

Doing Gender in the Military

A. R. Brookshire, Department of Sociology

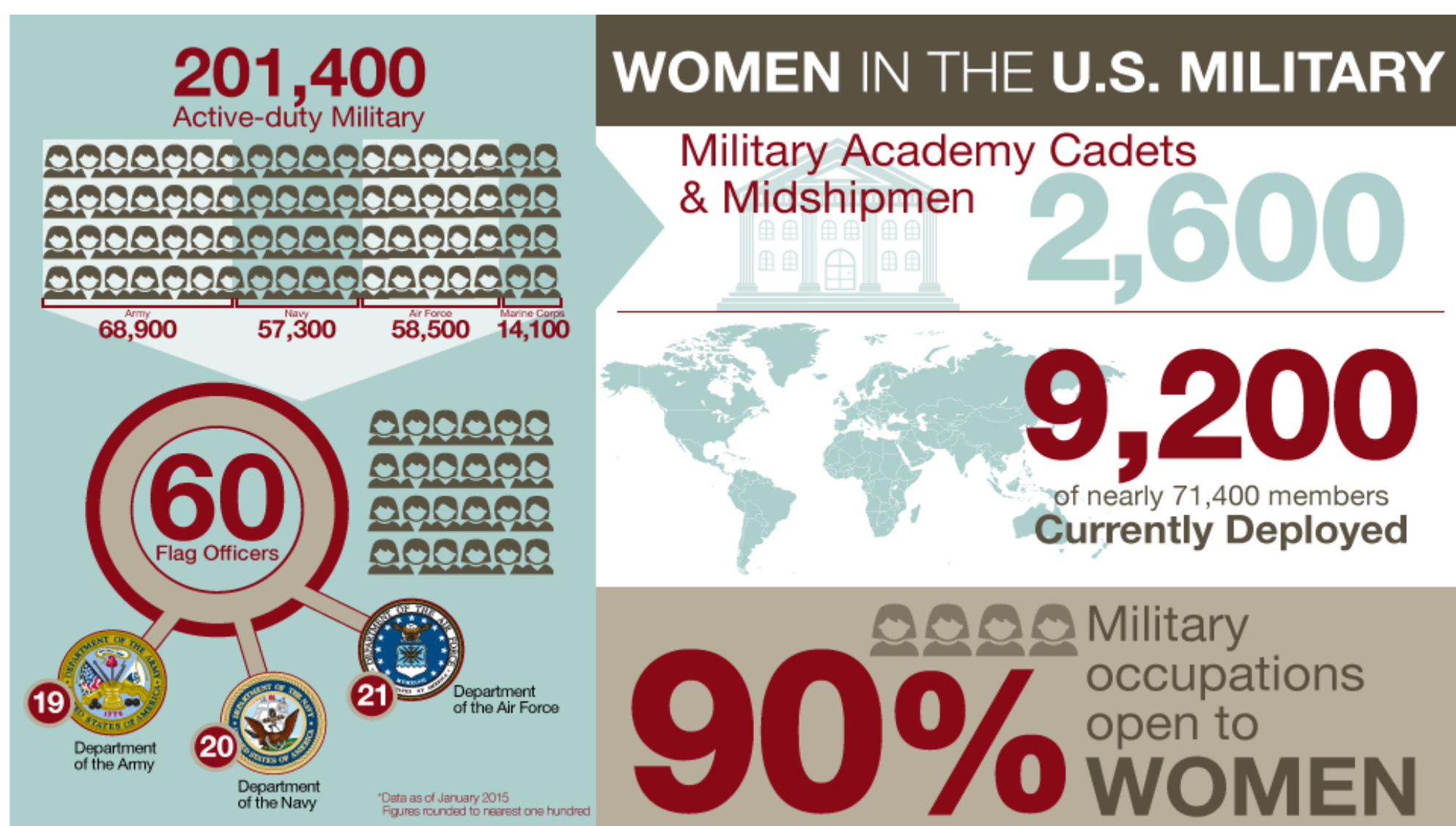
Background & Theory

Women are 14.6% of the U.S. military and over 90% of military occupational specialties (MOS) are open to women. In 2016, the U.S. legislature debated whether women should be required to register for selective service and debate is ongoing as to whether transgendered people will be allowed to serve. Gender integration in the U.S. Armed Forces is an ongoing public policy issue.

Critical Mass Theory¹ describes the experiences of token minorities in organizations which limit the possibility for complete integration. Features of tokenism include:

- **Visibility** – women were more easily singled out and remembered because there were so few of them
- **Isolation** – women felt social exclusion because of their gender
- **Boundary Heightening** – men reacted with hostility to women's presence

Given changing perceptions of women in the workplace, does this theory still apply? The United States Military is a suitable test case because women comprise just shy of 15% of enlisted service members – meaning they are a “skewed group” who are most likely to experience the negative impact of tokenism.



Picture courtesy of the Dept. of Defense²

Data & Methods

The data was gathered from 22 semi-structured interviews with female veterans who served on active duty between 2005-2015. Interviews focused on women's experiences and perceptions of military culture, as well as strategies they used to negotiate gendered expectations.

Interview transcripts were analyzed for recurring themes using *QDAMinerLite* qualitative research software. Participants' names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Results

Visibility, Isolation, & Boundary Heightening			
Category	Count	Cases	% of Cases
Visibility	17	9	40.9%
Isolation	14	7	31.8%
Boundaries	13	9	40.9%

Visibility

“You have to really, it's like being on eggshells. Everything you say and do they just watch. Because so many of the other girls make the wrong decisions and then they get this reputation without even trying. And so, yeah, it's just, adds stress because you're already trying to be a good soldier and do your job and you're away from home and then you have to you know, you can't even be yourself, really. You have to watch everything you do.” – Kelly

Isolation

“So, yeah I did feel isolated because I didn't—I really couldn't relate to these guys” – Brenda

“a lot of the males were going out to a baseball game and they didn't even think to invite me. It was like “ohhhh. Why do—I'd like to go!” -Harriet

Boundaries

“They're not going to salute me, basically. It's like disrespect that they're just from the very beginning like, ‘I'm not going to salute you. Nooo!’ Well - I mean I don't know if it's meant for like more of a joke or not. But most of them seem pretty serious and that I guess is not being supportive” - Stacy

References

- ¹ Kanter, R. M. (1993). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- ² United States Department of Defense (2015) By the Numbers. Retrieved from: http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2015/0315_womens-history/

Acknowledgements

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