



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 6, 2014

Military Gender Issue Reignites as 45 Percent of Female Marines Fail Pull-up Test

A [brief announcement](#) on the U.S. Marine Corps' social networking site was enough to [set off another round in the gender wars](#): "Corps postpones pull-ups for women & female Marines."

The reason was simple: Despite being given more than a year's warning that pull-ups [would be the only option](#) for testing females' upper body strength in the Corps' Physical Fitness Test (PFT) starting January 1, only 45 percent of those tested at Paris Island, South Carolina, met the bare minimum of three. In the wisdom of the Marine Corps, this was the minimum "muscular strength required to perform common military tasks such a scaling a wall, climbing up a rope or lifting and carrying heavy munitions."



The delay is for an undetermined period of time because its implementation ran "the risk of losing recruits and hurting retention of women already in the service," [according to the Associated Press](#).

This is part of the plan of gradually install females into combat positions in the U.S. armed forces, starting in 2016. Said Marine Corps Commandant General James Amos, the Corps wants to "continue to gather data and ensure that female Marines are provided with the best opportunity to succeed." In the interim, they may continue to opt out of the pull-up requirement in favor of the much less demanding "flexed-arm hang" which requires only that the soldier to hang with her chin above the bar for a minimum of 15 seconds.

This isn't the first time that females have been unable to complete tasks assigned to males in the Corps. In September, 15 female and 266 male Marines [took the Corps' grueling two-month infantry course](#), carrying 85-pound packs and rifles and engaging in various obstacle courses while at the same time learning how to shoot, launch grenades, conduct patrols, and avoid [IEDs \(roadside bombs\)](#). Of the men, 221 made it through the course, while just three women finished. Earlier 20 female Marines attempted to complete the even more difficult officers' training course, and none passed.

Differences in gender have been reflected in PFTs for years. [At present](#) a perfect score for a male requires 20 pull-ups, 100 crunches in less than two minutes, and a three-mile run in 18 minutes or less. For a female a perfect score requires only the flexed arm hang for 70 seconds, 100 crunches, and a 21-minute three-mile run.

The only way "equality" on the PFTs can be achieved will be to lower the bar for women, according to James Joyner, [writing for Outside the Beltway](#):

It's pretty clear that very few women are cut out for the infantry. Thus far, in tests conducted with



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the most highly motivated and physically fit women the Marine Corps can find, zero women have made it through [the] infantry officer training and only a handful have made it through the enlisted course....

We're never going to be able to produce female grunts in large [numbers] without lowering standards.

This was confirmed in [a statement](#) by Captain Maureen Krebs, acting as a spokeswoman for the Marine commandant: "The commandant has no intent to introduce a standard that would negatively affect the current status of female Marines or their ability to continue serving in the Marine Corps."

The founder of the Center for Military Readiness, Elaine Donnelly, [said](#) that some allowances can be made for female Marines serving behind the lines, but they cannot be made for those intending to serve at the front:

Gender-specific allowances to improve fitness can be justified in basic and entry-level exercises. [But] they are not acceptable in training for infantry combat, where lives and missions depend upon individual strength, endurance, team cohesion and trust for survival....

Thirty years of studies and reports ... have confirmed that in the close combat environment, women do not have the equal opportunity to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive.

The Marine Corps no doubt will find a way to soften the requirements while keeping them "equal." According to Donnelly, one may soon expect to read about how new "gender-neutral" standards will include fitness testing standards that are measured using "gender-normed" scores: a distinction intending to hide the difference.

[Fitness experts](#) think that the real difference in performance is because of genetic makeup and that training approaches may only help close the gap a little. As Richard Liegy [noted wryly in the Washington Post](#): "Putting physiology, social policy, behavioral theory and military doctrine aside, it appears that for reasons known only to the Maker, men and women are different."

Is it too much to ask that such a revelation inform the commandant and his superiors who at present think there should be no difference between genders, and that any apparent difference can be erased by changing the numbers?

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