

Puzzles of Inclusion: Comparing Gender in the United States Army and Navy

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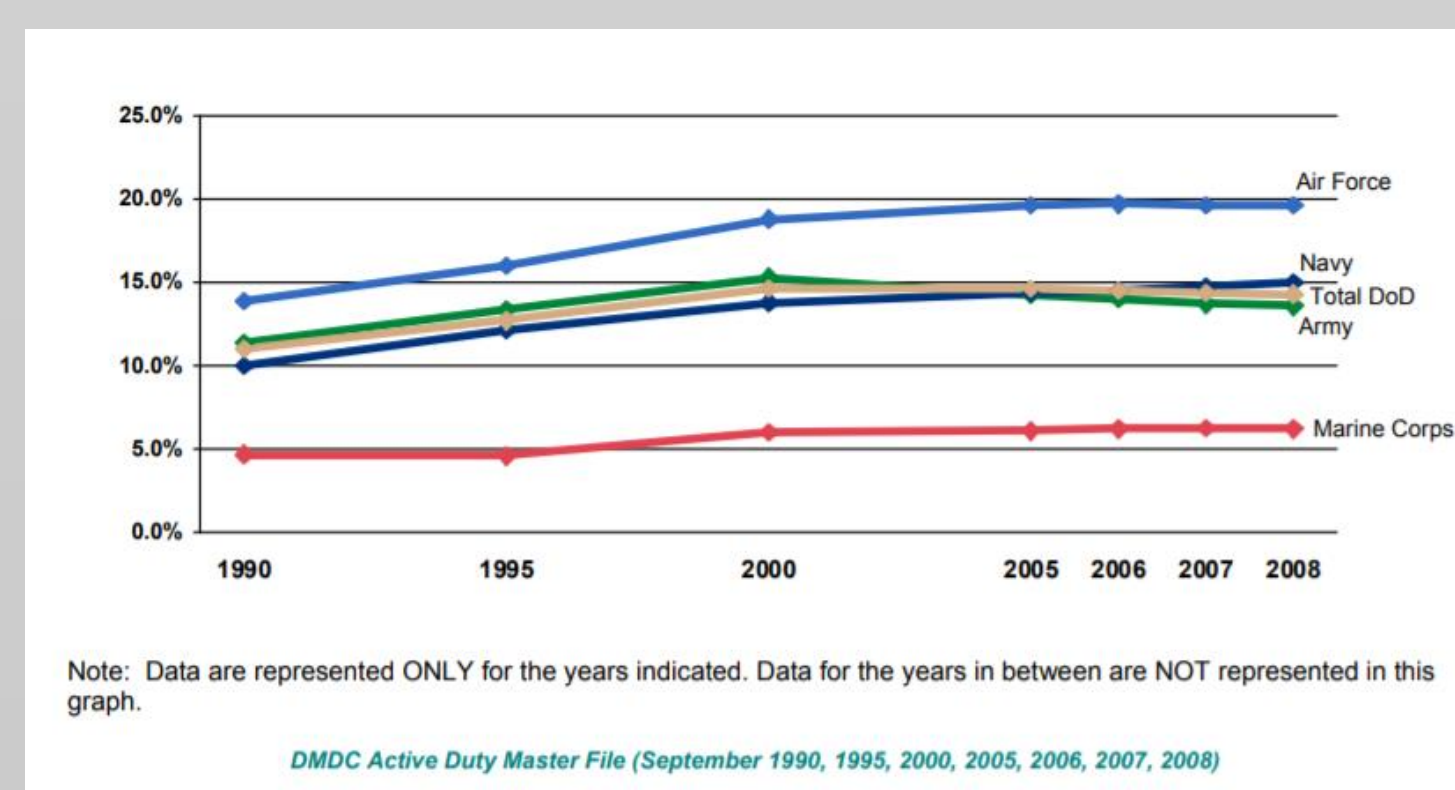
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Abstract

The US Military is a singular body of defense composed of many branches and components with similar goals, yet those branches all have significant differences in their percentages of women. The entire military pulls from the same applicant pool of American society, so what causes these differences? The shift in greater female participation rates from the Army to the Navy in recent years creates an intriguing puzzle that builds upon what was once thought to be inherent, unquestioned branch characteristics. Why do these trends change? This thesis examines qualities of institutional values, locations, technical opportunities, physical fitness, and retention that could explain this gap. Through personal interviews and research analysis, this work concludes that traits of the branch differences contribute to the overall image each service creates. This image then demonstrates the inclusive values that attract women to different branches of the armed forces.

Introduction

The trends of the gap are the focus of this thesis because they represent the propensity for changing rates of inclusion. Currently, the Navy, along with the Air Force, is the branch of the armed forces with the one of the highest percentage of females in its ranks, five percent higher than the largest branch: the Army. However, this was not always the case. The Army was historically known as one of the most inclusive branches with high rates of females in its ranks, until the early 2000s when the Navy had a dramatic increase in women that has steadily increased past the dropping numbers of the Army.



This negates the typical explanations of their differences and calls for analysis into what was happening socially and politically in the military history of this period. Previous literature is broad and severely lacking regarding the specific intricacies of interservice gender inclusion and its influences.

Methodology

There is little to no discussion in current prevailing literature analyzing the different rates of inclusion in the Army and the Navy and why they experienced a shift in trends over twenty years ago. Using the written work on female experiences in the Army and the Navy, I began my own research to generate different hypotheses on explaining the differences between the service branches.

To fill in the gaps between societal theories and the numerical statistics, I spoke to women in both branches to hear how their experiences have been impacted by the integration trends of the Army and the Navy. Interviews with cadets and veterans from diverse generations and backgrounds revealed where the individual experiences confirmed previous hypotheses, the ways in which they were completely contradicted, and how some answers called for an entirely new approach to understanding the complicated cause and effect of inclusion.

I created the sampling criteria around service component, gender, location, and rank to ensure that I spoke with knowledgeable, relevant interview participants who could share insight about the role of gender policies in the Army and the Navy. I chose officers in California who I could speak with anonymously about their experiences in the Army or Navy. I chose veterans and ROTC cadets, representing the past and future of the services. Once I knew who I would recruit and interview, I structured questions to understand their background and perspectives about the topic of inclusion in the military. My interview questions were structured around four broad categories: Experience, Satisfaction, Interservice Comparisons, and Hypotheses of Integration.

The image to the right shows the questions used to guide conversations with the interview subjects in this research. It can also be found in Appendix A of the full thesis work.

Appendix A. Questionnaire Used in Interviews

- I. **Introductions**
 - a. Have a conversation with the participant about their basic information (name, age, hometown) to establish trust and flow of communication.
- II. **Army/Navy**
 - a. What made you want to join the military, specifically as an officer?
 - b. Why did you choose the army (or navy)?
 - c. What kind of career did you initially want to pursue in this branch?
 - d. Do you feel that this branch was a reliable way to achieve your career goals?
- III. **Satisfaction**
 - a. How happy are you with your choice?
 - b. Would you go back and change it if you could?
 - c. Did you accomplish your career goals in this branch?
 - d. How long did you spend/plan to spend in this branch?
- IV. **Compare and Contrast**
 - a. How do you feel females are treated in this branch compared to their male counterparts?
 - b. How are women in your branch treated by superiors? What about subordinates?
 - c. Did you ever see a network of female support in your branch? What was their presence like?
 - d. Did you see any females in leadership positions?
 - e. Do you think all the branches treat women about the same, or are some more inclusive than others?
- V. **Thesis Specifics**
 - a. Which branch of the military would you guess has the largest percentage of females today? Why do you think that is?
 - b. The Navy currently does but the Army did in the 20th century. Why do you think this shift happened? (For veterans, did you notice this shift?)
 - c. Did this percentage or your perception of it alter your decision for which branch you wanted to pursue?
 - d. Do you think physical standards could be a prominent differentiating factor between the branches at all?
 - e. How important were recruiting efforts that lined up with your goals or background to you?
 - f. How do you think this big shift in female presence impacted the Army and the Navy?
 - g. Do you think this trend will continue (with the Navy having higher percentage than the Army)?
 - h. Could this trend alter the future of these branches in your opinion?

Results

I used the results of the interviews in conjunction with previous literature to generate hypotheses that could answer why inclusion trends could shift and change between the services. I categorized the findings of these hypotheses into the broad findings of institutional explanations, locations, technical opportunities, physical standards, and retention. I then discussed how each of these have changed throughout the modern history of the military and how they could potentially explain the trends of inclusion. While each hypothesis could explain the reasoning for an individual service member, these differences do not effectively explain the overall shift in evolving inclusion trends throughout the twenty-first century. Overall, no singular answer about the statistic differences between the branches explains the rates of gender over time. Rather, the overarching theme that each hypothesis contributes to is the organizational image of the branch that represents its values and priorities.



The Army and Navy were chosen as the focus of this research because their shifting trends prove that factors influencing women in the services are mutable and influenced by key policy decisions. The way women perceive the differences in standards they are held to and the way they are treated is the foundation of how generations of women will choose to serve and in which branch. The shift in the early 2000s demonstrates that the branches do not have inherent differences in how they appeal to female servicemembers, and the phenomenon on the shifting presence of women is vital to understand their impact and experiences in the armed forces. The military is often a symbolic microcosm for American society, so understanding how their policies and systems impact inclusion is vital to understanding how other perceptions and comparisons in civilian society can impact politics of participation and integration.

Conclusion

The organization image, or how people perceive the branch, is more visible and therefore more influential than the reality of the statistics. The effort that is put into crafting an image shows both those inside and outside of an organization what is prioritized and what will be valued.

Less than one percent of the U.S. population serves in the armed forces. So, that leads the question, why should civilians care about military politics? The answer is that in a way, the military represents American values and society of strength, respect, and merit. Once this dominant of an institution begins to address systemic issues, we can begin to understand where else these trends exist in American culture. The Navy is not inherently more conducive to diversity and inclusion, the shifting of effort and priorities made it that surpass long standing Army trends of female participation in its ranks. If a rigid and hierarchical system like the military can evaluate and influence these complex issues, then other civilian systems and organizations can address and apply similar influences and policies in their spaces to expand on the same needed change.

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