Women and U.S. Special Operations
Barriers to the Successful Integration of Women into Special Operation Forces

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Introduction
In January 2010, nearly 220,000 combat military occupations opened to women, including all Special Operations positions. Assessment, Selection, and Qualification into the ranks of Special Operations Forces (SOF) are very selective, and they present extremely difficult physical and mental barriers to all personnel who attempt to join. Right now, female membership into these elite units is strongly opposed, creating additional barriers unique only to women. In my research I identify and address three of these barriers:
1. Special Operations Organizational Culture
2. Discrimination Based on Sex and Gender
3. Standards

Barrier I
• Special Operations Organizational Culture
  - Male Dominated, Masculine Culture
  - Combat

Barrier II
• Discrimination Based on Sex and Gender
  - Sexual Assault
  - Sexual Harassment

Barrier III
• Standards
  - Assessment, Selection, and Qualification Standards
  - Operational Environment
  - Biological, Physiological and Cognitive Differences Between Men and Women

Methods
1. For my research I conducted literature reviews of:
   • United States (U.S.) Armed Forces’ Previous Force Integrations
   • U.S. Special Operations Forces
   • Leadership and Ethics
   • Society, Culture, and Organizational Diversity
   • Organizational Theory
   • Organizational Inertia
   • Biological, Physiological and Cognitive Differences Between Men and Women
2. I conducted interviews with Special Operations Personnel
3. I drew on my personal experiences as a female Soldier in the U.S. Army

Literature Cited