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The Frailty Myth: The Case for Gender-Neutral Physical Fitness assessment practices among the United States Airmen

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THE FRAILTY MYTH

LT COL STEPHANIE A. FRAIOLI &
DR. MAGDALENA T. BOGACZ

**The case for gender-neutral
physical fitness assessment
practices among the United
States Airmen**



WHITE PAPERS — THE JUSTIFICATION

2013 - Rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule

- restricted assignments of women to occupational jobs in direct combat units

2014 - National Defense Authorization Act

- directed the establishment of empirical-based gender-neutral physical standards before opening any restricted occupations to women

2018 - RAND report

- uncovered gaps in the evidence base that need to be addressed for the test to meet the DoD's fitness goals

2022 - Air Force Manual for Physical Fitness

- "Every member should be physically fit, regardless of age, grade, gender, or duty assignment"

2023 - National Defense Authorization Act

- mandates the creation of gender-neutral physical fitness standards for "combat arms" positions but does not specify what jobs this will apply to



FA IN THE AIR FORCE — CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

1. **Air Force Fitness Assessment (FA)** for women is comprised of the same components as males, but with slower run times and lower repetitions for all events

2. **2012 Marine interview**

- "It is simply not reasonable to expect the average women to perform the same exercises as men due to a genetic predisposition for weakness and other physical shortcomings."

- norms and traditions based on myths and not empirical evidence — **the Frailty Myth**

3. **Skill vs Ability**

- FA events are skills, not abilities based on physical types, that can be perfected with practice

- societal and cultural pressures perpetuate the Frailty Myth instead of improving skills

- no significant difference in lean muscle quality was found between genders

- Marriott & Grumstrup-Scott (1990) *Body Composition and Physical Performance*

- Williams, Haywood & Painter (1996) *Environmental versus Biological Influences on Gender Differences in the Overarm Throw for Force*

4. **Psychological Aspect of the Frailty Myth**



SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Relative Strength**

- "the amount of strength in relation to one's body weight"

2. **Wilks Coefficient**

- a mathematical coefficient that can be used to measure the relative strengths despite the different weight classes of athletes

3. **Sinclair Coefficient**

- a mathematical equation designed to figure out who is the best male or female athlete, across any age group and weight class, during the current year or "cycle"

4. **Allometric Scaling**

- the changes that take place within a species or between species as sizes change

5. **Non-gender specific early physical education and training**



THANK YOU!

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