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## Homosexuality and the United States Military: Problems With Sex Policies and Policies on Sex

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Abstract. This article identifies some problems with current United States military personnel policies related to homosexuality.

Recent data seem to suggest that the United States (U.S.) military services are discharging more personnel for violating policies related to homosexuality than was the case several years ago. These data have led many observers to question aspects of current homosexuality-related policies since different policies were in effect several years ago. In essence, the inference is being made that differences in discharge data must be significantly and causally linked to differences in the respective temporally contiguous homosexuality-related policies--as opposed to other policies and events. This inference is provocative, because political authorities who created and supported the current policies claim that they did so with then understanding that these policies would lead to a decrease in homosexuality-related personnel discharges.

The current "don't ask, don't tell" policies denote that homosexuals can serve in the military as long as they do not engage in (or are not detected engaging in) sexual behavior characterized as homosexual. As long as such behaviors are not occurring (being detected), military authorities cannot ask personnel about sexual orientation and personnel are directed not to divulge their orientation. (This article does not address the very real problems of viewing the sexual orientation construct as discrete versus continuous and static versus dynamic. This article also does not address intrinsic and unavoidable difficulties the "don't ask, don't tell" policies might have in being equally and equitably applied when confronted with the policies' tolerance of engaging in heterosexual acts and speaking about them.) The antecedent policies on the other hand allowed authorities to ask and required personnel to tell.

A rational analysis might lead an observer to infer that homosexuality-related discharges would decrease with the current policies in contrast with the antecedent ones. Yet the converse seems to be the case. However, one needs to be aware of some complexities with the discharge data before developing reliable and valid policy implications from such data. For example, the concurrent downsizing of personnel throughout the military services and upsizing of homosexuality-related discharges suggests that the discharge increase is even more significant than would otherwise be the case. The current policies may be intended to be more effective in removing homosexuals from the military than previous policies regardless of the publicly stated intent to the contrary by the political authorities who developed the policy. Perhaps the current policies are being implemented to remove more homosexuals from the military than in previous years regardless of intent of political authorities. Perhaps the current policies are being used and abused by disaffected military personnel to leave the military regardless of personnel's sexual orientation. Or more homosexuals may be joining the military, sexual orientation identification systems based on sexual behavior and independent of policies may be becoming more accurate, or commanders and other military officials and personnel may be more intent on using and abusing current policies to "get" personnel who are otherwise deemed with disfavor.

Although the "don't ask, don't tell" policies may have problems with intention of authorities and implementation of authorities and personnel, an even larger problem remains. The very notion of the

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policies is built on a lie--that personnel who are homosexual should pretend to be what they are not and can be less of who they are than others in what is a vital sphere of functioning for most people. They must take vows of abstinence and silence that their heterosexual peers do not. This pretense must ineluctably effect the entire military command system that is formally based on values such as honor, integrity and character.

One might surmise that to maintain the homosexual stigma as to military service, the foundation of such service is being destroyed. How different is this from some U.S. national leaders who are attempting to violate and may already have violated the U.S. Constitution during the various Presidential impeachment proceedings in an effort to maintain the stigma on specific kinds of sex and when and how one speaks about them? In the former case, telling the truth leads to immediate punishment. In the latter case, it doesn't seem to matter at all. Is this why sex should be left out of most public policies? (See A straight word on sex for the United States Armed Forces. (June 20, 1997). IBPP, 2(8); Herek, G.M., Jove, J.B., & Carney, R.M. (1996). Out in force: Sexual orientation and the military. University of Chicago Press; Jones, F.D., & Koshes, R.J. (1995). Homosexuality and the military. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152, 16-21; McCrary, J., & Gutierrez, L. (1979-1980). The homosexual person in military and in national security employment. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 5, 115-146; Myers, S.L. (January 23, 1999). Military discharges for homosexuality double in 5 years. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Sex and the military: Implications of the exotic as erotic. (February 6, 1998). IBPP, 4(5); Wyman, M.A., & Snyder, M. (1997). Attitudes toward "gays in the military": A functional perspective. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, 306-329.) (Keywords: Personnel Policy, Public Policy, Sex.)