Service Member Views on the Challenges of Gender Integration and How to Address Them

2011-2015 Focus Group Findings from the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)[1]

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Introduction

The Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) was established in 1951 with a mandate to provide the Secretary of Defense with independent advice and recommendations on matters and policies relating to servicewomen in the military. One topic the Committee has been studying annually since 2010 is the integration of servicewomen into combat positions. During this time, two momentous changes took place in DoD related to this issue. The first of these occurred on May 14, 2012, when DoD implemented changes to its assignment policy opening up approximately 14,000 additional positions to servicewomen. The second change occurred on January 24, 2013, when then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey rescinded the ground combat exclusion policy and directed the Services to comply with a three-year plan to open closed positions and units to servicewomen no later than January 1, 2016. In addition to these changes, and in keeping with DACOWITS' annual recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on this issue, on December 3, 2015 Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that beginning in January 2016, all military occupations and positions will be open to women, without exception.

Background

DACOWITS began recommending that the Services eliminate the policy implemented in 1994 excluding women from ground combat[2] and open all military positions and units to women in 2010; the Committee repeated this recommendation each year until then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey issued a memorandum on January 24, 2013 rescinding the ground combat exclusion policy[3] and directing the Services to comply with a three-year plan to open closed positions and units to women no later than January 1, 2016. The Services' plans were to include ". . . the development and implementation of validated, gender-neutral occupational standards and the required notifications to Congress,"[4] an approach that was consistent with the Committee's 2011 and 2012 recommendations that any physical standards be validated to accurately predict performance of actual, regular, and recurring duties of a military job and applied equitably to measure individual capabilities.[5,6]

Following the release of the January 24, 2013 memorandum, the Committee has been monitoring DoD's and the Services' implementation of the memorandum's three-year plan. Figure 1 below presents an overview of the three-year plan directed by the January 24, 2013 memorandum, including major milestones with which the Services were to comply.
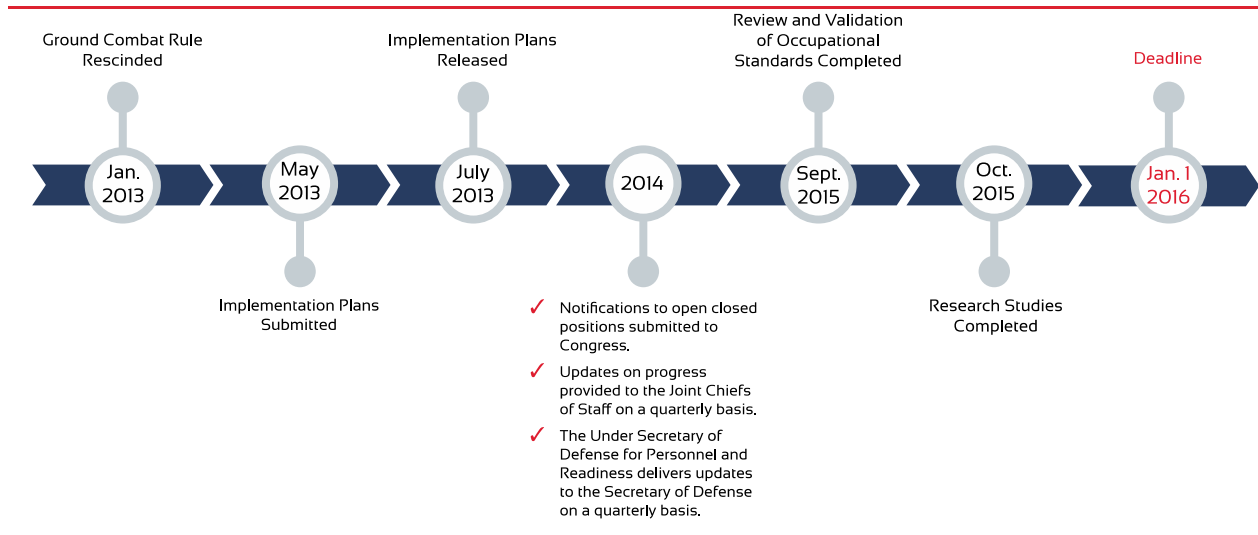
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[6] Hemphill, H. K., Cammermeyer, M., Campbell, N. D., Cleckley, J. J., DiRosa, J., Estrada, J. L., . . . Wilson, F. (2012). *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) 2012 report.* Retrieved from http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/Reports/2012/

Figure 1. Timeline of Process for Opening Previously Closed Positions and Units to Women

As part of their implementation plan, the Services undertook several measures to examine the feasibility of women being assigned to previously closed units and positions. DACOWITS received briefings from the Services outlining the methodology being deployed for many of these measures, including: literature reviews to examine the potential impacts such a decision could have on unit cohesion and morale based on similar decisions made in civilian-sector career fields or similar team environments such as team sports; conducting surveys to gauge Service members' attitudes on the topic; and carrying out experiments to measure women's perform in the training process for several of these previously closed positions and schools. However, while these activities were carried out and the Services were able to brief DACOWITS on the methodology of them, the results were infrequently made available to the public. Thus, DACOWITS' examination of the topic of gender integration in focus groups conducted annually with members of the Armed Forces are one of the primary sources of data on the topic that is publicly available.

Although the decision to open all positions to women has already been made, reviewing the findings from DACOWITS' examination of Service members' opinions on gender integration in recent years, including potential benefits and barriers, may provide insight on best practices for implementing this decision and avoiding foreseeable pitfalls. In addition, because DACOWITS' examination of the topic spans the period before and after the initial two important policy changes occurred (in 2012 and 2013), a review of these findings allows for an understanding of Service members' opinions on the topic both before and after the changes took place.

Methods

Each year as a primary source of information, DACOWITS collects qualitative data during site visits during April and May to military installations around the country. DACOWITS examined the topic of gender integration during focus groups with Service members each year from 2011 through 2015. The focus groups for 2011-2014 included Service members from the four DoD branches and the U.S. Coast Guard, while the 2015 focus groups included only members of the DoD Services. DACOWITS' exploration of the topic in 2011 (prior to DoD's 2012 and 2013 policy changes) focused on ways to effectively integrate servicewomen into ground combat units, including a discussion of potential barriers to such integration. The discussions in 2012, 2013, and 2014 similarly addressed the challenges to gender

integration and the best methods for integration, as well as participants' general opinions on the appropriateness of opening all units and positions to servicewomen. The 2015 focus groups built upon these previous discussions by addressing the steps the Services were taking at the time to prepare for gender integration, participants' satisfaction with the Services' integration efforts, any remaining challenges for integration, and potential strategies for improvement.

DACOWITS examined the topic of gender integration in-depth during the focus groups conducted in 2011 and in 2015, while the topic was addressed briefly and in a less structured manner during the focus groups in 2012-2014. The 2012-2014 DACOWITS focus groups examined topics other than gender integration; however, gender integration was discussed as part of an open discussion period held at the end of each focus group. This paper will focus primarily on the 2011 and 2015 focus group findings, though the 2012-2014 findings will be included as relevant. The sub-section below presents an overview of the demographic profile of the focus group participants and the discussion topics for the 2011 and 2015 focus groups. A full presentation of the demographic profile of the focus group participants and the discussion topics for 2012-2014 will not be presented. In total, DACOWITS conducted 44 focus groups in 2011, 42 focus groups in 2012, 51 focus groups in 2013, 40 focus groups in 2014 and 67 focus groups in 2015. The focus groups were composed of Service members – both men and women, across all rank categories (officer and enlisted).For the 2011 and 2015 focus groups, only a portion of that number examined the topic of gender integration; for the 2012-2014 focus groups most discussed the topic, though briefly.

Focus Group Participants and Topics Overview: 2011 and 2015

In 2011, DACOWITS conducted 21 focus group sessions examining the assignment of military women. A total of 199 participants attended the focus groups, representing the entire Active component Services and some elements of the Reserve component. Each focus group session included Service members who had deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and/or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), including junior and senior Service members, enlisted and officer, women and men. The majority of the focus group participants were female (70%). The unequal gender distribution was recruited intentionally – one of the topics for examination during the 2011 focus groups was weapons training for servicewomen so an effort was made to recruit an adequate number of female participants. Table 1 provides an overview of other key demographic variables of the 2011 focus group participants.

Table 1. 2011 Focus Group Participant Demographics (N=199)

	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female	139	70%
Male	60	30%
Total	**199**	
Service Branch		
Army	55	28%
Marine Corps	41	21%
Navy	33	17%
Air Force	28	14%
Guard and Reserve	42	21%
Total	**199**	

	Number	Percent
Pay grade		
E1–E4	45	23%
E5–E6	70	35%
E7–E9	19	10%
O1–O3 (incl. Warrant Officers)	45	23%
O4-O6	20	10%
Total	**199**	
Length of Military Service		
Less than 3 years	11	6%
3–5 years	46	23%
6–10 years	60	30%
11–15 years	42	21%
16–20 years	25	13%
More than 20 years	15	8%
Total	**199**	
Race and Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic White	96	48%
Non-Hispanic Black	51	26%
Hispanic	38	19%
Other (Non-Hispanic)	14	7%
Total	**199**	

The 2011 focus groups examined the potential implications of revising the assignment policy to fully integrate women into all combat units and strategies for how to make full integration of women into combat units a success.

In 2015, DACOWITS conducted 25 focus groups on the topic of gender integration, including a total of 134 participants. The groups were conducted with male and female officers and enlisted Service members. Because the Coast Guard is already gender integrated, questions on this topic were asked only of members of the other four Services. Table 2 provides an overview of key demographic variables of the 2015 focus group participants; this overview is for the participants in all of DACOWITS' 2015 focus groups, including several groups that discussed different topics.

Table 2. 2015 Focus Group Participant Demographics (N=694)

	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	349	50%
Female	345	50%
Total	**694**	
Service Branch		
Army	148	21%
Marine Corps	139	20%
Navy	153	22%
Air Force	98	14%
Coast Guard	156	22%
Total	**694**	
Pay grade		
E1–E3	37	5%
E4–E6	257	37%
E7–E9	103	15%

	Number	Percent
W01-W05	30	4%
O1–O3	164	24%
O4 or higher	103	15%
Total	**694**	
Length of Military Service		
Less than 3 years	84	12%
3–5 years	128	18%
6–10 years	107	15%
11–15 years	141	20%
16–20 years	144	21%
More than 20 years	79	11%
Missing	11	2%
Total	**694**	
Race		
White	483	70%
Black	95	14%
Asian	21	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5	1%
Other	34	5%
Multiple Races	56	8%
Total	**694**	
Hispanic Ethnicity		
Hispanic	98	14%
Non-Hispanic	593	85%
Missing	3	<1%
Total	**694**	

The 2015 focus groups addressed Service members' experiences with gender integration, Service members' awareness of gender integration preparation activities by the Military Services, Service members' perceptions of gender integration and the impact of military culture on gender integration, and challenges and recommendations for gender integration.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

DACOWITS gathered data during 90 minute focus groups using focus group protocols and a short demographic survey of focus group participants. The focus group analysis process involved several systematic steps. During each focus group, staff from Insight Policy Research, Inc., and ICF International recorded verbatim discussions between focus group participants and DACOWITS facilitators; the research team cleaned and redacted the transcripts. Next, the team identified themes and subthemes by reviewing all transcripts for a given focus group topic and noting common responses that arose. Once the themes were identified, the data were entered into qualitative analysis software (NVivo and Atlas.ti) and the transcripts were coded by themes. This allowed the research team to explore whether certain responses were more common among subgroups (e.g., gender, pay grade, Military Service). Unless otherwise specified, themes from the focus groups were common across pay grades, Military Services, and genders.

To give a rough indication of the frequency with which a particular theme was mentioned, we use several key terms throughout the report (e.g., "many," "several," "some," "a few," "a couple") to indicate descending levels of frequency. In addition, when comparing multiple responses to a given question, we use terms such as "nearly all of the participants who respond to this question . . ." or "the

most commonly mentioned theme . . ." to give a rough sense of the proportion of participants who expressed a given opinion, rather than use fixed terms that imply every participant provided a response.

Findings

The following sections present the relevant findings from the DAOCIWTS 2011-2015 focus groups. Each sub-section presents a series of explanations of overarching findings followed by quotes to illustrate the theme. Due to variation in the demographic composition of the groups across different years (i.e., mixed-gender versus single gender, mixed enlisted and officer leadership versus separate enlisted and officer groups), the terminology used to describe the focus group participants to whom illustrative quotations are attributed throughout this section varies.

This section is divided into the following sub-sections:

- Overall Opinions on Gender Integration and the Potential Impact on Unit Readiness
- Challenges and Barriers to Gender Integration
- Suggestions for Successful Gender Integration
- Current Efforts to Prepare for Gender Integration

Overall Opinions on Gender Integration and Potential Impact on Unit Readiness

Participants consistently expressed their support for gender integration beginning in 2011 (before the policy changes had occurred) and continued to express this support every additional year the topic was mentioned. This was true across genders, rank groups, Military Services, and installations. Despite this generally positive response, there were a few participants each year that expressed opposition or concerns related to gender integration. The concerns reported by those opposed to gender integration are discussed in the Challenges and Barriers to Gender Integration sub-section and will not be similarly addressed here.

> "It all goes back to doing those things that people don't think we can do. It's too long we've said what people can't do without giving them the opportunity to show or demonstrate what they can do. Everyone should be equal to a task and the standards should be the same." (Senior Enlisted Man)

> "The people who have issues with it are the ones who haven't had women working with them before. The majority of the guys who don't want women haven't fought with women before; they just hear stuff from other people." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

> "…women are capable of the same jobs that males are…I know there are women that are totally capable and I think we should be allowed to do all the things men can do, or at least be able to try. We should at least have the option…We should all be afforded those opportunities. A sexist mindset shouldn't be able to stop us." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

> "I think women have proved themselves... I want the best person for the job, period." (Senior Male Service Member)

Impact on Military Readiness

During the 2011 focus groups, participants were asked what they think the overall impact on military readiness would be if women were to be fully integrated into combat units. The majority of participants felt that the full integration of women into ground combat units would have a positive or neutral impact on unit readiness.

> "I think that we would have a better [Service] if it (i.e., full integration of women into combat units) were implemented, getting females into the roles…" (Junior Female Service Member)

Some said that the full integration of women into combat units may have a short-term negative impact on military readiness during the transition phase, but that any impact would dissipate over time.

> "On the short term there are these speed bumps, and you have the 'old crusties' that won't let them do things, and the females may fight back. So I can see that happening first, but once that first female is allowed to do her job and she does it well, the integration process will speed up. But there will be short-term issues." (Senior Male Service Member)

> "It was just like when women first started in the Armed Forces. Initially there are issues, but as it grows it will get better just like now." (Junior Female Service Member)

> "…you'll have these guys who will be like, 'No, I won't do it', and they'll be in the position to make those decisions, and it will take 5 or 10 years for them to retire, and the new generation will come through, and the new sergeants and higher-ups – they will be the norm, [but] until then, it will affect the readiness." (Junior Male Service Member)

A few participants in the 2014 focus groups similarly emphasized the short-term challenges associated with the transition period.

> "The biggest challenge right now is that we're at a social turning point. With the combat jobs opening up, it's going to create turmoil for a while but if we play it right, we can have an equal force. We have all of these preconceived social expectations for women and men. Men are supposed to be strong and burly and women are supposed to be beautiful and…I've seen weak men and strong women. Tearing down those social barriers, I didn't think I could do this but now I realize I can. It's going to take years for things to change in the public's eye and society's perception but right now we're at an important turning point…" (Junior Enlisted)

Rarely, participants said that they believe the full integration of women in combat units would have a negative impact on readiness because women may not be strong enough or may be too emotional to perform the job tasks required. These concerns will be addressed more fully in the sub-section on Challenges and Barriers to Gender Integration, below.

Challenges and Barriers to Gender Integration

Focus group participants throughout 2011-2015 discussed several challenges and barriers to integration, many of which fall under the broad category of military culture. Specific barriers discussed include:

- Increased sexual harassment, sexual assault, and fraternization;
- Men's innate drive to protect women;
- Women's potential inability to meet the physical demands of the job;
- Negative impact on the morale and/or unit cohesion of currently male-only units;
- Logistical barriers to berthing, shower facilities, and restrooms; and
- The traditional masculine and feminine roles.

Each of these will be briefly addressed below.

Increased sexual harassment, sexual assault, and fraternization

An increase in sexual harassment and sexual assault was mentioned several times during the 2011 and 2012 focus groups as a potential challenge to the full integration of women into combat units. In a few cases, this was based on past experiences in mixed-gender units, while in other cases the concern was based on more hypothetical grounds. Several focus group participants similarly believed fraternization would be a challenge to the full integration of women into combat units. A few mentioned pregnancy resulting from fraternization as a challenge as well.

> "I deployed 9 months late for a 15 month deployment. There were issues with females in my unit sleeping with the males. It was harder because of the reputation the other women established before I got there. They think every female is the same. That's what I came into." (Senior Female Service Member)

> "The only issue with opening combat arms is having an all-female platoon because if you deploy, you'll have one female in a whole group of guys. That's setting females up for rape, sexual assault, etc. Shouldn't mix the two." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Men's innate drive to protect women

Several study participants in 2011, 2012, and 2015, both women and men, raised the concern that men have an instinct to protect women, a mentality that was ingrained in them as they were growing up and that could interfere with their ability to respond appropriately in combat situations. While some participants in the 2012 focus groups felt this might compromise the mission, others felt this concern was rectifiable over time and men's reactions to women in ground combat should not necessarily be considered in the decision on whether or not to open the positions to women. During the 2015 focus groups, the concern about men's innate drive to protect women was mentioned most commonly among senior enlisted participants.

> "It's a cultural thing. . . . It's a man's nature to protect a woman. Women can protect themselves, but when you look at it, the man is supposed to do this and women to do that. That is a realistic scenario he was taking about…under heavy fire when I'm looking out for the women. She can protect and defend herself, but I'm still looking out for her." (Senior Enlisted Man)

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> "Guys want to protect us; it's their instinct. I came across that on deployments. The [men] were extra protective of me. It's engrained in us as humans." (Junior Officer Woman)

Women's potential inability to meet the physical demands of the job

Participants in the 2011-2013 and 2015 focus groups sometimes expressed the concern that women may not be able to handle the physical demands of ground combat and that the mission would be compromised if they were introduced into challenging combat assignments. This was expressed by both men and women during the 2011-2013 focus groups but was expressed almost solely by men during the 2015 focus groups. Men often likened ground combat and special operations roles to professional sports where women are not physically capable of competing. During the 2015 focus groups, participants commented on women's lack of physical, biological, and emotional capabilities to perform the jobs that were being integrated; during the earlier focus groups participants commented on the physical capabilities alone.

> "Regardless of how hard I train, in reality I can't carry a 300-pound dummy… is it worth the risk? We are saving lives. Is it helpful putting us in those combat positions?" (Junior Enlisted Woman)

> "SEALs are like the professional athletes of the Navy. There are no women in professional sports. She'd have to be a monster, jacked up compared to a man. The NFL is equivalent to being a SEAL, so it could happen but it's not likely." (OCS/OTS Candidate Man)

Negative impact on the morale and/or unit cohesion of currently male-only units

Focus group participants in 2012 and 2015 identified the masculine culture of non-integrated units as a challenge to gender integration. In 2012, participants from one Service in particular felt that introducing women may weaken the morale of the unit as a whole.

> "The infantry mindset is barbaric and aggressive. That is based on the stuff I heard when I was in infantry. Can the females deal with it? If not, they may be shunned or not accepted . . . being around a group of guys in a combat situation, or out in the field, just the stuff that they talk about and how aggressive it is." (Junior Enlisted Man)

> "You might actually be weakening their group or morale. You show up at their FOB [Forward Operating Base] with just two females there, and that screwed up their morale. For me, that's not a place I think we should be." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Logistical barriers to berthing, shower facilities, and restrooms

Participants in 2011, 2012, and 2015 reported that logistical issues, such as inadequate facilities and hygiene are potential challenges to the full integration of women into combat units. Participants noted that facilities at several locations will need to be upgraded to include women, which will depend on Service finances. Several participants in the 2015 focus groups reported that the need for additional accommodations has created a delay in the integration process.

"The only thing I would think would be housing. They need to deal with their female issues [being] met and that's hard when we are in a small group… Privacy and things are the issues: sleeping quarters, showers, that type of thing." (Junior Male Service Member)

"Just getting the berthings and processes to get the ship outfitted for the females. We have to change the internal portions of the ship to accommodate the females. . . . That's what's taking so much time, due to operational commitment to other ships and in the shipyard, and that's something people can't do anything about." (Senior Enlisted Man)

The traditional masculine and feminine roles

Some of the men in the 2011 focus group discussions said that they or their male peers may struggle with accepting women into combat units. A few of the women also noted this, mentioning that combat units are often a "good old boys club".

"I don't think the women would have any problem integrating; it would be the males." (Senior Male Service Member)

"I think it will be harder because men don't believe women should be in that position." (Junior Female Service Member)

Suggestions for Successful Gender Integration

In addition, participants provided suggestions for how best to undertake the process of gender integration. For the 2011 focus groups on this topic, DACOWITS specifically asked women focus group participants who had served in combat ships or aircraft, as well as men who had served alongside women in combat ships and aircraft, to share their experiences and lessons learned from these experiences, and to assess whether the military might apply these lessons to the full integration of women into ground combat units. For the 2012-2015 focus groups, the discussion was more general in nature. As discussed in the Overall Opinions on Gender Integration and Potential Impact on Unit Readiness sub-section, a few participants specifically indicated a belief that the transition will initially be difficult, but will improve over time. Specific suggestions for successful gender integration include:

- Developing valid occupational standards and ensuring they are administered equally to both genders;
- Providing training to men and women prior to integrating new units and positions;
- Ensuring full leadership support for the integration effort;
- Providing mentorship to women throughout the process; and
- Integrating women in cohorts rather than sending only one or two to a unit/command.

Each of these will be briefly addressed below.

Developing valid occupational standards and ensuring they are administered equally to both genders

A common opinion expressed by focus group participants every year is the concern that men and women should be treated equally and standards should not be lowered in order to allow women into these previously-closed positions. Participants commonly indicated lowering the standards would

compromise men's respect for women who successfully complete the selection and training process for newly integrated units and positions.

> "I think it could either be a step forward or a step back. Don't just let women in and make a quota; if the females that go to these schools are held to the same standards and succeed, then it's good." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

> "it is important to ensure we have the gender-neutral standards so you're not making it so the men can say 'You only got in because your test was easier than mine.'" (Male Officer)

Providing training to men and women prior to integrating new units and positions

Participants in the 2011, 2012, and 2015 focus groups discussed the need for training for men and women prior to gender integration. The 2011 focus group participants were mixed on whether training would successfully mediate potential challenges anticipated with the full integration of women into combat units, while the 2012 participants emphasized the need for the right kind of training. The 2015 focus group participants specifically indicated that changes to military culture would be necessary before gender integration could be successful. Similarly, many women indicated training was needed prior to integration for both men and women. Participants indicated that, in addition to training men needed exposure to servicewomen prior to integration, as well as training on how to interact with them.

> "I would say exposure…None of them had ever worked with female [Service members]. The [senior enlisted leader] had the idea to have me do a question and answer with the platoon sergeants to allay some of their fears. What most of them didn't realize is that women in the [Service] want to be in the [Service]. The mission comes first; they want to work hard. After two weeks, they were talking about how the women weren't at all what they expected. Most of their experiences had been with spouses and dependents. They couldn't picture what a female [Service member] could be. So once they saw us, they had a change [of opinion]." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

> "It's not only that [women are] prepared to meet the demands of the career field, but also be prepared to deal with all the attention. Whether it's negative or . . . I've had to stop comments before . . . I tell them, 'They're not dinner meat; they're your co-worker.'" (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Ensuring full leadership support for the integration effort

Several focus group participants in 2011 and a few participants in 2015 also believed that in order for the integration of women into all combat units to be a success, leadership needs to play a key role in the process to set the right precedent from the beginning.

> "It starts with the leadership - they set the standards, and we follow them." (Senior Male Service Member)

> "We are always going to be viewed a certain way by men, and it is always going to be up to the command to put that to rest. It is all the higher-ups. If there is a guy saying

something, they have to tell them to shut up. It's up to them to determine how we are viewed. And that is everyone, and it starts with NCOs all the way up to staff NCOs. It's up to them to cut it off." (Junior Female Service Member)

Providing mentorship to women throughout the process

In 2011 DACOWITS asked focus group participants what ways they think mentoring would be helpful if women were fully integrated into combat units, what forms would be most helpful and about mentorship experiences of those who have served on combat ship or aircraft. Overall, study participants thought that mentoring would be helpful to both men and women if women were to be fully integrated into combat units. The importance of mentorship to successful gender integration was also mentioned by participants during the 2015 focus groups.

"If you get a new [Service member], male or female, if you treat the female different, you're already throwing them under the bus. You have to mentor her the same way as a male, or it will never be the same." (Senior Male Service Member)

"If you have females in the unit already, obviously a female mentor would be better. Either way you look at it, we're still different, males and females. But if there's a female already integrated into the unit, then that's what you need." (Senior Male Service Member)

Integrating women in cohorts rather than sending only one or two to a unit/command

A few focus group participants in both 2011 and 2015 noted that if women were to be fully integrated into combat units, a large-scale integration would be more successful than integrating only a small number of women at a time.

"We don't [want to] bring them in by 'one-sies and two-sies'; you do it as a herd. You bring a quality group that meets a standard, but a group [nonetheless]." (Senior Female Service Member)

Current Efforts to Prepare for Gender Integration

When asked in 2015 about what efforts participants were aware of that the Services are undertaking to ensure successful integration, participants observed that the Services are doing the following:

- taking steps to ensure the standards in place are appropriate and gender neutral
- making modifications to physical spaces such as berthing on ships and submarines, housing during deployments, and separate restrooms
- holding discussions or training with men in male-only units prior to integrating women into the units
- increasing vigilance for sexual harassment and sexual assault occurrences in newly integrated units.

These responses suggest that the Services may be working to address many, though not all, of the challenges and suggestions participants voiced during the focus groups in 2011-2014. Despite this, female participants in the 2015 focus groups expressed mixed satisfaction with the Services' efforts

(though nearly all men were all satisfied with the efforts). Women's dissatisfaction stemmed from the processes the Services were using for the testing/development of gender-neutral occupational standards and a lack of education for men and women prior to integrating women into previously male-only units.

Conclusions

With the December 3, 2015 announcement by Defense Secretary Ash Carter that beginning in January 2016, all military occupations and positions will be open to women, without exception, the Military Services are at an exciting and momentous point. The findings reported here are useful in taking the next steps toward implementing this policy change. Participants expressed several challenges to gender integration, with many of them mentioned across several years, yet during the 2015 focus groups participants suggested that several of these challenges are being addressed by the Services as part of their integration efforts (though participants were not always satisfied that they were being addressed as carefully and meticulously as is needed). As the Services continue their integration efforts, they should remain cognizant of the challenges reported here and take into consideration the various suggestions Service members offered for easing the transition into a fully gender integrated military.

The recommendations DACOWITS has made on this topic through 2015 have focused on the need to open all military occupations and positions to women – a recommendation which has now been heeded. In the reasoning for its 2015 recommendation to open all units and positions to women, DACOWITS addressed several of the challenges and barriers to gender integration reported in this paper. While DACOWITS has not yet ventured into recommendations for how best to implement gender integration, focus group participants suggested the need for developing valid occupational standards and ensuring they are administered equally to both genders; providing training to men and women prior to integrating new units and positions; ensuring full leadership support for the integration effort; providing mentorship to women throughout the process; and integrating women in cohorts rather than sending only one or two to a unit/command. DACOWITS will continue to monitor this issue closely in 2016 to ensure a timely and successful gender integration process.