

Gender Segregated/Integrated Training

Discussion

The purpose of recruit training is simple - to make Marines. The young men and women who arrive at the recruit depots are generally away from home for the first time. They have brought with them diverse perceptions of right and wrong and varied appreciations of permissible behavior. Their experiences with authority figures may have been good or bad, proper or improper or even abusive. The only thing they have in common is their desire to be a Marine. By capitalizing on that desire, recruit training transforms these individuals into Marines imbued with a common set of values and standards.

Although recruit training teaches basic military skills such as physical fitness, close order drill and marksmanship, it does not train the recruit to fight and survive in combat - that comes later at Marine Combat Training (MCT). Instead, recruit training is more truly a socialization process. Civilians are transformed into basic Marines. It is a physically and mentally challenging ordeal, and one requiring constant supervision. Drill instructors control and manage the transformation of their recruits through constant interaction. They teach core values, institutional rights and wrongs, and what constitutes proper authority. This teacher-student/father-son/mother-daughter relationship is the heart and soul of the recruit training experience.

In gender segregated recruit training, the drill instructor provides impressionable young men and women strong, positive role models. For women it also removes the stereotype that only men can be authority figures. They see strong female role models not only in control of them and their group, but also positively interacting with other male drill instructors. Very early in their training cycle, women recruits come to realize that they are expected to be strong, assertive leaders. Gender segregated training provides an environment free from latent or overt sexual pressures, thereby enabling recruits the opportunity to focus on, and absorb, Marine standards of behavior.

Additionally, gender segregated training takes into consideration the difference in physical strength and endurance between male and female recruits. The recruit training physical conditioning program has two primary objectives –to achieve and maintain a peak level of physical fitness and to build confidence. Due to strength and endurance differences, initial physical fitness standards are different for male and

female recruits. Fully integrated recruit training with a common standard would result in either lowering the male standards or increasing the female failure/attrition rates – neither of which is acceptable.

The case for gender integrated training is often built on the “train as we fight” thesis which argues that men and women should train in gender integrated units because that is the way they will fight. This argument generally misses the point that the Marine Corps, unlike the other services, has a block of training entitled MCT, between recruit training (socialization) and military occupation skill training. It is at MCT that newly forged Marines are actually taught combat skill, and this training is conducted in partially integrated units at MCT-East, Camp Lejeune. Women Marines undergo MCT only at Camp Lejeune because the smaller number of female accessions only justifies a single site. Another important distinction is that MCT occurs after the intense transformation process that produces Marines with strong and clear standards of behavior, and the values, mental and physical toughens, self-reliance, and confidence essential to earn the title “Marine”

After Transformation, Marines are then, and only then, placed in a combat training environment. And most appropriately, it is in this expeditionary training environment that they will be organized into gender integrated units for the first time. At MCT, both male and female Marines will be taught and led by male and female Marine Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers. Both male and female Marines are exposed to a gender integrated chain of command and the professional conduct between male and female leaders. In tough field conditions they see both male and female leaders in action. The objective is for male and female Marines to see themselves as members of the same team, committed to performing the same tough duties, mentally and physically, in the same demanding environment. From that experience they develop an appreciation of each other as professionals.

Marine Corps Position

The Marine Corps will continue to make Marines that are tough, dedicated, and imbued with the values of the Corps - Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Through this process we will emphasize the dignity of all Marines. Current Marine Corps policy regarding gender segregated recruit training is sound and is supported by the Kassebaum Baker Congressional Committee chartered to evaluate this policy across the Services. Marine Corps gender integrated training is consistent with the “train as we fight” approach and commences at MCT.