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Should Women Serve on the Frontline?

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, women had roles in or for the British Army. For centuries women went to war as camp followers, taking on roles such as cooking, cleaning and mending clothes and equipment for the male soldiers (Forty and Forty, 1997). These women shared in the “*heat, cold hunger thirst, long marches, heavy burdens and uncomfortable quarters*” (Van Creveld, 2001:76) of the Army. The tradition of camp followers finished at the end of the nineteenth century (Adie, 2003), that is when gender segregation in employment began to take root (Bilton et al, 2002). Over the centuries numerous women have disguised themselves as men in order to be in the Army (Forty and Forty 1997, Van Creveld 2001). Between the end of the nineteenth century and the Second World War, women were denied any role in or alongside the Army, with the exception of nurses (Van Creveld, 2001). Instead, they participated in war from afar, by doing jobs such as working in ammunition factories during World War One (Adie, 2003).

During the Second World War women had the chance to prove that they were as capable as men were in doing certain jobs, and consequently they gradually began to take on roles in the Army. By 1994 women had the opportunity to work in forty-seven percent of the Army’s roles; in 1998 this was expanded to seventy percent (MOD, 2002a). When women first had the opportunity to join the Royal Artillery, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Engineers corps in 1998, it was the first time in history that they were officially permitted to serve on the frontline of the British Army. Women are currently prevented from serving in any role where the primary task is ‘to close with and kill the enemy’, which means that they are still excluded from the frontline units of the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps (MOD, 2004).

Chapter one will discuss whether women want to serve on the frontline and what indicators there are to suggest women are in favour of or are against serving

there. If women do not want to serve on the frontline, then there seems little point in examining whether they should have the opportunity to serve in the roles from which they are currently excluded. If women could join the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps, but there were no females interested in taking up those roles; it might result in a waste of resources where the Army attempts to accommodate for female soldiers that never arrive.

Chapter two contains a review of the women who want to serve on the frontline to discover why they might want to do so, with the aim to determine whether women are or would be serving on the frontline for suitable reasons. These discussions lead to an in-depth debate in the third chapter about whether women should be on the frontline and more specifically whether they should be allowed to take on roles where they may have to 'close with and kill the enemy'. One important issue that is observed and discussed in chapter three is the issue of equality, because, if the prohibition of women from the infantry and Royal Armoured corps is discovered to be 'unnecessary and inappropriate', then the Army may be breaking European laws of equality by excluding women from these units (MOD, 2002a). The report challenges many of the existing theories and explores the positive and negative points of having women on the frontline. The main aim is to explore the feasibility of having women in roles where their primary task is 'to close with and kill the enemy', from an unbiased perspective.

One of the main themes discussed is the difference between men and women. Since men serve in all frontline units and women are denied the opportunity to serve in some units, there must be a perceived difference between men and women. Whether the difference is biologically or socially produced is debated throughout the report. Many sociologists argue that any differences that may exist are socially produced (Abbott et al, 2005; Best, 2005; Bilton et al, 2002; Browne, 2005; Giddens, 2006; Marsh et al, 2000; Payne, 2000). Some Sociologists also argue that characteristics cannot be assigned to one gender or the other (Best, 2005; Marsh et al, 2000; Oakley, 1972; Wharton, 2005) and that there are many more similarities than differences between men and women (Marsh et al, 2000; Wharton, 2005). However, as discussed in detail in chapter three, other authors continue to insist that there are differences between men and women and that these differences matter (see Adie, 2003; Alexandrou, 2001; MOD, 2002a and 2004; Van Creveld 2001)

There is a neglect to discuss the physical differences between men and women and the way this affects a woman's ability to serve on the frontline because the MOD (2002a) recognises that some women are as physically capable as men are, therefore there must be other reasons, to be explored, that are preventing the MOD from allowing women into all units.

CHAPTER ONE: DO WOMEN WANT TO SERVE ON THE FRONTLINE AND PARTICIPATE IN CLOSE QUARTER COMBAT?

The purpose of this chapter is to find out whether women want to serve on the frontline and participate in close quarter combat in the British Army.

Recruitment and retention

Despite seventy-one percent of the British Army's roles being accessible to women, women form less than ten percent of the Army's personnel (MOD, 2004), suggesting that very few women are interested in any role in the Army. "*The average female officer serves four years less than her male counterpart and female soldiers serve three years less than males*" (MOD, 2002). There could be numerous reasons that explain why there are problems in recruiting and retaining women. They may be discouraged from joining the Army due to the prospect of long, unsociable hours and time away from home, especially if they are the primary carer of children. They may perceive a role in the army to be too physically demanding. Men may have discouraged women who have considered a career in the military.

The women who join the Army may have two sides to their reasons for leaving. On the one side, outside factors could have influenced them to leave the Army, for example, to have children. This would effect women rather than men, because women take time off from their careers, in varying amounts depending on their marital status and the number and age of children they have, where as for men, having children has no impact on their labour activity (Abbott et al, 2005). On the other side, issues within the Army could have pushed the women away, for example sexual harassment and bullying (that frequently occurs according to Alexandrou (2001) and Rutherford et al

(2006)). According to Cockburn “*women often feel uncomfortable in the masculine environment*” (Cockburn, 1991), partly due to sexual harassment, that is “*one way in which men subordinate and control women in the workplace. It is one of the tactics used by men in restricting and resisting moves towards sexual equality in organisations*” (Payne, 2000:79). This suggests that women would be discouraged from working in units where close quarter combat is their primary role, because these units would comprise of a majority of males who are likely to harass any women in the unit. Perhaps if the Army eradicates sexual harassment from frontline units, women would show more interest in working in them.

Women who are in the Army

There are suggestions that very few of the women who are in the Army want to go into units where close quarter combat is the primary role. Kate Adie, who has spent many months, throughout the 1990's, in combat zones as a reporter, observed that “*even from the women who had made the army their career there seemed to be no loud demands to join their colleagues ‘with fixed bayonets’*” (Adie, 2003:230). This could be due to a mixture of reasons, some of which are discussed in detail in chapter three. These reasons may be broken down into two categories, sociological and physical. Sociological reasons are those that society has taught women. In the sociological category, women could be discouraged from joining close quarter battle units by suggestions that they lack aggression (Lindsey, 2005), that women would damage the ‘necessary’ military culture (Van Creveld, 2001) and that it is socially unacceptable to have women in these units (Alexandrou, 2001). Because these reasons might be learnt (Payne, 2000), a change in societies attitudes could eradicate them. In the physical category arguments that women have smaller and weaker bones, are more prone to injury, are more prone to cold injuries and are less fit or weaker than men could deter them.

In order to join the Army women have already overcome some of the sociological deterrents, for example views that it may be socially unacceptable for women to go to war. Other sociological factors, such as male colleagues rejecting females in their units, could discourage these women from working in frontline units, where there is likely to be a much higher ratio of males to females, than there are in their current units. Women are probably also discouraged from serving in frontline roles due to

physical reasons, as the Ministry of Defence (MOD) estimate that only 1 percent of the 8.2 percent of Army personnel that are female are physically capable of sustaining roles in the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps (MOD, 2002a).

Some women in the British Army serve on the frontline; perhaps some of those women would be interested in serving in close quarter combat units. However, the number is minimal; of the women that make up 6.7 percent of trained personnel, only 1 percent of them are in combat (frontline) roles, with 21.9 percent in combat support roles and 77.1 percent in combat service support in 2004 (MOD, 2004). Not all of the female recruits who pass the entry tests for frontline roles choose to go into them; some choose to go into more technical, less demanding roles (MOD, 2002a). This may be because, despite their ability to pass the tests, they do not want the physical hardship that comes with the roles (Van Creveld, 2001), or it could indicate that they are discouraged more by sociological reasons.

Where women have been allowed into the frontline, in close quarter combat roles, for example in Canada (MOD, 2002), they have drifted back into more traditional roles (Van Creveld, 2001). The suggestion that they were in the roles, but have 'drifted back', insinuates that women are interested in being in combat roles, but that something is deterring them from those roles. Is it that women find the roles too physically demanding? Or are men and the strong male culture of frontline units deterring women? Van Creveld suggests that women go back to traditional roles "*because many non-traditional jobs involve difficult living conditions, shift work, the capability to respond to an emergency on a twenty-four hour basis, and long separations from home . . . Others are dirty, unpleasant and even dangerous*" (Van Creveld, 2001:210). However, this description of non-traditional jobs could apply, more or less, to most roles in the British Army, yet there are still a number of women in various roles in the Army, therefore his suggestion could be discounted.

The social belief of 'unsuitability'

Another reason for women not wanting to be on the frontline is that they realise they are unsuitable for the work (Creveld, 2001), this is a rather unconvincing argument, as the Army is unsure as to whether women should work in frontline units, therefore how can any woman be so sure that she is unsuitable for them? The MOD estimates that one

percent of women in the British Army are physically capable of having close quarter combat roles (MOD, 2002a), unless any of these women attempt to work in those roles it seems doubtful that they could truly realise that they are unsuitable for the work. So what is it that makes women believe they are unsuitable? Have they picked up this belief from society? Is it a belief that they are physically unsuitable, or a belief that it would be morally and culturally wrong? Perhaps the arguments about whether women should serve in close quarter combat units, in the third chapter, can provide some answers.

A female fighter pilot, after the second world war, suggested that women do not want to be in frontline units, she stated that *“to want to be in the military is not quite natural for a women”* (Van Creveld, 2001:145). This could be a more useful explanation if we knew what makes it ‘unnatural’ for a woman to want to join the military; is it biology or society? In addition to that, is it natural for men to want to be in the military? Could there be natural differences between men and women that make men more inclined to join the military than women, or are the differences taught to men and women by society? Sociologists argue that ‘biology is an inadequate explanation’ (Payne, 2000) and Best argues, *“there is nothing inevitable about male or female behaviour. Gender roles were culturally defined and socially produced rather than biological in origin”* (Best, 2005:197). This indicates that the attitude of women may change if society’s attitudes change, and in the future there may be more women wanting to serve in frontline units.

However, Best’s theory could be wrong, as there are suggestions that physical and attitudinal differences between men and women exist through biology. Moir and Jessel argue that key differences between men and women begin in the foetus, these early developments *“shape the body and brain in a particular way, which in turn determines thought processes and emotions . . .in effect the wiring of the brain is different in women and men . . . men are more aggressive and competitive”* (Marsh et al, 2000:334). If the theory is correct, then maybe women will never be as inclined as men to serve on the frontline.

On the other hand, evidence of women serving on the frontline today (Forty and Forty, 1997; MOD, 2002a and 2004), and at various times throughout history (Forty

and Forty, 1997; Van Creveld, 2001) suggests that some women do want to serve there. More women may want to serve on the frontline if they have the opportunity to, because “*people may adjust and change their aspirations as new opportunities present themselves and others are closed off*” (Wharton, 2005:171). If more units allow women in, then maybe more women will take the opportunity available to them and decide they want to serve in units where the primary role is to close with and kill the enemy. Additionally, the current prohibitions to women may give some of them the false impression that they would not have the ability to do the job, thus making them not want to do it, as Giddens states “*men and women are socialised into different roles*” (Giddens, 2006).

Conclusion

Despite a lack of evidence of women wanting to serve on the frontline, previous cases of women serving there prove that some women do want to; however, these cases are so rare that they could almost be discounted. On the other hand, these women had to go to extreme lengths to serve in their desired roles and there may have been numerous women who would have liked to serve on the frontline, but were incapable or unwilling to go to such lengths. Additionally, women have been denied the opportunity to serve on the frontline for so many centuries that many women may never have considered a career there, and if they have, then society may have given them the misguided belief that they were unsuitable for such roles. Therefore, it still seems appropriate to continue on the discussion, to discover why some women want to serve on the frontline.

CHAPTER TWO: WHY DO SOME WOMEN WANT TO SERVE ON THE FRONTLINE AND PARTICIPATE IN CLOSE QUARTER BATTLE?

The first chapter revealed that some women want to serve on the frontline. This chapter investigates what it is that drives these women to deviate away from imposed social norms and towards a role that men currently dominate. Oakley argues “*it [is] misleading to think in terms of two distinct sexes and more useful to think in terms of the female and the male being placed at the ends of a continuum with overlap*” (Oakley, 1972). Many of the reasons for women wanting to serve on the frontline may overlap with the reasons for men wanting to serve on the frontline, but some may be

very different. Although this chapter will cover a wide range of reasons for women wanting to be on the frontline, it focuses on the reasons that might be placed with the female end of the continuum. It may be important to know and understand why some women want to serve on the frontline, because their reasons could affect their ability to carry out the role, perhaps leading closer to an answer as to whether women should serve on the frontline.

Military influence

One reason, which is clearly social, may be that they were raised in a military environment (Forty and Forty, 1997). If the parent/s were in the military throughout the female's life, then she might know no other lifestyle than the one she learnt in the military and may want to continue that lifestyle by serving on the frontline. A woman who has been raised in a military atmosphere may be more comfortable with the military culture than women who have been brought up in civilian lifestyles. A woman with a military background could believe that a military career is what she would be good at because it is something that she knows a lot about. This is probably a suitable reason to want to serve on the frontline, because these women are likely to have background knowledge of what the role is about and are therefore more likely to be prepared for the role. Women who are raised in a military environment are likely to be more comfortable with the military culture and be able to deal with the masculine environment more successfully than other women can.

Similarly, family members or friends could influence some women to want to be on the frontline. If a father or brother, or, as of recent years, a mother or sister serve on the frontline, then the life that these family members lead, the types of jobs that they do and the stories they bring home from their roles may appeal to some women. Having a family member in the frontline gives a woman the chance to make an informed decision about whether she wants that kind of role, suggesting that it is an appropriate reason for her to serve on the frontline. However, a decision produced from the lifestyle and stories of family members or friends may be bias. The family member or friend may emphasise certain parts of their job, and withhold information about other parts, perhaps in order to impress or protect the woman. The experience of a male family member or friend may be very different from the experience that a female would have. The masculine environment of the frontline may make it more difficult for

a woman to work there, especially if she is subject to sexual harassment (which, according to Rutherford et al (2006), is likely).

Following loved ones

Previous examples of women fighting in close quarter combat show that they have done it in order to follow loved ones; “*the majority of women who went into battle first put on uniform in order to follow loved ones into the Army*” (Forty and Forty, 1997:56)(also see Adie, 2003). It seems unlikely that this would be a popular reason in modern times for women wanting to serve on the frontline, because modern technology, such as phones and the internet, allows women to keep in contact with their loved ones whilst they are at war. The desire to follow a man into battle could give a woman the determination to complete the training for a frontline role, but would she be able to do her job effectively? Would the desire to stand by a loved one be enough to make a woman fight and kill the enemy? Even if a woman who is following a loved one could carry out her role effectively, it could be dangerous for the couple to work together on the frontline. If one of the couple became a casualty on the frontline, the other may rush to their attention, which could put both of their lives at risk, as well as the lives of their colleagues who are serving around them.

A sense of achievement

For women who leave school with few qualifications, like men, the Army may be one of few careers open to them that can fulfil their human needs. According to Maslow, needs, that are arranged in a hierarchy of importance, motivate humans (Mullins, 2006). There are five main needs, with physiological needs at the lowest level, then safety needs, love needs, esteem needs and, at the highest level, self actualisation needs (Mullins, 2006). A job in the Army includes food and accommodation, so physiological needs become fulfilled. All recruits receive training in how to defend themselves, which means that their safety needs are fulfilled. Belonging to the organisation and working and living in a team could fulfil love needs.

Women who have been able to meet the first three needs without joining the Army, may want to serve on the frontline in order ‘*to achieve something in life*’ (Van Creveld, 2001:140), something that they consider to be worthwhile. Serving on the frontline could lead to the fulfilment of esteem needs by giving women a sense of achievement and a mark of respect, which, as Alexandrou (2001) draws attention to, is

something women have been denied until recently. The woman achieving what she perceives to be her full potential in her career in the Army may reach self-actualisation. However, some women may be denied the opportunity to self-actualise through the prevention from serving in frontline roles, as they may not consider themselves to have reached their full potential without serving in such roles.

Equality

As women have been denied the opportunity to serve on the frontline until recently and are still prevented from serving in certain units, some women may want to serve there in order to assert their right to equality (Forty and Forty, 1997), to prove that women can and should participate in all units and roles. However, previous examples of women serving on the frontline reveal that “*joining up as an act of female rebellion seems much less common*” (Adie, 2003:8) than other reasons. Whether this is a worthy reason to join the frontline may depend on how much passion the individual woman has about proving her equality. To put one’s life at great risk and potentially kill others for the cause of equality may be too extreme for all but a very small minority.

Rather than try to prove that women should be treated equally to men, some women may want to serve on the frontline in order to prove they *are* like men. They may believe that they are very masculine, possessing traits such as aggressiveness and competitiveness (cited as masculine traits by Payne, 2000; Marsh et al, 2000; Lindsey, 2005; Low, 2001; Wharton, 2005) and therefore want to have a masculine role in order to assert their masculinity. Van Creveld (2001) suggests that these women may have ‘problems of sexual identity’. It seems unreasonable that a woman who wants to prove that she is like a man is labelled as having a ‘problem’, especially as masculinity may be socially imposed upon men (Payne, 2000). Women who want to serve on the frontline because they have masculine traits might be more successful in such roles, as they may be physically fitter than other women and more comfortable working in the masculine culture of the frontline; as the ‘similarity-attraction’ hypothesis states; “*people should prefer to interact with others like themselves*” (Wharton, 2005:179).

Human capital theory suggests that women who are most like men in their social capacity will be the women who want to work in the military and serve on the frontline (Wharton, 2005). According to the theory, women and men choose jobs that

are most beneficial to themselves. Women tend to choose jobs where they are able to take time out for having and rearing children. “*This perspective implies that women who neither marry nor bear children would be less likely to work in predominantly female jobs*” (Wharton, 2005:172). The marital status of Army recruits supports this theory, as nearly all female recruits are single, (ninety-eight percent compared to ninety-three percent of male recruits (MOD, 2002a)). However, research has shown that, in general, women who do not marry or have children are no more likely to be in predominantly male jobs than other women are (Wharton, 2005).

Women who are labelled as ‘tomboys’, due to their interest in what society considers to be masculine pastimes, may want to serve on the frontline because they believe that they would enjoy a more masculine career. In the past these types of women have joined the Army ‘for the hell of it’ and have enjoyed themselves (Forty and Forty, 1997). A career on the frontline may appeal to these women for similar reasons that it may appeal to a man - as an exciting, adventurous, physical career. At least one example suggests that this is not enough to give women the enthusiasm to fight and kill; 2000 Russian women joined a frontline battalion as an ‘exciting adventure’, enthusiasm dwindled to 250, they carried out an attack, but some women fainted and were hysterical, others ran or crawled back to the rear (Adie, 2003). On the other hand, there are examples of men reacting to attacks in a similar manner (Leese, 2002), suggesting that a woman’s ability to work on the frontline may be no less than a man’s ability to. Additionally, this is an example from the beginning of the twentieth century, in a wartime situation, in the Russian Army. Women joining the frontline of the modern British Army are likely to be more knowledgeable about what their role and tasks will be through learning about the role when applying for the job, or through the internet, television and other media, giving them the chance to be more prepared for what they will have to deal with.

Patriotic beliefs

Some of the women in the Russian battalion were inspired to join through patriotic beliefs (Adie,2003) and female fighter pilots in the second world war wanted to ‘do something for their country’ (Van Creveld, 2001:140). Women today may also want to serve on the frontline, for their country, through patriotic beliefs. From a biological view, a woman may want to defend her territory, because “*a wild animal, be it male or*

female, will usually defend its lair against all comers. This is especially true of a mother defending her young. No matter how weak she may appear, she will invariably protect her offspring . . . The same is applicable to humans” (Forty and Forty, 1997). However, if the proverb ‘out of sight, out of mind’ is to be believed women may not be as passionate about being patriotic as they were in the Second World War when fighting was happening within the UK, as opposed to overseas in country’s such as Iraq and Afghanistan. British women may not be as patriotic as they were in the Second World War, because Britain has since joined the European Union, making citizens of Britain European as well as British.

Conclusion

Some of these reasons, for women wanting to serve on the frontline and in close quarter combat units, such as to follow a loved one, indicate that it could be dangerous for women to serve in such roles. Most of the reasons, particularly the need to self-actualise, could be used to assert that women should be allowed to serve in roles where their primary task is to close with and kill the enemy. Chapter three discusses, in depth, whether women should serve in frontline units.

CHAPTER THREE: SHOULD WOMEN SERVE ON THE FRONTLINE AND PARTICIPATE IN CLOSE QUARTER COMBAT?

Since 1998 women have been permitted to serve on the frontline of the British Army in the Royal Engineers, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Artillery. Women are prevented from having any role where the primary duty is to ‘close with and kill the enemy’, which excludes women from the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps (MOD, 2004). This chapter explores the reasons for the exclusion of women from these units and aims to determine whether it is justified. The chapter seeks to identify whether women are different from men, and if they are, whether the differences make women incapable of working on the frontline.

The ‘differences’ between men and women

The MOD (2002a) states, “*There is no single personality characteristic that can be attributed exclusively to gender, so theoretically it should be possible for women to*

perform infantry and Royal Armoured Corps tasks. But attitudinal barriers will be significant, and are unquantified". If the attitudes of women are different from those of men and these differences affect their ability to work on the frontline, then it seems important to identify whether the differences are learned or instinctive; manmade or biological. If the differences are learnt, then women could change, so that they are more effective in roles on the frontline. If the differences are biological, then women may have to accept that they are unsuitable for working on the frontline. One view is that "*all gender behaviour is an act, a performance*" (Payne,2000:60), indicating that if women were put into a frontline role where they need to behave in a certain, perhaps masculine, manner, then they would be able to put on the act of masculinity. Another theory suggests "*many of the differences between women and men are the product of social and cultural processes*" (Marsh et al, 2000:338). In order to discover whether women are able to lose and acquire the necessary traits to serve on the frontline it would be important to determine which differences are natural and which differences are 'the product of social and cultural processes',

Moir and Jessel believe that males and females are different from the start, when varying amounts of different hormones are released into the foetus. These differences are exaggerated and confirmed with the release of more hormones during puberty that have 'profound effects on personality and capabilities'. In effect women's and men's brains are wired differently, with women being better at language and social skills and men being able to make quicker decisions and being more aggressive and competitive (Moir and Jessel, 1991). If this theory is correct, it would suggest that men are better suited to roles where they need to 'close with and kill the enemy', but women may be better at peacekeeping roles, where they would have to interact with people. One problem with this theory is that it neglects to account for the diversity between men and between women (Marsh et al, 2000). Not all men are aggressive and competitive and not all women are better than men are at language and social skills. Wharton recognizes this and states that "*there are virtually no traits or behaviours that reliably distinguish all men from all women. Hence, whenever sex differences are found, they represent average differences between the sexes, not categorical distinctions*" (Wharton, 2005:25). This Evokes the idea that some women may display more masculine traits and behaviours than some men, therefore some women may be

more suited to working on the frontline than some men are, yet all able-bodied men have the opportunity to work in all units, but no woman has that opportunity.

Parsons (1966) also argues that there are natural differences between men and women, that mean they are better suited to different things, "*women have an instinct to nurture . . . Male biology leads men to be more aggressive and competitive*" (Marsh et al, 2000:334). If it is accepted that men and women have different characteristics and attitudes due to nature, and therefore these differences cannot change, does this mean that women are any less able to carry out a role on the frontline?

Perhaps the most debated subject, in respect to differences, seems to be about a woman's ability to be aggressive and competitive. Aggression and competitiveness may be the most sought after characteristics to have in a role where 'closing with and killing the enemy face-to-face' is a primary duty. Van Creveld highlights the importance of having these characteristics by stating, "*In no field did women's lack of aggression and competitiveness confront them with greater obstacles than in war. The reason being that in war, as distinct from many other human activities, one either fights or dies*" (Van Creveld 2001:230). As has already been recognised, there is variation between women and between men (Abbott et al, 2005); therefore some women may have the aggression and competitiveness that, arguably, are required on the frontline. Van Creveld later admits, "*Most women are as susceptible to the excitement of war as men. Moreover, some female leaders are as aggressive, as competitive, and as bent on exercising dominance as any males*" (Van Creveld, 2001:236), suggesting that women, in respect of aggression and competitiveness, are equally as suited to working on the frontline as men are.

If some men and women are aggressive and competitive, some are not, and if these characteristics are such an integral part of a frontline role, they ought to be taught in the training for the role and consequently would be unnecessarily prerequisites for the job. In studies carried out for the MOD there was evidence that women were less aggressive than men, but the conclusion was that, given enough training "*the gap between male and female aggression could be closed*" (MOD, 2002a). Again, all women have been grouped together, neglecting the prospect that some women are likely to be more aggressive than some men. Overall, it seems that lack of aggression

cannot be used as a barrier to preventing women from working in frontline units, because, with enough provocation, most women are likely to be as aggressive as most men.

On overcoming the argument about whether women are aggressive enough to serve on the frontline, women may be able to bring other valuable supposed characteristics and attitudes to the frontline that men are allegedly less likely to bring. Women's 'natural' capacity as nurturers and conciliators works in favour of mitigating or reducing conflict (Alexandrou, 2001:60), which could, in turn, reduce the number of deaths that would occur during conflicts. An observation that women are much less likely to get drunk and fight each other and are more obedient in training (Adie, 2003) suggests that women would be better prepared for a frontline role than men are, as they are less likely to be hung-over and more likely to have acknowledged what they were taught during training. The influence of women may also help to reduce conflict between the men serving in frontline units. The MOD has become aware that the presence of women in other units of the Army "*is felt to contribute to a more mature and civilised environment*" (MOD, 2002a). This leads to a conclusion that allowing women into the infantry and Royal Armoured Corps could be of benefit, throwing doubt on the MOD's statement that "*to admit women. . . involves a risk with no gains in terms of combat effectiveness to offset it*" (MOD, 2002).

Alexandrou (2001) maintains that differences between men and women matter, despite arguments that characteristics cannot be assigned to one gender or the other, (Oakley, 1972; Marsh et al, 2000, Wharton, 2005) and that there are many more similarities than differences between men and women (Forty and Forty, 1997; Wharton, 2005). The type of torture that women could receive if captured supports Alexandrou's statement. However, it seems unlikely that the prospect of torture would prevent a women from carrying out her role any less effectively than men, as men also risk torture, albeit it of a different nature. Female partisans in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and other resistance fighters across Europe demonstrated this during the Second World War, when they suffered the most dreadful tortures and indignities when captured "*yet tens of thousands of them contributed in some way or other to the fight against their oppressors*" (Forty and Forty, 1997). Women who take on a role in the frontline may choose to accept the risk of torture, in the same way that a woman who

walks down a dark, quiet street at night may accept that she is taking a risk. The question is whether giving women the potential to be in that situation is socially and morally acceptable. There would be no official prevention from women walking alone after dark in order to avoid such dreadful crimes happening, so why should there be a prevention from serving on the frontline for that reason?

One argument for preventing women working in frontline roles, is that military and civilian morale will go down if female soldiers are sexually assaulted by the enemy (Alexandrou, 2001), but surely morale also goes down if a male soldier is tortured by the enemy. More to the point, the defence committee (2000) concluded that if women are being excluded from combat roles due to 'moral distaste', rather than physical ability, then it is time this exclusion is abandoned (Alexandrou, 2001). Another argument is that the emotional effects of torture may be far worse and longer lasting for a female, than the more physical effects that men may suffer. The aversion of a women going through such torture is shown in The Russian women's death battalion where the thought of a women being raped and tortured was so horrifying that "*every women carried cyanide potassium, to take if she was made prisoner and feared rape or torture*" (Adie, 2003:56). However, there is also a threat of rape to men if the enemy captures them, and the sheer experience of capture and torture by the enemy would probably have a severe psychological effect on the victim, irrespective of their gender and the nature of the torturing.

The social and moral aspects

The prospect of torture is one reason that makes it socially unacceptable for women to serve in roles where the primary duty is to close with and kill the enemy. Another reason might be that the women could be leaving children in order to go to war and the death of female soldiers could result in children losing their mother. However, it seems likely that a mother would only be able to join the Army if there was already a suitable carer for her children. Therefore, in the event that she is unable to return to her children, there would be someone who could take care of them, in the same way that there would be if a father went to war.

Society may portray that it is unacceptable for women to serve on the frontline, because the women become viewed as sex objects. This may be an attitude that has

continued from the First World War, when “*From the forces point of view, the main problem with women was not the quality of the service they gave. . . but the need to prevent the public from perceiving the women’s corps as dens of sexual licence*” (Van Creveld, 2001:125). Women and men seem to work together in other jobs without this problem. However, the working conditions that personnel encounter on the frontline are different from any other job (MOD, 2002), which may effect the nature of relationships with colleagues and the way the public perceives those relationships. On the frontline, unlike most other jobs, personnel may have to spend months away from their families, living with and depending on colleagues for their survival. In civilian jobs, relationships between colleagues are unlikely to have a vast affect on the workers abilities to do their jobs. In the frontline difficulties may be created by the possibility of sexual relationships (Alexandrou, 2001), because “*survival depends upon the cohesion of the team*” (MOD, 2002) (cohesion is discussed in more detail on page twenty-two). On the other hand, as women have already integrated into many of the Army’s units, surely adding them to the remaining frontline units would cause few further problems, in this respect.

Throughout history, as additional possibilities of allowing women to serve in more roles in the Army have arisen, society has put up protests. For example, from 1949 until 1992 women in the Army could only serve in the Women’s Royal Army Corps (WRAC). 1980 was the first time arming the WRAC, for their own defence, became a possibility and the media put up great protest (Forty and Forty, 1997), suggesting that society was not ready for such a change in women’s roles. The attitudes of society could be a significant barrier that needs to be overcome if women are to be permitted to serve in units where the primary duty is to close with and kill the enemy, because “*the social roles of men and women are not nearly as flexible as some people believe or want others to believe*” (Van Creveld, 2001:164).

On a more personal level, perhaps women should not serve on the frontline because men may subject them to sexual harassment that is likely to affect the morale and emotional wellbeing of the individual, as well as damaging group morale and cohesion. The issue of sexual harassment has arisen and been dealt with in other units in the Army (Alexandrou, 2001), but it could have a more detrimental affect in units where personnel have to close with and kill the enemy. On the other hand, that women

should have to forego an opportunity to serve on the frontline due to unwanted attention from men seems unreasonable. Especially as the attention, according to Cockburn, “*is one way in which men subordinate and control women in the workplace. It is one of the tactics used by men in restricting and resisting moves towards sexual equality in organisations*” (Cockburn, 1991). Women should not have to submit themselves to men’s attempts to dominate them. Perhaps before women can be permitted to serve on the frontline, in order for effective group cohesion to continue to exist, men will need to be re-educated on the acceptable treatment of females and strict rules and discipline regarding sexual harassment will need enforcing. Imposing a discipline procedure and educating men may be effective because, men in the Armed forces seem to want to understand what behaviour constitutes sexual harassment, in order to avoid punishment (Rutherford et al, 2006).

Group/unit cohesion

One of the main barriers to women serving in units where the primary role is to close with and kill the enemy is the issue of unit cohesion. The Mod (2002a) maintains that unit cohesion is essential in order for the frontline roles to remain effective. According to Alexandrou “*to open up additional roles to female recruits seems likely to reduce unit cohesion*” (Alexandrou, 2001:36). However, the MOD (2002a) admits that it does not know what affect the introduction of females would have on cohesion; therefore, this should not be considered as a solid argument to preventing women from working in the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps. The suggestion that “*men have an emotional incentive to differentiate themselves from women*” (Wharton, 2005:180) (also see Abbott et al, 2005) implies that the introduction of women would affect unit cohesion. If men think they have to be different from women, this could cause conflict between the two genders and could result in men preoccupying themselves with proving that differences exist between the genders, with less attention being given to the task in hand, ultimately leading to casualties and/or loss of life.

One factor that could affect unit cohesion is the physical ability of unit members. Women are, arguably, less physically able and slower than men, so they would slow the team down, however, Van Creveld (2001) suggests that they make up for this, to some extent, by inducing teamwork. An overlap in the genders (Oakley, 1972) suggests that some men, possibly those nearer the female end of the continuum,

would have a detrimental effect on unit cohesion and some women, possibly those who are nearer the male end of the continuum, would integrate into the units as well as most men do. Therefore, to prevent all women from serving in frontline units on the basis that they will damage unit cohesion seems unfair.

The way that a person affects unit cohesion ought to be judged on an individual basis, perhaps by monitoring individuals during basic training. Another way of overcoming the problem could be to separate the sexes. In units where the primary role is to close with and kill the enemy, soldiers mainly work in groups of four (MOD, 2002a); therefore, females could be grouped together in fours, since the MOD has concluded that “*it may be easier to achieve and maintain cohesion in a single sex team*” (MOD, 2002). On the other hand, previous examples demonstrate that mixed units can work effectively (Forty and Forty, 1997; Van Creveld, 2001), suggesting that unit cohesion is only a problem where it is made an issue. Overall, the issue of unit cohesion could apparently be a valid barrier to allowing women to serve in the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps. However, there are possible solutions to potential problems that should be explored before making the final decision that women should be denied the opportunity to serve in all frontline units.

Military culture and the resistance to change

Another barrier to allowing women on the frontline is the worry that it would be damaging to military culture, although, the importance of the (male) military culture towards the effectiveness of the role is debatable. Does the military culture of the frontline need to revolve around masculine values? This argument may lead back to the discussion of unit cohesion, as speculations are based on ideas that male bonding and male friendships are necessary for military efficiency (Alexandrou, 2001).

General Sir Charles Guthrie puts forward the idea that introducing women into frontline units produces “*a real danger of damaging something that really works very well*” (16/02/01), but has the General considered the advantages of having a more diverse Army? As described earlier in the chapter, there may be benefits to women serving on the frontline; allowing women into more units in the Army could make something that ‘really works very well’ work even better. The General seems to be speaking as the voice of an organisation that is resistant to change. Van Creveld

supports this by stating, *“Like all organisations, armed forces tend to be conservative and resistant to change”* (Van Creveld, 2001:209). Therefore, it is possible that there is no real barrier to women serving in all units in the Army, other than resistance from the organisation, which is resulting in the formation of excuses, in order to prevent women from serving in all units.

Equality

The Army would have to overcome any resistance to change if the need for equality is asserted. The charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (December 2002) states *“Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and play”* (Best, 2005:206). The Army is not exempt from this policy; however, according to the European Court of Justice *“member states can derogate from the principle of equal treatment in the interests of combat effectiveness, but such derogation must be necessary and appropriate”* (MOD,2002a). Therefore, if at the end of this report, the exclusion of women from some roles in the Army is considered unnecessary and inappropriate, the Army may need to change its policy to ensure that it abides by the charter of fundamental rights and that there is equality between men and women.

Allowing only men to serve in some units can result in men having unfair advantages over women, for example, Adie proposes that *“with some jobs off-limits, there’s no doubt that promotion prospects for women are poorer”* (Adie, 2003), giving men an unfair opportunity to earn higher wages. On the other hand, if allowing women into additional roles could cause units to be less effective, perhaps leading to loss of life, and/or, posing a risk to national security (Alexandrou, 2001), then safety and a resilient military may need to take precedence over equality. Overall, it seems that women should not serve on the frontline purely for the sake of equality, because the risks could outweigh the benefits. However, the MOD should continue to review the reasons for preventing women from serving in frontline units to ensure that the risks of allowing women in these units continue to outweigh the need for equality.

The decline of male applicants

There is a suggestion that equal opportunities should not occur, because men would be less likely to join frontline units if women were able to join them too (Alexandrou,

2001). The objection to the prospect of less men joining could stem from some of the issues already discussed; the addition of females and reduction of males could make effective unit cohesion difficult to achieve, it is likely to change the (masculine) military culture, it could damage ‘something that really works very well’ and it may be something that the MOD does not want to happen because the Army is resistant to change.

Men may be less likely to join the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps if women join them because “*In the military, as in any other institution, the influx of large numbers of women is both symptom and cause of declining social prestige*” (Van Creveld, 2001:220) (also see Payne, 2000). Although society’s attitudes may need to change in this respect, so that jobs with larger numbers of women no longer decline in social prestige, the frontline is probably not the right place to try to make the change, because fewer applicants to frontline roles could result in a weaker Army. However, if women were permitted to join the Infantry and Royal armoured corps, if there are enough female applicants to make up for the reduction in male applicants, surely men being less likely to apply would not matter.

There is already an indication that the availability of young males is declining (Alexandrou, 2001) and that men are no longer interested in an Army career (Van Creveld 2001, Adie 2003). In 2002 the Army had a shortfall of 6070 personnel, with significant shortages in the infantry (MOD, 2002b). Therefore, women should serve on the frontline in order to replace the lack of men. One problem with allowing women into additional roles for this reason is that if the availability of men increases, it could result in the redundancy of females. Furthermore, going back to the previous argument, the MOD may consider that allowing women to serve on the frontline is unacceptable if it results in even fewer men joining.

Technological advances

Lastly, there is a claim that women should serve in all units, because modern technology means that personnel do not have to be as fit or as strong as they used to be (Alexandrou, 2001, 2002). Personnel in these roles are less likely to come face-to-face with the enemy than they used to. This line of discussion indicates that women are prevented from joining the infantry and Royal Armoured Corps because they are

thought to be physically inept for the roles, but this chapter has shown that there are many more reasons given to prevent women joining the units, other than their physical ability, therefore changes in technology may be irrelevant.

Conclusion

Presently, there is a strong argument for the exclusion of women from the Infantry and Royal Armoured corps, because further investigation is required, particularly into unit cohesion, before it is safe to give women the opportunity to serve in the units. On the other hand, the differences between men and women, previously specified as reasons to keep women out of frontline units, seem to be either so small that they are insignificant, are a help rather than a hindrance, or training could remove them. One significant factor, which has been discussed, is the prospect that no specific characteristic or attitude can be assigned to one gender or the other (Oakley, 1972; Marsh et al, 2000, Wharton, 2005), meaning that some women may be better suited and more effective at working on the frontline than some men are.

There are some social and moral problems that may need dealing with in the event of women serving in all frontline units, but these problems should not prevent changes occurring. The main barrier to women seems to be the attitude of men, as they are responsible for creating a masculine culture (Oakley, 1972) that women may be uncomfortable working in (Rutherford et al, 2006). They could make unit cohesion difficult (Alexandrou 2001, Wharton 2005, Abbott et al 2005) and they may decide not to work on the frontline if women are there (Van Creveld, 2001). Women having the opportunity to serve in the same roles as men is important, in order to ensure that the genders are equal, however, equality ought not to take priority over combat effectiveness (as held by the European Court of Justice (MOD,2002a)) and the safety of lives.

Overall, there seem to be no permanent barriers, to women serving in the Infantry and Royal Armoured Corps. Many of the current reasons for excluding women seem to be socially imposed and could therefore be changed, so it is possible that some women will serve in the units in the near future and are likely to be as effective in the roles as their male counterparts are.

CONCLUSION

Chapter one discussed whether women wanted to have the opportunity to serve on the frontline. There is evidence to suggest that women do not want to serve there. In the case of women who are already serving in the Army, this may be due to the behaviour of male colleagues, who are likely to subject females to sexual harassment (Alexandrou 2001, 2002; Rutherford 2006). Therefore, more women may want to serve on the frontline if sexual harassment is eradicated. There may only seem to be a few women who want to serve on the frontline because, historically women have been prevented from serving there and consequently may have overlooked the possibility of having such roles. They may also have developed a belief that they are incapable of performing such roles. Previous examples of women disguising themselves in order to serve on the frontline (Forty and Forty 1997, Van Creveld 2001) prove that some women are desperate to work there.

Chapter two describes the reasons for some women wanting to work in frontline roles. Serving for some of the reasons stated, such as to follow a loved one into battle, may be dangerous, but other reasons implied that women would have the appropriate motivation to work effectively in such roles and the need to self-actualise suggests that women should work in them.

Chapter three discussed whether women should and could serve on the frontline. Most of the reasons discussed, many of which are used in other literature to imply that women should be denied the opportunity serve on the frontline, did not seem to provide valid reasons for sustaining the prohibition. However, further research may be required into unit cohesion before it is safe to allow women to serve in all roles.

In terms of equality, the Army seems to be on the verge of breaking European laws, as the prohibition of women from the two frontline units appears to almost be 'unnecessary' and 'inappropriate'. If any evidence becomes available to prove that the introduction of females to the units is unlikely to negatively alter unit cohesion, then the Army may have to cease to prevent women from joining these units in order to adhere to European laws.

Many of the reasons for women not wanting to serve in the frontline seemed to be social, rather than biological, as were most of the reasons for prohibiting women from frontline units. With evidence that some women may have appropriate, compelling reasons for wanting to serve on the frontline a change in society's attitudes could be required in order for the, perhaps necessary, employment of women on the frontline to occur safely.

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