

2015 Focus Group Report

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)



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Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods

This report outlines the findings from the 2015 Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) focus groups. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and methods, including an overview of the focus groups, the characteristics of the focus group participants, and the analysis approach. Chapters 2 through 5 include the findings on gender integration, career progression of servicewomen, facilitators and barriers to reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, and the impact of social media on military Service members respectively.

A. Focus Group Overview

DACOWITS collected qualitative data during site visits to 11 military installations,¹ representing all four DoD Service branches and the U.S. Coast Guard, from March to May 2015 (see Appendix A). During the focus groups at these sites, the Committee addressed two Assignments topics and two Wellness topics:

Assignments:

- ▶ Gender Integration
- ▶ Career Progression

Wellness:

- ▶ The Impact of Social Media on Military Service Members
- ▶ Facilitators and Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

In partnership with researchers from Insight Policy Research (Insight) and ICF International (ICF), the Committee developed a series of focus group protocols; each protocol included either one or two topic modules to ensure each study topic was addressed by each Service, gender, and pay grade group. Protocols with two topic modules were used for 90-minute focus groups; protocols with one topic module were used for 45-minute focus groups. Committee members facilitated the focus group discussions to elicit and assess the views, attitudes, and experiences of Service members on the study topics. The Committee also distributed mini-surveys to participants to determine the demographic composition of the groups. All data collection instruments were approved by ICF's Institutional Review Board, with concurrence from the DoD Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and readiness to ensure the protection of human subjects.

In 2015, DACOWITS conducted 67 focus groups. Of the 67 groups, 33 were conducted with men and 34 were conducted with women. Seventeen groups were conducted with junior enlisted participants (E1–E5), 20 groups were held with senior enlisted participants (E6–E9), and 30 were conducted with officers. In total, there were 713 participants, with an average of 10 participants per session. Each installation was responsible for recruiting focus group participants who matched the specific demographic categories provided by DACOWITS.

¹NAVSTA San Diego, Fort Carson, Hurlburt AFB, Eglin AFB, NAVSTA Mayport, Dover AFB, CAMSLANT Chesapeake, Fort Campbell, Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton, Training Center Yorktown. The Committee also visited Twentynine Palms but did not conduct focus groups there.

For the Assignments topics, the Committee conducted 25 focus groups on gender integration and 30 focus groups on career progression. The focus groups on career progression were held exclusively with senior enlisted Service members and officers. For the Wellness topics, the Committee conducted 30 focus groups on the impact of social media on military Service members and 41 focus groups on facilitators and barriers to reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault. For each topic, the Committee members provided participants with handouts to facilitate the discussions and clarify terms that could have been confusing.

B. Focus Group Participant Characteristics

In addition to analyzing the qualitative focus group data, the research team compiled a demographic profile of the focus group participants using responses from the mini-surveys. In total, 50 percent of the participants were men and 50 percent were women. The Coast Guard (22 percent), Navy (22 percent), Army (21 percent) and Marine Corps (20 percent) were nearly equally represented, with fewer participants from the Air Force (14 percent). A vast majority of participants were Active Component (99 percent). Participants had a wide range of ages, with all but the youngest category equaling about one-fifth of the participants: ages 18–20 (3 percent), ages 21–24 (17 percent), ages 25–29 (23 percent), ages 30–34 (20 percent), ages 35–39 (18 percent), and 40 or older (18 percent).

Overall, enlisted Service members represented slightly more than half of the focus group participants; E4–E6 Service members made up the largest portion of focus group participants (37 percent), followed by E7–E9 Service members (15 percent) and E1–E3 Service members (5 percent). The largest subset of officers was made up of those at levels O1–O3 (24 percent) followed by level O4 or higher officers (15 percent) and WO1–WO5 officers (4 percent).

Focus group participants had varying tenure in the Military Services, with relatively equal distribution across all categories. The least represented groups were those with less than 3 years of service and those with 20 or more years of service (12 percent each), followed by those with 6–9 years of service (16 percent), 3–5 years of service (19 percent), and those with 10–14 years of service and 15–19 years of service (21 percent each).

A majority of participants identified as White (70 percent); smaller proportions identified as Black (14 percent), multiple races (8 percent), other (5 percent), Asian (3 percent), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1 percent). In terms of ethnicity, 14 percent of participants identified as Hispanic.

Most participants were married (63 percent), followed by those who were single with no significant other (14 percent) and those who were divorced or legally separated (11 percent) and single with a partner or significant other (not including domestic partnerships or civil unions) (11 percent). More than half (51 percent) of participants had at least one dependent child living in their home.

Table 1. Focus Group Participant Demographics

	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gender				
Male			349	50%
Female			345	50%
Total			694	100%
Service Branch				
Coast Guard	80	23%	156	22%
Navy	78	23%	153	22%
Marine Corps	75	22%	139	20%
Army	73	21%	148	21%
Air Force	39	11%	98	14%
Total	345	100%	694	100%
National Guard or Reserves				
Yes	2	1%	5	1%
No	342	99%	688	99%
Total	344	100%	693	100%
Missing	1		1	
Age				
18–20	19	6%	23	3%
21–24	70	20%	120	17%
25–29	79	23%	160	23%
30–34	66	19%	140	20%
35–39	58	17%	123	18%
40 or older	52	15%	127	18%
Total	344	100%	693	100%
Missing	1		1	
Pay grade				
E1–E3	27	8%	37	5%
E4–E6	129	37%	257	37%
E7–E9	49	14%	103	15%
WO1–WO5	10	3%	30	4%
O1–O3	77	22%	164	24%
O4 or higher	53	15%	103	15%
Total	345	100%	694	100%
Length of Military Service				
Less than 3 years	57	17%	84	12%
3–5 years	63	19%	128	19%
6–9 years	54	16%	107	16%
10–14 years	78	23%	141	21%
15–19 years	62	18%	144	21%
20 years or more	26	8%	79	12%
Total	340	100%	683	100%
Missing	5		11	

Race	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White	212	61%	483	70%
Black	63	18%	95	14%
Asian	14	4%	21	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5	1%	5	1%
Other	17	5%	34	5%
Multiple races	34	10%	56	8%
Total	345	100%	694	100%
Hispanic				
Yes	61	18%	98	14%
No	282	82%	593	86%
Total	343	100%	691	100%
Missing	2		3	
Marital Status				
Married	188	56%	428	63%
Divorced or legally separated	47	14%	76	11%
Widowed	1	<1%	2	<1%
Single with a partner/significant other (not including domestic partnerships/civil unions)	47	14%	75	11%
Single with no significant other	52	16%	97	14%
Total	335	100%	678	100%
Missing	10		16	
Dependent Children Living in the Home				
Yes	149	44%	343	51%
No	187	56%	336	49%
Total	336	100%	679	100%
Missing	9		15	

C. Analysis

The focus group analysis process involved several systematic steps. During each focus group, Insight and ICF staff recorded verbatim discussions between participants and Committee 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.

As a data collection method, focus groups have several limitations. For example, the results are qualitative in nature, and since the sample of participants was not representative of all Military Services, the results cannot be generalized for any particular group. In addition, due to time constraints, and to maintain the flow of conversation, not every question in the protocol was asked in each group; therefore, the amount of data available for each question varied. Focus groups are designed to gather in-depth and varied opinions; this contrasts with survey research (e.g., DACOWITS mini-survey), which gathers information on concurrence or proportions of respondents who hold one of several well-defined experiences, beliefs, opinions, or attitudes. Focus group data are not easily quantified. Given the nature of conversation, it is unlikely that each participant will respond to every question asked and/or will respond in a predefined or standard manner. 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. However, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of focus groups is to obtain rich detail on a topic, rather than to achieve precise measurement of the frequency and type of responses.

Chapter 2. Gender Integration

The Assignments Working Group has an ongoing interest in the Military Services' current efforts in gender integration. Expanding upon its exploration of the topic in 2011 through 2014, DACOWITS conducted 25 focus groups on the topic of gender integration. Issues addressed in these groups consisted of the following: steps being taken to prepare units for gender integration, Service members' perceptions of the gender integration preparation process and their satisfaction with it, the role of military culture in gender integration, and how gender integration may influence registration for the Selective Service. Because the Coast Guard is already completely gender integrated, questions on this topic were asked only of members of the other four Services. This section provides a summary of the 2015 DACOWITS focus group discussions on the topic of gender integration, and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Service members' experiences with gender integration
- ▶ Gender integration preparation activities by the Military Services
- ▶ Service members' perceptions of gender integration
- ▶ The impact of military culture on gender integration
- ▶ Challenges and recommendations for gender integration
- ▶ Women and the Selective Service

Although it was not part of the protocol for the focus groups discussing gender integration, the issue of career progression was frequently raised in these focus groups. The comments largely mirrored the results from the focus groups conducted on the topic of career progression, reported in Chapter 3. A summary of these comments is included at the end of this section. Many of the findings from the 2015 focus groups on gender integration echo findings from previous years' examinations of this topic; please refer to prior years' reports for more information.

A. Service Members' Experiences With Gender Integration

DACOWITS began the discussion on gender integration by asking if participants had personal experience with the topic, through belonging to a unit that had recently undergone or was currently undergoing gender integration. To aid in the discussion, participants were provided the following definition of gender integration: "Gender integration is the process of eliminating all gender-based barriers to service, and fully integrating women into occupational fields to the maximum extent possible—particularly efforts following the call to rescind the direct combat exclusion rule for women by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2013."²

² Dempsey, M.E., & Panetta, L.E. (2013, January 24). Elimination of the 1994 Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule [Memorandum]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense. Retrieved from <http://www.defense.gov/news/WISRJointMemo.pdf>

Table 2. Experience with gender integration among participants in gender integration focus groups

	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Is Your Unit Gender Integrated or Currently in the Process of Integration?				
Integrated for 2 or more years	120	92%	235	90%
Integrated within the past 2 years	4	3%	6	2%
Currently undergoing integration	5	4%	10	4%
Not integrated	1	1%	9	3%
Total	130	100%	260	100%
Missing	4		7	

Less than 10 percent of participants cited experience in a unit undergoing integration. Though the small proportion of participants with experience relevant to the topic limited responses, participants were able to respond to some of the topics covered during this discussion. In particular, some female participants were able to draw from their experiences being the only woman or one of only a few women in a male-dominated unit and/or a male-dominated career field. While their experiences might have differed somewhat from those of Service members in a newly integrated unit, participants in a unit undergoing integration were still able to provide relevant input.

“I am the only girl in my division and . . . it really is hard, because most of them . . . have, no idea on how to . . . work with me and how to handle that and what to do. It is really difficult, and sometimes frustrating. Sometimes they will do something and then be like, ‘Oh, I ‘m sorry, you know, I just came from an all-male [unit].’” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“We just started the process, we are still kind of waiting . . . It’s not like they change how we do our work, but just the integration; a lot of people have different thoughts how it’s going to go and they’re not sure. It’s a big change going from virtually all male [units] to integrated. Being on both, I have found pluses and minuses to both sides. Integrated [units] seems to be cleaner but there’s potential to lose some [Service members] because of stupid relationships . . .” (Male Officer)

“I’ve always been in [units] that are primarily male. There have been leaders that have never worked with females . . . The majority of those fields were combat. That was my first initial experience with males never having worked with females. I didn’t get a lot of resistance, but I appreciated them treating me the same at the end of the day. But was it stressful? Yes, it was very stressful.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Participants were not asked specifically about their awareness of gender integration in the Military Services outside of their personal experiences. However, the discussions made it clear that among participants who were not part of career fields or units undergoing gender integration, there was a general lack of knowledge about the endeavor, including when and if it was occurring and how it was

being carried out. This lack of awareness of the Military Services' gender integration efforts likely affected other discussions on the topic.

“Having been in career fields integrated all along, prior to seeing email trail to tell me to come here, I hadn't thought much about the integration. I didn't realize it was still an issue.” (Male Officer)

B. Gender Integration Preparation Activities by the Military Services

Regardless of personal experience with gender integration, participants were asked what, if anything, was being done to prepare units for gender integration. Responses varied greatly; participants cited activities such as determining appropriate gender-neutral standards, modifying physical spaces, preparing men prior to integrating women into previously closed units, increasing monitoring for sexual harassment and sexual assault, and taking no action.

1. Determining Appropriate Gender-Neutral Standards

A few participants observed that the Military Services were conducting testing to ensure the standards currently in place for entry into closed units and positions were appropriate and gender neutral. Others said the Military Services were allowing a selected group of women to participate in the training for male-only positions to gauge if women could successfully complete the training.

“They're looking at how to standardize testing to get them in . . . determining the best standards for physical abilities . . . what they think the best option should be for what the women will need to physically and mentally go through. They are getting a few select women now to go through it.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Until women are integrated in the [gender integration-related] experiment, we are not putting women in the infantry because we are not sure how it will work.” (Male Officer)

2. Modifying Physical Spaces

Several participants expressed the need for modifications to physical spaces such as berthing on ships, housing during deployments, and separate restrooms. Some participants indicated the modifications were in progress, while others reported they were anticipated but had not yet begun.

“ . . . They set up [housing space] for male and female . . . had to go through a big process to make it acceptable for females and make sure there is segregation in [housing spaces].” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“The military is very diverse—men and women have separate restrooms most places, [and] everywhere should be. Even if there is one female, it should be an everywhere type of thing [to accommodate men and women].” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

3. Preparing Men Prior to Integrating

Discussions and training among previously male-only units were described by some participants with experience in units undergoing gender integration, ranging from formal training to informal discussions. These discussions generally focused on how the men were expected to behave around servicewomen.

“When we got two female [Service members], everyone got pulled into formation, excluding them, and we got told some of the do’s and don’ts of interacting with them . . . [We were told to not] shy away from talking to them, that they are [Service members] and trying to do their job, and that they did not necessarily volunteer to come to this unit. We needed to make them feel comfortable.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“ . . . Some of the words we say, some the things we talk about, we need to try to censor ourselves and . . . not saying that we are dirty, but watch what we say around everyone. It’s not like they change how we do our work, but just the integration—a lot of people have different thoughts how it’s going to go and they’re not sure. It’s a big change going from virtually all male [units] to integrated.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

4. Increasing Monitoring for Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

A small number of participants mentioned increased vigilance for sexual harassment and sexual assault occurrences in newly integrated units, based on the expectation such occurrences would increase.

“I recently received the first class of female [Service members]. The only problem we had with integration was with our [unit] supervision. As we tried to integrate them and keep the gender bias to a minimum . . . [we] monitored the process to ensure there were no [sexual harassment and sexual assault program] violations.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

5. Taking No Action

Other participants involved in gender integration or familiar with the process observed that no special steps were being taken to prepare units for integration. Several male participants believed no special preparation was needed, while many of the female participants said training was needed, though it was not occurring.

“Um, no real prep. I mean, our [Senior enlisted leader] told us 6 months beforehand that we’re going to get females. Seems like they are getting more aggressive with integration. We haven’t seen the female [Service members] yet, that we were told we would see. [It was] just a heads up, I guess.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“There was no preparation for it. We treat them as [Service members] who are no different than male [Service members].” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“One of my challenges was being deployed twice in combat forces. That didn’t go over too well . . . I had no idea what I was going into . . . How could they have prepared me? Give me a briefing; tell me what it’s like.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

C. Service Members’ Perceptions of Gender Integration

Participants were asked how they felt gender integration was proceeding overall and if they were satisfied with the process. Nearly all the men who responded to this question indicated they were satisfied with the gender integration process.

“We have had two new female officers but enlisted is a whole new thing. But, ah, it’s more tame than expected.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

In contrast, the women who responded were evenly split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Women’s dissatisfaction stemmed both from the manner in which the testing/development of gender-neutral standards was being carried out and the lack of education units received prior to integrating women into previously male-only units.

“It’s the same as women trying to go to the [male-only training]. When women fail, it is news, but when men fail, and lots do, it’s nothing. The news makes it a huge deal when women fail. It’s portrayed as ‘We have to let women in this field, so what do we do? We lower the standard.’” (Female Officer)

“I was sent down [to a new unit] and I was told that I was the first . . . woman in the infantry . . . I was scared. I had no idea what to expect. When I first walked in . . . everyone was very cautious; they wanted to see how I would react. But nobody made a big deal about it and it was actually a very comfortable transition.” (Female Officer)

D. The Impact of Military Culture on Gender Integration

Participants were provided with the following definition of culture for this discussion and asked what about the culture of the Military Services made it easier or more challenging for women to integrate into newly opened units and positions: “Culture is a way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation.”

1. Benefits of Military Culture

Participants reported fewer benefits than challenges of military culture on efforts to integrate women into previously closed units and positions.

a. A Norm of Acceptance, Especially Among Younger Service Members

The most commonly mentioned benefit of military culture in relation to easing the gender integration transition was the accepting nature of the Military Services, particularly among the younger generation. Participants indicated younger Service members were more accepting of women and tended to adapt

more easily than older Service members did at viewing everyone first as a Service member and secondly as a man or woman.

“Have I heard females and males say that we aren’t equal? . . . Yes. Do I think it’s a lot of our young [Service members] coming in today? I’d say no . . . I think our younger [Service members] are more adaptive to it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“As a community, the military is generally accepting of who comes into your unit since it is a voluntary service. You are accepted, because you chose to be there and are a part of the unit . . . We know how to accept new people because we are of a transient nature.” (Male Officer)

“If you had asked me if I thought it would have been difficult to integrate women 10 years ago, I would have said definitely. I think it was a lot harder 10 years ago. Nowadays, I don’t think so much. I think the general consensus with the people I work [with] is that when someone comes to work with you, man or woman, you treat them the same. It does not matter if they are a man or a woman, you treat them the same.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“It’s the mindset of those above them . . . It was at least 3 months [into the deployment] and then the one guy talked to me. But they were told not to talk to me . . . Their leaders need to be aware females are being integrated. People’s mindsets have to change on it. Today that’s the way the military works.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

b. Military Discipline

Less frequently, participants suggested the discipline of the Military Services as beneficial for gender integration.

“One thing that I would say makes it easier. When you’re in the [Service], you’re used to doing things you don’t want to do. You do what you’re told. So with integration, suck it up and move on.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“It is easier with the actual military culture mindset, if the discipline is there. It could be . . . a smoother transition. It would need strong disciplinary values and beliefs in order to get that mindset.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

2. Challenges of Military Culture

Women were more likely than men were to mention challenges military culture poses to the successful integration of women.

a. Women Are Viewed Stereotypically

Women, in particular, frequently indicated they are viewed stereotypically. This manifested itself in several ways, including the jobs women are assigned and the expectations men had for their military

service. The most commonly cited challenge was the general mindset that women should not be in traditionally male positions and units. This mindset was ascribed particularly to older men.

“There’s still a lot of men who have been in the military a very long time. They’re still in the mindset that women are the paper pushers. They can’t be [in traditionally male career fields] and they can’t do these jobs because they are women.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“They have the idea that women don’t belong [in that unit]. They have the mentality that you come in and make the [unit] less of a [unit]. Jobs like that it has to do a lot with the group . . . The group now is like ‘This is a male career field and you don’t belong here.’” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

b. Women’s Perceived Lack of Respect From Men

Another frequently mentioned challenge was women’s perceived need to work harder than men to earn the same respect that men received. This view was reported exclusively by women.

“Coming in brand new, I have to work harder than a male coming in. [For men coming in, the other men think,] ‘You’re a dude, I already like you.’ I’m already a female in a male career field, so now I have to work harder than the guy to gain the respect.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“It’s been a challenge learning how to gain their trust. If I tell them to do something, they push [it] aside. I’ve been told that people wouldn’t have said that if [I wasn’t] a woman.” (Female Officer)

“So my problem is I will come in and work five times harder and a guy will come in and do one great thing and everybody loves him! And I’m like ‘What have I done? I have done five times what he’s done and I’m being overlooked.’ . . . My [career field] is male-dominated and [in] every command I have always been the only female and I had to work 10 times harder than the men to get good evals.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

c. Stigmatization Surrounding Pregnancy

A few participants stated that women were often viewed negatively for becoming pregnant, and many women were stigmatized by the mere potential that they could become pregnant, which could hinder efforts to integrate women into previously closed units and positions. This view was expressed solely by women.

“You can’t tell the chain of command that you are planning on having kids.” (Female Officer)

“It’s really sad . . . I made a comment . . . ‘There’s a lot of pregnant women’ and my [male] NCO said ‘I guess that’s what they tell them to do. Come in, get pregnant, and collect their paycheck.’ I was dumbfounded.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

E. Challenges and Recommendations for Gender Integration

Participants were asked about the challenges with integrating women into previously closed units and positions, aside from the challenges mentioned in relation to military culture, and what the Military Services could do better to ensure women are successfully integrated into these units and positions.

1. Challenges With Gender Integration

A number of challenges were mentioned; while some were cited most commonly by male participants, others were echoed frequently by female participants as well.

a. Structural Barriers

Though some participants reported that physical modifications were being made to housing, restrooms, etc., they also felt inadequate facilities posed structural barriers to gender integration. Most of those participants reported the need for additional accommodations has created a delay in the integration process.

“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)

“We have trouble sending our females out because there [is] not enough [housing spaces] for other ships we go into. So our males get more time on sea tours . . . It hurts their career because the only time they can do their job is when they’re out to sea . . . It’s a really bad thing at my command that the juniors aren’t getting the training they need because there aren’t enough female racks. It’s a major problem.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

b. Perceived Limitations of Women

Several male participants felt the biggest barriers to integration of women were women’s lack of physical, biological, and emotional capabilities to perform the jobs that are being integrated. Similarly, a few men believed women would interfere with the unit cohesion of previously male-only units. Physical limitations were the most commonly observed, followed by social factors. Only a few participants mentioned biological and emotional limitations of women.

“In my unit there are some things female [Service members] physically can’t do, [like handle] a 110-pound ammo can. The females can’t do that . . . In combat, it can’t be like that . . . there’s no picking up the slack.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“The kind of area and conditions are such that I honestly don’t believe a female can do what I’ve seen a man be able to do. Their rounds are 110–120 pounds each. I’ve felt bad and helped them carry them. I’m a medic and it’s not my job. The stuff they talk about

. . . it would just be awkward if a woman were there. The camaraderie that helps the guys come together and be one force.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

c. Culture of Male-Only Units

Barriers related to the masculine culture of non-integrated units were commonly identified by both men and women as a challenge to integration.

“The infantry has always been its own animal . . . they would have to have a rehaul of infantry culture.” (Male Officer)

“You talk different when you’re around just women or just men. In a male career field it does not matter—they will talk how they want, if you’re there or not. They talk differently.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“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)

d. Men’s Perceived Need to Protect Women

A few participants stated that men have a need to protect women, a mentality that had been ingrained in them as they were growing up and that would interfere with their ability to respond appropriately in combat situations. This was mentioned most commonly among senior enlisted participants.

“For the men there—for me, at least, there is the tendency to try to protect women. The guy on my right is getting shot but I’m thinking about the woman on my left. Let the guy fend for himself; don’t let a woman get hurt. That’s how I was raised, it’s ingrained in me.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“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)

2. Recommendations for Successful Gender Integration

When asked what the Military Services could do to better ensure women are successfully integrated, there were three themes that emerged across focus groups, as well as a series of suggestions made by only one or two participants. All are described in the next section.

a. Hold Men and Women to the Same Physical Standards

Several male and female participants asserted standards should not be lowered for women. 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.

"Keep them the same. Part of the reason the guys harbor resentment is because women are treated differently—giving women second chances with diving, etc. Women are not treated the same and will not be if we are going to lower standards just to make sure there are more women." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"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)

"In special ops you establish your street cred by getting through the accession. If you're able to do it, you're good to go. I think that's part of the reason 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)

b. Enculturate and Train Men and Women Prior to Integration

Several participants suggested 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, prior to integration, men needed exposure to servicewomen as well as training on how to interact with them.

"I would say exposure. They actually had this integration go as the unit was being put in an operation. 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 2 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)

Several women and a few men indicated there was a need for training for women going into newly integrated units as well. Women needed training in what to expect and how to handle the reactions they were likely to receive from men.

"It's not only that they're 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)

c. Ensure Leadership Support in Units Undergoing Integration

A few participants highlighted the importance of leadership setting the right precedent from the beginning.

“I think one of the biggest things that can be done is not to treat them like a woman or a show pony. Whenever somebody asks me what it’s like being a female in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), I say that when I’m in my uniform, I’m not a woman, they aren’t men, we’re all EOD techs. If leadership doesn’t differentiate in the beginning, I think it will set a better tone for the rest of their career. They won’t want to be treated [differently].” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“Gender integration is absolutely going to affect the culture. If leadership isn’t bought into gender integration, there will be issues.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Other suggestions for facilitating the process of integrating women included the following:

- ▶ Integrate more than one woman into a unit at a time
- ▶ Integrate leadership positions first
- ▶ Provide more opportunities for same-sex female mentorship
- ▶ Use integrated housing
- ▶ Use integrated training, beginning with initial entry training
- ▶ Use a continuous feedback loop of leadership dictating how to implement the integration and obtaining regular feedback and lessons learned from the ground-level units

F. Women and the Selective Service

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions related to Selective Service registration. To aid in the discussion, DACOWITS provided participants the following overview of the Selective Service: “After America’s draft ended in 1973, the Selective Service System was created in case a mobilization of military forces became necessary during a crisis (e.g., World War III). Since young men between the ages of 18 to 25 years old are required by law to register with the Selective Service, the System maintains information on U.S. citizens who are potentially subject to a draft.” Despite being provided this information, several participants—particularly women—were unsure about Selective Service registration and often confused registering for the Selective Service with being drafted; this difficulty in distinguishing between Selective Service registration and being drafted should be kept in mind when considering the results presented in this section.

1. Views on Requiring Selective Service Registration for Women

Participants were first asked if women should be required to register for the Selective Service, as men are, now that the combat exclusion rule for women has been lifted.

a. Require Women to Register

Most of the participants who responded to this question believed women should have to register for the Selective Service. Nearly all those expressing this opinion indicated that requiring women to register would ensure equality between the sexes.

“We’re hammering equal rights for everything. You want to be equal, this is what it costs to be equal.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think for most guys it’s more about fairness. If we have to do it, then so should they.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I believe yes. Ever since we’ve been going towards more equal rights of both genders, this is something that has always stopped us. Yeah we still have major problems, but solve one problem at a time. If women want to be treated completely equally, they should have to sign that draft card—same as us.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

b. Eliminate the Selective Service Altogether

A sizable minority of the participants who responded to this question believed Selective Service registration should be eliminated for both men and women. Several stated that if it were not eliminated, women should have to register as men do.

“Why not just get rid of it? You have the Social Security number of everyone in the country . . . You still have the ability to pull that range of ages. It makes us all do additional work and keep another database.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Why don’t we just get rid of it? We all volunteered. Why do we need it? Either get rid of it or make it equal for everyone.” (Female Officer)

c. Do Not Require Women to Register

A smaller number of the participants were opposed to forcing women to register; reasons included concerns about drafting mothers and concerns about women becoming pregnant to avoid being drafted, women’s potential disinterest in the Service, and society not being ready for women to be drafted.

“Another disadvantage . . . how many women would get pregnant as a scapegoat? How many children will be born? How many women will get pregnant? . . . The statistics show that a lot of women want to join for whatever reason, but there are a lot more women that would never join the military.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I think that it should be only for men because right now in society . . . men make more than women and women are the majority of people who stay home and take care of the kids. So I don’t think they should have to sign up.” (Female Officer)

“If it was a national vote, I don’t think it would pass. We want to protect our mothers and daughters.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Views on the Impact of Mandatory Registration

Participants were asked how requiring women to register for the Selective Service might affect women’s interest in joining the Military Services.

a. No Impact

The majority of the participants who responded to this question believed requiring women to register for the Selective Service would not have an impact on women’s interest in the Service.

“No, I don't think it would help gain female interest in the military.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I registered for Selective Service, but I didn’t join until 9 years later. I don’t think it would have any impact because if they have an interest in joining then they will. I only registered because it was required by law.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

b. Increase Women’s Consideration to Join the Military Services

A sizable minority of the participants believed requiring women to register for the Selective Service would encourage more women to consider joining the Military Services.

“It would make them think about it. Some women just don’t consider the military. They may have to consider what will happen and what they will do if they are drafted. It may require them to do some research. It will create some thought process at least.” (Female Officer)

“I think it would affect knowing about the military. I had never heard of the [Service] before I joined.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

3. Specific Advantages of Requiring Women to Register

Some participants noted that having women register would ensure the appearance of equality between men and women.

“We get blamed for the law [requiring only men to register for the Selective Service] . . . I didn’t draft the law . . . This law makes it look like we get to pick and choose.” (Female Officer)

A few male participants also stated that requiring women to register for the Selective Service would broaden the pool, should the draft be reinstated.

“It’s a number game—the more people you can go through to see if qualified, the better.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

4. Specific Disadvantages of Requiring Women to Register

A few of the participants believed it would harm the Military Services to force women to register for the Selective Service. Some participants anticipated women would become pregnant to avoid being drafted, which would eliminate the equality gained by requiring women to register.

“I get wanting it to be equal, but women have the chance to just become pregnant to avoid it that men don’t have.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

A few participants felt requiring women to register would lower the quality of the Military Services, should the draft be reinstated, because they believed men were generally better suited for military service compared to women.

“I don’t want to have a certain woman on the lines with me, and have my back, when she just isn’t built for that. Some women are just not built for that . . . I am not trying to say all women are the same, because they aren’t. I don’t think a certain class of women should be drafted into the [Service] and asked to protect somebody else when they are not built for it. They couldn’t pull the trigger.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

G. Summary

While few participants had personal experience in a unit undergoing integration, several participants were able to add to the discussion based on experiences in units or career fields with few women. Among participants who were not part of units or career fields undergoing gender integration, there was a lack of knowledge about gender integration. When asked what the Military Services were doing to prepare for gender integration, participants observed that the Services were taking steps to ensure the standards in place are appropriate and gender neutral; were making modifications to physical spaces such as berthing on ships, housing during deployments, and separate restrooms; were holding discussions or training with men in male-only units prior to integrating women into the units; and were increasing vigilance for sexual harassment and sexual assault occurrences in newly integrated units. Other participants indicated the Military Services are doing nothing to prepare units for gender integration.

Participants were asked how they feel gender integration is proceeding overall and if they are satisfied with it. Nearly all the men who remarked on their satisfaction with how gender integration was proceeding indicated they were satisfied. In contrast, the women who responded were evenly split between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Women’s dissatisfaction stemmed from the process for testing/development of gender-neutral standards and the lack of education for men and women prior to integrating women into previously male-only units.

When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of military culture in making it easier or more challenging for women to integrate into newly opened units and positions, participants noted fewer benefits than challenges associated with military culture. Women were particularly likely to denote factors of military culture that hindered gender integration. Benefits mentioned included the accepting nature of the Military Services, particularly among younger Service members, and the discipline of the Military Services. Challenges of military culture included men holding stereotypical views of women, which commonly manifested in women not being assigned difficult job tasks and the mindset among

older men that women should not be in traditionally male positions and units; women's perceived need to work harder than men to earn the same respect that men received; and stigmatization surrounding pregnancy.

Participants were asked about challenges with integrating women into previously closed units and positions and what the Military Services could do better to ensure women are successfully integrated into these units and positions. Challenges mentioned included structural barriers such as a need for modifications to housing and restrooms to accommodate women; men's perceived barriers to women's physical, biological, and emotional capabilities to perform the jobs that are being integrated, including interference with unit cohesion of male-only units; the masculine culture of non-integrated units; and the mentality that men must protect women, including how this may interfere with men's ability to perform appropriately in combat situations. Recommendations for improving the success of gender integration included a need to ensure the Military Services do not lower the job standards of currently or previously closed units and positions to allow women to complete the selection and training process; changes to military culture and training for both men and women prior to integrating women in previously closed units; and ensuring leadership in integrating units set the right precedent from the beginning.

Focus group participants were asked a series of questions related to Selective Service registration. Despite being provided an overview of the Selective Service, several participants—particularly women—were unsure about Selective Service registration and often confused registering for the Selective Service with being drafted. Most participants believed women should have to register for the Selective Service because this would create equality between the sexes. Other participants believed Selective Service registration should be eliminated for everyone. Several of these stated that if it were not eliminated, women should have to register as men do. A smaller number of the participants were opposed to forcing women to register, for various reasons. When asked how requiring women to register for the Selective Service might impact women's interest in joining the Military Services, most indicated it would not have an impact. Some participants, on the other hand, believed requiring women to register would encourage more women to consider joining the Military Services. Specific advantages participants noted for requiring women to register for the Selective Service included gender equality and an expanded pool should the draft be reinstated. Specific disadvantages participants mentioned included the possibility that women would become pregnant to avoid being drafted, which would mitigate the equality gained by requiring women to register, and a belief that it would lower the quality of the Military Services, should the draft be reinstated, because men are generally better suited for military service compared to women.

Chapter 3. Career Progression of Servicewomen

In 2015, the Assignments Working Group continued its examination of the career progression of servicewomen. Similar to 2014, the focus groups on this topic included only officers and senior enlisted participants. Thirty of the focus groups in 2015 addressed the topic of career progression. For 2015, the Committee based its study on this topic around the following definition for career progression: “Career progression is the process of advancing or growing within a chosen career path. It is achieved when employees are able to engage in a combination of work assignments, job rotation, training, education, and self-development programs. This could include, but is not limited to, timely selection for military schooling, including joint professional military education; choice career assignments; and timely promotions.” This section provides a summary of the 2015 DACOWITS focus group discussions on the topic of career progression, and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Perceived gender differences in career goals
- ▶ Perceived gender differences in access to professional development opportunities
- ▶ Perceived gender differences in senior leadership opportunities
- ▶ Perceived gender differences in career progression between servicewomen and civilian sector women
- ▶ Suggestions for improving career progression of servicewomen
- ▶ Gender discrimination

Although it was not part of the protocol for the focus groups discussing career progression, the issue of gender integration was frequently raised in these focus groups. The comments largely mirrored the results from the focus groups conducted on the topic of gender integration, reported in Chapter 2. A summary of these comments is included at the end of this section. Many of the findings from the 2015 focus groups on gender integration echo findings from previous years’ examinations of this topic; please refer to prior years’ reports for more information.

A. Perceived Gender Differences in Career Goals

DACOWITS asked participants if they believed men and women in the Service had the same or different career goals.

1. Same Career Goals

Several participants suggested servicemen and servicewomen had the same career goals.

“I wouldn’t think the goals would differ from men and women any more than they would differ from me and anyone in this room [of other women]. It isn’t any different than a group of men.” (Female Officer)

2. Changing Career Goals Over Time

Others indicated that men and women entered the Service with similar goals, but that those goals changed over time. Most commonly, women altered their aspirations once they married and began

having children. A few participants also mentioned aspirations changing when women who are facing challenges in their career fields see other women in those fields progressing.

“The thing about goals with me is that goals change. A female meets someone, gets married, and has kids. Nine times out of ten it’s the female that gets out of the military.”
(Senior Enlisted Man)

“Initially the goal and the drive might have been there but that changed because of obstacles they faced or seeing and witnessing the things that didn’t seem fair, compared to males.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

3. Different Career Goals

A few participants believed that men and women had differing career goals from the outset. More specifically, participants believed women who joined the military were often focused on obtaining a college education while men were more focused on gaining military-related skills.

“It is about priorities. I think college is a great thing and an amazing opportunity, but, for me, I just got [a less stressful job duty] after about 8 years. College was on the backburner because I was more concerned about [gaining job-related skills] . . . A much larger proportion of [enlisted] females are going to college as a stepping-stone for the civilian world . . .” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I guarantee you, if you do a poll . . . Females would blast men out of the water [in terms of who is taking the most college courses]. Every female I have has taken a college class . . . that’s 10 females. There are maybe, maybe, six guys who are taking a class or who have taken a college class—and that number is out of 25–26 guys. Females have that ambition. Take the officer programs right now, a lot of the females are driving for [one of the commissioning programs]. Guys aren’t doing that.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

B. Perceived Gender Differences in Access to Professional Development Opportunities

Participants were asked about the opportunity for professional development programs in the Military Services and if any of these programs were specifically for women. Participants were also asked if there were any programs being adapted to accommodate the opening of positions that were previously closed to women. As in 2014, both men and women frequently had difficulty pinpointing what professional development opportunities were available within their respective Military Services beyond the required leadership courses; this difficulty in citing available professional opportunities should be kept in mind while reviewing this section.

1. Equal Opportunities for Professional Development

Most participants said that men and women had the same opportunities for professional development, though men expressed this view more frequently than women did. This finding varied slightly by Service,

as some Services had schools that were closed to women at the time of these focus groups (e.g., Army Ranger school, USMC Infantry Officer Course) while others did not.

“They are geared towards [Service members]. There is not a gender-specific program. If you are a [Service member], then you act like a [Service member] and you go to school to be a [Service member], not a male or female [Service member].” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“There are leadership courses for everyone . . . There are opportunities for everyone.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Programs Specifically for Women

When asked if the Military Services had leadership development programs specifically for women, responses varied by Service. A few participants identified no programs specifically for women. Men were more likely to express this view than women were.

“There is no particular program that is just for females.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Aside from professional military education that is mandated, again mandated gender-neutral, I haven’t seen women-only type professional advancement courses.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Other participants described leadership development programs that were specifically for women. Several specific programs were mentioned; some were Service-specific, while others existed in more than one Military Service.

“There are women leadership symposiums and forums. I don’t pay attention, but I know they are out there. It is encouraged and well organized. In the [Service], women’s leadership symposiums are well known.” (Male Officer)

“We have [a mentorship and empowerment program for women]. It can help develop junior female officers, but there’s the perception that females are getting special treatment. Previous people have had experience with Sisters in Arms, and people complained about it. We ended up doing it, and tried to keep it very professional. But the mentality and perception is that it’s ridiculous and why are we doing it.” (Female Officer)

C. Perceived Gender Differences in Senior Leadership Opportunities

Committee members asked participants why there were fewer women than men at the highest levels of DoD leadership and if they felt women had the same opportunities as men to reach these senior leadership positions.

1. Equality in Senior DoD Positions

Several participants believed there were fewer women than men in top DoD leadership positions because more women than men chose to leave the Service prior to the point of consideration for senior-level leadership positions. Most participants cited family-related reasons for women's decisions to separate. This finding was more common among male than female participants.

“Females tend to self-select out of those higher level opportunities. They make a personal decision—either the husband's career is going to take a backseat, or I'm not going to move, or I'm going to leave [the Service] at a certain mark because that additional higher billet is going to impact my relationship. Or, they don't even get to this decision because they want to be a stay-at-home spouse with their children and not only see them twice during the week.” (Female Officer)

“We have young [Service members] and many more females get out rather than staying in the career for the long haul . . . By choice. I know four who were O6 and they wanted to get out. By choice. For their families or to follow their husbands. Do I think it's fair? I think everyone has that opportunity. Is it balanced? I think we lose some of the very best . . . I worry about why they're walking but at the same time family values are a lot more important to some people.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I saw a couple of Lieutenants who got out just because of their kids and they didn't want to be a mom in the military. They didn't want to move around. They did it for education and then they wanted to move on. Not because of advancement, but they just got out because of their kids.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

2. Equality in Leadership Opportunities

Participants were asked if women had the same opportunities as men to reach the highest DoD leadership levels, regardless of whether or not they actually attained them. Most of the participants who responded to this question believed men and women had the same opportunities, though this finding was more prevalent among men compared to women.

“Everyone has same opportunity to advance and become what they want to become in the [Service]. The fact that females may not be advancing, it may be their drive; it is the same for men. They may not want to be [a general officer] . . . The opportunities are the same for everyone, it just depends on how much heart and will they have.” (Male Officer)

“I just need to fill the mission. I'm going to burn them all out equally. We give them every opportunity to fail or succeed.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

3. Inequality in Leadership Opportunities

In contrast, several participants believed men had more opportunities compared to women, while none said that women had more opportunities compared to men. This was reported most frequently by

women, though several did note that women’s opportunities have improved in recent years. Participants specifically mentioned a lack of mentorship opportunities for women as an inequality.

“I don’t think that women have had the same opportunities. I do think it has improved though . . . It is improving, but where I am it is still much harder for me personally.”
(Senior Enlisted Woman)

“We have the same opportunities, but not the same grooming opportunities. There are more men in the military. We have the same opportunities because the law says we have to, but I don’t think we get the same grooming opportunities as we come up through the ranks from a mentoring perspective. There aren’t many women above us and there aren’t many males willing to help us.” (Female Officer)

4. Specific Factors That Hindered Servicewomen

Participants specifically mentioned three factors that, while potential barriers for both men and women, were more likely to hinder the career progression of servicewomen than servicemen.

a. Being Dual Military

Some participants noted that while servicewomen might have the same opportunities as servicemen, dual military status and having families were more likely to affect women’s careers than men’s. This was more commonly expressed by women than by men. Two participants disagreed, however, indicating that these issues affected men and women equally.

“I’ve aspired to be a [senior enlisted rank] for as long as I can remember. I went into the career field—I was in the first pipeline class. I wanted to see it. I am married, military to military. He is on his ninth deployment. I’ve seen my career hurt because of that. We have four kids at home. I’ve missed out on opportunities left and right because of that.”
(Senior Enlisted Woman)

“And often you’re married to another Service member, so you make career choices based on being married to another Service member. Those are challenges women face. People who get to the highest level have the perfect career.” (Female Officer)

b. Pregnancy

A few participants remarked on how becoming pregnant could hinder a woman’s career, particularly if the pregnancy occurs during specific points in her career. This finding was mentioned primarily by women officers.

“I have to plan to the day having a child within my specialty. If I get pregnant on a [particular leadership assignment], it is a career ender . . . My last tour was [in that particular assignment]. Every day of that [assignment] I was on birth control and I was making sure that nothing happened because I would have been relieved of command

. . . It is not fair; the men don't have to physically worry about that kind of thing. I have to fit [having a child] in. I am 36 and finally could fit it in." (Female Officer)

c. Absence of Same-Sex Mentorship

A lack of female mentors was cited as a barrier to career progression among servicewomen, though a few female participants did report having had access to a same-sex mentor. This view was expressed by both men and women, but it was most commonly mentioned by women.

"Same-sex mentorship is crucial. You should get it from both [sexes] but it's crucial to know that they've made it and what it took for them to do it. I've been called on several times to talk to other female [Service members]. You have a different approach, different perspective. Whether it's personal situations or career progression—you want that connection." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"When you think about how you are getting your name out there and associating with others and networking. It is a lot easier for the male because it is a lot easier for males to associate and connect with each other. The networking is easier. There are more men that are similar to myself. It is easier to make a bond and associate myself. It is then easier to show my work. For females, it is harder to make those networks and connections when the military is so male dominated. So, to associate yourself and get guidance, there are less females to look to . . . Males are more able to get guidance and align more with men, and there are more men in the military." (Senior Enlisted Man)

D. Perceived Gender Differences in Career Progression Between Servicewomen and Civilian Sector Women

DACOWITS asked participants what differences if any they perceived in the career progression for servicewomen versus women in the civilian sector, and why those differences may occur. Several participants indicated they had no experience in the civilian sector upon which to base such comparisons. However, some participants were able to make comparisons, either based on personal experience in the civilian sector prior to joining the Military Services or on conversations with civilian friends and family members.

1. Perception That the Military Services Were Better Than the Civilian Sector for Women

Most participants who commented on the differences felt the Military Services were better compared to the civilian world for women. Reasons cited included the equality of pay and career progression opportunities in the Military Services, as well as better maternity leave policies and better awareness of sexual harassment as an impediment to equal opportunities for women in the Military Services.

"One positive thing is that our pay is not different, which is what I tell women thinking about the military. It's a big issue. That's one thing I feel very good about. I know women who are professional attorneys who have to worry about that." (Female Officer)

“It is a lot harder to openly discriminate against women in the military because we get a lot more attention. In a civilian world, there are ways around that kind of stuff. We’re protected when we get off maternity leave and are paid for maternity leave. And, if something happens to us we have people in Washington, DC we can complain to. In the civilian world, someone at [a civilian corporation] will have less protection. Employment at will is the biggest difference in the civilian world, and they can fire you for being a female. Women have to prove something to file a suit. I feel we’re protected a little bit more.” (Female Officer)

2. Perception That the Military Services and the Civilian Sector Were Similar for Women

A few participants believed that women faced similar struggles in both the Military Services and the civilian sector and that one was not necessarily better than the other was. A few felt that women faced different struggles in the Military Services versus the civilian sector, but that career progression was still similar.

“I think it’s about the same. I don’t think there is a difference. I used to think it would be better [in the civilian sector], but talking with my sister it sounds the same as what I experience.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I spent a lot of time with corporate women, and they face similar struggles. I have a work life balance to juggle . . . as far as career progression, it is relatively the same. They have different hurdles but the same pace progression-wise. We were about the same level corporate-wise as well as active duty military, and some GS (general schedule) employees.” (Female Officer)

“I got out after 10 years, so I got to see what it is like [in the civilian sector] and there is not much of a difference. Females are striving hard for raises and personal achievements and goals. They are just as challenged out there as they are here. It is the same in the [Service]—females fight to prove themselves, working for that raise or promotion or career achievement. In either case, it is just about trying to achieve greatness. There really is not a stark difference.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

3. Perception That the Civilian Sector Was Better Than the Military Services for Women

A few participants perceived the civilian sector was better for women.

“Yeah, I think that the military is designed to up and out. You need to progress in the military. That’s capped much sooner. You need to promote or you’ll be tenured out. In civilian, you don’t need to promote out. At some point that’s a personal choice where you are comfortable . . . In the military we need folks to keep promoting up. That is how manpower is designed.” (Male Officer)

“They seem to be more protected there [in the civilian sector] and can achieve their goals a little bit faster.” (Female Officer)

E. Suggestions for Improving Career Progression for Servicewomen

When asked what the Military Services could do to increase women's ability to reach the highest levels of leadership, the discussion focused predominantly on ways to keep women from separating from the Service. This was in keeping with the discussion in the previous section of this report on differences in career progression between servicemen and servicewomen. Several participants felt nothing could or should be done, because often nothing would convince women to choose career progression over starting a family and spending time with their children.

"When we were growing up . . . the ladies who are now the [general officers] when we were [junior officers], none of them had it all. There was a captain of a ship and she wasn't married, or married but no kids, or got divorced. I don't look down at any Lieutenant that got out and wants to have babies." (Female Officer)

"I understand equality and all that and I judge individuals on merit, but there's stuff that we can't change. We want it to be a smorgasbord of races and genders, but it can't be like that. Females and males aren't the same. When I come into work—that's what I want to do for the rest of my work. My wife isn't like that. She wants to stay at home with the family and the kids. I think that until the culture changes, it can't change here." (Senior Enlisted Man)

For those participants who did recommend improvements to increase women's career progression, the most common suggestions were to increase female mentorship and to extend maternity leave and the length of the non-deployable post-partum period.

"Thinking of the number of men, the chances of finding a mentor who is like-minded who went down the same career path [are small]. I'm not saying you can't have a male mentor, but if you are looking to build strong leaders in women, it may help to have more women in leadership roles, but it is just a consequence of numbers. It would help." (Senior Enlisted Man)

"I say put maternity leave at 6 months and don't deploy us for a year. I'm very sensitive to this." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"Increasing maternity leave. I'm not a woman so I don't know, but [that might] keep them in." (Senior Enlisted Man)

F. Gender Discrimination

Participants were asked if they or anyone they knew had experienced discrimination based on gender. Participants were provided with the following definition of gender discrimination for this discussion: "Gender discrimination involves treating a person unfavorably because of that person's gender."

1. Experiences With Gender Discrimination

Personal experiences with gender discrimination were commonly described by women; several men witnessed others experience gender discrimination as well. “Reverse” discrimination (i.e., discrimination against men) was reported by a small number of participants in an effort to point out that it is not only a female concern. A few participants noted that gender discrimination was more likely to come from older men than younger ones.

“Some of the older ones treated females different but the younger ones treated you the same. Like older officers treat you with kid gloves” (Female Officer)

“I have [seen gender discrimination]. Yes, it’s the ‘I don’t want that female’ or ‘No, I will not take her.’ So the female [who] earned [that] spot does not get promoted or put in [the] position, because there are others that do not want to work with females. That’s gender discrimination in my book.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

A few participants felt that women in particular are too hard on other women.

“My supervisor is a female. As [a junior enlisted Service member], I told her I was pregnant. She said the [Service] didn’t issue children. I feel as our gender we are hard on each other. That makes it easier for male counterparts to have the advantage.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Types of Gender Discrimination

The gender discrimination participants described took several forms. Most participants mentioned subtle forms of discrimination, but a few reported more blatant discrimination experiences.

a. Subtle Forms of Gender Discrimination

One common form of discrimination mentioned was women’s perceived need to constantly prove themselves.

“There is so much I have to fight for on a daily basis and men don’t have to. I’ve proven myself constantly and it just gets tiring. We get sick of having to fight the fight. I just want to just do my job and be able to not have to put up with all the extra crap and prove myself extra.” (Female Officer)

“I’m the only senior female NCO . . . it is very hard working at the leadership tier and being taken seriously. I’ve had the same struggles as these ladies. I was told this is not a woman’s [Service]. I have seen improvements though . . . the younger generation [views] me as equal [to my male counterparts in leadership]. They take me seriously.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Others mentioned being viewed as a woman rather than a Service member.

“What I’ve experienced, among some of the senior male population, I think I got looked at more as a daughter than as a female [officer] providing a brief. It was a joke that they’d throw me on the stage because ‘[senior leadership] won’t yell at you because you’re a girl.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“When we go on hikes, males always assume the females won’t make it. Some don’t, but some do. But males always make that assumption that they won’t. It is not based on the person; it is based on their gender. That is a form of discrimination, calling it before it happens.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“The problem is that they don’t look at us as [Service members]; they look at us as women. They’ll cater to us as a woman. It’s kind of a fine line . . . It’s those subtle things where I hear them loud and clear.” (Female Officer)

Some participants noticed that women were more likely to be given job tasks unrelated to their career fields, under the guise that women were better organizers, typists, etc. Male participants said this was because women were better at those jobs. Women, however, believed men used such arguments as an excuse and became frustrated by constantly being asked to take on the stereotypically female job tasks.

“I don’t know how it is everywhere else, but female [Service members] are also often used because, let’s face it, women are better organized than male [Service members], and they get pulled to office jobs and they get pulled out of their career progression. They’re not bad [jobs], but it pulls them out of their career progression.” (Senior enlisted Man)

“Females have a broader span of taking in information. I can take one female [Service member], to save time and to save everyone else a lot of legwork, I can take this one female [Service member] and everything’s done nice and neat. If I take [a male Service member], I have to check on him every 15 minutes. I don’t want to say that everyone has a specific job they should do, but there are people who are better at certain things.” (Senior enlisted Man)

“For me most of the time it had to do with the front office. Like they call me and see if I want to [take a paper-pushing kind of job].” (Female Officer)

A few female participants experienced not having the chance to assume challenging positions because men were trying to protect them. This lack of opportunity has hindered women’s career progression.

“I’ve been at six bases now and I’m always the only female in my [unit] . . . I’ve been treated like a sister. They want to care for you. I’ve never been told anything negative—it’s just more of a ‘take-care-of-her’ [attitude]. I was a mom and had little kids. When deployments came up, it would always be the males that would get talked to first. I don’t take offense, but you do have to be more assertive as a female.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“ . . . Something I have seen throughout my time in the [Service], especially in the more physically demanding [career fields], if you are a female in a [career field] with physical demands, you are not tasked to do the same thing that a male is tasked to do. When men are tasked with these more physical tasks, they get a better idea of what they need to do, and how to lead and manage it. The female doesn’t as much.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

b. Blatant Forms of Gender Discrimination

A few participants described more-blatant discrimination.

“There will be [enlisted Service members beneath my rank] who come up to me and say ‘I don’t work with females’ and I say ‘You don’t sign my paychecks.’” (Female Officer)

“When I requested certain training, I was told I couldn’t go because I was female and would never get that position. When would I get the opportunity to see the other assignments that are out there? The reality is that a male will be more likely to get that position.” (Female Officer)

3. Recent Reduction in Gender Discrimination

Some participants indicated gender discrimination has subsided in recent years.

“[I haven’t experienced discrimination] recently . . . I joined the [Service] in ’95. From about ’95-’97, you started seeing integration . . . To where I am now, I can’t say I personally witnessed discrimination in the last 5 years. Early on in my career, I can say I have.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I’ve seen huge changes from physical fitness standards and in terms of women being respected for work. I’ve seen improvements in sexual harassment, and the way that men and women treat each other. It’s not perfect, but I don’t think it will ever be. In the last year to 2 years, I’ve had males speak to me about how they can come across as not gender biased, including males in leadership positions. This is appreciated, but I think we still have a ways to go.” (Female Officer)

G. Summary

When asked if they believed men and women in the Service had the same or different career goals, several suggested that servicemen and servicewomen had the same career goals, while others indicated men and women entered the Service with similar goals but that those goals changed over time for women due to having a family or witnessing other women in the career field struggle to progress in their careers. In contrast, a few participants reported that men and women entered the Service with different career goals; women focused more on civilian education, while men concentrated on gaining military-related skills.

When asked about the opportunity to participate in professional development programs in the Military Services and if any of these programs were specifically for women, participants frequently had difficulty pinpointing what professional development opportunities were available within their respective Services beyond the required leadership courses. Similar to career goals, most participants observed that men and women had the same opportunities for professional development. Regarding programs specifically for women, a few participants stated there was none, while others described leadership development programs specifically for women, including leadership forums and mentorship programs.

Gender differences in access to senior leadership opportunities were perceived similarly. When participants were asked why there were fewer women than men at the highest levels of DoD leadership, several participants indicated it was because more women than men chose to leave the Service prior to the point of consideration for senior-level leadership positions, citing family-related reasons for women's decisions to separate. Most participants believed women had the same opportunities as men to reach the highest levels at the DoD, regardless of whether or not they actually attained them. In contrast, several participants stated that men had more opportunities than women did, while none reported that women had more opportunities than men. Several of these participants noted that women's opportunities had improved in recent years. Being dual military, pregnancy, and an absence of same-sex mentorship were mentioned as factors that, while potential barriers for both men and women, were more likely to hinder the career progression of servicewomen than servicemen.

DACOWITS asked participants what differences if any they perceived in the career progression for servicewomen versus women in the civilian sector and why those differences may occur. Most participants who commented on the differences felt the Military Services were better compared to the civilian world for women. Reasons for this included the equality of pay and career progression opportunities in the Military Services, better awareness of sexual harassment as an equal opportunities issue, and better maternity leave policies in the Military Services. A few participants believed career progression for women in the Military Services and the civilian sector were similar, while others perceived the civilian sector as better for women.

When asked what the Military Services could do to increase women's ability to reach the highest levels of leadership, the discussion focused predominantly on ways to keep women from separating from the Service. Several participants felt nothing could or should be done, because usually, nothing would convince women to choose career progression over starting a family and spending time with their children. For those participants who did recommend improvements, the most common suggestions were to increase female mentorship and extend maternity leave and the length of the non-deployable post-partum period.

DACOWITS asked participants if they or anyone they knew had experienced discrimination based on gender. Personal experiences with gender discrimination were commonly cited by women; several men witnessed others experience gender discrimination. Reverse discrimination (i.e., discrimination against men) was reported by a small number of participants to point out that it was not only a female concern. A few participants noted gender discrimination was more likely to come from older men than younger ones. The gender discrimination participants described took several forms. Most participants mentioned subtle forms of discrimination, but a few shared experiences of more-obvious discrimination. Subtle forms of gender discrimination included women's perceived need to constantly prove themselves; servicewomen being viewed as women rather than Service members; women being given job tasks unrelated to their career fields, under the guise that women were better organizers, typists, etc.; and

women not receiving the chance to assume challenging positions because men were trying to protect them. Some participants indicated gender discrimination has subsided in recent years.

Chapter 4. Facilitators and Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

The Wellness Working Group has maintained its interest in studying sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Military Services as it has in the past several years. In 2015, the Committee focused specifically on facilitators and barriers to reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault and asked participants about the impact of military culture on reporting; differences between bystander reporting and sexual harassment victim/sexual assault survivor reporting; differences between reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault; and the effect of peers, the chain of command, and social media on reporting. DACOWITS conducted 41 focus groups on facilitators and barriers to reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The Committee used the following definition of sexual harassment for this study: “A form of sexual discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: submission to, or rejection of, such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person’s job, pay, career, or submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person, or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.”

The Committee used the following definition of sexual assault for this study: “Sexual assault is a crime. Sexual assault is defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, physical threat or abuse of authority, or when the victim does not or cannot consent. Consent should not be deemed or construed to mean the failure by the victim to offer physical resistance. Additionally, consent is not given when a person uses force, threat of force, coercion or when the victim is asleep, incapacitated, or unconscious. Sexual assault includes rape, nonconsensual sodomy (oral or anal sex), indecent assault (e.g., unwanted and inappropriate sexual contact or fondling), or attempts to commit these acts. Sexual assault can occur without regard to gender, spousal relationship, or age of victim.”

Participants were encouraged to differentiate between sexual harassment and sexual assault, but often, the conversations on these topics were integrated.

This section provides a summary of the 2015 DACOWITS focus group discussions on the topic of reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ The impact of military culture on reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault
- ▶ Comparison between reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault
- ▶ Comparisons between bystander reporting and sexual harassment victim/sexual assault survivor reporting
- ▶ The impact of peers on reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault
- ▶ The impact of chain of command on reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault
- ▶ The impact of offender’s rank on reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault
- ▶ The impact of social media on reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault

A summary is included at the end of this section.

A. The Impact of Military Culture on Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Participants were asked to describe the ways military culture supports the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault, as defined in an earlier chapter. Discussions focused on perceived changes in military culture, the sexual harassment and sexual assault training Service members receive, and military values and camaraderie.

1. Changes in Military Culture and Policies to Support Reporting

Respondents discussed how military culture and policy have changed over the years, and have fostered a climate that better supports reporting.

“It’s not pushed to the side anymore. It’s hard to discourage it. Now, they take you straight to the [sexual harassment and sexual assault program] advocate. Even when I was overseas, it was the same way. Everyone made sure it didn’t matter what rank you were, you were going to be heard. It didn’t matter if they were officers or senior enlisted.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“There’s a lot of training now. Years ago, there’s like a stigma with it. They don’t want to make the unit look bad or the military look bad. But now the culture has changed.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“There are policies in place now. Ten to twelve years ago there was a lack of education and a lack of support and resources available to the victims . . . Now there are policies and directives and guidance out there that make it easier to deal with situations.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think the [Service] does support reporting now. I think it’s putting those resources in the units in the last 5 to 10 years. Previously, reporting was thought of as being weak.” (Male Officer)

Participants also described how the Military Services have developed a formalized process to handle allegations. The representatives and victim advocates that assist victims of sexual harassment and survivors of sexual assault were viewed as a useful resource that facilitated reporting.

“The reps [sexual harassment and sexual assault program representatives] do come around and have an open door policy. They are very hospitable when it comes to their office. They’re highly accessible. It makes it easier to go talk to them. You see them working together and they’re always there when you need them.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Sexual harassment is a large portion of the [equal opportunity program], which was created to specifically address the reporting issue. I can tell you that, at least from what

I have seen in the 10 years I have served, it has become much easier to report. It is easier to anonymously [report] and to see something being done about it . . . If someone comes to me and says I have been sexually harassed, I have no authority to tell them no they weren't. My job is to forward that up to the chain of command and an investigation will start from that point. Everything is taken seriously.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

a. Perceptions of Increased Reporting

Men and women described how increased training, awareness, and avenues for reporting have led to increases in the number of sexual harassment and sexual assault cases being reported.

“I’m a [victim advocate], and the numbers have skyrocketed. It is unbelievable how many open cases there are right now. I think there is a 3 percent DoD false reporting rate,³ but when it is reported correctly and procedures are correct, then there isn’t a knee-jerk reaction and it is handled correctly. You let the professionals do their job and make that determination. Nine out of ten times, there is some misconduct that did take place.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“As far as reporting goes, because it’s been crammed down our throats every 5 seconds, they report both [sexual harassment and sexual assault] more . . . [T]hey are more willing to speak up and say ‘no.’” (Female Officer)

Although reporting has increased, some participants stressed that the Military Services still had room for improvement.

“I think the numbers show that it’s [reporting is] going up, but I think there’s a lot going on underneath because of fear or whatever the motive is to not report. I think it’s getting better than it was, but it’s not where it should be.” (Male Officer)

“We’ve come a long way with education and awareness. We still need a little help with the execution of it all. We know we are supposed to live in a climate that doesn’t tolerate it. In my experience, people still don’t speak up and say, ‘I don’t appreciate you making that comment.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Training

While training on sexual harassment and sexual assault varied across Services, many men and women said the focus on sexual harassment and sexual assault training has started to change military culture and attitudes. While the training was regarded as necessary and useful by most, participants criticized the content, delivery, and frequency of the training. DACOWITS also studied and reported on sexual harassment and sexual assault training in 2013 and 2014.

³ In 2 percent of reported sexual assault cases allegations were determined unfounded (Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military, SAPRO briefing to DACOWITS, June 17, 2015)

a. Benefits of Training

Participants detailed how individuals were trained to identify, prevent, and report inappropriate behavior. The training also helped generate knowledge about the resources available to support victims/survivors, and stressed that the Military Services view sexual harassment and sexual assault as a serious issue.

“We highly encourage it. Every month we are having a new training to reiterate who you contact and who the support structure is . . . We have training all the time.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“The training piece provides the awareness of the resources out there. [It shows] the willingness of the organization, as a whole, to folks who go through these issues, and [creates] confidence that someone will be there.” (Male Officer)

“There’s really no way, with all the training we get, to not know who or how to report that. It’s been driven into us over the past 5 years that the lowest [junior enlisted Service member] knows what to do.” (Male Officer)

“[Our Service has a] different spin on sexual harassment, sexual assault, and bullying [training]. I’ve been in a very long time, and [I’ve] seen a progression of how the [Service] has tried to curtail sexual harassment and sexual assault. When I came in, there was no such thing as sexual assault because it was taboo.” (Female Officer)

Some men and women noted that training has been excessive; however, these individuals also recognized the importance of training in conveying the message that sexual harassment and sexual assault are not tolerated.

“The [reporting] process is out there; the training reiterates it. It is almost too much. I don’t mean to sound insensitive, but we get a lot of training.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I think all in the military are more aware of sexual harassment due to policy changes, and also commanders are more willing to continuously educate us. Sometimes it’s too much. In one ear and out the other.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I understand it’s a reaction to a real problem, but at my level it’s not a problem and it’s just an obstacle. We have to have our [sexual harassment and sexual assault] training and it just gets blasted out and sometimes it’s a distraction.” (Male Officer)

b. Suggested Improvements to Training

Some participants perceived PowerPoint lectures and computer-based trainings to be less effective and engaging than interactive skits and lectures were in cultivating awareness about sexual harassment and sexual assault.

“The skits are our go-to training. They try to bring some humor to it. Our senior leadership are typically the ones that do the skits. People get a better understanding of

the different types of [sexual] harassment and [sexual] assault that way.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“It [training] is more than just a once per year thing. It gets touched on a lot. My last unit . . . just [had] a mandated training we blow through. I didn’t actually learn anything. Here, you get together in the auditorium and it is very involved. People are very receptive. It is great. We are making major headway.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“The training should not be computer based. Someone should be presenting it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think the way they go about it isn’t as good. It should be more conversational and interactive rather than watching a video or a PowerPoint.” (Male Officer)

A small number of women thought trainings were too focused on sexual assault and did not explore sexual harassment in much depth.

“Trainings are focused on sexual assault . . . we have probably all seen people get harassed, but no one is saying anything until it is assault. There is less emphasis on [sexual] harassment. Training on [sexual] harassment and [sexual] assault should be equal.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“We inhibit reporting [sexual harassment] because we use examples in training that are black and white and pure, there is no question left . . . Everything they use is so cut and [dried].” (Female Officer)

“I think sexual harassment is very difficult to report. [The senior officer of one Service] did a great job with the sexual assault campaign in the [Service]. Probably more so than in the civilian sector, everybody knows what resources there are. Sexual harassment training is ridiculous—green, yellow, or red [traffic light colors used to group behaviors]. I’m not offended, but someone else could be. If I put my hand on your shoulder, is it green or yellow? It’s ridiculous. There’s a widespread misconception about what sexual harassment is. Is me saying, ‘Hey, you look good tonight’ sexual harassment? The training and education part is not the same.” (Female Officer)

A few individuals also observed that training on sexual harassment and sexual assault against men was lacking.

“I find that the [sexual harassment and sexual assault] training that we’ve been conducting is so focused on a female victim, but more men are victims. That’s not demonstrated in the training materials, and I think that would benefit the training to shift focus.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think we have increased it for females to report . . . [but] when you look at barriers for men in [sexual harassment and sexual assault] classes and in bystander interventions, it

is always just tacked on that men get sexually harassed and assaulted too. It's a side note. I think it is a function of men having a lot of pride." (Senior Enlisted Man)

One group of women discussed how training could force sexual assault survivors to relive trauma and could potentially identify them as survivors to the larger group.

"I get putting awareness out, but they are not thinking about the ones who've been through that [sexual assault] . . . We forget about the victims, especially in the small groups. In the training, you can pinpoint people, looking at their body language and what they say. Now you made it more uncomfortable . . . I've been raped before. I was in a small session group, and I'm shifting in my seat and looking at those next to me. I walked out; so did the person next to me. Now everybody knows we've been through something. That's what I don't like." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

3. Military Values That Have Encouraged Reporting

In the context of military culture, several participants discussed how the values, morals, and camaraderie of the Military Services could help curtail sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as create an environment that supports reporting. These values encourage individuals to look out for one another and ensure they receive the support they need.

"I tell my [Service members] that we are family. We have two names . . . You have your family name and then you have the [Service]. I think that supports them trying to take care of each other and it gives the sense that if a female gets sexually assaulted, then she will not be embarrassed to talk to me or someone about it." (Senior Enlisted Female)

"I think the [Service] values always doing what's right even when no one's looking. When it comes to sexual assault and sexual harassment, it very quickly starts to ingrain in people coming in that that's not the way to do business. I think that culture helps facilitate that this isn't acceptable." (Senior Enlisted Man)

"We have [Service] values . . . You're honor bound. You're indoctrinated to that. You're coming into a set of values and a belief system that sometimes your individual beliefs are given up for the culture in the military. The [Service] values tools, guidelines, and rules that would encourage reporting." (Male Officer)

Although it was not a topic raised by the Committee, a few individuals noted that the Military Services provided a means for reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as an emphasis on reporting, that was not found in the civilian sector.

"I think the [Service] has established a program that is unlike any other program, or like any other business organization. So, I feel that we are right on track . . . because if you go to work for any other company, like let's say [a corporation], they aren't going to

have a system to report sexual harassment or [sexual] assault in the same manner that we do in the Department of Defense.” (Junior Enlisted Male)

“That’s the Service culture, to never leave a [Service member] behind. The Service portion, that’s important. The Commandant’s orders can very quickly change the command climate. You couldn’t do that at [a corporation].” (Male Officer)

“I experienced it [sexual harassment] more in the civilian workplace. There [wasn’t] . . . as much awareness. I think the military does better . . . I thought I had to ignore it and push it aside, not say anything. Here there is so much more push.” (Female Officer)

4. Cultural Barriers to Reporting

While participants generally agreed that reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault has increased, some noted that certain aspects of military culture could dissuade individuals from reporting. Participants described a number of scenarios where sexual harassment victims and sexual assault survivors decided not to report the incidents. Barriers to reporting included anticipated consequences (i.e., stigmatization and career concerns), male reluctance to report, and uncertainty about the outcomes. Circumstances unique to small units and remote locations also were mentioned as a barrier to reporting.

a. Anticipated Consequences of Reporting

Respondents cited concerns that reporting inappropriate behavior still stigmatized reporters and could mark them as troublemakers. These findings are consistent with the Committee’s findings from prior years.

“A lot of people felt like you don’t want to be the one creating waves. There is a fear people would ostracize you for doing what is right. For a lot of people, it has shifted in new units; it has become more friendly and open.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“You don’t want that stigma attached to you. There is still a bit of a stigma.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“People don’t want to be labeled, which is a barrier to reporting. We need to change that culture so that labeling does not exist. If someone chooses to report, they should not be labeled a troublemaker, but that takes time to change minds . . .” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Sexual assault is a problem. Sexual harassment is a problem. And if your name is associated with sexual assault or sexual harassment, your name is associated with a problem.” (Female Officer)

“We need to remove the stigma of reporting a [peer]. We have the one team, one fight mentality and we need to get rid of ‘Hey, you’re getting rid of someone who is helping us fight wars.’” (Male Officer)

A small number of women said women might be less inclined to report out of concern that doing so could negatively impact their careers.

“I have heard plenty of, surprisingly, young female officers just say that it was just not career enhancing to report. They had to get their [promotion] or their hours . . . and by the time it went to my office, they had put it off for a year or two or 6 months, and they just felt . . . command had proven to them that it was not career enhancing to report. We have come a long way, but we have a long ways to go.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think there is still a lack of confidence in the system on the part of the victim/reporter . . . More often than not, they don’t want it reported. They are afraid of what will happen career-wise.” (Female Officer)

b. Reluctance to Report Among Men

Men in several groups noted that men were less likely to report sexual harassment or sexual assault than women were. Reluctance to report might include embarrassment or concerns that their peers would view them as weak.

“I think in the military, the culture, the guys are supposed to be seen as tough, so if you report you could be seen as weak.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I’ve seen a situation of male-on-male, and he didn’t report it because he was embarrassed. It took it to the point where it was a serious incident.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Male soldiers don’t like to bring it [sexual harassment and sexual assault] up because, being males, we’re taught to suck it up and be strong. Don’t let emotions cloud your judgement; we’re taught to hide our emotions. Females are taught to be in touch with their feelings more than males are. I feel that females have more fortitude to come forward.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I guarantee you that a man would not tell that they were raped by another man. If a man was raped by a female, they would probably run around and brag about it.” (Male Officer)

c. Unknown Outcomes of Reporting

Respondents in several groups noted that individuals might be dissuaded from reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault when the outcomes of reports were largely unknown.

“People are often hesitant to report it because it will not be taken care of. You never hear what happens to the [offender]. Why put myself out there? Everyone will know. Even if you are confidential, if you work in a small unit or depend on your friends, people will know about it. Often the [offender] just gets a slap on the hand. It’s like . . . if

you had issues you just let it go because it is easier. You just want to be done. Nothing happens to them anyway.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“[T]hey are putting out all the information . . . that if this has happened to you then here are the people you can talk to, but there is still the hush-hush factor. It will still just be swept under the rug. Something will happen, everyone knows it happened, but we never know what happened as a result. We never know the outcome and why this person is still here and interacting with other [Service members] . . .” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“People hear stories and it discourages them. We hear stories of revictimization. We hear stories of someone getting charged when they really didn’t do it. You know what stories we don’t really hear? We don’t hear stories about someone getting charged and they really did it and they are now getting punished for it. We don’t hear those stories—just the ones that portray the negative.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I think that because the punishment is so delayed that it doesn’t stick with the guys.” (Male Officer)

d. Small Units and Remote Locations

Participants described how sexual harassment and sexual assault might be reported less frequently in some locations, particularly remote areas, compared to others.

“Every command I’ve been to in recent years, with all the training, it is pretty well known you can walk to a commander’s office and shut the door and talk to them about it . . . For smaller units that have 10 people in the middle of [rural state], it may be harder for them to feel that comfort.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“If you are at a unit where [you are] 2 hours away, where the clinic and [sexual harassment and sexual assault representative] is, it is a lot more difficult to contemplate telling people about it.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Some participants explained how being at sea could make reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault difficult.

“On the boats where people live together for weeks at a time, [sexual harassment] is a bit more accepted. In an office setting like this, you won’t see it too much.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I feel like it is boat life that discourages people from reporting because you all know who it is.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Some participants described how reporting might be less common in small units or units that were newly integrated.

“When it is a small unit it sucks, but you are scared not just for yourself but [that] the working environment will be [expletive]. Once things happen and all [expletive] breaks loose, you don’t know how it can change. It is so much better now. I don’t think that would happen today.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I think the closeness of a unit can discourage it [reporting]. We work in close quarters and if someone did something bad—that’s the team you work with all the time. It’s going to have a negative impact on the team.” (Male Officer)

“With harassment, I think there’s a fine line, especially in the combat arms culture. There’s a way guys act. My females were thrust into an armor community that, frankly, was not female friendly. They might have some discomfort with the scenario but they want to fit in. I think that can inhibit reporting. It’s such a fine line with the combat arms.” (Male Officer)

5. Fear of False Claims Affected Male-Female Interactions

Some participants noted that interactions between men and women have changed since the reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault has become a higher priority. They discussed how men were concerned about making a mistake that could impact their careers, and sometimes limited their interactions with women out of concern something they might say or do could be considered inappropriate. These findings are consistent with DACOWITS’ findings from prior years.

“If there’s a female around, then everyone’s just silent because they’re afraid to say something . . . so women get ostracized even though we’ve given them power.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I think it is too easy for reporting of both [sexual harassment and sexual assault]. It is a witch hunt right now. Does it happen? Yes. Is it wrong? Yes. But as males, we have to walk on eggshells when we talk to females. It is scary to possibly be charged with sexual harassment. I got in trouble because a female [Service member] said I was flirting with her. I wasn’t. I wouldn’t. There was, fortunately, a witness that said I wasn’t either.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“If you are the only female, the other guys say things and they don’t realize they say things. You are seen as difficult if you say something about it, but if you don’t say something, then it doesn’t get fixed. They don’t like that they have to be sensitive. When I walked through the door, they can’t stop themselves because they were used to it when it was all guys.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“We do [sexual harassment and sexual assault program] training on a monthly basis. It’s kind of like walking on eggshells because [men are] afraid of saying something wrong. They’re worried about something they’ll say because it could be construed as a violation.” (Female Officer)

While false reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault is rare in the Military Services, some men and a few women reported that individuals have abused the reporting process for their own personal gain. Some of these individuals felt the focus on curtailing inappropriate behavior has led to men being presumed guilty.

“If a guy does sexually assault or harass a female, then burn them, take them down, punish them. It is awful. But we are now in a place where we assume guilt and where everything is highlighted negatively in the news and in the [Service] community.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“All the false allegations weaken the ones that actually happen.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“You don’t blame the victim, but you also have to watch out for the accused. I have seen, two or three times, where people lost their job. They were [subjected to a non-judicial punishment procedure] and put out because of the knee-jerk reactions. So the accused has rights, and you have to go through the due process, and it’s going to be painful no matter what and it takes some time to get those people on and off of the ship.” (Male Officer)

“If you have a command that’s so afraid of sexual harassment and [sexual] assault, and that reports everything that comes up, then people can take advantage of it. If you have a false accusation, it can still be a black mark on you. It could just be someone that was irritated or pissed off at you. There’s no recourse against the person that made the false accusation.” (Female Officer)

6. Personal Facilitators and Barriers to Reporting

Although military culture and policy were recognized as influential in one’s decision to report sexual harassment and sexual assault, participants noted the Military Services could only do so much to change individuals’ behavior. Individuals’ experiences and upbringing were described as a major factor in one’s ability to recognize sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as their willingness to report inappropriate behavior.

“I think it depends on the person, too. If they don’t want to say anything, then they’re just not going to say anything. If they don’t want to tell, then they’re not going to tell.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I think it’s about your upbringing. If your parents don’t teach you, you think something’s okay that’s not.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Their upbringing has everything to do with it . . . there’s a diversity of background. How people react to challenging situations might not be how we might want them to react.” (Male Officer)

“I don’t think it’s different from the civilian world. I think most impediments to reporting come from your personal experiences.” (Female Officer)

B. Comparison Between Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Participants were asked to describe differences between reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, including how common it was to report one over the other. Topics of discussion included how reporting has increased overall and challenges identifying sexual harassment.

1. Frequency of Reporting

Groups were asked to compare the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Most participants indicated sexual assault has a greater likelihood of being reported than sexual harassment. Some also thought sexual harassment was more likely to be addressed outside of the official reporting system.

“Sexual assault is more likely than sexual harassment to be reported. I work in close proximity [to females]; sometimes jokes can lead to harassment. It is unintentional, but the progression—some things go too far and it becomes harassment. It can lead to assault and then it gets reported when it goes too far.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Harassment you can handle face-to-face or even through email. They haven’t touched you and it isn’t necessarily creating a more hostile environment. Sexual assault though, whether the victim is male or female, then that would affect you and possibly your unit.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I think a lot of times with sexual harassment and [sexual] assault it’s usually somebody you know. You don’t want to ruin your friend’s career, but at the same time you want it to stop. I think in the initial stages, you might not report someone who harasses you, whereas assault is immediate.” (Male Officer)

“I would say sexual harassment is probably not reported. I think it’s acted on by the [Service members] and that they make it stop. It’s a difficult line when two [Service members] are friends, they’re joking around, and one day it’s fine and the next it’s not.” (Male Officer)

“In terms of sexual assault, I think it’s a different story but sexual harassment is all about what you take offense to.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

2. Identifying Sexual Harassment Versus Sexual Assault

Participants sometimes found it difficult to identify sexual harassment, and suspected this might contribute to underreporting of harassment. Sexual assault, on the other hand, was clearly defined and recognizable to participants.

“I imagine assault would be the easiest to recognize and report, just because it’s assault. Harassment is harder to recognize.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Sexual assault, at least in my mind, is a hard line—yes or no situation. Where I would say harassment is one of those boys’ club mentalities of certain comments you learn to deal with and certain ones are past the line . . . The line with assault, you [know they] passed that line, but harassment . . . you tend to rationalize away.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I think sexual assault would be more often reported because a lot of times I think instances of sexual harassment are not so blatant that it’s not an open and shut case . . . Whereas sexual assault, this is a crime.” (Male Officer)

“I could inadvertently sexually harass someone and not intend to. I still look at that as your responsibility to say it makes you uncomfortable. Sometimes I don’t know how my personality [comes across] if you are an E4 and I’m an O4 affecting you . . . Sexual assault is more clearly defined and there is no way you can assault someone and not know you are doing it. There are so many different shades of gray in sexual harassment and how people interpret it as opposed to sexual assault.” (Male Officer)

Many individuals noted that the definition of sexual harassment was ambiguous and could mean different things to different people.

“We’ve all been around a situation some time or another when someone has said something that may be perceived as harassment, but people take it as a joke or not something serious.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Sexual harassment is such a touchy thing because anything could be sexual harassment.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Sometimes harassment for one person isn’t the same for someone else.” (Male Officer)

C. Comparisons Between Bystander Reporting and Sexual Harassment Victim/Sexual Assault Survivor Reporting

Focus groups were asked about the differences between a bystander and a victim/survivor reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault. Participants were also asked if a bystander would be more likely to report than a survivor would be. Opinions were varied as to which group reported more, and discussions largely focused on efforts to increase bystander reporting.

1. Bystander and Victim/Survivor Reporting

There was no clear trend among the focus groups suggesting either bystanders or victims/survivors reported more frequently compared to the other. Participants described instances that may compel or dissuade one group from reporting compared to the other.

a. Bystanders Would Be Less Likely to Report

Some participants described how victims/survivors were more likely than bystanders to report, and that many bystanders would not think they should intervene.

“I think bystanders are less likely to report either for the fact that—I don’t know his take on it. If someone slapped him on the butt, was that just him and his friend horsing around?” (Male Officer)

“I’d say it [bystander reporting] rarely, if ever, happens. People say, ‘Hey, this is none of my business. Let them have their Chief or DIVO (Division Officer) handle it.’” (Male Officer)

“Victims report more. Bystanders are just that—let me stay out of it.” (Female Officer)

“A bystander may not report it because they’ll think it’s none of their business.” (Female Officer)

b. Bystanders Would Be More Likely to Report

Some participants thought bystanders would be more likely to report because there would be fewer consequences if they report compared to a victim/survivor.

“It’s easier to report as a bystander because it doesn’t directly affect your life.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“You have nothing to lose as a bystander” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think bystanders are more likely to report because, it might sound wrong, but there’s no dog in the fight. A victim has to go to court but a bystander might not.” (Male Officer)

Other participants mentioned that the Military Services train bystanders to intervene in situations that arise.

“We fight for other people. That’s our job, so I feel like we report for others more than ourselves.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“If someone sees you’re having a very tough time, then someone may be more likely to report it.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I think the word is out there now that you don’t want to be the person that saw something and didn’t say something.” (Male Officer)

Many participants thought that bystander reporting had increased as a result of training on bystander intervention.

“I think there is a big push right now to get more involvement from the bystanders . . . [I]t’s influencing more people to come out and speak up when you do see something. Up until recently, I think the survivor would be more likely to report it—everyone just wants to stay away. But this push to get us more involved and cohesive as a family, as a unit, as a [Service] . . . I think you should see a rise in bystander reporting.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“We’re more likely to step in if we see something now because of all the training. We’ve been told to say [something] and we will.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“With the training we have, I think hopefully we would have more bystanders step up.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think bystanders are more likely to report now since we’re pushing this wingman concept. If you see something inappropriate, you need to step in and stop it. I think [intervention is] more likely for sexual assault. I could see intervention in sexual harassment, I could see outsiders intervening, but not sure about reporting.” (Male Officer)

A few men described how penalizing the failure to report sexual harassment or sexual assault had increased reporting.

“I think now, Commanders and OICs (Officers in Charge) are scared. As soon as a report of sexual assault or sexual harassment comes through, they make sure to assist with any investigation. They don’t want it to affect their career if they were trying to keep it quiet or something. They are just as scared nowadays as we are.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“It’s part of our report card now too, and no one is going to want that to blow up in their hand. Kind of like a hot potato, I don’t think anyone in leadership wants that to be caught in their hand.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“A commander today would be terrified not to report it.” (Male Officer)

“[N]ow it’s going on people’s evaluations. If they don’t report it then they’re gone.” (Male Officer)

A few individuals thought training on bystander intervention was likely to decrease incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault, but not necessarily increase reporting of those incidents.

“I think [training] is preventing the issues from coming up. The emphasis on the bystander is helping prevent others from being stupid. It is working well to prevent things. I don’t see people reporting things, but I do see it from stopping things from occurring in the first place.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

D. The Impact of Peers on Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Participants were asked about the role one's peers could play in encouraging or discouraging the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Discussions focused on how reporting had been influenced by peer pressure, concerns about keeping incidents private from one's peers, and the unrestricted and restricted reporting processes.

1. Peer Influence

Participants described how peer pressure could be a useful force in encouraging someone to report sexual harassment or sexual assault.

"I think peer pressure is important. If you're in a group and they say that harassment is bad then you're going to report because you have that peer pressure. The same with assault . . . you're going to report it if other people think you should." (Junior Enlisted Man)

"Peers play more of a role than command. You work with peers every single day. They know you on a personal level . . . Your peers are friends outside of work, and you see them inside and outside of uniform. Your gut tells you something is wrong. They are more likely to tell you something is wrong as a peer. If someone told me without my uniform on, I'm still obligated to report it." (Senior Enlisted Man)

"For junior [Service members], a lot of times it is their first time away from home. Mom and dad are usually far away. So peers are everything to these [Service members] . . . So, if your peers say you need to report, then they will report . . ." (Senior Enlisted Man)

"Peers can give you that support—that if you don't want to do something, your peer can encourage you." (Male Officer)

On the other hand, some participants described how peers who are accepting of inappropriate behavior could discourage reporting.

"If a large portion of your peers tend to accept behaviors or jokes or things then that person experiencing it is less likely to speak up. [The person will think] others are okay with it . . ." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"Some people don't want to be looked down on by turning in one of their [peers], so it's a shame thing as well." (Male Officer)

2. Privacy Concerns

During the focus groups, participants shared a perception that sexual harassment victims and sexual assault survivors often weighed the risks of reporting, one of which was the loss of privacy.

a. Privacy and Peers

Participants noted that it could be difficult to keep cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault private. Concern that one's peers might learn about the case was often identified as a barrier to reporting.

"As soon as you get the unrestricted [report], then it spreads like wildfire." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"I would say the more potential [there is that] people are going to find out about it, the less likely people are to report it . . ." (Male Officer)

"Let's be realistic; when you are on a ship for 5 months, there is no confidentiality. That is ship life." (Female Officer)

"You may feel comfortable going to a [sexual harassment and sexual assault program representative] in your unit, but by human nature it may not be a private report." (Female Officer)

b. Privacy Implications of Restricted and Unrestricted Reporting⁴

Participants stressed the importance of having the option of restricted reports to facilitate the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

"A person can report and no one in the unit will know. You can keep it quiet or you can reach out to peers. Before [restricted reporting was available], when you report[ed] it to your command, everyone knew. [It] was a barrier." (Junior Enlisted Man)

"If you don't want your peers to know, then that is the beauty of the restricted report. They will never know . . . if it is assault." (Senior Enlisted Man)

"There is more of a push, as a result of the trainings, that there will be no reprisal [for reporting]. You report it, you can make it a restricted report, and things are handled very diligently and tactfully." (Senior Enlisted Man)

However, men and women highlighted flaws in the restricted reporting process that could lead to a report becoming unrestricted. Concerns about a potential breach in confidentiality could reduce reporting.

"[Something] that really bothers me is trying to be a VA (victim's advocate) now . . . If something happened to my friend and they didn't know who to [ask] to make a restricted report and they talked to me to get help, now it is automatically unrestricted because she needed my help in a time of need." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

⁴ According to SAPRO, unrestricted reports allow the survivor to participate in the military criminal justice process. Restricted reports are kept confidential, and one's immediate chain of command and law enforcement are not notified. When the survivor reports the crime to someone in the chain of command, a restricted report is no longer an option.

“Even if you report it restricted, where nobody is supposed to know, if you make even the most minor mistake in the restricted reporting, it becomes unrestricted and everybody knows about it.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I saw a lot of [Service members] who wanted to tell their best friend because they didn’t know who to go to. The best friend would be quick to say we need to go to get you help. They were quick to take the person to a VA, which is the correct way to go about it. But there was a huge disconnect, because the best friend or whoever they told about it . . . really didn’t understand that because they know and there is a bystander reporting, it is no longer a restricted report. It is no longer an option. We need to find a way to educate victims that they should be the ones to report if they care about it being restricted. We tell, we teach, but we are not giving that part of the class the emphasis it needs.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“If that peer was able to get you to a VA but still have confidentiality, that might help [increase reporting]. We don’t have that option now.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

E. The Impact of Chain of Command on Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Focus groups were asked to discuss the role of one’s chain of command in encouraging or discouraging reporting. Participants discussed how reporting was influenced by command climate and trust, removal of immediate chain of command from the reporting process, and presence of female leadership.

1. The Impact of Command Climate

Many men and women stressed the importance of their command in cultivating an environment that encourages the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Participants observed that efforts by one’s chain of command to address sexual harassment and sexual assault were highly visible, and could inspire confidence in those considering reporting.

“The [sexual harassment and sexual assault program] and EO (Equal Opportunity) programs only have the ability to be successful if the command environment allows it. If the hierarchy and upper echelons don’t support it—they set the command environment for those programs to succeed or fail. Senior leadership is the determining factor.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“It depends on the command cadres. If you knew that a command handled it in a professional manner then they will be more willing to report it . . . I’m less likely to report if something is less likely to happen.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“It depends on your individual command’s commitment to reporting. They will determine if it’s handled in the appropriate way. If you have a command that swipes it under the rug and doesn’t do anything about it, then that’s the climate that’s set.” (Female Officer)

“People are concerned about their command. Units might harass them to drop their claim. Some people are ostracized, and they’re not supported at all. I think that causes other people not to report . . . I didn’t report my assault until I got to another unit because I didn’t think my command would support me.” (Female Officer)

“There’s a culture for each unit. If there’s no emphasis on [sexual harassment and sexual assault programs] on the part of the leader then sometimes things can slip . . . When you are trying to cultivate a climate in your unit, [Service members] see everything and know everything before you do. How you handle those things is huge in establishing a climate. If they don’t see consequences, then they don’t think it matters.” (Male Officer)

Many participants stressed the importance of trust in one’s command. Without trust, individuals are less likely to report because they lack confidence that anything will be done.

“If you can’t trust the chain of command, you won’t go to them.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“[A]s a young female, if I report something and put myself in the limelight but . . . feel like my command is going to look down on me for that, then I am not going to put myself in that position . . . If I am in an environment where I feel like command is going to have my back and support me and give me the counseling and whatever else I need, then I am going to report it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“If someone will report based on chain of command, it comes down to trust. Will I be taken seriously? Will it go south? That is a huge chunk of it. Having a third party come in would fix it.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I think most people who don’t report are concerned about a lack of confidentiality. They don’t trust their command. It’s definitely not because people don’t know the reporting process.” (Female Officer)

“If people don’t trust their chain of command to handle it or think they’re going to get ostracized—it’s huge.” (Male Officer)

A few men and women described how sexual harassment and sexual assault by leaders could erode trust in the chain of command and discourage individuals from reporting.

“Sometimes you do not trust them if the command is the one that sexually harasses. That happens a lot.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“If [a leader] says something that’s not right and he’s not [in] my chain of command, I’m more likely to report. If my chain of command is the problem, I’m less likely to report.” (Male Officer)

“You lose trust in your chain of command if it’s someone in your chain of command who’s doing it.” (Female Officer)

2. The Impact of Removing Immediate Chain of Command From the Reporting Process

Some men and women described how removing one’s immediate chain of command from the restricted reporting process has helped encourage reporting. They noted that the restricted reporting process has helped those who lacked trust in their leadership, were concerned about bias or inaction, or were embarrassed to report to their superiors.

“Now, it is an unbiased party that comes in and does the investigation. That gives confidence to victims. [The] good old boy network has been removed.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Having everything in black and white and removing the command element . . . from the reporting process . . . is great. I can tell the CO that something happened, but he can cuss me up and down all day and I will not tell him a word [as a victim’s advocate] about the who, what, where, when, why, or any other detail of it. I think the biggest issues that we had with the program originally is that a bunch of people in command had no idea how to handle something . . . no one had a background or training in how to handle the situation. Now, this happened, this is what they will do, this is what you will do, etc. It is outlined and in black and white. (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I agree with taking the commander out of the chain. Like with college, the dean of the school wouldn’t need to be in on that. I believe in a college the police should be involved.” (Female Officer)

3. The Impact of Reporting to Female Leadership

A small number of women observed that women might be more willing to report sexual harassment or sexual assault if someone in their chain of command was also a woman. Female leaders were viewed as being more likely to address inappropriate behavior.

“In the [Service], we have female [leaders]. And maybe that’s not who you would go to directly, but sometimes knowing you have somebody higher up . . . who will have influence, who will make you feel safe and is also a female, will make females come forward more.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I wish we had a female NCO. The rest are privates or specialists. We don’t have a female NCO to step in and say something for us.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

F. The Impact of Offender’s Rank on Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Focus groups were asked how the rank of the offender might influence someone’s decision to report sexual harassment or sexual assault. Participants discussed how reporting was influenced by discrepancies in rank, the risks of reporting a superior, and concerns about credibility.

Many men and women reported that the rank of the offender could decrease the likelihood of someone reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault.

“I think it can depend on rank, too. If you got a private who’s got an E6 harassing her, then it can prevent her from reporting it.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“If the commanding officer sexually harasses a [junior Service member], I would like to think I’d step in, but I don’t know if I really would. I don’t know if I could stand up to the commanding officer. I don’t know what I’d do.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Now if the higher rank person is the person assaulting or harassing, that is only going to make it more difficult. Rank plays a huge part in the decision.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I definitely think it’s scary to report someone in your direct chain of command.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“It takes a strong person to report a commanding officer . . . [There is] fear of retribution. Will I be believed? You can equate that in the civilian world with [reporting] a CEO (chief executive officer).” (Male Officer)

Reporting peers was regarded as being considerably easier.

“Someone would be more likely to report a [junior enlisted Service member] than a [senior enlisted Service member]. They might think, ‘I’m just a [junior enlisted Service member]; who’s going to believe me?’” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Peer-to-peer is a little easier [to report] . . . [you] would handle it right there. If there is a big rank gap, I don’t know what I’d do.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“The higher the rank, the scarier . . . There’s, you know, more resistance. If an E3 harasses an E2, it will get taken care of right away—not the case for an E9.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

1. Challenges of Reporting a Superior

Participants noted that some individuals might be dissuaded from reporting out of fear the accused could make life difficult or take action against them.

“It could also be detrimental to the work place . . . [H]e has all these people that work under him and he will talk and you will be an outcast. You will be treated differently and that will just affect the work space.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Many still have fear of retribution and it coming back on you.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“If the offender is in the chain of command, they could threaten them or their career—put the fear into them that something’s going to happen if they report it.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“[There is] fear of reprisal, especially for those trying to include themselves in the good ole boy club.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“A lot of times the victim may not report out of fear that the [offender] may come after them, or something may not happen after it’s reported.” (Male Officer)

2. Perceived Credibility of a Junior Victim/Survivor

Participants indicated that there was a perception that higher ranking individuals were more credible than lower ranking ones, which might decrease reporting by junior Service members.

“With the rank thing, somebody could think, ‘Oh, well maybe they aren’t going to believe me because I am an E1 and he’s an E7 and he’s done all this great stuff for the military and I’ve really done nothing. So, why would anybody believe me?’ They could have that mentality.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“If you are the number one guy or girl and [your] command thinks you walk on water and now I am going to report you—then it may not be worth my time to report because they [think you] walk on water.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I think it’s even more difficult if it’s an officer—someone with a lot of credibility . . . those are the people who feel irreplaceable to everybody else. I think it’s intimidating . . . [to] get them to believe [he is replaceable]. Like any social dynamic, if he is competent and really good and a great leader and everybody likes him, [then they won’t believe it].” (Female Officer)

G. The Impact of Social Media on Reporting Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault

Focus groups were asked about the positive and negative influence of social media on reporting. Opinions about the influence of social media varied among Service members; however, groups reported how social media could be used to deter or encourage reporting, as well as to criticize or support those that file reports. Social media could also be used in positive or negative ways after a report is filed.

1. Social Media Could Deter Reporting

Participants were more likely to say social media could discourage rather than encourage reporting. Service members spoke about how social media could be used to blackmail or slander individuals who are contemplating reporting.

I have [Service members] that have met someone online and then been blackmailed. Seriously, like if you don't pay me money, then I will post our conversations or your private pictures online or on Twitter. I had a male [Service member] that was so embarrassed to tell his female command that he was getting blackmailed regarding sexual exchanges he had with a female. It does more bad than good. (Senior Enlisted Female)

Social media could also be used as a form of retribution to revictimize someone who has already reported an act of sexual harassment or sexual assault, therefore deterring others from following suit. This theme was more commonly reported among women.

"I was sexually harassed in tech school. I made the report. He was Facebook friends with me, and [after I reported him] he posted this [expletive] and said my name and said '[investigative service] is investigating me.' That was my circumstance." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

"The big thing in the media now is revenge [postings of intimate nature]. That is something I never had to worry about when I was younger. Social media will end you." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"A challenge could be that if a female reports something and people find out, people might attack her Facebook page. Especially if she has pictures of her dressed provocatively, they might say that she asked for it." (Female Officer)

Social media could affect whether a report is restricted or unrestricted, sometimes without the awareness of the victim/survivor. Service members described how social media has made it hard to keep incidents and reporting private.

"In that sense social media can be used more in a negative way, depending on the situation. If more than one person is there [at the scene of an incident], the info gets posted on social media whether the victim wanted it there or not. Then they feel like 'Should I hide? Do I want to report? I'm not comfortable.' Social media puts things out there that you don't always want to read." (Senior Enlisted Woman)

"As far as unrestricted and restricted, if you find something inappropriate happening and they want it not investigated you have to be sure they know that before you blast it out on Facebook or Twitter. Once you talk outside of the [sexual harassment and sexual assault program] group, you need to know you're taking unrestricted options away." (Female Officer)

2. Social Media Could Encourage Reporting

Service members were less likely to say that social media could have a positive impact in encouraging reporting of sexual harassment or sexual assault; however, they did describe some positive aspects. For example, social media could offer an opportunity for victims/survivors to share their experiences and encourage others to stand up for themselves; it could also encourage victims/survivors who are feeling vulnerable or alone to speak up.

“I think that it can be positive because there are all sorts of videos that my friends post that can say stuff. The last video I saw was of a girl who was saying how sick she was of dealing with harassment. I think these are good messages.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“It can be turned into a positive. Sometimes things get so misconstrued. The person it affects may say ‘I want to speak out as well.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

3. Social Media Would Not Affect Reporting

Some Service members believed that social media had no impact on reporting.

“The last thing on my mind if I was a victim would be what the [expletive] someone is saying on Facebook. It would be if my confidence is shaken by peers, not because of social media, but more about face-to-face interactions. It is not going to be about what they are putting on Facebook.” (Male Officer)

4. Use of Social Media After Reporting

After a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault has been filed, participants expressed how social media could be used in positive or negative ways.

Social media could be used to paint the victim/survivor in a negative light.

“Let’s say a girl was sexually assaulted—or a guy—and their Facebook profile⁵ was all racy photos or party photos; then people are going to say, ‘You seem like the kind of person . . .’ That’s how it [social media] can backfire on a person.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

Social media could be used to show support for the victim/survivor.

“Say Joe’s my friend and he said something and within minutes there were 30 responses. ‘Been there’ and ‘Go here for support.’ It was a good thing. (Male Officer)

Social media could be used to show how offenders are held accountable which can encourage other victims/survivors to report.

⁵ Identifying information that users provide about themselves on a social networking site; this information might include a username, contact information, personal interests, a photo, bio, or other data.

“Well just like [someone] was saying, [in the Service newspaper] and stuff people see repercussions regardless of rank. As soon as the CO, XO (Executive Officer) is fired, these junior sailors are on Facebook seeing “Bam! The CO got fired.” So in that way, social media is helping to get the word out there, and [Service members] see there are repercussions for committing the atrocities.” (Male Officer)

H. Summary

Participants were asked to describe the ways that military culture supports the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Respondents discussed how military culture and policy have changed over the years, and have fostered a climate that better supports reporting. Participants also described how the Military Services had developed a formalized process to handle allegations. The representatives and victim advocates that assist sexual harassment victims and sexual assault survivors were viewed as a useful resource that facilitated reporting. Men and women described how increased training, awareness, and avenues for reporting have led to increases in the number of sexual harassment and sexual assault cases being reported. Although reporting has increased, some participants stressed that there is still room for improvement in how the Military Services handle this issue.

While training on sexual harassment and sexual assault varied across Services, many men and women discussed how the focus on sexual harassment and sexual assault training has started to change military culture and attitudes. While the training was regarded as necessary and useful by most, participants criticized the content, delivery, and frequency of the training. Some men and women noted that training has been excessive; however, these individuals also recognized the importance of training in conveying the message that sexual harassment and sexual assault are not tolerated. Some participants perceived PowerPoint lectures or computer-based trainings to be less effective than interactive skits were in cultivating awareness about sexual harassment and sexual assault. A small number of women thought trainings were too focused on sexual assault and did not explore sexual harassment in much depth. A few individuals also observed a lack of training on sexual harassment and sexual assault against men.

In the context of military culture, several participants discussed how the values, morals, and camaraderie of the Military Services could help curtail sexual harassment and sexual assault and create an environment that supports reporting. These values encourage individuals to look out for one another and ensure they receive the support they need. Although the Committee did not raise the issue during the focus group discussion, a few individuals noted that the Military Services have provided a means for reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well an emphasis on reporting, that is not found in the civilian sector. While participants generally agreed reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault had increased, some noted that certain aspects of military culture could dissuade individuals from reporting, such as anticipated consequences (i.e., stigmatization and career concerns), male reluctance to report, and uncertainty about the outcomes. Circumstances unique to small units and remote locations also were mentioned as a barrier to reporting. Respondents cited concerns that reporting inappropriate behavior could stigmatize an individual and identify reporters as troublemakers. A small number of women said women might be less inclined to report out of concern that doing so could negatively impact their careers. Men in several groups noted that men are less likely to report sexual harassment or sexual assault than women are, perhaps due to embarrassment or concerns that their peers would view them as weak. Some participants explained how being at sea could make reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault difficult. Some participants described how reporting might be less common in small units or newly integrated units. Some participants noted that interactions between

men and women have changed since reporting sexual harassment and sexual assault has become a higher priority. They discussed how men were concerned about making a mistake that could affect their careers, and sometimes limited their interactions with women out of concern that something they might say or do could be considered inappropriate. Some of these individuals thought the focus on curtailing inappropriate behavior has led to men being presumed guilty. Although military culture and policy were recognized as influential in one's decision to report sexual harassment and sexual assault, participants felt the Military Services could only do so much to change individuals' behavior. Individuals' experiences and upbringing were described as a major factor in one's ability to recognize sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as their willingness to report inappropriate behavior.

Most participants indicated that sexual assault has a greater likelihood of being reported than sexual harassment. Some also thought that sexual harassment was more likely to be addressed outside of the official reporting system. Participants sometimes found it difficult to identify sexual harassment, and suspected this might contribute to underreporting of harassment. Sexual assault, on the other hand, was clearly defined and recognizable to participants. Many individuals noted the definition of sexual harassment is ambiguous and can mean different things to different people.

Participants were also asked if a bystander was more likely to report compared to a victim/survivor. Opinions were varied as to which group reports more often, and discussions largely focused on efforts to increase bystander reporting. There was no clear trend among the focus groups suggesting that bystanders or victims/survivors reported more than the other did. Some participants described how victims/survivors were more likely to report than bystanders were, but others thought bystanders would be more likely to report because there are fewer consequences if they report compared to a victim/survivor. Many participants thought that bystander reporting has increased as a result of training on bystander intervention. A few men described how penalizing the failure to report sexual harassment or sexual assault has increased reporting. A few individuals thought training on bystander intervention was likely to decrease incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault, but not necessarily increase reporting of those incidents.

Participants were asked about the role one's peers play in encouraging or discouraging the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Participants described how peer pressure could be a useful force in encouraging someone to report sexual harassment or sexual assault. On the other hand, some participants described how peers who are accepting of inappropriate behavior could discourage reporting. There was a perception that sexual harassment victims and sexual assault survivors often weighed the risks of reporting, one of which was the loss of privacy. Participants noted that it could be difficult to keep cases of sexual harassment or sexual assault private. Concern that one's peers might learn about their case was often identified as a barrier to reporting. Participants stressed the importance of having the option of restricted reports to facilitate the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. However, men and women highlighted flaws in the restricted reporting process that could lead to a report becoming unrestricted. Concerns about a potential confidentiality breach could reduce reporting.

Many men and women emphasized the importance of their command in cultivating an environment that encourages the reporting of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Participants observed that efforts by one's chain of command to address sexual harassment and sexual assault were highly visible, and could inspire confidence in those considering reporting. Many participants said it was important to be able to trust one's command. Without trust, individuals might be less likely to report because they might lack confidence that anything would be done. A few men and women described how sexual

harassment and sexual assault by leaders could erode trust in the chain of command and discourage individuals from reporting. Some men and women described how removing one's immediate chain of command from the restricted reporting process has helped encourage reporting. They noted that the restricted reporting process has helped those who lacked trust in their leadership, were concerned about bias or inaction, or were embarrassed to report to their superiors. A small number of women observed that women might be more willing to report sexual harassment or sexual assault if someone in their chain of command was also a woman. Female leaders were viewed as being more likely to address inappropriate behavior.

Many men and women reported that the rank of the offender could decrease the likelihood of someone reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault. Reporting peers was regarded as being considerably easier. Participants noted that some individuals might be dissuaded from reporting out of fear the accused would make life difficult or take action against them. Participants indicated there was a perception that higher ranking individuals were more credible than lower-ranking ones. Fear that no one would believe a junior Service member might decrease reporting.

Opinions about the influence of social media varied among Service members. Participants were more likely to say social media would be more likely to discourage rather than encourage the likelihood of reporting. Service members spoke about how social media could be used to blackmail or slander individuals who are contemplating reporting. Social media could also be used as a form of retribution to revictimize someone who has already reported an act of sexual harassment or sexual assault, therefore deterring others from following suit; this theme was more commonly reported among women. Social media could affect whether a report is restricted or unrestricted, sometimes without the awareness of the victim/survivor. Service members described how social media has made it hard to keep incidents and reporting private. Service members were less likely to say that social media could have a positive impact in encouraging reporting of sexual harassment or sexual assault, however, they did describe some positive aspects; social media could be used by victims/survivors to share their experiences and encourage others to stand up for themselves and could encourage victims/survivors who are feeling vulnerable or alone to speak up. Some Service members believed that social media had no impact on reporting. After a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault has been filed, participants expressed how social media could be used in positive or negative ways, such as to paint the victim/survivor in a negative light, to show support for the victim/survivor, or to show how offenders were held accountable, which could encourage other victims/survivors to report.

Chapter 5. The Impact of Social Media on Military Service Members

The Wellness Working Group studied a new topic in 2015, the impact of social media on military Service members: issues addressed included how social media are used, military culture surrounding social media, changes in attitudes over time toward social media, advantages and disadvantages to using social media, policies and training around their use, and the impact of social media on bullying, harassment, and gender-integration efforts. DACOWITS conducted 30 focus groups on the topic of social media in 2015. It is worth noting that many participants talked about social media use among “younger” Service members, but they did not define this age group. Participants were provided with the following definition of social media for this discussion: “Social media consists of web pages where users, like you, generate the content for dissemination. Examples of social media include websites for social bookmarking, social news (Reddit), social networking (Facebook, Twitter), social photo and video sharing (Tumblr, Vine, YouTube), messaging (Snapchat) and wikis (Wikipedia).” This section provides a summary of the 2015 focus group discussions on the topic of social media, and is organized into the following sections:

- ▶ Current landscape around social media
- ▶ The double-edged sword: Advantages and disadvantages to using social media
- ▶ Understanding of social media policies and guidelines
- ▶ Assessment of social media training
- ▶ The impact of social media on bullying and sexual harassment
- ▶ The impact of social media on gender integration

A summary is included at the end of this section.

A. Current Landscape Around Social Media

Participants were asked to discuss the ways Service members use social media. Though not something specifically asked about, they also described social media’s increasing popularity over time, particularly among younger Service members. Participants also shared perceptions about the relationship between military culture and social media.

1. Service Member Use of Social Media

Across groups, participants confirmed that Service members used social media for both personal and professional reasons. They discussed using a range of social media sites and platforms, including the following:

- ▶ Facebook⁶ (the most commonly mentioned)

⁶ A social networking site that allows users to create profiles, exchange messages, build networks of friends and fans, and share content.

- ▶ Twitter⁷
- ▶ Snapchat⁸
- ▶ Instagram⁹
- ▶ Tinder and other dating sites
- ▶ YouTube¹⁰
- ▶ Reddit¹¹
- ▶ Special-interest military pages, sites, and blogs¹²

As shown in Table 3, 90 percent of all participants who were in the social media focus groups had a personal account on at least one social media outlet that they accessed at least once a week.

Table 3. Social media use among participants in social media focus groups

	Women		Total (Men and Women)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Do you have a personal account on at least one social media outlet that you access at least once a week?				
Yes	137	94%	268	90%
No	9	6%	31	10%
Total	146	100%	299	100%
Missing	4		8	

2. Increased Use of Social Media

Service members were also asked to comment on how the attitudes and culture around social media changed since they first joined the Military Services. Virtually all participants agreed social media usage had become common in recent years, and many noted the rapid increase in use since they had joined the Service.

“I remember when the Commandant first got Facebook and now it is not a big deal. There has been a lot of change and acceptance toward it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

⁷ A social networking site in which users are able to create “microblogs” by sending short messages of 140 characters or less (known as “tweets”) that are immediately distributed to their network of followers.

⁸ A text-, photo- and video-messaging app that allows the user to send messages that will disappear 1-10 seconds after the recipient(s) receives them.

⁹ A social networking site that enables users to take pictures and videos with their mobile devices, edit the pictures with filters, and share them with friends and followers on a variety of social networking sites.

¹⁰ An online video community that allows users to upload video content, share that content, and view the content uploaded by others.

¹¹ An entertainment, social networking and news website where registered users can submit content, such as texts, posts or direct links, and vote on submissions to determine its position on the site.

¹² A self-published diary or commentary that allows the writer to make entries as often as wanted about any subject. Blogs vary in length and can include photos, links to other websites, or other types of media.

“In terms of the culture, it’s grown. It’s becoming more acceptable [and] usual for Twitter to be part of your day. Get on Facebook, send a message to your [unit].” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“[Social media] didn’t exist when I first started, so it has changed considerably.” (Male Officer)

3. Generational Differences in Social Media Use

Most participants felt younger people used social media more frequently than older people did. They commented on the challenges associated with managing the newest Service members, who grew up in an era where social media were common and had different opinions on what was appropriate to share online.

“There has been a change in demographics. We [in this focus group] are all in our late 20s, but for younger people, their ideas of what they can release information-wise is different.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Kids these days don't know the limits of saying too much. Who the [expletive] wants to know half the things people are sharing? The young [Service members] don’t understand the concept of too much information.” (Male Officer)

“I think that because social media is so prevalent in society . . . the younger folks have grown up with it; they don’t think twice about it. It’s normal and they don’t think about . . . the seriousness of what they’re putting out there.” (Male Officer)

Older Service members also used social media, but several focus group participants talked about the limits of their usage.

“For [my subordinates], being on their phone and connected to Internet is like second nature, but I feel like that’s a waste of my time. I try to tell them, the human connection is way better than the 1,000 friends¹³ you have on Facebook.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“My engagement with social media is very passive at best . . . what we use at our age and our position will be different than the [initial entry training] clientele.” (Male Officer)

“You get kids who are 17, 18 and you’re comparing that to people who have been in the military for years. I think it’s just an adjustment period. I know people who are older use social media on the outside. They just know how and when to use it.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

¹³ A person who is a part of another user’s network on a social networking site.

a. Changing Standards of Professional Communication

Some senior Service members commented on the changing standards of professional communication among their more junior staff. They felt that social media and electronic communications, while favored by some younger Service members, were less effective than other types of interaction.

“How you interact with [other Service members] is so important, but now it is all about social media. They are so awkward when you try to communicate with them face-to-face. They have lost all sense of how to interact with people if a phone or computer is not between them.” (Female Officer)

“I’ll have a [subordinate] send me an email and he or she is sitting less than 50 feet away. Did you really just send me an email?” (Female Officer)

“You can see some people talking more on social media than they do face-to-face. They think on their phone or laptop or Twitter, that they feel more comfortable. I’ve never understood it, I never will.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

b. Transforming How Service Members Learn and Obtain Information

Some senior focus group participants felt social media changed the way younger Service members learn.

“It’s making them take the easy way out. Instead of looking up the information or networking, they go to the website because they expect everything to be given to them on a silver platter.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“Before social media and the Internet, if a boss asked you a question you’d lock yourself in a closet with the manuals until you discovered it because you wanted to have this knowledge. Now, I’m ok with the fact that my [subordinate] doesn’t care about the inner workings. He will find the answer quickly online with a highlighted manual. I will not get an education out of him—I’ll just get an answer. That changes our teaching a bit . . . it is a different mindset.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“So, we have a [MOS-specific] page. And they will post¹⁴ ‘Where do you find this information’ instead of looking it up in the publication, instead of learning more than just ‘Go to page 5.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

A few junior Service members confirmed they used social media and technology to support their learning.

“There is a generational gap with social media. We all go through that phase of thinking old guys don’t know. When you can look everything up on Google, you can know if

¹⁴ Content, in any format, placed on a website.

everything is right. You take the word of the Internet over people in leadership positions; that is one of the challenges.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

c. A Platform for Complaints

Service members noticed that social media outlets were increasingly being used to “vent” about their jobs or things that are not going well. Participants perceived this to be especially common among younger Service members.

“Social media gives you a blanket of security to sit behind a wall and gripe and complain about your duties. They think ‘let me put it on Facebook.’ It is a way to vent without going through a supervised event.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I saw a situation where a member was having a hard week and went on Facebook and made comments about the senior staff . . .” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I don't think you should vent publically; you should probably talk to someone. But . . . you need that kind of release in some way. For people who can't talk to anyone I guess I can see them turning to the Internet.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I see people using it as a venting tool. It's getting harder to separate yourself as a person, and people are posting things that can put the Service in a bad light . . .” (Male Officer)

4. Military Culture and Social Media

Many focus group participants talked about challenges faced by the Military Services as a culture, organization, and employer to keep up with social media advances.

“The military is playing catch-up to the changing culture.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Even if leaders get frustrated with technology, it's not going anywhere. You're going to have to embrace it. We just have to become smarter about how we monitor these programs.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“Our culture, right now, is changing. We are becoming more [involved with] social media . . .” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I feel like we are stumbling as an organization. We don't want to be left behind and we want to jump on [social media] but we don't know how.” (Male Officer)

B. The Double-Edged Sword: Advantages And Disadvantages to Using Social Media

DACOWITS asked Service members to share perceived advantages and disadvantages of using social media in the Military Services. Several participants described social media as a double-edged sword with unique pros and cons.

“Anything that is invented could be used for bad and good. You can put something out there to gain camaraderie, to gain friends . . . but, it can also be used horribly.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“It gets information out quickly, but . . . that’s twofold, good and bad.” (Female Officer)

“Social media is a good person’s megaphone and a coward’s shield. Half of people say we are doing good things . . . other folks do the opposite . . .” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I think social media is double-sided . . . [it] highlights both the bad and the good. Unfortunately, some people ruin it for everyone.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

1. Advantages to Using Social Media for Service Members

Focus group participants discussed several perceived advantages to social media in the Military Services.

a. Supporting Communication With Service Members

Many participants felt that social media assisted with communication; because a large number of Service members were connected to social media, it was another tool that could be used to disseminate information and make contact.

“Our [senior leader] actually made a Twitter account and it was mandatory for us to all follow¹⁵ him . . . At first we thought it was ridiculous, but, actually, it has helped communication. It’s a lot better way for him to communicate with command. When he posts something, everyone is on their phone anyways, so now they just get a little update and we get the news right there.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“[Social media are] a good way to get the right information and I think it’s a more effective tool than some of the other avenues. We’re not at work all the time, so the emails they send to our work address we don’t get. But if we ‘like’¹⁶ the right page, we can get the information.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“That’s the fastest way to get information now. Old-school ways don’t really work anymore.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Reaching People Quickly

One specific way participants used social media for communication was to reach Service members quickly, particularly when other means of communication were ineffective.

“I have used Facebook to communicate with other guys in my unit when other means were not as fast or not working.” (Male Officer)

¹⁵ The act of signing up to receive updates or messages from another user.

¹⁶ A feature in social networking services, Internet forums, and blogs that allows users to express that they enjoy or support certain content.

“On my last deployment, I said, “I need somebody to contact me,” and someone reached out to me . . . I had to reach out to social media because I wasn’t able to get help from lines in the US. It helped me complete a mission.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“We used it a lot . . . to get in touch with people who were deployed or out on missions. ‘Hey, you’re coming back on Wednesday, can you do this mission on Saturday?’ or ‘When are you coming back? Does your wife need help?’ I don’t know how else to get in touch with people who are deployed.” (Female Officer)

“[Facebook] is the quicker way to get in contact than email . . . If someone is stateside and they have a Facebook, the first thing they are going to check is their Facebook.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

Sharing of Logistical Information

Additionally, many focus group participants mentioned that social media supported the sharing of routine logistical information like weather alerts or delayed openings.

“You can get messages about weather, construction. When the gate [to the installation] was closed you might not have gotten that [information without social media].” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I was in the Child Development Office and had to update people on child development center delays. I was able to inform them about that [using social media].” (Female Officer)

“It can be helpful. Like this winter when the base was delayed for weather.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

b. Allowing for Official Military Pages

Participants said that the Military Services often used official social media pages to communicate and boost morale among Service members, as well as to share updates with families and friends; for example, during deployments.

“My [unit] has a Facebook page. They try to post anything positive that we do. It is used sparingly, but well. I think it boosts morale.” (Male Officer)

“My unit has a Facebook page. I think most people do. If a unit is deployed, then I can see what they are up to.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“We were gone nine months on deployment and every week our [leader] had a note, updating our friends and families. He posted pictures and updates on our advancements and awards . . . so that was good. It can be motivating.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

c. Promoting Military Efforts to the Public

Another perceived benefit of official military pages and general military presence on social media was that they could be used to share positive information about the Military Services with the broader public in a transparent manner.

“You can show . . . the world what we are doing and that their tax dollars are working. You can use it for recruiting purposes . . . We can be transparent and show the public what we do.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“It is a good thing for us . . . now there is social media, people can see us out there. We still get “What do you guys do?” but it is good for us to be compared to other branches, they see what we are doing, we are a part of the Armed Forces.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“[Our installation] is good about posting and educating and staying up with current events like pictures of graduations. It shows transparency. Think that’s really what it [social media] was meant for.” (Female Officer)

d. Facilitating Supportive Online Communities

Participants felt social media could help Service members to connect with online communities, which could be a source of information and support for women and other minority groups, particularly for those who may not be able to connect face-to-face.

“There is a [social media] group I was added to called ‘Women in the [Service]’ and they put what women have achieved; they give inspiration about what you can achieve; it is a cute page.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I’m part of a group on Facebook . . . which is a support network for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) within the [Service]. They talk about safe places to live when transferring and conferences coming up.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

One focus group participant discussed a group that had been formed to help Service members dealing with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.

“We had a rash of suicides. We formed a Facebook group and are up to 900 members. It’s really brought together a multigenerational group to prevent these suicides. When people get out of the [Service] after deployment, that’s where we see a lot of the suicides. That’s when we use social media to our advantage because we saw failures at multiple levels to deal with guys with PTSD and other issues. Just in the month this has been running, I’ve seen all kinds of help for guys. It can be a huge tool for good.” (Male Officer)

Other online communities focus on support and information related to specific job positions.

“I’m a [career field] and there are [others in my career field] in one Facebook group.”
(Senior Enlisted Man)

“There’s a page to connect social workers across the [Service].” (Female Officer)

e. Helping Service Members Stay in Touch

With frequent deployments and transfers, it can be challenging for Service members to communicate with their families and former colleagues. Most focus group participants felt using social media was a helpful way to keep in touch with others.

Most focus group participants felt social media were helpful to maintain contact with family members and friends.

“I use [social media] . . . to keep in touch with family and friends that I grew up with. Just personal family stuff, posting pictures of kids and stuff I do outside of work.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I know when I was stationed in [an overseas location] for two years, me and my wife used Facebook video messaging . . . That was our marriage for two years, Facebook video messaging.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I used mine in [an overseas location]. My friends and family got to know what I was doing and got to know I was okay. They could see pictures of me and my friends.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Focus group participants also discussed using social media to correspond with their friends and colleagues in the Military Services.

“I’m being transferred quite a bit, so I use social media to keep up with other Service members. I don’t want to call all the time; your time off is precious . . . Social media, whether Twitter or Facebook or Instagram, it is a nice way to check up on friends and congratulate them when they hit milestones and see where they are going.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“We move so often that it’s hard to keep connections [with colleagues]. Social media makes it easier.” (Male Officer)

“Before social media, I would be in a unit and would transfer and that was it. Now with social media, I can keep those people in contact.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

A few focus group participants said they not only kept in touch with former military colleagues, but also used those contacts for professional networking and mentoring.

“I have served on different units . . . and being able to reach out to my buddies that are all over is great. My buddy got me a job at [corporation] he helped me out incredibly, and it was as simple as just reaching out online. You can lose touch with some of these

people you serve with, you know, going to [different military installations worldwide] so I think it is positive, sometimes, the use of social media.” (Male Officer)

“It’s one way to keep in touch [with other Service members]. Two days ago I got in touch with [someone I served with] three years ago. He had turned down [a position] and we talked on Facebook about it. It’s a good way to stay in contact and keep your networking up. He made the decision but I helped him. I try to keep one or two people from each unit in contact with Facebook.” (Male Officer)

“I use it for most mentors that have left the [Service] . . . It helps you stay connected.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Disadvantages to Using Social Media for Service Members

In addition to the benefits Service members described, they mentioned several disadvantages to using social media.

a. Potentially Compromising Security

Security concerns were the most commonly cited disadvantage for using social media. Participants commented on the potentially high stakes involved; some information, if posted online, could compromise the safety of Service members or the completion of a mission.

“The last time I was deployed in Afghanistan, there was a [Service member] that had aerial photos of his life at a [base]. This guy—he should be tried for treason—he posted all the stuff . . . That [base] got attacked. I don’t know if it was related but there were [Service members] who died in that.” (Male Officer)

“Some [Service members] made a music video of a Britney Spears song and posted a video. But, some of the clips had barriers and flight lines. A week after the video was posted, there was an attack on the camp . . . That’s how people found out, or so it is assumed. The events can’t be connected, but it is guessed that they are more than related.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“People want to use their cell phone and check in and say “Look at me! I am ok!” but they are giving away our position. You have DoD members in danger because of it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Service members commented on the threat of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in particular, monitoring social media.

“We have ISIS looking at our social media pages, there is a rumor they are targeting families . . . I started taking a lot of that stuff away. I have buddies totally off social media for that reason. Terrorists use social media against us.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“We can’t put too much on there because of ISIS. You can’t post anything that will garner the attention of a lone wolf . . . if you post anything military related, then it could share information that we don’t want to be made public or that could help our enemies.” (Female Officer)

“I had a person. There was so much information about her out there, that a terrorist could have used that information against her in a hostage situation. ISIS has Twitter, ISIS is on Facebook.” (Male Officer)

Service members also noted the potential hazards of geotagging.¹⁷

“I had a friend that was deployed get in trouble for posting pictures and the geotags shared the dates and times of where he was.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I have a buddy that [announces when he arrives somewhere] and it will show the geolocation. So, not only did he say where he is, but now it has a geolocation tag identifying the exact location . . . I comment every time, ‘Take it off’ or ‘COMSEC’ (communications security).” (Junior Enlisted Man)

b. Negatively Portraying Military Services to the Public

Many focus group participants worried about the speed with which negative social media content from Service members could be disseminated to the public and the public’s reaction to that content.

“It’s terrible; it’s a public outlet that is no longer just between the sender and the receiver; it’s with everyone. People feel the need to share everything and it is one post away from being national news.” (Male Officer)

“It makes it public, it is not just you and another person, now [it’s] everyone you’re friends with . . . it spreads like a virus, everyone sees it instantly.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“They tend to forget that it is public and that people can get into trouble for stupid stuff . . . They forget that they are not just venting, they are venting to the world, and it will come back to you.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“People are posting negative things about the military and civilians see that. What makes them believe in you if we go to war? Why should they trust you to save their life? It makes them not trust the military at all.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

While transparency may be considered a positive aspect of social media, a few senior Service members expressed concern that, thanks to social media, it was harder to conceal negative behavior than it was when they were younger.

¹⁷ When geographical information is linked to photos and other content.

“I think we did worse things prior to social media . . . Now that it’s seen so quickly by millions of people, you have to handle it differently. When it’s out in view of the public, it’s not as tolerable.” (Male Officer)

c. Promoting Fraternization

Service members must adhere to rules against fraternization. Focus group participants, particularly higher-ranking individuals, were concerned that social media might erode these boundaries.

“I think [social media] undermines our chain of command. I always get [some lower ranking Service member] who wants to be my friend [on social media] . . . and that's a horrible idea.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“The biggest disadvantage is that type of environment seems to trump fraternization. When I have a [Service member] who is friends with a [lower ranking Service member] on Facebook, then people start to think they’re friends.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“It adds another layer, too, because then there is fraternization. The whole thing of when you have your first [subordinate] try to friend you on Facebook. You are thinking to yourself . . . should I friend him or her?” (Female Officer)

d. Interfering With Formal Channels of Communication

Several focus group participants commented on the importance of using formal channels of communication for sensitive situations, and how social media could obstruct those tested processes. A few focus group participants also mentioned ways official job-related information, such as promotions, could be disseminated prematurely through social media.

A few male focus group participants who had served in combat discussed ways that information about wounded or killed Service members spread through social media. Sometimes, this information was incorrect since it had not always been verified through official channels.

“When I was blown up in combat, that’s what happened to me. My name was on Facebook as a [Service member who] was killed.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“The only time I’ve been livid with Facebook is when [Service members] were killed and the word got out too soon.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“The wife of a Service member found out her husband died in a helicopter crash from social media before someone was able to properly notify her.” (Male Officer)

“Someone put out a post on Facebook that a [Service member] was killed, and it was the wrong [Service member].” (Male Officer)

e. Lowering Morale

Some focus group participants felt that social media harmed morale and cohesiveness among Service members. This was more commonly mentioned among higher-ranking groups.

“I have a serious estrogen problem in the office. These young girls are always fighting over something and saying things about each other [on social media].” (Female Officer)

“I see it in my office—it is destroying relationships, which then affects the unit . . .” (Female Officer)

“When I went through [training] in 2004, it was not prevalent . . . A [Service member] would not have been by himself, he would have been with other [Service members] . . . Now in combat zones, I can go off patrol and go internal and use Facebook. We don’t connect as [Service members] like they used to . . . I think that is a real negative thing.” (Male Officer)

f. Distracting From Work

Some focus group participants felt social media prevented Service members from being productive in the workplace.

“I wish we saw a chart of productivity and how it fell when . . . Facebook [began].” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“At my old command, you could have cellphones and everyone was always on them. At my new command, you can’t have cellphones at all, and it is so great. We get so much more work done.” (Female Officer)

“I think that’s a distraction . . . when you’re on [social media] at work, you could be doing a lot of other things besides checking your Facebook . . . We have a lot to do. I think it would be good if we refocused.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

g. Permitting Sites That Portray Service Members Negatively

Across Services, there were a number of websites and social media pages containing potentially derogatory or negative content. Some of these sites and pages are discussed further in this section, as they pertain to sexual harassment.

“How many times has [a military website made by former and active duty Service members] been banned on Facebook? The stuff that is on there is just so bad, it is not building morale. It is tearing people down.” (Male Officer)

“The thing that I see that affects morale is the [satirical social media page targeting a particular Service]. This is a Facebook page where servicemen post pictures. There was one here at [installation] where the [Service member] was sleeping on duty and holding a [weapon].” (Female Officer)

“There’s a Facebook site, [Installation] Confessions. I told a [high-level Service member], ‘Read what’s going on, on your base.’ Just to hear how people are behaving . . . they say things like, ‘Hey, my husband deployed, think I’m going to go sleep with my neighbor.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

h. Biasing First Impressions of Incoming Personnel

Several focus group participants noted that social media could disadvantage new Service members joining a team or unit. For example, others could find the new person’s profile on social media and form opinions about him/her before he/she arrives, which could create a challenging work environment.

“I am getting ready to check into a command, and I guarantee somebody is already digging into my Facebook, my Instagram, and are contacting my friends to get information . . . They look at you and your Facebook and they use it against you, someday somehow.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“People are looking at their [incoming Service members] before they arrive and passing judgment on them. One member in particular has tattoos and has the pictures on Facebook, but when she met the person face-to-face, she covered them up so you couldn’t see them. And his comment to her was ‘Oh, I thought you were more of a party girl.’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I consider it an issue. The joke about Facebook stalking. When someone gets orders, everyone looks them up on Facebook, and if they’re pretty they make a judgment about what type of female that person is going to be before they report. I know more than once I walked into my office and they had this girl’s Facebook up . . . so Facebook is a way to judge your [Service members] before they arrive.” (Female Officer)

C. Understanding of Social Media Policies and Guidelines

Focus group participants had varying opinions about military social media policies. Some felt very confident that policies existed, while others felt there were still many ambiguities to address. Participants also shared their opinions about unacceptable uses of social media. Many participants acknowledged some degree of confusion or inconsistency related to social media policies. Participants shared their views on how social media could allow leaders to monitor subordinates in new ways, and had mixed opinions on whether the Military Services should control social media use and how policies and guidelines were being enforced.

1. Belief That Social Media Use Was Largely Covered by Broader Policies Governing Conduct

Senior Service members noted that social media usage is governed at least partially through broader policies pertaining to general conduct areas like communications. Several participants specifically referenced the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

“There doesn’t need to be separate rules for social media because the UCMJ rules are already there . . . It’s almost more of a kiss of death to do it on social media and someone can turn you in for it.” (Female Officer)

“There’s OPSEC (operations security) guidelines and [Branch-specific instruction]. There’s a critical information list about items you’re just not allowed to put out there.” (Female Officer)

“We have our equal opportunity classes, our [sexual harassment and assault program] classes. We brief them on websites and stuff that has been put out there. We tell them what they can and cannot put on websites.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“You can be prosecuted under the UCMJ if you post some stuff on Facebook.” (Female Officer)

Some participants’ comments, however, suggested these policies could be difficult to apply to social media; they recognized the challenges leaders faced in deciding when online behavior violated policy or UCMJ, and if it did, how to address it.

“Yes, the way that you can handle these situations, it depends on the seriousness of the offenses. If there’s nothing under the UCMJ, you can still take administrative action to hold the person accountable for what they put on social media. If it violates UCMJ you can start looking, depending on the seriousness, [to file a] violation of lawful order; you may go Article 15 [non-judicial punishment] or you may go court martial . . .” (Male Officer)

2. Common Beliefs About Unacceptable Uses of Social Media

Most participants confirmed that certain behaviors were unacceptable given the standard expectations of conduct for Service members.

a. Wearing Military Uniform in Unofficial Capacity

Focus group participants agreed that Service members should not express certain opinions or demonstrate certain behaviors while in uniform, including in photos or videos on social media.

“You got men and women that wear a uniform every single day, but they want to degrade it by showing half-naked bodies . . . or wearing their uniform while breaking the rules. It completely discredits the military and it is completely ridiculous.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I think unacceptable is like when people are wearing their uniform unbuttoned or posing . . . hat backwards [on social media] . . . Some people care about the uniform, and these people are ruining it for everyone.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“When people were stomping on the American flag [on social media]. To represent that while you also represent this uniform, you can’t.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“The last big crackdown was during the ice bucket challenge.¹⁸ They cracked down because people were doing it [in uniform]. They couldn’t do it in uniform.” (Male Officer)

b. Being Disrespectful of the President of the United States or Chain of Command

It also goes against rules of conduct to speak out against the Commander-in-Chief and higher-ranking Service members. Focus group participants discussed ways that Service members might violate this rule on social media.

“There are so many in active duty that will bash the President and people in Washington. I won’t [‘like’ the post] even if I agree because it’s stuff we’re not supposed to voice.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“They shouldn’t be able to say negative things about the President [on social media] because he’s the Commander-in-Chief.” (Female Officer)

“They don’t get that if they sit on their computer and bash a political figure, it looks bad since they are serving our country. They don’t get that they should not be bashing their Commander-in-Chief. Not allowed to do that, ever! . . . You need to respect yourself, your friends, your uniform, and your country. If you can’t do that, then you shouldn’t be here and you shouldn’t be on social media.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

c. Expressing Political Opinions

Finally, focus group participants mentioned that Service members should not express political views when identified as military personnel, including when they are on social media.

“You are not allowed to say ‘I am a [Service member] and this is my political view.’” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“[Service members] can be too political [on social media] . . . when it comes up you have to do something about it.” (Male Officer)

“People know that you’re in [the military]. If I disagree with an opinion on a public page, they can find out I’m military. For my personal opinion, off duty hours, I can get in trouble at work.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

¹⁸An activity involving publicly allowing a bucket of ice water to be dumped on one’s head to promote awareness of the disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and to encourage donations to research. This was a popular topic on social media during summer 2014.

“You can’t campaign for a political candidate or protest [on social media].” (Junior Enlisted Man)

3. Perception of Guidelines Rather Than Policies on Social Media Use

Many service members referred to guidance and recommendations, rather than strict official policies, on social media usage they have received.

“Some commands have you sign an [acknowledgement form] on proper use of social media. There are some rules and the things they don’t put rules on are recommendations on what you should and shouldn’t post and why.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“There’s a CO’s (commanding officer’s) hand book specifically for social media. That’s [Service]-wide.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“They have guidance on what you should and shouldn’t post—not a strict policy for ‘you can’t do this and have to do that’ because it is your personal life. Other than certain things.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“There is a social media handbook that has guidance on recommended security settings.” (Male Officer)

4. Lack of Clarity Surrounding Policies and Guidelines

Many focus group participants indicated that existing policies and guidelines pertaining to social media were unclear, inconsistent, or poorly communicated.

“Rules on social media tend to change when the leadership changes. When I initially came to this [installation], you couldn’t have your phone out at all. Then people would have their phones out, on the Internet all the time. Now they’re starting to crack down again.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“There’s very vague guidance about what you can post on social media. There’s not a lot of guidance which makes people unsure.” (Female Officer)

“There could be more transparency as far as policies regarding us as members and what is ok and what is not ok and what the repercussions are.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I believe we do have regulations . . . but we don’t provide the education on the policy nor do we advertise that the policy exists and this is where there is an issue.” (Male Officer)

Some were unsure whether social media policies or guidance existed at all.

“There are no clear rules on how to deal with people in the military and social media.” (Female Officer)

“How are people accountable [on social media]? Where can I read what you can’t do?”
(Junior Enlisted Man)

“I think we’re walking a fine line without guidance right now.” (Female Officer)

5. Social Media Could Allow for Leaders to Monitor Subordinates in New Ways

Many participants across groups noted social media provided new ways to monitor Service members’ behavior and ensure their compliance with relevant policies.

“Supervisors will friend you to see what you’re doing.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“You can’t stop them from using public sites, but I have the [Service members] in my unit somewhere on my social media. Like, on my Facebook, if they post something questionable, I let them know. I’ll shoot them a text.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I chose to friend my [Service members] in Afghanistan. I took over a very badly fractured section who didn’t trust anyone and they were stressed out . . . it was the only way I could know what was going on.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

However, monitoring requires time and resources that may not be available.

“The problem I see for OPSEC (operations security) is that I don’t have any authority or control over anyone’s Facebook. Say I did have the ‘God permission’—I would need 2 or 3 extra people to monitor [their pages].” (Female Officer)

“I was the investigator . . . and lots of people said ‘Hey, my account was hacked’ or ‘I have a scorned lover and I wanna file charges’ but there is very little you can do unless you can get [a Service’s Criminal Investigative Service] help to get the IP address and that’s, in general, money and time the military isn’t willing to spend on it.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Though not a common theme, a few officers in one of the Military Services discussed using social media to monitor emotional well-being and intervene when individuals seem depressed or at risk of suicide.

“We have had several instances . . . where a [Service member] is monitoring a Facebook account, and he is able to intervene because a friend was going to commit suicide . . . You can deep dive on guys that were below the radar.” (Male Officer)

“We had a suicide . . . but, if you had looked on their Facebook, you would have known. They were depressed and alone and lost . . . if anyone had looked at their Facebook, they would have known and could have told them to go to counseling.” (Female Officer)

6. Perceptions on Whether the Military Services Should Control Social Media Use

The majority of participants agreed that being a member of the Military Services is more than a 9-to-5 job; it dictates behavior outside of conventional working hours and therefore limits what Service members should be able to post online.

“We have to acknowledge that as members of the military, our service obligations do curtail our freedom of speech more and we cannot post certain things based on us wearing our uniform.” (Male Officer)

“You sign a contract—24/7. It’s volunteer. Anything you say and do, uniform on or off, electronic or in person, you can and will be held accountable for that.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

Though participants generally agreed that Service members are limited in what they could say on social media, some felt the Military Services were limited in their ability to curtail personal social media use.

“You can’t do anything [to take away social media]. You can’t take away freedom of speech. It makes the military look bad unnecessarily.” (Female Officer)

“We can’t take social media away from [Service members]. That’s their personal accounts. Let’s say it comes down through the government that they make it mandatory for all branch Service members not to have accounts, then [shrugs.] But we don’t have that right now.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

While most Service members acknowledged that it would be impossible to get rid of social media, a few wished that they could. They felt that social media were too difficult to control and appropriately regulate.

“I think that, honestly, that they should make a rule about social media. If you are in the military, then you shouldn’t have social media . . . I know it would never fly, but people have too much trouble separating and understanding what is and is not allowed.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“The whole concept of social media, you give people this lane to voice their opinions. I guarantee you everyone has had a thought that, had we said it aloud or put it on social media, we wouldn’t be here. I think they should do away with all social media.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

7. Perceived Enforcement of Policies and Guidelines

Just as focus groups members felt policies and guidelines on social media could be inconsistent, they perceived punishments to be inconsistent or expressed differing opinions about what would result in punishment.

a. Enforcement of Penalties for Unacceptable Use of Social Media

Some Service members gave examples of policy and guideline enforcement. The punishments varied in their level of severity.

“In my last assignment we gave someone an LOR (Letter of Reprimand) for bashing someone on social media.” (Female Officer)

“I brought a member and his wife in and gave counseling to him about how his wife was bullying people and violating OPSEC (operations security) with information he told her.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“My command just [issued non-judicial punishment to some Service members] for what they said on social media. There was a surge of really derogatory stuff and that didn't go unnoticed.” (Female Officer)

“One of our guys got in trouble, because he decided to vent about our [Assistant] and he got tracked down, and, he got disqualified from receiving the [Service member] of the Year award.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

b. Non-enforcement of Penalties for Unacceptable Use of Social Media

Some Service members also described situations where they felt a policy or guideline should have been enforced, but was not.

“We had . . . a situation in [overseas location] where someone posted information about where we were. I don't think anything ever came out of the situation, but what she posted was detrimental to the unit. I can't say that everyone will always be punished.” (Female Officer)

“How are you going to punish everyone? You may have posted something similar to another person who got in trouble, but how are you going to monitor everyone? I guarantee those that are getting in trouble are not the only ones who wrote or posted something like that.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“It is serious stuff, so I think there needs to be more done. People preach about what not to do, but . . . there are no real repercussions.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

D. Assessment of Social Media Training

Opinions on social media training were mixed. Some focus group participants believed that Service members received sufficient training, while others felt that the trainings were inadequate or did not address the full spectrum of issues related to social media.

1. Perception that Service Members Received Adequate Training

Some Service members commented positively on the amount and quality of social media training that they received.

“The [Service] has a yearly training. They do have a portion on training about social media. It pretty much tells to not put any personal information on there, turn off your location, pretty much anything that would help people find you and tell them who you are—that’s what you shouldn’t be posting.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Our training tells us to turn off location services, and how to take that off your phone. They do teach us these new things, they are done annually because they are updated. The training is definitely appropriate.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I know they put out something about how to set up your smart phones and stuff so you’re not tracked. That was really educational.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

Most focus group participants agreed that the Military Services provided education related to security (including operations security (OPSEC)), in particular.

“The education is good about OPSEC.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Everyone has general OPSEC training. That’s the basic stuff everyone knows, though. That stuff is self-explanatory.” (Male Officer)

2. Perception that Service Members Did Not Receive Adequate Training

Although some participants felt Service members received adequate training on social media use, many others identified a need for more training or different kinds of training.

“We have cyber awareness training . . . if there is anything in there on social media, I don’t remember it. That is not a good thing.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“When we train on social media, we don’t pull out regulations like other trainings. It’s usually “[E9] said not to do this.” Social media is not going away, and it’s about time we come up with [official regulations] that deal with it.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

While most agreed that Service members received OPSEC training, as discussed above, some questioned the quality of that training. Specifically, participants questioned the effectiveness of computer-based training in this area; this was consistent across Services.

“That’s a joke. You just click through . . . you just put the volume on low and do it quickly. There is nothing like official . . . or useful.” (Female Officer)

“[Our OPSEC training is] a waste of time. You can click through and if you have a computer with multiple screens, then you can do your other work at the same.” (Male Officer)

“They give you a bunch of training on COMSEC (communications security) and tell you what not to post. But, I’ll tell you right now, any military training that is [on a web portal] or on the computer, you just click through so you can get back to work.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

3. Family Members Should Receive Training

Several focus group participants, especially senior-ranking participants, pointed out that civilian family members might also need training on appropriate use of social media as it relates to the Military Services.

“I hear from my wife ‘Hey, this person put up ‘Three more hours ‘til my husband leaves . . . Two more hours ‘til he leaves . . . Two more hours ‘til he gets back.’ I’m like ‘Why are you putting stuff on social media?’ We train the [Service members] but they’re not taking the same training home.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“Spouses need some sort of training.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“[My last unit’s] Facebook page was a place for spouses and family members to air grievances publically . . . everyone could see it. You might have gone to look at something about the unit, but then you see a spouse has said, ‘Why did my husband have to stay late? I want to talk to the commander.’ You need to . . . speak to the [Service member] and their spouse.” (Female Officer)

E. The Impact of Social Media on Bullying and Sexual Harassment

Focus group participants were asked about the role social media might play in bullying and sexual harassment. Many participants said that social media was used to bully and/or harass, while others said it either did not play a role or was not something the Military Services should regulate.

1. Perception That Bullying and Sexual Harassment on Social Media is a Problem

Focus group members’ discussions yielded more examples of sexual harassment than bullying, though many participants noted issues with both. Examples included both individual contact and broader derogatory pages.

a. Personal Attacks and Harassment

Focus group participants commented on ways that social media were used to target individuals.

“I think cyber bullying is a real thing. It can really affect morale.” (Male Officer)

“It’s much more difficult for the person being harassed because they can’t get away from it so they are getting barraged even when they leave work.” (Female Officer)

In discussions of sexual harassment and social media, focus group participants were more likely to provide examples of women than men being sexually harassed.

“I have been sexually harassed by my [leader]. He did it to all the females . . . it was the norm for him to make comments. When he would see your Facebook page, he would come in the next morning and talk about it. I was married and always covered up and stuff. He would come in and say, ‘I wish it was me there instead of your husband in that photo.’ It made my work environment horrible.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“I had an NCO send a provocative photo to a [Service member] via SnapChat. She complained . . . but SnapChat deletes things after [only a few seconds], so it was his word versus her word.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I had a junior [Service member] who was dating another junior [Service member], but they broke up. Once they broke up, he posted a naked picture of her on the Internet. Everyone got to see her naked body.” (Female Officer)

b. Derogatory Sites and Content

Sometimes, rather than attacking an individual, bullying or sexual harassment took place through broader forums such as web sites or memes.¹⁹

“People make memes of every stupid thing and they could tag²⁰ someone on it and it could be offensive they may not think it is bullying but it is. You can ask them to take it down, but people comment on it and I don’t find it funny. That is another form of bullying.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Female participants from one Service spent time discussing derogatory content targeting women on social media.

“I don’t like to admit this, but there was an article for the [official] division Facebook page and there was a picture of me and there were thousands of comments. ‘Why isn’t she in the kitchen?’” (Female Officer)

“On these female-bashing sites . . . I’ve seen a sister on [a page mocking women], and she’s a pretty woman, and the comments—‘Where was she at when I was a [junior Service member]?’” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“They will make memes [with pictures of female Service members] and say like ‘rape time.’” (Female Officer)

“I took a picture of me and my 2 best friends from overseas and I put it online for my mom to see, and someone took it and put it on this other website . . . people called us useless [Service members] . . . waste of human life.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

Men also discussed these websites and social media pages.

¹⁹ A concept that takes the form of an image, catchphrase, hashtag, or video that is spread via the Internet.

²⁰ Keywords added to a blog post, photo, or video to help users find related topics, people, or media.

“It’s a website that posts nasty jokes . . . [they are] funny at times . . . but crude, and there’s pictures of girls with captions that allude to sex or rape.” (Male Officer)

“ . . . [It’s] degrading of women . . . it’s just a bunch of pictures that [Service members] post that are a bit more provocative pictures of females . . . That shouldn’t be on there. It’s not stuff I want to see.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

c. Behind-the-Keyboard Bravery

Many focus group participants perceived that bullies or harassers benefited from the distance social media provides from their target; they were more likely to say things that they might not say in person.

“It is faceless bullying and sexual harassment . . . It is easier to call someone something you would never say to their face . . . With Facebook, now you can hear it more because you can see the pictures and the comments, but there is still that distance or ‘protection.’ It is still faceless. It is still easier to say things.” (Male Officer)

“Bravery behind the keyboard. You can’t see the person so you can say whatever you want to people.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“You don’t have to stand behind your words anymore. Back in my day, people knew you were a bully. You got [called out] when you were a bully. But, now, you can hide behind your computer.” (Male Officer)

“It’s the visibility factor. You can say pretty much whatever you want and not feel guilty. If I am sitting here talking to her, I won’t make fun of her . . . I’d rather do it on Facebook where she can’t punch me in the face.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Perception That Bullying and Sexual Harassment on Social Media is Not a Problem

A number of focus group participants felt that bullying and sexual harassment on social media were not major issues. This feeling seemed to apply to social media bullying, in particular, which a few participants appeared to equate with youth and a high school mentality.

“I think that’s more high school, not for us . . . There’s a lot of accountability, so it doesn’t happen.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I have not seen any bullying or harassment on social media. People who are doing it . . . confront that person by themselves. They won’t put it on social media where everyone can see it.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

3. Perceived Role of the Military Services in Addressing Bullying and Harassment on Social Media

Focus group participants who believed that social media were used for bullying and harassment had different opinions about whether the Military Services should address the problem.

a. Responsibility of the Harassed Party to Stop Bullying and Harassment

A few focus group participants felt that victims of online bullying or harassment could avoid the issue by simply blocking the offender, or otherwise cutting off contact with him or her; these individuals felt it was the victim's responsibility to prevent being bullied.

"If you are cyber bullied, then I would cut if off. I would not participate. I don't get how it happens because why would people let it happen? Just shut off the computer." (Junior Enlisted Man)

"If people are posting things on the [Facebook] wall²¹ that are offensive to you, you should defriend them and move on." (Male Officer)

A few participants also thought victims could be blamed for the problem, if they posted pictures or things they should not have posted.

"You shouldn't post pictures of yourself in a bikini and then not expect the guys you work with to comment." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

"How do you sexually harass someone on social media? I think I am just trying to get an idea, because if someone puts a picture up and another posts '[expletive] you look sexy' then is it harassment because they put the inappropriate picture up in the first place?" (Junior Enlisted Man)

"To me, I see the females that get sexually harassed on social media are the ones that do things they shouldn't. A lot that I do see is people putting themselves out there to be sexually harassed. It's not right, but you shouldn't present yourself that way." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

b. Use of Social Media by the Military Services as Evidence

Many participants agreed that social media could be used as evidence in cases of online bullying and harassment, in instances where the Military Services gets involved in addressing the situation.

"I think it has helped . . . people are so dedicated and involved in social media, it is easier to prove when someone says or does something inappropriate. You can see the Tweet or Facebook post. You can see if someone checked in.²² There is a footprint there. Social media has helped [the prosecution of] sexual harassment in terms of being able to document that it exists." (Junior Enlisted Woman)

²¹ The portion of a Facebook page that displays a user's updates and comments.

²² When a user shares his or her location with friends and followers.

“You can get a screenshot²³ of them harassing you and you saying ‘stop messaging me’ and them continuing. That is one good thing about social media, it makes providing evidence easier.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I think it is great because [social media] creates a record that we may not have had before. Now if someone is being bullied or harassed through social media, then there is documentation and evidence that can tied down to the case.” (Male Officer)

F. The Impact of Social Media on Gender Integration

During the focus groups, Committee members asked participants to share their opinions on how social media might be used to support gender integration. Responses were mixed, with participants identifying both positive and negative ways social media could affect this effort.

1. Social Media Could Promote Integration Success Stories and Raise Awareness

Several focus group participants discussed positive ways that social media could support gender integration, such as highlighting examples of women who had excelled in a male-dominated field or disseminating information about gender integration changes.

“I would say have articles about women doing amazing things. Show women doing amazing things that men can’t do.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Having it out there and showing men and women working side-by-side and that it is ok that the world didn’t burn down. That everyone is trusted. Social media has potential to be very positive.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Show the benefits and the milestones they’re making with gender integration. Like the steppingstones they’re making. Showcase just how far we’ve come.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

2. Social Media Could Lead to Backlash Against Gender Integration

Even in groups that discussed positive uses for social media in gender integration, participants noted ways social media could be used as part of a negative backlash or to highlight women’s challenges.

“It’s great as long as the women are doing well, but as soon as they start to fail, it’s fodder for the men to say they never should have been there.” (Female Officer)

“With social media, it is going to be harder to integrate. When someone, specifically a female, fails in a unit, believe that there are 20 phones recording it.” (Male Officer)

“It would be like having this conversation [about gender integration], but with millions of people and no guidelines.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

²³ An image of the display of a person’s computer screen or mobile device.

“There are already sites talking crap about . . . dependents and female [Service members]. Now you’re going to add at least five more sites talking about female integration.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

G. Summary

Participants were asked to discuss the ways Service members use social media. Though it was not something raised by the Committee, they also described social media’s increasing popularity over time, particularly among younger Service members. Participants shared perceptions about the relationship between military culture and social media. Across groups, participants confirmed Service members used social media for both personal and professional reasons. They discussed using a range of social media sites and platforms; Facebook was the most commonly mentioned. Ninety percent of all social media focus group participants had a personal account on at least one social media outlet they accessed at least once a week.

Service members were also asked to comment on how the attitudes and culture around social media changed since they first joined the Military Services. Most agreed that social media usage had become common in recent years, and many noted the rapid surge in use since they joined the Service. They commented on the challenges associated with managing the newest Service members, who grew up in an era where social media were common and had different opinions on what is appropriate to share online; older Service members also used social media. Some senior Service members commented on the changing standards of professional communication among their more junior staff. They felt that social media and electronic communications, while favored by some younger Service members, were less effective than other types of interaction. Some senior focus group participants felt social media had changed the way younger Service members learn. Service members indicated they increasingly used social media to “vent” about their jobs or things that are not going well; participants perceived this was especially common among younger Service members. Many focus group participants mentioned how the Military Services as a culture, organization, and employer has found it challenging to keep up with social media advances.

DACOWITS asked Service members to share perceived advantages and disadvantages of using social media in the Military Services. Several participants described social media as a double-edged sword with unique pros and cons. Many participants felt social media assisted with communication; because a large number of Service members were connected to social media services, they were additional tools that could be used to disseminate information and make contact. Additionally, many focus group participants said social media supported the sharing of routine logistical information. Participants reported the Military Services often used official social media pages to communicate and boost morale among Service members and their families. Official military pages and general military presence on social media could be used to share positive information about the Military Services with the broader public in a transparent manner, and social media could help Service members to connect with online communities that could be a source of information and support for women and other minority groups, particularly for those who may not be able to connect in person. Most focus group participants felt social media was a helpful way to keep in touch with others like family members, friends, and fellow Service members.

In addition to the benefits Service members described, they mentioned several disadvantages to using social media. Security concerns were the most commonly cited disadvantage for using social media. Participants commented on the potentially high stakes involved; some information, if posted online,

could compromise the safety of Service members or the completion of a mission. Service members commented on the threat of ISIS, in particular, monitoring social media. Service members also noted the potential hazards of geotagging. Many focus group participants worried about the speed with which negative social media content from Service members can be disseminated to the public and the public's reaction to that content. Focus group participants, particularly higher-ranking individuals, were concerned that social media may erode boundaries surrounding fraternization. Several focus group participants commented on the importance of using formal channels of communication (i.e., not social media) for sensitive situations, and how social media could obstruct those tested processes. A few male focus group participants who had served in combat discussed ways that incorrect information about wounded or killed Service members had spread through social media. Some focus group participants felt social media harmed morale and cohesiveness among Service members. This was more commonly mentioned among higher ranking groups. Some focus group participants felt social media prevented Service members from being productive in the workplace. Several focus group participants noted social media could disadvantage new Service members joining a team or unit.

Focus group participants had varying opinions about military social media policies. Senior Service members felt social media use was at least partially governed through broader policies pertaining to general conduct like the UCMJ. Some participants' comments, however, suggested that these policies could be difficult to apply to social media; they recognized the challenges leaders face in deciding when online behavior violates policy, and if it does, what to do about it. Most participants confirmed the following behaviors were unacceptable given the standard expectations of conduct for Service members: 1) wearing a military uniform in an unofficial capacity, 2) being disrespectful of the President or chain of command, and 3) expressing political opinions. Many Service members referred to guidance and recommendations they received on social media use, rather than strictly enforced official policies. Many focus group participants felt existing policies and guidelines pertaining to social media were unclear, inconsistent, or poorly communicated. Some were unsure whether social media policies or guidance existed at all. Many participants across groups noted social media provided new ways to monitor Service members' behavior and ensure their compliance with relevant policies. The majority of participants agreed being a member of the Military Services was more than a 9-to-5 job; it dictated behavior outside of conventional working hours and therefore limited what Service members should be able to post online. Though participants generally agreed that Service members were restricted in what they could say on social media, some felt the Military Services were limited in their ability to curtail personal social media use. Just as focus group members felt policies and guidelines on social media could be inconsistent, they perceived punishments to be inconsistent or expressed differing opinions about what would result in punishment.

Opinions on social media training were mixed. Some Service members commented positively on the amount and quality of social media training that they received. Most focus group participants agreed the Military Services provide education related to security (including OPSEC) in particular. Although some participants indicated Service members received adequate training on social media use, many others identified a need for more training or different kinds of training. Some questioned the quality of OPSEC training. Specifically, participants questioned the effectiveness of computer-based training in this area; this was consistent across Services. Several focus group participants, especially senior ranking participants, pointed out that civilian family members may also need training on appropriate social media use.

Focus group participants were asked about the role social media might play in bullying and sexual harassment. Many participants said that social media was used to bully and/or harass, while others said

it either did not play a role or was not something the Military Services should regulate. Focus group members' discussions yielded more examples of online sexual harassment than bullying, though many participants noted issues with both. In discussions of sexual harassment and social media, focus group participants were more likely to provide examples of women than men being sexually harassed. Sometimes, rather than attacking an individual, bullying or sexual harassment took place through broader forums such as web sites or memes. Female participants from one Service spent time discussing derogatory content targeting women on social media. Many focus group participants perceived that bullies or harassers benefited from the distance social media provides from their targets; they were more likely to say things that they might not say in person. A number of focus group participants felt that bullying and sexual harassment on social media were not major issues. Participants had different opinions about whether the Military Services should address the problem. Participants in a few focus groups felt victims of online bullying or harassment could avoid the issue by terminating contact with the offender; these individuals felt it was the victim's responsibility to prevent being bullied. A few participants also thought victims could be blamed for the problem in some cases. Many participants agreed social media could be used as evidence in cases of online bullying and harassment, in instances where the Military Services gets involved in addressing the situation.

During the focus groups, Committee members asked participants to share their opinion on how social media might be used to support gender integration. Responses were mixed, with participants identifying both positive and negative ways social media could affect this effort. Participants felt social media could highlight examples of women who had excelled in a male-dominated field or be used to disseminate information about gender integration changes. They also suggested that social media might be used as part of a negative backlash or to highlight women's challenges.

Chapter 6. General Comments

When time permitted after the standard focus group protocol was completed, participants were asked if there were issues that might affect women in the Military Services that had not been covered in the focus groups, including the biggest challenges faced by women in the Military Services and recommendations participants would make to the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). The majority of focus groups were able to address at least one of these general questions. This section provides a summary of the themes respondents most commonly reported. Because of the overlap in responses to the two questions, the findings from both questions are reported together. Several of the themes covered here were also mentioned by participants in response to the primary focus group topics discussed earlier. Those themes are included here if they were specifically mentioned during this section of the focus groups. Several of the findings in this section mirror findings from DACOWITS focus groups in previous years.

A. Perception of Men’s Attitudes Toward Women

The most commonly reported challenges to women in the Military Services today were specific challenges they faced with regard to men’s attitudes and opinions about women in the Military Services. These challenges included perceptions and stereotypes of women by men, discriminatory and/or sexist attitudes, as well as the perceived physical barriers of women. A general lack of respect for women in the Military Services was mentioned as a challenge in 2014 as well.

1. Perceptions and Stereotypes

Different stereotypes were mentioned by men and women. Specifically, women indicated men often saw one servicewoman who made a mistake or does not represent the uniform well and used that to portray all servicewomen as such, or men generally categorized all servicewomen into one of a few derogatory categories.

“They assume that because you live in the barracks that you’re a [derogatory term for a promiscuous woman]. It makes everyone else look bad when one person is doing that. Males will think that because one person is like that, then everyone is like that . . . It’s perceived that because I’m a female, that I’ll want to do that stuff.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“There are so few women, so if one messes up, then . . . bam . . . it’s all females suck. That is not the same for men.” (Female Officer)

2. Discriminatory and Sexist Attitudes

Both men and women spoke about discriminatory and sexist attitudes against women, though women were more likely to indicate this.

“It’s a cultural factor. The language—I hate to say boys’ club.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“I know I haven’t experienced sexual harassment or assault, but have been discriminated against. I’ve had a sexist comment said against me. I had to file a complaint that I was not being treated as equally as men.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

3. Physical Barriers

Participants mentioned physical barriers women face. Some men believed women were not able to perform at the same level as men physically, while women stated men used physical standards to make women appear less capable of performing their jobs.

“She has to prove herself. If she can, good, but if I have to pull an 80-pound sack of weight, but she can’t, then that’s a problem.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“Being singled out. Just because you can’t do 20 pull-ups and a male can. I am constantly achieving and making number 1, but they always tear me down. I am an easy target. They say things to make me look bad to my higher ups. I mean they attack you. It’s petty.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“Infantry is a young man’s game . . . We are not designed the same. They [women] are in combat roles right now and I am afraid the physical strain will break them. I understand what they are trying to do, but it’s not just about the institution, it’s about what is best for females too.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

B. Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Breastfeeding Concerns

Just as in 2014, focus group participants noted various challenges pregnant servicewomen faced. These challenges included some general pregnancy concerns, not having adequate breastfeeding support or lactation facilitates, as well as not having adequate maternity leave after giving birth.

1. Pregnancy Challenges

Both men and women noted challenges associated with pregnancy in the Military Services. Male participants suggested being pregnant could keep women from performing certain job tasks, while female participants tended to suggest being pregnant was viewed as a handicap. Some women expressed safety concerns such as exposure to harmful chemicals.

“ . . . to get my waiver to the second trimester was arduous with a doctor who didn’t support my decision . . . Then the other one is that you’re not allowed to go to training when you’re pregnant. You’re not allowed to go.” (Female Officer)

“One concern I have is putting females in key billet positions and it is not for anything other than if she gets pregnant, she is no longer deployable. What do I do then? It becomes an issue of readiness because I can’t put someone else in that position—not immediately at least.” (Male Officer)

“The command needs to know that, yes, you’re pregnant, but you’re not dying.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“ . . . There is no protection from chemicals and whatnot when you are pregnant or breastfeeding. I am in a ship where there is cadmium and it can cause premature labor or low birth weight and I am not really sure what to do.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

2. Changes to Post-Partum Leave Policy

In addition to inadequate maternity leave being a big challenge to women in the Military Services, it was a concern participants wanted brought to the SECDEF. Both male and female participants mentioned that postpartum leave was not long enough for either mothers or fathers.

“My daughter was born prematurely and she was in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) for 66 days and I would have been required to be back at work before she left the hospital. Luckily, my command was very supportive, but there should be some leniency between vaginal birth and C-section birth because the recovery is very different. And there is no documentation of how to deal with a premature child. We want women to stay in, we want to support them, maybe we should address those problems.” (Female Officer)

“I have been thinking about this a lot. I just had a baby and the maternity policy is the same for vaginal birth and C-section. I was returned to full duty after almost dying on the table and I went to the chain of command and was able to handle it later. So maternity leave expectation is terrible.” (Female Officer)

“ . . . Paternity leave needs to be looked at. It is very unequal to the civilian workplace.” (Male Officer)

“Give the dads more time. We give them 10 days and that includes the weekend. And they are even looked badly upon if they take 10 days.” (Female Officer)

3. Lack of Breastfeeding Support

Participants reported a lack of space and time given to women to pump while lactating. This was most commonly mentioned by women.

“I can’t tell you how many times we end up with a [Service member] that says my command does not support me when I need to pump. Women who are lactating and breastfeeding are supposed to be given a place to pump.” (Female Officer)

“My wife is active duty and she pumps in a supply closet.” (Male Officer)

“We are so mission driven. A female who has children and breastfeeds takes time away from the mission. It’s hard to change that mindset, that warfighter mindset. It’s a short-term perspective.” (Female Officer)

C. Challenges Involving Work/Family Balance

Some participants, mostly women, mentioned balancing work and family was an issue for them, especially as it related to their decision to stay in the Military Services.

“Balancing family and your career is an issue. Who deploys with a 4-month old baby?”
(Female Officer)

“I had [a servicewoman] who would have made an amazing [senior NCO] who had kids but couldn’t compete because she couldn’t put in the time and leave the kids.” (Female Officer)

“I think what I’ve experienced in my career is the family and military . . . the balance issue.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“You’re not going to solve the retention problem unless you allow women to have a family and come back on . . . I’m telling you ‘Sir, I need to come off birth control on this date so I can have a baby by this date and still have a Master’s degree and come back.’ It’s a huge stressor, we are losing people.” (Male Officer)

1. Separation, Co-Location, and Deployment Concerns for Families

Separation, co-location, and deployment issues were mentioned. Participants also noted challenges they had concerning deployments for those Service members involved in dual-military relationships and those Service members with children.

“I think having something that doesn’t have both parents on the same deployment cycle. It’s sometimes hard if you’re doing continuous back-to-back deployments.”
(Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I’ve got a couple now that is dual-active, and we have to deploy them both. So, I have to ask, do you want to go when he gets back, or when he’s gone?” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I have been separated from my husband for a year and half and the [Service] is telling me that we have to be separated for another year and half.” (Female Officer)

“I would pass back the issue as a whole about relocation and ability handle two career fields with the cost of daycare and cost of schools—a lot of families need both spouses working and can’t maintain two professional careers. . . . If we can stay in an area longer, if we made more money to support family in a dual income level, it would keep me in. If we had longer tours and better geographic stability or we could be closer to family support networks, if we had grandparents around who could watch kids that would help.” (Male Officer)

2. Single Parenting

The challenge of being a single parent in the Military Services was also a prominent subtheme of balancing work and family.

“I think the biggest challenge is single mothers.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I’m a single dad. I lost my wife. And now if I get a deployment. It’s like, ‘What about my daughter?’” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I recently became a single parent. I’ve had kids and have been underway. I’m more limited because I’m a single parent.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

D. Physical Fitness Expectations and Height/Weight Standards

Focus group participants noted that height and weight standards were a big challenge to women in the Service. Similar to 2014, both male and female focus group participants made recommendations regarding physical fitness and body structure issues in the Military Services.

“We have a height, weight, BMI (body-mass index) standard based on age and in 2010 I believe it got more strict. I think if we had a way of testing physical abilities and we could lift a pump or a person out of the water, why does it matter?” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I am referring to getting taped. There are a lot of women that are physically fit and solid, but how they carry their weight or how their body is shaped has such an influence on whether they are a successful [Service member] or not. That should not take away from our performance, but it does.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“It doesn’t matter if you work out every day or train endlessly, there are just body parts that you cannot control or lose weight from. They need to adjust the standards.” (Junior Enlisted Female)

“They only do men’s necks and waists, but they also do our butts. If you have a bubble butt, even if you have a tiny waist, you’re not meeting the standard.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

1. Equal Physical Standards

Participants mentioned the lack of equal physical standards as a challenge for women. This issue was raised in focus groups held in several previous years as well. Focus group participants, particularly men, wanted the SECDEF to be aware they desired gender-neutral physical standards. Several participants indicated having equal physical standards would ease the gender integration process.

“My biggest thing has got to be—as far as anything changing in the military—is one set standard. There should be one set standard as far as male-female across the board.” (Junior Enlisted Man)

“One thing that would help ease that transition is to bring those physical standards to the same levels as the males currently serving in those positions.” (Male Officer)

“It’s ridiculous. I sympathize with males too. It is not fair to the male [Service members] too. Just make a standard that fits both males and females and that is realistic. If you want the promotion, then you will work to get to it. We can’t compromise the quality of the [Service member] or the product by making multiple standards or exceptions.” (Female Officer)

“We have to remember that she didn't join to be a female [Service member], she joined to be a [Service member]. So why are we making [physical] exceptions for females?” (Junior Enlisted Man)

2. Physical Challenges After Pregnancy

The difficulty of getting back into shape after having children was a widely mentioned subtheme among women.

“You have 9 months to put it [weight] on and 6 to get it off!” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I had kids within the last year or so. They expect you to lose the weight in 6 months. They don't take into consideration that there may be complications that make it so it takes longer than 6 months.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I’ve been pregnant in the civilian sector and military sector. Any OB/GYN (obstetrician-gynecologist) says it takes your body about a year to get back to normal. For the PT test it is 4–6 months [after giving birth that you are required to pass the test].” (Female Officer)

“I miscarried at 16 weeks last year and had a PT test right away.” (Female Officer)

“After having kids, I struggle every single weigh in. It is easier for me to make the scale because my hips are just not going to shrink in. It is one of those things I’d rather do a physical standard of doing a PT test, run, and sit ups.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

E. Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Issues

Several participants mentioned issues concerning sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Military Services. Participants’ concerns mainly centered on the reporting system, the length of time required for resolving sexual harassment and sexual assault cases, and care for victims/survivors.

“Speed up the investigation process on sexual harassment and assault.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“The sexual assault process is ugly and I knew a girl who didn’t want to press charges. They wanted to discharge [the offender] for commission of [a] serious offense. These guys raped girls and we just discharged them. We put two sex offenders on the street. That is what I don’t like about my job. There is no conviction.” (Female Officer)

“ . . . One concern is they [sexual harassment and sexual assault cases] get dragged on. We’re facing a shortage of lawyers who can deal with those cases. I’m currently waiting three to four months for this case that I have. I’m not sure if it’s a base thing or a [Service] thing.” (Female Officer)

“I think barriers to reporting is very shortsighted. I think the focus has to be on aftercare.” (Female Officer)

“Here I had one female who was sexually assaulted. She was afraid to go to and stay in the barracks, but there were no other options. Why can’t we have a safe house?” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

As noted in Chapter 5, many believe training on sexual harassment and sexual assault has helped to change military culture around this area, but many participants believed that they were receiving an excessive amount of training in this area. They expressed concerns that excessive training has desensitized Service members to the training content.

“Stop the knee-jerk reactions. Every time someone throws a fit we’re going to have sexual assault training, alcohol training. Someone can’t follow the rules, just get rid of them. There comes to a point where it’s just too much. Stop the knee-jerk reactions. If they can’t follow the rules, just get them out.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

“I wouldn’t want the Service to be seen as being insensitive. Any sexual assault is too many. But I think the way we’re going about bringing it to our attention has gone past what is needed to beating a dead horse. There’s got to be a better way to do it—not the same topics over and over again to the point of glazed eyes.” (Male Officer)

“I fell asleep in so many [sexual harassment and sexual assault training] classes when it’s PowerPoint. When it’s PowerPoint, after PowerPoint, after PowerPoint, people are going to stop listening. And if you have people whose first language isn’t English, they may not understand what to do in situations.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“[Sexual harassment and sexual assault] training in units. It is taught at all leadership levels. If you teach it, you see it 2–3 times per week . . . It seems nice, like make sure it is in everything, but it is complete overload where everyone in the [Service] can recite the training.” (Senior Enlisted Man)

F. Desire for Mentorship

A few participants expressed the need for female mentorship. Some male participants specifically mentioned their desire to mentor women in the Military Services as well.

“Find more senior female leaders who can mentor down to us.” (Junior Enlisted Woman)

“For the mentoring, I think that definitely more is needed. For women in the military, that’s something that should be stressed a little more. Avenues for mentorship.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“[Mentorship] not necessarily by a female. It can be a male.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“ . . . We have served with women in combat and are fathers of daughters and we have aspirations for [mentoring females] too, and the women taking care of women as the primary [model] doesn’t seem to be working that well . . .” (Male Officer)

G. Uniform-Related Concerns

Similar to previous years’ findings, several participants mentioned issues with military uniforms. Participants’ concerns were mainly about uniform design.

“We have two times as many uniforms as men and we don't have enough money to cover it, as a woman. Even as [senior enlisted women] we don't have the money to cover it and they don't always fit.” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“ . . . The only thing I have been consistently frustrated with is my uniform. These boots are horrible, the rise on these pants, the stupid purse they want me to carry. Like coveralls, do you have to undress every time you go to the bathroom?!” (Female Officer)

“I think that the [Service] is doing a disservice for making them dress like male [Service members].” (Female Officer)

“They want to change our uniforms to make them more like men’s, but there isn’t anything wrong with our uniform. Why is it so bad to be a woman and wear a more feminine outfit but still be a pretty darn good [Service member]?” (Senior Enlisted Woman)

“I hate the hat! I don't see my males signing up to wear a female [hat]. I don't wanna be a man, I don't need a dude to wear my [hat]; it's the whole female uniform that has history and tradition.” (Female Officer)

Appendix A. Installations Visited

Site	Members	Dates
Naval Station San Diego and Twentynine Palms, San Diego, CA	Dr. Jackie Young & MG (Ret.) Gale S. Pollock	March 30–April 3, 2015
Fort Carson, Fort Carson, CO	FLTCM (Ret.) Jacqueline DiRosa & SMA (Ret.) Preston	April 8–April 11, 2015
Hurlburt Field, Hurlburt Field, FL and Eglin Air Force Base, Eglin Air Force Base, FL	LTC (Ret.) Hae-Sue Park & Ms. Teresa Christenson	April 14–April 17, 2015
Naval Station Mayport, Jacksonville, FL	Rev. Dr. Cynthia R. Lindenmeyer & CAPT (Ret.) Beverly G. Kelley	April 21–April 24, 2015
Dover Air Force Base, Dover, DE	CMSgt (Ret.) Bernise F. Belcer & Ms. Monica Medina	April 27–April 30, 2015
Fort Campbell, Fort Campbell, KY	LtGen (Ret.) Frances Wilson & VADM (Ret.) Carol M. Pottenger	May 5–May 8, 2015
Camp Lejeune	Dr. Kristy E. Anderson & CMSgt (Ret.) Bernise F. Belcer	May 10–May 16, 2015
Camp Pendleton	LTC (Ret.) Hae-Sue Park & Ms. Sharlene Wells Hawkes	May 13–May 16, 2015
Communications Area Master Station Atlantic (CAMSLANT), Chesapeake, VA and Training Center Yorktown, Yorktown, VA	MG (Ret.) John Macdonald & Ms. Donna M. McAleer	May 17–May 21, 2015