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A Straight Word on Sex for the United States Armed Forces

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Abstract. This article presents aspects of a policy on sexuality that will support "good order and discipline," "character," and other hypothetical constructs allegedly associated with a military's contribution to the security of its sponsors. (For a related article see "Sex as a Military Weapon" in IBPP Vol. 1, No. 14, February 28, 1997.)

Should sexuality in its many forms--e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, behaviors, frequencies, fantasies, sociolegal contexts--be the concern of the United States Armed Forces? The answer is yes--a resounding yes. Unfortunately, military authorities are going about it the wrong way.

The Rationale. Typically the military rationale for policies, rules, guidance, programs, and sanctions on sexuality is founded on amorphous notions of "good order and discipline" and "character." For example, fellatio, cunnilingus, and the varieties of anal sex violate this notion regardless of who is on the receiving end and who is providing the service. On the other hand, a male and female, legally married to each other, who engage in a variant of sexual intercourse typically called sexual intercourse do not violate these notions. In fact, they may even be contributing to good order and discipline and to character, unless one or both spouses have legally binding commitments to be elsewhere during their sexual interlude. The bottom line is that there are explicit and implicit assumptions and attributions along a nomological net stemming from the actual form of sexuality. These assumptions and attributions include ascribing good order and discipline and character to certain sexual acts or predilections, the converse to others. If some of this sounds psychotic, ridiculous, or somewhat problematic, military authorities will point out that their personnel have voluntarily chosen their military status and thus have promised to comply with all strictures--sexual and otherwise. In other words, whether it is right or wrong, it is right or wrong, much as 1 and 1 equals 3 in the novel 1984.

Problems with the Rationale. Well, what about breaking a legal promise? How about the proverbial B-52 pilot who, say, engages in some sort of sex with a partner married to a third party--an act that is proscribed? Does a military superior sound credible when linking the sexual act to unworthiness to fly a plane that can carry nuclear weapons? If the superior states that the real issue is lying about it, the assumption is that worthy pilots don't lie. Given the psychological reality that people lie many times daily--to themselves, to others--the issue may then become a policy that certain kinds of lies make a pilot unworthy. But which ones? Lying about the status of a military weapon or weapon system versus the marital status of one's sexual partner versus what one said about the sexual attractiveness of someone else may not be equivalent in terms of their import on good order and discipline. And what about the military adulterers--including married patrons of houses and streets of ill repute--who confess when formally interrogated? Why is lying by omission--not volunteering transgressions though having voluntarily promised not to transgress--extenuating in the face of committed lies? One is left with counting angels on the head of a pin or identifying what kinds of angels may be dancing elsewhere.

The apparent psychological fact that people always have and are still today engaging in many legally proscribed forms of sex and in lying about it should be a red flag to those sincerely concerned with the performance of the military. In essence, there should be performance anxiety over the current anxiety

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about personnel's sexual performance. The consequence of proscribing the various forms of sexual behavior, including one's discourse about proscriptions--in a context wherein many engage in the proscribed--is selective sanction or prosecution of a significant subset of all violators and an accompanying disrespect for law in general. The latter most certainly has significant import for good order and discipline and character.

An intermediary conclusion, then, is that military authorities should adopt a minimalist approach to listing proscribed behavior or characteristics. As painful as it may be, they should delve beyond various traditions, rituals, religious beliefs, and personal biases to what truly is injurious to military performance.

With this orientation, military authorities should instead proscribe personal relationships which are injurious to good order and discipline and character. Sex, friendships, business relationships, and religious study groups may form the core of the inappropriate personal relationship, but by themselves none of these should be the offense. Thus, any one, two, or more military personnel may have sex or any other relationship within, between, or among them. Sometimes, relationships will help or have no effect on military performance. Sometimes, they will harm it. The latter must be dealt with.

With this approach, one avoids the vice squad, witch hunt, and inquisition approaches--themselves injurious to good order and discipline and character, as well as using up finite resources better employed elsewhere.

In conclusion, one might think of a quote from Graham Greene. "In Batista's day I liked the idea that one could obtain anything at will, whether drugs, women, or goats." It is not the intrinsic nature of one's vices but their relationship to the polity that should set policy and standards--whether Batista, Pol Pot, or blue-ribbon committees on the personal lives of military personnel. (See Beere, D., & Pica, M. (1995.) *The predisposition to dissociate: The temperamental traits of flexibility/rigidity, daily rhythm, emotionality and interactional speed*. *Dissociation: Progress in the Dissociative Disorders*, 8, 236-240; Fried, C.B., & Aronson, E. (1995.) *Hypocrisy, misattribution, and dissonance reduction*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 925-933; Kinzer, S. (May 27, 1995.) *Beating the system, with bribes and the big lie*. *The New York Times*, p. A4; Sciolino, E. (May 22, 1997.) *Air Force Chief has harsh words for pilot facing adultery charge*. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A26.) (Keywords: Military Standards, Sex.)