

# Strategy Research Project

## Psychological Standards for Combat Arms Gender Integration

by

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Class of 2014

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Psychological Standards for Combat Arms Gender Integration**

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## **Abstract**

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U.S. national values and societal norms continue to evolve concerning gender equality and equal opportunity. After the revocation of the combat exclusion rule, General Dempsey directed the validation of both physical and mental occupational performance standards in those military occupational specialties that had been closed to women. To date, the services have focused only on validating physical standards and have largely ignored mental and psychological standards. Regardless of gender and similar to physical standards, not all service members are psychologically suited for the combat arms. Through a review of life and death stress responses, psychological attributes critical in combat and psychological injuries linked to combat, this paper suggests that a psychological screening process be developed and implemented for the combat arms. Through use of psychological screening and in conjunction with physical and cognitive screening criteria, the services can optimize selection for the combat arms across the full spectrum of operations regardless of gender.



## **Psychological Standards for Combat Arms Gender Integration**

We are not created equal. We do not have equal skills. Not men or women, nor you or I. When selecting soldiers for combat units, only skills count.

—Soren Sjogren<sup>1</sup>

U.S. National values and societal norms continue to evolve concerning gender equality and equal opportunity. With the revocation of the Combat Exclusion Rule, General Dempsey directed the validation of both physical and mental occupational performance standards in Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) that remain closed to women. To date, the services have only focused on validating physical standards while ignoring mental standards. Regardless of gender and similar to intellectual and physical standards, not all recruits are psychologically suited for the combat arms. A psychological combat standard and screening protocol should be implemented which allows services to select the most capable members for service in the combat arms. Through a review of life and death stress responses, psychological attributes critical in combat and psychological injuries linked to combat, this paper suggests a psychological standard be established and implemented.

### **Background**

“Women have shown great courage and sacrifice on and off the battlefield, contributed in unprecedented ways to the military’s mission and proven their ability to serve in an expanding number of roles.”<sup>2</sup> While this statement provides official recognition of women’s contribution in the armed forces, Secretary Panetta does not describe anything new. Throughout world history, women have filled roles in the military ranging from common foot soldier to respected commander of armies, across most continents, cultures, ethnic and religious divides.<sup>3</sup> Historic accounts of women’s roles in

battle were sometimes understated and other times embellished, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions from their actions. In some cases, they were directly responsible for great military victories, in others for crushing defeats, and in yet others, their participation did not significantly sway military combat one way or another. What is not clear despite having reviewed historical events is that when adjusted properly for the changing character of war, will integrating women into the combat arms increase, decrease or maintain the status quo with respect to the combat effectiveness of our fighting forces.

So, what is the determining factor of these outcomes and how does the DoD apply this in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to ensure the greatest possibility of successful integration? General Charles Krulak stated in his 1998 address to Congress that the Marine Corps performs two tasks for this nation, “we make Marines and we win battles.”<sup>4</sup> How are Marines and Soldiers made in order to win our nation’s battles and how is this successfully applied to women? Based on historic and contemporary observations of all volunteer military forces, two critical steps are commonplace; these are:

- 1) Screen and recruit the most qualified personnel.
- 2) Train and equip those personnel adequately for the anticipated mission(s).

This paper shall focus primarily on screening and recruiting, but will also provide some insight into the training and equipping portion.

The mission statement expressed on the US Army Recruiting Command website specifies, “1 October 2013 through September 2019, the Army (USAREC) will recruit professional, volunteer Soldiers; Soldier 2020, capable of effectively executing operations in the Army's complex operating environment.”<sup>5</sup> Simply put, it is to select the

most qualified person(s) available in order to complete the task assigned. Not mentioned in this mission statement yet understood by military professionals are those uncertainties within the complex operating environment that cannot be anticipated. In order to compensate for the unknown, senior military leaders often take the prudent step of screening to a higher standard than was exercised during the last conflict or during training events.

Before achieving specific MOS selection, general recruitment must first occur. To facilitate proper recruitment, relevant measurable individual standards are required for proper screening. An effective screening process must exist to enable this action. Our military currently screens the following areas either prior to enlistment, or just after volunteers enter into service: health, physical fitness, and intelligence potential. Psychological measurements are largely absent from the recruiting process other than through casual observation by untrained professionals.

#### A Single Standard

Clive Hamilton, writer for the Sidney Morning Herald stated, "Who can argue against the claim that if a woman can meet the physical and psychological criteria, she should be allowed on the front line."<sup>6</sup> Two years after that article published, General Dempsey submitted his implementation plan to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, which described how the services were to "integrate women into occupational fields to the maximum extent possible."<sup>7</sup> In this memo, General Dempsey outlines five guiding principles to ensure successful integration. Of these guiding principles, number four states:

Validating occupational performance standards, both physical and mental, for all military occupational specialties (MOS), specifically those that remain closed to women. Eligibility for training and development within

designated occupational fields should consist of qualitative and quantifiable standards reflecting the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for each occupation.<sup>8</sup>

In human resource management terms, this provides for person-to-task-analysis and matching. General Dempsey further details five goals with specific timelines for completion. The third goal describes the requirement to validate occupational standards. "Services will continue to develop, review, and validate individual occupational standards. Validated gender-neutral occupational standards will be used to assess and assign Service members not later than September 2015."<sup>9</sup>

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines mental as "of or relating to the mind; specifically: of or relating to the total emotional and intellectual response of an individual to external reality <mental health>." The second definition offered states the following: "of, relating to, or affected by a psychiatric disorder <a *mental* patient> (2): mentally disordered: mad, crazy."<sup>10</sup> These definitions provide a partial answer that becomes complete when viewed through another lens. The definition of psychology is "The mental or behavioral characteristics of an individual or group."<sup>11</sup> Through a synthesis of these definitions, it becomes clear that mental, emotional, intellectual and behavioral are all interrelated and tied to psychology. Clearly, General Dempsey's intent is to establish and validate gender-neutral MOS standards to include psychological standards.

An example of how the military is doing it correctly through a mature entrance and advanced screening program is the intellectual standard assessment. This process begins with the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.

Commonly known as ASVAB, this is a multiple-choice test, administered by the United States Military Entrance Processing Command, used to determine qualification for enlistment in the United States armed forces. It

is often optionally administered to American high school students when they are in the 11th grade, though anyone eligible to and interested in enlisting can take it. The ASVAB was first instituted in 1976.<sup>12</sup>

To date, the ASVAB has provided satisfactory intellectual standardization and screening for potential military service members. Once in the service, the General Technical (GT), a sub score of the battery, becomes part of the selection criteria for military occupational specialties. "The ASVAB is a multiple-aptitude battery that measures developed abilities and helps predict future academic and occupational success in the military."<sup>13</sup> Education and skills testing continues to ensure that service members are learning and retaining knowledge pertaining to their specific MOS as well as for general military skills. Technical training and testing is flexible and adaptive to maintain relevancy with the rapidly changing technology of today's military. Failure to meet MOS intellectual and technical standards may result in retraining of those skill sets, or a lateral move into an MOS that is more suited to the individual's capabilities.

While all the services maintain and screen to an intellectual standard through recruitment and for each MOS, most do not screen and test for specific physical standards. Boot camp provides physical screening as part of the service screening and indoctrination process, and culminates when the individual passes the service specific Physical Fitness Test. However, with few exceptions the services have not established MOS specific physical task standards. This deficiency has become the focus of the services concerning gender integration into the combat arms, particularly the Army and Marine Corps. Through different approaches, the Army and Marine Corps are focusing on this deficiency in order to meet the timeline set by General Dempsey. Neither Army TRADOC, Soldier 2020 nor U.S. Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs are devoting resources toward the establishment and validation of individual mental or

psychological occupational standards.<sup>1415</sup> During WW I and WW II, psychological screening was conducted within the scope and understanding of the time. In WW II, testing of fourteen million inductees resulted in 14% declared as unfit for service due to psychological disorders.<sup>16</sup> The screening process began with the issuance of Medical Circular No. 1 in November 1940 and initially used manpower intensive psychiatric interviews. With the high demand for recruits and a shortage of psychologists, this process evolved into a self-completed form that eventually evolved into the Neuropsychiatric Screening Adjunct (NSA) by 1944.<sup>17</sup>

### Combat Stress Responses

When developing psychological standards for combat arms, one must define the most challenging task. Captured succinctly by General Robert H. Barrow, 27<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps as he testified to the Senate Arms Service Committee he stated:

Exposure to danger is not combat. Being shot at, even being killed, is not combat. Combat is finding ...closing with...and killing or capturing the enemy. It's killing. And it's done in an environment that is often as difficult as you can possibly imagine. Extremes of climate. Brutality. Death. Dying. It's ...uncivilized!<sup>18</sup>

That most difficult task is to face the danger of combat, overcome fear of death, conduct oneself within ethical norms, and maintain the personal convictions required to take the life of another human if necessary. Because of the nature of war and killing, much of this can be associated with the human response to life threatening stressors.

Depending on the type of response, a service member's reaction may be advantageous or detrimental to military success and the survival of the individual and his/her unit.

How do humans respond to life threatening situations? There are many theories that attempt to explain both how and why humans respond to life threatening stressors.

Arguably, the most widely recognized theory is the fight or flight response. The fight or flight response theory is considered an acute stress response which was first described by Walter Cannon in the 1920's.<sup>19</sup> His research determined that a threat "stimulates a sequence of activities in an organism's nerves and glands. We now know that the hypothalamus controls this response by initiating a cascade of events in the autonomic nervous system (ANS), in the endocrine system and in the immune system."<sup>20</sup> The release of cortisol into the body by the adrenal glands is part of this response, providing a series of physiological responses.<sup>21</sup> These responses afford the individual a physiological boost to provide a greater chance of surviving the threatening encounter. Non-essential bodily functions shut down, circulatory and respiratory functions speed up, senses heighten and the body is prepared either to fight off a threat or to run away thereby ensuring survival. According to Stress Management, the fight or flight response can trigger as many as 1400 different physiological and biochemical changes in the human body."<sup>22</sup> Some in the scientific community believe that this physiological response explains why soldier's react the way they do under the stress of combat. If true, then the reactions of those in combat would be very easy to predict. Either individuals engage the enemy, or they will run in the face of danger.

Unfortunately, this binary description falls short of explaining many of the observed reactions of soldiers in combat. As can be confirmed through a multitude of combat after actions and personal accounts, soldiers exhibit several other responses than just fight or flight. One of these responses is to 'freeze-up' presumably under the fear of death. The usual example associated with this theory is that of stumbling across a bear in the woods. Even with elevated strength and speed, a human is unable to fight

off or outrun the bear. According to this theory, one recognizes that there is no hope of surviving, therefore the individual freezes-up and in the case of the bear encounter, survives the encounter by playing dead. Stimulated through the parasympathetic branch, which activates the release of hormones and painkillers causing a relaxation response, senses relax, breathing slows and making pain more tolerable.<sup>23</sup> Observation of the freeze response occurs often in combat. As described by Soren Sjogren, a Danish officer and veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan, "A few times I have seen some of my soldiers hesitate or even freeze."<sup>24</sup> Soren goes on to explain that to overcome the freeze; another member must push or nudge the afflicted soldier.

Dr. H. Stefan Bracha, MD offers an even more comprehensive theory that includes freeze, fight, flight, fright or faint. The addition of fright or faint assumes a different definition of the freeze response. Dr. Bracha describes the freeze as a period of hyper-vigilance and a time when the individual will "stop, look, and listen."<sup>25</sup> This may lead to survival because most mammalian carnivores (and to a lesser extent humans), have evolved to perceive motion more than color. Demonstrated by modern soldiers, a 'hold' signal freezes the patrol movement in order to assess and discern if there is a threat. Sometimes this includes finding adequate concealment or cover.

Dr. Bracha explains further that in animals, the follow on response sequence would be flight, and then fight if unable to outrun its adversary. The following step he describes as fright. Recognizing that there is often confusion between the clinical definitions of freeze and fright stress responses, Dr. Bracha explains that fright is tonic immobility and more often used by slower moving animals. The animal recognizes that its best chance of survival is to 'play dead' in the hope of finding an opportunity to

escape. He also uses this theory to explain the behavior of rape victims during the assault.<sup>26</sup> As explained by Dr. Paul W. Ragan, who served as a combat psychiatrist in the Persian Gulf War “Not to be confused with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, combat stress reactions may freeze soldiers under fire.”<sup>27</sup> In Dr. Bracha’s theory, the final response mechanism is the ‘faint’ response. Bracha proposes that the fainting in response to stimuli associated with bloodletting might have been a Homo sapiens-specific survival response in Paleolithic non-combatants such as women and pre-pubescent males. He explains that this begins with Blood-Injection-Injury Type Specific phobia (BIITS) which have three primary reactions. These are the emotional response of fear, the behavioral response of avoidance and the physical response of fainting (flaccid immobility). Citing a test of 1,920 subjects that concluded that 4.4% of women and 1.8% of men, suffered from clinically significant BIITS phobia at some point in life, he states that this response occurs in a relatively small number of people.<sup>28</sup>

While fainting is not part of the acute stress reaction sequence for most individuals, neither is fright. The primary function of fear-induced fainting may have been to non-verbally communicate to equally preverbal adversaries that one was not an immediate threat and could be safely ignored.<sup>29</sup>

As with the basic fight or flight theory, these other theories do not adequately explain all of the responses observed in combat. LtCol Dave Grossman presents a more comprehensive theory in his book “On Killing”. He explains that fight or flight response is more appropriately applied when a creature experiences danger from other than its own species. When creatures face danger presented by their own species, two more responses enter into the equation. Those responses are posture and submit. Grossman presents that when faced with a threat from the same species, the first reaction is posturing.<sup>30</sup> Posturing may include displays of movement, noise, size, color,

and generally bowing-up to appear as intimidating as possible. These displays are usually harmless and intended to dissuade the opponent by presenting oneself as dangerous and threatening. Many historic examples such as bright banners, large plumes atop helmets, war drums, shouts and even bagpipes, illustrates attempts to intimidate the enemy into capitulation or submission without a fight. Modern soldiers display this same trait when they fire into the air or even at the ground as a form of posturing in an attempt to intimidate their opponents into submission or retreat.

When posturing fails, then the remaining options of fight, flight or submit are applied. Grossman further explains that when creatures choose to fight within the same species, the engagement rarely end in death. Animals either flee or submit by exposing some vulnerable portion to their aggressor instinctively knowing that their opponent will not further harm or kill one of its own species.<sup>31</sup> When viewing humans in modern combat engagements, soldiers often seek retreat or surrender from their opponents vice outright killing.

While recognized as the best theory to describe responses to combat stress, the posture, fight, flight, or submit has its flaw as well. Nearly all of the test samples in both humans and lab animals happened to be male (including those on the battlefield). Recognized by Shelly Taylor, PhD of psychology and professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, she and her colleagues wondered if women and men might respond differently to stress. They reasoned that the evolutionary adaptation of fight or flight would be lower in women due to having to care for dependent offspring. The theory that she developed is the 'Tend and Befriend' acute stress response. Through research conducted with animal and human subjects, the team found that during times

of acute stress, females would ensure the safety of their offspring by moving them to safety and calming them rather than offensively engaging their threat.<sup>32</sup>

Other studies covering non-life threatening stress such as that conducted by psychologist Rena Repetti, found that after a hard day of work, men tended to be reclusive from family life where as women were more nurturing toward their children.<sup>33</sup> Similar to the posture, fight, flight, or submit theory, tend and befriend response begins with chemical releases in the body which cause a physiological cascade in an attempt to increase the chance for survival. For tend and befriend it is the release of oxytocin that stimulates the behavior response to acute stress. This response may present itself either in the form of protecting offspring, or by seeking social interaction for one's well-being and protection.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Taylor also discovered that estrogen strongly enhances the effects of oxytocin while testosterone reduces its effects. This helps to explain why oxytocin seems to play a greater role in women's behavior than with men. Tend and befriend is not strictly a female response. According to Regan Gurung, PhD, an associate professor of psychology and human development at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay, "Men can also tend and befriend. Although, on average, women show this tending and befriending significantly more often."<sup>35</sup>

What these widely accepted theories show is that humans may react with one of several stress responses in combat situations. Whether it be posture, fight, flight, submit, or tend and befriend; each person will respond differently both within gender and between gender boundaries. However, the trend must be noted that the preponderance of men will generally respond with posture, fight, flight or submit, while the preponderance of women will generally respond with tend and befriend.

## Psychological Attributes

With a common understanding of stress responses in humans, it is time to define what attributes should be screened and accepted to provide the most effective combat arms personnel. General Odierno in his interview with CNN correspondent James Sciutto spoke about the uncertain future and having to not only retain the recently learned skills of asymmetric warfare, but also train to the more challenging tasks required of high-intensity conflict, possibly having to conduct both simultaneously in the future.<sup>36</sup> This means that selection criteria must include the ability to conduct full spectrum operations in a flexible and adaptable manner, possibly adjusting from low-intensity to high-intensity operations within one region and on one deployment. When matching weapons to target, there are multitudes of weapons to choose from which may provide different effects upon the target. Likewise, there are multitudes of psychological attributes to choose from in the human arsenal. What are the desired effects? General Odierno's response of full spectrum capabilities is the answer. The next question is which of these is the most difficult to train to? Ask any Marine what the mission of the Marine Corps rifle squad is and they will tell you "The mission of the Marine Corps rifle squad is to locate, close with, and destroy the enemy by fire and maneuver, or repel the enemy's assault by fire and close combat."<sup>37</sup> This implies some very direct and violent attributes.

Earlier, this paper described the most difficult psychological task for combat arms was to locate individuals able to face the danger of combat, overcome fear of death, conduct oneself within ethical norms, and maintain the personal convictions to take the life of another human if necessary.

Since killing another human is an unnatural act as explained in LtCol Grossman's book "On Killing"<sup>38</sup>, it would serve the military well to screen for attributes that indicate an individual who is more capable of overcoming this obstacle. Recommended and discussed in this next section are those attributes and traits to screen for as selection criteria.

The most difficult yet the most important of personal attributes is ethical grounding. One only has to view recent news of military personnel crossing the ethical boundary and causing at the least an embarrassment, but at worst an international incident. Events such as the Marine snipers urinating on dead Taliban, the Army Soldier going on a house-to-house killing spree in Afghanistan and the Nuclear Program cheating scandals in both the Air Force and Navy all highlight acts void of ethical grounding.

A longtime topic of debate is can the military services teach ethics or are they ingrained in people by the time they enlist as adults? Research by the late Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg points out that people grow in their ability to deal with ethical issues just as they grow physically. He offered that people grow ethically throughout life and that education is the most important factor in achieving ethical growth. He classified three stages of growth that included pre-conventional, (children), conventional (adolescents) and post-conventional (adults).<sup>39</sup> So while ethics may be learned in adulthood, the basic ethical foundation has already been established. To screen for those individuals with appropriate ethical beliefs serves two purposes. The first is to ensure that individuals selected are able to process and come to terms with

the potential for killing another human being. The second is to reduce the risk of incidents such as those previously mentioned.

The next attribute to screen for is courage. Defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, courage is “the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous; mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.”<sup>40</sup> With respect to combat arms, it is the courage required to take a human life. Perhaps the true attribute to screen for is the ability to overcome fear. As Nelson Mandela once stated, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”<sup>41</sup> Nearly everyone who has experienced challenges and fear can attest to some examples of courage and the value that it represents. Many soldiers throughout the centuries have displayed courage on the battlefield. Sometimes formally recognized, but more often just appreciated by fellow soldiers. The award citation for combat medic Lance Corporal Kylie Watson of the Royal Army Medical Corps states “Watson's immense courage, willingness to put her own life at risk and absolute bravery saved the life of one warrior and acted as an inspiration to her platoon and their Afghan National Army partners.”<sup>42</sup> This citation certainly captures her ability to overcome fear and display courage under fire.

Ben Shalit includes in his definition that courage involves a threat to the well-being of the individual.<sup>43</sup> He offers three levels of courage: the bold, the brave, and the courageous. Of these three classifications of courage, he identifies ‘the brave’ as having the appropriate cognitive appraisal of confidence and aggressive disposition, which give people of this category high potential for combat.<sup>44</sup> Shalit also synthesizes other works

on courage that address courage as either social courage or existential courage. He concludes that acts of courage involving self-sacrifice are perceived as more courageous than acts of courage based on ignorance of the danger or for showing off.<sup>45</sup> A display of fear is not immediate grounds for elimination from the combat arms. Rather the ability to overcome fear in an effective and timely manner defines an individual's level of courage that is desirable for combat arms especially when it comes to taking the life of another human. As General George S. Patton Jr. stated "Courage is fear holding on a minute longer."<sup>46</sup>

The next attribute to screen for is aggression. Timidity is not desirable on the battlefield or when making decisions dealing with soldiers' lives. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines aggression as "a forceful action or procedure (as an unprovoked attack) especially when intended to dominate or master; the practice of making attacks or encroachments."<sup>47</sup> When thinking of aggression, one cannot help but to associate with the criminal element. In fact, Robert Maginnis argues that men are more aggressive as evidenced by the Bureau of Justice Statistic on homicides that shows nearly 90% of offenders are males.<sup>48</sup> This is true for violent crimes that end in fatality, however it only tells part of the story. As explained in a study on trends in the gender gap in violent offending, men have displayed a larger decrease in non-lethal violent crimes when compared to women.<sup>49</sup> Both genders are capable of aggression; however, men commit more acts of violence when compared to women.

Martial Arts enthusiast and author of "Women Warriors", David E. Jones explains gender aggression in terms of self and command presence:

As a fighting arts instructor, I was drawn to address and remedy this "structural weakness," which was neither a universal female condition nor

a lack of physical strength. Some people with a slight build are stronger than larger people. I have taught women who have a very powerful sense of their psychophysical selves, but they are the exception. In the same vein, some males do not have this sense of martial self, but considerably more males than females, in my martial arts teaching experience, possess this “command presence” of mind and body or can be taught to access it.<sup>50</sup>

Specifically, these statistics show that men are generally more aggressive and specifically more willing to kill as compared to women. However, is aggression all about killing? Ben Shalit breaks aggression into three dichotomized dimensions: physical/verbal, active/passive, direct/indirect.<sup>51</sup> This distinction helps to understand how genders express aggression differently. According to Taylor, in men, testosterone increased significantly with acute stress and testosterone reactivity to acute stressors was significantly associated with level of hostility. “Males are more likely to use physical aggression in struggles for power within a hierarchy or to defend territory against external enemies. Females reliably show less physical aggression than males but they display as much or more indirect aggression, that is, aggression in the form of gossip, rumor-spreading, and enlisting the cooperation of a third party in undermining an acquaintance.”<sup>52</sup> Both types of aggression are useful when considering the full spectrum of operations and demand selective balancing in the combat arms.

The next attribute to address is bias for action. Explained in business terms, bias for action is “having an idea or premise, and understanding quickly what that market thinks of it. The faster you take action, the faster you execute, the more quickly you will deliver innovation, results and growth.”<sup>53</sup> It is to take action in the absence of a detailed analysis due to lack of time, money or resources. The purpose of this action is to place you ahead of your competitors. Alison Monahan explains that putting aside risk aversion is a necessary step to achieving bias for action.<sup>54</sup> Her suggestion is correct. In fact, risk

assessment and balancing becomes a necessary step in bias for action because some details may be lacking at the critical decision time. A better definition for bias for action may be to take decisive action, after assessing and balancing risk of not having all of the facts, in order to advance over a competitor. Meg Whitman, when elevated to the position of CEO for Hewlett-Packard, spoke of how her bias for action propelled her throughout her career. Making bold decision even though some of them did not result as she anticipated, allowed her to achieve her success today.<sup>55</sup>

For the combat arms, bias for action comes to play by applying John Boyd's Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act (OODA) loop. Bias for action is necessary to get inside the OODA loop of your opponent. By deciding and acting quicker than your opponent, you then force that opponent to react to a situation that has already changed thereby increasing your chances of victory over them.<sup>56</sup> These decisions, often made without all the necessary information, assume a level of risk, which the decision maker must assess, and balance. That service member must be willing to take risk in order to execute effectively. Kingsley Browne addresses the concept of accepting risk in his book "Co-ed Combat". In his discussion, he presents the fact that men are willing to accept higher physical risks as compared to women. This begins early enough in life (toddlers) that socialization is not a causal element. He states, "Females seemed to be disinclined to take risk even in fairly innocuous situations or when it was a good idea."<sup>57</sup> However, there is evidence that some women are able to assess and balance risk. A good example is that of LCpl Watson and her actions that earned her the Military Cross. In the course of events, she "made a 100m dash in full view of the enemy under sustained accurate fire to deliver life-saving first aid to a soldier who had been shot

twice.”<sup>58</sup> Watson utilized bias for action as she assessed and balanced the obvious risk of death against the gain of rescuing a soldier and freeing up another to fight who was caring for that soldier. Bias for action is directly relevant to the success of missions and therefore demands screening for the combat arms.

Two items demand Acknowledgement. The first is the challenge of screening for these attributes and traits. Dr. Stephanie McWhorter, research psychologist and Chair for the Consortium on the Health and Readiness of Servicewomen (CHARS), confirmed this. She stated that while biomarkers may identify fight or flight responses, it is very difficult to screen for the type of attributes and traits listed due to the lack of a conclusive test and protocol.<sup>59</sup> Risk of error exists and may lead to false positives and false negatives during the screening process. However, any improvement over our current psychological selection process is a step in the right direction. Proper implementation and resourcing will ultimately lead to improved test batteries and methods of selection. The second acknowledgement must be that men and women are different and bring different abilities, strengths and weaknesses. When considering the full spectrum of military options, men and women both provide critical tools, when combined, will provide a more capable force. In his book “The Evolution of War”, Maurice R. Davie states,

The sexes are complementary and are capable of specialization and cooperation. The combination of a man and a woman is more favorable to cooperation in the struggle for existence than that of man and man or woman and woman, for in the former case the activities and natural abilities of the two persons complement and supplement each other.<sup>60</sup>

#### Mental Health

The next item to screen for is not a psychological attribute or trait but in fact is a state of health and as such should be included in the health assessment and screening portion of recruitment. A more thorough evaluation of the mental health of each recruit

must occur. Through a simple comparison to the screening of physical health, the issue becomes clear. Would a service accept a recruit into the combat arms if apparent that the individual had significant spinal trauma from which they did not fully recover? The answer is obviously no because the individual would not be capable of carrying even the lightest of loads required for combat. Would a service accept a recruit into the combat arms if the individual had significant psychological trauma from which they did not fully recover? The answer again is obviously no because they would not be capable of handling the lightest stresses associated with combat. However, the lack of adequate psychological screening and reporting prevents this from occurring.

To their credit, the services have implemented different forms of service-wide psychological screening. The Air Force has been using the Biographical Evaluation and Screening of Troops (BEST) program since 2007.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the Navy and Marine Corps have been using the Recruit Assessment Program (RAP) since its trial implementation in 2000.<sup>62</sup> The Army utilizes its Assessment of Individual Motivation (AIM) as “an accession screen for attrition and individual success as a Soldier.”<sup>63</sup> All of these assessments fall short of the desired results and require improvement or replacement.

A recent article in the *LA Times* discusses three studies by the Army and the National Institutes of Mental Health that are part of a larger research initiative begun in 2009. These results address some staggering statistics that highlight current military service screening deficiencies. It stated in one study that nearly 1 in 5 soldiers had a common mental illness such as depression, panic disorder and ADHD before enlisting in the Army.<sup>64</sup> Another study found that suicide rates among soldiers who both had and

had not deployed rose steadily between 2004 and 2009.<sup>65</sup> One might understand the rise in suicide rates among those deployed, but what explains the rise among those who had never seen combat? Historically, the services have been psychologically healthier than the rest of the population. Now these researchers are finding that soldiers are generally less healthy when compared to society. During their military service, the soldiers' rates of certain psychiatric disorders climb and significantly exceed the rates seen in the civilian sector.<sup>66</sup> There is obviously a negative trend concerning the services and mental health. There are more than 90 prevention programs within the services at an estimated cost of well over \$1 billion. These programs drain vital resources away from the primary focus of the services.<sup>67</sup> What is obvious is that the current mental health screening is failing miserably. This failure places a significant burden upon the services, which degrade combat capabilities and readiness while significantly increasing health and medical costs.

#### Psychological Injuries and Ailments

Dr. Jonathan Shay, a counselor in Boston and author of "Odysseus in America" states "War is monstrous and hideous, and it does terrible things to people's bodies and minds," he compares the deep psychological wounds of Vietnam veterans he sees with those of Homer's conflicted hero, struggling to get home after war.<sup>68</sup> There is no doubt that the number and degree of psychological ailments for those deployed to combat is significant. From anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, sleep disorders, to depression and PTSD. Unfortunately, many of these lead to suicide as captured in a study written in *Psychiatric Services*. Between the ages 18 to 34, female veterans are three times more likely to kill themselves than nonveterans. Similarly, men are twice as likely when compared to nonveterans.<sup>69</sup> These are not unlike the injuries

and ailments describe by LtCol Dave Grossman in his book “On Killing”. He lists fatigue, confusion, conversion hysteria, anxiety states, obsessional and compulsive states and character disorders.<sup>70</sup> What is not clear is how gender plays a role in psychological ailments and injuries. Some recent studies have developed statistics, but offer little in the way of providing solutions. An article in the LA Times captures some of these statistics as part of an Army initiative begun in 2009.

Rates of mental illness among active-duty troops rose 62% between 2000 and 2011, according to the report. More than 935,000 current or former service members were diagnosed with adjustment disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems over that time. The suicide rate nearly doubled between 2005 and 2010.<sup>71</sup>

Another study conducted comparisons from eighteen studies from eight unique study populations. From these studies, the conclusion, based on the preponderance of evidence, was that women exhibit a higher risk for developing PTSD after returning from deployment.<sup>72</sup> Another study demonstrated that women reported significantly more psychological distress than their male colleagues did, but the men who were diagnosed were more likely to develop substance abuse or antisocial problems.<sup>73</sup> Yet another study completed on the German Bundeswehr six years after fully integrating gender into their combat arms found that the number of cases of primary care outpatient treatment for psychological symptoms more than doubled for women with no corresponding change for that of men.<sup>74</sup> As a point of clarification, many of these results are subject to limitations inherent in self-report and cross-sectional data.<sup>75</sup> More focused studies need to be funded and conducted among all services to determine the distinct differences between gender, and to determine how to reduce or eliminate these injuries. DoD should seek funding in support of a joint research effort to develop effective resiliency, prevention, and treatment measures for psychological injuries. In the meantime, through

proper screening for qualified personnel, the services may immediately reduce the number of psychological injuries.

### Conclusion

Robert Engell stated, “The integration of women in combat units should be seen as an opportunity to revise the culture and structure of the armed forces for increased effectiveness in contemporary warfare. It should therefore, be accomplished with the aim of maximizing the effectiveness of what the organization is supposed to be good at – using force, or the threat of force – for security, stability, or plain victory.”<sup>76</sup> According to the theories discussed, humans may react to stress in one of a myriad of different ways. With respect to gender, general trends do exist. However, males and females may respond with similar or different responses despite their gender therefore absolutes cannot be ascertained. Certain psychological attributes and traits are desirable for acceptable performance in the combat arms. The following three recommendations would significantly improve the integration process while reducing the number of psychological injuries. First, the services should develop a screening test and protocol for specific psychological attributes to assist in identifying and selecting qualified members for the combat arms. Second, the services should conduct more demanding mental health screening. For the purposes of recruitment, DoD should be able to access the mental health records of new recruits. Third, the DoD should request funding to conduct joint service studies on the prevention, resilience, and treatment of service members with psychological injuries.

Through use of psychological screening and in conjunction with the other screening criteria, the services will optimize selection for the combat arms across the full spectrum of operations regardless of gender. This will ensure The United States

retains the most capable military that our society is able to support through an all-volunteer force throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This screening and selection would provide a more capable fighting force, meet the intent of CJCS, and reduce the risk of PTSD and other psychological injuries. "Thus a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle; an army destined to defeat fights in the hope of winning."<sup>77</sup>

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