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## MIND THE GAP: WHAT CF LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GENDER DIFFERENCES

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***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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GENDER DIFFERENCES**

Maj J.L. Morrison

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“At the outset we would like to express our delight at the fact that there are differences between men and women. We hope that it will remain ever thus.”<sup>1</sup> And thus opens, in a rather unorthodox fashion, a report from the Department of National Defence concerning medical considerations for the employment of women in the Canadian military published in 1978, at a time when several occupations (and many a mindset) were opposed to the integration of women in the CAF. The gender integration pendulum in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has, to the benefit of many individuals as well as the institution itself, swung over so far as to have created a gender neutral armed forces. This is beneficial when considering that there are no limitations to employment, compensation, promotion and opportunities for advancement based on gender. Legislation such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Human Rights Act and the Employment Equity Act ensure that gender cannot be a basis for exclusion or discrimination.

However, while employment equity legislation and regulations may have positively contributed to the relatively high representation of women in the CAF as compared with other militaries,<sup>2</sup> a policy of gender neutrality has a detrimental effect when considered in the context of sustained combat operations being executed by mixed-gender units. The reality is that there are gender differences, on the psychological and physical levels, which affect thought process, training and performance. Integrating women into the conduct of military combat operations under the pretense that these differences either do not exist or do not affect performance, decreases the effectiveness at both the individual and institutional levels. Ignorance is not bliss, and as much as the progress of gender integration up until the present can be lauded, CAF has

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<sup>1</sup> N. H. Haakonson, V. A. McKee and Canada. Directorate of Preventive Medicine, *Medical Considerations for Employment of Women in the Canadian Military*, Vol. 1/78 (Ottawa, Ont.: Dept. of National Defence, Directorate of Preventive Medicine Surgeon General Branch, 1978), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> In terms of percentage female representation within the military, Canada has consistently ranked within the top 3 for highest proportion of women across NATO forces from 2001 through 2011. Ref Table Anita Schjolset, "Data on Women's Participation in NATO Forces and Operations," *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (2013).

now reached the point of needing to move beyond ‘gender neutral’ (or ‘gender invisible’) and instead embrace a ‘gender smart’ culture, where leaders are informed of gender differences that are relevant to the operations for which they are responsible.

Eliminating gender as a basis for discrimination and exclusion is separate and distinct from acknowledging gender differences and empowering leaders with knowledge of these differences. No formal ‘gender training’ exists which highlights these differences, with the result being employment based on uniformity rather than diversity. One of the principle tenets of leadership is to ‘know your people’, and to ignore gender differences means that both individual and collective performance may not be optimized. This is not a call however for an extensive, CAF-wide review of equipment, procedures, training, etc. in order to effect mass customization based on gender differences. Canada does not possess the scale, budget or female representation to make this affordable, feasible or desirable. Rather, this is a call for a campaign of awareness of gender differences across all levels of CAF leadership, in order to position leaders to optimize the individual and collective performance.

While recognition of gender differences may be perceived as a regression in terms of challenging the progress and gains achieved under the ‘gender equality’ cultural shift over the past decades, the critical distinction here is that the knowledge of gender differences must be used to *enhance* individual and collective performance and, ultimately, to improve the CAF’s ability to execute sustained combat operations. Highlighting gender differences does possess the potential for poor leaders to use this information to isolate or discriminate against women; however institutional intolerance for this behavior is well established, and the potential benefits of having ‘gender-smart’ leaders outweigh this risk. Gender differences in a biological sense are not merely “a societal construct, erasable with a few strong lectures and a bit of sensitivity

training.”<sup>3</sup> Leaders of mixed-gender units who are informed of the psychological and physical differences can tailor their behavior, approach, training, techniques and/or procedures as required so as to compensate for weaknesses and exploit strengths. To remain ignorant of gender differences and to continue to apply a ‘one size fits all’ mentality undermines the opportunity to collectively benefit from the strengths of the CAF’s men and women. The gender integration pendulum should be adjusted back to the point where gender differences are not only recognized but are also used, not to discriminate or exclude, but rather to educate and enhance.

## **BACKGROUND**

It is important to first recognize that the term ‘gender’ has many different definitions. For the purposes of this paper, the term gender refers exclusively to the biological differences between males and females, and does not encompass the learned differences between men and women, specifically the “particular roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors and values that society ascribes to men and women”<sup>4</sup> although this distinction is difficult to entirely achieve. This definition has been selected based on this paper’s focus on the physical and psychological differences; the sociological and cultural dimensions, while highly relevant to the larger-scale issue of gender integration writ large, are for the most part considered beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, this paper does not examine the considerable breadth of types of employment within the CAF, but focuses instead on general combat operations with particular attention to the sustainability aspect.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Gutmann, *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 300, p.20.

<sup>4</sup> Toiko Tonisson Kleppe et al., *Gender Training for Security Sector Personnel: Good Practices and Lessons Learned*, Vol. Tool 12 (Geneva: Dcaf, Osce/odihr, Un-Instraw, 2008), 20.

This paper is aimed at outlining what CAF leaders need to know about gender differences: it highlights those gender differences of which whose recognition presents leaders with an opportunity to make small-scale adjustments to behavior, attitudes, approaches and/or procedures in order to minimize negative effects and maximize positive effects, and improve endurance and overall performance of CAF members. This paper is not about examining the validity of qualification standards or occupational specifications, or the relevance (or lack thereof) of gender in setting these standards: the requirements of the job must drive the standard. The “honest broker checking that the strength/endurance requirements are based on real requirements for combat”<sup>5</sup> plays a critical role in ensuring job requirements are absolute, free of bias and accurately reflected in specifications and standards. Fitness standards must be developed based on “valid occupational requirements in order for ... these standards to be defensible in a Court of Law in accordance with Human Rights legislation”, and occupational requirements must be determined “in a systemic manner, using a heterogeneous and representative sample of participants, in order to determine the level of fitness (aerobic or anaerobic) required.”<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to review Lee’s summary of the evolution of CAF fitness standards, from ‘normed’ standards, accounting for variances in abilities based on age, gender and type of unit assignment (combat or support), to establishment of standards “based on the one need that can be objectively determined, i.e., the fitness requirement of the job itself.”<sup>7</sup> Gender distinction does not mean abolishment of a gender-neutral Universality of Service, fitness standards or

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<sup>5</sup> Rosemarie Skaine, *Women at War: Gender Issues of Americans in Combat* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 1999), 299, p.183.

<sup>6</sup> Tara Reilly, "Canada's Physical Fitness Standard for the Land Force: A Global Comparison," *The Canadian Army Journal* 13, no. 2 (2010), p.61.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Lee, *Task Related Physical Fitness and Performance Standards: A Canadian Forces Approach* (Ottawa: NDHQ:Directorate of Physical Education/Directorate of Personnel Policy,[1997]), p.3.

occupation task requirements; gender distinction involves evolving to a higher level of performance by recognizing and tailoring to the strengths of each gender in order to optimize long term health, achieve continued readiness and create a positive work environment. This paper also does not make the case for developing highly-tailored training plans in order to allow select women to meet elevated standards given specific training regimens and specialized equipment; the feasibility of this approach is not practical given the small numbers of women in combat arms trades within the CAF.

Rather, this paper endeavors to bring to light factors which will perhaps enable a mentality that is more open to considering alternate techniques or approaches that, while potentially different in strength or endurance criteria, nevertheless achieve the required effect. Being aware of gender differences does not mean lowering standards; rather it means ensuring valid standards are established which are not pre-disposed to needlessly favoring aspects for which gender inherently introduces advantages and disadvantages. The objective is to promote reflection and understanding, spur debate, increase awareness and initiate the notion that gender neutral policies in certain contexts may not be the ideal approach.

This paper will first provide an overview of various gender differences in the physical and psychological domains, followed by a discussion on their relevance from the perspective of training for, executing, and recovering from sustained combat operations. Discussion then continues with considerations for how awareness and education of these differences should be approached, followed by concluding remarks.

## OVERVIEW OF GENDER DIFFERENCES

Gender differences are divided into the following two broad categories: physical and psychological. It is acknowledged that the range, scale and interconnections between gender differences across these dimensions far exceeds the scope of this paper; however the objective of the following section is to focus on a limited number of differences that are relevant to sustained combat operations.

### Physical Gender Differences

Men and women are physically constructed differently. Studies regarding anthropometric, body composition and cardiorespiratory comparisons between genders are widespread, in particular due the recent American debate on the opening of combat trades to women. Numerous findings are relevant to the tactical leadership of CAF, with specific issues highlighted as follows:

- Body Composition, Strength and Cardiovascular Performance. Anthropometric and body composition studies have long identified variances in heart volume, lung volume, red blood cell count, cardiac output, VO2 Max, as well as static, dynamic and explosive strength capacities. Several studies have shown however that proper pacing and development of gender-tailored training regimens can eliminate many of these differences. It is worthwhile to note that several anthropometric studies of aircrew have noted advantages to smaller stature on numerous aviation platforms (e.g. fine motor dexterity, reach, etc.) which would favor typical body composition of females vice males. (Gender differences in these areas are more commonly known and as such will not be further expanded on within this paper.)



- Menstruation. Diet and levels of exercise can have a significant impact on the susceptibility of women to amenorrhea, as well as related increased risk of osteoporosis and stress fractures of the lower extremities and pelvis; menstrual history is shown to be an independent risk factor for musculoskeletal injury, and imbalances between energy intake and expenditure decreases bone density and increases rates of injury among women.<sup>8</sup> High-tempo training programs and sustained physical exertion carries a toll that continues beyond the operation or deployment. In extreme cases, women may be diagnosed with reproductive ailments, such as polycystic ovarian syndrome, as result of the hormonal changes endured during training and deployment.<sup>9</sup> While the CAF medical system imposes employment limitations on women who are pregnant or post-partum, women who are attempting to get pregnant may have to resort to employment limitations in order to decrease levels of physical exertion and allow hormone levels to re-balance to the point of allowing regular menstrual cycles to occur. Menstrual periods often become longer and more painful during deployment, and menstrual suppression using birth control pills is considered by some as a way of avoiding periods, although it may prolong irregularities in hormone regulation.
- Bladder and genitourinary problems. Difference in bladder anatomical design in females contributes to higher rates of genitourinary infections, further exacerbated by field characteristics of heat, stress, dehydration and sparse access to private, sanitary toilets and showers. In a 2000 survey, nearly half of deployed women had symptoms of a urinary tract infection or vaginitis while deployed, and a lack of education permeated both leadership and individual members: female soldiers and field commanders alike were not trained on female

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<sup>8</sup> Institute of Medicine (U.S.). Committee on Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health of Military Women, *Assessing Readiness in Military Women: The Relationship of Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 352, p.110-111.

<sup>9</sup> Captain Katie Petronio, "Get Over it! we are Not all Created Equal," *Marine Corps Gazette* July 2012, .

health issues or on the available kit within the U.S. military supply system to assist in dealing with these issues (e.g. Female Urinary Diversion Devices and Women's Military Self-Diagnosis Kits).<sup>10</sup> Women in positions in which regular (frequent) urination is inconvenient or not desirable tend to decrease fluid intake to the point of dehydration, which when combined with exposure to environmental extremes “can impair physiological function and may affect cognitive function by impairing balance.”<sup>11</sup>

- Gynecological Problems. Field conditions along contribute to significantly higher rates of adverse gynecological health issues when they operate in poor hygienic conditions prevalent in the environment in which ground troops will train and fight. A study of over 500,000 Gulf War veterans Found that women who served in the Gulf were at increased risk of hospitalization for inflammatory diseases of the ovary, fallopian tube, pelvic cellular tissue and peritoneum, as well as infertility.<sup>12</sup>
- Pregnancy. Setting aside the obvious medical employment limitations that are imposed as soon as pregnancy is diagnosed and lasting until up to 12 months following delivery, pregnancy during deployments can be detrimental to units as women are removed from the field without backfill. Birth control measures are widely available through the medical system, and education and family planning can decrease the number of unexpected pregnancies during operations. Furthermore, pregnancy complications among active service-women are at elevated levels despite decreased workloads, with risk factors being “so

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<sup>10</sup> Women's Health Assessment Team, *The Concerns of Women Currently Serving in the Afghanistan Theatre of Operations* Army Medecine, [2011], p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Institute of Medicine (U.S.). Committee on Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health of Military Women, *Assessing Readiness in Military Women: The Relationship of Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 352, p.121.

<sup>12</sup> Lorry Fenner and Marie DeYoung, *Women in Combat: Civic Duty Or Military Liability?* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 207, p.138.

persistent that researchers have recommended ... mandatory education for military leaders regarding sensitivity to women's reproductive issues but also specialized briefings for women inductees on the realities and risks of pregnancy in the military".<sup>13</sup>

- Injury rates. A study on the basic training cycle in the U.S. Army found that while women's physiology predisposes them to higher injury rates (in particular injuries of an 'overuse' nature – stress fractures, tendinitis and strains), susceptibility to “potential orthopaedic and medical conditions can be identified before the beginning of training and minimized through proper remedial activity before a strenuous physical training program is initiated.”<sup>14</sup> In a comparative study of gender-normed training with gender-neutral training, similar conclusions were drawn regarding overuse injuries among women due to the compounding of excessive muscle stress with gender differences “in bone size, in cortical thickness and in skeletal muscle mass which interact to magnify stress through the bone.”<sup>15</sup>

Canada is not alone in grappling with gender-based physiological differences. While “the prospect of finding ways around the physiological barriers to equality frightened many,” the U.K. has alternated between gender-neutral and gender-segregated training for Physical Selection Standards (Recruits) in the British Army, striving to balance equality testing and standards while lowering high injury rates among females following a gender-neutral training regimen.<sup>16</sup> Overall, physical differences account for many significant challenges faced by women in the training for and execution of combat operations. Multiple deployments in harsh

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<sup>13</sup> Lorry Fenner and Marie DeYoung, *Women in Combat: Civic Duty Or Military Liability?* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 207, p.143.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis M. Kowal, "Nature and Causes of Injury in Women Resulting from an Endurance Training Program," *Journal of American Sports Medicine* 8, no. 4 (1980).

<sup>15</sup> Ian M. Gemmell, "Injuries among Female Army Recruits: A Conflict of Legislation," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95 (2002), p.25.

<sup>16</sup> Irene Eulriet, *Women and the Military in Europe: Comparing Public Cultures* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173, p.58.

environmental conditions will exacerbate the real hurdles outlined above; however, the impact of these hurdles can be significantly lessened through education and adjustment of training and hygiene routines as well as capitalizing on innovative kit.

## **Psychological Gender Differences**

Gender differences are not limited to the physical domain: the design and functioning of men's and women's brains share many commonalities but also have several differences which manifest in how a person will react, respond to, understand and approach a given situation.

General differences deemed relevant to field operations are as follows:

- Fear of Conflict, Stress and Anger. Female brains are wired “on a molecular and neurological level to ease and prevent social conflict:” when a relationship is threatened, a woman will feel anxious and bereft due to drops in levels of neurochemicals such as serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin and increases in the stress hormone cortisol.<sup>17</sup> Women's brains are also more able to suppress expression of anger and aggression, and they may be more inclined to take measures to avoid angering another person for fear of damaging the relationship. An aptitude for defusing conflict and forging and maintaining relationships can be advantageous during engagement between coalition forces and host nation leaders.
- Leadership. In leadership, women are less likely to ask for what they want, to initiate negotiation and to promote themselves for leadership positions: there is a social cost to ambition that is disproportionately favoring to men over women, ‘homosocial reproduction’ produces biases that disadvantage women based on how male leaders evaluate performance and potential, and women leaders are more criticized than their male counterparts based on

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<sup>17</sup> Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2006), 279, p.40.

‘cross-pressures’ arising from prejudice and critical perceptions.<sup>18</sup> These trends cannot be reversed if they are not recognized by leaders.

- Emotional Sensitivity. Female brains are more apt to rely on emotion detection and visual cues in facial expression and tone of voice than exclusively on verbal communication, and will make inferences based on registered matches (and mismatches) between tone and meaning, body sensations and expressions and emotions.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, heightened emotional sensitivity also means that women are nearly twice as likely as men to suffer from depression and anxiety, especially through their reproductive years.<sup>20</sup>
- Communication. Gender differences in how brains receive and interpret various words can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of communication between genders. A simple example is when the word ‘yes’ is used in a conversation, for men it indicates agreement, whereas with women it indicates they are following the discussion.<sup>21</sup> The theories behind ‘gender intelligence’ can assist in both understanding and overcoming mixed-gender communication difficulties and ensuring accurate understanding of dialogue, instructions and expectations between men and women.
- Childbirth and Mothering. Regular, close contact with infants stimulates neurochemical changes in the brain that create and reinforce maternal brain circuits, resulting “in a motivated, highly attentive and aggressively protective brain that forces the new mother to alter her responses and priorities in life.”<sup>22</sup> While there has been an increase in men’s

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 485, p.357 - 359.

<sup>19</sup> Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2006), 279, p.118 - 119.

<sup>20</sup> Louann Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2006), 279, p.132.

<sup>21</sup> *Interview with Barbara Annis: Gender Intelligence*, directed by TVOntario Unknown)

<sup>22</sup> Brizendine, *The Female Brain* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2006), 279, p.96.

participation in domestic responsibilities, women continue to assume the majority of child care tasks, and respond to work-life balance stresses by taking advantage of maternity and parental benefits (risking marginalization due to the no-backfill policy and incurring a loss of job experience) or releasing, opting to stay at home or seek jobs demanding fewer hours.<sup>23</sup> Jobs involving prolonged and repeated separation from family, such as combat arms with frequent field training exercises and deployments, often conflict with women's desire to build and maintain close family ties. As the proportion of married servicewomen increases, awareness of family issues and the impact they may have on a female soldier must be part of the supervisor's awareness. A further perspective is gender differences in attitudes toward the value of human life – whether it is harder to kill when one is inherently designed to bring and nurture life (although it could be debated whether this reluctance would be an asset or liability during combat operations, depending on the nature of the operation).<sup>24</sup>

Awareness of the effects of personal, human factors and an understanding of human nature are “very powerful in that it is integral in the process of developing and motivating any team, where the inspiration of confidence in followers or the leadership is arguably crucial to the success of any mission.”<sup>25</sup> An overall understanding of psychological differences can improve communication and increase resiliency through training and adjustment in approach, improving gender relations and strengthening overall cohesion of the force.

Gender differences are widely varying and often ignored or downplayed by both men and women in any typically male-dominated environment. However, both physical and psychological

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<sup>23</sup> Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 485, p.355.

<sup>24</sup> Gutmann, *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 300, p.151.

<sup>25</sup> Karen D. Davis and Canadian Defence Academy, *Women and Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Perspectives and Experience* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 196, p.46.

differences can have real impact on effectiveness of a combat unit: its ability to perform required tasks and achieve goals on a sustained basis, its ability to successfully communicate and its ability to function as a team in which the contribution of each and every member of the team is valued and optimized.

## **RELEVANCE TO SUSTAINED COMBAT OPERATIONS**

Performance standards for CAF are specified through various occupational specification task statements and fitness standards, programs and evaluations. Six common military tasks have been identified based on validated operational tasks; these form the backbone of the Minimum Physical Fitness Standard for Universality of service as well as the core drivers in defining the physical demands and movement patterns simulated in the design of the FORCE fitness evaluation program for CAF.<sup>26</sup> Infantryman occupational task statements outline requirements for endurance, resilience and strength (across physical and psychological domains); related duties for example include the following: performing individual field movements (run, roll, crawl, etc.) wearing Battle Order, cross country, for up to 12 hours; evacuating a casualty weighing 90kg and carrying 100m using fireman's lift; and remaining alert for 20 hours a day under combat conditions.<sup>27</sup> Overall these requirements demand a high level of physical fitness, in terms of strength, cardiovascular and endurance. However, one could ask what proportion of these requirements are rooted in the fact that these tasks are for the most part carried out by men, and are designed based on how men would solve specific problems they encounter given the inherent attributes and capabilities available at their disposal?

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<sup>26</sup> Annex C of A-MD-154-000/FP-000 Medical Standards for Military Occupations. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-medical-occupations/op-def-performance-standards-minimum-tasks.page>: Accessed 8 May 15.

<sup>27</sup> Annex D of A-MD-154-000/FP-000 Medical Standards for Military Occupations. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-policies-standards-medical-occupations/op-def-performance-standards-minimum-tasks.page>: Accessed 8 May 15.

The conduct of military field operations, from a historical perspective, has largely (but not exclusively) been the purview of the healthy, fit male. When the means available to military leaders by which to prepare for and conduct field operations are homogenous, the solutions thereby devised will naturally reflect (and capitalize on) the attributes of this homogeneity. This approach is without doubt logical; however it is not absolute if the homogeneity dissolves. A platoon composed of 120-lb women would likely approach certain tasks in a very different way than a platoon of 220-lb men. It would be interesting to examine how the role, criticality and structure of the armed forces would change if the decision-makers at senior political and military levels were exclusively women. What proportion of the difficulties of women adapting to the combat arms are due to the fact that for the most part the training, equipment, methodology, machinery and physical techniques are exclusively designed with the male physical attributes in mind.

While the representation of women across the majority of armed forces around the world continues to be a definite minority, as overall numbers increase, the flexibility in terms of methodology and technique should correspondingly increase as well. In order to ensure all military personnel are qualified to perform their jobs, the establishment of occupation-specific fitness standards should be combined with development of task-oriented (vice generic) strength training programs and self-pacing to allow women to reach their full potential, as well as possible ergonomic assessment of tasks and equipment, and changes in technique (shifting loads) and load/package design to decrease or modify the need for physical exertion.<sup>28</sup> The rationale behind job redesign research conducted at the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental

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<sup>28</sup> Institute of Medicine (U.S.). Committee on Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health of Military Women, *Assessing Readiness in Military Women: The Relationship of Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 352, p.77.



Medicine and U.S. Army Research Laboratory is that increasing numbers women and some NATO troops are too small to handle equipment and perform tasks designed for larger U.S. men, and decreased physical exertion should correspond to a decrease in job-related injuries, improve endurance and allow for flexibility in employment.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, it should be noted that in general, occupational task standards specify the requirements from the perspective of a discrete point in time, and only account for the sustainability required for operations in a highly limited sense, in that the ability to execute these tasks on a continued basis is considered in a scale of hours or days, vice over several months and ultimately over a career spanning several years as multiple deployments are conducted. Given the amount of training and effort that the CAF devotes to each of its soldiers, the sustainment aspect is important for ensuring readiness levels are able to be met on a continual basis with sufficient qualified and trained individuals over the long term.

Women will join and leave the forces for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to training and physical selection processes and standards, clothing and equipment issues, the existence or lack of family-friendly practices, sexual and gender harassment and leadership commitments.<sup>30</sup> While it is acknowledged that sustained combat operations are physically and psychologically demanding, and the innate characteristics of women are in general disadvantageous in the combat environment, *adaptation* to overcome gender differences, and not marginalization, is the key to positioning these women (and their units) for success.

## **AWARENESS AND EDUCATION**

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<sup>29</sup> Institute of Medicine (U.S.). Committee on Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health of Military Women, *Assessing Readiness in Military Women: The Relationship of Body Composition, Nutrition, and Health* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1998), 352, p.79.

<sup>30</sup> Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: The Politics of Gender and the Contemporary British Army* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 144, p.43.

CAF leaders should be made aware of the gender differences highlighted in the preceding section, in order to enable them to optimize individual and collective performance of within their units. Unlike gender integration, promoting a better understanding of gender differences and how they can affect combat operations is not a task which requires an extensive cultural shift within CAF. Rather, it requires a subtle shift in mindset, moving from a prescribed approach to a more varied approach, thereby allowing for accommodation of different techniques and methodologies, flexible leadership styles and open attitudes towards training and the execution of tasks.

The challenges currently faced by CAF in the integration of persons with disabilities highlight the fact that a “belief that diversity is an asset and therefore preferable to uniformity” is critical, but is often difficult “for organizations like CAF that have traditionally operated in a one-size-fits-all organizational structure.”<sup>31</sup> These challenges at the core are aligned closely with challenges of a developing a ‘gender-smart’ CAF. Gender training, as recommended in a UN Gender Training for Security Sector Personnel publication,<sup>32</sup> could begin with a ‘pre-training’ gender assessment to gauge level of knowledge of gender differences currently possessed by tactical-level leaders, and be followed by development of training material and pedagogy which accounts for the challenges arising from deeply rooted perception of cultural norms and individual identity.

This shift in mindset must first be preceded by an awareness campaign whereby gender differences are formally incorporated into leadership courses such as the Primary, Intermediate

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<sup>31</sup> Canada, *Persons with Disabilities in Defence: Deep Dive to 2023* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence,[2013]), p.26.

<sup>32</sup> Kleppe et al., *Gender Training for Security Sector Personnel: Good Practices and Lessons Learned*, Vol. Tool 12 (Geneva: Dcaf, Osce/odhr, Un-Instraw, 2008), 20, p.4 -13.

and Senior Leadership Qualifications at a much greater level than is currently the case. For example, the only reference to distinction between male and female in the PLQ training plan is in a single teaching point on hygiene and sanitation standards within an enabling objective for Enforcement of Fieldcraft in a Tactical Environment.<sup>33</sup> Given the scope and scale of differences as outlined in the preceding section, it would be an understatement to believe that this is less than sufficient.

The introduction of in-depth education on gender differences at the lowest levels of leadership in career courses that span occupation and service boundaries would allow for the change in mindset to gain momentum en masse across the forces: the stakeholders most resistant to change in technique or mindset must be targeted, and the leadership role of the non-commissioned members at the MCpl, Sgt and WO ranks should be exploited to carry this change. Effort should also be made in regards to senior leadership awareness and education of gender differences, both to enable understanding for their own professional knowledge and benefit, but more importantly to obtain support for driving changes in the culture and in the ‘institutional consciousness.’ A guide to issues of women in armed forces cites factors contributing to the ongoing problem of sexual harassment as including a “lack of understanding of the value of women to the military” and “the devaluation of women due to their minority status and differing physical fitness standards between men and women.”<sup>34</sup> A professional leadership cadre which values human dignity and respect, can have a greater impact in leading positive change in regards to improving gender relations within their forces if they are informed, educated and motivated to effect this change.

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<sup>33</sup> EO 211.02 in Primary Leadership Qualification (AINR) Training Plan A-PD-050-PLQ/PH-H17

<sup>34</sup> Darlene M. Iskra, *Women in Te United States Armed Forces: A Guide to the Issues* (Denver, CO: Praeger, 2010), 195, p.103.

Another factor relevant to the discussion of education and awareness is recognition that there is a strong culture within the military which values conformity, uniformity and adherence to a specific methodology. The military values the sacrifice of individual identity for collective identity, and recognizing gender differences challenges the notion that all soldiers are not equal. A common attitude among military women is that they are ‘one of the guys’, and acceptance among the men was gained only after suppression of ‘feminine’ traits and qualities. While this may have been a contributing factor to overcoming initial resistance to employment of women as a whole in the military and in combat arms roles, in order to reach the next level of integration, whereby differences are acknowledged and handled in such a way as to optimize and elevate individual and collective performance, CAF leaders have to be educated on and confront gender differences. Not only must social and cultural stigmas and taboos be defeated, the context in which they are formed and prevail within the CAF must be understood and articulated. In consideration of this reality, rather than verbal briefs and formal instruction, relevant gender differences could be summarized in an informative booklet similar to the CF’s Family Friendly Personnel Policies: A Guide for Commanding Officers and Supervisors.<sup>35</sup>

Recognition of gender differences may be perceived by some as a threat to the traditional ‘masculinity’ of the armed forces. As one U.S. Marine Corps Colonel noted, the debate on women in combat “should not be argued from the standpoint of gender differences... [or] female rights... Important as these issues are, they pale in the light of the need to protect femininity, motherhood, and ... the graceful conduct of women.”<sup>36</sup> There may also be reluctance to discuss certain aspects of both male and female biology. Many women do not want to draw attention to

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<sup>35</sup> Canada, *Family-Friendly Personnel Policies* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1998), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Sara L. Zeigler and Gregory G. Gunderson, *Moving Beyond G.I. Jane: Women and the U.S. Military* (Toronto: University Press of America, 2005), 194, p.45 - 46.

their gender, for social and cultural reasons based on their attempt to eradicate the topic of gender from their unit lines. Discomfort should be acknowledged but must be overcome. There is a certain level of maturity and professionalism required in order to institute education and awareness in regards to subject matter that, in the military as well as in many parts of society, remains taboo or is only discussed in private or with health care professionals.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper aimed to highlight those gender differences that CAF leadership ought not only to be made aware of, but also to recognize an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the forces at both the individual and organizational level. While acknowledging the tremendous progress that the CAF has achieved in regards to gender equality over the previous decades, the institution has now reached a point whereby it can move beyond simple gender assimilation and 'gender neutral' policies, and begin educating its leaders on the challenges and opportunities relating to the gender diversity it currently enjoys. In order for the CAF to optimize its operational capabilities, it must develop, generate and employ leaders that are attuned to the psychological and physical traits of their subordinates.

Gender differences are not only real but they are highly relevant in the preparation for and execution of sustained combat operations. From the physical domain, well-understood but poorly accounted for differences in body composition, strength and cardiovascular performance can be overcome through adjustments in pace, technique and training; confronting lesser understood challenges in gynecological, genitourinary and reproductive areas of health can be achieved through increased awareness of causes and available kit to improve field hygiene for women; injury rates can be lowered through increased preparation and training prior to

operations. From the psychological domain, reactions to stress and anger will be different between men and women; communication variances in reception and interpretation will result in different meanings attributed to different exchanges; neurochemical changes as result of pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum will effect changes in how women respond to and prioritize certain situations.

Given the mixed-gender nature of today's CAF, there is an undoubted validity in occupational-based testing and standards; however there is also opportunity on many occasions, in the execution of operations, to consider alternate methodologies and approaches: given that occupational standards are met, a balance can then be struck, in that "women must accommodate to the military, and the military must accommodate to women."<sup>37</sup> Given the limited scope of this paper, it is evident that further study and analysis is needed across the domains of gender differences identified in the preceding section. This paper has focused on making the case for the need for recognition of gender differences using a limited number of examples of which acknowledgment and corresponding changes in leadership, training and procedural aspects will improve CAF members of both gender to excel in the performance of their duties.

By not only recognizing gender differences but also educating leaders on their existence and relevance to training for and execution of operational tasks, the CAF will be best-positioned to optimize the performance of all members and create a healthy work environment in which diversity, and the contributions of all members, are valued. Education on gender differences should form a logical part of the CAF's "Creating a Culture of CF Health" framework with its

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<sup>37</sup> Davis and Canadian Defence Academy, *Women and Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Perspectives and Experience* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 196, p.119.

goal of “maximizing operational strength.”<sup>38</sup> In a time where experience levels are low and retention of (men and) women is a continual challenge, a change in mindset across both tactical and strategic leadership to recognize and embrace gender differences can have a positive impact. Integration of gender perspectives into the CAF, in terms of how it trains, how it educates and how it fights, will result in a stronger, more capable and more enduring force.

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<sup>38</sup> Canada, "Canadian Forces Health and Physical Fitness Strategy" (Unknown), p.30.

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