THE CRITICAL NATURE OF A MULTIMETHOD APPROACH

We must reiterate the importance of a multimethod research approach for a balanced assessment. We used focus groups to probe for gender issues and developed a rich understanding of gender issues that exist in newly integrated units and units with newly integrated occupations. However, the interviews and surveys were invaluable in placing those explanations of gender issues into the larger context of readiness, cohesion, and morale. Had we just depended upon focus groups, we would likely have drawn more negative conclusions about the impact of gender integration in these units. Likewise, had we depended solely upon the survey data, we would have concluded that gender was not an issue in these units at all. In concert, all data sources offered a greater context and indicated that gender issues are just one aspect, and indeed a relatively minor aspect, of readiness, cohesion, and morale.

We must also point out that, on a number of questionnaire items for which gender first appeared to be significant, the difference was in fact due to grade. Misperceptions about gender relations may occur, then, because women are often concentrated in the junior enlisted grades. This finding has implications for anyone making judgments about gender, based on casual observations of units. In many locations, there were very few, if any, women in the senior enlisted or officer grades. Therefore, unit members may perceive the opinions of junior enlisted women as representing the opinion of women in general, but actually they may more accurately reflect the perspective of the junior enlisted.
RESULTS

In response to the policy and legislative changes, the services have opened more occupations and organizations to women. Table 7.1 shows the change in the number of positions open to women. Relatively few new positions opened in the Army and Air Force. The increases in the Navy and Marine Corps are much larger, although the number of women who can be assigned to the new openings in the Navy is limited by the number of berths for women on combatant ships. The movement of women into these positions has varied, depending on such factors as the number of women in each service, their interest in these positions, training or retraining times, and whether facilities or systems must be reconfigured.

The legislative and policy changes also opened core combat roles to women in the Air Force and Navy. Women can now fly in combat aircraft in both services, and they can serve on combatant ships in the Navy. As a result, women will be able to acquire the experience in combat units that is a key to most senior leadership positions.

Limitations do still exist across the services, and some of them operate in complex ways. Certain units and skills are still closed to women, primarily those that engage in direct ground combat or collocate with units that do. In other cases, the skill is open to women but only at certain organizational levels, e.g., brigade or higher. Some positions that are officially open to women may actually be closed because the position is coded to be filled by a skill closed to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Positions Open Before April 1993</th>
<th>Positions Open After Law and Policy Changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>97.0</td>
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<td>Marine Corps</td>
<td>33.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DoD Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>67.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>80.2</strong></td>
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women, e.g., infantry. Unfortunately, there is no method other than by individually checking each position that is formally open to women to determine its MOS coding. Finally, some limitations are informal, e.g., the commander who will not have a driver or an aide of the opposite sex because of concerns about rumors or potential charges of sexual harassment. In other cases, a commander may have a woman assigned to a nontraditional position but actually performing duty in another.

**Effects on Readiness, Cohesion, and Morale**

A major finding of this study is that gender integration is perceived to have a relatively small effect on readiness, cohesion, and morale in the units we studied. This is not to say that it has no effect. However, other influences, such as leadership and training, are perceived as being far more influential.

Commanders and personnel in the units we studied indicated that gender integration has not had a major effect on their units’ readiness. Both men and women asserted in the survey that women perform about as well as men, although there was widespread support for setting gender-neutral physical requirements for positions requiring strength. The most-often mentioned effect on readiness was the nonavailability of personnel due to pregnancy. When the unit has many women or is understaffed, the limitations imposed by pregnancy are both more visible and have a disproportionately greater effect.

Any divisions caused by gender were minimal or invisible in units with high cohesion. Gender appeared as an issue only in units with conflicting groups, and then it took a back seat to divisions along work group or grade lines. When it did negatively affect cohesion, it was generally because gender is one way that people break into categories when conflict surfaces or because dating occurred within a unit. Gender was also mentioned as having a positive effect, raising the level of professional standards.

In the survey, gender was almost never mentioned in issues cited as affecting morale. Leadership was regarded as the overwhelming influence. In the focus groups, we centered the discussion on gender issues, and two were most frequently brought out: sexual harass-
ment and double standards. The majority of both men and women reported that sexual harassment does not occur in their units. Of those women in the units studied who said they have been harassed (and there is considerable confusion about what constitutes sexual harassment), most did not report it. Most frequently, they regarded such incidents as minor and handled them on their own. Less frequently cited reasons include a fear of overreaction by the institution, resulting in draconian punishment; a belief that such reports will be used against the case for women in the military; and a belief that nothing will happen to the offender. The fear of unsubstantiated or false sexual harassment charges was prevalent among men in the focus groups. The perception of a double standard was held most widely by men and tended to revolve around such things as different physical standards and a perceived unwillingness of male supervisors to demand as much of women as they do of men. Finally, dating and sexual relationships, even those not forbidden by the regulations, can pose problems for morale within a unit.

Gender integration also has some positively perceived effects upon morale. Some men told us that the integration resulted in the units developing a more positive, professional work atmosphere. In addition, both women and men told us that men could discuss frustrations and other personal issues with female colleagues more than with men, and that this opportunity prevented them from seeking more destructive outlets, such as excessive drinking or fighting.

Other Findings Related to Gender

This study offered an opportunity to gather the opinions of personnel in newly integrated units on various issues in the public debate.

- The majority of men and women favored integration in basic training. However, 25 percent of women and 39 percent of men preferred segregated training.
- Few (14–18 percent) felt that women should be assigned in groups to newly opened units, but the remainder differed in whether women should be assigned evenly across all units or whether the assignment process should be gender blind.
Most study participants do not care whether they report harassment to a man or a woman. Twenty-two to thirty-five percent do have a preference, most often for someone of the same sex.

Over half of surveyed men in the enlisted ranks favor some relaxation of the ground combat exclusion policy; only one-third of male officers agree, and Army and Marine Corps men of all grades are more likely to prefer the current policy. A change in the policy is supported by over 80 percent of the women surveyed. Those who support change differ on allowing women to serve voluntarily in ground combat positions or requiring them to do so, as men are.

Many of the men and women we talked to were concerned that the public spotlight on gender integration in the military was making the adjustment more difficult and diverting attention from the progress that has occurred.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

During our visits to the 14 units we studied, we were given numerous suggestions for remedying issues that related to gender. Some suggestions were very specific, such as to improve supervision and the flow of information in female berthing areas on ships. Others were broader, such as to evaluate how much discretion commanders and supervisors should exercise in how they use the women assigned to their units. We have been careful to incorporate both types of suggestions in this report. In concluding, we summarize some of the more important and broader implications for policy arising from our results.

The personnel in these units do perceive some differences in the availability and physical abilities of the women the units, compared to men. However, it is not clear which of these differences are perceptions due to women’s greater visibility and which would be borne out by systematic data. Better information would clear up any misperceptions and identify areas where policies might be developed to minimize differences that do occur. We heard repeatedly how double standards undermine women’s credibility and generate hostility from junior enlisted men, who believe that they are afforded the fewest privileges of anyone. Although some double standards are set
by policy, many result from practice. New policies should avoid estab-
lishing double standards for men and women in the same posi-
tions and, where possible, eliminate double standards that exist now. Another consistent message we heard was the call for a screening
toprocess that would help the military to assign personnel to heavy-la-
bor occupations and remove the need for a double standard. We do, however, acknowledge the difficulties inherent in establishing such a
screening process.

Navy personnel were highly satisfied with the practice of assigning
women leaders prior to or in concert with the junior women. Their
presence helped with transitional issues, provided a positive role
model for female behavior, and contributed overall to the discipline
on the ship. In Army and Marine units that lacked female leadership,
both junior and senior personnel found this situation undesirable, or
less preferable, to a more balanced representation of women. A pol-
cy of ensuring senior female leadership in integrated units may not
be feasible in all cases, but the experience of the units we studied
suggests that it is desirable when it is feasible.

Especially during the transition period, new norms are required
when men and women work together. The military’s sexual harass-
ment programs and policies on consensual relationships are cur-
rently being reevaluated. Our study adds to the evidence pointing to
areas needing the most focus when women enter previously re-
stricted occupations or units: clearer guidance on what constitutes
acceptable and unacceptable behavior, more emphasis on the “do’s”
than on the “don’ts” in instructing men and women about working
together, and ensuring that sexual harassment complaints are—and
are perceived to be—handled as fairly as possible.