

ALL'S FAIR IN WAR? FAIRNESS AS VIEWED FROM THE MILITARY¹

Janice H. Laurence

Director, Research and Analysis
Office of the Under Secretary of Defense
Personnel & Readiness
janice.laurence@osd.mil

Background

Fairness is a pervasive yet elusive construct. Despite the ambiguities, military personnel policies are scrutinized from such a perspective. According to a popular adage, "all's fair in war;" but what about personnel recruitment, selection, training, assignment, and career progression practices and outcomes that are used to manage the warriors? The commentary in this manuscript addresses personnel management fairness for women and minorities in uniform.

In FY 2000, the military services enlisted 178,833 new recruits and commissioned 17,548 second lieutenants (or ensigns) to "top off" the active duty strength figures at 1,153,575 enlisted members and 201,922 officers, respectively (Department of Defense, 2001). The representation levels of women and minorities among the service newcomers and total active duty force are shown in Table 1. Compared to appropriate civilian benchmarks, women are under-represented in the enlisted and officer ranks. Minorities (especially Blacks) are over-represented among enlisted personnel and, among officers, show a roughly comparable presence relative to the college-educated workforce figures.

Is the military unfair to women and more than fair to Blacks? The answer may depend upon one's vantage point: poised during peace or deployed during war. There are benefits and burdens associated with being a soldier, sailor, Marine, or airman. Employment, education, training, and career progression within the

profession of arms are among the tangible rewards. Family separation, demanding working hours, stressful conditions, and risk to life and limb are among the grave obligations.

In addition to one's status as an officer or enlisted member, job or career field assignment is an important fairness consideration. Table 2 shows the occupational group distributions of enlistees and officers by gender and race/ethnicity. Although there are distributional differences in assignment by race/ethnicity, they pale in comparison to the gender differences. Whereas men serve in military jobs characterized as the "tooth" (e.g., infantry, tactical operations, equipment repair), women serve in the "tail" (e.g., administrative and health care jobs). Assignment differences are more than an interesting tidbit of military trivia—they are an important factor for career progression! Unlike Jiminy Cricket's croon in *Pinocchio*, "when you wish upon a star," in the military, it *does* make a difference **who** and **where** you are. Men in tactical operations are promoted faster and farther than women, who tend to be excluded from tactical operations.

Barriers and Limits

Although women have made considerable progress with regard to representation in the military, full integration has not been achieved. Though to a lesser extent than for Black and Hispanic minorities, recruitment and selection measures are among the early hurdles for women.

Women are not as actively recruited as men and concomitantly their propensity to join the military substantially lags their male counterparts. Further, whereas women and men score similarly on the primary cognitive screen — the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) — they tend to score lower on science and technical tests used for job training assignment (Arabian & Welsh, 2000; Wise, Welsh, Grafton, Foley, Earles, Sawin, & Divgi,

¹ Paper presented as part of Playing Fair: Juggling Multiple Views of Fairness Symposium at the 110th American Psychological Association (APA) Convention, Chicago, Illinois; August 22, 2002. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Naval Postgraduate School, the National Defense University, the U.S. Military Services, or the Department of Defense.

1992). Given that military officers are culled from college graduates (and especially those with technical majors such as engineering), women's lower math and science test scores and relatively short supply among technical majors, puts them at a disadvantage for commissioning (Department of Defense, 1999).

Selection and assignment policy and the institutional culture, more so than the assessment instruments and process serve as barriers to participation by women. Women can and do serve aboard combat ships and fly fighter planes, but they are restricted from serving aboard submarines and in ground combat assignments.

Table 1. Gender and Race/Ethnicity Representation Within the Active Duty Military
(as of the end of Fiscal Year 2000)

Service by Attribute		Enlisted		Officer Corps	
		Accessions	Active Duty	Accessions	Active Duty
Army					
Gender	Male	79.1	84.5	79.2	84.7
	Female	20.9	15.5	20.6	15.3
Race/Ethnicity	White	61.3	55.2	74.5	79.0
	Black	23.0	29.1	12.0	11.4
	Hispanic	10.9	9.1	5.9	4.1
	Other	4.7	6.6	7.6	5.5
Navy					
Gender	Male	81.6	86.4	81.2	85.0
	Female	18.4	13.6	18.8	15.0
Race/Ethnicity	White	57.0	60.6	79.0	83.2
	Black	20.8	20.6	7.6	6.5
	Hispanic	12.0	9.9	6.0	5.5
	Other	9.3	8.8	7.3	4.8
Marine Corps					
Gender	Male	92.9	93.9	91.9	94.9
	Female	7.1	6.1	8.1	5.1
Race/Ethnicity	White	67.2	66.3	83.1	85.3
	Black	12.8	16.2	5.7	6.5
	Hispanic	14.6	13.5	6.3	5.1
	Other	5.4	4.0	4.8	3.1
Air Force					
Gender	Male	74.1	80.7	77.8	82.9
	Female	25.9	19.3	22.2	17.1
Race/Ethnicity	White	67.6	72.8	81.3	88.3
	Black	19.3	18.4	8.0	6.4
	Hispanic	7.4	5.5	1.4	2.2
	Other	5.7	3.3	9.3	3.0
Total DoD					
Gender	Male	81.2	85.3	80.4	85.0
	Female	18.8	14.7	19.6	15.0
Race/Ethnicity	White	62.5	62.5	78.6	83.8
	Black	20.0	22.4	9.0	8.1
	Hispanic	11.2	9.0	4.6	3.9
	Other	6.3	6.0	7.8	4.3
Civilian Workforce*					
Gender	Male	49.8	53.5	46.7	51.8
	Female	50.2	46.5	53.3	48.2
Race/Ethnicity	White	65.6	69.5	77.7	79.2
	Black	14.3	12.4	7.9	8.1
	Hispanic	15.0	13.1	5.4	5.2
	Other	5.1	5.0	9.0	7.5

Source: Department of Defense (2001).

* Civilian comparison groups are defined as follows: Enlisted (Accessions = 18-23 year olds; Active Force = 18-44 year old workforce) Officers (Accessions = 21-35 year old college graduates; active component = 21-49 year old college graduates in the civilian workforce)

Table 2. Gender and Race/Ethnicity Representation Within the Active Duty Military by Occupational Area
(as of the end of Fiscal Year 2000)

	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total
Occupational Area	ENLISTED						
Infantry, Gun Crews & Seamanship	18.9	5.4	18.4	12.6	18.2	15.3	16.9
Electronic Equipment Repair	10.3	6.1	11.0	7.2	8.0	7.4	9.7
Communications & Intelligence	8.8	9.2	9.7	7.7	7.3	6.4	8.8
Medical & Dental	5.2	15.3	5.8	8.1	7.5	10.5	6.7
Other Allied Specialties	3.0	3.0	3.3	2.5	2.4	2.6	3.0
Functional Support & Administration	13.1	33.5	11.9	26.4	17.8	18.0	16.1
Electronic/Mechanical Equipment Repair	21.8	7.9	21.8	14.5	18.3	20.6	19.7
Craftsmen	3.8	1.7	3.7	2.9	3.1	3.6	3.5
Service & Supply	8.2	9.6	7.1	11.9	8.5	8.7	8.4
Non-Occupational*	7.0	8.3	7.4	6.1	9.1	7.0	7.2
Occupational Area	OFFICERS						
General Officers & Executives	.5	.1	.5	.3	.1	.1	.4
Tactical Operations	41.6	9.4	38.5	24.8	33.4	28.6	36.8
Intelligence	4.9	5.9	5.1	4.8	5.3	4.7	5.0
Engineering & Maintenance	12.0	10.5	11.5	15.0	11.0	11.8	11.8
Scientists & Professionals	4.7	4.9	4.9	4.2	3.7	4.3	4.8
Health Care	14.1	43.0	18.2	19.2	14.2	27.4	18.5
Administration	5.8	12.4	6.1	11.2	12.3	7.3	6.8
Supply, Procurement, & Allied	8.6	9.1	8.0	15.1	10.1	8.5	8.7
Non-Occupational*	7.7	4.8	7.3	5.5	10.0	7.3	7.3

Source: Department of Defense (2001).

*Includes patients, students, those with unassigned duties, and unknowns

Even without formal proscriptions, there are limitations on women's participation in the armed forces. In the Navy for example, shipboard accommodations (i.e., limited bunk space and policies designed to separate the sleeping quarters and enhance privacy for male and female sailors) reduce access to the more career enhancing technical jobs at sea.

Recent policy rescinded plans to include women in the Army's Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) teams by reclassifying them as direct ground combat units. Although few women are directly affected by this specific policy, it is germane to the issue of gender fairness and symbolic in the continued debate on the role of women in the military. Although recently resolved favorably for women in uniform, the "abaya" issue, championed by Lt Col Martha McSally (USAF), also conveyed questions about the status of women. Up until a few months ago, women stationed in Saudi Arabia were required to wear Muslim abayas (head-to-toe black robes) over their uniforms when outside the confines of their military base. In addition to marginalizing (or erasing) women's presence, this practice undermined women's leadership and authority.

Performance

Although there is agreement that women are vital to sustaining force levels and maintaining readiness, resistance to women's full participation in our national defense remains. Critics of military women and their expanding roles claim that there has been an erosion of military culture. Their arguments are couched in inflammatory rhetoric. Aside from questioning their physical and emotional fitness, women are feared to undercut cohesion and commitment and compromise good order and discipline. In other words, women are weaker than men in terms of upper body strength. What's more, they disrupt male bonding and distract men with their sexual wiles. In addition to limiting women's participation in the military (to include assignment restrictions), there has been vocal opposition to gender-integrated basic training. Equal opportunity and fairness for women are vilified as pandering to social experimentation and political correctness.

Are there bona fide occupational qualifications that override gender inequities? This line of inquiry has escaped honest inquiry. Brains and brawn still have face validity, but surely with an environment as complex as the military, a full spectrum of expertise is

required. Performance in any setting, and perhaps especially in the military, has many elements. These elements can be organized into such categories as: a) knowledge; b) skills; and c) motivation (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993). All too often, one performance component—physical strength—is singled out and discussed as if it were the only determinant. Admittedly, the average man has greater upper body strength than the average woman. However, upper body strength is not the only physical facet let alone the only skill that determines performance—physical or otherwise. Different absolute measures (e.g., running speed and distance) applied to men and women may equate to equal fitness levels. In addition to other human resource dimensions (e.g., social and emotional intelligence; language skills; multitasking; etc.) that add to the medley of performance, leveraging technology (including “human factors” designs for women) should also continue to be considered as a compensatory and enhancing performance partner.

Retention of women is lower than the rates for men. But instead of responding to this fact with alarm and a call to corrective action (as would accompany a similar retention downward spiral among men), women are marginalized further and the vicious cycle in retention patterns continues. It is time to attend to the underlying issues such as quality of life, family exigencies, training, assignment, mentoring, organizational climate, fair treatment, attitudes, expectations, and career progression. Furthermore, although pregnancy renders one non-deployable, so too do other gender-neutral factors, such as physical injuries (Congressional Commission, 1999). Military women are somewhat less likely to get pregnant than their same-age civilian counterparts. Although disruptive, pregnancy is not a rampant, common, or typical deployment “show stopper.”

What about cohesion? After all, organizational effectiveness depends on more than task performance. Morale is important and can be affected—in a positive or negative manner—by change. Gender-integration is one such “change” that can affect cohesion. Research has demonstrated that women’s performance and attitudes are enhanced in integrated training settings (Mottern, Foster, Brady, & Marshall-Mies, 1997). Men’s performance is not adversely affected by the presence of women in units. Furthermore,

research shows that good leadership mitigates negative morale reactions by men to the co-assignment of women (Harrell & Miller, 1999). Gender integration facilitates teamwork and cohesion, and reduces isolation and marginalization (Army Research Institute, 1977; Harrell & Miller, 1999). It is also notable that the Air Force—the most gender-integrated Service—has the lowest incidence of gender-related misconduct (Mason, Kavee, Wheeless, George, Riemer, & Elig, 1996). Data suggest that not only the equal opportunity climate but overall organizational effectiveness are more favorable in units with higher levels of gender integration. (Dansby, Laurence, & Wetzel, 1999).

Parts of the military culture have changed. Drunkenness, debauchery, disrespect, and discreditable deeds are no longer condoned—and this is for the better. Certainly, the increased presence of women increases the complexity of personnel management or, at least, alters the organizational environment. There is a need for cultural shift regardless of the number and roles of women in uniform. Such adaptation does not mean a complete overhaul of tradition and should not be lamented.

The problem is *not* women. Shrinking budgets and expanding commitments exact a toll on military resources—including human resources. But the solution includes preparing Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen to act as a cohesive team when they operate and maintain lethal, and often unforgiving, weapon systems.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

Why be concerned about the military’s sticky floors and glass ceilings? Wouldn’t fairness actually be detrimental and expose women to greater risk of being casualties or prisoners-of-war (POWs)? Full participation in the profession of arms promotes full participation in American society. This principle has served as a powerful argument for honoring the civil rights of minorities. The content and character of military service continue to operate as a litmus test for public office. A military pedigree opens the potential to be seated at the “head table.”

Aside from political ambitions, the noble goals of “duty, honor, country” hold for women too. Our countrywomen have fought and died in every war since the Revolution. Contemporary history records that women

were held as POWs and died in Desert Storm, alongside their male counterparts. As a consequence of the October 12, 2000 attack on the USS Cole, while in a Yemen port, male and female sailors died. For her leadership in forestalling electrical fires, the Cole's chief engineer, LCDR Deborah Courtney received the Meritorious Service Medal. Women are among the casualties of the War on Terrorism. They died on September 11, 2001 in the World Trade Towers, at the Pentagon, and in a field in Pennsylvania. Female enlisted members and officers alike are among the fallen heroes in and around Afghanistan.

Uncle Sam Needs You—Military Psychologists

War may never be completely fair, but we must wrestle further with the place of women in the military. As the harbingers of human development and performance, psychologists can make significant contributions to military personnel policy and practice. Through systematic study of job demands (e.g., the relative contributions of cognitive skills, psychomotor skills, self-management skills, and interpersonal skills) optimal assessment and team assignments can be achieved. Organizational (and leader) development efforts could work to remove constraints on performance and enhance cohesion, commitment, and effectiveness. Flexible yet practical personnel policies that deal with institutional and individual exigencies should be devised. With the burgeoning international and homeland security needs, the military can ill afford to turn away or waste the talents of any segment of its citizenry—least of all the half of the manpower pool that are women.

Women and minorities are present and accounted for in the military, but full-integration has not yet been realized. Certainly, all is not fair in war, but we must strive to fully develop, employ, and deploy our nation's human resources—in the interest of life, liberty, and the pursuit of all who threaten it.

References

- Arabian, J.M., & Welsh, J.R. (2000). Impact of Science and Technical Tests on Job Classification in the U.S. Military. Paper presented at the International Military Testing Association
- Army Research Institute. (1977). *Women content in units force development test (MAXWAC)*. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.
- Campbell, J.P., McCloy, R.A., Oppler, S.H., & Sager, C.E. (1993). "A Theory of Performance," in N. Schmidt & W.C., Borman (Eds.). *Personnel selection in organizations*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, pp.35-70.
- Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues. (1999). *Final report: Findings and recommendations* (Volume I). Arlington, VA: Author.
- Dansby, M., Laurence, J.H., & Wetzel, E. (1999). Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS): Overview of results related to the CMTGRI. In Congressional Commission on Military Training and Gender-Related Issues, *Final report: Research projects, reports, and studies* (Volume IV, pp. 689-723). Arlington, VA: Author.
- Department of Defense. (2001). *Population representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2000*. Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy).
- Department of Defense. (1999). *Career progression of minority and women officers*. Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness).
- Harrell, M.C., & Miller, L.L. (1999). *New opportunities for military women: Effects upon readiness, cohesion, and morale*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Mason, R., Kavee, J., Wheelless, S., George, B., Riemer, R., & Elig, T. (1996). *The 1995 Armed Forces sexual harassment survey: Statistical methodology report* (DMDC Report No. 96-016). Arlington, VA: Defense Manpower Data Center.
- Mottern, J., Foster, D., Brady, E., & Marshall-Mies, J. (1997). *The 1995 gender integration basic combat training study* (Study Report 97-01). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.
- Wise, L., Welsh, J. R., Grafton, F., Foley, P., Earles, J., Sawin, L., & Divgi, D. R. (1992). *Sensitivity and fairness of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) technical composites* (DMDC TR 92-002). Monterey, CA: Defense Manpower Data Center.