



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

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ABSTRACT

Women have played many roles in the military, from ancient warrior women, to the women currently serving in conflicts like the Iraq War. The role of women in combat has become a particularly contentious issue in contemporary militaries throughout the world. This paper focuses on the effect of policies changes on the attitudes towards women in military

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INTRODUCTION

The history of women in the military extends over 4000 years into the past, throughout a vast number of cultures and nations. Women have played many roles in the military, from ancient warrior women, to the women currently serving in conflicts like the Iraq War. Despite various roles in the armies of past societies, the role of women in the military, particularly in combat, is controversial and it is only recently that women have begun to be given a more prominent role in contemporary armed forces. Many countries have historically portrayed the woman as a nurturer and symbol of the home in need of protection from the outside world. It is from this standpoint that the role of woman as soldier and national protector is debated. As increasing numbers of countries begin to expand the role of women in their militaries, the debate continues. The role of women in combat has become a particularly contentious issue in contemporary militaries throughout the world. With the current exclusion of women from many combat roles seen by some as a form of sexual discrimination, an ongoing debate continues to rage. Although women are recruited to serve in the military in most countries, only a few countries permit women to fill active combat roles. Countries that allow this include Canada, Denmark, Finland, France,

Germany, Norway and Switzerland. Other nations allow female soldiers to serve in certain Combat Arms positions, such as Israel and the United Kingdom, which allow women to serve in Artillery roles, while still excluding them from units with a dedicated Infantry role. The United States allows women in most combat flying positions. One of the most obvious physiological concerns regarding women in combat situations is the fact that, on average, female soldiers do not possess as much physical strength as their male counterparts and this may put them at a disadvantage when fighting males (Clark *et al.*, 2000). The female skeletal system is also less dense, and more prone to breakages (Cohn, 2000). There is also concern that, in aviation, the female body is not as adept at handling the increased g-forces experienced by combat pilots. Furthermore, health issues regarding women are argued as the reason vast majority of submarine services from accepting women, although mixed-gender accommodations in a small space is also an issue, as is explained in more depth below (Dohkgoh, 2003). The Center for Military Readiness stated that "Female soldiers who are, on average, shorter and smaller than men, with 45-50 percent less upper body strength and 25-30 percent less aerobic capacity, which is essential for endurance (Dohkgoh, 2003)". The disruption of a combat unit's esprit de corps is cited as another reason for women to be banned from front-line combat situations. Indeed, many soldiers have stated that they could not trust a woman to perform her duties in a place where trusting their fellow soldier would be critical (Drake, 2006; Firestone, 1987), although the example of Raven 42 demonstrated women were quite

effective in direct combat (Adams, 1982). There is a secondary concern that romantic relationships between men and women on the front lines could disrupt a unit's fighting capability and a fear that a high number of women would deliberately become pregnant in order to escape combat duties (Herbert, 1994; Dohkgoh, 2003). In the British Army, which continues to bar women from serving in infantry-roles units, all recruits joining to fill infantry vacancies partake in a separate training program called the Combat Infantryman's Course. This all-male course is kept segregated from other training courses in part to maintain the "Boy's Club" culture that has proven effective within such units. In the American armed forces, the 1994 rules forbidding female involvement in combat units of battalion size or smaller are being bent. Colonel Cheri Provancha, stationed in Iraq, argues that: "This war has proven that we need to revisit the policy, because they are out there doing it (Hurrell, 1995). The fact that women already engage in combat in today's armed forces counters the idea that women do not possess a sufficiently aggressive mentality to kill enemy soldiers. A third argument against the inclusion of women in combat units is that placing women in combat where they are at risk of being captured and tortured and possibly sexually assaulted is unacceptable. In a Presidential Commission report it was found that male POWs, while being subject to physical abuse, were never subject to sexual abuse, and women were almost always subject to sexual abuse (Dohkgoh, 2003). Rhonda Cornum, then a major and flight surgeon, and now a colonel and Command Surgeon for United States Army Forces Command, was an Iraqi POW in 1991. At the time, she was asked not to mention that she had been molested while in captivity (Hurrell *et al.*, 1994). Cornum subsequently disclosed the attack, but said "A lot of people make a big deal about getting molested," she noted later, adding: "But in the hierarchy of things that were going wrong, that was pretty low on my list."

This point is countered, however, by the fact that women who are currently in non-combat roles are still exposed to the risk of capture and sexual abuse, yet are not given the weapons or training to adequately defend themselves through combat. Furthermore, it is argued that women who joined the military in combat roles would almost certainly be aware of the risks and accept them. It is also worth remembering that male soldiers are frequently abused by their captors, and this has on numerous occasions included severe psychological and sexual abuse. In general, it can be stated that volunteer soldiers are expected to have accepted the risk of such treatment when enlisting, regardless of gender. Some nations allow female soldiers to serve in certain combat arms positions. Others exclude them for various reasons including physical demands and privacy policies. The United States military has most of their positions open to women (Hussain, 2005). There are some restrictions because of physical demands that women cannot meet such as special forces positions. Women have been involved in the U.S. military since 1775, but more in the civilian fields of nursing, laundering, mending clothing and cooking. Several hundred women enlisted and fought in the US Civil War, nearly all of them disguised as men, many discovered on the battlefield and in hospitals after becoming wounded (<http://www.army.mil/women/today.html>). In 1917 Loretta Walsh became the first woman to enlist. But it was not until 1948 that a law was finally passed that made women a permanent part of the military services. In 1976, the first group of women was admitted into a U.S. military academy (<http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/2015/05/23/air->

[force-testing-gender-neutral-standards-in-san-antonio/](http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/2015/05/23/air-force-testing-gender-neutral-standards-in-san-antonio/) 27 848207/). Currently, approximately 16% of the graduating West Point class consists of women (<http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/2015/05/23/air-force-testing-gender-neutral-standards-in-san-antonio/> 27848 207/). In the years 1990 and 1991 some 40,000 American military women were deployed during the Gulf War operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. But not one woman was able to take on any form of combat. From 1994 on a policy prohibited women from being assigned to ground combat units below the brigade level. According to statistics from 2013, 15.6 percent of the U.S. Army's 1.1 million soldiers, including National Guard And Reserve, were female. That year, women served in 95 percent of all army occupations (Todd Lopez, 2014). Indian Army began inducting women officers in 1992 (Hurrell, 1994). In 2015 India opened new combat air force roles for women as fighter pilots, adding to their existing role as helicopter pilots in the Indian Air Force.

Policy Changes: Prior to the 1993 Department of Defense assignment rule, 67 percent of the positions in the Army were open to women. Today, 78 percent of the positions in the Army are open to women, and women serve in 95 percent of all Army occupations (active duty and the reserve components), as of 2014 (Drohan, 2013). In the U.S. Air Force, 99% of career fields are open to women, the only ones prohibited to women are Special Tactics Officer, Combat Control, Special Operations Weather Technician, Combat Rescue Officer, Pararescue and Tactical Air Control Party (Lawrence, 2013). In January 2013, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta issued an order to end the policy of "no women in units that are tasked with direct combat", though it still has yet to be determined if and when women may join the US Army's Special Forces (Michaels, 2015). In 2013 female U.S. Army soldiers are being asked to take part in a new training course designed by Combined Joint Task Force Paladin, which is specifically designed for Female Engagement Team members. The course will help female soldiers train for tasks such as unexploded ordnance awareness, biometrics, forensics, evidence collection, tactical questioning, vehicle and personnel searches, instructions on how homemade explosive devices are made and how to recognize if a device is homemade.^[17] This change will open up hundreds of thousands of front-line positions for women. The goal is for all assessments to be complete and have women fully integrated into all roles in the army by 2016 (Lamothe, 2015). By May 2015, all nineteen women vying to become the first female Army Rangers had failed their training at Ranger School. Eleven of the nineteen dropped out in the first four days of training. Of the remaining eight who failed in the next step, three were given the option to enroll in the course again (Marines' combat test period ends without female grad accessed, 2016). Two of the original 19 women graduated in August 2015 (Lamothe, 2015). In April 2015 after two-and-a-half year period in which the tough Marine Corps' Infantry Officer Course became gender-integrated for research ended without a single female graduate (Last IOC in Marine infantry experiment drops female officers accessed, 2016). The final two participants in the Marines' experiment with training women for ground combat started and failed the IOC on April 2. Both were dropped that same day during the grueling initial Combat Endurance Test (<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/09/18/officials-marine-commandant-recommends-women-banned-some-combat-job/72421888/>). In December 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter stated that starting in 2016 all combat

jobs would open to women, however Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford of the Marine Corps, wanted to keep certain direct combat positions such as infantry and machine gunner closed to women (<http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2015/09/18/officials-marine-commandant-recommends-women-banned-some-combat-job/72421888/>).

Conclusion

A 2008 study by Jennifer M. Silva, a sociologist of culture and inequality (her goal is to investigate the relationship between systems of inequality), found that the female cadets saw military training as an "opportunity to be strong, assertive and skillful" and saw such training "as an escape from some of the negative aspects of traditional femininity". The female cadets also believed that the ROTC program was "gender-blind" and "gender-neutral". The study claims that female cadets "were hyper-vigilant about their status as women performing tasks traditionally seen as men's work and often felt that they had to constantly prove they were capable". Silva's study found gender playing a role in how cadets perceive leadership, quoting one female cadet: "in the Navy the joke is that a woman in the Navy is either a bitch, a slut or a lesbian, and none of them are good categories to fall into, and if you are stern with your people then you are a bitch, but if you're a guy and stern people are like, wow, I respect him for being a good leader (Jennifer, 2008)". This article covers and provides a historical perspective, and reviews the main arguments made for and against women in combat.

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