

POLICY PAPER  
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AN EMERGING POLICY ISSUE\*

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*The armed forces regard homosexuality as an undesirable trait; gays are barred from enlistment and gay personnel in the service are separated. The services have recently moved to "decriminalize" homosexuality; that is to award honorable discharges to personnel separated for homosexual tendencies or for involvement in homosexual acts with consenting adults. A challenge to this exclusionary policy is possible, either by the courts or by the gay rights movement. The implications for the military and for gays of such a policy change under various personnel procurement arrangements are examined.*

This paper examines the policies of the military services regarding "homosexuals."<sup>1</sup> It considers current policies and their consequences for both military organizations and "gays," likely new policies and their consequences for the military and for gays, and possible further policy adjustments and their implications.

INTRODUCTION

Gay persons are not permitted to serve in the armed forces. A history of homosexual acts or tendencies is a bar to enlistment; service personnel who engage in homosexual acts or display homosexual tendencies must be discharged (Department of Defense, 1978:10-11).

Notwithstanding these long-established policies, gay individuals continue to serve in the armed forces. There is no way of discerning the number (or variety) of gay persons currently in the military. Extrapolations must be computed from already "separated" soldiers or from the general population (Williams and Weinberg, 1971:38-53). Such computations are always suspect, of course, but lead to rough estimates ranging from eight to twelve thousand on the conservative end to one hundred thousand or more on the other end. Neither extreme, nor any midpoint, should be considered reliable. We would agree with Williams and Weinberg, however, that "...there must be a considerable number of homosexuals. . ." in the military (1971:59) as well as their finding that gays are more likely to be discharged from the service than non-gays (i.e. "straights") -- although only a fraction are separated (1971:60).

Two policy issues are implicit in these data: First, established policies exclude a significant segment of the population from military service. In a period when the

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1. Since "homosexual" is often considered a stigmatizing label, we have used "homosexual" to refer to behavior patterns and the euphemism "gay" to refer to those who so behave. The latter term appears more desired by individuals who practice a homosexual life style.

armed forces face increasing difficulty in meeting their personnel needs (Snyder, 1978:24-31), any policy which serves to limit the number of potential recruits must be examined critically. Second, existing policies are not being applied consistently; gays continue to serve in the armed forces, apparently quite satisfactorily, despite the ban on their service (Lester, 1974:5-13). This inconsistency creates the basis for a legal or political challenge to existing policies.

The need to examine these policy issues is underlined by data on those gays who have elected to serve. The overwhelming majority of gays do not, we suspect, seek out military service.<sup>2</sup> Those that do, however, appear to constitute a very special subpopulation. Because of their gayness, they are "not like" most other soldiers or civilians, and because of their military service they are "not like" other gays. Studies of homosexuals separated from the services during the 1950's and 1960's indicate that the group is largely white, middle or upper-middle class, and partly or mostly college educated (Williams and Weinberg, 1971:76-81). Because the social and racial composition of the armed forces has changed since the shift to an all-volunteer force in 1970, they appear to constitute, except for their "gayness," precisely the "kind of people" the services are so critically short of and unable to attract in sufficient numbers.

### THE ISSUES: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, LEGAL RESTRICTIONS, AND PUBLIC OPINION

The policies of the armed forces that exclude gays from military service do not provide a detailed explanation for this exclusion (Department of Army, 1977: 13-1).<sup>3</sup> The policies, however, would seem to rest on three considerations: (1) organizational effectiveness, i.e., the gay constitutes a threat to effective individual and unit performance; (2) legal restrictions, i.e., the military services do not want within their ranks individuals whose sexual activities are illegal under existing criminal codes; and (3) public opinion, i.e., the military services do not wish to jeopardize their standing with government leaders and civilian groups by treating favorably individuals who are largely disliked (Nyberg and Alston, 1976/77:106-107). The perspectives of the military services on each of these issues can be summarized as follows:

*Organizational Effectiveness.* Military historians, sociologists, and military officers agree that the effectiveness of military units depends critically on such factors as the quality of weapons, the level of individual and unit training, physical conditioning, leadership quality, and so on. But of equal or greater importance is the existence of close interpersonal relationships and small group cohesion. The argument is put graphically by the historian S.L.A. Marshall in *Men Under Fire*:

... the thing which enables an infantry soldier to keep going... is the near presence or the presumed presence of a comrade. The warmth which derives from human companionship is as essential to his employment of the arms with which he fights as is the finger with which he pulls a trigger... The other man may be almost beyond hailing or seeing distance, but he must be there somewhere within a man's consciousness or onset of demoralization is almost immediate...

2. The bases for this opinion are discussed on p. 78.

3. Army Regulations 635-200 states only the following: "It is... (Army) policy that homosexuality is incompatible with military service. A person with homosexual tendencies seriously impairs discipline, good order, and security of a military unit. Accordingly... the member will be processed for separation" (November 21, 1977). Navy and Air Force Regulations employ essentially similar language.

... (1) It is far more than a question of the soldier's need of physical support from other men. He must have at least some feeling of spiritual unity with them... Should he lack this feeling for any reason, whether it be because he is congenitally a social misfit or because he has lost physical contact or because he has been denied the chance to establish himself with them, he will become a castaway in the middle of a battle and as incapable of effective offensive action as if he were stranded somewhere without weapons (1947:42).

Behavioral scientists who have studied military organizations, e.g., Stouffer (1949), Shils and Janowitz (1948:280-315), and Moskos (1970) confirm Marshall's conclusions.

Given the strong focus on camaraderie, military authorities believe that the effectiveness of units that depend upon close interpersonal relations and small group cohesion would be seriously impaired by the inclusion of homosexuals.

There are three presumed impairments to organizational effectiveness. First, close interpersonal relations are unlikely to develop between gays and straights. Thus, the necessary "buddy" relationships prevalent in successful military units, and especially critical in combat units, would be less likely to exist. Second, cohesion requires compliance with the mores of the group; by definition, gays do not conform to the dominant orientation that largely characterizes military organizations. Finally, military discipline would be undermined because the frequency of disciplinary infractions is higher among gays than straights.<sup>4</sup> Any of these characteristics would create interpersonal problems within military units, and together they are thought to constitute a major threat to military effectiveness.

*Legal Restrictions.* The policies of the military departments regarding homosexuals are consonant with criminal codes in the United States. There are important differences between military law and the criminal law applicable to civilians (Bishop, 1974:16), but the Uniform Code of Military Justice views homosexual acts in much the same way as state or federal criminal codes: homosexual acts are criminal offenses. Two articles of the Uniform Code of Military Justice apply: Article 125, Sodomy; and Article 134, the so-called "general article." The *maximum* punishment for sodomy with a minor or non-consenting adult is 20 years confinement; in cases between consenting adults, five years. Assault "with intent to commit sodomy," an offense under Article 134, has a *maximum* punishment of 10 years. In addition to confinement, convicted offenders may forfeit all pay and allowances and receive a dishonorable discharge.

Courts-martial involving homosexual offenses have been infrequent in recent years, and convicted offenders usually receive less severe punishment than the maximum permitted by law (Johnson, 1979). Nevertheless, in legal terms, military law is reasonably consistent with state or federal criminal law in its approach to homosexual offenses.¶

As previously noted, military regulations require the separation from service of those persons exhibiting homosexual tendencies or those engaging in homosexual acts with consenting adults (i.e., over 16). Such acts or tendencies by service personnel are evidence of "unsuitability;" until recently, service members were often

4. We know of no data concerning disciplinary infractions among gay service personnel. It is reasonable to infer a higher rate, however, since gays in civilian life tend to have more extensive police records than non-gays. Part of the explanation, of course, is the general hostility of society towards gays and the fact that their sexual behavior is illegal in more than half the states.

awarded "general" or "other than honorable" discharges -- as opposed to "honorable" discharge certificates.<sup>5</sup> Because the basis for separation is a matter of official record, the individual receiving a "general" or "other than honorable" discharge is "labeled," thereby limiting his or her prospects for future employment (Williams and Weinberg, 1971:129-176).

*Public Opinion.* Military authorities attach great importance to public opinion. Favorable public attitudes are viewed as essential in that they contribute to the flow of volunteers into the service and to favorable judgments regarding the defense budget. A multitude of service activities -- including parades, ceremonies, and demonstration teams -- are used to promote favorable public attitudes, and specialized organizations, such as the Association of the U.S. Army, have been developed to deal with opinion leaders and congressional officials (Janowitz, 1959:382-387).

Public attitudes towards homosexuals are unfavorable. A 1977 poll indicates that 78% of the respondents regard homosexuality as "always/almost always wrong." Half or more of all respondents in a second poll believed that homosexuals should *not* be permitted to hold positions as a camp counselor, school principal, teacher, or clergyman (Public Opinion, 1978:30). Public opposition could be expected to extend to homosexuals occupying similar positions in the military, e.g., drill sergeants, unit commanders, and training personnel. Finally, the recent efforts of gay rights groups have not resulted in any general improvement in public attitudes toward homosexuals (Nyberg and Alston, 1976/77:106).

In excluding homosexuals from military service, the armed forces are conforming to the views of a majority of Americans. Military leaders probably believe that permitting homosexuals to serve would result in less favorable public attitudes towards military institutions and military service.

*Changing Military Policy.* Though generally consistent with civilian legal codes and public attitudes, military policies towards homosexuals are undergoing change.

A Department of Defense study group has recently completed a review of the policies governing administrative separations. Two of the study group's recommendations concern homosexual behavior. One recommendation is to reaffirm the long-established ban on gays in the military. Specifically, the study group has proposed that the phrases "homosexuality is incompatible with military service" and "processing (for separation) is mandatory unless . . . the allegations are groundless" be included in all subsequent DOD directives on personnel separations.<sup>6</sup> The second recommendation is that, in cases of "unsuitability," i.e., those involving homosexual tendencies or homosexual acts between consenting adults, individuals receive an *honorable* discharge (1978:10). (Homosexual acts involving assault or coercion, or with a person under 16, would continue to be regarded as "misconduct," with the individual receiving a *general* discharge or undergoing trial, as appropriate.)

5. In FY 1977, for all services, 525 personnel were separated for "Unsuitability-Homosexual Tendencies;" 407 (or 77%) received honorable discharges. An additional 910 personnel were separated for "Misconduct -- Sexual Perversion," which includes homosexual acts. Of these, 548 (60%) received general discharges and 53 (6%) received "other than honorable" discharges (Department of Defense, 1978b).

6. As the *Report of the Joint-Service Administrative Discharge Study Group* notes, "Such a policy statement is nowhere else contained within DOD Directives." The study was evidently motivated more by inconsistencies in administrative separations than by concern for gays. The study group's report makes no reference to Williams' and Weinberg's 1971 study of homosexuals separated from the service. Study group members report they had no contact with representatives of the gay rights movement -- although they were certainly aware of the court hearings on Sergeant Matlovich of the Air Force.

The second recommendation rests on two considerations. One is the variation within and among the services regarding the type of discharge awarded in such cases. Current policies permit issuance of either a general or honorable discharge, but the type of discharge awarded had become, more often than not, a function of the local commander's views regarding homosexuality rather than of the nature of the act or tendencies. The second consideration is the view of homosexuality embraced by the study group:

. . . homosexual acts. . . (are) non-volitional acts and therefore absent certain aggravating circumstances, individuals discharged for this reason should not be stigmatized with a less than Honorable Discharge (10).

The caution of the study group on this issue is suggested by a later comment in the report:

. . . while the language in the proposed (DOD) directive may at first blush seem excessively liberal, it is not a significant departure from what the Services are already doing. . . (10).

The proposed policy is still under review, but its adoption is expected late in 1979. Under the new policy, homosexuals would be no more welcome in the military services than before. But those discharged for "unsuitability," i.e., consenting acts or tendencies, would no longer be stigmatized by the type of discharge certificate they receive. The effect of the change is to decriminalize acts between consenting adults and homosexual tendencies. This action by the Department of Defense thus parallels the actions of 19 states that have decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults (Bell and Weinberg, 1978:187).

## THE BASES FOR A CHALLENGE TO POLICY

Though both present and proposed policies regarding homosexuals are reasonably consistent with civilian law and social attitudes, these policies are vulnerable to challenge.

Over the past decade the gay rights movement has emerged as a visible and occasionally vocal element in American politics. A national organization, the Gay Rights Task Force (a coalition of numerous gay rights groups), has been in existence for several years. The Task Force is active in recruiting new members and in coordinating the efforts of its member groups; it has attempted, with only limited success, to represent gay rights interests to Washington lawmakers. The movement is supported by a nationally distributed newspaper, *The Advocate*, as well as several magazines, including *Blueboy*, which has a circulation of 135,000 (Esquire, 1979: 11). An important limitation on the effectiveness of the Gay Rights Task Force is the division among its leaders on a number of issues. As yet, it has failed to achieve the importance or power of the civil rights or anti-war movements of the 1960's; it can be best described as a nascent force working to achieve political effectiveness.

A somewhat different situation exists in many major urban communities (Nyberg and Alston, 1976/77:103). Well-organized and politically effective gay rights groups are active in a number of cities, and they have achieved some impressive gains. Housing ordinances that discriminate against homosexuals have been overturned in New York and Austin, homosexuals can now be hired by the San Francisco police force and the Washington highway patrol, and declared homosexuals currently hold major political offices in some cities. Local gay rights groups have also challenged what they regard as discriminatory ordinances in six states.

These activities, as a recent *Time* cover story noted, have produced other changes as well:

... on the social and psychological fronts. . . the increasing openness and acceptance of gays is startling. Significantly, some 120 national corporations, including . . . AT&T and IBM, have announced that they do not discriminate in hiring or promoting people because they are homosexual (1979:73).

As previously noted, we do not think that most gays are interested in military service. Nevertheless, the gay rights movement might find it advantageous politically to challenge the exclusionary policies of the armed forces. Such a challenge was useful for other groups seeking legal equality and greater acceptance within American society. Twice since World War II the personnel policies of the armed forces have been changed to admit such groups. Racial integration began in the armed forces in 1950, and blacks were integrated into the armed forces much earlier than into other major American institutions. A similar process is now in progress with women. The number of women in the armed forces has increased from 1% in 1970 to about 7% at the present time and is expected to exceed 11% by 1983 (Gilder, 1979:30). Women have been admitted to the service academies since 1976. More important than the increase in number are new assignment policies that permit women to serve in all but combat positions. The change, in George Gilder's view, represents "a new alliance between Pentagon personnel administrators and policy makers and the women's liberation movement" (30).

Opening the armed forces to gays would be an important symbolic victory for the movement. As in the case of blacks and women, military service would symbolize equal legal status and might speed acceptance of gays by other employers and by society at large. The importance of such a step has not escaped the leaders of the Gay Rights Task Force; they reportedly raised this issue with former presidential adviser Midge Costanza in a March 1977 White House meeting (*New York Times*, 1977a and b).

One possible basis for such a challenge is the inconsistency in present policies. Military policy defines homosexuality as an "undesirable" trait, yet some homosexual personnel, whose sexual preferences are unknown by their military supervisors, are considered "desirable" in that they are satisfactory soldiers. Put another way, homosexuals "in the closet" now serve in the armed forces; declared homosexuals, even if their homosexuality is no more disruptive or visible after their declaration than before, are not permitted to serve.

The paradox is clearly illustrated by the case of *Matlovich v. Secretary of the Air Force*. Matlovich, an Air Force sergeant with some 14 years service, advised his superiors that he was homosexual. His military record was satisfactory in every respect, and his superiors had rated his job performance as excellent. He was discharged, however, because of unsuitability. Although Matlovich's separation was upheld by the federal courts, the Air Force has been directed to review its policies and further legal challenges are possible (*New York Times*, 1975). In addition to the dilemma created by satisfactory service and a blanket categorization of unsuitability, present policies have other implications. One is that under existing policy a large segment of the population is automatically excluded from military service. This raises an important equity issue: should such a sizable group be exempted from military service, since such exclusion necessarily shifts the entire burden of military service to heterosexuals?

Medical and psychiatric science have been unable to establish precise guidelines on what constitutes homosexuality or homosexual tendencies (other than participation in the sexual acts themselves). Thus, categorization as a homosexual can occur at the initiative of the individual concerned. It then becomes possible for

anyone, whatever his or her actual sexual orientation, to adopt this categorization and thereby avoid military service. Such self categorization was advised by some draft counsellors during the Vietnam era, although this means of avoiding service was not apparently widely employed (Baskir and Strauss, 1978:45). The potential for avoiding service is nevertheless present; with greater public acceptance of homosexuals, the cost to the individual of avoiding service by so declaring would be lessened. This tactic may be more widely employed if the military draft is reinstated.

## RESEARCH ON GAYS

A rational view of homosexuality has always been very difficult to hold and to propagate. . . (Homosexuality) has been the subject of a great deal of ignorance and often vicious prejudice (McCracken, 1979:26).

Recent research on gays has added considerably to our understanding of this phenomena. But does it provide theoretical or substantive insights applicable to the policy question which we think will eventually be raised: should gays be permitted to serve in the armed forces?

Research by Bell and Weinberg provides valuable new data on the social and psychological characteristics of gay men and women (1978).<sup>7</sup> Their major conclusions are that homosexuals are considerably more diverse than generally believed and, overall, a good deal happier than imagined. To better understand this diversity, Bell and Weinberg have developed a preliminary typology of homosexual men and women:

*Close-coupled*, the sampled gays who are able to establish and maintain stable relationships.

*Open-coupled*, referring to gays who live with one another but who tend to seek satisfaction outside the partnership.

*Functionals*, those gays living as analogous equivalents of "swinging singles."  
*Dysfunctional*, those whose sexual activity and life style accord most closely with the stereotype of "homosexuals."

*Asexuals*, those whose life style is characterized by a lack of involvement with others, both sexually and socially (217-228; 470-481).

The share of the sample, as well as the social and psychological characteristics of the males and females in each of these "types," are indicated in Table 1. For the percentage or statistical measures that Bell and Weinberg employ to describe these groups we have substituted a qualitative measure. It is less precise, but nevertheless conveys in a broad way the characteristics of each particular type.

Based on this typology, it appears that at least two and possibly three of the several types of gays -- close-coupled, open-coupled, and functionals -- could adapt satisfactorily to military service. These three types account for a majority of the sample -- 60% of the males and 76% of the females. The remaining two types -- dysfunctionals and asexuals -- are below average in terms of their social and psychological adjustments, which would probably hinder their ability to serve effectively. Further evidence that close-coupled, open-coupled, and functional types could

7. *Homosexualities*. . . is the most exhaustive and careful study of the non-sexual behavior of homosexual men and women yet undertaken. It is the third of the major sex research studies planned by the late Alfred Kinsey. Both the methodological approach and the conclusions are controversial. The sexual behavior of homosexuals is examined in the recent study by William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson, *Homosexuality in Perspective* (1979). For useful reviews of the Bell and Weinberg Study, see Martin Duberman (1978) and Samuel McCracken (1979).

perform military duties satisfactorily is provided by analyses of work records: in terms of job stability and job satisfaction, homosexual males as a whole rank about the same or slightly better than heterosexual males while homosexual females rank slightly below heterosexual females.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE 1  
HOMOSEXUAL TYPES AND THE  
CHARACTERISTICS\* OF ADJUSTMENT

Type (%)	Acceptance of Homosexuality	Incidence of Cruising	Social Adjustment	Psychological Adjustment
Close-coupled				
M: 14	High	Low	Above avg.	Above avg.
F: 38	High	NA**	Above avg.	Above avg.
Open-coupled				
M: 25	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Average
F: 24	Moderate	NA	Average	Average
Functionals				
M: 21	High	High	Average	Average
F: 14	Very high	NA	Average	Average
Dysfunctionals				
M: 18	Very low	High	Below avg.	Below avg.
F: 8	Very low	NA	Below avg.	Below avg.
Asexuals				
M: 23	Low	High	Below avg.	Below avg.
F: 16	High	NA	Below avg.	Below avg.

\*As compared to other homosexuals.

\*\*Not available.

SOURCE: Bell and Weinberg, *Homosexualities*..., pp. 217-228, 470-481.

In the context of the policy question, however, other considerations must be taken into account. First, while most close-coupled, open-coupled, and functional types might serve effectively, selecting these types, while excluding dysfunctionals and asexuals not suited for service, would be difficult, at least by measures now available. To the extent that the latter two types entered military service, they might soon emerge as unsuitable because of adjustment or disciplinary problems.

8. It is reasonable to believe that satisfactory work records are most evident among those in the close-coupled, open-coupled, and functional types, although Bell and Weinberg do not provide these data.

Second, the social and psychological well-being of gays is closely related to the "support systems" available in the community. As Bell and Weinberg note, "...it should be recognized that what has survival value in a heterosexual context may be destructive in a homosexual context, and vice versa" (231). Thus, gays who are stable and well adjusted in civilian communities such as San Francisco may become less well adjusted and productive in a military community.

The original and provocative contribution of Bell and Weinberg's study is the categorization of homosexual types and the delineation of the social and psychological characteristics of each type. The behavioral characteristics of individuals they categorize as close-coupled, open-coupled, and functionals are such as to suggest that some individuals in these categories could serve satisfactorily in the armed forces.

Indirectly, their analysis helps explain why the majority of gays who have served in the military have done so satisfactorily and received honorable discharges. Certainly it is likely that those who did not were among the "less stable" types. But since social adjustment is related to the community and the support systems that are available, the number capable of satisfactory military service is probably lower than the 60% male/76% female of the samples contained in these three categories. Beyond providing a more accurate description of homosexual behavior and evidence that some gays could serve satisfactorily, however, the study offers no insights into the policy issue that may soon surface.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While the armed forces are moving to lift some of the penalties for homosexual acts between consenting adults and for homosexual tendencies, it seems unlikely the military will soon initiate further policy changes, and the gay rights movement now lacks the organizational strength or the public support to challenge these policies. The armed forces remain an inviting target, however, and at some point the military may be asked to alter or remove entirely the ban that prevents declared homosexuals from serving. What are the implications of such a step for the military and for gays?

Many of the implications of such a policy change fall within the categories identified earlier, i.e., military effectiveness, legal conformity, and public opinion.

*Military Effectiveness.* The impact on military effectiveness would depend on the service and type of unit. Organizations in which large numbers of people work and live together closely, such as naval vessels and ground combat units, would probably be affected the most. In general, however, the impact would depend in part on the method of personnel procurement in use at the time. With a volunteer system, the effect is likely to be limited; if a draft were in operation, the effect would be somewhat greater.

A volunteer force would suffer some immediate and short-term loss in military effectiveness. This judgment rests on two assumptions: First, not many gays are likely to want to serve. The general hostility of the military community to gays, the near total absence of support systems, and the structured and hierarchical character of military life combine to make military service unattractive, especially as compared to the more congenial life style that gays can now find in many major urban areas. Second, we assume the military would retain authority to separate administratively those gays who exhibit anti-social or undesirable characteristics. In all likelihood, then, those gays who could not adjust would be identified and separated quickly, perhaps before their entry-level training was completed. The number joining tactical units would not be great, and the impact on military effectiveness would therefore be limited.

A somewhat different situation might develop were a military draft in effect. Under a draft, and with homosexuality no longer a bar to service, gays could not "select out" of military service. Therefore, the number entering the armed forces would be larger. Moreover, the services would probably have to end expeditious discharge programs and return to the strict separation policies of the pre-volunteer era (Department of Defense, 1978:3-29 - 3-39). In these circumstances, it is reasonable to believe there would be more gays in the service and more in combat formations than with an all-volunteer force. Hence, the impact on unit effectiveness would almost certainly be greater.

In the worst case situation, i.e., with a military draft, the armed forces would face a number of difficult problems. At the unit level, interpersonal tensions would increase, depending on the number of gay (or suspected gay) personnel. Many long-standing problems, ranging from physical violence in the barracks, to the existence of cliques, would be intensified. At the policy level, several issues would require resolution. One is whether homosexual marriages (and whether military chaplains could perform them) would be permitted. Related to that issue are such matters as on-post family housing, dependency benefits, and survivor benefits. The question of separate recreational and social facilities, such as gay clubs and baths, as well as the possibility of affirmative action programs for gays, would also surface quickly. Decisions supportive of gay personnel needs would almost certainly be perceived as disruptive of those characteristics of the military community that are believed to support the combat mission of the armed forces. Further, the discussion surrounding these issues would both prolong and complicate the assimilation of gays into military units.

These problems, while clearly difficult, may not be insurmountable. The armed forces have demonstrated repeatedly a fairly remarkable ability to adjust to sensitive manpower additions. Similar issues emerged following the entry of blacks and women into the military. Concern about unit cohesion, for example, was one basis for excluding blacks and is again being raised in terms of women. Yet military organization seems able to cut across many normative differences without marked loss of effectiveness. The ability and willingness of the military to provide social services supportive of homosexual needs would be crucial. Such facilities, it should be noted, have been provided for alcoholics and drug abusers and, to some extent, for blacks and women. Finally, some positive benefits would accrue from such a policy change. The need for furtive behavior, and the psychological strains that accompany it, would be reduced. Security problems would also be diminished since gay service personnel would be less subject to blackmail.

The conclusion that assimilation would not present insurmountable difficulties is not wholly "pollyanna." Two additional considerations must be noted. The first is public attitudes. Strong support of the policy change by national opinion leaders would be essential to demonstrate to military leaders of all ranks that the armed forces were not scapegoats of unwise political appeasement or the coming budgetary victims of public indignation. Research indicating that some gays could serve effectively is an inadequate basis for such a radical policy change. Needed is action demonstrating society's awareness and acceptance of such knowledge -- in this case, supporting legislation. The second is the quality of military leadership. Even if all of today's military officers are competent professionals, few are behavioral scientists and most hold the stereotype of homosexuals prevailing in society at large. The assimilation of gays into the armed forces would be difficult, and military effectiveness would undoubtedly suffer.

**Legal Conformity.** Legal sanctions against homosexuals are long established and are closely tied to major religious faiths. Homosexual behavior is widely regarded as both sinful and criminal. Removing the ban on service therefore involves a

radical departure from long-standing legal and religious precepts. The change is greater in many respects than in the case of racial integration or women's rights because "gay rights" have only a limited constitutional basis -- certainly gays are not denied political freedoms or "civil rights" as were blacks, and the extent of discrimination in employment and housing is less pervasive than in the case of other minorities (McCracken, 1979:24). Thus removing the ban on service would almost certainly be perceived by the public as a radical change. The reaction would be virulent, moreover, because the gay rights movement has been far less successful in "liberalizing" public attitudes than the more established black and women's movements. The fact that military service often involves unusually sensitive and important responsibilities (e.g., handling nuclear weapons or intelligence materials) serves to underline such a perception. This puts the armed forces once again in a difficult position of being the cutting edge for a new "social experiment."

**Public Opinion.** As noted above, public attitudes towards homosexuals are unfavorable. Nor has the emergency of "liberal pockets" of tolerance in urban areas in recent years caused any significant change in overall public attitudes (Nyberg and Alston, 1976/77:103). Thus, removing the ban on enlistment might be expected to lead to "a battleground of accelerating fury" (Duberman, 1978:40). How much of this fury will be directed at the military is, at this point, difficult to determine. But even assuming the military is not the main target, there are still two possible consequences of adverse public opinion. First, some personnel then serving might decide against reenlistment because they would believe the general public regarded their position with decreased esteem. If the loss of experienced personnel, especially veteran noncommissioned officers, were substantial, military effectiveness could be significantly impaired. Second, recruiting for the enlisted force could be expected to become more difficult. To the extent that reenlistments decline, more non-prior service accessions would be required. Further, most new accessions into the enlisted force are high school graduates (or the rough equivalent). The attitudes of that group towards homosexuality are generally more adverse than those held by individuals with more education (Nyberg and Alston, 1976/77:104). A perception of the military as a "gay" organization might deter some of these individuals from enlisting.

Removing the ban on homosexuals in the military would pose some troublesome issues for the armed forces. Challenging this policy might also create difficulties for the gay rights movement.

It is quite possible that an effort to change the policy will not succeed. The armed forces are institutions with deep roots in American history and society. In opposing a policy change, the armed forces can be expected to receive the strong support of patriotic groups, veterans organizations, and the service associations. Organizations sympathetic to the military could also be counted on to oppose the policy; groups similar to the "Right to Life" movement might well be organized to fight the change. In a contest of will over this issue, the gay rights movement might easily come off a poor second:

...when homosexuality is ringingly declared by popular vote *not* to be a protected status -- e.g., in Dade County, Florida, and Eugene, Oregon -- homosexuals may be considerably worse off than when the people had not spoken to the issue one way or the other (McCracken, 1979:24).

Thus, to the extent that the challenge provokes an acrimonious public debate, the gains made elsewhere in American society by gays could well be threatened.

Second, the gay movement must consider the implications of a challenge for those gays who are now serving, or are likely to serve, in the armed forces. A

challenge to, or change in, existing policy could be expected to create considerable resentment against the gays in the military. Certainly the majority of service personnel, especially enlisted members, hold strong views against homosexuality. Gains for the movement as a whole could conceivably be paid for by the personal costs incurred by individual gay service personnel then serving in the military.

### CONCLUSIONS

The possibility exists that future legal and political events may require the military to reassess and perhaps change policies regarding gays in the service. Were such a change to occur, it would create many difficult problems for the military and for gay service personnel. There are some reasons to believe that over a longer period many of these difficulties might largely disappear. Under present circumstances, however, both military effectiveness and the gay rights movement would be affected adversely. The vast majority of young gays -- as with young "straights" -- would continue not to serve in the military. Even if gays evidenced better talents and skills than the typical recruit, their small numbers would improve only slightly the overall quality of military manpower. Similarly, those same small numbers would also prevent any appreciable dispersal into the general gay culture of the skills and advantages acquired during military service.

Cogent arguments can be made for the eradication of prejudice and discrimination based on sexual preference. The eradication of such prejudice may well improve the overall quality of life for all -- military and civilian, gay and straight. Still, these are distant and general ambitions (some would say platitudes or heresies) that the armed forces ought not to be required to achieve. Since more liberal and less strategic institutions, such as education and industry, have not eliminated discrimination against gays, we do not believe the military should move beyond the elimination of stigmatizing separation procedures.<sup>9</sup> Neither gays nor the military would benefit significantly from such a radical policy change, and there are numerous indications that both world experience short-term difficulties.

Recent research, as well as the experience of the armed forces, indicates that some gays can serve effectively. There is also considerable evidence testifying to the resiliency and strength of the armed forces and of their ability to integrate unpopular groups into military institutions. These considerations lead us to believe that gays could be assimilated into the armed forces, providing there is clear societal support in the form of legislation for such a change.

We conclude with a suggestion for further research: Since the exclusionary policy may be challenged successfully, the armed services should begin systematic research on gays in the military. Some of the topics that might usefully be explored are the performance patterns of gays in military service, the attitudes of service personnel towards homosexuals, and the complex relationships among leadership, performance, and sexual anxiety. Case studies of the assimilation of homosexuals into industrial and police organizations would be especially instructive.

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