

Report from the Center for

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Women in the Military

To make its research easily available to a broad audience, the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy publishes a quarterly newsletter: *QQ—Report from the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy*. Named after the abbreviation for “questions,” *QQ* summarizes and supplements Center books and working papers and features other selected philosophical work on public policy questions. Articles in *QQ* are intended to advance philosophically informed debate on current policy choices; the views presented are not necessarily those of the Center or its sponsors.

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Women are employed more extensively in the American armed forces than in the military forces of any other nation in the world. This increased reliance on women for our national defense is currently facing intense reexamination. The Army has recently ordered a “pause” in the escalated recruitment of female soldiers. And last year Congress, responding to President Carter’s call for renewed Selective Service registration, voted, in opposition to the president’s wishes, against female registration. The constitutionality of the male-only draft has been challenged in the courts, but the Supreme Court has upheld the restriction. Meanwhile, public opinion continues to oppose full integration of women into the military. Through all the controversy surrounding this issue, the moral question remains: Should men go off to war while women weep?

This question resolves itself into several further sets of questions. First, do women have a right to serve in their nation’s armed forces, and if so, what is the source of this right? Second, what limits should be placed on this right? Are there sound empirical grounds for arguing that women’s right to serve should not include a right to full participation in offensive combat? Finally, if men are drafted to serve, should women be drafted as well? Or should the female presence in the military remain voluntary? The answers we give to these questions depend on our views on the significance of sex-related differences, the purposes of the military, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The Right of Military Service

In the past decade, the percentage of women in the military has risen dramatically from 1 percent in 1971 to 8 percent in the current all-volunteer force. Recruiting goals have called for 12 percent by 1985, for a total of 250,000. Under the new administration, however, the desired levels of female participation are being reevaluated. Field commanders have complained that the increased female presence confronts the military with a host of personnel problems. These range from the provision of housing, uniforms, and adequate day care to sexual harassment and a lack of male peer acceptance. It is expected that the re-assessment will result in a reduction in female enlistments.

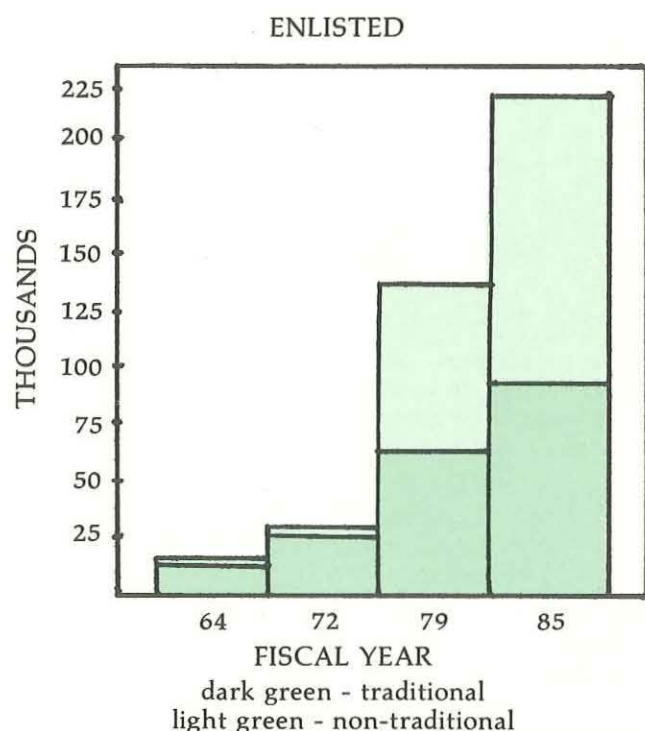
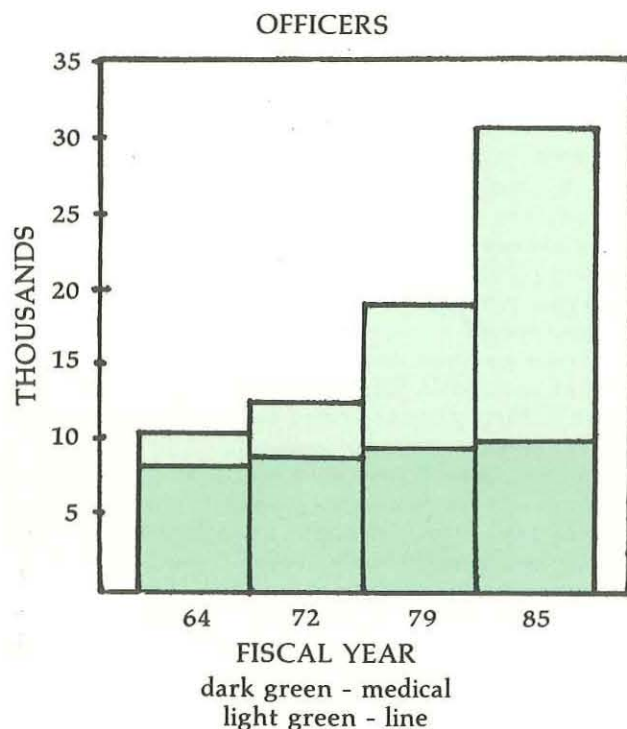
It may seem that the recruitment of women is not worth its social and perhaps even military costs. But denying qualified women the opportunity to serve in their nation's armed forces may have still heavier moral costs. According to Sara Ruddick, a philosopher at the New School of Social Research, to deny qualified women participation in the military is to deny them a *right*, for the right to serve in one's nation's armed forces and to defend one's very way of life is a basic right of citizenship, belonging equally to all citizens. "To fight and to command fighters, when qualified to do so, is a right conferred upon citizens and cannot be denied them because of their membership in a class or group. Women claiming the right to fight are claiming full citizenship." This right, fur-

thermore, is an especially important one for women, bearing a certain symbolic significance. Some of the military's privileges are eagerly seized by all disadvantaged groups: The military provides economic and educational opportunities for women, as it does for racial and ethnic minorities. "But there is a special point [for women] in proving our ability to fight where stakes are high and, hitherto, masculinity has prevailed. Military success would challenge the perception, common in civilian life, that women are weak, dependent, and powerless."

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If military service is a right shared by all citizens, the Pentagon will have to produce weighty arguments for setting it aside. It will not suffice to cite additional expenses or inconveniences, for we ordinarily think that rights can be overridden only by considerations of special societal urgency. The difficulties of providing new uniforms for female soldiers do not tip the balance here. Seriously compromising our national security would.

ACTIVE DUTY WOMEN



Courtesy Dept. of Defense



Women in Combat

Those who oppose women's participation in the military frequently charge, however, that any right of women to serve is indeed overridden, or at least limited, by more urgent national security concerns. David H. Marlowe, Chief of the Department of Military Psychiatry at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (speaking in a private capacity and not representing any official view), insists that the right to serve must be measured against "that potential lost war that could alter . . . the integrity of the nation and its security for decades to come." If the presence of women in the military significantly increases the likelihood of losing that war, then it may be morally permissible or even obligatory to reduce their participation, or to limit their areas of performance.

Military service can take many forms, and the right to serve need not imply a right to serve in every military capacity. While women currently serve in scores of nontraditional military positions, they are excluded from strictly combat functions, such as infantry and armor. Defenders of the exclusionary policy argue that full inclusion of women would jeopardize our fighting effectiveness. Others dispute these claims, insisting that women should have fuller access to all occupational specialties.

Women in Combat: No

The case against women in combat often begins with a recounting of the physiological differences between men and women. Women average 86-89 percent of male bulk and volume, and even when size is held constant, women are only 80 percent as strong as men. These differences in scale are accompanied by differences in structure. David H. Marlowe cites a long list of physiological traits distinguishing the sexes: "The greater vital capacity, speed, muscle mass, aiming and throwing skills of the male, . . . and his more rapid rises in adrenaline make the male more fitted for combat." Opponents of women in combat also point to anthropological evidence that women play less aggressive roles than men in all observed societies, with aggressiveness differentials manifesting themselves in very young children prior to any significant socialization. Aggression has been linked to testosterone, the male sex hormone, and has been shown to fluctuate with hormone levels.

Even if these putative sex differences turn out to be more myth than fact, the existence of the myth itself works against the inclusion of women in combat units. Marlowe cites World War II studies "[demonstrating] that the performance of military units is, in part, governed by soldiers' perception of the unit and its members." According to Marlowe, many male soldiers who currently train in sex-integrated units suffer a loss in self-esteem, feeling that they have been subjected to less intensive training than soldiers in exclusively male units, even when objective examinations show otherwise. If women could do all the

things they could do, how challenging could those things be? This self-doubt could take its toll in combat effectiveness.

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Finally, the presence of women in combat units is said to have an adverse effect as well on the attitudes of our allies and enemies. Again, here the myth is as damning as the fact. University of Maryland sociologist Mady Segal points to the belief of many that: "The perception of our military effectiveness by allies and adversaries is crucial to our national security. If our military is viewed as weak because of the inclusion of women in combat roles, our international posture can be just as critically affected as if we were truly weak."

Women in Combat: Yes

Defenders of women in combat concede many of the relevant sex differences charged by their opponents. Men are on average bigger and stronger. The anthropological record *does* contain unbroken millennia of male domination across widely divergent cultures. Sexual stereotypes, whether or not grounded in fact, *do* determine to some extent soldiers' self-perceptions and world attitudes toward American military effectiveness.

However, lesser female size and strength may be compensated for by the superior mental aptitude and educational background of average female recruits. The all volunteer force has faced severe criticism for its deteriorating personnel quality, as measured on military qualification tests. The mental and technical abilities women bring to the armed forces may on balance offset any decline in physical standards, for a net gain in fighting effectiveness. Furthermore, an elevated mental profile for our enlisted troops may favorably affect both the self-perception of units and the attitudes of allies and enemies.

Sex-linked differences in strength and physical capacity are, moreover, only differences in *average* ability. Mady Segal cautions, "We must be careful not to confuse a difference in average physical strength between men and women with a situation in which all men are strong enough and no women are. . . . Rather than assuming that all women are incapable of performing by virtue of the average woman's lack of capability, specific requirements should serve as the selection criteria, not gender."



The role of women in the military has changed dramatically during the past decade.

Photos courtesy U.S. Army Photographs (above, CC 80342; top right, CC 98651; bottom right, CC 100358)



This emphasis on actual performance as a gender-free standard is especially important for eliminating discrimination based on unfounded prejudice. Segal reminds us that "many of the arguments currently being used to justify excluding women . . . from combat roles have been used in the past to justify excluding women from other occupations," such as medicine, law, government, and law enforcement. Many of the arguments that "prove" that women should not be fighters equally well "prove" that they should not be doctors, voters, property-owners, or, indeed, independent, strong, autonomous persons. Such unpalatable conclusions lead us to be suspicious of the arguments that generated them.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind the wide range of tasks all falling under the common heading of combat specialties. Service in the infantry and service on board an aircraft carrier, for example, are both forms of combat service from which women are now excluded. But they require very different skills and abilities. Upper arm strength is critical in toting heavy weapons and ammunition across jungle terrain. It is irrelevant to success in piloting fighter planes. The physiological argument against women in combat cannot justify excluding them from combat specialties where their special liabilities are unimportant.

The arguments for and against excluding women from various combat specialties may seem incon-

clusive, with the final choice resting on our views about the essential purpose of the military. On Marlowe's view, "The primary and essential role of the armed forces is to fight and win those wars to which the nation commits them." The national security is too important for us to court the risks of possible combat ineffectiveness. For others, the military is equally important for the role it plays in our national life, as an employer of massive scale and a symbol of citizen rights and responsibilities.

Volunteers or Draftees?

It might be thought that the right to fight and the duty to fight are merely different sides of the same moral coin, that the right to volunteer for service implies the duty to serve when called upon to do so. But rights do not imply duties in this way. Sara Ruddick compares the right to fight to the right to have children. "Neither right entails that a woman in fact choose to participate in the activity to which she is entitled." These rights entail only that, having chosen, one assumes whatever responsibilities—as soldier or parent—are attendant upon one's choice.

The right to fight, then, does not itself directly imply the duty to fight. But many women claim the right to fight as a right conferred upon all citizens. Perhaps in the same way the duty to fight is a duty all

citizens must share. Perhaps accepting the duty to serve is a badge of full and equal citizenship. The important questions now become: should *any* citizen be drafted? If so, do the reasons justifying such a draft apply equally well to the drafting of *all* citizens, men and women alike?

Marlowe defends a draft by arguing that the costs of losing a war are greater than the costs of coerced military service. He believes that the all-volunteer force may be incapable of successfully defending the nation, because of a skewed distribution of aptitudes and skills, and that the nation's defense is a high enough priority to justify conscription. "The costs of service as a conscriptee should be accounted . . . against the consequences to the individual and society in the event that a war vital to the national interest or national survival is lost." Against the costs of coercion he weighs "the death of a way of life."

Marlowe's argument in favor of a draft justifies drafting qualified women as well as men. An army capable of victory "requires that it have the most competent and highly skilled personnel available manning its force, its weapons, and its support systems . . . If we are to man our military force in a way that will ensure optimal competence, skill, and ability—given the approaching demographic dip of the later eighties through nineties—women will have to provide a significant part of that force."

Ruddick addresses the legitimacy of drafting women by raising questions about the sources and limits of political obligation, as these bear upon the coerced participation of women in the armed force. Do women and men have the same obligations to their government? Do these obligations include military service?

It can be argued that women are socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged relative to men, and that they are therefore less obligated to support their state and defend its political and economic arrangements. If benefit from and participation in the state ground a duty to serve in the military, they do not, according to Ruddick, "obligate women to the same degree and for the same reasons [as men]." Few contemporary political theorists believe, however, that such a grave duty as military service can be justified on these grounds for the vast majority of citizens.

It is more plausible, on Ruddick's view, to view political obligation generally as grounded in a "natural duty to preserve states in their justice." A citizen of a (relatively) just state accepts obligations to it "because his state is just and he is moral." If this account justifies the drafting of men, it equally justifies the drafting of women, because men and women "are the same kind of moral person." But does a citizen's moral obligation to a just state include military service? Ruddick thinks not: the duty entailed is a duty both to assist in just wars *and* to resist unjust wars. Individuals must be allowed in conscience to decide the justice of the wars their state chooses to wage before deciding to join in waging them; this duty of conscience is

shared fully by citizens of both sexes, and for both sexes it is equally incompatible with currently proposed drafts.

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For this reason, Ruddick views conventional policies of conscription as unjust and unjustified—again, for men and women alike. But if men *are* in fact unjustly drafted, should women be drafted as well? Should a burden that no one should bear be fairly shared? Ruddick believes that the answer may be yes—however socially, politically, and economically advantaged men may be as a group, coerced combat remains a terrible thing: "there is a fundamental fairness that decrees it impermissible that men, solely because of gender, bear the sole burden of combat."

Conclusion

The moral question about the role of women in the military seems in the end to come down to a question about the rights and obligations of citizenship. If the right to fight is a citizenship right, it is a right qualified women share with qualified men. If citizenship carries with it an obligation to serve, women, as full and equal citizens, will have to accept their portion of the military burden. Segal writes: "One of the basic principles on which our nation was founded is the full participation of all citizens in all aspects of the life of the nation. The ultimate question that still remains is to what extent we are willing to treat women as equal citizens of the nation."

The services do not now accept volunteers who cannot meet established standards, and past drafts have exempted those for whom competing moral obligations—to family, church, or conscience—have forbidden military participation. There seems no reason to believe that existing standards and exemptions cannot continue to bar or excuse those men and women who cannot or ought not serve, while encouraging the full participation of all able-bodied and willing citizens, whatever their race, creed, or gender.

The views of Sara Ruddick, Mady Segal, and David H. Marlowe are drawn from papers prepared for the Center for Philosophy and Public Policy's Working Group on Voluntary versus Non-voluntary Military Service. Working papers available from this project are "The All-Volunteer Force and Racial Imbalance," by Robert K. Fullinwider; "If the Draft is Restored: Uncertainties, Not Solutions," by Kenneth J. Coffey; "Military Organization and Personnel Accession: What Changed with the AVF . . . and What Didn't," by David R. Segal; and "The Obligations of Citizens and the Justification of Conscription," by A. John Simmons. See order form, p. 15.