frequently acknowledged that women have different upper body strength and body compositions, they were generally unable to accept the degree of difference between the men’s and women’s physical fitness requirements. We were told repeatedly that, if relevant and realistic physical tests existed so that only qualified women (and men) were assigned to these positions, gender integration would not be an issue. The presence of women proven strong and capable would not be resisted:

By this survey it probably appears that I’m strongly against women in the military, I’m not. I AM against women being put in jobs they are not qualified to do. I AM against different standards for men and women (performance, physical, and otherwise). When women are held to the same standards as men you will have equality. . . . Some of the women [in the unit] work very hard and are definitely as asset to the [unit]. The other 2/3 of them shouldn’t be here.

To the extent that gender affected morale, the perception of different standards or policies for men and women was a frequently cited source of morale problems. Some of these differences were instituted because they were believed beneficial to the women. For ex-

ample, we were informed frequently of an unofficial Army policy that women should receive showers every 72 hours while deployed to the field. Although the likelihood of infection is generally cited as the reason for this policy, the practice is not supported by official medical guidance. The practice appeared to erode morale and build resentment among the men, who endure a heavier workload when the women, the vehicles, and the drivers return to base so that women can take showers. Many women who have deployed on exercises or missions assert that “Wet Wipes” or sponge baths suffice under field conditions and that they do not need more frequent showers than do men. Absent specific medical guidance supporting this practice, it appears unnecessary. Instead of benefiting the women, practices such as these build resentment and are used as arguments against integration, such as “I cannot take my women on field exercises, because I cannot provide showers every 72 hours.”

### **Romantic Relationships Affect Morale**

In this study, we had no way of determining how common dating or sexual relationships were in these units. When these relationships had occurred, they were perceived to affect morale. Relationships that qualified as fraternization were dealt with by the chain of command. However, personal relationships between male and female peers not in a chain of command relationship do not usually violate the regulations, unless they affect good order and discipline. Such relationships were identified as potential morale problems, however, especially within the combined living and working environment found aboard ship or when units are deployed overseas.

There are several problems with these relationships. First, we were told that the existence of such relationships “sexualizes” the environment and makes it difficult for colleagues to regard one another as just coworkers. Thus, the cohesion of the unit is negatively affected. For example, “The mess . . . at night [for] this unit looks more like a singles club or promenade deck than a mess hall [for a military unit]” and

I get tired of seeing a junior enlisted female and her boyfriend [at mess] Both are attached to [this unit]. This place is like high school all over again. Everyone is dating others. To me this is not the mili-

tary. We are here to do a job not meet our spouse. Guys seem more worried about getting a girl than doing their job.

These relationships can also breed resentment among colleagues based upon jealousy or sexual frustration. Second, when these relationships dissolve, the effectiveness of the individuals and the morale of others suffer. While this is a natural response to affairs of the heart, we were told that these emotions do not belong in a military environment. Finally, we were told that a dissolved relationship leaves the male vulnerable to charges of sexual harassment and even rape if the woman claims that she was not a consensual partner.

Friendships between men and women were not a problem. In fact, some men told us that they appreciated the opportunity to have friendships with women and that they were able to talk to women about many of their personal problems that they were not comfortable discussing with their male colleagues. Thus, the women relieved some of the stress of the extreme living and working conditions and reduced the inclination of some of the men to become drunk and disorderly in the process of “blowing off steam.” In this way, the presence of women promoted a more pleasant work environment.

## CONCLUSION

Because morale refers to the degree to which group members are enthusiastic about and committed to carrying out the duties of that group, the enthusiasm the study participants had for their jobs and for their units is notable. When asked whether serving in their current units has made them more or less interested in staying in the military, enlisted personnel in grades E1–E6 were more likely to say their current experience has made them less interested in remaining in the military. These responses are shown in Table 5.9. These views did not differ by gender. Although many of the units we visited were recently integrated units that might have been expected to be more difficult environments for women, women and men did not differ in their evaluation of the experience.

Instead, the differences in views are attributable to differences in grade. Throughout the study, officers and senior enlisted personnel tended to hold higher views of cohesion and morale. Junior people

were more likely to feel overworked and underappreciated; therefore, their experiences were more likely to give them a more negative view of a military career. In addition, many of the junior people were serving in their first unit. We do not have evidence to suggest that they would have answered any differently if they had been serving in other units.

In conclusion, gender issues were cited by fewer than 1 percent of the survey respondents when queried about issues that affect morale. Leadership was overwhelmingly cited as the primary factor of morale. The gender-specific factors of morale raised in focus groups were often issues of leadership. To the degree that leadership can address and resolve such issues as the perception of a double standard for men and women, morale will improve. In addition, service or unit policies that apply to men and women differently, thus emphasizing the differences between the genders, are especially detrimental to morale. Finally, when they occur, dating and sexual relationships, even when not proscribed by the regulations, are often problematic within military units.

**Table 5.9**

**Responses to the Question: “Has Serving in This Unit Made You More or Less Interested in Staying in the Military?” (by grade, in percent)**

	Officers (N=117)	E7-E9 (N=108)	E5-E6 (N=264)	E1-E4 (N=438)
It has made me more interested in staying in.	28	19	13	11
It has made little difference.	44	56	42	38
It has made me less interested in staying in.	28	25	46	51

NOTES: For grade,  $p < 0.001$ . Service, gender, unit, race were not significant. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.