



Marine Corps Study Analysis

Summary:

In January 2013, then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta lifted the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, frequently referred to as the “Combat Exclusion Policy”, thereby opening all closed combat positions to women. He gave the Services and Special Operations Command three years to implement the new directive.

On September 10, 2015, the Marine Corps released a four-page summary of its findings from its yearlong Marine Corps Force Integration Plan study, a study that examined women’s potential service in ground combat units. This four-page, unsigned, undated, summary was provided to Congressional Staffers and select members of the press.

On September 23, 2015 a fourteen-page summary with nineteen pages of attachments was leaked to the press. This summary was on Marine Corps letterhead and was signed on August 18, 2015 by Brigadier General George W. Smith, Director of the Marine Corps Force Integration Office.

The more extensive summary (hereafter referred to as the “official summary”) shows that the truncated, four-page version released, without attribution, was neither a fair nor an accurate summary of the findings and conclusions.

The official summary reveals that despite the Marine Corps’ numerous statements over time that they have historically operated under validated occupational standards that are reviewed every three years, that has not been the case. According to the official summary, “perhaps the single-most important result of this almost three year process” has been “to essentially deconstruct many collective ground combat arms tasks to identify what individual tasks and standards an individual Marine must achieve ...to be a fully contributing member of that unit.”

However, at the same time that the Marine Corps was deconstructing collective tasks and narrowing them to individual requirements, they were evaluating a group of newly trained women Marine volunteers against these emerging occupational standards. Furthermore, rather than report whether or not individual female Marines were judged capable of meeting occupational standards, as all male Marines are judged, the women were evaluated collectively and the results reflect the average performance of female Marine volunteers relative to newly emerging standards.

It is inappropriate to draw conclusions from the Marine Corps study about the abilities and performance of all women based on the abilities and performance of some women.

Other observations:

1. The official summary admits that the USMC didn’t have any clear standards in place and that “they relied heavily on the fundamental assumption that simply because a Marine in a particular ground combat arms MOS is a male, he should be capable of performing all of the physical tasks associated with the regular duties of that MOS” (p. 3).



2. Integration requirements have forced the USMC to examine and set standards that will reduce “wastage”, a reference to male Marines who cannot adequately perform the duties of their assigned occupational specialty. Furthermore, they note that going through this process has meant that they are “increasing the combat readiness of the force-today and into the future” (p.4).
3. Despite the requirement to set standards it still isn’t clear what standards the teams, all-male or gender integrated, were measured against. Furthermore, there appears to be contradictions between General Smith’s letter and the enclosures as to whether or not standards have now been set and implemented. The question remains, did the gender integrated teams achieve passing scores and if so against what standards? Or, was their performance simply compared to better trained, more experienced all-male teams?
4. The official summary attempts to differentiate Marine infantry from Army infantry by claiming that Marine infantry is “platform agnostic” and therefore must move longer distances under heavier loads. However, there is no quantification of average distances or minimum loads that justifies this differentiation (p.5).
5. In the official summary the USMC acknowledges the possible and likely benefits of full integration and notes the importance of leadership in a successful process. On page 8 they note that leader resistance will likely be a greater impediment to combat effectiveness and readiness than actual integration. Pages 8-11 lay out a reasonably thorough path to successful integration.
6. In the summary and conclusions section of the OAD Executive Summary there are extensive positive implications of integration, none of which were listed in the four-page report that was briefed to Congress and the media.
7. On page v2 9 of the ppt attachment they note that men and women of similar fitness levels experienced the same or similar injury rates and that if they had used a stricter screening criteria for volunteers they would likely have filtered out the female and male Marines who sustained injuries.
8. No mention is made in either of the documents about assigning women in currently open MOSs to ground combat staffs and units currently closed to them. Did the study examine women’s ability to serve in staff positions in open MOS since those positions remain closed to women?
9. The official summary contains a surprising statement: “In the main, such shifts have been positive for our country in a broader context, but have perhaps diluted the paramount importance of winning in battle against our nation’s foes -- the sole reason for the existence of a Marine Corps” (p. 14). The summary provides no information for which shifts they are referring to or specifically how they have diluted the importance of winning or negatively impacted combat effectiveness.

Conclusion:

- Flawed Study Design

The SECDEF directive of January 2013 directed the services to establish, NLT September 2015, gender neutral standards required for successful performance in ground combat MOS’ that would be applied to asses individual performance. The study, however, grouped Marines based on



gender rather than evaluating individuals on their capability to meet an occupational standard. The women were judged not on their individual successes or individual capabilities, like their fellow male Marines are, but on overall group averages.

The number of women examined throughout this experiment was low and continued to drop throughout the research timeframe. The results are offered as proof yet statistical significance was substantially less than the standard regularly employed by any scientific community for experimental research.

- **Gender Neutral Standards**

Despite initial entry training deficits (ie. Marine women are segregated during initial entry training and held to lower standards than men), some Marine women in this study were able to meet the existing physical and tactical standards required for combat MOSs. However, the summary fails to address the potential impact of the lower standards for women in initial recruit training on their performance compared to men.

The official summary still does not outline a universal standard against which combat arms Marines will be tested for entry into combat occupations. Did the study establish gender neutral standards and if so what are those standards?

- **Emotional Verbiage**

Both the four page summary and the official summary are laced with emotional verbiage, dated studies, assumptions and hyperbole that clearly reveal an emotion based view for why all women, regardless of individual capabilities, should be excluded from combat positions.

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Read the [summary](#) of the Marine Corps Force Integration Plan

Read the full [Marine Corps Force Integration Plan](#)