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GENDER INTEGRATION IN BASIC TRAINING:

The Services Are Using a Variety of Approaches

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to provide a statement for the record on our report on gender integration in basic training.[1] This statement addresses (1) the extent to which the services have gender-integrated basic training and (2) the performance of men and women in gender-integrated basic training compared with that of men and women whose training is segregated.

In summary, the military services' approaches to the integration of men and women during basic training range from integrating some training units to having separate gender units that share some training venues with units of the opposite gender to providing totally separate training.

Data to compare the performance of trainees in gender-integrated units and segregated units is not available from all of the services. Limited information on the impact of gender integration from two studies done for the Navy and the Army suggests that gender-integrated basic training programs do not negatively affect trainees' performance. A 1992 study done for the Navy reported no impact on performance and improvement in teamwork for both men and women trained in gender-integrated units.[2] A 1996 study of gender integration in the Army reported that women's performance improved in gender-integrated training units and men's performance was not degraded.[3] Because the data available to evaluate the impact of gender integration was so limited, we recommended that the Department of Defense (DOD) gather more extensive data. DOD concurred with our recommendation and is in the process of collecting the data.

Background

Women have traditionally played a role in the military services. In recent years, many more career fields have opened to women, and their assignment opportunities have expanded considerably. In the past, all of the services had different programs for basic training for men and women and trained the two groups separately. More recently, however, the services have adjusted their philosophy of basic training for women and now have programs more closely aligned with those of the men. During

[1]Basic Training: Services Are Using a Variety of Approaches to Gender Integration (GAO/NSIAD-96-153, June 10, 1996).

[2]Jerry C. Scarpate and Mary Anne O'Neill, "Evaluation of Gender Integration at Recruit Training Command." Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, July 1992.

[3]Dr. Zita M. Simutis and Dr. Jacqueline A. Mottern, "Basic Combat Training in a Gender-Integrated Environment." Briefing for Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) by the Army Research Institute, January 25, 1996.

fiscal year 1995, the services trained 179,068 recruits—18 percent of whom were women. Women comprised 18 percent of the 75,616 basic training graduates in the Army, 20 percent of the 40,813 graduates in the Navy, 24 percent of the 30,515 graduates in the Air Force, and 5 percent of the 32,124 graduates in the Marine Corps.

Degree of Trainee Gender Integration Varies

The services use different approaches to integrating men and women in their basic training programs. The result is a varying degree of integration and interaction between men and women during initial training, depending on the branch of service. In all four services, women and men follow the same program of instruction, with differences in medical examinations, hygiene classes, and physical fitness test standards. The degree of integration within training units in these services, however, does vary. In the Marine Corps, men and women are trained separately, but according to Marine Corps officials, the program of instruction is the same for men and women. Table 1 compares some aspects of the services' basic training programs.

Table 1: Selected Aspects of the Services' Basic Training Programs

Figures in percents

Service	Program of instruction for men and women	Integrated at operating level of training	Trained in integrated operating units, fiscal year 1995	
			Women	Men
Army	Same[a]	Yes	100	49
Navy	Same[a]	Yes	100	25
Air Force	Same[a]	No	0	0
Marine Corps	Same[a]	No	0	0

[a]The only differences were in medical examinations, hygiene classes, and physical fitness test standards.

The Army and the Navy basic recruit training programs are nearly identical for men and women, and in gender-integrated units, trainees are mixed at the operating level. The only differences are that male and female trainees are berthed separately, have different medical examinations and hygiene classes, and must meet different physical fitness test standards. In fiscal year 1995, the Army trained all of its women and 49 percent of its men in gender-integrated units composed of 20 to 50 percent women. Many of the men trained in all-male units were in combat arms specialties closed to women. In the same year, the Navy trained all of its women and 25 percent

of its men in gender-integrated units composed of about 50 percent of each gender. In forming training units, the Navy considers it important not to have only a few of either gender in a group because those trainees might feel isolated or intimidated. Therefore, because the number of men that can be trained in integrated units is limited by the number of women available to train with them, some units must be all male.

As in the Navy and the Army, the Air Force's male and female trainees follow the same program of instruction, with differences in the medical examinations, hygiene classes, and physical fitness test standards. However, the operating level of recruit training, the flight, is single gender. Each flight is paired with a "brother" or "sister" flight, and the pairs often train side by side, but they do not mingle. Thus, male and female flights may be at the marksmanship range or in an auditorium together, but they do not mix. The exception to this is the physical conditioning program, where men and women are intermingled.

The Marine Corps does not conduct gender-integrated basic training—men and women are trained separately. Marine Corps officials told us they changed their basic training program for men and women in October 1996. At the time we did our original audit work, the program of instruction for men and women was different. Men received a 24-day course of Marine combat training after their basic training, whereas women received only an additional week of basic training that incorporated an abbreviated course of Marine combat training. In addition, only the men were trained in combat hitting skills and pugil sticks. Now, according to the Marine Corps, the program of instruction for men and women is the same.

Limited Data Suggests That Gender Integration Does Not Erode Performance

We had little data to use to compare the effectiveness of integrated and segregated training because of curriculum changes, a short history of integration, and few records documenting trainees' performance. The limited data that is available, however, suggests that gender-integrated basic training programs do not negatively affect the trainees' performance.

The Marine Corps does not have integrated training and therefore has no comparative data. The Air Force provided some performance data on its trainees by gender but had no data that could be used to compare the performance of training units. Thus, we could not compare same-gender pairs of flights with opposite-gender pairs.

The Navy-sponsored 1992 study showed that gender-integrated training did not affect the results of performance tests and improved teamwork. Since that time, the Navy has changed its basic training program of instruction significantly, placing greater emphasis on physical training. The Navy could not provide data to compare the performance of trainees in integrated and segregated units using this new program of instruction.

The 1996 Army-sponsored study concluded that in gender-integrated units, women's performance improved and men's performance was not degraded. This conclusion was based on a 3-year study of measures of performance such as physical fitness, marksmanship, and individual proficiency test results. We compared this study's results with some performance data the Army provided for fiscal years 1993-95 for about 80 percent of the trainees from an all-male training location. Although information on the other 20 percent was not available, officials at the all-male location said that they believed the 80 percent was representative of the whole. This data indicates that the pass rates for male trainees in the gender-integrated companies exceeded the pass rates for trainees at the all-male location in those categories of physical performance for which data was available—the Army physical fitness test and the basic rifle marksmanship test (see table 2).

Table 2: Pass Rates for Men in All-Male and Integrated Army Training Units (fiscal years 1993-95)

Figures in percents

	Army physical fitness test		Basic rifle marksmanship qualification	
Fiscal year	**All-male location**	**Integrated units**	**All-male location**	**Integrated units**
1993	97	98	97	98
1994	89	99	97	98
1995	88	99	96	98

Data to Compare Current and Previous Army Gender-Integrated Programs Does Not Exist

Although the Army had gender-integrated basic training in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Army has no records of those programs or their results to compare with those on its current program and results. However, we did find reports of a 1976 Army test of the same basic training program of instruction for men and women.[4]

Before September 1976, women entering the Army received different training from that the men received. From September to November 1976, the Army tested a common program of instruction for men and women. Although men and women received the same training for the test period, they were trained in single-gender units. According to a report on the test results, the instructional program was similar to that previously used for men's basic training and very different from that previously used for women. The study showed that women met all the standards except the physical fitness standards (the men's standards were used for both men and women) and that those standards could be modified for the women without changing the content of the training or reducing the value of the training. Problems observed during the test were as follows:

- The uniforms the women were issued for the training were inadequate, and women were issued men's boots that often did not fit their feet. Also, the field jackets, although made for women, were not as warm and did not fit as well as those issued to the men.
- Male instructors were inadequately prepared to train women. They tended to be overprotective and assumed women would not meet the standards.

We could not determine what actions were taken as a result of the study. However, some Army training locations did continue gender-integrated basic training programs until the early 1980s, when the Army ended them. The Army could provide no documentation of these early gender-integration programs, their results, or the reasons for stopping them. Army officials had various opinions on the programs' results and the reasons for discontinuing the programs. Some said the results were not good, which led the Army to stop the training. Others said that the results were good and the training was stopped because of a lack of support within the Army.

In 1993, the Army again began integrating basic training and has avoided many of the problems identified in the 1976 study. For example, different physical fitness standards are used for men and women, all trainees'

[4]Performance data is reported in Basic Initial Entry Training Test Report, Department of the Army, December 30, 1976. Attitudinal data is reported in Basic Initial Entry Training Test Attitude Survey, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, September 1978.

clothing appears to be more suitable for the weather, women are issued boots suitable for them, and athletic shoes are used by all trainees for physical training. As noted previously, the 1996 Army-sponsored study indicated that the current gender-integrated program is effective. However, the training of instructors is still an issue because, according to the study, many drill sergeants believe that their training course does not adequately prepare them for gender-integrated basic training. Army officials told us the Army is now modifying its training course for drill sergeants to incorporate lessons learned from the study. They expect the modified course to better prepare the drill sergeants to conduct gender-integrated basic training.

Although unable to specifically cite problems in the earlier gender-integrated basic training program, Army officials told us that many factors had positively affected the training environment since then, including improvements in training equipment and facilities, advances in sports medicine, the use of athletic shoes for physical training, and increased roles for women in the military and society in general.

To evaluate the effectiveness of each service's approach to the integration of recruit training, we recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the services to retain and analyze comparative performance data for men and women in single-gender and gender-integrated training units. DOD concurred with the recommendation, stating it would instruct each of the services to retain and analyze such data over a 1-year period, to be completed by fiscal year 1998.

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