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An Update on the Political Psychology of Sex and Personnel Security

Editor

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Abstract. This article describes the positive and negative contributions of scientific psychology to the interface of sexual orientation and personnel security.

Advocacy based on scientific psychology has made three major, positive contributions to the interface of sexual orientation and personnel security. Based on empirical and experimental data and theory based on these data, this advocacy advanced the conclusion that homosexuality per se should not be a contraindication to receiving a security clearance, special access to sensitive information, or status for sensitive duty. This advocacy has allowed governmental, military, and business organizations to benefit from the expertise of a population that otherwise would be serving with an important aspect of self identity intentionally covered, concealed, or camouflaged or would choose not to serve at all so as not to have to deceive as to this aspect of self identity. This advocacy also has helped remove an "iatrogenic" vulnerability to personnel security through the very construction and maintenance of a personnel security criterion that possesses inadequate validity. Finally, this advocacy has contributed to supporting the human and civil rights of homosexuals--an advance that seems consonant with the moral and ethical values of most representative democracies as described by or inferred from political and legal documents.

However, these positive contributions have gone hand-in-hand with negative ones. First, in the quest to attack invalid assumptions about personnel security and homosexuality, representatives of scientific psychology have at least indirectly reinforced the malign connotations of other sexual orientations--those frequently termed "paraphilias." By isolating these other sexual orientations deemed as psychiatric or maladaptive by most traditional mental health authorities--a bent that might well have been warranted in terms of political strategy--the saviors of homosexuality have seemed to be identifying with the very aggressors that isolated homosexuality as security-phobic from heterosexuality as security-philic. In essence, homosexuality's saviors have still been contributing to the notion that sexual orientation per se might validly disqualify an individual from a desired security status--without the necessary theoretical, empirical, and experimental research. (It is instructive here to note that psychologists who might maintain that homosexuality is not a paraphilia and thus should not be associated with the latter seem conveniently unaware and/or resistant to the argument that they are but identifying with or mimicking the mental health traditionalists who termed and term homosexuality as abnormal as opposed to the normality of heterosexuality.)

Second, and in a somewhat contradictory manner, scientific psychology's representatives who have been successfully minimizing bias associated with homosexuality have concurrently and, perhaps, unwittingly minimized the very notion that any aspect of sexual orientation is an appropriate criterion in matters of personnel security. To too many of homosexuality's bias minimizers, whatever gets you through the night is all right, whatever gets you through the day is ok. This is neither all right nor ok. Just the sanitized history of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency's personnel security, counterintelligence, espionage, and covert action activities and its analyses of those activities of its allies, neutrals, and adversaries bear out this latter conclusion. An individual's shame, self-control, impulsivity, compulsivity, and degree of ego syntonicity are just some of the sexual orientation aspects

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

that have been associated with violations of trust in government, the military, and business. Scientific psychologists need to attempt to elucidate methods of identifying, predicting, and establishing the base rate frequency of such security threats.

Third, most psychologists working in the area of sexual orientation and security continue to reify the belief that sexual orientation exists as one of a small number of discrete entities that are resistant to change and fluctuation. This certainly does not seem compatible with scientific psychology's findings that individuals vary in many aspects of their sexual orientation throughout their lives. Less frequently, this involves a change in self-perceived labels--e.g., from heterosexuality to homosexuality. More frequently, this involves changes in preferred physical characteristics of sexual partner(s) and preferences for who does what and to whom what is done. To foster beliefs to the contrary contributes to personnel security authorities maintaining erroneous beliefs about people--a contraindication to effective security practice.

Psychological research strongly suggests that there is nothing mutually exclusive about good security and civil and human rights for homosexuals. Advocates who in many ways have been so successful with one can uniquely contribute to success with the other. (See Cramer, R. E., Manning-Ryan, B., Johnson, L. M., & Barbo, E. (2000). Sex differences in subjective distress to violations of trust: Extending an evolutionary perspective. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 22, 101-109; Erickson, B. H., Albanese, P., & Drakulic, S. (2000). Gender on a jagged edge: The security industry, its clients, and the reproduction and revision of gender. *Work and Occupations*, 27, 294-318; Herek, G.M. (1990). Gay people and government security clearances: A social science perspective. *American Psychologist*, 45, 1035-1042; 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.) (Keywords: Personnel Security, Sexual Orientation.)