

Architecting a Paradigm Shift to Further Invest in Human Capital

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ABSTRACT

Scope of the Contribution

Common themes and discussion points consistently emerge in the dialogue on gender integration. This includes beliefs about women that are not always based on facts, but instead are misconceptions (i.e. pregnancy, sexual harassment/assault, physiological characteristics, etc.). This is prevalent not only in the military but also in the civilian sector, and can lead to cultural, behavioral, and group dynamic changes in the organization. Such misconceptions and generalizations can have a negative impact on women who currently reside in an organization and/or for the introduction of women into a previously male only organization. Additionally, the idea of equal opportunity for underrepresented populations can lead to concerns about lowering requirements/standards and not hiring the best capable and most qualified candidates because often leadership feels compelled and/or pressured to rush the process and meet quotas/goals from higher. This means that job requirements and standards (i.e. knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes) must be clearly established, and then the assessment and selection criteria must be clearly aligned with the job requirements, and be gender neutral. Finally, the idea of reaching a critical mass is not always a realistic goal in certain organizations that simply do not have a large population of interested women to pull from, and then to further search for fully qualified and capable women inside the already small interested population does not happen immediately, but takes time and patience.

The U.S. Military has taken several steps towards opening previously closed positions and organizations to women. However, in many instances, women have been creatively attached and/or working directly in ground combat units for quite some time. Women have been assigned to U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), attached to combat units in direct operational roles, and serving as members of Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) career fields for over 20 years. In 2013, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff initiated the Women in Service Review (WISR) Implementation Plan directing each Military Service and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to develop plans to integrate women into previously closed units and positions. Subsequently, USASOC examined all special operations jobs and assessed how to further integrate women into Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF). Furthermore, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) conducted a job analysis for USASOC to determine the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes essential to effective performance for the Special Forces and Ranger Regiment Soldier. USASOC validated all assessment and selection programs that were closed to females, with a focus on ensuring that the tasks and standards were operationally relevant, current, and gender neutral. USASOC's policy continues to be - to accept all qualified applicants while selecting the "best and most qualified" candidate, regardless of gender.

USASOC additionally participated in and conducted several studies with third party research and academic organizations (i.e. RAND, OPM, Kansas University, JSOU, NPS, etc.) to better understand integrating women into the organization, and developed a deliberate integration process beginning with select senior leader positions. None of the research or studies provided a defensible argument to request an exception to policy to keep the current closed occupations and positions closed. The studies did not predict that the integration of females into ARSOF would lead to a decrease in mission success or readiness. None of the

studies identified insurmountable concerns to the integration of females in previously closed occupations and positions, but they did indicate that implementation would be complex due to U.S. Army guidance and maintaining team cohesion. Studies indicated that the opposition over integration would decline over time. There were several leadership challenges identified in the studies and most of the concerns required action at all levels. Lastly, the studies recommended consideration of the specific unit of assignment and the cultural norms of the area of operation to ensure the highest level of effectiveness for the individual and unit.

Relevance to the meeting - Measurement of operational and combat effectiveness; Group dynamics, conformity, and cohesion; Practical integration; Critical mass

1.0 BACKGROUND

In recent decades, the United States Department of Defense (DoD) made progress toward integrating women into the Armed Forces. In 1975, DoD opened the military service academies to women with the first women Academy graduates commissioned in 1980. Congress repealed laws prohibiting women from serving in air and naval combat units in the early 1990s. Additionally, in 1993 DoD allowed women to fly fighter jets and serve on combat ships at sea. In 1994, DoD also issued the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR), which prohibited women from being assigned to units whose primary mission was engaging in direct ground combat.

This rule stood for two decades, until January 2013, when the Secretary of Defense rescinded it and opened 110,000 positions to women. This allowed women across the Armed Forces to make progress (i.e. Army Ranger School, serve on submarines, etc.). However, 220,000 combat positions remained closed. The decision for opening these remaining positions was pushed to the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). They had three years to study the issue of opening all positions to women and request any exemptions, if deemed necessary. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff would review these requests, and the Secretary of Defense would decide whether to approve them. This period of study expired in January 2016 and examined questions about the operational and political risks involved in integrating women into combat positions.

Although the military services collaborated throughout the period of study, Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) efforts and decisions regarding integration were separate and distinct from the Army. The USASOC Implementation Plan was a deliberate, phased approach that outlined decision points for the assignment of senior/experienced female Soldiers to support the expansion of opportunities in ARSOF enabler positions, the opening of positions/units that are closed to women, and developing a future female capability in support of Special Operation Forces (SOF) core activities. USASOC collaborated with the Army and USSOCOM on the physical standards validation for SFAS (Special Forces Assessment and Selection) and RASP (Ranger Assessment and Selection Program), and with USSOCOM's social science studies focused on SOF specific issues. In addition, USASOC worked closely with the Army to ensure that the plan supported the Chief of Staff of the Army's (CSA) Strategic Priority to build adaptive leaders for a complex world. USASOC remains committed to maintaining the highest standards and delivering the most qualified ARSOF operators to the Nation, regardless of gender.

2.0 REQUIREMENTS AND OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

In 2013, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff initiated the Women in Service Review (WISR) Implementation Plan directing each Military Service and USSOCOM to develop plans to integrate women into previously closed units and positions. Subsequently, USASOC examined all

special operations jobs and assessed how to further integrate women into ARSOF to support the ARSOF 2022 priority – Invest in Human Capital. The end state is enhanced capability. This review consisted of three efforts: (1) expanding opportunities in ARSOF enabler positions, (2) examining the positions that were closed to women, and (3) developing a future female capability in support of SOF core activities.

USASOC worked from the point of view that “we have it right, and have had it right” as reflected in the performance of the force for the past 30+ years. USASOC continually looks for refinements that will serve to enhance the success already realized with the standards and methods. Physical Standards must be clearly established, enforced, and operationally relevant. This ensures that the right Soldiers are assessed, selected, and qualified throughout their career regardless of gender.

2.1 Job Analysis

USASOC’s initial work on the standards validation in 2013, resulted in identifying the need to conduct an updated job analysis for SF and the 75th Ranger Regiment. The job analysis was not to make a decision about integrating women, it was simply to update the outdated job analysis that the Army Research Institute (ARI) last completed in 1996. A job analysis is the foundation for all assessment and selection decisions. It is crucial to fully understand the nature of that job in order to identify the best person for the job. A job analysis provides a way to develop this understanding by examining the tasks performed in a job, the competencies required to perform those tasks, and the connection between the tasks and competencies. Information from a job analysis can also be used to determine job requirements, training needs, position classification and grade levels, and inform other personnel actions, such as promotions and performance appraisals. As a result, USASOC solicited third party support from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to conduct two job analyses: one for the Career Management Field (CMF) 18 Special Forces, and a second for the 75th Ranger Regiment. The purpose of these two analyses was to examine role requirements and expectations that are common for any CMF 18 SF Soldier, and, separately, any member of the 75th Ranger Regiment. Additionally, they determined the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes essential to effective performance for Special Forces and 75th Ranger Regiment Soldiers. The job analysis also incorporated recent changes to doctrine and the application of SOF in the current operational environment.

OPM psychologists worked with USASOC personnel to conduct the analyses using a multi-method approach composed of three primary steps, each conducted for both SF and the Ranger Regiment: (1) document review, (2) interviews, focus groups, and observations, and (3) quantitative survey administration and analysis. The overall goal was to provide current information on the tasks involved in job performance and the individual attributes (competencies) needed for successful performance.

First, OPM psychologists reviewed job-related documentation and existing academic and military literature to develop draft lists of job information for both CMF 18 and 75th Ranger Regiment. For SF, examples included Command Briefs, Commissioned Officer and NCO Development Guides, MOS-specific course documents, Operational Handbooks and Field Manuals, Doctrinal Publications (ADP 3-05), Tactical Human Optimization, Rapid Rehabilitation and Reconditioning (THOR3) information, a previous SF job analysis, and ARSOF 2022 documents. For the 75th Ranger Regiment, examples included the Ranger Handbook, the Blue Book Standards, Ranger Charters, the Ranger Creed, and ARSOF 2022 documents. The draft lists contained information on job tasks (duties that SF Soldiers or Rangers may perform), competencies (personal attributes that make SF Soldiers or Rangers successful), and contextual aspects of the environment in which SF Soldiers or Rangers operate.

Second, OPM psychologists conducted site visits at each Special Forces Group and at several U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) facilities. Psychologists also visited each Ranger Battalion and observed components of the RASP 1 and 2 programs. Site visits took place between August and November 2014. During the site visits, psychologists observed training exercises,

conducted focus groups with Soldiers, and interviewed experienced Soldiers. Groups of subject-matter experts (SMEs; current Soldiers, leadership, training personnel) at these sites were convened to review and revise the draft task, physical ability, and competency lists to ensure the materials fully and accurately covered the CMF 18 or the Ranger Regiment.

Third, OPM developed and administered command-wide Job Analysis Surveys separately for current CMF 18 Special Forces and 75th Ranger Regiment Soldiers. Surveys were administered between December 2014 and January 2015. In completing the Job Analysis Survey, Soldiers indicated whether they performed sets of tasks, along with providing judgments about the importance of work duties and operation in various types of environmental conditions. Soldiers also judged the importance of a series of competencies, including physical abilities. For general competencies, Soldiers provided input on the degree to which each personal attribute is required at entry to the SF or Ranger career. For technical competencies, Soldiers indicated the level of proficiency needed to perform successfully at their rank.

Responses from over 3,000 SF Soldiers were included in the analyses. OPM used the data gathered in the site visits and surveys to identify the tasks and competencies critical to successful performance as an SF Operator. The analysis of primary focus was to examine results across all CMF 18 respondents. –Responses from over 1,500 Rangers were included in the analyses. As with SF, OPM used the data to identify critical tasks and competencies for Rangers, and the primary analysis was across all participating Rangers.

OPM found that the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes essential to effective performance for SF and Ranger Regiment Soldiers have changed little from 1996 to 2015. Task and competency information such as that collected in this study provide the foundation for a variety of integrated human resources initiatives including competency-based assessment and selection strategies, training curricula, performance management, and career development plans. For example, the current job analyses identified selection competencies that could be used in USAJFKSWCS's continual evaluation and support of SFAS, the 75th Ranger Regiment's RASP, and other assessments. The results also identified developmental competencies that could be used as a basis for assessing any skill gaps in the current SF organizations or Ranger Regiment force, and for carrying out training initiatives related to these occupations. Although the results focused on analyses across all respondents, analyses were also conducted by unit, rank, and MOS (SF only) to provide USASOC with additional information for use in other aspects of the organization.

2.2 Validation of Assessment and Selection Standards

As directed from DoD, USASOC validated all ARSOF assessment and selection programs that were closed to women. This included Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) and the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program (RASP). The focus was on ensuring that tasks and standards are operationally relevant, current, and gender neutral. Under the direction of USSOCOM, the Naval Health and Research Center (NHRC) built on OPM's job analysis and USASOC's standards validation, in order to analyze and validate all SOF training and occupational standards. Specific to USASOC, NHRC validated the physical standards for the SFAS and the RASP. The NHRC researchers concluded that the physical standards are fair and reflective of the job demands. Additionally, they found that Special Forces training and occupational standards are operationally relevant and gender neutral. These standards are used in all phases of SF assessment, selection, training, and operational qualification. The NHRC researchers also found that the 75th Ranger Regiment RASP training and occupational standards are operationally relevant and gender neutral. These standards are used in all phases of RASP. Both standards validation processes verified that SOF standards are occupationally specific, operationally relevant, and gender-neutral.

2.3 Measurement of Operational Effectiveness

There is a distinction between the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Special Operations as far as the focus on entry-

level and operational standards, especially as approached through the standards validation process. Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was the lead for the Army on establishing legitimate, defensible standards. Additionally, TRADOC was charged with identifying institutional and cultural factors that would impact integration, assist in policy and execution guidance, and communications. TRADOC focused on evaluating and establishing clear tasks, conditions, and initial entry level standards based on occupational specific requirements. They identified 31 total physical tasks with 7 common to multiple occupations, and then high demand tasks specific to Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Engineers (generally those occupations considered combat arms). They converted these tasks into a predictive (physical) test to administer to initial entry Soldiers to best determine their capability for specific occupations and then assign them accordingly. An important distinction here between Army initial entry and SOF initial entry standards is that the Army established minimum physical standards required to enter a specific occupation (i.e. Infantry, Armor, Aviation, etc.). If a Soldier meets these minimum standards, then they can serve in that occupation. Conversely, the SOF standards are set and applicants must meet these requirements to be considered for the assessment and selection course. If there are more applicants than positions, then the applicants are ranked from 1 to n and the best and most qualified candidates are selected for assessment and selection. Those that successfully complete the assessment and selection course are then rank ordered again and move forward to the qualification course in rank order based on the number of positions available. Additionally, SOF standards were already naturally gender-normed (those occupations that were closed to women only had one standard, not male and female standards) and in some cases, most are age-normed as well. After completing the job analysis and standards validation process, all SOF standards were updated to be age and gender-normed, if they were not already. Physical Standards are clearly established, enforced, and operationally relevant. In addition to physical standards, SOF units look for the “total person” and seek applicants with the ability to reason through a problem, make decisions logically, work in teams, and respond to unexpected circumstances. These qualities are considered combat-relevant and incorporated throughout assessment and training courses. This ensures that the right Soldiers are assessed, selected, and qualified throughout their career regardless of gender.

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION

The United States Army Special Forces (SF) and Army Special Operations attribute their lineage to the Operational Groups and Jedburgh Teams of the Office of Strategic Services Branch (OSS) during World War II. As part of the ARSOF linkage with Unconventional Warfare (UW) and the OSS, women served as operators conducting UW within the OSS. Women were recruited, trained and employed as UW operators. One legendary example is Virginia Hall, whose language skills and regional knowledge along with further training in intelligence collection, communications, and demolition enabled her to provide exceptional support to the resistance effort.

In support of both ARSOF 2022 and the USSOCOM CDR's future female capability initiative, USASOC developed an enduring female capability organic to ARSOF formations. ARSOF requires an enduring force that utilizes females to more effectively operate within ALL aspects of a population, as determined by the mission and operational objectives of the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs) across the spectrum of SOF core activities and operations. This is a separate effort from the integration of women into SF and Ranger Regiment.

On 24 January 2013, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) rescinded the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCAR) and directed the integration of women NLT 1 January 2016, into currently closed units and positions after the development and implementation of validated, gender-neutral occupational standards. This decision allowed women to potentially serve in units whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. Based on the CSA's and the USSOCOM Commander's guidance, the USASOC Commanding General (CG) approved an implementation plan in March 2013 that provided an

explicit timeline for evaluating the opening of military occupational specialties (MOSs), units, and positions to women as part of the USSOCOM implementation plan.

Women serving in Army Special Operations is not new. Women have been assigned to USASOC, attached to combat units in direct operational roles, and serving as members of Civil Affairs (CA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) career fields for nearly 30 years. The female population currently serving in CA and PSYOPS is comparable to the percentage of women serving in the Active Army. All have served exceptionally well, living up to the exemplary standard set by early SOF pioneers.

Prior to the SECDEF rescinding the 1994 DGCAR in January 2013, the CSA approved USASOC's request to open helicopter pilot and crew chief positions (CMF 15 Aviation positions) in the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) in December 2012. Congress subsequently approved USASOC's notification request to open all CMF 15 Aviation positions throughout the entire Army Special Operations Aviation Command (ARSOAC) on 19 June 2013. The opening of Aviation positions within the 160th SOAR to women was a natural transition, as these Aviation occupations were already open to women in the Conventional Army. Female aviators and crew chiefs may now apply, assess, and be selected for assignment into the 160th SOAR. USASOAC recruits, assesses, selects and trains highly qualified aviation experts to execute the Nation's most complex missions. All applicants must meet stringent standards to serve in the 160th SOAR and there have been no changes to the current assessment process, or to the training and qualification standards, and there are no quotas. USASOC does not provide specific and/or individual results of women applying, assessing, and selected, as is the case with all personnel attending assessment and selection courses.

In January 2015, Congress approved SOF notification packets to open all remaining positions to women in the in Army Special Operations Aviation units (except 13F as it was still a closed MOS at that time) and opened enabler positions to women in SF Command, the JFK Special Warfare Center and School, and also Tactical PSYOP Teams. Therefore, the ONLY remaining positions closed to women in ARSOF units in 2015 were due to (1) Career Field and (2) Position. "Career field" refers to CMF 18 (Special Forces), 11 series (Infantry), 13F (Field Artillery), and 12Bs (Engineers), which were tied to the Army's decisions on 11 series, 13Fs, and 12Bs. "Position" refers to positions that were coded "male only" due to an Additional Skill Identifier (ASI), such as Ranger positions indicated with a "V" coding. These closed positions existed in the 75th Ranger Regiment, Ranger coded positions throughout ARSOF, and Special Forces Companies.

Finally, the DoD Implementation Policy of 2015 opened ground combat occupations and any remaining units previously closed to women service members. As a result, those "career fields" and "positions" described previously as closed were finally opened to women. Women service members can now apply to initial entry SF programs and to serve in the 75th Ranger Regiment.

As can be expected, the number of women applicants who have volunteered and applied for SOF training is small. As of the April 2018 USSOCOM Report on Progress of Integrating Women, three enlisted women began the SF assessment and selection process and none progressed beyond the initial assessment and indoctrination phase. Two women were selected on the Officer Selection board to attend SFAS. No women service members have successfully completed the entry level SF qualification and training program. However, three women began the 75th Ranger Regiment RASP, with two women successfully completing it, and then selected to positions within the Regiment.

For some additional perspective, the 2018 report shows that there are only 2% (1665 of 77,019) of eligible male Soldiers who applied to enlisted SF positions. For those enlisted positions, 81% (1350 of 1665) of the men who applied were selected to attend SFAS. There are only 0.0003% (2 of 5,439) of eligible enlisted female Soldiers who applied to enlisted SF positions. For those enlisted positions, 50% (1 of 2) of the women who applied were selected to attend SFAS. For officers, 20% (811 of 4044) of eligible males

applied and 35% (287 of 811) were assessed in SFAS. For female officers, 3% (2 of 75) of the women who applied were selected to attend SFAS. In SFAS, the attrition rate for men was 50% and the top three causes of attrition (in order) were failure to meet course standards, injury, and drop on request (DOR). For women, attrition was 100% and the cause was failure to meet course standards. Following successful completion of SFAS, Soldiers return for the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) which lasts just over a year. The attrition rate in SFQC was 45% and the top three causes (in order) were failure to meet course standards, DOR, and injury. Upon completion, Soldiers are then designated as a CMF 18 Special Forces Soldier and assigned to SF units.

RASP has similar trends but has different entry points for Soldiers to apply to assess and subsequently join the organization. Enlisted Soldier can enter through a Ranger School contract, attend basic training, then the preparation course for RASP (Pre-RASP), and finally RASP 1 (if they pass Pre-RASP). The second route is enlisted Soldiers in basic training (without a Ranger School contract) can apply to attend RASP. The third route is Soldiers in-service (enlisted and officers) can apply to attend RASP and upon successful completion be reassigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment. RASP is divided into two separate courses based on rank and a previous assignment to the 75th Ranger Regiment. Junior enlisted Soldiers attend RASP I and it currently holds a 53% attrition rate with causes of attrition being DOR, failure to meet course standards, and injury. RASP II is for NCOs and officers with the current attrition rates of 31% and 25% respectively. Causes of attrition for the NCOs was failure to meet course standards, elimination by end of course board, and injury. Causes of attrition for the officers were elimination by end of course board, injury, and failure to meet course standards. One junior enlisted female Soldier attended RASP I, but she did not meet the course standards. Five female in-service Soldiers applied for RASP, one was selected to attend RASP II, and that one female passed RASP II, and was assigned to a position in the 75th Ranger Regiment.

Although separate from Special Operations, it is important to note that 24 women have completed the Army's Ranger School since it opened in April 2015 as part of a limited test program with 19 women, and then officially opened in September 2015 after the first two women graduated from Ranger School (from the original group of 19 who started in the test program). Attrition rates have remained the same at Ranger School, meaning attrition rates have not decreased to potentially indicate a lowering of standards. This is significant because many Soldiers who earn an Army Ranger Tab subsequently apply for SOF level training programs and do well.

Critical Mass: Opening everything to the entire population translates to a larger pool of eligible applicants who can compete for positions, and then potentially be selected for elite assignments/units if they can meet the standards, especially since including women would double the potential pool of candidates. Discounting half of the population's talents and skills is just not a good business practice, especially since only 1% of the U.S. population has the propensity and eligibility to serve in the military.

Studies indicated for a variety of reasons that only a small number of women would compete for the newly opened combat positions initially. This is not surprising because current female service members surveyed expressed that they were generally happy with their current occupation and/or were too senior to make a career change. Additionally, some would have been interested in previously closed jobs/units if they were open during their initial entry into the military. Other factors that cause women to be hesitant to join include concerns over long term career path options, family planning, tokenism, and balancing a dual military/career/income household (The majority of female Soldiers who are married, are married to another service members or someone who also works). The idea of reaching a critical mass is not always a realistic goal in certain organizations that simply do not have a large population of interested women to pull from, and then to further search for fully qualified and capable women inside the already small interested population does not happen immediately, but takes time and patience to see progress.

Keeping these concerns in mind, and balancing the small population of females expected to pursue SOF, USASOC planned to leverage already established ARSOF females (i.e. CA, PSYOP, support roles) as

instructors/cadre for initial entry SOF training and qualification programs as women began entering SFAS and RASP. There is also potential to expand this to SOF females from other countries as instructors/cadre. Additionally, USASOC has ensured equal opportunity for all Soldiers in occupations based on vacant positions and potential for performance, over the concern for trying to keep "female buddy teams" together. Finally, USASOC minimized media exposure from the beginning of implementation and when applicable, provided equal opportunity to press engagements for both genders.

Even when you examine other occupations and career fields outside the military that have been traditionally dominated by men, the progress is slow for the number of women to meet the number of men. Reaching a critical mass is not a realistic goal and that is okay. Leaders can take action to help clear a path for an increase in the number of women, but not at the expense of changing job requirements and lowering standards simply to meet a quota.

USASOC integrates all Soldiers into units following the normal process, and that has not changed since opening everything to women. Women have been assigned who are already established and experienced in their occupation (i.e. officers, senior NCOs, etc.). This initially began with the support occupation positions in SF units, where senior, more experienced women were assigned on a normal assignment cycle to the unit. There was no additional Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program (SHARP) Training. Integration will be a long-term process – not an event. Education, leadership, training, and evaluation programs at all levels are critical to the success of expanding opportunities for women and improving ARSOF for the future.

4.0 TEAM DYNAMICS AND COHESION: STUDY RESULTS

In conjunction with USSOCOM, USASOC conducted several studies with third party research and academic organizations to better understand integrating women into the organization, and develop a deliberate integration process. The research examined the standards, opportunities, effects, and implementation issues inherent in opening combat positions to women.

The studies validated occupational standards, and also examined unit cohesion, propensity to serve, attrition/success/injury rates, equipment sizing/supply/facility modifications, and potential effects on living arrangements and sexual assault. These studies included surveys and focus groups of the force (male and female). They also examined comparable organizations, such as other military organizations and elite mixed-gender teams operating in close quarters (NASA, law enforcement, three letter agencies, etc.). Aside from the physical standards validation studies mentioned previously, USSOCOM and USASOC sponsored social science studies that examined the following topics:

Joint Special Operations University (JSOU): Can SOF mixed-gender elite teams effectively accomplish SOF mission objectives?

Kansas University (KU): Examine the potential benefits and barriers to integrating women into SF ODAs, specifically focused on task cohesion and unit cohesion.

RAND Corporation: Implication of gender integration on unit cohesion (SOF)

Naval Post Graduate School (NPS): Can mixed-gender SF ODA Teams effectively accomplish SF mission objectives?

USSOCOM and USASOC manage human capital very well, and have extensive experience with mixed-gender teams. Therefore, the studies focused on outcomes, and what would maximize team effectiveness.

These studies yielded insights beyond gender integration and increased understanding of the physical and physiological demands on service members and the cultural currents that influence unit cohesion and morale.

SOF teams function as more than just a sum of their parts/people. Even before integrating women, building a 10-man SF team with the right people, the right skills, and the right personality mix to get the job done is challenging. There is an art and a science behind it. Understanding the impact of task and unit cohesion and why and how these teams work is critical to not only creating a highly effective team, but also how best to integrate women on such teams. The idea of equal opportunity for underrepresented populations (in this case, women) can lead to concerns about lowering requirements/standards and not hiring the best capable and most qualified candidates. Although there are physiological differences between men and women, this means that job requirements and standards must be clearly established, and then the assessment and selection criteria must be aligned with the job requirements, and be gender neutral. This is the best way to combat these concerns. Teams work best when they know and trust that everyone is capable of doing their job. This is task cohesion; a team that performs well together. The more difficult part of cohesion, regardless of the idea of gender integration, is building team cohesion in SOF teams. This is not the same as task cohesion - the team's collective ability to do its job and each person's ability to do their specific role, but it is about building a team that has a deep sense of connection and belonging to the team and mission. None of the studies indicated insurmountable concerns to the integration of women into SOF teams, but that implementation would be complex initially to maintain team cohesion, and opposition would decline over time.

There has long been concern about why women are underrepresented in a variety of career fields. The military is not unique to this issue, but it happens to have certain physical job requirements, and men and women have physiological differences. Fire fighters, law enforcement, three-letter agencies, and other occupations are similar. However, when physical standards are clearly established and enforced, then the right people who are fully qualified will be selected for such occupations, regardless of gender. Aside from concerns about physical standards and women's abilities to perform such standard, other issues surface and potentially create a gender bias. Similar to underrepresentation of women in the military, another area of underrepresentation is in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), which has led to calls for increased mentoring, better family leave policies, and workshops designed to teach women how to negotiate like men. A vast literature of sociology research shows women in science are deemed to be inferior to men and are evaluated as less capable when performing similar or even identical work. This systemic devaluation of women results in an array of real consequences: shorter, less praise-worthy letters of recommendation; fewer research grants, awards, and invitations to speak at conferences; and lower citation rates for their research. Such wide-ranging devaluation of women's work makes it harder for them to progress in the field.

Leah Boustan, an economist at Princeton University, suggests that the problem can be understood in terms of the "pollution theory of discrimination." The theory, articulated in 2002 by Claudia Goldin, an economist at Harvard University, says that because women are perceived as lower-skill, their presence reduces the prestige of a previously all-male profession. Men thus intimidate female colleagues to keep them out of the profession and protect its prestige. Often this type of behavior is attributed to misinformation and bias.

A variety of other studies and research conducted have shown that misinformation and bias exists, and are probably the greatest challenges that organizations face when trying to integrate and/or increase an underrepresented population. In the military, misinformation often surrounds concerns about female personal hygiene needs, which were recently debunked when Ranger School opened to women. Additionally, concerns about pregnancy, sexual harassment, and sexual assault are all dictated by DoD and Army policies but misinformation continuously rise to the top of discussions rather than facts. For example, pregnancy and having a non-deployable status should not be a more concerning issue than the assortment of other reasons that makes a male Soldier non-deployable. Less than 1% of the female force in the Army is ever not available for duty due to pregnancy. In fact, when examining primarily male operational units, the non-deployable rate is approximately 14.5% due to medical (i.e. surgery, injuries, motorcycle accidents, etc.),

administrative (i.e. parental leave, vacation, etc.), and/or and legal reasons. Even when examining these simple facts and data, survey data showed that these non-deployable reasons are somehow seen as more acceptable than pregnancy.

While sexual harassment is certainly an issue, there is a need to examine in depth gender bias. Systemic sexism and racism exist within the confines of science, government, and the military. Those women who do make it to the upper ranks have often been told that they were only given that job, award, opportunity, promotion, etc. because they are women. This implies that the occupation is admitting less-deserving women simply to increase their numbers. But in fact, studies show that many of the women must be more capable than the men, to even have advanced in the occupation. Therefore, in addition to misinformation, there is the challenge of bias, which includes implicit bias and unconscious bias. These terms describe broadly similar biases and are often used interchangeably. However, they do have slightly different meanings. Unconscious bias refers to a bias that a person is unaware of, and happens automatically. It is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by a person's background, cultural environment and personal experiences. Implicit bias refers to the same area, but questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially after being made increasingly aware of them. Leadership is responsible for recognizing and acknowledging biases and finding ways to mitigate their impact on the organization, behaviour, and decisions.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The U.S. Military has taken several steps towards opening previously closed positions and organizations to women. Common themes and discussion points consistently emerge in the dialogue on gender integration. This includes beliefs about women that are not always based on facts, but instead are based on misinformation, misconceptions, and/or bias. This is prevalent not only in the military but also in the civilian sector. Such misconceptions and generalizations can have a negative impact on women who currently reside in an organization and/or for the introduction of women into a previously male only organization. Acknowledging and understanding that bias is often a result of a culture or societal norms, and that it will exist within the organization regardless of the changes leaders try to make is important. It is up to leaders to recognize this and take the necessary steps to shape the cultural, behavioral, and group dynamic changes in the organization.

None of the research or studies provided a defensible argument to request an exception to policy to keep the certain ARSOF occupations and positions closed. As a result, USSOCOM and USASOC recommended opening all positions in their components to women. They concluded that some concerns about integration, such as unit morale, cohesion, and readiness, were either unlikely to materialize or could be addressed in implementation. The studies did not predict that the integration of females into ARSOF would lead to a decrease in mission success or readiness. None of the studies identified insurmountable concerns to the integration of females in previously closed occupations and positions, but they did indicate that implementation would be complex due to U.S. Army guidance and maintaining team cohesion. Studies indicated that the opposition over integration would decline over time. There were several leadership challenges identified in the studies and most of the concerns required action at all levels. Lastly, the studies recommended consideration of the specific unit of assignment and the cultural norms of the area of operation to ensure the highest level of effectiveness for the individual and unit.

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