

Homosexuality and the military sociology essay



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Homosexual members have long served in the United States military. The policies and legal regulations affecting them have gone through many changes often mirroring society in general. With President Obama's recent repeal of a ban on homosexual service members serving openly arguments for and against allowing homosexual men and women need to be addressed and reexamined. These arguments include homosexual members' affects on a unit's cohesion and ability to perform its military role. In addition to how integration of homosexual members would affect the daily lives of service members' privacy and living conditions. In order to understand these arguments, parallels need to be drawn from both current military units of countries who have allowed homosexual members to serve and U. S. institutions that are similar to the military, but have allowed membership of open homosexual persons.

Homosexuality and the Military

The debate as to whether gay men and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly in the military has grown in intensity over the last two decades. Two value systems appear to collide where both camps view themselves as defenders of morality. People who oppose the ban on homosexual members in the military stand on the principle that gays are a minority group whose civil rights should not be violated. They contend that this ban creates an unwarranted climate of fear and intimidation for gays and lesbians in the military (Miller, 1994). In contrast, people who support a ban on gay men and lesbians believe that lifting the ban would undermine basic moral values on which this country was founded. They often view homosexuality as a sinful behavior that cannot be condoned (Miller, 1994).

Homosexuality has not always been a fervent issue with the military. The progression of the legal history in the military is important to trace. The legal history beginning with early policies and ending with the current administration gives a reference in which the argument has been framed throughout history. An understanding of the past and the changes that occurred throughout history gives a lens in which to view current arguments, positions, and policy.

Much of the current argument surrounding the issue of homosexuality and the military involves either unit cohesion or a heterosexual member's right to privacy. The cohesiveness of a unit is hard to judge and difficult to understand. What makes a unit more or less cohesive is often as ambiguous. Therefore, arguments that homosexuality will negatively or positively impact a unit's cohesion must be viewed from both a U. S. perspective and a military perspective. To do this, military units from countries who have integrated homosexual members into their armed services should be examined as well as United States non-military units which also require cohesive teams and have integrated homosexual persons. A heterosexual's right to privacy, the need to be able to be comfortable showering, sleeping, and using the bathroom are issues that need to also be examined. People who feel uncomfortable in their living conditions are not likely to make better soldiers or more productive workers. The rights which may be violated need to be addressed as well as how these violations affect people. Before examining current issues, a brief look at the legal history will shed light as to ways in which the United States came to its current situation.

Legal History

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Early Policies. U. S. military law prior to World War I did not specifically address homosexuality. The Articles of War of 1916 restricted consideration of sodomy to cases of assault with the “ intent to commit” sodomy (Davis, 1991). Following the end of World War I, Congress enacted the Articles of War of 1920 which named sodomy (Article 93) as a specific offense (Articles, 1920). In 1950, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) was put into law, replacing previous military judicial statutes (Burrelli, 1994). The UCMJ included Article 125, which specifically bans acts of sodomy between members of the same or opposite sex (Burrelli, 1994).

1940s-1970s. Policies concerning military action in regards to homosexuality shifted from the 1940s to the 1970s. Early policies were based on a treatment and retention model while later policies continued to accept treatment but moved toward separation and in some cases punishment of known homosexual persons (Burrelli, 1994). Policy until the mid 1970s remained under a medical model of illness, treatment, and integration or, later separation from the services (Burrelli, 1994).

Carter’s Policy. During the late 1970s, the Carter administration revised the policy concerning homosexuality and included the statement, “ homosexuality is incompatible with military service,” (Burrelli, 1994). The Carter administration’s revised policy became the basis of the Department of Defense (DoD) policy (Snyder & Nyberg, 1980). The DoD policy (Directive No. 1332. 14, 1982) stated:

Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who,

by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission. The presence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Military Services to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among service members; to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the Military Services; to maintain the public acceptability of military service; and to prevent breaches of security (p. 13).

This directive addressed homosexual administrative discharges from a behavioral perspective. That is, “ persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct” are considered eligible for separation (Directive No. 1332. 14, 1982 p. 13). Generally when an individual was administratively discharged for homosexuality alone, an honorable or general discharge was issued (Burrelli, 1994). The directive also lists those instances in which an individual could be separated under other than honorable conditions. These conditions included the use of force, homosexual acts with a minor, and fraternization deemed sufficiently disruptive to good order (Directive No. 1332. 14, 1982).

Another directive (Standards for Enlistment, 1986) addressed prospective service members attempting enlistment or commission into the services. During the screening process, individuals were asked if they were homosexual; an affirmative answer was sufficient grounds to deny entry into

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the service. A recruit who stated that he or she was a homosexual was reasoned to have been engaged in or to have intended to engage in homosexual behavior (Standards for Enlistment, 1986). Carter's policies remained relatively unchanged from 1981 until 1993.

Don't ask, Don't tell. In 1993, new laws and regulations pertaining to homosexual persons and U. S. military service came into effect reflecting a compromise in policy. This compromise, colloquially referred to as " don't as, don't tell," held that the DoD would not ask questions concerning the sexual orientation of prospective members of the military, and individuals would be required to either keep their homosexual orientation to themselves, or if they did not, they would be discharged if already in the service or denied entry into the service (Burrelli & Feder, 2009). On July 19. 1993, President Clinton announced his new policy on homosexual members in the military (Clinton, 1994, p. 1111).

As written, the law made no mention of sexual orientation, but rather was structured around the concept of sexual conduct including statements concerning an individual's sexuality; therefore, attempts to implement, analyze or, evaluate it in terms of sexual orientation have resulted in confusion and ambiguity (Burrelli & Feder, 2009).

Repeal of DADT. Since the years the " Don't Ask" policy was established, sentiments in much of the military's top officers had shifted. In early 2010, Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, " It is my personal belief that allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly would be the right thing to do" (Saldin, 2011, p. 63). Beyond the moral considerations, the

military has a practical concern for keeping its gay and lesbian soldiers employed. Adequate staffing in certain military jobs is an issue. The military, with many troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan is currently stretched thin to the point of extending deployments, sending troops on multiple tours, and reaching out to felons as potential recruits (Saldin, 2011). In such a context, the approximate fourteen thousand military members dismissed on the basis of sexual orientation seemed like some a mistake and addressed the need for President Obama to issue a repeal of the Don't ask, Don't tell policy (Saldin, 2011).

In December of 2010, the Senate voted to repeal the ban against openly gay military personnel. The vote passed by a 63-33 majority and was sent to the President (Hulse, 2010). The repeal has not gone into effect at the writing of this paper. With the ban repealed, it is still important to examine areas that led to exclusion of homosexual individuals. This examination is important so that these areas may be appropriately addressed during transitioning as well as be reexamined to determine their merit as future countries weigh the same decision.

Rationale for Homosexual Exclusion

The U. S. government has used several different justifications for banning openly homosexual members from the military. Early exclusion was based on the idea that gay men and lesbians were considered to be mentally and physically unfit to serve in the military, but this has been shown to not be the case as demonstrated by examples of their honorable service throughout military history (Berube, 1990) as well as psychology's eventual reversal of

homosexuality as a mental illness. In the 1950s, Senator McCarthy claimed that homosexual people posed a national security threat, but that claim was dispelled by the Navy Crittenden Report (Lehring, 1996) which stated that alcoholics and adulterous heterosexual members were more of a security risk than homosexual members. Current justifications for excluding gay men and women from serving openly in the military are unit cohesion and the violation of heterosexual service members' privacy rights (Sinclair, 2000).

Unit Cohesion. Unit cohesion is often cited as a reason to deny access to the military for openly gay men and lesbians. One perspective on this is that because heterosexuals dislike homosexual people they will not be able to establish the required bonds necessary to function effectively as a unit (Moradi, 2009). Here it is important to distinguish between social and task cohesion. Particularly, unit social or interpersonal cohesion reflects the emotional bonds among unit members, whereas task or instrumental cohesion reflects shared commitment to and confidence in carrying out group goals (Moradi, 2009). Sexual orientation disclosure, concealment, and harassment are likely to be related directly to social cohesion due to the social aspects of unit climate (Moradi, 2009).

Unit Cohesion in Countries with Homosexual Service members. Researchers have studied countries such as Britain, Australia, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands and many others that have integrated homosexual members within their ranks and did not discover any negative consequences (Park, 1994; Gal, 1994; Belkin, 2003). The argument, of course, could be made that the heterosexual members of these nations are more tolerant of homosexuality than U. S. service members. However, a study by Bateman

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and Dalvi (2004) found that openly gay, non-American service members have interacted and worked successfully with American military in multinational units and operations.

Unit Cohesion of U. S. Police and Fire Departments with Homosexual Members. The Rand Corporation (1993) examined police and fire departments that had policies of inclusion of homosexual members in six large cities representing different regions of the United States. The researchers used intensive individual interviews and focus groups as well as reviewed department documentation, policies, regulations, equal employment procedures, and training programs. Although there were a few accounts of pranks, there were no negative incidences related to unit cohesion and no reports of harassment. It was also found in this study that very few homosexuals revealed their orientation even though there was a nondiscrimination policy. Those who did reveal their homosexuality did so only after they felt that they would be accepted in their particular work environment (RAND, 1993).

Privacy Rights. Currently in the military, males and females shower, use latrines, and sleep in different areas. The shower, latrines, and sleeping quarters are generally viewed as privacy rights in which people are free to get undressed without the pressure of having someone that could possibly be attracted to them or they are attracted to in the vicinity (Sinclair, 2000).

Violation of Privacy for Heterosexual Members. Military living conditions in general are different from civilian living conditions. Therefore, sexual behavior in the military is not a matter of " what happens behind closed

doors” because soldiers share living quarters and have no choice in the selection of roommates or tent-mates (Miller, 1994). Service men and women often work together, shower together, and sleep in close quarters, while civilians typically can go home at the end of the day and, if they wish, avoid intimate contact with co-workers. This leads supporters of the ban on homosexuality to point to norms against forcing members of the opposite sex to room, undress, or shower with each other (Miller, 1994). Placing homosexual men and women into this formula undermines the assumptions and strategies already in place for managing sexual attraction.

Given the current standards of segregation for men and women in living quarters, many supporters of the ban question the options available when homosexuality is included (Miller, 1994). Three logical conclusions for living conditions follow. Either the military would need to discontinue segregation by sex, give everyone individual rooms and showers, or set up facilities for gays and lesbians (Miller, 1994). Many members of active duty feel the first option to be morally unacceptable, and the latter two to be impractical and costly (Miller, 1994).

Privacy Rights in College Dormitories, Gyms and Prisons. The military is not the only place where people shower and use the bathroom together. Many gyms have people of unknown sexual preference in close proximity to one another. College dormitories and prisons most closely mirror the living conditions associated with military life and have been studied to determine the effects of heterosexual and homosexual people living together. Sinclair (2000) identified two social norms commonly in practice in dormitories and prisons which are used to prevent the feeling of privacy being violated.

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Mutual gaze aversion occurs when individuals consciously avoid eye contact while etiquette of disregard involves people averting their sight in a neutral direction away from others (Sinclair, 2000). These two strategies are learned at an early age and have been observed to exist in settings such as college dormitories and prisons (Sinclair, 2000).

Whatever reason is used to support or deny gay men and lesbians access to openly serving in the military, it is important to understand both sides and how these changes will affect living conditions. A thorough look at both sides of the arguments for and against homosexual members in the military is important as the military transitions into a post-ban period. Changes will most likely need to be implemented, but an understanding of the costs and practicality of those changes can be addressed by examining other organizations who have dealt with similar issues.

Discussion

Gay men and lesbian women join the military to take advantage of the same opportunities offered to heterosexual men and women: education benefits, social mobility and to be patriotic (Sinclair, 2000). The ongoing discussion of homosexuality and the military has forced the country to confront military policies and practices publicly. The progression of military laws and regulations from the World War Two era ban on sodomy to Carter's policy where "homosexuality is incompatible with military service" show a distinction in thought that has spurred much debate over civil rights, homosexuality, and the role of the military. Further progression into the don't ask, don't tell era of Clinton began much of the heated debate which

has continued into President Obama's final repeal of the ban recently. This evolution in military policy is a close reflection of society's views in general. Because the military often has and continues to be a mirror of society it will change as society's attitudes toward homosexuality change.

This issue of homosexual members serving in the armed forces is a controversial and emotional issue. Many of the arguments for allowing homosexuals and against allowing homosexuals appear to be generated more by emotion than reason. A careful review of research needs to be conducted, on both of the main arguments against banning homosexual members from serving to determine whether reason or emotion is influencing our decisions. Unit cohesion is one of the most often cited arguments against allowing gay service members to openly serve. By examining other countries, we are able to gain a real world perspective on how homosexuality has impacted cohesion of units. Furthering this idea is that homosexual members of these countries' armed forces have worked closely with the U. S. military. This allows us a direct perspective into how a small sampling of our military has dealt with homosexual members of their unit. Additionally, U. S. police departments and fire departments give a snapshot of how U. S. unit cohesion is directly impacted. The overall conclusion is that effects on unit cohesion would be negligible. Units are adaptable and will continue to be cohesive based on goals and task accomplishment.

Finally, a look at the privacy rights of heterosexual members needed to be addressed. The real world implications of members living in close quarters has implications for military barracks and training facilities. Research from <https://assignbuster.com/homosexuality-and-the-military-sociology-essay/>

colleges and prisons shows that while adaptations may need to be made, there will not need to be large changes in living conditions to accommodate homosexual members.

The overall debate on homosexual members serving in the armed services parallels many of the past debates of minorities serving in the military.

Whether African Americans, women, or homosexuals, the arguments for and against have been equally strong and in the end the military adapted to the changes and became stronger for it. With the recent final repeal of a ban on homosexuality, the military will once again adapt to the change and become stronger for it.