

Women in the Non-Traditional Workforce: Beyond Confidence, Competency & Connections¹

The increasing push for a diversified workforce within both private and public institutions is recognized as a function of both need and benefit. In a 2013 interview on National Public Radio, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey stated that he foresees “a military that has to adapt to a changing world, [and] not just a socially changing world but literally a demographically changing world.” He went on to consider how those changes would affect military recruitment, saying, “we’re going to need to attract as much diversity and as much talent as we can possibly attract.”² Just before leaving his position as Chairman, he reiterated in a speech at Fort Hood that, “diversity is our greatest strength.”³ Diversity, it must be emphasized, is not something done for equity purposes; it is done to strengthen an organization.

Attracting, hiring, retaining and advancing women in non-traditional fields such as the military, here focusing on officers, will require concerted action on the part of the organization, especially in helping women to build internal support systems. But women must also do their part to prepare for the challenges they will inherently face. Competence, long considered by women as the key to breaking into non-traditional fields, is not enough. Confidence, being able to accept criticism, tenacity, learning to build internal networks, and mentoring come into play in hiring, retention and advancement as well.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Consequently, women interested in non-traditional career fields must understand the nature of the issues they will encounter so they may better be prepared to deal with and effectively address those issues. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to raise awareness among men and women regarding the obstacles women face in breaking into non-traditional fields, by synthesizing what studies have shown regarding the applicability of factors men traditionally rely on for hiring, retention and advancement – confidence, competency and connections -- to women. Issues regarding hiring, retention and advancement for women in non-traditional fields such as but not limited to the military, appear strongly related to Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) theory, including the “blind fish” phenomenon of individuals not recognizing sexism or their involvement in perpetuating sexism. While this paper is not an empirical study, relevant empirical studies are cited in support of assertions presented.

Additionally, suggestions are offered regarding furthering the diversity General Dempsey clearly indicates as an institutional goal of the military. In that regard, it appears women having a background that directly prepares them for competitive environments may have an advantage in retention and advancement. Further, an institutionally supported approach to mentoring could help create internal support systems which, when lacking, have been shown as strongly related to low retention issues.

Considering the broader group of women in non-traditional fields (those where women make up less than 25% of the workforce)⁴ rather than only women military officers was taken due to the commonality of gender-related career obstacles when career fields are numerically dominated by one gender, and there are far more empirical studies that span non-traditional fields. The organizational cultures of organizations employing women in non-traditional roles

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

are the focus, rather than specific process issues related to the military personnel systems.

Further, women military officers in, for example, the nursing profession would likely not encounter the same gender-competitive retention and promotion issues as their female pilot counterparts. The first women promoted to flag rank in both the Army and the Navy commanded the Nurse Corps.

Clearly, there are “good news” stories of women who have “made it” through the hiring, retention and advancement gauntlet. Michelle Howard, for example, was named the Navy’s first woman four-star admiral in 2014. In fact, she was the first African-American woman to achieve both three- and four-star rank in the U.S. Armed Forces as well as being the first woman and African-American woman to achieve the rank of admiral in the Navy, through an exemplary operational record as a surface warfare officer. While her promotion was a significant event for the Navy, the military, and for women, Howard herself said in 2012, “There were individuals who didn't want me there or wanted to undermine what I was trying to do.”⁵ A *Navy Times* article chronicled the prejudice, resistance and resentment she encountered “from her Induction Day in 1978,” and continued as a flag officer. This kind of resistance can hinder women’s ability to do their jobs as it connects to the Navy and the nation, and therefore requires it be recognized and addressed.

The resentment suffered by Admiral Howard came to light in 2013 after a Navy report cited one of her peers, Rear. Adm. Chuck Gaouette, for telling others that Howard “may not have had to cross as many hurdles in the same fashion to get where she was at,” and her race and gender may have sped up her selection for vice admiral, according to a Navy investigation.⁶ Gaouette, who was fired from command of the John C. Stennis Carrier Strike Group mid-

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

deployment in 2012, admitted his comments were “petty” and said he’d apologize to Howard.⁷

Gaouette’s comments, however, demonstrates that challenges to inclusive diversity remains a problem for women in non-traditional fields, such as many of those in the military.

INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY

Organizations, including the military, are making efforts to support diversification. The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) was established in 1951 to advise the Pentagon on laws and policies as related to women in the military. Although it was significantly reduced in size, activity and consequently effect in 2000,⁸ there have been recent efforts to revitalize it, including the naming of retired Lt. General Francis Wilson, USMC as the new Chair in 2014.⁹ The Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) was established in 1971, initially to deal with issues related to race relations, and now expanded to generally institutionalize equal opportunity in the military.¹⁰ DEOMI conducts courses on equal opportunity, diversity and positive human relations, and has graduated over 43,000 students from all services, from bases all over the world. They return to their units as advisors and trainers.¹¹ In many instances, however, DEOMI focuses on processes, rather than organizational culture issues. A new process to report hostile work environment issues will not be used though, if minorities do not trust organizational leadership to support them.

The former Women Officers Professional Association (WOPA) is now the Sea Services Leadership Association (SSLA) and holds annual conferences that bring women together toward promoting camaraderie and mentorship at both the national and regional levels,¹² hopefully to spill-over into support for those more isolated at local levels. The Navy supports SSLA by announcing events in all Navy messages as well as allowing travel funding by individual

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

commands. These organizations and efforts exemplify positive steps forward, but not enough.

The benefits of diversity, including innovation, expanded problem-solving techniques and capabilities, and strategic perspectives are documented.¹³ Research has also shown, however, that visible signs of diversity, such as race, gender and age, can initially have negative effects on teamwork because it cues an increased likelihood for differences of opinion within the team. With time, however, even that cueing can enhance the team's ability to handle conflict, because members expect it and therefore handle it better when it surfaces.¹⁴ So what initially “feels good” for the group may not be what is best for the group in the long term, and what “feels bad” can actually increase group effectiveness. Consequently, current organizational research focuses on “how” rather than “if” diversity should be an organizational goal. A key point repeatedly raised regarding effective diversification of the workforce is that diversity is useless without inclusivity.¹⁵ Harvard University simply defines an inclusive culture as one “that accepts, values and views as strength the difference we all bring to the table.”¹⁶ In other words, inclusive diversity is more than statistics, and more than toleration.¹⁷ Inclusive diversity means that an individual can voice an opinion without fearing damage to their career and that their input is valued rather than dismissed. That truth has been the subject of a number of earlier works.¹⁸

“Body counting” alone as an indicator of diversity fails to consider the context of social relations, subjectivities, experiences and processes by which inclusivity occurs. Focusing on numbers fails to consider that an established, sometimes hostile culture remains in place after women are hired; largely invisible, subjective and unchallenged due to its embedded nature. The presence of women, even in the upper layers of institutions, though encouraging, cannot

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

not be taken as a clear indicator that organizational cultures and structures are significantly changing, as changes to organizational culture are among the hardest changes to make.

The Naval War College senior leadership course includes a case study on former IBM CEO Lou Gerstner that specifically focuses on the importance of and challenges to changing organization culture.¹⁹ Culture change does not occur without management making it a clear and observable priority. It is not something that will change after an organizationally mandated meeting featuring a PowerPoint presentation defining sexism and saying it is bad, a nominal method for an organization to demonstrate responsiveness to an issue.²⁰ While process can be an important part of culture change it is not enough, especially in a hierarchical organization.

Army Colonel Diane Ryan wrote her 2008 doctoral dissertation on measuring gender attitudes and egalitarianism among U.S. Army personnel.²¹ The effect of Social Dominance Orientation, referring to the general tendency of people to form and maintain group hierarchies in the interest of upholding the status quo, was a key consideration. Further, the effect of SDO was considered in that empirical study, drawing from the 2004 work of Dambrun, Duarte and Guimond,²² suggesting that the reason men impose social dominance is because they belong to a higher status group. Ryan explains.²³

[Social Dominance Orientation] is defined as a general individual-difference variable expressing anti-egalitarianism, a view of human existence as zero-sum and relentless competition between groups, the desire for generalized hierarchical relationships between social groups and in-group dominance over out-groups.²⁴ SDO is thought to generate and sustain legitimizing myths that

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

provide the justification for maintaining in-group dominance (e.g. women are not as intelligent as men).²⁵

SDO provides the rationale necessary to legitimize otherwise unacceptable personal behavior, specifically sexism.

While there are many different definitions of sexism, here it refers to prejudice or discrimination (often small, called microaggressions²⁶) based on sex, and behavior, conditions and attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles and, as such, prejudice and discrimination. On an accumulated, and (even tacitly) tolerated basis, these attitudes and behavior can constitute the invisible, unspoken institutional sexism referenced prior, supplementing rule- and structurally-based institutional sexism. Rule- and structurally-based institutional sexism includes policies to “protect” women from jobs and activities deemed appropriate only for men, and are broken down through step-by-step processes of integration where women “prove” that they can “do” particular jobs, such as women as fire fighters and women in combat roles.²⁷

As Brigadier General (ret) Wilma Vaught stated in her Keynote address at the 2016 International Society for Military Ethics (ISME) conference in Annapolis, Maryland, changes for women in the military have occurred through legislation, which she chronicled in her address, and lawsuits. In other words, change has not come easily. Lawsuits, however, can be difficult and intimidating for minorities to pursue since they are most often responsible for paying their own legal fees, against a battery of government lawyers that are on constant stand-by, paid for by taxpayers.²⁸ The government can often prevail simply by outlasting the individual’s available funds.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Dambrun, Duarte and Guimond's research further suggested that maintaining the status quo allowed men to maintain their group status as well as a positive social identity.²⁹ Ryan went on to consider, therefore, whether certain organizations, such as the military, "may foster hierarchy enhancing or attenuating ideologies."³⁰ Ryan's results supported previous work that suggested men in male-dominated career environments may feel compelled to 'hunker down' in the interest of preserving their privilege in the last bastion of male superiority, and that men generally agreed gender should be an asset to their careers.³¹

Issues in gathering and drawing conclusions from attitudinal statistics within a gender-dominated organization should be noted as well. In an organization of 400 individuals, for example, only 25 might be women. If a survey question is asked regarding whether the organization condones sexism, and all 25 women answered "yes," how the statistics are interpreted makes a big difference. If what percentage of women see sexism as a problem is considered, the answer is 100%. If, however, what percentage of the overall population considers sexism is a problem, the answer is 6.25% and that figure might not be considered statistically significant. Consequently, in Command Climate Surveys taken in military commands or Equal Employment Opportunity surveys, for example, it can be statistically concluded there is no organizational problem with sexism, even when all or near all the women feel there is a problem. In addition to this statistical interpretation issue, women can be reluctant to even participate in institutional surveys where demographic information that could identify them is required, for fear of being identified and categorized as "a problem" if they express negative views, evidencing that issues are often ones of trust, not process. These statistics can

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

perpetuate misperceptions of sexism as an institutional issue. In her dissertation, Diane Ryan considers differences in perceptions regarding whether or not sexism exists as well.

Regarding egalitarianism as an indicator of inclusivity, Ryan cites Gordon Allport's 1979 book *On the Nature of Prejudice*, which failed to consider sexism as a form of prejudice, and the later work of Laurie Rudman that likens Allport to "the proverbial fish – blind to the water he swims in."³² In other words, Allport failed to recognize all of the key features of his own environment. This non-recognition perpetuates sexism, if only through benign neglect. Ryan suggests sexism is a form of prejudice that may be considered more acceptable than others, attributable to Social Dominance Orientation. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's June 2015 comment to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina complimenting her on her strong stance against terrorism, "despite being a woman,"³³ and British Nobel laureate Tim Hunt's comments about women scientists being a distracting presence in laboratories and their tendency to cry³⁴ are examples of likely unintended "blind fish" sexist remarks. Hence the importance of raising awareness, especially among men, of the challenges faced by women in non-traditional careers.

BREAKING THE GLASS (OR BRASS) CEILING

Women have entered non-traditional career fields, including fire fighters, surgeons, business executives, military officers³⁵ and Supreme Court justices. In 2013 the Pentagon opened certain combat positions in aviation and surface warfare occupations to female service members. Then in December 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that all U.S. military positions would be open to women, though over the objections of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine General Joseph Dunford.³⁶ The Air Force Thunderbirds precision flying team has including female F-16 pilots since 2005. These are all good news stories.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

The Navy included a female member on its Blue Angels team for the first time in 2015, Marine Capt. Katie Higgins, piloting the team's C-130 "Fat Albert" transport plane. Her appointment came the year after the Blue Angels got an institutional black eye when a former commander was found guilty of allowing "obvious and repeated instances of sexual harassment" and "condoning widespread lewd practices."³⁷ Blue Angels commander Capt. Tom Frosch, however, says Higgins appointment had nothing to do with the 2014 incident, and that he "doesn't believe" there are institutional challenges to accepting a female to their ranks. To skeptics who suggest that her inclusion was related to last year's Blue Angels debacle rather than merit, Capt. Higgins says: "Well, honestly, I would tell'em to watch the demo. They can't tell the difference between mine and the other two pilots on here because I fly it as well as they do."³⁸ With over 1000 hours flying time, including over 400 combat hours,³⁹ Capt. Higgins shouldn't have to defend her flying skills. Studies have shown, however, that if skeptics could identify Capt. Higgins on the demo tapes, they might have a predisposition to favoring males.

While women have their foot-in-the door in non-traditional fields, bias still exists.⁴⁰ A double-blind 2012 study evidenced that among applicants randomly assigned a male or female name for an academic laboratory manager's position, the resumes of those with male names were considered more highly qualified and hireable by faculty reviewers.⁴¹ Similarly, a 2014 study found both men and women were more likely to hire a man for a job that required math.⁴² The findings of that study were challenged, and those challenges were challenged,⁴³ perhaps evidencing the sensitivity of subject. In 2015, a peer-reviewer suggested a rejected study on post-doctoral job opportunities by evolutionary biologist Fiona Ingleby at the University of Sussex could be improved by adding a male co-author. Doing so, the reviewer

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

stated, would “serve as a possible check against interpretations that may sometimes be drifting too far away from empirical evidence into ideologically biased assumptions.”⁴⁴ Patronizing comments are themselves a subtle (or not so subtle) expression of bias. And bias is not limited to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, which demonstrates the commonality of challenges faced in non-traditional fields.

While Ellen Pao recently lost her high-profile case against her former venture capital firm, *The Economist* reported⁴⁵ that although Silicon Valley likes to think of itself as perhaps the ultimate meritocracy - more than half of its firms are founded by immigrants - the spirit of meritocracy diminishes when it comes to gender. Although Silicon Valley boasts its share of high-profile women, about half of America’s publicly traded technology companies have all-male boards. In the area of software and computing, women’s share of jobs actually fell from 34% in 1990 to 27% in 2011.⁴⁶ The proportion of female partners in American venture capital firms also declined from 10% in 1999 to 6% in 2014. A 2010 study found that only 9.4% of corporate board directors were women.⁴⁷ A 2014 survey by *Fortune* magazine⁴⁸ found only 4.2% of the partners of the 92 most successful venture capital firms are female.

A 2014 article in *Joint Forces Quarterly*⁴⁹ (*JFQ*) pointed out the value of diverse perspectives in teaching, often stimulated by demographic diversity, and the lack of gender diversity prevalent in senior-level Professional Military Education (PME). Self-imposed structural requirements bias hires toward the same kind of older, white male faculty members already dominating PME faculty.

PME faculty positions are argued to require academic “generalists” rather than “specialists,” with women purportedly tending toward specializations.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Consequently, it is reasoned, few qualified women applied for or were assigned teaching positions. In reality few male applicants are generalists either, but they expand their expertise on the job. However, it certainly is the case that the number of female teaching faculty applicants has been lower than men. And even when qualified women do apply, there are still multiple hurdles to overcome.

The “best athlete” approach to hiring is often used in both the public and private sectors. In PME, best athlete candidates are considered to be those possessing a broad range of educational attributes and professional experience in the military or the security field. Far fewer minority candidates are statistically likely to possess this combination of attributes, thereby potentially disadvantaging or eliminating many otherwise highly qualified individuals.⁵⁰

In fields like education, where diversity of perspectives is important to teaching critical thinking, the effectiveness of the organization becomes undermined when inclusive diversity is not an organizational priority.

ADVANCEMENT AND RETENTION

At the very least, studies therefore show that equal consideration of qualified women cannot be assumed. Further, once hired, advancement and retention in non-traditional fields are challenges. While competency remains an entrance prerequisite, and women often assume as the key to success, its value in advancement is now questioned. Networking and mentoring, tried and true advancement approaches for men, often fail women as well.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Women must then ask themselves what it takes to be accepted into traditionally male-dominated career fields and to rise in the leadership ranks, given the sometimes tacit resistance to hiring and an at best “blind fish” and at times openly hostile work environment that continues. Assumed answers, largely based on accepted approaches regarding what it has taken men to succeed, group into three general categories: confidence, competence and networking. Yet the role of each of these for women in non-traditional fields has recently come into question, which then leaves women wondering what they are to do both to get in the door and be accepted? As one female Naval officer, a pilot, lamented (after being assured of anonymity) to the author, “I find it best to just show you can get along with the boys.”

Be Confident, But Not Too Confident. Women, including women in top leadership positions, often suffer from a type of imposter syndrome, one stemming from lack of confidence. Journalists Katty Kay and Claire Shipman write about it in their 2014 book *The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance – What Women Should Know*, as does Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg in her 2013 bestseller, *Lean In*. Sandberg’s largely self-reflecting book talks about her many fears – and overcoming them - when she took on her job at Facebook. She admitted to Kay and Shipman, “There are still days I wake up feeling like a fraud, not sure I should be where I am.”⁵¹ This imposter syndrome is backed by numerous studies. A 2011 UK Institute of Leadership and Management survey of managers found, for example, that half of female respondents had self-doubt about their job performance and careers while less than a third of male respondents reported similar feelings.⁵² This self-doubt can lead to women giving up on a task before even starting, fearing failure or demonstrating incompetence.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

There is, however, a link between competence and confidence that is important and deserves consideration as well. Women have long assumed that demonstrating competence will lead to acceptance. The International Space University hosted a 2014 panel in Montreal of four highly trained, highly competent, women astronauts, from the United States, China, South Korea and Canada. Asked by an audience member what their biggest challenge was in being or becoming an astronaut, Canadian astronaut Julie Payette answered without hesitation. "Getting male colleagues to take me seriously and having to prove my competence over and over again."⁵³ Her astronaut colleagues nodded vigorously in agreement. Confidence can be hard to sustain if your colleagues do not take you seriously. Research led by Hastings Law School Professor Joan Williams in 2014 cites having to repeatedly prove themselves as one of five reasons women, particularly women of color, leave STEM fields.⁵⁴

In the late 1990's, Cornell psychologists David Dunning and Justin Kruger extensively studied the link between competence and confidence.⁵⁵ Now dubbed the Dunning-Kruger effect, they found some people (largely unskilled) substantially overestimate their own abilities, based on erroneous readings of both their own abilities and those of others. Basically, the less competent someone is, the more they tend to overestimate their own abilities. In 2003, Dunning and Washington State University psychologist Joyce Ehrlinger⁵⁶ went a step further in this research considering the relationship between female competence and confidence. On a quiz of scientific skills designed to test both competence and confidence, women rated themselves more negatively than men on skills, yet on the average performed at about the same level. Between having to overcome doubting themselves, doubt sometimes reinforced by male colleagues, women are left in a precarious position. Yet according to *Forbes* contributor

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Bruce Kasanoff, "...senior leaders perceive that they perpetually confront the same problem... they can't find women who are both confident and competent."⁵⁷

The flip side of self-doubt must be considered as well. Harvard professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal 1977 book *Men and Women in the Corporation*,⁵⁸ examined how structural issues, the high-visibility of women when in a minority, and stereotypical perceptions within organizations affect workplace performance. Gender-based stereotypical perceptions remain a key issue for women in non-traditional career fields. A 2011 study by Stanford Graduate School of Business,⁵⁹ documented what many women already know: if women behave in too feminine a manner, they will be seen as weak and not as leaders, but if they are too masculine, they will be seen as aggressive -- and ostracized.⁶⁰ Consequently, the study concluded that women needed to know how to switch on and off masculine behaviors of being aggressive, assertive and confident. Speaking up first could get a woman viewed as "bitchy," while piggybacking on a male comment was acceptable. The study suggested that disagreeing with male colleagues by first stating the merit of their premise, before gently suggesting another option, would be less threatening to these colleagues. While admittedly good practice, it nevertheless puts women in a position of having to "manage" -- or as a female colleague of mine put it, "mommy" -- their male colleagues.

Army General Anne Dunwoody (ret), the first female four-star officer in the military, wrote about how easy it is for women to be dismissed when in the minority, even a flag officer.

A new idea could easily be dismissed by a few heads shaking or simply by deaf silence in the room. If I felt strongly about something, I would repeat it, and if I

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

really felt strongly about something, I would have to raise my voice or throw out a four-letter word to get their attention: “You guys are coming up with the same old shit solutions that haven’t worked in the past!”⁶¹

Unfortunately, few women are in a position where they could take such actions, and get away with it. More often, their views are simply shut down, or they would be chastised for being too aggressive.

These findings have been extended beyond business fields as well. Analysis conducted in 2015 by Northeastern University Assistant Professor Benjamin Schmidt on data gathered through the website RateMyProfessor – 14 million student reviews -- found students evaluate women professors differently than men. Men professors are more often considered brilliant and funny, while women are either nice, or rude and bossy.⁶² This reinforces the tendency for people to think more highly of men than women in professional settings, praise men for the same things they criticize women for, and are more likely to focus on a woman’s appearance or personality and on a man’s skills and intelligence.

A 2014 study conducted by linguist and tech entrepreneur Kieran Snyder⁶³ documents this general tendency. Snyder looked at 248-workplace performance reviews given to men and women across 28 companies. Snyder found that managers, regardless of gender, gave female employees more negative feedback than they gave male employees. Further, 76% of the negative feedback given women included personality criticism of some sort, such as “abrasive,” “judgmental” or “strident,” whereas only 2% of men’s reviews included similar negative personality comments. Women are judged by different standards than their male counterparts, and in personalized ways that can mar confidence.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Competence Can Hurt You? Competence has been an assumed prerequisite for acceptance and success, and many women have proven their competence, but that has not eliminated sexism. In 2010, Emilio Castilla, a professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management, and Indiana University sociology professor Stephen Bernard examined how meritocratic ideals and performance awards play out in organizations, including those seeing themselves as committed to diversity.⁶⁴ Castilla and Bernard dubbed their findings "the paradox of meritocracy" in that even when an organizations core values emphasized meritocratic values, managers awarded higher monetary awards to male employees than to an equally performing female employee. It seems that individuals who think they are objective and unbiased – blind fish – don't monitor and scrutinize their own behavior. Rather, they just assume that they are right and their assessments accurate.⁶⁵

Within non-traditional career fields women win awards and commendations for outstanding performance. However, whether competence is in fact a benefit to women once in the workforce has been put into question. London Business School researchers M. Ena Inesi and Daniel M. Cable conducted a 2014 study of 200 U.S. military commanders responsible for performance evaluations. They found a high correlation between gender bias and performance evaluations "when the evaluator was male and high social-dominance oriented and when the female subordinate's objective on-the-job performance was high."⁶⁶ Social Dominance again appeared to be a factor. Inesi and Cable concluded that in hierarchical organizations past accomplishments can actually be detrimental to women in evaluations from men who want to maintain the traditional gender balance because women's accomplishments can be viewed as threatening.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Complaints about incompetent women in the military being advanced through the ranks to meet “diversity metrics” (quotas), receiving plum assignments based on “affirmative action,” especially pilots, date back to the 1994 death of Lt. Kara Hultgreen while attempting to land her F-14 on board an aircraft carrier. While differing physical standards have been a long-standing source of discourse – complaints - about women being accepted into certain military billets, studies have shown a cultural issues come into play as well, issues related to Social Dominance Orientation.⁶⁷ Certainly not all women are more, or even equally qualified for all or particular positions than all men. The point, however, is about assumptions made about women’s competency, dismissal of competency once demonstrated, and that Social Dominance Orientation means when they are competent, that very fact can work against them.

The mainstream media does not help either. In a September 2014 *Fox News* segment about the United Arab Emirates’ first woman pilot, Major Mariam al Mansouri, launching bombs against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, panelist Greg Gutfield quipped “Problem is, after she bombed it she couldn't park it.” Another panelist, Eric Bolling, then asked, “Would that be considered boobs on the ground, or no?”⁶⁸ Such sexist attitudes broadcast through the media, even with an apology offered by Gutfield and Bolling later, perpetuates ingrained Social Dominance Orientation attitudes.

Helping Each Other Up the Ladder? Women’s networking groups are described by *Forbes* writer Meghan Casserly as “groups intended to help women to succeed by building a solid community of women to help lift each other up.”⁶⁹ She expressed skepticism, however, about the value of those groups and offers advice on telling whether a group is worth the time commitment to attend. What kind of women attend? Are they well connected within the

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

business world? Is there functional communication within the group? Her bottom line: Is this a group that could help her land “a plum position higher up the food chain.”

Darlene Iskra considered mentorship in her 2007 dissertation *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Elite Military Women’s Strategies for Success*. Mentorship was considered an important factor in success, yet she found “there has been a lack of female role models and mentors in the highest echelon of the military branches.”⁷⁰ While in some instances men are willing to mentor women, and do an outstanding job, that is not always the case.

Harvard Extension School student Allyson Reneau did an internship at the Naval War College in 2013. As part of that internship she interviewed members of all military services, but mostly Navy, and wrote a paper on mentoring later published by the United States Naval Institute as a blog post.⁷¹ Reneau’s mentorship post made CHINFO Clips, a daily news update compiled by the Chief of Information office of the US Navy, and widely distributed. Titled “Mentoring in the Military: Who’s Your Sea Daddy?” it talked about the formal mentoring systems instituted within some services and, according to those interviewed, the far more effective organic mentoring that takes place between individuals within all service communities. Gender was considered as well.

Several women military officers, including those at the level of Navy captain and Army/Air Force colonel, declined interviews for Reneau’s projects, and most who agreed to be interviewed did so only on conditions of anonymity and that meetings would be conducted privately so as not to draw attention to themselves. Not wanting to draw attention to themselves was a prevalent reason stated among women for declining Reneau’s interview requests as drawing attention, she was told, can get a female officer dubbed weak or a

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

problem. Reneau quotes a female officer who had served 25 years as saying, “Active duty in the Navy – as a woman – is asking to belong to a club where they don’t want you.” From those she spoke with, Reneau found that cultural bias, fear of reprisals and intra-gender competition all inhibited women in the military from being afforded the same kind of effective mentoring opportunities as their male counterparts.

With organic mentoring clearly the most successful, personal connections are a prerequisite for mentoring. But male officers admitted to Reneau a reluctance to mentor women for fear of accusation of sexual harassment. Even an accusation could put a black eye on their career and they were concerned that “sometimes compliments can be taken wrong by an overly sensitive female.” Women, however, can also be reluctant to mentor women. Called the “queen bee syndrome”, researchers since the 1970 have shown that women who achieve success in male-dominated careers “were at times reluctant to oppose the rise of other women.”⁷² Further, and clearly most disingenuously, “whereas men helping men is considered mentorship, women helping women is often considered favoritism, favoritism that can get the mentor shunned by male colleagues in the future.”⁷³ Experienced women who mentor younger women fear accusations of favoritism, which often leaves younger women without a mentor. Both women suffer, as does their work organization.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Women might be allowed into all career fields, but their rise and tenure is still determined on factors very different from their male counterparts. Obviously, rather than “climb the ladder” some women opt out to raise families or attend to other

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

personal issues. Some base their decision on what has been called the “fight-or-flight” moment, about 10 years into their career.

In 2008 researchers at the Harvard Business School conducted a study of women in private sector, male-dominated, Science, Technology and Engineering (SET) fields.⁷⁴ They were concerned with the brain drain of women in SET, with results that can be more broadly applied to many non-traditional careers generally. Dubbed the Athena Factor, researchers found that five factors played into highly qualified, talented women opting out at about the 10-year mark, many gender-centered.

“1. Hostile macho cultures. Women in SET are marginalized by lab coat, hard hat, and geek workplace cultures that are often exclusionary and predatory (fully 63% experienced sexual harassment).

2. Isolation. A woman in SET can be the lone woman on a team or at a site. This makes it difficult to find support or sponsorship (45% lack mentors; 83% lack sponsors).

3. Mysterious career paths. As a result of macho cultures and isolation, women in SET find it hard to gain an understanding of the way forward – fully 40% feel “stalled” or “stuck” in their careers.

4. System of risk and reward. The “diving catch” culture of SET companies disadvantages women, who tend to be risk averse (35% have difficulty with risk).

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Without buddies to support them they feel that can go from “hero to zero” in a heartbeat.

5. Extreme work pressures. SET jobs are unusually time intensive and, because of their global scope, involve working in multiple time zones (54% work across time zones).⁷⁵

Many women in non-traditional career fields find hostile environments, working in isolation or near-isolation, and mysterious career paths are commonalities found tied to not having an internal support network.

As a result of the 2008 study, some tech companies instituted programs specifically designed to change the patterns of women leaving the SET field, focusing on alleviating the perceived hostile and isolated environment.⁷⁶ However, a 2014 study by the Center for Talent Innovation, founded by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, the lead researcher on the 2008 study, still found that women are 45% more likely to leave their SET jobs than their male counterparts, and increasingly earlier. Many leave the first year, citing generally the same reasons as cited in the 2008 study, and having “to walk the famously tricky line between aggressiveness and assertiveness that can often derail women’s careers.”⁷⁷ The good news was being the lone woman on a team was less pervasive than in 2008.⁷⁸

Considering the evidence presented, quite clearly, women cannot rely on male-dominated institutions to “fix” things on their own. Social Dominance Orientation, especially in hierarchical organizations including the military, the blind fish

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

phenomenon, and the military tendency to see fixes as rooted in “processes”, combine in a powerful way to diminish the likelihood of that outcome. Further, relying on others to make changes carries with it an unhealthy victim mentality. Realistically, at least part of the responsibility for success falls to women to find ways to effectively build their own internal support systems.

REALITIES AND ROADS FORWARD

As the Schmidt and Snyder studies evidenced, powerful women are criticized in an often very personal way that rarely happens with men. It happens and shows little sign of abating. The public and high-level nature at which they occur perpetuates cultural stereotypes. New York’s junior Senator Kirsten Gillibrand talks about her peers commenting on her weight, including calling her “porky,” in her 2014 book *Off The Sidelines*. As both a Presidential candidate and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton’s pantsuits and hairstyles were often fodder for water cooler talk and Twitter chains. Men, however, are not similarly criticized for their hair or clothes because it is implicitly understood those have no bearing on their abilities. Generally, men are valued and evaluated based on their knowledge and skills; women for their looks and manner.

Women are fighting against cultural and historical norms. Culturally, many world religions have traditionally considered women as “subservient.”⁷⁹ Historically, women have had to rely on men for their physical, social, and economic well-being, making “being liked” a practical imperative. In her 1994 book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, therapist Mary Pipher discussed the societal pressures on young women that too often result in transforming confident, athletic children into self-conscious adolescents.⁸⁰ Centuries of

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

accepted gender roles and cultural norms are difficult to overcome. Striving to be liked turns out not to be good training for dealing with and accepting criticism. So how does one “toughen up”?

A 2014 study by EY Women Athletes Business Network and sponsored by espnW surveyed more than 400 female executives in five countries (20% were U.S. women) and found a job applicant’s involvement in sports was considered a positive factor by women executives in hiring decisions. Survey participants believed that people who have played sports make good professionals because they bring qualities like competitiveness, teamwork, the ability to motivate others and a commitment to bringing projects to completion to their jobs. Among the group surveyed, over half had played sports at the college/university level, and only 3% had never played sports at all.⁸¹ The overall results showed an emphasis on intangible skills gained or honed through participation in sports.

Olympic Champion Donna de Varona summarized the overall benefits of sports participation in developing teamwork and leadership skills.

If you try out for a basketball team but quit in the middle of the first game, or if you choose not to pass the ball to your talented teammate because you don’t like her, or if you are unwilling to spend extra hours to work on a weakness, you aren’t going to get very far. Sports teaches fundamentals for success and that is why both men and women executives like to hire athletes. C-suite executives [CEO, CFO, COO or Board of Directors] hire these women because they share a common bond and know when the pressure is on they will not be let down.⁸²

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Building common bonds is important in overcoming the situation that too often results in mid-career “flight”; an individual feeling that she does not have an internal support network.

Women must proactively build the skills and seek the opportunities to better get to know her female colleagues toward building the all-important internal support systems.

There is also preliminary evidence that participation in sports correlates with higher retention rates for women in the military, and so may have been conditioning for workplace challenges. A 2004 thesis paper completed at the Naval Postgraduate School considered whether participation in varsity sports at the Naval Academy yielded higher officer retention rates than for those who had not.⁸³ The small sample size of women, however, made firm gender-specific conclusions difficult. However, seventy-eight percent of the female flag officer interviewed by Darlene Iskra as part of her 2007 dissertation indicated they had participated in individual sports, and 81% were active in team sports.⁸⁴ Whether participation in sports builds enduring organic networks, “acceptable” leadership skills, somehow equates to combat experience in terms of being a “bonding” experience, just toughens competitors up to criticism -- or all of the above -- remains untested. It appears worth exploring though as part of continuing research on female officer retention in the military, research that may yield results transferrable to other non-traditional fields.

Obviously, women already in the workforce who did not play sports in their formative years cannot go back and change history. But being aware of the advantages those women who did participation in sports feel they gained from the experience may be useful. Awareness also allows young women who might not have otherwise considered sports as part of their career training to do so.

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

Toward taking responsibility for their own destinies, women must also change their attitudes toward and methods of mentoring. Why don't women effectively mentor other women? Unquestionably, organizational structures currently create competition between women. But women are going to have to pull other women along through mentoring, which they have so far failed at miserably. Perhaps that is because women have so few positive mentoring role models. Hollywood doesn't help. Women went from growing up in the 1960's seeing women in movies and television getting married and living happily ever after with two children, wearing pearls and an apron, to SEAL wanna-be Demi Moore being betrayed by Ann Bancroft in *GI Jane* in the late 1990's, and Anne Hathaway being tormented by Meryl Streep's character in *The Devil Wears Prada* in 2006.

Mentoring can make all the difference. In a 2013 interview, Air Force fighter pilot Lt. Clancy Morrical – who finished her F-16 initial pilot training as a Distinguished Graduate - told of the importance of mentoring in her career. "I was crazy lucky to be in a squadron with two women in leadership," she said enthusiastically. "It was really neat to watch them lead and to have the opportunity to learn about being a female pilot, such as the differences and logistics of flying as a woman. They are amazing pilots."⁸⁵ But not all women in non-traditional career fields are "crazy lucky," nor should they have to be.

If organizations are serious about inclusive diversity, women should be incentivized – lending itself to a process -- to mentor other women. Organizations must take responsibility for removing the "favoritism" stigma that has inhibited women from mentoring other women. Rather than ostracizing women for organically selecting and mentoring a protégée, women should be organizationally encouraged and rewarded for doing so. Realistically as well, in many

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

instances women will have to be taught to be mentors because they have had so few role models or experience mentoring.

Organizationally endorsed mentoring will have another benefit as well. Competent women are offended by hiring or promotion schemes that are not merit based. Mentors would carefully select protégées because the protégée's performance would professionally reflect on the mentor. Other women would identify women who cannot prove themselves competent. Women should help themselves and others, but also weed out the ones who hurt their efforts. Energizing women as mentors is not to say sincere male leaders should be left out of mentoring women as well, but women need to step up in far greater numbers.

As the number of women in non-traditional fields grows, the potential for change increases as well. A 2011 study at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute found that the "tipping point" for a minority opinion to eventually grow to a majority opinion (here that opinion being the importance of inclusive diversity) is a committed 10% of a population.⁸⁶ The key word in that proposition is "committed," which requires a perceived ability to voice opinions without it being potentially career damaging or ending. The more an organization becomes diversified numerically, including but not limited to gender, the less the potential effects of Social Dominance Orientation on the organization because dominance of a single group decreases.

Women in non-traditional workforce careers will not be a matter of choice in the future but rather, as General Dempsey said, a matter of changing demographics. As long as sexism exists in the workplace though, even tacitly or as a function of blind fish, competency will be a necessary but not necessarily sufficient qualification for women's entry into non-traditional careers, and cannot be assumed as an equalizer or advantage in considerations for

Joan Johnson-Freese
Naval War College
johnsonj@usnwc.edu

advancement. Tenacity seems at least equally required. Whether through experience playing competitive sports or some other method, women entering non-traditional fields must enter armed with tenacity to endure and advance. And women must mentor each other in the same way that men do, including helping protégée's land plum positions, with institutional support.

Changing Social Dominance Orientation means changing organizational culture, and that is a leadership issue that takes time and concerted effort that goes beyond rhetoric, and process solutions. But it is in the interest of the nation to hire, retain and advance the best and the brightest. It is the responsibility of the relevant organizations to provide the best and the brightest the opportunity to reach their full potential and an environment conducive to doing so. It is the responsibility of women in these careers to prepare themselves for the challenges they will face. Everyone will benefit from taking his or her responsibilities seriously.

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