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# **Barriers to Women's Advancement: Ability, Experience, and Personal Lifestyle Choices**



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In this mini-paper I would like to discuss the moral dilemma faced by the United States Air Force in having a very small percentage of women compared to women's percentage of representation in the overall population. Is this lack of parity in representation due to a predetermined policy? If not, must the military try to create artificial incentives to get women to join in greater numbers over men? Would this be fair from a moral standpoint if we accept the negative rights afforded by the constitution that guarantee freedom from government interference in deciding what professions people choose? To answer this question it is necessary to outline a research model aiming to build a case for the USAF's current actions being either morally right or wrong. To do so one must examine the relevant utilitarian and deontological implications of these policies.

Traditionally, the military has been a male only profession. Only in the last century did a significant number of women start participating in the American Armed Services mostly in support positions. After the mid-seventies the US military saw more than 15% of its forces become composed by women. Today, most military professions with the exception of front line combat positions are open to women. The military cites moral and operational reasons as the causes that hold back women from actively participating in forward combat units.

Some argue given that females make up around 51% of the US population and compose roughly only 20% of the armed services women are underrepresented in the military because of glass ceilings, limited opportunities, and other artificial social restrictions that penalize women in being able to actively pursue a military career.

Based on that argument some people think that the military must create artificial incentives to recruit women over men so that the military represents each gender more equally. Such measures for women would work very similarly to affirmative action programs that would include lower standards for admission into the military, higher pay, extra perks, etc.

From a utilitarian perspective it would be necessary to see how the following groups would be affected by the current USAF personal life behavior guidelines:

- Male Airmen
- Female Airmen
- Male Officers
- Female Officers
- Operational Capability
- Department of Defense
- National Interest
- Global Interest

From a Deontological perspective it would be necessary to examine whether the constitutional negative right guaranteeing freedom from government interference in establishing what professions people can choose is applicable to the military. I think it is. Notwithstanding the UCMJ, as well as the fact that the military is an extension of the government, I do not believe it is right for the government to establish artificial policies meant to alter one of our most sacred freedoms: freedom to pursue happiness in professions of our own choosing.

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Since this is only a research model, I can only offer an answer to the dilemma referenced in the introduction based on my current access to top level statistical data and my own personal experience.

I believe that the USAF is morally right in its actions and I do not recommend a parity seeking affirmative action program in the future for the Air Force. From a utilitarian standpoint, it would be disadvantageous to all parties with the exception of women airmen if an affirmative action style program were to be implemented. From a deontological perspective it goes against the freedoms guaranteed by our constitution.