

12-17-1999

Sexual Policy and the Military: A Need for a Primer on the Birds and the Bees

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1999) "Sexual Policy and the Military: A Need for a Primer on the Birds and the Bees," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 7 : Iss. 22 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol7/iss22/3>

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Author: Editor

Volume: 7

Issue: 22

Date: 1999-12-17

Keywords: Department of Defense, Gender, Homosexuality, Race, Sex

Abstract. This article describes some basic misconceptions about sex as explicated in the personnel and security policies of the United States Department of Defense (DOD).

DOD sexual policies are again under fire in the aftermath of the conviction and sentencing of an Army enlisted troop for beating to death another in his unit allegedly because the latter allegedly was "gay." The controversy currently centers such Issues as whether lesbian and gay individuals can "overtly" serve in the military, can serve under a "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" policy, or should not serve at all. The very nature of the controversy suggests gross misconceptions about basic elements of sex.

The discourse on whether "overt" serving should be allowed to occur implies that "lesbians" and "gays" already are covertly serving. And, in fact, one can reasonably posit that this is, has been, and will be the case. The "overt-covert" distinction also suggests a social fact that "covert" service apparently is not as detrimental to DOD in the way that "overt" service allegedly is. This is because "overt" service is supposed to lead immediately to separation proceedings against the "overt" individual, while "covert" service to the extent that it exists has not been linked to detrimental consequences for DOD. One who asserts that "lesbians" and "gays" have some special potential to be blackmailed must admit that what really is "blackmailable" is "overtness" of sexuality not sexuality itself. Thus, one soon must conclude that DOD sexual policy as to "overt" service is really about keeping certain aspects about sexuality "covert." Following from this, one soon sees that it is not the acts or observations of sexuality that are at Issue, nor the consequences to those who are the objects of that sexuality, but the reactions of some others who find out about the sexuality--breaking the key that makes the "covert" "overt." This certainly suggests that DOD policy might better address those whose reactions to someone else's sexuality engender malignant or noxious intrapsychic and behavioral consequences as to morale and social cohesion.

The discourse on "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" suggests that asking and telling--if not pursuing--have nothing to do with sexuality. In fact, asking and telling are sexuality related and for some people a great deal of their sexuality. Sexuality is many sided with actors, askers, tellers, observers, and pursuers. One can successfully (as to compliance) fragment sexuality into prescribed and proscribed as easily as splitting a baby into pieces for real and ersatz parents.

Finally, the discourse on "lesbians" and "gays" suggests that sexual orientation is a discrete, static entity intrinsic to an individual as opposed to a continuous, dynamic entity that variously depends on a host of factors interacting with individual characteristics. One might strongly defend the premise that many individuals within DOD cross the boundaries of the prescribed and the proscribed and are accurately characterized by labels besides "lesbians" and "gays." And that characterizations should also encompass sexual impulsivity and the effects of sex on cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral functioning.

Being beaten to death might be the consequence of current DOD policy or an expression of what the policy is trying to manage or gradually change. To some observers it might suggest the need to go

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"overt." To others it might suggest the need for some sexualities to remain in the deepest recesses of global closets. To still others a clarion call for a search and destroy mission. As with previous policies about African-Americans and women that were based on misconceptions about race and gender, however, DOD policy on sexuality is based on a world that hasn't existed, doesn't exist, and probably never will. That's no way to train for, deter, and fight a war. (See Africa, T.W. (1982). Homosexuals in Greek history. *Journal of Psychohistory*, 9, 401-420; Clines, F.X. (December 12, 1999). For gay soldier, a daily barrage of threats and slurs. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Herek, G.M. (1993). Sexual orientation and military service: A social science perspective. *American Psychologist*, 48, 538-549; 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; Williams, C.J., & Weinberg, M.S. (1970). Being discovered: A study of homosexuals in the military. *Social Problems*, 18, 217-227.) (Keywords: Department of Defense, Gender, Homosexuality, Race, Sex.)