

Socializing Men Like Women:

Using Gender-Based Ethical Research to Implement a Value-Based Ethical Culture

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14. ABSTRACT: Recent ethical scandals in the Navy have turned the focus of ethics training to value-based ethics. Ethics research for decades has confirmed that there is a gender disparity in socialization that associates traditional feminine behavior with more ethical decision-making and actions. The traditional military culture is build on a more individualistic, masculine culture that rejects value-based ethics, but the tools to change the culture already exist.					
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“Structural theory essentially holds that women become more like men as their careers unfold. In this study, ethical differences between the sexes narrowed with age and experience. Yet..the results appear to come closer to saying that it is men who become more like women.”¹

The Glenn Defense Marine Asia (GDMA) scandal took a heavy toll Navy leadership, implicating approximately 700 Navy members and leading to 33 Federal indictments on charges such as conspiracy, bribery, and obstruction of justice.² The scandal led to a re-evaluation of traditional Navy ethics training, which had emphasized the criminal consequences of failing to fulfill ethical duties rather than the moral underpinnings of the rules. The Navy has adopted value-based ethics and expects leaders to ask not only what *can* be done, but also what *should* be done to both comply with rules and promote the values of the organization. Value-based ethics require that individuals develop favorable qualities within themselves upon which they can rely when facing ethical dilemmas.

Forty years of research across demographic groups offers evidence that women make more ethical judgments, and even stronger evidence that women are more likely to act ethically. Throughout their professional lives, women are less susceptible to manipulation with gifts or, as executives, to engage in or run companies that engage in bribery.³ Researchers explain the difference through the socialized value-based ethics of women, which tend to embody deontological values emphasizing the morality of an action and its impact on groups. In contrast, male socialization traditionally emphasizes pragmatic and competitive values based in duty and

¹ Leslie M. Dawson, “Ethical Differences Between Men and Women In the Sales Profession,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 16, no.11, (August 1997): 1143.

² Sam LaGrone’ “Paying the Price: The Hidden Cost of the ‘Fat Leonard’ Investigation,” January 24, 2019, <https://news.usni.org/2019/01/24/paying-price-hidden-cost-fat-leonard-investigation>. None of the indictments have been against women, though there is evidence that women have been investigated.

³ Sean R. Valentine and Terri L. Rittenburg, “The Ethical Decision Making of Men and Women Executives in International Business Solutions,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 71, no. 2, (March 2017): 126.

the individualism, hallmarks of military culture.⁴ In shifting to a value-based ethics model, the Navy should seek to make men more like women ethically, instilling collectivist values that promote converting judgment to action and the organization over the individual.

Women and Ethics

Not all women make ethical decisions, and not all men lack a deontological framework, but studies show women are more likely to take ethical action when confronted with a dilemma. Studies using vignettes to analyze ethical dilemmas to study ethical judgment do not find statistically significant differences between the genders, suggesting that both genders are capable of identifying an ethical question and the most ethically correct response.⁵ However, gender disparities arise in the choice to convert the decision into action. As one study summarized:

The lack of significant differences in workplace values between females and males lends some support to earlier studies that suggest similar ethical beliefs... However, the differences appear to occur when individuals are asked to act on those beliefs and perceptions. The ethical choice behaviour of women...was consistently and coherently the ethical choice. The behaviour of the male respondents, on the other hand, appears to relate to the moral intensity of the situation.⁶

Highlighting this difference, one study attempted to differentiate the planning, execution, and termination phases of the decision-making cycle. In the execution phase, analyzed individually from deontological, egoist, and justice ethical perspectives, women showed significantly stronger

⁴ Robert Loo, "Are Women More Ethical than Men? Findings from Three Independent Studies." *Women in Management Review* 18, no. 4 (2003): 169.

⁵ Loo, "Are Women More Ethical," 169. Interestingly, later analyses of these "neutral" studies that try to control other demographic factors, such as age and experience, tend to find that women make more ethical decisions even in this context.

⁶ Saundra H. Glover, Minnette A. Bumpus, Glynda F. Sharp, and George A. Munchus, "Gender Differences in Ethical Decision Making," *Women in Management Review* 17, no. 5 (2002): 217. Moral intensity was defined as the how clear the ethical choice appeared to be.

ties to ethical frameworks, and less significant but still relevant stronger ties under utilitarianism and relativism, suggesting that women have stronger ethical proclivities.⁷

Another way to deconstruct the decision cycle is into four steps: recognition, judgment, forming ethical intentions, and taking ethical action.⁸ Gender differences are often small in the first two steps, but not the last two. One study found the conversion of ethical judgment to ethical intentions is positively related to age and experience but negatively related to gender, meaning that after controlling for some demographic factors, women are more likely to convert an ethical decision to intentions.⁹ Critically, studies consistently show that women are more likely to take ethical action, react more appropriately to questionable business activities, believe that questionable organizational acts are unethical, and evaluate business practices more ethically.¹⁰ A study using climate surveys found a statistically significantly higher likelihood of bribery in both male-CEOs and male-led organizational leadership, a particularly relevant finding in light of leadership failures in the GDMA scandal.¹¹ A study of salespeople found that women make more ethical decisions at all experience levels, but that decisions became more ethical for both genders and narrowed with age and experience.¹² The study also analyzed why people made a decision and chose to act. The finding was not simply that the gap in ethical behavior narrows as men gain age and experience, but that this narrowing occurs because men become more like women in how and why they act when faced with an ethical dilemma.¹³

Why Are Women More Ethical?

⁷ Loo, "Are Women More Ethical," 171-2.

⁸ Valentine and Rittenburg, "The Ethical Decision Making" 125.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kristine Velasquez Tuliao, "CEO Duality and Bribery: The Roles of Gender and National Culture," *Management Decision* 55, no. 1 (2017): 225.

¹² Dawson, "Ethical Differences," 1143.

¹³ Dawson, "Ethical Differences," 1143.

Studies show women tend to be more ethical than men when the decision is less clear, while men are more ethical when the decision is clear, meaning men make easy choices more easily, but women make hard choices better.¹⁴ One explanation could be that women more strongly internalize moral traits, making their ethical standards part of their identity rather than something they must actively invoke.¹⁵ Some may argue that this supports a theory that women are biologically inclined value-based ethics while male individualism is just “boys being boys.” Research does not support this assertion, but rather that the genders are socialized differently.¹⁶ The differences are related to socialized traditional “feminine” traits such as concern with collective values, less relativism, and more rules orientation to promote harmony, which support ethical organizational behavior.¹⁷ Women who exhibit these traits tend to be more consistently ethical and less relativistic in applying ethical principles to their actions.¹⁸

In contrast, men tend to be socialized to break the rules, to be situational, individualistic, and outcome-based, valuing achievement and success, often without considering the effect on others.¹⁹ A recent *New York Times* opinion piece provides anecdotal evidence of the impact on values in politics:

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York wore suffragist white... because...it “was a small way we could honor those that paved the way for us.”...Ms. Ocasio-Cortez[said]. “Darkness taught me transformation cannot solely be an individual pursuit, but also a community trust,” she wrote. “We must lean on others to strive on our own.”

From these women, the message is clear: Their strength comes from collaborative, generational efforts to move toward the good. The promise of America is not the

¹⁴ Loo, “Are Women More Ethical,” 176. Researchers found that women equivocate more than men, considering different perspectives and potential consequences even when the most ethical choice is clear.

¹⁵ Jessica A. Kennedy, Laura J. Kray, and Gillian Ku, “A Social-cognitive Approach to Understanding Gender Differences in Negotiator Ethics: The Role of Moral Identity,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 138, no. 1 (January 2017): 30.

¹⁶ Loo, “Are Women More Ethical,” 176.

¹⁷ Glover, Bumpus, Sharp, and A. Munchus, “Gender Differences,” 217..

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¹⁹ Connie R. Bateman and Sean R. Valentine, “Investigating the Effects of Gender on Consumers’ Moral Philosophies and Ethical Intentions,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 95, no.3 (2010): 396.

possibility of individuals going at it alone and achieving in a high-profile way as a result, and the purpose of politics is not personal empowerment....Powerful men have always considered their individual legacies. These powerful women seem more interested in their role in improving an evolving and complex ecosystem.²⁰

The differences in socialization carry individual and social costs. In 2019, the American Psychological Association issued guidelines for treating the negative effects of traditionally masculine traits such as stoicism, dominance, aggression, and competitiveness, which can harm men's mental health and contribute to social ills such as misogyny.²¹ The *New York Times* editorial explains the effects of these behaviors on society in its conclusion:

In some ways, this refusal to take full individual credit for professional success is a very female thing...If voters can see the group effort that enables power and achievement, it could diminish the collective discomfort with powerful women. It can also help illustrate the unearned advantages that put some people in power. Women shouldn't adapt to the existing lie; men in the political realm should be more honest.²²

The anecdotal, psychological, and ethics evidence all leads to the same conclusion: to make leaders more ethical, men must become more like women in their approach.

Unique Military Contextual Challenges: History and Uniformity

Applying critiques of politicians, such as a lack of group identity, collectivist ideals, or adherence to rules-based systems to the military may seem misplaced. In the abstract, the

²⁰ Jill Filipovic, "When Honest Women Replace 'Self-Made' Men," *New York Times*, January 11, 2019 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/opinion/sunday/pelosi-congress-women.html?fbclid=IwAR2ipue6u03DUueud_cHDMOORXftsU7uZoLNIJWewha-tMCzXY8OEhOQNZ4.

²¹ Monica Hesse, "How 'Traditional Masculinity' Hurts the Men Who Believe In It Most," *Washington Post*, January 13, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/how-traditional-masculinity-hurts-the-men-who-believe-in-it-most/2019/01/12/22d2518a-14fd-11e9-90a8-136fa44b80ba_story.html?utm_term=.e975526a5f2c.

²² Filipovic, "When Honest Women Replace 'Self-Made' Men." While the topic of sexism is only tangential to the arguments in this paper, the article explains that sexism underpins why women engage in collective behavior, a finding reinforced in the discussion of military culture below:

In some ways, this refusal to take full individual credit for professional success is a very female thing, and perhaps itself springs from sexism: Women who are seen as individually ambitious or self-glorifying pay a price — unlikability — that men do not...But the fact that this version of a hero's journey grows partly out of sexism doesn't make it any less true. If voters can see the group effort that enables power and achievement, it could diminish the collective discomfort with powerful women. It can also help illustrate the unearned advantages that put some people in power. Women shouldn't adapt to the existing lie; men in the political realm should be more honest.

military is a rules-based public service organization built on group identity. A study comparing CEOs with military experience to those without found that military experience encourages more ethical behavior.²³ Formerly military CEOs are also less likely to commit fraud.²⁴ However, society holds the military to a higher standard of public trust than the business community, and any scandal such as GDMA requires action to regain the public trust. The military must look more deeply into the reasons why its leaders engage in unethical behavior to address the culture of unethical behavior GDMA exposed. The problem is not the rules or training on the subject of the rules. A 2004 Inspector General's study of Commanding Officer reliefs found, "in nearly every case...officers relieved for personal behavior clearly knew the rules."²⁵ The military faces the same problem as civilians: getting an actor who knows the ethical choice to take an ethical action.

Despite an ethical tradition, the Navy's transition to a value-based ethic may be difficult given the military history of praising "masculine" traits and disparaging "feminine" traits. For example, an official report argued against women attending the Naval Academy because "the waging of war...requires professional attributes and characteristics which are the antithesis of what we in this society consider essentially feminine qualities."²⁶ Even courts reinforced this view, arguing that "in providing for involuntary service for men and voluntary service for women, Congress followed the teachings of history that if a nation is to survive, men must

²³ Efraim Benmelech and Carola Frydman, "Military CEO's," *Journal of Financial Economics* 117, no. 1 (2015): 55.

²⁴ Ray Fisman, "Are CEOs Who Served in the Military More Trustworthy?," *Slate*, May 25, 2012, <https://slate.com/business/2012/05/ceos-who-served-in-the-military-are-they-more-honest.html>.

²⁵ Navy Inspector General, "Commanding Officer Detach for Cause Study," November 15, 2004, [https://www.secnav.navy.mil/ig/FOIA%20Reading%20Room/NAVINSGEN%20Commanding%20Officer%20Dismissed%20For%20Cause%20\(DFC\)%20Study%202004.pdf](https://www.secnav.navy.mil/ig/FOIA%20Reading%20Room/NAVINSGEN%20Commanding%20Officer%20Dismissed%20For%20Cause%20(DFC)%20Study%202004.pdf).

²⁶ Susan Jeffors, *The Remasculization of America: Gender in the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1989), 60.

provide the first line of defense of while women keep the home fires burning.”²⁷ The traditional bias against women stifles feminine value-based ethic in its cultures of indoctrination and promotion. From the start, calling new recruits “ladies” and “girls” until they “prove” themselves reinforces the belief that feminine characteristics must be vanquished.²⁸ Once accepted, women are mentored by those who succeeded in the current environment, are evaluated on standards promoting individualistic behavior, and advance by displaying the traditional values leaders promote, pressuring even those socialized in value-based ethics to suppress them.²⁹ Indoctrination and integration into the organization may risk reversing the desirable ethical outcome of age and experience; rather than making men more like women, the danger is that women in the military will abandon value-based ethics and become more like men.

Incorporating Value-Based Ethics in a Culture of Tradition

In order to change the ethical culture, the Navy must socialize all of its members with a collective value-based ethic, focusing on the quality of decision-making. As the European Commissioner with responsibility for Employment, Social Affairs and Health Matters argued, “It is important to stress that what is at stake not simply the quantitative objective of a numerical balance of women and men in decision-making bodies; rather it is the qualitative objective of actually improving decision-making.”³⁰ Just as the integration of traditionally feminine values is prompting a re-evaluation of culture in politics, changes to the ethical culture in the Navy should also explicitly define its ethical values. To begin, the Navy must recognize that the problem is not just teaching ethical choice, but getting people to act ethically. Three elements of ethical

²⁷ United States v. St. Clair, 129 F. Supp. 122, 125 (S.D.N.Y. 1968).

²⁸ Lucinda J. Peach, “Woman At War: The Ethics of Women In Combat,” *Minerva* XII, no. 4 (1994): 12.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Glover, Bumpus, Sharp, and A. Munchus, “Gender Differences,” 222.

behavior emerge from the research: decision-makers must know the values of the organization and why they exist; the decision-making context must uphold those values; and, actors must be empowered to take action, including intervening when necessary to stop unethical behavior.

To begin to change its ethical culture, the Navy should emphasize the nature and purpose of the change. The Navy has a template for changing another longstanding culture where the “boys will be boys” mentality persisted: sexual assault. The Navy invested considerable resources defining its values by improving the knowledge of what sexual assault is, making unwanted sexual behavior incompatible with Navy culture, and teaching sailors to recognize a potentially dangerous situation and intervene when necessary. Efforts increased the percentage of members reporting engaging in or intending to intervene as bystanders from 12% to 38%.³¹ Training included the legal aspects but also emphasized the impact of sexual assault on both individual and groups. Instead of focusing on the gender biases, training taught “the premise that everyone has a role to play in ending sexual violence.”³² Interactive presentations provided context and empowered individuals by giving them an opportunity to gain experience through practice.³³ Poster campaigns such as “Don’t Be That Guy” deglamorized traditional stereotypes about military culture and reinforced bystander intervention.³⁴ Rather than focusing solely on legal consequences, the programs emphasized the value of change for the benefit of the victim, the unit, and the organization.

Using the sexual assault model as a basis, the Navy should adopt a similar education and practice approach to ethics training starting early in every Sailor’s career. Current training

³¹ Lindsay M. Orchowski,, Cristóbal S. Berry-Cabán, Kara Prisock, Brian Borsari, and Donna M. Kazemi, "Evaluations of Sexual Assault Prevention Programs in Military Settings: A Synthesis of the Research Literature." *Military Medicine* 183, no. suppl_1 (2018): 426.

³² Potter, Sharyn J. and Mary M. Moynihan. "Bringing in the Bystander in-Person Prevention Program to a U.S. Military Installation: Results from a Pilot Study." *Military Medicine* 176, no. 8 (2011): 874.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jean Shaw, “Don’t Be *That* Guy!,” (2009), accessed February 8, 2019, https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/That_Guy_JFGRA1.pdf.

focuses on the general rules, an approach with “minimal impact on ethical perceptions, behavior, or awareness.”³⁵ Given the socialized biases that can drive decision-making, it is understandable why compliance driven training may not lead to change. Identifying organizational values and supplementing compliance-based training with values-based training would be more effective. For example, research shows training for executives on the values of institutional collectivism reduced the likelihood of engaging in bribery related behavior.³⁶ Changing the ethical culture must include not only education but interactive training, as experience in resolving ethical conflicts is the characteristic most associated with more ethical behavior.³⁷ One option is to provide opportunities to apply value-based ethics while working through ethical problems in mixed rank groups, allowing senior members to act as mentors. The Navy already has a platform capable of supporting such an effort in the form of Full Speed Ahead (FSA) training. FSA is designed to change culture by taking individuals with different backgrounds, explain the values of the organization, provide scenarios where those values are both applied and explained, and demonstrate why certain practices are incompatible with those values. Explicit integration of ethical dilemmas into this training would be a first step to providing ethical experience. By explaining the standards, providing problem-solving experience, and empowering individuals through practice, change is more likely and worth the investment of time and resources.

A parallel effort must focus on the re-socialization of Navy leadership. The study of CEOs and bribery shows the link between leadership and organizational values, and the Inspector General’s report highlights the Navy’s challenge in getting leaders who know the rules

³⁵ Ethan P. Waples, Alison L. Antes, Stephen T. Murphy, Shane Connelly, and Michael D. Mumford. "A Meta-Analytic Investigation of Business Ethics Instruction." *Journal of Business Ethics* 87, no. 1 (2009): 141.

³⁶ Tuliao, “CEO Duality and Bribery,” 218.

³⁷ Of note, even studies that do show some impact of training on ethical decision-making, training does not close the gap between the genders; those with training may be more ethical, but women without ethical training are more ethical than men without training, and women with training are more ethical than men with training. Liz C. Wang and Lisa Calvano, “Is Business Ethics Education Effective? An Analysis of Gender, Personal Ethical Perspectives, and Moral Judgment,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 126, no. 1(2015): 594.

to comply with them. Flag Officers are currently required to do in-person and online ethics training annually to comply with statutory requirements.³⁸ However, the problem remains that the training is generally individual and compliance-based. The Navy should create more opportunities for groups of senior leaders to work through ethical dilemmas together and share their experiences, creating opportunities for mentorship amongst leaders. Changing the approach to ethical training for leaders is critical to change throughout the ranks.

Conclusion

The connections between gender and ethical behavior are well documented in decision-making research and explained by socialization. The Navy's traditional compliance-based approach to ethics is based in its traditional emphasis on individualistic and duty-based characteristics. However, ethical failures in the Navy show this often creates leaders who know the rules but choose not to follow them. Compliance is not sufficient, and neither is simply including more women. The solution is to embrace the value-based standards that build a culture of ethical behavior. While culture change requires time and resources, developing decision-makers who both think and act not just how they can, but also how they should, is critical to meet the standard inherent in holding the public trust.

³⁸ Some efforts have been made to integrate values based training into these requirements, but ethics counselors vary greatly in their implementation and emphasis during the presentation.

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