

#### Student Opinions Submission #4

Prior to January 2016, there was a flurry of debate surrounding opening up combat positions to women. To a large extent, when the Pentagon opened all military jobs, the discourse dried up. With the toxic rose colored glasses of this new declaration placed upon the nose bridge of every high ranking officer, it appeared to some as if the systemic injustices plaguing military women had become a mere mirage, a thing of the distant past. To others, this change in policy was viewed as a tool used to trick the brass into instating a nonsensical standard (out of a sense of political correctness). But, in reality, this is all *incorrect*. Both viewpoints discount the ingrained, tacit discrimination and obstacles that women entering the military face today. The battle for equality on the battlefield is far from over.

The most notorious, but by no means the only issue facing military women, is rape. The most recent statistic estimates that a quarter to a third of women are raped while in the military (Weitz). This is a two pronged issue: rape by a fellow troop member and rape perpetrated by a hostile enemy nation. In regards to rape by a foreign adversary, many of the countries where U.S. troops are deployed (Syria, Iraq etc.) have pervasive anti-women cultural and religious practices, including restricting access to education solely to men. In certain radical forms of Islam, being killed by a female fighter is believed to make one incapable of achieving paradise in their afterlife ("The Kurdish"). It isn't outside of the realm of possibility that people who hold such archaic, demeaning ideologies would target female soldiers and subject them to torture and sexual violence (Ellen). While this is true, it discounts the fact that the goal of combatants is to kill one another. All soldiers must be especially vigilant when surrounded by enemy troops, making this an invalid reason to keep women off the front lines.

The other issue is rape by another soldier. When a person elects to report, according to U.S. Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP), they have two choices, unrestricted or restricted reporting. The first, unrestricted, which launches a formal investigation and removes the assailant from the victims barrack, differs dramatically from the unconventional method of restricted reporting. Under this program, "your assailant remains unpunished" and "evidence from the crime scene.. may be lost" and "you will not be able to discuss the assault with anyone in your chain of command"("Sexual Harassment"). Why would anyone elect to issue a restricted report? Well, declaring you have been raped in a hyper-masculine institution such as the military can be career suicide, especially when there is very little evidence to prove that one is telling the truth. Women know that being forced to silently cope with sexual trauma is a very real possibility if one chooses to enlist. Navy Reserve member Sabrina Rangel was told to "keep quiet" about her rape if she wanted to continue her military career (Lawrence). Similarly, Jamie Livingston, a military policeman who was raped multiple times throughout her service, asserts that she "knew the command's attitude toward rape, so (she) didn't say anything" and her rapist was her "superior and (she) had to work with him everyday"(Lawrence). By providing women with an option to let their victimizer off, it sends the message to men that there is a chance that their unlawful actions may not have any repercussions, as well as telling women that they are nothing more than toys for male consumption.

Military rape is often rationalized through an outdated "boys will be boys" mentality. According to the Conservative Independent Women's Forum, women shouldn't engage in combat since the male "sex drive" (qtd. in Mackenzie) when around women is insurmountable. This statement

devolves men to the same moral standards as wild animals who aren't sentient enough to use their mental faculties to discern a consensual engagement from a violent crime. If that is truly the case, then it stands to reason that all men, everywhere, need to be separated from women at all times in order to aid them in trying to contain their innate animalistic tendencies. However, the ubiquitous societal concept of it being a woman's fault for choosing to be in the military leads women to feel "responsible for preventing rape"(Weitz) and ultimately drives many talented women to evade military duty. According to Tammy, an Army Reserve veteran, her male commander told the only three women in the barrack that they were allowed to carry a loaded weapon (which is normally against the rules) since he "wasn't going to have a rape on his watch"(Weitz). By putting the burden of stopping rape on the women instead of actively combating rape culture within his force, the commander is delegating the responsibility and isolating the women from the other members of their platoon.

Other nations have been utilizing the full force of their population; it can be done. Israel requires all women to serve two years in the military or in military support roles. Admittedly or not, a nation can increase their qualitative military edge by fully integrating all citizens into the armed forces. While military rape may seem superfluous to national security, it is imperative that these obstacles for women are dismantled, creating a more cohesive fighting body; if we hope to stay globally influential and relevant in the international sphere, it is something we must strive towards. The battle for the dignity of women on the battlefield has begun; with adequate attention, women's rights are sure to be won.

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