

Starting Strength

Women in Ground Combat

by

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It is fashionable these days to appear concerned about what is currently interpreted as “inequality.” Inequality can be accurately defined as any diversity in the outcomes of any human endeavor deemed to be the potential subject of an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or *Yahoo News*. As such, what I am about to say will be ignored by these outlets, both because it appears to promote “inequality” even though it does no such thing, and because it is based on a logical analysis that cannot actually be made the subject of opinion, and despite the fact that I have been dealing with strength training in a professional capacity since 1977, *and* despite the additional fact that my methods have made more people stronger in the past 10 years than anybody else in this business.

To wit: **If** a particular occupation or physical activity has a quantifiable strength, endurance, or power component inherent in its successful or even satisfactory performance, **then** the physical requirements of that job or activity can be quantified. And **if** the physical requirements of the job can be quantified, **then** the physical abilities of the potential holders of the job can be specified. So can their hiring criteria.

A [recent article](#) details the important difference between the physical performance potential of men and women, and explains its physiological basis. It has not been refuted. Briefly, men and women display disparate levels of neuromuscular efficiency, based upon sexual differences in hormonal milieu, their divergent physical development under differing hormonal environments, and the very real limitations this physiological divergence imposes upon us – *whether we like it or not*.

This last part is tough: we cannot really do anything about the reality of this situation except to 1.) deny that it exists, or 2.) deny that it is important.

Well, it exists, just as surely as there is men’s and women’s tennis, golf, basketball, soccer, and every other sport. And it most assuredly as hell is important, especially when the outcome of ignoring it becomes more important than merely winning or losing a *game*.

Getting yourself and other people *killed* is not a game. And it should also not be the unintended consequence of politically-motivated employment policy. Once again: **if** the job has quantifiable physical requirements, **then** the job should have quantifiable hiring criteria based on objectively assessed levels of required physical performance.

Any time a job’s physical testing parameters have been altered to determine anything other than the most successful objective physical performance of that job, the job’s ultimate successful outcome

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has become secondary to the hiring agenda. Or the job wasn't really important anyway; the *appearance of importance* has become the primary concern, along with other agenda items.

"Equality," and yet at the same time "Diversity" (the old Orwellian term "doublethink" applies here) have become the primary concern within some military organizations. The most important thing in the world is *diversity*, even when some of those super-valuable differences mean an *unequal* ability to do things. ("Good news! Your salary has been increased from \$4000 to \$3500!")

Some examples are obvious. When compared to men in the same unit, women in infantry and special forces ground combat roles cannot physically perform to the same standard – required by an objective assessment of the physical performance necessary for all members of the unit. This is especially true if the enemy is composed of male fighters who might be willing to take advantage of any opportunities handed to them.

There will be, of course, individual (and primarily hypothetical) women who can operate at the same physical capacity required of men in combat. But not many. Recent experience has demonstrated that lower performance levels and higher injury rates in integrated units are the normal outcome. This is not surprising to even a partially objective observer.

Now, it may be determined that an all-female unit is a viable entity on the battlefield – that way, apples are being compared to apples. "Diversity" is promoted across the service, while at the same time eliminating the problems of inequality within a unit. If we, as a society, are prepared to deal with the consequences of the potential defeat of an all-female unit under our flag and our command, fine. That's a separate question for another essay.

Conversely, we may determine that not *all* members of an integrated unit must be able to do *all* of the physical tasks the members of the unit might be called upon to perform under battlefield circumstances. For example, women *never* have to carry the machine gun – that's the rule, dammit, *doesn't matter what's actually necessary right now*. But if all members of a unit might realistically be subjected to the same physical conditions in a combat situation, then we cannot be prepared to integrate people into that unit who do not meet the same objective physical performance standard.

Doing so will get people killed who otherwise might not be dead. Thorny social interaction topics aside (assuming they can really be ignored – they can't, but that's another different essay), male/female integrated battlefield combat units are inherently less efficient in a hot combat situation. That might be fine for people sufficiently cynical to advance Human Resources/Political objectives over battlefield outcomes. But that makes me uncomfortable. I hope it makes you uncomfortable too.

And the only way such a thing can be accomplished is to lower the physical testing standards for everybody, or lower the physical testing standards for women. This is irrational, *if the job in question has objectively assessable physical requirements*. Irrational, illogical, and dishonest. **If** physical standards are lowered so that more women can be included in ground combat infantry and special forces, and even law enforcement and as firefighters, **then** fools and knaves have been allowed to make the decisions.

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