

Women in leadership essay

Business



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Are Female Military Leaders Truly Given a Chance to Lead? American Military University October 29, 2009 Introduction It is no secret that military organizations create and cultivate high-performance leaders. The military services “ focus on developing persons even at the expense of organizational performance” (Hemingway, 2007). Service academies exist purely to mold new leaders and an officer’s entire career is carefully tracked by higher headquarters to ensure leadership experience and skills are gained with each assignment. In order to attain the highest ranks in the military, one must have leadership experience- and that is certainly something that cannot be taught in an academy. Experience leading troops is only gained over time and in opportunities presented. Individuals who are never presented an opportunity to lead, teach, or do, are rarely successful and eventually pushed out of the service. Females within the military are many times excluded from such an opportunity. Without approval to serve in ground-combat, they are at a disadvantage to their male counterparts to receive that coveted experience and therefore rise to the highest ranks.

What are some barriers to their success, other than the obvious? What can be done to provide women leaders with the same opportunities for advancement if they are not allowed to fight in combat? This paper will discuss these topics as well as offer solutions of how the military can level the playing field for female leaders to reach the highest levels of military rank. History Female integration into the military have always generated a plethora of research and debates. Their effectiveness and leadership style has been an easy topic of conversation for some time. Females have served in different capacities throughout all of America’s great conflicts, however, it

was only fairly recently that female were officially authorized by the government to serve on active duty. In 1948 the Female's Armed Services Integration Act was passed by Congress.

The implications of this Act limited the total number of females allowed in each rank and prevented females from having any command authority over male troops, however it still granted females permanent status in the Regular and Reserve forces of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps as well as in the newly created Air Force (Doll, 2008, p.). In the 1970's the military went through a drastic change in their demographics. The draft was eliminated and an all-volunteer force was put into place. Enlistment was low, and Department of Defense saw the opportunity to eliminate troop shortages and fill vacant positions with females. Public Law 94-106 was signed in 1975 ordering all U. S. service academies to open their doors to female applicants, " thereby creating conditions in which female officers would lead men" (Doll, 2008, p.

2). This was a major milestone for women pursuing leadership roles in the military as graduates of these academies make up the largest percentage of officers within the service. In 1970 Brigadier General Anna Mae Hayes became the first woman general officer in United States military history (Hames, 2009, p.

10). What is important to note is female officers from this time period were only found in the medical career field, where they are considered non-line officers, meaning they are non-combatants during times of war. In operational circumstances line officers may hold positional authority over

non-line officers of higher rank. As of October 2009 there are less than sixty female general officers. In 1972, 1.8 percent of Army soldiers were female. In 1991, the ratio had risen to 11 percent. By 2005, the number was 14.

3 percent. As of October 2008, the Department of Defense shows 15.3 percent of active duty Army are female. As of October 2009, 19.2 percent of total Air Force members are female; with 18.4 percent of officers being female and 19.

8 percent enlisted females (AFHQ, 2009). On November 14, 2008, Army General Ann Dunwoody became the first woman promoted to 4-star rank. The rise of females up and down the chain of command has provided a new set of role models for younger females.

Women, like men, join the military for many reasons, chief among them a desire to serve their country. Our military has made tremendous strides in integrating women into all aspects of, but although not directly on the surface, there are still barriers that exist that prevent women from achieving the same level of success that men achieve. Some of these barriers will now be discussed. Barriers to Success “ Many researchers of female in leadership roles declare the glass-ceiling metaphor as all but abolished. Times have changed and there are no longer absolute barriers at a specific high level in organizations” (Eagly, 2007, p.

64). A clear example is of 4-star Gen Dunwoody or Secretary of Defense Hilary Clinton. There is no question that woman have the ability to reach the highest positions of leadership, but the problem now is, “ for female who aspire to top leadership, routes exist but are full of twists and turns, both <https://assignbuster.com/women-in-leadership-essay/>

unexpected and expected” (Eagly, 2007, p. 4). The expected twists are fairly obvious and written about ad nauseam.

Men are more likely than females to say they plan to stay in the military until retirement age, and work-life balance is a factor in that decision. For example, a 2005 Army survey found that 45 percent of enlisted men said they planned to stay in the active-duty Army until retirement, compared with 34 percent for enlisted female (Yeager, 2007, p. 2). This is usually due to female’s desire to start a family and needing to leave their military career to raise children.

In this day and age, this is certainly still a factor for many females, but significant strides have been made and improvements in work-life conditions so that this is not an “end-all-be-all” for career driven females. Interestingly, many argue the military’s, “increased attention to family-friendly programs such as childcare, a valuable benefit for military female and men, is not because of more women in the military but it’s not like the old draftees where you could treat them like pieces of dirt, they are volunteers, they are professionals, and you have to treat them with respect” (Yeager, 2007, p.). Another barrier to success that is fairly obvious is the age-old discrimination against women by other military members. In August 2005, after a series of harassment and assault cases in the Air Force Academy, the Department of Defense investigated the situation and published a report writing, “although progress has been made, hostile attitudes and inappropriate actions toward female, and the toleration of these by some cadets and midshipmen, continue to hinder the establishment of a safe and professional environment in which to prepare future military officers” (Walters, 2005, p. 1). It is no

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surprise that in a high intense training environment men and female are inherently different, but physically and mentally. The military, just by the nature of war, is an environment filled with testosterone, physical activity and proving one's strength and ability.

Women simply cannot compete with men physically yet even in physically active military jobs, it is hard to argue that being good at physical activity has a direct affect on your leadership ability. No general officer is on the front lines running convoys and carrying a rifle. Mentally, women are just as effective leaders as men, just different. In the language of psychologists, the clash is between two sets of associations: communal and agentic.

Female are associated with communal qualities, which convey a concern for the compassionate treatment of others. They include being especially affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, and sympathetic.

In contrast, men are associated with agentic qualities, which convey assertion and control. They include being especially aggressive, ambitious, dominant, as well as self-reliant and individualistic. The agentic traits are also associated in most people's minds with effective leadership – perhaps because a long history of male domination of leadership roles has made it difficult to separate the leader associations from the male associations. As a result, female leaders find themselves in a double bind. If they are highly communal, they may be criticized for not being agentic enough. But if they are highly agentic, they may be criticized for lacking communion. Either way, they may leave the impression that they don't have “ the right stuff” for powerful jobs (Eagly, 2007, p. 66) In the last few years, the military has

actually seen a change in leadership style that is more suited to female's ability.

“ Military leaders are no longer so autocratic, and in fact people who are autocratic are actually denigrated now, whereas that used to be the primary leadership style. Such a shift is evident in the Army's 2007 posture statement, which sets forth the following attributes for the service's leaders: “ sets the standard for integrity and character; confident and competent decision-maker in uncertain situations; empathetic and always positive; professionally educated and dedicated to life-long learning; effective communicator” (Yeager, 2007, p. 6). The biggest barrier to women's success is the ban of females from fighting with units engaged in direct combat with the enemy. More than 90 percent of military occupations are open to females; but they are still banned from joining certain high-risk specialties reserved for men (Motevalli, 2009). However, it's understood that this only serves to keep female out of the certain aspects of combat but not out of combat itself.

Female in logistics, services, and military police have been assigned to ride in supply convoys which are an easy target for the enemy. The policy Congress set of banning women from combat failed to anticipate the current realities that American troops face. The war we currently face overseas is unlike any we have fought before. “ There is no front line — the moment military members step on Iraqi or Afghan soil, they are in harm's way. The rules have increasingly been blurred and skirted as they prove their mettle during the extended conflicts” (Jenkins, 2009).

Women overseas frequently find themselves in combat situations even though the ban exists, yet they are still prohibited from commanding and leading, which is the central way military leaders are judged on performance. The implications of banning females from combat are obvious during times of promotion. Women simply cannot compete with their decorated peers in the meritocratic nature of the military promotion system.

Commanding troops on the home front is not treated with equal weight as a commander in a deployed environment. Experience overseas in a deployed environment is what sets a leader apart in the military world, and if there are limited opportunities for female to take advantage of these positions, there is a very limited chance for them to ever attain a higher rank. And, of course it has been done in the past, but it is significantly harder for women than men, and therefore unequal. Additionally, "in all branches of the military, even now, female are over-represented in support and administrative specialties, which do not provide job skills they could not easily also have acquired as civilians. Moreover, while female are in the military, their civilian counterparts are accruing job-specific skills and investing time in their civilian careers, which puts them at a relative advantage in the labor market" (Prokos & Padavic, 2000). Traditionally, it is not the support and administrative specialties that make up the general officer population -it is the positions that are most essential to the mission in the war effort, part of the 10 percent of positions women are excluded from. Progress Despite all the barriers female military leaders face, it is undeniable that a significant amount of progress has been made, especially since the Female's Armed Services Integration Act was passed in 1948. A former female lieutenant

general in the Marine Corps stated, “ it has been an evolutionary process and there is still more to be done, more doors to open.

I think it’s better done in an evolutionary way. If it can be done quickly, it can be undone quickly” (Yeager, 2007, p. 6). Potential Solutions In 2005 Congress established an investigative committee to investigate the nation’s military academies following numerous sex scandals that included harassments and rapes. The report recommended 44 steps to raise awareness of the issue of sexual assault and harassment, to make it easier for victims to report those offenses, and to change the culture of the academies to reduce incidents of sexual assault and harassment.

They also suggested ways the military can improve female’s leadership opportunities, stating, “ ensure consistent opportunities for female to be involved in leadership and decision-making, including representation on admissions boards, on academic boards, in athletic discussions, and in other senior level forums” (Walters, 2005, p. 1). This viable solution is to ensure female instructors are found in key positions such as basic training and officer training schools.

This was, in fact, one of the committee’s recommendations (Walters, 2005, p. 1). This would allow these female officers and enlisted to serve as role models for both male and female cadets and midshipmen. In the Marine basic training course, there are instructors of both sexes with the platoons at all times. “ Men see the female carrying the same packs, weighing anywhere from 40 to 50 pounds, living in the same conditions and learning the same skills before going to their military occupational specialty school. The

professionalism and discipline of all instructors working together shows young Marines what is expected of them once they hit the operating forces or supporting establishment” (Yard, 2004, p. 1).

One instructor said, “ the students see the male and female instructors working together, this sets a good example for the students. ” A young troops wrote, “ we respect the females because they’re Marines. We’re all family. We’re all Marines” (Yard, 2004, p. 1). In the end, this is the best solution for integrating females into leadership roles.

When people are exposed to certain things, it becomes the norm and eventually becomes commonplace. If females are performing the same jobs as men, the same duties and held to the same standards, eventually it will become so normal to see a woman general no one would look twice. One female general, when asked what allowed her to be successful in a male dominated career field stated, “ being physically fit was important. That’s one of those things, at a young age in the Army, I recognized that my ability to run and to work out [was important]. Men noticed me because I could run well. Leadership recognized that and whether or not that’s fair or not, that was reality” (Doll, 2008, p. 3). Simply seeing a woman performing the same standards asked of them, men will respect the hard work a woman puts forth as one of their peers.

Conclusion Prokos & Padavic (2000) hypothesized that women veterans would earn more than non-veterans, in the same way past research has shown that male veterans tend to out-earn non-veterans; however they concluded that it was simply impossible to give a simple yes or no answer.

Younger women veterans in particular suffered an earnings disadvantage compared to same-age non-veterans and older veterans. The findings offered little support for the idea that the military provides modern women a bridge to higher paid civilian employment. Thus, while the military advertises to young people that it can further their careers, it does not offer a route to higher paying jobs for all women.

” (p. 7). The most interesting aspect of this study is that Prokos & Padavic found little support for the idea that the military provides a bridge to higher-paid civilian employment by providing exposure to traditionally male jobs. Women today may experience higher opportunity costs than did women of earlier eras by pursuing a military rather than a civilian career. This leads one to believe that women, if they want to have a well paying career might as well stay clear of the military. Therefore, it is more important than ever to ensure women are ensured equal opportunity for promotion and exposure to leadership experiences.

Women contribute a great deal to our military and it is important to have diversity across the force. In 2008 23 of the highest ranking Army females were interviewed and summarized, “ female general officers have the same attitudes and draw the same conclusions from their experiences as their male counterparts: Any officer who aspires to higher levels of Army leadership should do the best possible job in the assignments they are given; prepare themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally; accomplish the mission; take care of their soldiers; mentor and be mentored; stay true to their Army values; and not aspire to make general officer until they are colonels in the Army (Doll, 2008, p. 7). Men and women will always be

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inherently different, but obviously there are similar leadership characteristics they share.

Despite the military's deep masculine tradition, there are signs that the military is adjusting to a growing role for female. There is no question the military as a whole has certainly made progress in integrating females into the highest ranks of the organization, but the question is, are they afforded the same opportunity to progress and lead? If they were truly afforded equality, there is no reason why there are only sixty female generals within the entire military. Yes, women can get there, but not as easily as their male counterparts.

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