

There are currently around 219,024 (16.67%) female and 1,313,585 (83.33%) male Active Duty DoD members according to the June 2019 report by the Defense Manpower Data Center (Active Duty Master Personnel File, Military Academies). The disparity in the number of women to men is quite large. It's understandable looking at those numbers, as well as the cultural history of the military, that accounting for and comprehending the female perspective can present a challenge. If the military wants to tackle issues of productivity, mental health, and retention among its female members, it needs to ensure their needs are being met and a sense of belonging is being cultivated.

A sense of belonging means a person feels they are an accepted member of something and numerous psychologists have spoken to the high importance of this sense in regards to a person's well-being. A sense of belonging in the workplace is essential and for women in the military this can be difficult. Looking at the number of male vs female active duty service members mentioned above, women can be considered a minority in the workplace. According to one study minorities in the workplace spend an average of 25% to 30% of their time worrying about how they fit in (Reilly, 2017). This line of thinking most likely occurs in the environment of which the person feels like a minority. This means a significant amount of time, focus, and mental energy is being devoted to these thoughts instead of the work task at hand. It has been observed in several studies that women in jobs with larger male ratios are so worried about fitting in with their male counterparts that they unconsciously adopt gender identities that are not natural to them (Rosen, Knudson, & Fancher, 2003). They will overemphasize masculine traits to gain a sense of cohesion with male members and this can be psychologically stressful. Feeling as though one does not belong can also lead to depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Bryan, McNaughton-Cassill, & Osman, 2013; Ferrier-Auerbach, Erbes, Polusny, Rath, & Sponheim,

2010). These effects are directly tied to a psychological sense of burnout and a physiological decrease in the effectiveness of the immune system (Piko, 2006). Both of these symptoms lead to more sick days (mental health or physical) which leads to a lack of productivity and puts stress on the workforce as it attempts to compensate for the absenteeism. Members who feel that they do not belong also report lower job satisfaction. A key finding notes that employee satisfaction has been found to be a reliable predictor of retention (Bobbitt, Faupel, & Burns, 1991; Meek, 1998) and women currently have lower rates of retention in the military than men.

Part of ensuring an employee feels like they belong in the workplace is taking the time to understand their needs and finding ways to implement solutions. Women have some needs that differ from men when it comes to hygiene. Under the Statutory Instrument 1992 No.3004, The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, it states, “Suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences shall be provided at readily accessible places”. It can be argued that feminine hygiene products are “sanitary conveniences” for women. Currently, DOD workplaces offer free sanitary supplies to its employees such as toilet paper, paper towels, soap, and tissues. Some of these are essential to hygiene and some can be argued to be “conveniences”. For example, tissues are not a necessity. However, when a person sneezes unexpectedly they feel relieved by the availability of the tissues and acknowledge that they are a more sanitary option than other means. The same analogy can be applied to when a women unexpectedly starts her period.

In a survey conducted by the Free the Tampon Foundation 86% of 661 female subjects had started their periods in public without the necessary supplies. Of those women 48% only carried products if they knew they were going to have their period. Not all periods are regular and women cannot 100% accurately predict the day and time it is going to start. Another 51%

forgot to restock their bag and 24% didn't have their bag with them. Everyone can relate to accidentally forgetting something at home. For solutions some "Macgivered" a product using toilet paper. This is a less effective measure and can be very uncomfortable. Some had to ask another woman for one, which can be socially uncomfortable. Others went to the store or home, which takes time out of the work day and limits production. Of these women 50% or more felt frustrated and annoyed, while 43% felt anxious and stressed, and 35% felt panicked. Now imagine if the 1,313,585 male service members endured this natural, and at times uncontrollable and unpredictable, phenomenon as well. It's hard not to think that the DOD would set a precedence for ensuring the availability of hygienic products in order to deter these physical and mental difficulties.

As many schools and businesses slowly begin to stock their facilities a main argument against this campaign is, who pays for this and how much is it costing? The following breaks down the predictive expense:

Someone working 8 hours per day in a 5 day week with 30 days holiday per year will spend 21% of the year in the office. One study found that women use around 169 tampons a year (Howard, Rose, Trouton, Stamm, Marentette, Kirkpatrick, Paget, 2011). Multiplying the time in office (21%) by the number of products a single female uses in a year (169) you get 35.49 tampons used during work in a year. The cheapest tampons that can be found in bulk are around \$0.06 per tampon, but we can round it up to \$0.10 as it is the average cost for most companies. So providing free tampons for one person in your office is going to cost about $35.49 * \$0.10$ per year, that's roughly \$3.55. If you multiply that by the number of women currently in the military it is a yearly cost of \$777,535.20.

Now that may seem like a large number for the military and its tax payers to support however, the military pays way more for marketing campaigns that aren't even that affective according to studies. During the 2012 fiscal year, the National Guard spent \$26 million on sponsoring Dale Earnhardt Jr. (McCain-Flake Report). Nearly 25,000 individuals became prospective recruiting candidates that year, of which only 20 were qualified, according to a May 2014 report by USA Today. Of those 20, not a single person joined the Guard. The McCain-Flake report found that from 2012 to 2016 a total of \$10.4 million had been given to professional sports teams by the military and a possible total of up to \$100 million dollars had been given to NASCAR. There are countless other examples, but it's not just marketing that uses up more of the military's budget than necessary. OpenTheBooks is a nonprofit that discloses government spending. They found that end of the year fiscal spending in 2018 by the military included \$2.3 million on crab and another \$2.3 million on lobster, as well as a purchase of a \$9,341 Wexford leather club chair, \$14,000 on individual 3-D printed toilet seat lids, and \$1,280 on individual self-heating cups. For a healthcare comparison, \$84.24 million is spent each year on erectile dysfunction medications. If the military is willing to help take care of this unfortunate uncontrollable male health issue, then it would make sense to help female service members with theirs.

The idea of freely available tampons for women across the United States is growing and it seems it is only a matter of time until it becomes a norm and not a privilege. In fact, 15 states have recently decided to end the taxing of feminine hygiene products with others not far behind. Several businesses and universities have taken the initiative to stock their facilities with freely available products. Apple has been stocking it's restrooms since the 80s and Google also offers free supplies to their female employees. Brown University, Stanford University, University of

Iowa, and University of Washington have all begun to offer free menstrual products in their restrooms for students. Through these samples we can gain knowledge on what works and what doesn't. One argument has been made that women may take advantage of free tampons, grabbing handfuls to stock up at home. From those participating in the initiative it has been found that this trend occurs for the first three months and then declines. One company, Hospeco, who has been making metal tampon dispensers for 40 years, is working on developing new dispensers in accordance to the recent growing demand. This new design dispenses tampons for free, but delays the next tampon by 8-12 seconds in order to deter women from taking more than they need. The military can collaborate and gain from those participating in order to develop a system that works for it.

Providing feminine hygiene products for women in the military seems like a small way to show service members that they are welcome and being taken care of, but it's a step in the right direction. Recognizing and addressing the struggles that others are going through is a way to cultivate a sense of belonging in those people. A sense of belonging felt by the women who see the military looking out for them will lead to healthier service members, both physically and mentally. In turn this increases productivity and leads to higher retention. Ultimately, meeting this need could create a ripple effect throughout the military and even society. The military has been in the spotlight as an innovative leader both technologically and culturally. If the military shows that it is doing its best to understand and meet the needs of women within its ranks, then society may find itself inspired to do the same.

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