



The University of Kansas

Project Diane: Women's Foundation of Greater Kansas City Final Report

Alesha Doan, Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; Political Science

Shannon Portillo, School of Public Affairs & Administration

Overview:

Over the past century, professions have become increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Male-dominated professions and organizations have become increasingly gender integrated both voluntarily and with cultural, legal, and political pressure. The military in particular has become more gender integrated, but remains a traditionally male-dominated institution with a specific masculine oriented culture. In the U.S., women are still banned from over half of the active duty military positions, as most positions are classified as combat positions. This, however, is quickly changing. Limited gender integration into combat units in the US military has already started, and more is on its way. Under a directive issued by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, nearly all combat positions in the U.S. military must be open to women by January 2016 or exceptions must be requested and explained. Most importantly, the order includes positions within the most elite forces such as the Navy Seals and Army Special Forces.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a great deal of resistance to gender integration in the military, particularly in the elite Special Operations units. Data for this report come from a larger project funded by the Army Research Institute (ARO Contract W911NF-11-1-0035). While the broader project considers the barriers and potential benefits to gender integration in the U.S. Army Special Forces (commonly known as the Green Berets). Special Forces is a special operations component of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USASOC), here we use that data to explore the integration of women into traditionally male-dominated organizations and what that means for the workplace. Based on 24 focus groups we conducted with 198 Special Forces males and Special Operations females, we find that confidence is important for women, but has limitations; the structure of organizations matters; and sharing experiences is important for women as they enter male-dominated organizations.

Women in the Military:

Women have informally been a part of the U.S. Military since the Revolutionary War, making up approximately three percent of the Continental Army (Rees 1996; Skaine 1999). As the military became a formalized force, women's roles transitioned into support services with women operating as cooks, nurses, laundresses, and the like. Although historians have commented that women picked up the arms of fallen male soldiers and participated in battle, they were largely seen as auxiliary enablers to male combat forces (Hall 1993; Skaine 1999; Treadwell 1954). It was not until the early 20th century that women were formally enlisted in the

military in order to free up enlisted men to fight in World War I (Devilbiss 1990). During World War II, women were recognized as a permanent part of the Army via The Women's Auxiliary Army Corp. The term "Auxiliary" was dropped from the title as women were formally integrated into the Army later in 1942 (Hampf 2004). After World War II, The Women's Armed Service Integration Act of 1948 was the first formal legislation permanently recognizing women's service to the military. Women were allowed to serve, but were barred from combat, were not allowed to hold a rank higher than Lieutenant Colonel, and were unable to have command over a man (Morden 1990).

In the mid-20th century many male-dominated professions underwent planned or forced gender integration, and the military followed suit. In the late 1960s, staffing limitations imposed on women via The Women's Armed Service Integration Act of 1948 were repealed, and in 1976 women were allowed to enroll in military academies. The enlistment age for men and women was also equalized (Burelli 2013; Skaine 1999). In 1978, The Women's Armed Service Integration Act was again amended to dissolve the Women's Army Corp, recognizing a permanent female presence in the armed forces. Early in the next decade, however, the Supreme Court in *Rostker v. Goldberg* (1981) held that drafting only males was constitutional, citing congressional precedent and the combat exclusion policy. Later in the same decade, the Department of Defense (DoD) clarified the exclusion of women in combat via the "Risk Rule" (Burelli 2013). This became formal policy in 1994 with the Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Policy banning women from serving in ground combat or being assigned to combat roles (Burelli 2013).

More recently, military leaders, politicians, and civilians have argued that the Combat Exclusion Policy is at odds with the reality that females are already engaged in direct combat (Scarborough 2005; Keenan 2008). The U.S. has been involved in protracted global conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, where identifying clear battlefronts is challenging, and "mission creep" has pushed women into combat roles while officially serving in non-combat positions (Feitz and Nagel 2008). U.S. military women have also been involved in humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, and post-war reconstruction (Kennedy-Pipe 2000). Addressing many of these contemporary realities, the Military Leadership Diversity Commission released the report "From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership and the 21st-Century Military." As part of its recommendations, the Commission suggested removal of the combat exclusion policy. In January of 2013, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced the Department of Defense was rescinding the policy and would begin to create gender-neutral occupational performance standards for all positions within the military. Nearly all combat positions in the U.S. military must be open to women by January 2016 or exceptions must be requested and explained. Preparing for these policy changes, the Marines recently opened its Infantry Officer Course to women in 2012; to date fourteen female officers have attempted the course but none have passed (Santangelo 2014). In April 2015, the Air Force began drafting gender-neutral occupational standards for special operations combat positions as a "big step" toward potentially integrating women into these previously male-exclusive positions (Losey 2015). For the Army Special Forces, as well as the rest of combat units assigned to the U.S. Special Operations Command, a gender integration plan must be in place, or the Army will need to present the DoD with

compelling reasons to continue female exclusion by January 2016. As a first step, Special Operations Command opened over 4,000 non-combat positions to women in March 2015, and the first Ranger school opened to women in April 2015 (Lamothe 2015).

Our Research:

We examine the integration of women into male-dominated organizations through a series of focus groups we conducted with the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF), commonly known as the Green Berets. This elite component of U.S. Special Operations Command specializes in unconventional warfare tactics and indigenous forces engagement. Although the broader goal of our research, funded by the Army Research Institute (ARO Contract W911NF-11-1-0035), is to examine the potential barriers and benefits of female integration into SF, here we look specifically at the integration of women into a male-dominated organization. While our data come from women and men working in the military, our analysis reveals that their experiences are generalizable to other traditionally male-dominated contexts.

From October 2013 to February 2014 we conducted a total of 24 focus groups, with a sample size of 198 participants at four Army forts in different parts of the U.S. Focus groups lasted an average of 120 minutes. We followed a semi-structured format, including questions regarding potential obstacles and benefits to integration and soldiers' experiences working with people of the opposite sex. All focus groups were conducted at the forts and participation was voluntary¹. Participants were recruited in advance through email announcements and word-of-mouth. For each group, at least one researcher served as the facilitator and one researcher served as a note taker. All of the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber for analysis. The transcriptions form the basis for our analysis and identification of themes.

Most of the focus groups were divided by rank with enlisted soldiers, warrant officers, and commissioned officers participating in separate focus groups. We also conducted focus groups with several entire twelve-member SF teams (or ODAs, Operational Detachment Alpha teams). The four focus groups conducted with female soldiers from Special Operations were mixed with enlisted soldiers and commissioned officers due to the limited number of females available for the focus groups. Female soldiers currently serve in Special Operations, but not within Special Forces. Female participants included soldiers from Civilian Affairs (CA), Military Information Support Operations (MISO), and Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), all units within Special Operations.

Data were analyzed based on repeated close readings of the transcripts using an inductive approach to the analysis (Maxwell 2012; Thomas 2006). Through this approach, dominant and

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all participants, and human subjects' approval was granted for this research. Participants were given a verbal and written description of the project and each participant was required to read and sign a written consent form. Respondents were provided with a copy of the consent form that apprised them of their rights and contained contact information for the researchers and the human subjects committee that approved the research.

frequent themes emerge from the data. These themes then are used to continually compare across participants to support themes, refine subthemes, and identify additional themes that emerge over the course of the focus groups (Maxwell 2012; Thomas 2006). Below we discuss how women and men manage the integration of women into a male-dominated organization.

Findings:

Soldiers' conversations of women entering traditionally male-dominated organizations focused around three main themes: confidence, organizational structure, and sharing experiences. While women pointed to the importance of confidence in their abilities, they noted that confidence was not enough to overcome barriers placed in their path by the organization and their male colleagues. Both men and women discussed the ways in which organizational policies and practices contributed to structures that prevented women from fully participating within the organization. Women recognized the importance of sharing their experiences, in order to develop mentoring relationships and support networks. Overall, women recognized that entering and changing a traditionally male-dominated organization or field was not something that they could do on their own, but required significant allyship from others within and outside their workplace.

Confidence:

One prominent theme that emerged from the focus group with female military personnel was confidence. Women expressed a great deal of confidence in their ability to learn new skills, perform their jobs, and succeed in new and changing environments. For example, women discussed the confidence they gained from learning and acquiring new skills, which often required a considerable degree of technical training in the fields of engineering, medicine, aviation, data analysis, or new language acquisition. Although learning these skills was challenging, women's confidence in their ability to master them grew throughout their training and in turn, prompted them to seek out new opportunities to further their training.

Women also discussed how deploying new skills in their jobs reinforced their self-assuredness. They were confident in their ability to perform their jobs and subsequently envision and pursue advancements in their careers. In addition to expressing self-poise, the women relayed stories about other women they admired because of their considerable skills in both technical competence and leadership.

Another source of confidence emerged from women's experiences working in new or changing environments. Women were frequently required to work with new teams domestically, or interact in new cultures in conflict-ridden countries. For example, most women discussed the trepidation they had prior to being deployed to strict patriarchal foreign countries, particularly in the Middle East where women from the focus groups were most commonly deployed. These feelings are reflected in Jennifer's comments:

“I was surprised. My first deployment was about a month after 9/11, and I didn't know a lot about the Middle East. I had class on Muslim as a religion but I didn't know much beyond what probably your average American knew. I expected to find sexism when I

was working with the Bahraini military- that they would not want to work with me. I found none of that. And they interacted with me and were very professional. I found the same thing again when I went to Kuwait and worked with Kuwaiti military.”

As Jennifer’s story illustrates, she was concerned about being marginalized by sexism among local populations and questioned her ability to interact and work with males native to Bahrain and Kuwait. Her experiences working in both countries, however, left Jennifer surprised and emboldened. She, like most of the women in the focus groups, derived confidence from operating successfully in foreign countries where they were able to apply their skills and navigate new cultural environments. Mastering these drastically different environments compared to their day-to-day careers in the U.S. provided women with an additional level of confidence in their abilities.

Other women discussed working in new environments that while less dramatic than Jennifer’s experience, represented a new terrain for them. Given the gender imbalance in military personnel, most women work in units/teams where they are the minority, and often, the only woman in the group. Although women have been succeeding in these environments, field demands have produced significant changes for some women’s military careers. For instance, under a new program designed to offer support services to Special Forces operating in the Middle East, Special Operations Forces launched a new program designed to train all female-support units to assist SF, particularly with interacting and providing services for local women and children because cultural norms prohibit American males from interfacing with these two population groups. Many of the women in the focus groups were part of this training and it was frequently the first time they had worked in an all female environment, which was a significant change from their routine work life. Despite women’s initial reservations about this change, they found training and working with all-female teams was some of the most positive and rewarding experiences they had in their careers. Once again, operating and thriving in new and changing work environments provided women with confidence.

Confidence has Limitations

The focus groups also revealed that confidence has limitations, often noting that confidence can only partially equip a person to succeed. Carmen’s story illuminates this point: “With my first site they treated me horrible. I’m talking like lesser human being, knocking my dinner out from like—I’m sitting here eating it—knocking it off the table and telling me, clean that shit up bitch. Like that’s how I was spoken to, just appalling. So I feel like, yeah okay your projection and your attitude has a lot to do with it, but it’s not just our minds that we need to change about how we’re worth something and we need to project ourselves professionally and confident. There are two pieces to the puzzle here. And so I feel like eight times out of ten you’re going to have the experiences that you’ve had where you project yourself confidently and aggressively, but what about all those other females that like they try that such as myself. And I mean it was—it was a little rough.”

Carmen’s quote illustrates that despite women’s confidence in their ability to master

skills, perform in their positions, and successfully navigate new environments, confidence is not enough. For many women, confidence did not mitigate the obstacles created by organizational policies and practices, nor did it prevent gender hostilities in the workplace. Despite improved job performance, and ability, success in difficult environments, and being confident in our the acquisition of new skills and capabilities, confidence is not enough.

Structure

Another significant theme that emerged from focus groups with both women and men was organizational structure. The organizational structure comes from policies and practices in the organization that essentially create the rules of the game for its members. This structure develops from both policies that are on the books -- like the combat exclusion policy, or exclusion from particular career paths like Special Forces or Army Rangers-- as well as individuals' interpretations of policies that apply throughout the organization like the hygiene policy governing male and female hygiene requirements. While explicit policies excluding women from particular career paths or training opportunities are being challenged legally with *Hegar et al. v. Hegal*², Army-wide policies also contribute to an organizational structure that precludes women's full integration into the organization.

One of the most discussed policies in the focus groups was the hygiene policy. As explained to us by both women and men there are different hygiene requirements for men and women in the Army. Many of the people we spoke with interpreted the hygiene policy as it relates to women to mean that women must come out of the field and be provided with a private shower once every three days. This interpretation would prevent women from serving in Special Forces given the austere environments in which they operate. As Matt discusses in the quote below, hygiene requirements enabled by this policy are enough to justify the exclusion of women from the organization:

“There's other issues besides a woman's willingness to live in an austere environment that are a limiting factor. And then—so now it's a whole nother gamut of medical stuff I've got to provide or bring as a medic when I'm already—I'm already cutting back on lifesaving equipment, things that are going to save your life if you lose a limb or get shot or things like that. And now I've got to add to that additional stuff to take care of women-specific problems like a yeast infection or things that are going to come from not being able to shower and cleanse herself properly for a long period of time.”

In contrast to the above quote, and the interpretation that women cannot live in austere environments without access to private showers, a female major we spoke with noted that she read the hygiene policy and interpreted it differently. Sarah noted that according to the policy

² This case was originally filed with assistance from the ACLU in 2012. The case is still pending, and continues to move forward despite the Secretary of Defense's recension of the Combat Exclusion Policy. It is still unclear whether women will be able to compete for all career paths within the military, particularly within Special Operations. All Special Operations units must develop a plan for integration, *or* present an argument as to why they should not have to integrate by January 2016.

women just needed the ability to cleanse themselves every three days with some privacy, “that could be a wet wipe behind some bushes.” Not only does the explicit policy make a difference in if and how women can be integrated into a male-dominated organization, but organizational members’ interpretation of the policy matters as well. The way leaders in the organization interpret the policy, structures the environment in which women and men operate.

A second policy with similar interpretive differences was the maternity leave policy. Many of the men we spoke with interpreted the maternity leave policy to mean that women would be useless to their teams for 18 months at a time - the nine months of pregnancy when she would be unable to deploy and the nine months following birth when she would be on leave and recovering physically. This was in stark contrast to how many women interpreted the same policies. One woman we spoke with, Susan, was pregnant at the time of our focus group. She serves as an intelligence analyst for the Military Information Support Operations (MISO). She noted that she has been assigned to light duty since the pregnancy, but she has kept up with physical training to reduce her post-pregnancy recovery time. In addition, Susan has spent her light duty time becoming fluent in a third language and attending all of the schools and trainings she was unable to schedule while deployed. Her goal was to come back to her team as soon as possible after her child’s birth being a stronger asset. She noted that she is treating her temporary light duty the same way that anyone would treat medical light duty for an injury sustained in the field or off duty. A number of women noted that men can sustain injuries on and off duty and use their temporary light duty to train as well. The perceptions of this policy, and how it will affect the structure of the organization differ widely between men who are fearful of potential colleagues’ absences, and women who have experienced the temporary leave afforded to them when they are pregnant.

The role of policy in creating and reinforcing organizational structures does not mean that the organization is impervious to change. Many women and men referenced policy changes that the Army has already participated in, specifically related to LGBT servicemembers. Here Jamie discusses the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell:

“I was going to bring that up, when they decided to repeal “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” and they just—there was a briefing. Every person had to sit in it, and they said, look this is law, we're repealing it, you will support this. We don't care what your thoughts are. You will not speak out against it... It was sort of like just—one day it was repealed, the next day nothing happened. And that was great. That's how the military should be governed. Execute to the best of your ability. If it's going to happen it's just going to have to happen.”

The policies, which set out the rules of the game for the organization, evolve into practices that reinforce expectations and norms for the organization’s members. They set the expectations for professional behavior, determine what actions get rewarded and what actions are frowned upon. One of the main reasons that four women sued the military to remove the combat exclusion policy stems from how combat experience is factored into promotions (*Hegar et al. v. Hegal*). Similarly, social norms become part of the structure that people are expected to live up. One such norm revolves around family and promotions. Many of the women we spoke with noted that in order to get promoted there is an expectation of having a family, and a resume

based off of a male's typical experiences. Here, Tia discusses the difficulty that expectation creates for many servicewomen:

“And at the same time if you choose to not have a family and then you get into those higher ranks you're expected to have a family, like this magical family that you made while you were climbing that ladder. You're not going to be in that position and not have a family because then you don't understand everybody that works for you. But you can't stop to have a family if you're going to make it up that high. It's totally Catch-22.”

Many of the norms that integrate into organizational practices, policies, and structures come from males' experiences. Men often discussed their point of reference for women as their wives, girlfriends, or daughters. So these were the experiences they used to develop norms, practices, policies and structures. Many men in the military had never experienced working with women in the military, leading them to lean on their social interactions with women socially as the norm for women's desires and capabilities.

Sharing Experiences: Organizational Culture

The focus groups revealed the importance of sharing experiences. For many women, their difficulties, disappointments, and work-hardships were understood as individual experiences. Women tended to internalize these obstacles as personal limitations or character flaws (i.e., I am not working hard enough, I am not approaching this group/task the right way, or I do not have good enough skills), as opposed to viewing them as structural and systemic shortcomings of the organization.

However, as the focus group discussions unfolded, women heard similar experiences reflected back to them by their female colleagues. Sharing these experiences began to change the paradigm through which women understood the challenges they were facing in the workplace. They started to assess and recognize that several of the negative dimensions of their jobs were not individual problems arising from individual deficiencies. Rather, these challenges stemmed from two primary sources: the culture of the organization and the pervasive invocation of gender stereotyping.

The male-dominated culture of the military, which is heightened among Special Forces who perceive themselves as “hyper-masculine,” “elite,” and “alpha males” creates an environment that strictly delineates between men and women. The latter are seen by most Special Forces personnel as inherently unqualified to operate in these positions based on their femaleness. As Tina explained:

“What they think they are, and what they are in reality, do not match up. I love that [Special Forces] thinks that it makes them more elite because they don't have females, when the units that are more elite than them all have females in them, that are operators, not that are support.”

In this conversation, the fact that women are excluded was unmasked by Tina as an artificial source of prestige and elitism among Special Forces. She points out that women serve on teams that are even more exclusive and covert compared to Special Forces.

Despite this discrepancy, the all-male teams have constructed gender exclusion as a point

of prestige and elitism, rather than an aspect of organizational culture that is reinforced through other organizational practices such as the persistent emphasis on labeling women according to their gender. As Michelle explains, “We're always referred to as the female something. It's never, hey the medic or the Civilian Affairs Officer or the team leader. It's the female.” Michelle’s comment underscores how the routine and pervasive use of “female” before any title, reinforces the gendered culture of the organization. Adding “female” before a woman’s job title draws constant attention to gender. This is similar to how we discuss women in policing, or women in engineering or women in other male-dominated professions. Colleagues label women in these professions by their gender, as women first before their professional positions. Gendering professional titles has the effect of reinforcing cultural norms that accept and foster these organizational environments as male-dominated work spaces. Gender designations underscore that being a woman in these positions is unusual, exceptional, and highlights that women are not fully accepted as part of the organization.

Women also shared stories about an organizational culture that unfairly characterized all women based on the performance of one woman. As Kristina succinctly stated, “If a male does something bad they're an exception. This guy just slipped through the cracks. He's a bad egg. He's a lone worker. A female does bad and you just ruined it for everybody.” These common and standard practices placed a tremendous burden on women to continually excel and surpass job performance expectations. Women were keenly aware that their female colleagues risked being collectively (and negatively) judged by male colleagues based on their individual performance.

The second commonality that emerged from sharing experiences in the focus groups was the pervasive practice of gender stereotyping by their male colleagues and to a lesser extent, some of their female colleagues. Gender stereotypes are used to reinforce the male-dominated organizational culture of the military. The severity of gender stereotyping ranged from questioning women’s competency to operate in male-dominated positions to outright hostilities.

For example, Nadine explained how gender stereotypes about women’s inability to perform in traditionally male-dominated positions, hampered women’s ability to perform their job. She relayed a story about her partner:

“My partner was a mechanic. That was her job. She had exactly the same training as a male mechanic in the army. But any time anything on the base mechanical would happen she would volunteer and try to use her skillsets and be helpful. But they'd always go to the male infantry mechanic first. And even after another civilian mechanic told the team leader, hey she knows what she's talking about. She's been doing this a little bit longer than him. He's only a specialist and she's an NCO, the team leader was like, get out. Okay well—I mean it's parts and grease and stuff so he's probably better at it.”

As a mechanic, Nadine’s partner performed a job traditionally associated with men. Despite her skills, her willingness to assist, and endorsements from another mechanic, she was routinely passed over because her male colleagues discounted her capabilities solely based on gender. At other times, military men drew on long-entrenched societal gender stereotypes pertaining to women’s unstable emotionality to question women’s ability to perform in the organization. Kevin’s remarks reflect similar sentiments expressed by other men that weave together women’s emotional instability and irrationality.

“One of my concerns is that in these split second scenarios where you have to make a decision, you have to make it quick, and you have to act on it... They're [female soldiers] indecisive and they're trying to process multiple things, connecting to it emotionally, and then freezing. I think that there's a huge potential for that. This is just talking strictly about how men and women think and process information.”

Sharing Experiences: Reinforcing Stereotypes

While some women talked about being stereotyped around job performance and competency, other women discussed being aggressively stereotyped based on sexuality. Stephanie captures this Catch-22: “There's always rumors about you. If you're too nice that means you're sleeping with everybody, and if you're not nice to people because you don't want them to think you're hitting on them—because automatically guys think you're talking to them that you're hitting on them.”

Shira remarked that male colleagues saw female colleagues in one of two ways, “You're a bitch or a whore. Those are your options.” Evelyn echoed her sentiment noting, “You're either standoffish or a slut.” This traditional virgin/whore dichotomy reinforces the presumed sexual identity of female colleagues, an identity category that is rarely referenced for men in the workplace. Numerous women discussed having to develop strategies to carefully navigate potential rumors and these stereotypical binary sexual identities. These strategies ended up falling into dichotomous extremes as well. The women we spoke with discussed two main strategies to navigate their time deployed with male colleagues. One strategy involved distancing themselves so as to avoid rumors of impropriety. The second was to very consciously rotate their time so they would not fall victim to rumors. Here Carmen describes how navigating this gendered terrain can add stress to an already tense situation.

“You have to segregate yourself completely or you have to integrate yourself and be very careful. When I say a fine line—I mean it's—it's almost nerve-wracking. You actually just want to be left alone because—you can't just be friends like my counterpart, everybody is a male. Like I have no other females at all in my whole entire battalion. So I'm just sitting here like, okay what do I do? If I go and run with this guy then I must be sleeping with him. It's so nerve-wracking. So you spend a lot of time alone.”

Similarly, Kristi discusses questioning her choice to join Civilian Affairs given the extra stress of navigating her deployment.

“I used to go to the gym every day between—depending on mission either early in the morning or right in the afternoon. All the guys started doing that, I changed my schedule completely—because I was like, I don't even want to be in there when the guys are in there. I didn't want the perception to be—and then I'd go to chow at certain times. And what I'd do is I just stuck to team. So whenever my team went to chow that's when I ate. If they didn't go until late because they were writing reports and stuff then I just didn't go until later. That's how I got through my deployment.”

Kate on the other hand discussed her choice to be social with her male colleagues. Even with her deliberate choice, she spent time thinking through her choices and navigating the social terrain carefully.

“The isolation, I didn't experience that, but it came at a risk. It did come at a risk of gossip and I had to be extremely cautious with it again with the whole like making sure that there were two or more. Even then you'd have to be like, okay there's a rumor there. I have to make sure I don't feed into this, or I've got to make sure that there's a whole squad in the room if I'm going to go hang out and play this or do that. So you guys addressed it and you didn't have the risk—you didn't incur the risk that I incurred by being social, but you did it at a price.”

The focus groups used in our research were designed as a data-collection method. However, they had the additional benefit of providing women with a space where they could relay work experiences to their female colleagues. Through this process, women's understanding of the obstacles and challenges they face in the workplace began to evolve from viewing them as a product of individual shortcomings to viewing them as a product of systemic organizational shortcomings.

Conclusions:

Our focus groups with women and men in the Special Operations community revealed important themes for women entering traditionally male-dominated organizations and occupations. Throughout the focus groups with women, they revealed the importance of mentorship and support networks. Both mentorship and support are important for women as they build their careers, but these are two different concepts. Mentorship, as a popular term didn't gain prominence until the 1960s, as women and people of color started entering more prestigious traditionally white, male-dominated work spaces and needed a word for the kind of experiences that eluded them and often went to young white male colleagues (Portillo 2007). We often talk about mentoring as something that comes from people who have shared our work and social experiences, but really it is the focus on career skills that is important with mentorship. Men can make great mentors to women, white people can be great mentors for people of color, but often we don't have the explicit conversations about what we need and want from mentoring relationships. Support networks are different and often do focus on the social experiences we share with those in our networks. These are spaces to “vent” and gain reassurance from our colleagues and friends.

In addition, focus groups pointed to the need to change the conversation. Women and men in our focus groups acknowledged that at least some women can do the job of a Special Forces Operator, but there was still significant resistance from men to see women enter their segregated work space. The conversation must change, beginning with the recognition of problems and concerns in the workplace. This acknowledgement often comes from women and people of color, who are traditionally underrepresented in their workplaces, sharing their experiences. By sharing experiences we often reveal the ways in which policies and practices impact individuals they often weren't designed by or for. All members of an organization have an obligation to challenge the underlying gender stereotypes which support the exclusion of

women in the workplace. Much of what we heard from men in our study was based on outdated or misinformed gender stereotypes. It is important for all people to be dedicated to positive change in the workplace, to denounce colleagues when they use stereotypes as a way to prevent conversations about real and meaningful change in the workplace. Challenging gender inequality is a structural problem that cannot be fixed individually, and must be addressed within and beyond particular organizations.

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