

# **Women's Gendered Work Experiences in a Hyper-Masculine Organization: Differences Between Cohorts**

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**ABSTRACT:** In 1973 the Department of Defense (DoD) switched to an all-volunteer force (AVF), opening many opportunities for women. Prior to this, women were an inconvenience that the military was forced to deal with, utilized out of necessity but legislated out of the ranks when possible (DePauw 1981; Lazar 2006). This disdain transferred to feelings concerning military families, something the military did not want to focus on (Lazar 2016; Miller 1997; Murdoch et al. 2006). However, a change to AVF projected shortfalls in manpower that necessitated incorporating women more fully. Over the next few decades, women's service continued to grow, as did their options (Crowley and Sandoff 2017; King 2015). In 2015, Secretary of Defense Carter set a January 1, 2016 deadline for the services to comply with his order to open all combat positions to women (Crowley and Sandoff 2017; King 2015). Today women serve fully in the military. Even as the military draws down the number of troops, women's participation stays constant, with some branches experiencing increases in the numbers of women serving. Nonetheless, the military remains predominately masculine in both its membership and culture (Crowley and Sandoff 2017). The military and family are competing institutions and, as such, women confront contradictory expectations of the roles they play (Segal 1986). These roles elicit competing devotions which demand complete dedication. While this phenomenon is not unique to military personnel, the intensity and complexity of the demands consume the lives of female service members more than many other workers.

**KEYWORDS:** women, military, mothering, equal opportunity

## **Gender in the Military**

### ***Gender Theory***

Gender theory aids in the analysis of women's experiences in a highly-masculinized culture because it examines the processes involved in the institutional reproduction of gender roles (Archer 2012). The reproduction of gender occurs in social institutions such as the family and economy. These institutions define what is appropriate behavior for men and women in terms of role identity and expectations (Archer 2012; Potucheck 1992). The hyper-masculine institution of the military reproduces gender roles and behaviors in its members through the expectations of normative behavior. These particular gender roles fortify the boundaries between work and family; when there are conflicting demands, work tends to win out for both men and women (Baker 2012). The military emphasizes the traditional model of the breadwinner-homemaker family, increasing the dynamic of separate spheres (Harrell 2001). With this traditional family ethos and strong reinforcement of separate spheres, the military makes it more difficult for women to negotiate WFC than non-military work environments. Coupled with societal expectations of women as primary caregivers, women are bound by two unforgiving institutions and forced to make compromises. With social expectations that mothers nurture, and fathers

provide, navigating the traditionally male military can be problematic for women (Furia 2009). Complicate this by a historical stance that families are unnecessary to military functioning, then multiply by it by the cultural demands for intensive mothering, and women in the military are in an impossible position it seems (Vealey 2016).

### ***Hegemonic Masculinity***

In highly masculinized work environments, the dominant cult belief is that masculinity is a sign of good character and signifies strong work commitment (Hennessy 2009). Women face insubordination and scrutiny when in positions of authority (Lunyolo 2017; Miller 1997). For example, Archer (2012) found female cadets were consistently rated lower on the following: influencing others, personal ethics, supervising, planning and organizing and developing subordinates. Negative feelings toward females in masculine work spaces are structural and assume women are emotional and unprofessional (Lunyolo 2017).

Whether using an equal opportunity, gender neutral, or equivalency approach, militaries struggle to integrate women. Where once all modern militaries prohibited women from combat, today many countries espouse equal opportunity for women (Brownson 2016; Heineken 2017; King 2016). South Africa, for instance, has a long history of women in combat and bolsters its equal opportunity stance with affirmative action and gender-neutral job requirements. The United States lifted the ban on women in certain jobs in the military in 2013, setting a full implementation date of January 2016 (Roulo 2013). The U.S. still maintains two standards for physical fitness, though job requirements now have gender neutral standards (Woods et al. 2017). Some argue that gender-neutral standards penalize women because of their natural physical differences compared to men (Brownson 2016; Heineken 2017; King 2016). This is where the equivalency approach comes in. Equivalency is meant to honor diversity and differing abilities. Diversity management fosters equitable treatment of women, but it ignores the underlying patriarchal power structure of the military and inherent differences in abilities (King 2016; Woodward and Winter 2006). There is no military femininity, and this shift to diversity management, with its accompanying language, pushes to make all differences equivalent, which works to depoliticize gender in the military. Furthermore, women's full integration into the military is not complete, as evidenced by ever-changing regulations regarding women's grooming (Furia 2010). But grooming is not the only part of a woman's body the military regulates. There are strict standards for pregnancy in the military involving everything from dress to exercise to hygiene (Gomperts and Grossman 2011; Holt et al. 2011; Jacobson and Jensen 2011).

Prior to 2012, women in the US military could not be assigned to combat units, although they were attached to those units as support (Crowley and Sandoff 2016). Combat, as the most masculine space in the military, is the antithesis to the socially constructed definition of feminine, that of weak, soft and caring (Crowley and Sandoff 2016; Mankayic 2006; Woodward 2000). Additionally, the military applies a binary logic to women, seeing them as sex objects but problematizing them being sexual. There is a double standard when sexual activity is considered in the military: men get lonely whereas women are either whores or use sex to get ahead (Mankayic 2006; Woodward 2000).

Koeszegi et al. (2014) describes the military as a war against women, where misogynistic jokes, denigrating glances and sexual harassment flourish in an effort to exclude (Heineken 2017). Women who do not comply with hegemonic masculinity suffer derogatory labeling (Heineken 2017; Koeszegi et al. 2014). Weitz (2015) argues that the military is a masculinist institution, rejecting any signs of weakness, read as "femininity." The military prizes strength, aggression, competitiveness, heavy drinking, risk taking, and the denigration and objectification of women (Heineken 2017; Koeszegi et al. 2014; Weitz 2015). King (2016) furthers this with the utilization of the slut-bitch binary.

## **Privileging Male Jobs**

In the civilian world, women who become mothers may have options to reduce work hours, move to less demanding work or leave the job temporarily. These options are not available to military women (Harris 2009; Sinclair 2004). Because the military requires unwavering commitment, women with families feel pulled in disparate directions, with career and social mothering incongruent (Blair-Loy 2003). Women in the military experience more conflict than men in the two loyalties of work and family because, while work requirements are equal for men and women, families demand more of mothers and societal expectation are that mothers fulfill these demands (Harris 2009; Sinclair 2004).

Williams (2001) defined the ideal worker as unencumbered and committed to long arduous hours of work, with no outside limitations. As men and women make the choice to have children while pursuing a career, they face different repercussions for their choices. When becoming a father, men gain in the appearance of warmth while keeping the perception of competence. Women who become mothers gain in perceptions of warmth but lose in perceptions of competence (Harris 2009; Stevens et al. 2007). Further, the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers is greater than the wage gap between men and women, with women facing a penalty of 5% per child in wages (Bernard and Correll 2015; Correll et al., 2007; Waldfogel 1997, 1998). When a woman becomes pregnant, her employers perceive her work commitment as secondary (Halpert, et al. 1993; Harris 2009).

Women who are mothers are seen as less capable workers, though men are not (Bernard and Correll 2015; Correll, et al., 2007; Harris 2009; Hodges and Budig 2010). In their study, Correll et al. (2007) found employers perceived mothers as less competent and committed, deserving of less salary and leniency, as well as less upwardly mobile. Fathers, conversely, were perceived as more competent, committed, deserving of larger salaries and leniency, and more upwardly mobile. Aisenbrey et. al (2009) support these findings and add to them in a cross-national study that found mothers in the United States suffered greater penalties for taking time out for children than women in Germany and Sweden. Additionally, sex segregation at work creates pay gaps where women in more traditional jobs receive lower wages than those in male jobs (Kennelly 2007; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Moreover, in masculine work spaces, men use labeling, such as “easy” or “dyke,” in order to exert control over women (Wright 2016). And rather than rejecting labeling, women scrutinize each other under these labels, preferring to work with men.

## **Hostile Work Environments**

### ***Othering Women***

What women say about other women tells a lot, as “talk is action” (Ezzell 2009; Kleinman 2007). In “othering,” the other is dehumanized, and this action reinforces gender inequalities (Kleinman 2007). For women, being one of the guys in a male-dominated work environment is important (Hayes 2009), as the woman worker may feel a “raise in stature” (Ezzell 2009; Kleinman 2007). At the same time, she may be erasing females’ characteristics. The phenomena of becoming one of the guys may involve cussing more or making disparaging comments about other women in an effort to distance the female worker from women in general. This “othering” of women is divisive (Burns 1999; Ezzell 2009) and feeds into the competition between women. In particular, the rhetoric on sexual infidelity works to implicate the woman as predator and men as responding normally to a highly sexualized trope (Burns 1999; Ezzell 2009). The discourse that the “other woman” is bad is simply an excuse for male infidelity and alienates women from each other.

**Bullying, Harassment and Horizontal Violence (BHHV)**

This “othering” of women is reflective of power and the way women use discourse to wield this power (Ezzell 2009; Kleinman 2007). Women experience horizontal violence, in the wielding of power laterally by other women which works to reproduce female inequality to male counterparts (Mougey 2004). While a woman is succeeding in her career, she garners the envy of other women and feels threatened by them rather than exercising collective action and empowerment (Beckwith 1999; Cech and Blair Loy 2010). Successful women see those who do not succeed as deficient. Power between women functions within the structure of gendered power, and power is associated with masculinity. Women’s collusion against “others” fortifies her oppression (Beckwith 1999; Ezzell 2009).

The military is a ripe environment for bullying, with the potential for abuse of authority, high levels of group cohesion, denigration of those who do not comply and institutionalized aggression (Koeszegi et al., 2016). The most studied field for horizontal violence is nursing. Research shows that bullying, harassment and horizontal violence (BHHV) are “oppressed group behavior evolving from feelings of low self-esteem and lack of respect from others” (Becher and Visovsky 2012; Namie and Lutgen-Sandvick 2010). There are active and passive accomplices in BHHV as there are coworkers and supervisors that may bear witness, participate or reinforce these behaviors. While globally it is estimated that nurses experience some form of BHHV at a rate of 17-76%, in the United States approximately 46% of those in the health care field experience it and over half have witnessed it (Becher and Visovsky 2012; Namie and Lutgen-Sandvick 2010).

BHHV is so widespread that the Bullying advice line in the UK receives 2000-3000 calls daily (Kumar et al. 2012). Twenty percent are teachers, 12% healthcare providers and 10% social services, with 90% of those reporting serial bullying (Kumar et al. 2012). Three-quarters of callers are women and half of those causing the harm are women. Normally BHHV takes the form of psychological or emotional harassment, although sometimes it manifests in physical aggression. Generally, BHHV consists of humiliating, alienating, unwarranted criticizing and gossiping (Becher and Visovsky 2012; Crothers et al. 2009; Curtis et al. 2007; Longo and Sherman 2007; MacIntosh et al. 2010; McKenna et al. 2002, Namie and Lutgen-Sandvick 2010; Taylor 2016).

***Cohorts***

Blair-Loy (2003) stated that much of the research on WFC focuses on individual choices and does not acknowledge that social institutions and cultural definitions may structure options. She further argues that research has focused on work and family demands as being external to the actor. There is a “deep seated, taken for granted powerfully compelling cultural schema that shapes constraints and people’s interpretations of them” (Blair-Loy 2003). Cultural schemas become institutionalized and internalized. Schemas of devotion give one orientation in the allegiance of time, energy and passion, connecting one to something outside of themselves. WFC becomes larger than the individual making cost-benefit decisions. The schemas dictate a moral definition of what is a good mother or a good worker. And while we have seen an increase in family-friendly workplace policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the military lags behind the civilian sector on such policies, only realizing their importance in 2006 with declining enlistments and retentions (Petite 2008).

Devotion schemas demand complete dedication, and the ideal worker is an unencumbered, fully committed man (Blair-Loy 2003; Williams 2001). This leads to conflict between work and family. In Blair-Loy’s (2003) research, she found a distinct difference between cohorts, with the younger cohort having more “successfully transposed the egalitarian schema from the workplace onto their families’ definitions of marriage and motherhood” (Blair-Loy 2003; Cotter et al. 2011). The two schemas, work and family, are

seen as callings, becoming one's life essence. The professionals in the study strove to justify their worth as a mother while acknowledging regret over lack of time with their children. Additionally, younger cohorts demonstrate more labor market attachment than older ones (Landivar 2015; Percheski 2008), with older cohort workers gravitating to more traditional work roles. Younger cohorts supply more labor earlier, tend to delay childbearing and pay a smaller motherhood penalty than their older counterparts (Pavalko and Wolfe 2016; Park 2016; Percheski 2008)

Carr (2002) found older cohorts made greater tradeoffs in negotiating competing demands of work and family, experience more WFC and less life balance. While the older cohort may see more extreme WFC, Cotter et al. (2011) argue that each subsequent cohort experiences increased pressure to intensively mother, experiencing more fatigue from the mother role (Nilsson 2016). This leads to younger cohorts seeking more flexibility in work as well as changing work values (Twenge et al. 2010). Older cohorts place more intrinsic value on their careers while younger place more extrinsic value, leading to differing levels of sacrifice (Carr 2002). This supports Bianchi and Milkie's (2010) findings that younger cohorts of professional women report lower levels of WFC than older, perhaps due to the younger cohorts' willingness to outsource domestic labor.

The concept of intensive mothering compounds the reproduction of gender in the military and family for women who serve (Arsenault 2018; Hays 1996). Intensive mothering is a socially appropriate model of caregiving, which entails investing immense amounts of time, energy and money to nurture one's child. This does not hold for men. Complicating societal expectations of intensive mothering, women serving in the military find further constraints to parenting due to long work hours and tours away from home.

Nomaguchi (2009), in examining changes in WFC over time, found several factors that increase WFC. Overall, from 1977-1997, parents felt more WFC while spending the same amount of time on childcare. She also found that increases in work hours, as well as educational attainment, increase WFC. However, older workers reported less WFC than younger. Further adding to the stress, economic restructuring has resulted in longer work weeks and decreased real wages (Stevens et al. 2007). The breadwinner-homemaker family has given way to the dual-earner, finding more spouses juggling the demands of work and family.

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