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The ban on reason: Gays in the military

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THE BAN ON REASON: GAYS IN THE MILITARY

by

Justin Cohen

Master of Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree
Department of Political Science
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

The Ban on Reason: Gays in the Military

by

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This thesis seeks to explain how and why President Bill Clinton's 1993 attempt to drop the ban on homosexuals serving in the military was vehemently opposed by key stakeholders, even though empirical evidence strongly indicates that the ban is unwarranted and conflicts with America's democratic ethos.

The theoretical framework for this paper is based on Roger Cobb and Charles Elder's writings on the political use of symbols. By manipulating cultural symbols, such as that of the masculine warrior, opponents of policy change forced Clinton into a compromise, the unsuccessful "don't ask, don't tell" policy. In torpedoing Clinton's effort, these antagonists employed the same rhetoric that conservatives used to oppose desegregating the military during World War II.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the best chance for dropping the ban involves bold and decisive executive branch leadership that must take into account anticipated problem areas of implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

MAKING THE AGENDA

As a probable presidential candidate in the fall of 1991, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton met with a group of students at Harvard University. One student in attendance cited numerous government studies concluding that the military's ban against gays should be dropped, and inquired as to whether Clinton, in light of this new information, still supported the ban. The future President replied, "Yes" - not in an altogether forceful tone but clear enough for the hundreds of students and professors in the audience to hear. Then, Clinton paused for several seconds - this was the first time he had ever spoken on the record about this issue - and added, "I think people who are gay should be expected to work, and should be given the opportunity to serve the country" (Rimmerman 1996 p. 113).

This was not an issue about which Clinton felt passionately, and it would hardly emerge as the centerpiece of his campaign. Nonetheless, candidate Clinton did not alter his position as he sought the presidency - indeed in his campaign text, *Putting People First*, he reiterated it - and Clinton proceeded to enjoy considerable public and financial backing from the gay community (Clinton 1992; Towell 1993). However, if the candidate could have anticipated the firestorm this policy issue would spark shortly after the election, he may have been more circumspect that afternoon in Cambridge.

On January 29, 1993, just days into his presidency, Clinton instructed Secretary of Defense Les Aspen to draft an executive order to end "discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in determining who may serve in the armed forces." The President asked that the recommendation be one that could be "carried out in a manner that is practical and realistic, and carried with the high standards of combat effectiveness and unit cohesion that our Armed Forces must maintain" (Rostker 1993 p. xvii).

Military leaders, including the President's Joint Chiefs of Staff, were almost universally incensed. In addition, vociferous pockets of the public - largely religious and veterans groups - were politically mobilized, and the media, sensing the scope and novelty of the conflict, as well as the passions that were driving it, christened the young President from the deep South with headlines worthy of war. Yet, Clinton's constitutional authority to issue the executive order was unquestionable, just as it was for President Harry Truman in 1948 when racial segregation was terminated throughout the military.

This paper seeks to understand why resistance to dramatic policy change in this area was so impassioned, unwavering, and often irrational. By examining the identity symbols that underlie the debate, an argument is posited that only culture can explain a political debate that was so traumatic and yet whose basis was so arbitrary. The theoretical approach is inspired mainly by Roger Cobb and Charles Elder's *The Political Use of Symbols*. Other models are relevant, but Cobb and Elder's theory has the most explanatory value.

The first chapter establishes that the ban is irrational. To explain how the ban exists with no social science backing, the second chapter

considers the power of culture in shaping the policy. This is the chapter that incorporates Cobb and Elder's theory in seeking to understand the dimensions of the policy question. To add perspective, Chapter 3 considers historical precedent through desegregating the military and Chapter 4 embarks on a comparative analysis of other nations' experiences confronting the policy question of gays serving openly. Lastly, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for action, consistent with Cobb and Elder's theory.

This thesis is finalized as a new presidential campaign is underway, featuring the son of the man Bill Clinton defeated in 1992 and Clinton's own vice president, Al Gore. Political campaign promises tend to address issues, such as gays in the military or flag burning, which have powerful symbolic appeal even though they address relatively insignificant national problems. Understanding the complex logic behind the deeply-rooted symbolic meaning to the stakeholders adds a valuable dimension to our civic discourse.

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND THE BAN

The Directive

The Department of Defense's ban on homosexuality as listed in directives 1332.14, "Enlisted Administrative Separations," and 1332.30, "Separation of Regular Commissioned Officers for Cause," is printed below. Prior to the controversy, the directive was last revised in February 1986.

The directive approaches discharges from a "behavioral-intent" perspective. To meet the criteria for discharge, an individual must have engaged in a homosexual act or expressed a desire and intention to do so (Burrelli 1993 p. 8). The military generally viewed declarations of an individual's homosexuality as grounds for investigation, but it would not necessarily warrant discharge. This loophole, in effect, allows the military to exercise discretion in enforcement.

The directive reads as follows:

Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct, or who by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission. The presence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Military services to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among service members; to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and

worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the military service; and to prevent breaches of security (Burrelli 1994 p. 19).

As used in Department of Defense policy, a homosexual act is defined as “bodily contact, actively undertaken or passively permitted, between members of the same sex for the purpose of satisfying desires” (Burrelli 1993 p. 7).

Addressing the Arguments

Virtually all of the arguments in the directive reflect a certain kind of homophobia, critics have observed. Noted author Richard Mohr observed, “None of them is based on the ability of gay soldiers to fulfill their duties of their stations” (Rimmerman 1993 p. 114). Another scholar, Craig Rimmerman, added of the military’s position,

All of the . . . arguments rely on bigoted and negative stereotypes of lesbians and gays But it is these arguments that served to define the broader context of the debate, arguments that both Bill Clinton and proponents of the debate had difficulty engaging in ways that would shift the grounds of the discussion (1996 p. 114).

Indeed, the military’s underlying contention throughout the policy debate was that the existence of discrimination in its ranks justifies the government’s decision to officially let it practice discrimination.

Social science is at a stunning loss to support the directive. As Rimmermann states,

By its very nature, the ban is rooted in the most ugly assumptions about the connections between sexuality and military performance

- assumptions that are not confirmed by any evidence (1996 p. 114).

However, the fact that they are expressed and codified by a powerful government institution makes the assertions appear valid. Circulated enough, they reinforce existing cultural myths. For the most part, military officials do not deny that their claims are challenged by most objective data. Instead, they argue that they are making a “professional judgment. . . which is inherently subjective” (Towell 1993; Ray 1992 p. 56).

Meanwhile, academics push forward an onslaught of studies that contradict the assertions that comprise the DOD’s policy as a whole. Three of the more commonly cited scholars are noted herewith. Gary Melton concluded in *Psychology and Law in Gay Rights* that, “the army’s self-declared rationale for excluding lesbians and gay men is contradicted by social science literature. . . there is no rational basis for the army’s counterproductive exclusion of gay people” (1989 p. 940). In *Managing The Military’s Homosexual Exclusion Policy*, political scientist Judith Stiehm, who testified on the issue before the Senate Armed Services Committee, also found the assertions logically absurd (1992). Sociologist Gregory Herek measured the military’s claims against available research and came to the same conclusion in his landmark article, “Sexual Orientation and Military Service” (1993). Another decidedly unbiased body, the General Accounting Office (GAO), which is the investigative arm of Congress, concluded that

no reasons to support (the ban) exist, including public opinion and scientific evaluations of homosexuality. If a more tolerant attitude

were enforced, it would lead to better functioning of all (Ray 1992 p. 37).

While the conclusions of these disinterested investigators are clear, the specific research behind these conclusions suggests just how irrational the ban is.

Too Close For Comfort

The most frequently cited problems that decision-makers expressed regarding gays serving in the military involve issues of privacy, bodily modesty, and sexual tension. Military brass believe that heterosexuals would be unwilling to share living quarters with gays, while members of Congress seemed obsessed with the prospect of sexual tension between gays and straights. As is often the case, the congressional committee hearings were held to shed light on this issue and manipulate public opinion, but they also revealed the puzzling logic of the lawmakers themselves. Consider the remarks of Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL), chair of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee and who would later become famous for his handling of the Clinton impeachment hearings:

Anyone who has a daughter has to imagine your daughter living in a barracks with a bunch of men and dressing and showering. You'd say that's unconscionable, that's wrong. I am unable to distinguish the difference between having to do that with people whose sexual orientation and arousal level is exactly the same and maybe more, for all I know (Siegal 1995 p. 201).

Former Senator William Cohen (R-ME) shared Hyde's point of view as he questioned Lawrence Korb, director of the Center for Public Policy Education at the Brookings Institution:

Sen. Cohen: Let me just ask you: Should there be separate facilities for women on board submarines or aircraft carriers?

Mr. Korb: I think there are already separate facilities.

Sen. Cohen: But should there be?

Mr. Korb: I think there should be.

Sen. Cohen: Why?

Mr. Korb: Well, because of the way in which society expects us to separate people.

Sen. Cohen: No, no But why? What would be the rational basis for society demanding a separation of the sexes.

Mr. Korb: I think it's based upon the moral values that we have.

Sen. Cohen: Does it have to do with sexual attraction of males and females?

Mr. Korb: Certainly (Armed Services Committee Hearings Transcript 1993 p. 286).

Ironically, Senator Cohen was later named Secretary of Defense by President Clinton, thereby turning a chief critic of gays in the military into the chief enforcer of Clinton's eventual "don't ask don't tell" policy.

Senator Dan Coats (R-IN), who would conclude after the Senate's exhaustive investigation that his paramount worry was gays and straights sharing the same bathroom, also spent much of his time during the hearing exploring the concept of sexual attraction (Adam 1994 p. 100). It is possible the now retired Coats' outlook was shaped by his former boss and mentor, former Senator and Vice President Dan Quayle; Quayle himself is a conservative military traditionalist. In any case, Senator Coats launched into the following exchange with Darryl Henderson, former commander of the Army Research Institute:

Mr. Henderson: So, sex does have a negative affect on military activities.

Sen. Coats: Is that then the basis essentially for segregating men and women in close living situations?

Mr. Henderson: Well, you have other issues, too. You have the privacy issues-

Sen. Coats: But it's the sexual attraction, tension, that could either undermine or destroy the unit. That is the basis for separate living quarters (Armed Services Committee Hearings Transcript 1993 p. 297).

Through their interrogatories, the congressmen were attempting to establish that just as the military segregates genders, a similar, logistically nightmarish approach would have to be employed between gays and straights should the ban ever be lifted.

Yet, less time grandstanding and more time examining social science research may have been a better way to allow the facts to emerge. Social science plainly debunks the analogy between gender and sexual orientation. Much of the difference lies in our cultural mores. As Paul Siegel explains,

Our genders define which doors we are permitted to enter and which are closed to us, which conversations we will be privy to, and which will be denied to us...Men and women function in quite different worlds (1995 p. 202).

The issue has much to do with the unique and well-documented power imbalance between men and women.

Males and females shield their naked bodies from each other, then, sometimes simply to maintain their status as the "other." Males and females are segregated for most of their lives in the traditionally private settings. Often times, gender segregation has more to do with the larger historical problem of power differences between men and women (Siegel 1995 p. 205).

Thus, public institutions are typically far more concerned about ensuring the privacy of women from men than vice-versa. Most police departments and hospitals have policies governing strip searches of women but not necessarily of men. While power imbalances exist between gays and straights, the relationship bears significantly different dynamics and is less institutionalized.

For example, gays have led their lives using the same bathrooms as straights. In such settings, they have become accustomed to the possibility of seeing someone whom they could potentially find physically attractive. By necessity, gays have generally developed the same behavior patterns as straights in those settings. Actually, research reveals that fear of humiliation makes gays exceptionally cautious in such settings. The same arguments apply with respect to the sharing of showers (Herek 1993).

Other, less enlightened officials have expressed unseemly concerns that the phenomenon of "cruising" in places such as bath houses may spill over into the barracks. In fact, cruising has always been practiced by a very small percentage of gays, and the phenomenon's popularity continues to rapidly decline as behavioral norms have changed with the emergence of AIDS. However, when cruising does occur, it is generally consensual and mutual. Unlike heterosexual pairings, encounters between gay men do not "immediately assign one participant to the role of initiator" (Herek 1993 p. 543). Thus, the likelihood of courting straights in the shower is even more unlikely. Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), who is gay, sums up this line of arguments:

I have to point out to people that gay men and straight men have been sharing dormitories, showers, and health clubs for a very

long time. I mean, gay men and lesbians throughout this country join health clubs, they live in college dormitories. We don't have ourselves dry-cleaned. We've been taking showers for a long time (Reuter Transcript *Face the Nation* 1/31/93).

Indeed, straights have always showered with closeted gays who served in the military. Heterosexuals who are particularly sensitive to the issue of bodily modesty might actually *prefer* to be aware of whether the person showering next to them were gay. Under present circumstances, they can only guess. All of these arguments drive at a more fundamental issue, which is that if gays were allowed to openly serve, their behavior would be moderated by the fact that, like straights, they must abide by the military's rigid codes of behavioral conduct.

The military trains soldiers for the horror of war. Should officials really be so preoccupied with whether the soldiers feel comfortable with the private lives of men in the next shower stall? Is the mightiest fighting force in the world that queasy? Interestingly, social scientists have discovered that attitudes about bodily modesty are surprisingly adaptable. Adaptation occurs in numerous settings, including college residence halls, prisons, and medical environments. During the Gulf War, female soldiers enjoyed little privacy from their male counterparts, especially during bathing, dressing, and using the latrine. Traditional vanity gives way to more important needs such as hygiene. Yet there were very few reported incidents of intimidation (Herek 1993). In fact, for many other cultures, unisex restrooms are the norm.

More than anything, bodily modesty is a highly individual phenomenon. Some people prefer not to be seen naked by heterosexuals of the same sex. Others are mortified in front of their own

immediate family and even their sexual partners. Military life demands adaptation from all these individuals. Troops must disrobe in front of other troops, no matter their traditional standards of bodily modesty (Herek 1993). Getting used to disrobing alongside soldiers who may happen to be openly gay would be a new phenomenon to many soldiers, but such an adjustment would be relatively painless, given the more demanding kinds of adaptation that military life requires.

While not perfectly applicable, studies of regimented institutions such as domestic police and fire departments that have recently welcomed gays to their ranks are instructive. Unlike other comparative analyses of military policies in other countries, police and fire departments operate within the American cultural context. Moreover, people working in these institutions must function in teams, wearing distinct uniforms. Much of their work, which is also devoted to public security, requires intense training and their service is punctuated by brief periods of dangerous activity. Finally, many law enforcement officials have served in the military.

The GAO examined various public safety agencies in New York, Washington D.C., Seattle, and San Francisco. These law enforcement departments cited cohesiveness, discipline, morale, good order, and a system of command as critical to their overall mission. In every case, the departments said that homosexuals within their forces was essentially a non-issue (Melton 1989). The highly regarded Rand Corporation conducted a similar study, reporting that department leaders felt a policy of non-discrimination had not impeded mission performance (Rostker 1993). The study added, "A valuable by-product of demanding nondiscriminatory conduct toward homosexual officers, leaders believed,

was that attitudinal change would eventually result" (Rostker 1993 p. 139). Other noteworthy conclusions were that gays who join these departments do so for the same reasons as straights, and that their presence did not hurt retention and recruitment (Rostker 1993). While the RAND study probably ruffles feathers among the military elite, few can doubt its merits. In fact, the chief author of the study, Bernard Rostker, is currently an Undersecretary for Defense.

Self-Discipline

The military also argues that gay men are unfit for duty. Officials contend this claim was largely based on the belief that gays have a greater propensity toward sexual harassment. This argument can be easily refuted in four statements. First, scores of studies revealed that sex drive and frequency of sexual activity are *not* related to sexual orientation. Second, gays are simply *not* more likely than straights to commit sexual harassment. In fact, there is considerable social science literature that finds heterosexuals are *more* likely to do so (Herek 1993). Like other minorities such as Jews and African-Americans, gays have been stereotyped as sexually predatory, but empirical data do not support such beliefs (Karst 1993). Third, sexual orientation is not associated with impaired psychological functioning (Herek 1993). Actually, the military's own studies revealed that gays tended to have pre-service suitability related adjustment that is equal to or superior to heterosexuals (Dyer 1990). Fourth, there is no evidence to suggest that a difference exists between gays and heterosexuals either in general vocational performance or ability to exercise supervisory authority (Dyer 1990; Herek 1993).

Another often heard claim is that the military is concerned that the presence of openly homosexual troops would impede friendship bonding and camaraderie. The military argues that cohesion and morale will be damaged because troops will not be able to foster close interpersonal relationships with gays. Yet, every study available on this subject indicates that the probability of expressing a positive attitude toward gays as a group is significantly higher if the respondent actually knows an openly gay person; about one out of three Americans do (Rostker 1993). Overall, social psychology research on prejudice indicates that opportunities for contact are likely to reduce negative feelings between groups, particularly when that contact takes place in a context in which both of those groups share goals (Rostker 1993).

Since the introduction of “don’t ask, don’t tell,” there have been some brutal attacks against soldiers who were suspected to be gay, such as standout Private Barry Winchell, who was beaten to death with a baseball bat by fellow soldiers as he slept in the morning after Independence Day in 1999 (Bissinger 2000 p. 224). These cases demonstrate not that camaraderie between soldiers straight and gay is impossible, but rather that when soldiers are forced to coexist under policies that encourage deceit, suspicion, and distrust, a dangerous frenzy could result. Soldiers are eager to vanquish the gay soldier, because he is living, breathing proof that their self-identity is arbitrary. However, allowing gays to serve openly, with an acknowledgement that the military will no longer support a cult of masculinity based on the suppression of women, gays, and any “other,” will destroy the motivation for such hatred.

Camaraderie

Fundamentally, the military is concerned about the ability of troops to work together. The military claims that heterosexuals will not respect or obey gay superiors and will be less trusting of gay peers. However, extensive research and court cases reveal that many gays have served effectively and with distinction in the military - garnering the respect and admiration of their colleagues - usually with at least some of those colleagues being aware that the soldier is gay. Cross-cultural studies also suggest that, while not absolutely without incident, gays have generally been able to successfully serve openly in other western countries (Konigsberg 1992). These studies in many ways only punctuate the obvious. The irrationality of the ban is so apparent as to have permeated the mainstream. Even *Vanity Fair* recently declared:

But the United States, virtually alone among NATO countries, stands firm claiming that homosexuality in the military can irrevocably damage the morale and cohesion of fighting units. There is no basis for this (Bissinger 2000 p.224).

Security Risk

Finally, even the military has conceded in recent times that the security threat issue is an invalid argument against lifting the ban. The threat is based on the concern of blackmail. If the policy were changed, the purpose for blackmailing would be eliminated. This realization was reached long ago by the military. The 1957 study *Report of the Board Appointed to Prepare and Submit Recommendations to the Secretary of the Navy for the Revision of Policies, Procedures and Directives Dealing With Homosexuality*, otherwise known as the Crittenden Report (so named after its author), found that the claim that "homosexuals pose a security

risk is unsupported by any factual data.” The study stated that homosexuals should be much less a concern than “alcoholics and those people with marked feelings of inferiority who must brag of their knowledge of secret information and disclose it to gain stature” (Dyer 1990 p. 29). The authors wrote that promiscuous heterosexual activity was a far greater threat than the presence of gays. Its conclusion: “No factual data exist to support the contention that homosexuals are a greater risk than heterosexuals” (Dyer 1990 p. 29).

Another armed services report produced in 1988 argues that homosexuality had as much bearing on job performance as being left or right handed (Dyer 1990). Like the Crittenden Report, this study was buried by the military. When then Representatives Gary Studds (D-MA) and Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) were anonymously sent the report, they demanded that the Pentagon release all their information on the issue. Made public were memos from Pentagon brass reprimanding the study’s authors for their conclusions. The authors asserted that “homosexuals also showed better preservice adjustment than heterosexuals” and “greater levels of cognitive ability than heterosexuals” (Dyer 1990 pp. 132 and 134).

Former President George Bush’s Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney (who is now the junior Bush’s running mate on a ticket opposed to dropping the ban), conceded to a congressional committee in July 1991 that

I think there have been times in the past when opposition to gays in the military has been generated on the notion that somehow there was a security risk involved, although I must say I think that is a bit of an old chestnut (Konigsberg 1992 p. 13).

Perhaps Secretary Cheney was referring to the fact that the last known instance in the western world of a gay soldier being blackmailed is believed to have occurred in 1912, when Austrian Colonel Alfred Redl was compromised into sharing secrets with the Russians (Konigsberg 1992). One might suspect that damaging heterosexual indiscretions have occurred with greater frequency. In any case, in 1995 Clinton repealed the policy of regarding homosexuality as a security criterion in providing clearances to government employees.

Given that the ban appears to contradict social science research, even the military's own research, what is truly the rationale behind the military's fierce opposition to lifting the ban? Thus far, this thesis has built a case that empirical evidence does not support maintaining the ban. Moreover, Cobb and Elder observe that Americans tend to be anti-intellectual, which perhaps enables us to shrug at the social science findings (1983). More importantly, however, Cobb and Elder provide stronger and deeper arguments that demystify the debate over the ban. In applying their research on the political uses of symbols, it grows clear that reason has been distorted, obscured by a complex arrangement of cultural symbols that shape the way we understand the world.

The heart of the next chapter discusses how potent meanings assigned to our cultural symbols enable us to wink at the facts. More importantly, it shows how and why our culture, and particularly the armed forces, is disposed toward retention of prohibitive policies against homosexuals serving in the military. It attempts to shed light on why the debate was so controversial and impassioned. The chapter will examine the symbols of manhood, the military, and homosexuality, and how they

are related and at tension with each other in ways that stifled the prospects for dramatic policy change.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLANATIONS: THE ROLE OF CULTURE

This discussion essentially follows from Cobb and Elder's approach as quoted below. The reader is encouraged to refer back to it frequently:

These symbols give definition to a particular world view, providing a frame of reference and a language for interpreting reality and communicating experience. The various elements of this world view, having been historically accumulated and transmitted piecemeal, will typically be only loosely organized. There will be gaps, inconsistencies, even contradictions. Still the paradigm formed by these elements will likely possess considerable internal logic, and there will be a notable degree of "systemness" arising from the interdependence of these elements (1983 p. 84).

The image of manhood is completely a social construct. It takes shape through various forms of expression. Manhood is comprised of how it is expressed and perceived. The phenomenon has no meaning - no existence - unto itself. When American males try to prove their manhood, they are relying on image and metaphor to guide them. They are attempting to personify a cultural symbol of manhood. The government is a prominent institution in image construction, and the military is viewed as an especially credible institution in defining the symbol of manhood. Official policy as conceived and dictated by these institutions provides an expressive function in American culture. They

both inform and validate cultural norms and symbols. As Gary Lehrig states:

Reflecting as well as initiating beliefs and values, the decisions of public policy helped shape the values of a culture and are in turn shaped by them, creating official meanings and accepted understanding, while granting legitimacy and recognition (1996 p. 269).

The image of manhood could be described with any number of words, but they all have similar connotations. A man is confident, direct, decisive, bold, competitive, morally capable of violence, collected, ready to lead, sexually aggressive, yet ready to protect the opposite sex. Manhood is rooted in dominance and subordination. Homosexuals, on the other hand, have come to be regarded by the military as lechers and deviants, lacking maturity, dishonest and criminal (Rimmermann 1996).

Proving Manhood in the Military

Males are constantly striving to prove their manhood. Demonstrations of manhood - exhibitions, really - are various and sundry, but Karst argues that they generally entail two main characteristics: they are expressive and revolve around the notion of power (1991). Since manhood is a societal construct, by definition behavior to that end must obviously be expressive. The power component is more complex. Karst explains:

Masculinity is traditionally defined around the idea of power; the armed forces are the nation's preeminent symbol of power, and not incidentally, "the marines are looking for a few good men" (1991 p. 501).

Indeed, the strongest, most widely recognized symbol of power in the United States is the armed forces. Moreover, not only is it a symbol of power within the United States, Americans view the military as a projection of their international power. Barry Adam observes:

National identity and pride are caught up with ideologies of strength and belligerence Unlike those of its allies, the military maintains a particularly central role in the American national imagination as the symbol of U.S. preeminence (1994 p. 113).

Thus, the military in our culture fundamentally serves as *the* venue par none for manhood.

Randy Shilts says flatly that boys go to war to achieve manhood, with combat serving as an unquestionable proving ground (1993). Steven Zeeland adds, "To be a Marine is to be thought a man. Masculine. Unquestionably heterosexual" (1993 p. 1). While perhaps oversimplifying, there is substance to these claims. Indeed, a significant body of research in anthropology and psychology concludes that one of the reasons war exists is to provide a forum for males to demonstrate their manhood (Shilts 1993). Western philosophy supports this claim. Achilles and Hector, for example, believed that there could be no complete manhood without war. In the modern era, manhood and warfare have become closely intertwined in the American cultural landscape. Consider the comments of the recently retired commander of the U.S. Marines, General Robert Barrow: "War is a man's work When you get right down to it , you have to protect the manliness of war" (Karst 1991 p. 534). Another former commandant added,

There is an inherent need in all males of the animal world to prove their masculinity or maleness....The Marine Corps reputation, richly deserved, for physical toughness, courage and its demands on mind and body, attracts those who want to prove their manliness (Zeeland 1993 p. 2).

While these leaders would not claim to be anthropologists, their public positions inform the attitudes of their many subordinates. Few institutions are as trickle-down in their approach to management as the military.

The commandants, however, were not exploring uncharted territory. Throughout much of history - including all of American history - manhood has been associated with being a fighter. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Karen Dunivin, a sociologist with a Ph.D, writes that a key element of the military's cultural paradigm is the masculine-warrior image:

As an institution comprised primarily of men, its culture is shaped by men. Soldiering is viewed as a masculine role - the profession of war, defense and combat is defined by society as men's work. Thus a deeply entrenched "cult of masculinity" - with accompanying masculine norms, values, and lifestyles - pervades military culture (1994 pp. 533-534).

It is important to be careful not to confuse a particular institutional sub-culture (the military) with the culture of the parent society (America). However, powerful streams in these societies feed one another. As a socializing institution, the military reinforces norms and values. Stiehm ponders, "How can one distinguish between male culture and military culture?" (1981 pp. 65-66). Moreover, the perceived chasm behind

warriorhood and homosexuality is an increasingly unique American cultural phenomenon.

Cobb and Elder argue that “For the most part, changes in the meaning of a culturally prominent symbol are gradual and serve to sustain its societal role” (1983 p. 82). Their observation applies to the masculine-warrior symbol as well. Manifestations of this American manhood symbol have changed over time. However, the adaptations serve only to perpetuate the symbol. The essential core meaning assigned to it (what Cobb and Elder might associate with the “premises and prescriptions” that underlie the political culture) remains basically constant. Shilts notes the example of the American Revolution “when a role model like George Washington carefully powdered his shoulder-length hair, and pulled on silk tights before galloping off to fight the British” (1993 p. 7). This is not exactly how we picture Sylvester Stallone’s Rambo, yet they both project militaristic images of manhood in American culture.

The Ban’s Meaning

The contention of this thesis is that America’s cultural concept of manhood is nothing but an image and claims that manhood is at tension with homosexuality do not necessarily exist in the pure nature of things. The tension may seem genuine in our cultural psyche, but, in fact, it is artificial. Fundamentally, this thesis argues that there is no intrinsic relationship - positive or negative - between homosexual relationships and military activity. The claim that there is a negative relationship is the result of cultural construction. The only true interest being served by any kind of ban is mainly symbolic and expressive, namely to

perpetuate an image for the armed forces that corresponds with the cultural symbol of manhood. Adam summarizes the controversy:

The crux of the issue in the United States is the culturally embedded view that homosexuality represents a feminization of men and that this feminization entails a world of implications debilitating to military effectiveness, namely all the traditional traits assigned to the feminine - weakness, submission, passivity softness, compassion, all of which detract from military readiness (1994 p. 104).

He notes that similar arguments were used to protest voting rights for women seventy years ago. Many American men felt that permitting women to vote would lead to the downfall of the country because women would prefer capitulation to defense (1994).

Furthermore, Karst points out that for men who have committed their life essentially to the pursuit of manhood - namely veterans and career military officers - "suggestions that seem to undermine the ideology of masculinity are deeply threatening" (1991 p. 558). This is confounded by the fact that manhood is, as noted previously, a social construct; the *ideology* of masculinity is by definition formulated. Here, the personal becomes political. As Karst reminds us, on a perhaps subliminal level everyone is aware that "gender ascription and typifications are tentative and fragile" (1991 p. 557). This awareness must be terrifying to any man whose "sense of self is strongly dependent on the conformance to the traditional images of masculinity" (Karst 1991 p. 558). Francine D'Amico states, "Fundamentally, the debate . . . over gay men in the military is about the politics of identity and practices of exclusion/inclusion. Who am 'I' and Who are 'we'" (1996 p. 3). This

concept is acknowledged by those on both sides of the issue.

Conservative legal scholar Richard Fein observed,

The lifeblood of a soldier is masculinity, bravery and gallantry. The battlefield soldier is inspired to risk all by fighting with comrades whose attributes conform to his view of manhood And it is inarguable that the majority of a fighting force would be psychologically and emotionally deflated by the close presence of homosexuals who evoke effeminate or repugnant but not manly visions (Rimmerman 1996 p. 114).

Arguably, the military is a magnet for these kinds of men, because of the forum it provides. Yet throughout all of our society, men strongly associate themselves with what the cultural symbol of manhood represents. This is a fundamental reason why the debate over admitting gays to the military was so controversial in the U.S. and particularly abhorrent to many social conservatives, veterans, and those currently serving in the armed forces. Adam believes that,

At the heart of the sense of terror among the military in the face of homosexuality is a semiotic chain, which binds aggression, masculinity and self-esteem into a tightly wound mechanism designed to motivate and discipline the male soldier. This mechanism is a well-honed extreme of a larger social obligation, which threatens males with a loss of male prerogatives should they show signs of sympathy with things "feminine" (1994 p.111).

In *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity*, Mark Simpson writes:

The performance of masculinity in all its various rites, from football to war, has more to do with the anxiety a man has about the "hole" hidden between his legs than his phallus, the possession of which he is forever advertising (Zeeland 1996 p. 4).

Shilts warns, “Cultures, like individuals, labor most vigorously to defend what they most doubt” (1993 p. 33).

Throughout the controversy, Cobb and Elder’s observation that “attachments to characteristic symbols are likely to be more a function of acquired affection than of well-specified cognitive meaning” was obviously applicable (1983 p. 83). Soldiering is designed to have a cult-like aura. It must be mystified because its tenets simply do not hold up under questioning. The absurdity of the military’s position is clearly obvious but only to those who give it close scrutiny. Cobb and Elder’s approach emphasizes that the socialization process “leaves little doubt as to whether something is regarded as good or bad, positive or negative, even though they may leave us uncertain as to why” (1983 p. 83).

Construction Through Discourse

Cobb and Elder are again on the mark when one considers some of the typical discourse throughout the military (1983). During basic training, if a recruit reveals any hesitancy or does poorly in an exercise, usually his drill sergeant will call him a “faggot” or “little girl.” With associations like that, the symbol of manhood along with all of its own affective associations and implications for its intended antithesis, homosexuality, is perpetuated. If every time a recruit performs poorly, he is referred to as gay, then of course he is going to draw connections between the concept of weakness and the concept of homosexuality. The young man is being socialized. Even worse, consider that airborne units at Fort Campbell were reported to march to cadences such as “Faggot, faggot, down the street. Shoot him, shoot him, till he retreats” (*Suro Washington Post* 03/04/00). This phenomenon is not limited to an

organizational or institutional culture. Indeed, we know through everyday observation that types of associative discourse regarding manhood are not unique to the military. It permeates all of society and shapes the way we perceive our world. Lehring explains,

The issue of homosexuality and military service provides a perfect opportunity to examine how widely disseminated these constructions of homosexuality have become. Often expressed by military officials and elected public servants, these epistemologies of sex have exploded in the official discourse of the United States. These diverse tenets often overlap and contradict one another, but they come together in their efforts to construct the homosexual as “unfit of military service.” The reasons generated are almost always unrelated to job performance, or any objectively verifiable standards of military readiness or effectiveness (1996 p. 271).

For that matter, soldiers might have different perspectives on homosexuality if discourse - that powerful instrument of culture - were radically changed. What if we lived in a society that honored recruits who successfully completed exercises by deeming them as “faggots” and those who failed were degraded as “wimpy straights”? A Navy psychologist explained:

The phallic aggressive imagery used by the drill instructor to spur his recruits onward may help them toward focusing their sexual drives appropriately, although it is unlikely that feelings of tenderness and compassion are thus inculcated. For the insecure and uncertain, the opportunity to fondle and sleep with his rifle must be a powerful contribution toward the masculine self-image (Zeeland 1996 p. 8).

Even discourse outside the rigors of boot camp is wrought with the same cruel irony. Zeeland notes the fabled soldier who claims the reason he had sex with a man the night before was because he was intoxicated.

The fact that he has had sex with another man may be displaying not just his fear that what he has done will be called queer - that is, unmanly, but his recognition that it is dishonest and unfair to call what he has done any significant departure from what anyone else might feel or do. Maybe he recognizes as factitious the only socially accepted excuse for what it is, really only (like even the most transgressive imaginable human sexual acts) the mundane exercise of just another human potential (1996 p. 134).

Incidentally, the ban, rigid as it was, actually exempted those whose sexual history included the "occurrence of a single episode of homosexual behavior while intoxicated" (Burrelli 1993 p. 8).

Assuming even remotely similar discourse filtered into and was employed by the larger society, it would be likely then that the culture also would have constructed distinctly different images of what it means to be gay and what it means to be straight. Maybe, then, that hypothetical culture would eventually decide to impose restrictions on the admission of heterosexuals to the military because they had come to symbolize femininity. Therein lies still another example of how this issue is also about the "personal being political" in political culture. Cobb and Elder note, "Symbols index properties of a political culture in much the same way that they index an individual's beliefs and values" (1983 p. 82). This leads Adam to explain:

The fusion of military effectiveness with masculinity and concomitant demonization of femininity and homosexuality has become so fundamental a part of the military psyche that the prospect of gays in the military stimulates a psychological panic rooted in the fears of the loss of self (1994 p. 111).

The Trauma Of Change

Amid panic of exposure and cultural change, exclusionary regulations will be extremely comforting to soldiers who have been so absorbed by the cultural symbol of manhood. Government policies are expressive and they inform and reflect upon our culture. Karst explains:

Exclusionary policies achieve this reassurance by standing as an official symbol of group domination, an authoritative statement consigning a "homosexual" to the status of outsider. The denial of membership to persons so labeled reassures other service members that they belong - and especially reassures males that they are "man enough" to be in the group (1991 p. 558).

Gore Vidal, a gay veteran of World War II, puts it more simplistically:

there is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person Most people are a mixture of impulses if not practices, and what anyone does with a willing partner is of no social or cosmic significance. So why all the fuss? In order for a ruling class to rule, there must be arbitrary prohibitions. Of all prohibitions, sexual taboo is the most useful because sex involves every one We have allowed our governors to divide the population into two teams. One team is good, godly, straight; the other is evil, sick, vicious (Zeeland 1996 p. 15).

Thus, it is not hard to understand why the policy debate is framed as the problem of gays in the military. Given Americans' cultural attitudes toward gays and manhood, blaming the victims is not altogether surprising. Lehring argues,

In the face of such overwhelming evidence that no legitimate interest or rational explanation exists for its exclusionary policy, the military has relied on stereotypic judgments of homosexuals and homosexuality that are rooted deeply in American culture The acceptance and promotion of age-old stereotypes and homophobia by the official instruments of the state have a

legitimizing effect, codifying prejudice and thereby making legal reform for lesbians and gays more difficult than ever (1996 p. 274).

Herek, noting the overwhelming lack of empirical proof supporting any kind of ban, claims that, since it should be “recognized that gay men and lesbians are not inherently unfit for military service,” that the “onus of the ‘problem’ should be defined in terms of heterosexuals - specifically rampant homophobia among that population” (1993 p. 547). In other words, the very fact that the debate centers more around the problem of gays than as a problem of heterosexuals provides a clear indication of cultural attitudes toward homosexuals in America. This dovetails with Cobb and Elder’s contention, “That culture colors perceptions and constrains problem definition is revealed daily in topical concerns of American politics” (1983 p. 85).

Apparently homosexuals were viewed as such a problem that Desert Storm’s famed General Norman Schwarzkopf told members of Congress that if the ban is abolished,

we will end up with a second class-class armed force Troops will faithfully try and execute the orders of their civilian leaders, but their hearts simply won’t be in it. . . . They will be just like many of the Iraqi troops in the deserts of Kuwait, forced to execute orders they don’t believe in (Bacevich 1993 p. 44).

Schwarzkopf expected policymakers to believe that if the U.S. lets gays serve openly, the most powerful military in modern times will collapse. Every other country in the world that has dropped its ban - including countries with powerful armies - do not report any remarkable hindrance to military effectiveness. In fact, many countries that feared soldierly bonding would be affected have launched education and sensitivity

training to enlighten the troops. Those efforts have largely been successful (Konigsberg 1993; Rostker 1993).

Schwarzkopf, in effect, actually asserts that the negative cultural attitudes toward homosexuals among U.S. soldiers are so entrenched that there is no way gays can be openly admitted without paralyzing the armed forces. Yet no congressional hearings were ever scheduled to examine the epidemic of homophobia in the military. Nor has it been considered that this rampant homophobia may actually hurt national security by discouraging potential top-notch recruits who happen to be gay from serving their country. Prohibiting qualified groups from enlisting plainly diminishes the talent pool for the nation's defense.

Framing The Debate

In a rare moment of candor and enlightenment, Senator Charles Robb (D-VA) spoke of the importance of framing the argument. During the congressional debate on the ban, Senator Robb, a Marine veteran, expressed disgust at the "specter of two girl sergeants dancing together." However, he suggested that "the threat to morale comes not from the orientation of the few but the closed minds of the many" (Doherty and Towell 1993 pp. 271-272). Fellow lawmakers who were on the Senate floor conspicuously scoffed at and heckled his remark. Given how closed minded the debate was, clearly Cobb and Elder's model helps us attempt to make sense of this brouhaha. Through symbol definition,

a political culture acts to limit the range of problems and problem solving alternatives that are likely to be considered, even entertained or recognized. While this tends to limit the demands that are placed on the political system and facilitates the development of routine modes of coping with problems, it can also

blind a polity to potential dangers and severely limit its ability to speak effectively to these problems that are recognized (1983 p. 85).

Adam concludes that the “‘problem’ of gays in the military then, has very little to do with the lives and experiences of . . . gay men.” Instead, it is rather the

projection of a series of fears and anxieties characteristic of the ideologies of the dominant classes in general and more particularly of gendered, nativist, heterosexist discourses circulated and reproduced by certain constituencies in American society (1994 p. 109).

(This point of how the “problem” is framed will be made clearer by later discussion on the approaches to the problem by other countries.) The ban protects and perpetuates these ideologies. The military’s position is a prejudicial, self-fulfilling prophecy that renders it impossible for gays to “officially” prove their equal value as soldiers. Karst calls it “the single most important government action in maintaining public attitudes that stigmatize homosexual orientation” (1991 p. 559). If the ban were these cultural elites’ most powerful weapon against gays, no wonder they found themselves fighting so hard to preserve it:

. . . the policy is an authoritative statement stigmatizing homosexuality. Every discharge of a gay soldier is an official degradation ceremony, an invitation to the troops - and especially to very young men - to participate in further acts of group subordination, relieving the anxieties of male rivalry through rituals of group domination. The exclusion policy is, above all, political theater (Karst 1991 p. 546).

If, in fact, the policy exists firmly to reinforce cultural symbols, it has surprisingly little practical effect. All sides agree that homosexuals have always served in the military and always will. Denying entry to those who are truthful (or certain) of their orientation while granting it for those who lie cannot be in the military's *practical* interest. Moreover, the notion that an unconditional lifting of the ban will usher in hordes of homosexuals is nonsensical and certainly not demonstrated in other contexts (Konigsberg 1993).

Irony And Tragedy

Ironically, the argument that the military is largely the domain of the masculine may actually entice gays to join, and assertions regarding the brutality of battle may have increased the determination of gays. Shilts refers to data that suggest the societal construct of gays as effeminate was often the impetus for them to join the armed forces in the first place - particularly in times of war (1994). They felt a special need to prove their manhood. Socialized into the culture's views of masculinity, they set out to prove what they had most profoundly come to doubt. The more dangerous the proposition, the more these men were determined to conquer it.

The fact is, many young people join the military for reasons they do not fully understand themselves. Enlistment actually jumped immediately after media reports of the infamous "McKeon Death March." This incident consisted of a drill-instructor-devised punishment that required 75 troops to march through a swamp in the middle of the night. Six recruits drowned, others were injured (Shilts 1994).

Once in the military, the desire to prove one's self rarely fades. Gay veterans who served with distinction often attribute their acts of valor during warfare to an enhanced desire to demonstrate their manhood. Tragically, an indifference to the risk of death due to a "disgust with life" was also frequently cited as a cause for their bravery. Some gay veterans claimed such depression was brought on by fear of the stigma they would bear if their orientation were to be made public. Numerous suicides have been attributed to pressure associated with rumors of a purge (Rimmerman 1996). Mohr laments:

The chief problem of the social institution of the closet is not that it promotes hypocrisy, requires lies, sets snares, blames the victim when snared and causes unhappiness - though it does have all these results. No, the chief problem with the closet is that it treats gays as less than human, less than animal, less even than vegetable - it treats gays as reeking scum, the breath of death (1993 p. 114).

Gays are certainly not the first minority group to be viewed as "less than human" in the United States. Government policies have institutionalized, validated, and perpetuated a systematic demeaning of marginalized groups ever since the republic was established. An obvious example is the lack of civil rights accorded to African-Americans throughout much of U.S. history. Other cases can easily be made for Native Americans, Asians, and women.

In particular, the military's position on gays is remarkably similar to how it approached racial issues, especially integration. This much can be said: the military is very consistent in its bigotry. The fight to restrict its cult of masculinity to an elite few has gone barely unchanged in

manifold decades. By “letting people in,” the military fitfully understands that it must redefine its masculine-warrior ideal.

Few arguments can highlight the military’s irrational allegiance to its own social constructions more than a direct comparison between its positions on the gay ban and opposing integration. In the next chapter, this thesis examines the history of gays and blacks in the military. The argument is proffered that both groups have been relegated to outsider status because they represent a rational challenge to the military’s elitist, irrational constructions of manhood. The military’s arguments for dropping the ban echo the arcane traditionalist assertions it made for prolonging segregation.

CHAPTER 3

THE PAST AND PRESENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF GAYS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

"I have worked too long and hard against segregated public accommodations to end segregating my moral concern. Justice is indivisible."

---Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Case Of Gays

The pattern of exclusion of gays is less concrete than that of African Americans. For much of American history, the extent of exclusion was a ban on sodomy that brought forth relatively few expulsions. The statutes mirrored similar kinds of prohibitions in civilian society. Most anti-sodomy laws had been passed in a more puritanical, early colonial era, but, throughout the twentieth century, enforcement grew increasingly lax. During World War I, the military still officially claimed that same-sex intercourse could be grounds for court martial, but no pre-induction screening procedures were instituted. The armed forces did not regard homosexuality as a group status with unique, detectable characteristics (Greenberg 1988). The military reconsidered this position during World War II as its ranks diversified and swelled to unprecedented levels. Some 16,000,000 Americans served in the armed forces during the war (Karst 1991). With such vast numbers, social issues suddenly pushed to the fore. In the aftermath of

Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysts were able to conjure up answers (albeit misguided ones) to the military's dilemmas.

In 1944, the armed forces formally borrowed the term "homosexual" from psychiatry and used it as a label to describe a series of sexual behaviors that were illegal (Berube 1991). Adopting the prevailing psychiatric opinion, the military determined that practitioners were mentally ill and should not serve. All mental illnesses must have symptoms, so the military responded by constructing some. Men who exhibited propensities toward same-sex acts could be characterized as, for example, effeminate, having a strong maternal attachment, passive, condescending, and easily frightened. This profile gave legitimacy to certain stereotypes. It was also designed to be the antithesis to the image of the masculine aggressive warrior. While conservative estimates put the number of homosexuals serving during World War II at many hundred thousands, less than one per cent of recruits failed their physical on account of homosexuality (Berube 1991).

Still, screening for homosexuality proved how silly the guidelines were; the military certainly could never be accused of instituting progressive policies regarding homosexuality. For example, during World War II, military doctors often used a tongue depressor to weed out gays. Recruits who did not gag when the depressor was "thrust to the back of their throat" were often suspected of having committed acts that would suggest they were unfit to be a soldier (Mohr 1988 p. 258).

While the military argued that part of the reason for the ban on gays was out of concern for morale, in reality morale issues may have actually compelled the military to tolerate homosexuality in its ranks. During World War II, homosexuality in the military was so common that

out of concern for the troops' morale, same-sex, private, and consensual relationships were largely disregarded so long as the Military Code of Conduct was obeyed in all other respects (Greenberg 1988). Of the soldiers who were singled out during the war, the military started sending them to psychiatric hospitals instead of prisons - reflecting a change in policy. Almost 25 percent of new admissions to the two primary naval hospitals in 1941 were for homosexuality (Greenberg 1998). Over the course of the war, psychiatric wards at military hospitals were slowly crammed with soldiers who were sent there for no reason other than because they were believed to be gay. The head of the infamous 3rd Station Hospital, Lt. Colonel Lewis Loeser, conducted a study of 270 homosexual patients and concluded in 1945 that most gays were "effective soldiers and should be integrated into the armed forces" (Berube 1990). At military prisons, "queer stockades" were established to house gay soldiers. Eventually, the military reformed its policy so that gays could be discharged as undesirables rather than incarcerated in prisons or mental hospitals. As peace arrived, the military aggressively downsized. Many cases that had been disregarded during the war suddenly drew administrative attention, resulting in thousands of dishonorable discharges.

The number of gays who served their country during World War II was vast. Familiar names include Rock Hudson, novelists John Horne Burns and John Cheever, and photographer Minor White. Presidential biographer Merle Miller served as editor of *Yank*, the enlisted men's magazine during his service.

The Case Of African Americans

The ban on African Americans serving in the military can be traced to the Militia Act of 1792. The Act limited recruitment for state militias to white male citizens. Protocols later outlined by the military solidified the ban. In 1798, Secretary of War Henry Knox decreed that "no Negro, mulatto, or Indian [is] to be enlisted nor any description of men except natives of fair conduct or foreigners of unequivocal character for sobriety and fidelity." Garry Rolison and Thomas Nakayama explain that this statement was important not just "because it excluded African-Americans but also because it equated being African American with character defects unacceptable to military service" (1994 p. 122). Explicit exclusion of African Americans continued well into the nineteenth century. The Navy codified its ban in 1818. The Army followed suit two years later.

This pattern of systematic exclusion was finally interrupted out of virtual necessity during the Civil War. In 1863 - while the outcome of the war was still uncertain - President Abraham Lincoln reluctantly repealed the ban. Manpower levels in the Union army were dropping, and Lincoln was desperate for troops; while Union soldiers easily outnumbered their Confederate opponents, this advantage was diminished by the North's staggeringly higher levels of attrition. The war would eventually see the participation of 200,000 black men, including African American troops comprising 25 percent of the Navy (Karst 1991 p. 512). Constitutional amendments were passed shortly after the war that ended slavery, granted African Americans citizenship, and gave African American males the right to vote. Civil rights pioneer W.E.B. Dubois later remarked that it was that the black man "rose and fought

and killed” that compelled whites to declare him a “man” (Karst 1991 p. 512).

Still, Lincoln’s repeal of the ban included tight restrictions. Lincoln insisted, for example, that black regiments be commanded by white officers. Pay scales for black troops were dramatically lower than for white counterparts. But perhaps the most historically important of these restrictions was manifested in the establishment of segregated units. Eighty years would pass before the military was persuaded to desegregate its forces.

In fact, it was in the backdrop of another armed conflict that progress was made in achieving full integration of blacks into the armed forces. During World War II, a more urbanized black population grew increasingly politically aware and organized. The emboldened black press amplified the sentiments of its community. *The Pittsburgh Courier* and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) journal *The Crisis* were two highly influential black-run publications that relentlessly argued for integration of the armed forces (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 122). The *Courier* actually set up an interest group, the Committee for Participation of Negroes in the National Defense, to lobby against racism in the military. Also, Jim Crow laws limiting the electoral power of blacks were slowly being lifted. African Americans were building political muscle at home while many were serving effectively overseas.

As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought re-election in 1940, he was concerned by the less than enthusiastic support coming from the African-American community. In the wake of a *Courier* endorsement of his opponent, Wendell Wilkie, Roosevelt issued an executive order to

commence "fair racial hiring practices" in the armed forces. He also established a panel, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, to monitor implementation (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 123).

Just as with gays, external pressure on the military forced the issue of integration onto the policy-making agenda. The ensuing internal debate was heated. Civilian personnel tended to be more amenable to change, while the more vociferous military brass favored the status quo. Political pressure being what it was, the military still fended off policy change for several years. Some historians speculate that anticipation of the Korean War may have also contributed to the eventual loosening of the military's position. An increasing number of military planners complained about the logistical difficulties of maintaining segregated units. Nonetheless, it was in July 1948, a full 150 years after the original Marine Corps ban was promulgated, that President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981. The decree called for racial integration of the military (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 124).

As an important indirect result of the policy change, African-American troops were assigned frequently to combat units as opposed to what was previously often menial labor duties. For example, over a million African Americans had served in World War II. While the few who were given the opportunity for combat fought with an impeccable record, the majority - 75 percent - were directed to units that dealt with road construction, laundry, stevedoring, and fumigating (Karst 1991 p. 517). However, after Truman's decree, African-American troops would in effect also be more readily given the chance to demonstrate their manhood (and their mortality) alongside of and in a similar fashion to white troops.

It is interesting to note that, prior to the policy controversy, African-American males were commonly referred to as "boy" in the United States, particularly in the Deep South. Tellingly, the term became gradually less socially acceptable after Truman's order was implemented. As far as the military's administrative policies were concerned, African Americans would be entitled to the same claims to manhood as white troops.

Truman's order, as previously noted, was issued in the face of stiff opposition from the military. Excerpts from memos written to him by his military advisers expose the military's intransigence; Truman's Assistant Secretary of War Robert Patterson decried

This policy (of segregating the units) has proven satisfactory over a long period of years and to make changes would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparations for national defense. It is the opinion of the War Department that no experiments should be tried with the organizational set up of these units (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 123).

General George Marshall, Chief of Staff for the Secretary of War, weighed in that

The army . . . should not be charged with such an undertaking. The settlement of vexing racial problems cannot be permitted to complicate the tremendous task of the War Department and thereby jeopardize discipline and morale (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 123).

Secretary of War Henry Stinson concluded that "experiments within the army in the solution of social problems are fraught with danger to efficiency, discipline, and morale" (Karst 1991 p. 520). General

Omar Bradley, the Army's Chief of Staff, was not so discreet as to express his feelings in a confidential memo. Just days before Truman promulgated his executive order, General Bradley flatly warned the press that desegregating the military would spark violence and rebellion in the ranks. He declared: "The Army is not out to make any social reform. The Army will not put men of different races in the same companies" (Truscott *New York Times* 2/1/93).

Discussion: Discursive Patterns

There appears to be little disparity in the roles that are being played. The actors are structurally the same - a disfranchised minority group that is demanding equal access against a military that deems the group a threat to its masculine warrior identity. The fine details vary, of course. Specific personalities within the military have changed over time, but their arguments for exclusionary policies have not. Likewise, the military's perceived enemy is now homosexuals instead of blacks, but the cause that is at stake remains the same, and, indeed, the battle is waged on the same rhetorical turf.

Observers could easily bicker over the differences in the nature of the oppression that homosexuals and African Americans have endured throughout American history. It is, in fact, prudent to caution against trivializing either group's historical suffering. However, the issue at stake is not necessarily a contest for who has suffered the most - to frame the problem in that way merely hijacks the debate to the military's strategic advantage. As African-American historian Henry Louis Gates puts it, "trying to establish a pecking order of oppression is generally a waste of time" (1993 p. 43). It is a popular tactic with the ban's

supporters, who realize the advantage in splintering a formidable coalition, pitting potential partners against one another. It also squashes a keenly powerful metaphor - one that expands the context of the controversy yet brings the arguments into tighter focus.

At the very least, an examination of the cultural symbols at play reveals how these groups are trapped in the same storyline. Marten Hajer explains that

Storylines are the medium through which actors try to impose their view of reality on others, suggest certain social positions and practices, and criticize alternative social arrangements (1993 p. 47).

African Americans and gays have been mired helplessly, for the most part, in a storyline, a web of cultural mythology perpetuated by the military in order to protect a system that provides for a certain type of group domination.

Exclusionary policies, after all, are official statements that relegate certain groups to outsider status. Those recruits who meet the military's criteria are reassured that they do belong and that they do possess the right stuff; hence, the elitism of the Marines' claim that they are looking for a "few good men." By rejecting particular groups outright the military implies that membership in such a group prevents someone from being a "good man." Decades ago, civil rights leaders fought for the right of black adult males to be regarded as nothing less than full men, in part by breaking down barriers to military service. Today, gay rights advocates undertake a similar crusade.

Thus, the military finds itself regurgitating an easily anticipated defensive discourse. The armed forces is a decidedly undemocratic

institution existing in a society spiritually and constitutionally committed to democracy. Rolison and Nakayama explain this tension:

On the one hand the military . . . asserts ascriptive differences between groups disallow membership in the military. On the other hand, a metadiscourse exists in civil society more generally to eradicate ascriptive differences as a barrier to equal political and civil participation (1994 p. 129).

President Clinton hinted at this dilemma when he announced his “don’t ask, don’t tell” compromise to top military officials assembled at the National Defense University:

Because (the military) is an institution that embodies the best of America and must reflect the society in which it operates, it is also right for the military to make changes when the time is at hand (1993 p. 1373).

Clearly, then, what is at stake here is more than just the access itself, but what it culturally symbolizes for the actors and stakeholders. It is about identity and about groups making claims to participation in society. Major Melissa Wells Petry, an advocate of the ban and author of the book *Exclusion: Homosexuals and the Right to Serve*, argued:

The wisdom of the army in avoiding issues that are confounding society at large is especially apparent since the process of confrontation and resolution of these issues . . . would require the expenditure of scarce resources, financial and otherwise, better spent on accomplishment of the military mission (1993 p. 170).

This defensive discourse that the military espouses using the same symbols within the same cultural storyline is evident. The military’s position has been a response to external pressures particularly from its

civilian overseers and the mobilizations of ostracized- but not resigned- minority groups. While the discourse espoused during the middle of the century was the result of growing black political power, the rhetoric heard at the close of the century is uttered amid an increasingly politically active gay community. As Alexander Cockburn noted in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Reform always comes as a matter of political calculation" (1/31/93). To some extent, Presidents Truman and Clinton were both attempting to appease vital political constituencies.

The specific similarities of the arguments can be categorized like chapters in a novel, all constructed in the name of protecting a carefully cultivated masculine warrior image. A brief review of the military's explanations for opposing racial integration clearly echoes the arguments put forth today against dropping the ban on gays.

There were three key aspects to the military's discourse that emerged in its struggle to deny blacks equality. The first is that restrictions against certain groups serving in the military are typically based on claims that only members of a "privileged group" have the moral fiber to be good soldiers. The second line of arguments contended that segregation was necessary because black and white units living and training together would be detrimental to morale, efficiency, discipline, and good order. For example, Vietnam War hero David Hackworth, a ban proponent, explained this position in the *Washington Post* "I cannot think of a better way to destroy fighting spirit and gut U.S. combat effectiveness." In 1948, *New York Times* military editor Hanson W. Baldwin wrote, "One of the surest ways to break down morale of the Army and to destroy fighting spirit and gut U.S. combat effectiveness," was to integrate the military (Bianco 1996 p. 544). With morale in

question, military leaders feared both then and now that volunteerism would suffer miserably. Schwarzkopf told a congressional committee that:

The impact on the Army's public image would also endanger recruitment and retention, by causing potential service-members to hesitate to enlist, making parents of potential service-members reluctant to recommend or approve the enlistment of their sons and daughters in an organization in which they would be forced to live and work with known homosexuals, and causing members of the Army to hesitate to re-enlist (Bacevich 1993).

Juxtapose Schwartzkopf's comments with the testimony of Navy Captain F.E.M. Whiting before the General Board of the Navy shortly after World War II:

The minute the Negro is introduced into general service...the high type of man that we have been getting for the last twenty years will go elsewhere and we will get the type of man who will lie in bed with a Negro (Bianco 1996 p. 54).

Whiting also cited the comments of Texas Representative W.R. Poage, who had declared that southerners would "cease to volunteer" when drafted if they had to share living quarters with African Americans. If compelled to serve, the congressman argued that they would do so without enthusiasm (Bianco 1996 p. 55).

The third line of reasoning emerged from the claim that the military should not be used as a venue for social engineering. These discourses endlessly resurface in the contemporary debate over whether to admit open gays in the military (Rolison and Nakayama 128). The military claims that it is a unique institution and should not be subject to the same kind of social pressures as other bureaucracies.

The similarities are hardly lost on chroniclers of the current policy debate. A *New York Times* columnist remarked, "Reading the reactions of senior military officials, you would think that time has stopped, that Truman's courageous stand never happened" (Truscott 02/01/93). He added, "Substitute gays for blacks and you've pretty much got the situation facing President Clinton" (Truscott 02/01/93). The *Los Angeles Times* ran a feature article entitled, "Blacks Battle in Military Likened to Gays" (Reza 05/14/93). The *Washington Post* addressed the similarities in a feature headlined, "Drawing Parallels--Gays and Blacks" (Duke 02/13/93). Cockburn published an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* with a headline blaring, "Same Song, Different Verse" (1/31/93). Cockburn analyzed records of congressional hearings on military desegregation with current transcripts from the television program *Crossfire* focusing on the ban on gays. He noted, "What the alarums indicate is merely that the segregators and the discriminators have no intellectually respectable arguments on their side" (*Los Angeles Times* 01/31/93). Yet, it was not just the media that was struck by the analogy.

Remarkably, some in the military itself were acknowledging the relationship, even though such perspectives were frequently quieted by superiors. In a 1991 study designed to examine the relationship between homosexuality and security risk, the armed forces' own Defense Personnel Research and Education Center drew the connection between the case of blacks and gays. It stated that the

intensity of prejudice against homosexuals may be of the same order as the prejudice against blacks in 1948 when the military was ordered to integrate. The order was first met with stout resistance by traditionalists in the military's establishment, dire consequences were predicted for maintaining discipline, building

group morale, and achieving military organizational goals. None of the predictions have come true (p. 22).

The report further suggests that,

Social science specialists helped develop programs for combating racial discrimination so that now the military's services are leaders in providing equal opportunity for black men and women. It would be wise to consider applying the experience of the past 40 years to the integration of homosexuals (p. 22).

So clear and informative is the analogy that even President Clinton drew upon it as he attempted to elicit support from a skeptical audience of military leaders. Clinton lectured:

Such controversies as this have divided us before. But our nation and our military have always risen to the challenge before. That was true of racial integration of the military and changes in the role of women in the military. Each of these was an issue, because it was an issue for society as well as for the military (p. 1372).

Academics have most adventurously explored the metaphor. Legal scholar Kenneth Karst wrote in the *UCLA Law Review* that these types of policy controversies have traditionally nudged American civic culture forward, and the current debate over the gay ban is another such opportunity. Karst also understands that ultimately the prohibition embodies an oppressive construction of masculinity.

From the colonial era to the middle of this century our armed forces have alternately excluded and segregated blacks in the pursuit of manhood, and today's form of exclusion and segregation are similarly grounded in the symbolism of masculine power (1991 p. 501).

As the primary advocates of change, civil rights leaders are all too familiar with the argumentative paradigms at work. In a speech at the graveside of her late husband, Coretta Scott King asserted,

I strongly believe that freedom and justice cannot be parceled out in pieces to suit political convenience I don't believe you can stand for freedom for one group of people and deny it to others (Reza *Los Angeles Times* 5/14/93).

The eclectic survey of quotes reflects how much play the analogy receives. Perhaps most noteworthy is the diversity of actors that raise it. The President, the media, civil rights leaders, and even some in the military concede that the current policy debate over dropping the ban on gays might well be understood in a larger historical context. The contemporary debate is part of a string of similar policy controversies that help define our culture and comprise our legacy. It represents yet another claim in a continuous national conversation that helps us understand our societal roles and conveys a gripping and often tragic story about who we are.

Sometimes even the most apparently silly and petty arguments ring familiar. For example, General Omar Bradley and some southern congressmen cited their serious concerns over the sharing of bathrooms after integration. Recall that, in current times, policy-makers such as Senator Coats indicated that their primary concern over dropping the ban on gays was also the sharing of bathrooms (*New York Times* 02/01/93; Adam 1993 p. 107). These absurd and offensive arguments have not been lost on representatives of groups fighting to overturn the ban.

Tim McFeeley of the Human Rights Campaign Fund explains,

The treatment of lesbians and gays and their ostracism and exclusion from the military is very similar to what blacks experienced prior to integration. People didn't want to have to shower with African-Americans. They didn't want to have to eat with them, sleep with them (Duke *Washington Post* 2/13/93).

David Smith, a spokesman for the Campaign for Military Service, a coalition of civil rights groups opposed to the ban, remarked,

White soldiers will not shower or sleep in the same barracks as African-American troops. Mixing African-American troops with whites will weaken the unit's cohesion - these are the arguments that opponents of integration were making fifty years ago. Substitute gay and lesbian and it's the same arguments being heard today. The common denominator is prejudice (*Los Angeles Times* 5/14/93).

Indeed, the military's rhetoric fits so neatly into its storyline that one would think the brass reviewed its discourses on segregation when developing its current public relations strategy. Time and again, civil rights advocates encourage people to simply "substitute in 'gays' for 'blacks'" while assessing the discourses. The following excerpt from the Secretary of the Navy in 1942 regarding segregation favors the analogy. Consider the following quote in the context of the current controversy over gays:

Men on board ship live in particularly close association; in their messes, one man sits beside another; their hammocks or bunks are close together; in their common tasks such as those of a gun crew, they form a closely-knit highly coordinated team. How many white men would choose of their own accord that their closest associates in sleeping quarters, at mess, and in gun's crew should be another race? How many would accept such conditions, if

required to do so without resentment and just as a matter of course? The General Board believes that if the issue were forced, there would be a lowering of contentment, teamwork and discipline in the service (Butler 1993 p. 15-16).

To the extent that “segregators and discriminators” were able to circulate through official channels the kind of arguments McFeeley and Smith refer to only helped to inform and validate existing stereotypes of African Americans and gays. Indeed, the cruel social constructs to which African Americans and gays have been victim do not simply meander into the world. Rather, these minority groups have been explicitly designated as antagonists in our cultural myths. The meaning of symbols, such as manhood, has developed amid the candid and rancorous rhetoric espoused during policy-making controversies such as the one this thesis discusses. To the detriment of the disfranchised, the resulting storyline has shaped and reflected our view of the masculine warrior. Rolison and Nakayama conclude, “The problematic of masculinity has informed the exclusion of both African Americans and gay Americans from the military” (1994 p. 130). Even the RAND study, which the military commissioned, saw merit in the analogy.

In light of the historical evidence, any assertion that racial integration was inherently less problematic than that of integrating homosexuals must be viewed with skepticism. The similarities of the difficulties involved is at least as striking as the differences (Rostker 1993 p. 160).

The next section of this chapter addresses the analogy in greater detail.

Status Versus Lifestyle

Even when officials attempt to draw distinctions between the military's treatment of gays and African Americans, the arguments are easily refuted. Recently, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell testified before the House of Representatives that homosexuality is not a "benign" characteristic, whereas race is. Powell explained race refers to a status, a class of citizens, while sexual orientation involves behavior and lifestyle (Rolison and Nakayama 1994 p. 129).

Advocates of the analogy do not deny that these differences exist. Certainly, as Gates notes, "Prejudices, of course, don't exist in the abstract; they all come with distinctive and distinguishing historical peculiarities. In short, they have content as well as form" (1993 p. 42). Yet, where Powell's logic falters most severely is that prejudice is almost invariably based on behaviors attributed to status. The prejudice rarely lies in the status itself.

For example, a Jew may be quick to be stereotyped as a miser, an Asian assumed to be brilliant but uptight, a woman as too sensitive, and an African American as threatening and lazy. Prejudices against these people have little to do with physical characteristics such as skin color. The physical characteristics may prompt demeaning jokes shared around the office water cooler, but what really institutionalizes prejudice is the behaviors assigned to these groups. Plainly, gays are victims of this kind of stereotyping and so are African Americans.

The military has assumed that gays are weaker, sexually promiscuous, more likely to harass others, and less trustworthy. The military also constructed behavioral reasons for banning blacks prior to World War II. Officials claimed blacks were dangerous, immoral, stupid,

and unsoldierly. These stereotypes within the armed forces were greatly diminished following integration. It is just as likely that stereotypes involving gays would fade as well. The problems gays and blacks face in the military are based on the erroneous belief that they regularly engage in a range of undesirable behaviors, most of which testify to a lack of character.

Throughout all of society, negative behavioral stereotypes assigned to gays have resembled those assigned to Jews more than to African Americans; for example, gays and Jews are each perceived as a "small cliquish, minority that nevertheless commands disproportionate and sinister worldly influence" (Gates p. 43). However, with respect to the prejudicial arguments against military service, African Americans and gays have not only been assigned negative behaviors, but also undeniably similar behaviors. Specifically, the purveyors of prejudice have claimed in both cases that African Americans and gays exercise a marked proclivity toward uninvited sexual aggression.

Just as blacks have historically been represented as sexually uncontrollable beasts, ready to pounce on an unwilling victim with little provocation, a similar vision of the predatory homosexual has been insinuated, often quite subtly, into the defense of the ban on gays in the military (Gates p. 43).

President Clinton's tangential references to the sociology of bigotry is worthy of greater consideration here. As noted by Stiehm, countless studies confirm that "trust and confidence develop not from homogeneity but shared experience" (1992 p. 693). The pioneering study in this area, quoted in RAND, found:

Prejudice . . . may be reached by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports . . . and if it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups (Rostker 1993 p. 319).

When Clinton announced to military leaders that he was implementing the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy,” he told his skeptical audience:

those who have studied this issue extensively have discovered an interesting fact. People in this country who are aware of having known homosexuals are more likely to support lifting the ban. In other words, they are able to see the issue in terms of individual conduct and individual capacity instead of the claims of a group with which they do not agree and also able to imagine how this ban could be lifted without a destructive impact on group cohesion and morale (1993 p. 1371).

Interestingly, after Truman’s executive order was instituted, the ratio of white soldiers opposing racial integration was slashed nearly in half, from 80% to 44%.

Arguably, it has been demonstrated above that the symbolic language that has been commonly used to characterize blacks and gay males as less than complete men can be linked back to the military and its congressional and interest group allies. So fervently has the military embraced its own positions that it might be argued that a process of discourse institutionalization has occurred. This theory explains how a powerful argumentative paradigm takes root in a particular institution - in this case the military - and actually manifests itself in the character and practices of the institution (Haajer 1993). Thus, for the military, the ban on gays, for example, is much more than another bureaucratic rule.

It actually helps define the character and culture of the institution. It reinforces the contention that African Americans and gays have been victims of the same cultural mythology that the military has perpetuated over the centuries in order to defend the policies that shape its character.

Decision-making theory, which is similar to Cobb and Elder's approach in that they both emphasize contextual variables, makes important contributions to this discussion. Admittedly, Truman was probably not perceived as the type of commander-in-chief who would knowingly act in any way to weaken the military for humanitarian purposes. Most Americans did not perceive him as a softy. He is, after all, the only person who ever ordered the dropping of an atomic bomb - *twice*. Who hasn't in some high school or college classroom debated the deployment of the atomic bomb, particularly the second one, on Nagasaki, which killed mainly women and children. Did it truly have an effect on the outcome of the war, or was it done to reiterate American strength and test the weapon itself? On the other hand, Clinton does not enjoy such a hawkish reputation among his constituents.

In fact, while Clinton's popularity actually jumped during the 1992 presidential campaign amid allegations of committing adultery with Gennifer Flowers and more recently with Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky, his numbers took a nose-dive when a letter was released suggesting he - like so many thousands of other Americans - had deliberately evaded the Vietnam draft (Rosenstiel 1993). This distinction alone reveals something about what comprises Americans' notions of manhood. Americans apparently felt Clinton was more qualified to be commander-in-chief when they learned of his womanizing, yet they felt

he was less fit to govern because he avoided service in the tragic and unpopular Vietnam War.

That the gay ban issue is context-specific is central to this thesis. While this chapter highlighted the constructions behind a culture of exclusivity, it also serves as a reminder of this debate's parochial nature. The proposition that gays are ill suited for military service is not universally agreed upon by the armed forces of the world and certainly not borne out by history. It is in fact quite relevant and strengthens the argument to briefly consider this issue in other contexts, as the next chapter does. Surveying the experience of other countries with this issue should underscore the overarching argument about the predominant role of culture. Chapter 4 should confirm that the belief of incompatibility between homosexuals and military service is based in pure, and, increasingly, uniquely American, cultural fantasy.

CHAPTER 4

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: POLICY IN OTHER NATIONS

The earliest roots for notions of democracy in the western world came from Harmodius and Aristogeniton, a homosexual couple who destroyed a cruel tyrant in Greek mythological literature. "That homoerotic bonding is the secret to an effective fighting force is old news" (Zeeland 1996 p. 3). In *Symposium*, Plato marveled at the virtues of homosexuality. He argued that the most effective fighting force would be comprised of homosexual lovers (Davis 1991). Sparta, the most fierce and feared warrior nation of the ancient world, fielded an army that was thoroughly homosexual. A popular motto at the time was "An army of lovers can never be defeated" (Shilts 1993 p. 33). In that military, having a homosexual lover was considered an important ingredient to being an effective soldier. Jokes were plentiful that when the current Marine Corps leadership sought to ban married enlistees, they were mindful of the ancient Sacred Band of Thebes (Zeeland 1996 p. 3). One of the more famous Greek warriors was Alexander the Great, conqueror of an empire that extended from present day Croatia to the Himalayas (Davis 1991). History certainly does not suggest that his bisexuality impeded his military prowess. The Greeks did not actually define sexual relations as homosexual or heterosexual. Gore Vidal points out that

(the Greeks) knew about reproduction. They knew about lust and love. They knew about the intensity of sexual desire between men and men, women and women but for them Lesbos was just an

island off the coast of Asia Minor while Sappho was your average Pulitzer Prize winning poet (Zeeland 1996 p. 3).

The rich Japanese samurai tradition is deeply imbedded in homosexuality. Intense homoerotic relationships were encouraged and expected between samurai and their acolytes. The acolytes themselves became samurai only after many years of benefiting from this partnership. In parts of Melanesia “the male lineage was bound together as a cohesive fighting unit through the transmission of semen from older to younger males” (Adam 1993 p. 105). A military caste linked by homosexual relationships also existed among the people of the Siwa Oasis in the Libyan desert from ancient times possibly through the twelfth century. Many groups of Viking warriors were also believed to have encouraged homosexuality in their ranks (Adam 1993).

But the successful gay warrior is not just found in ancient civilizations. Many countries today have policies that permit gays to serve in their national security forces. Their approach and especially how they frame their discussion of the issue is instructive to this thesis.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, one of the greatest “warriors” of the twentieth century, insisted that naval tradition is comprised of rum, sodomy, and the lash (Davis 1991). One can only imagine the brouhaha that would ensue if the current occupant of the White House ever made such a statement. [Of course Churchill might have actually been on to something. Between 1980 and 1990 the U.S. Navy was responsible for 51 percent (8638 cases) of the discharges for homosexuality, even though it comprises only 27 percent of the active force (Ray 1993).]

The U.S. is, of course, in the minority among its allies on the issue of banning gays from the military. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland all formally allow gays into their armed forces. Of the sixteen countries in the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) when Clinton took office, only Portugal and Greece maintained absolute prohibitive policies. Turkey has a strict version of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. No formal effort is made to discern the orientation of troops upon entry, but in those countries homosexuality is still widely viewed as incompatible with military service. Of course, among all the aforementioned countries, policies still vary greatly according to culture and tradition.

Some of these countries actively recruit and welcome gays into their military. A few formally admit homosexuals but impose thinly veiled regulations on conduct. Most common, however, is the approach that homosexuality is an irrelevant consideration to military service, what might be referred to as a *laissez faire* policy. While cultural manifestations varied, it is safe to say that in many contexts during ancient times homosexuality was socially constructed to be a military asset. Indeed, the corresponding generalization that could be made about many “modern” and particularly western cultures is that homosexuality has no bearing one way or the other on military ability. In sum, Adam argues that most western and some non-western U.S. allies

continue to participate in the modernizing trend of extending equal rights to all of their citizens regardless of traditionally ascribed

attributes or prejudices The United States (and to some extent) the United Kingdom remains exceptional in its continuing reproduction of homophobic ideology and its attachment to superstitions and paranoid postulations of a fictive connection (1994 p.106).

Segal puts it slightly more straightforwardly:

Most nations do not categorically exclude homosexuals. Some who have excluded homosexuals in the past have changed their policies in recent years. We know of no nation that in the past has admitted homosexuals and has recently moved to exclude them. Thus the number of nations where homosexuals are excluded from military service is declining (Segal, et al. 1993 p. 38).

The Anglo-American Countries

Countries often categorized as Anglo-American (England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) were among the least progressive of the aforementioned countries in dealing with the issue, yet even all of these nations dropped their bans before the close of the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, these countries broadly share similar cultural roots with each other.

England's military first enacted a formal ban in 1969, the same year homosexuality was legalized in that country. England held parliamentary discussions on its ban in early 1992, prior to the U.S. presidential elections, and introduced a relaxed policy, a cousin of "don't ask, don't tell" in June 1992. On September 28, 1998, the European Court of Human Rights unanimously declared that Britain's remaining, quasi-ban on homosexuals in the military was a "violation of the basic human right to privacy" (Lyal *New York Times* 9/28/99). The seven-member court, comprised of judges from Britain, France, Cyprus,

Lithuania, Austria, Norway, and Albania, is based in Strasbourg, France, and acts as the ultimate tribunal for Europeans, similarly to the U.S. Supreme Court. Given the court's decision, England has removed its ban.

While British officials cited similar arguments to the U.S. in futilely defending the policy, the court, in considering the cases of four soldiers with exemplary records who were bounced from the military based on hearsay and circumstantial evidence of homosexuality, ruled the ban was a violation of their human rights (Lyall *New York Times* 9/28/99). Steve Johnston, chair of Rank Outsiders, a British support group for gay soldiers, said of the ruling:

People who serve or who elect to serve their country do so with the commitment that the ultimate sacrifice might be to give up their lives for their country. They don't join the navy or the army or the air force to find same-sex partners (Lyall *New York Times* 9/28/99).

The U.S. military could only be embarrassed by the court's decision, which received international attention. The *New York Times* declared:

The change in British practice leaves the United States military nearly alone among Western nations in its official policy of discrimination. It is another clear indication that Washington's attitude is behind the times (Editorial 1/15/00).

Australia and Canada dropped their bans during the 1990s, though Canada had been incrementally relaxing its policy during the 1980s. Immediately after the most recent major switch, the Canadian military brass, which was concerned about strong anti-homosexual bias

among its 80,000 active troops, instituted sensitivity training. New Zealand formally confronted the issue at about the same time as the U.S.

Since their changes, Canada and Australia observed no adverse effect on general recruitment and retention nor did they sustain any major reported incidents of attacks on gays in their forces. Canadian officials stated:

they have noticed no changes in behavior among their troops. They say they know to date of no instance of people acknowledging or talking about their homosexual relationships, no fights or violent incidents, no resignations (despite previous threats to quit), no problems with recruitment, and no diminution of cohesion, morale or organizational effectiveness (Rostker 1993 p. 77).

A recent *New York Times* editorial noted:

Canada, which also had a ban on gay troops, was compelled by a federal court to reverse its policy in 1992. There is no evidence that the change in policy has led to harassment, resignations or unit breakdowns. Australia has had much the same experience (Editorial 1/15/00).

Data are not yet available for New Zealand.

While the issue attracted considerable controversy in all the Anglo-American countries, the debate in the U.S. was clearly the most heated. It is particularly interesting to note the difference between how Canada and the U.S. wrestled with the issue given that the two countries share such a vast border. Canada's policy change, which was prompted in part by judicial challenges, was overwhelmingly supported by the general population. Supporters of the ban imported kindred spirits in the American military to testify against change. However, this approach backfired as their arguments were discredited by the Canadian media

and courts. Officials found the Americans' testimony to be disturbingly similar to those used to defend segregation and that their arguments were scientifically suspect (Hoffman *Washington Post* 11/30/92). In the U.S., of course, those same assertions were attacked on the same grounds, but Americans as a whole were less inclined to see past their cultural blinders, particularly within the military.

Moreover, Canada has always had stronger anti-discrimination laws than the U.S. One spokesperson for the Canadian military explained, "All of the old sort of traditional bogeymen about gays and lesbians . . . weren't there anymore" (Hoffman *Washington Post* 11/30/92). Indeed, in Canada there seemed to be a sense among even the staunchest supporters of the ban that the military would eventually and inevitably have to adjust to attitudinal changes in its parent society. While the policy debate was not as controversial in Canada, it constituted even less of an issue for most Europeans.

The European Approach

In fact, much of Europe also has taken what could be called a *laissez faire* policy approach. In Spain, sexual orientation in the military has simply been regarded as a matter of choice since 1984, though it discourages sexual relations between soldiers in the barracks. Likewise, Brazil does not preoccupy itself with the status of recruits, but forbids "indecent acts" between soldiers (Davis 1991). In France, which fields a conscript army in which 10 months' service is required, the issue is also deemed as one of personal choice. Since the 1960's the French gay movement and its political allies (such as feminist groups) have developed a strong anti-militarist tradition. Therefore, the military says

that often gays find a way to screen themselves out of the draft, which in France has many loopholes. Yet, ironically, the cult of masculinity exists in the French forces. One Frenchman who is gay stated in an interview that some military examiners purposely denied exemptions to gays in hopes that service would “teach (them) to be a man.” Generally, however, France could be categorized as one of those countries that has not formalized the issue in a policy sense. The official prevailing view is that “there is no policy and there is no problem” (Rotsker 1993 p. 80).

Like France, Belgium also assumes a *laissez faire* approach, though in that country relations between the gay community and the military are warmer. In Belgium there are no “laws, rules, or regulations discriminating against homosexuals in the military” (Segal et al. 1993 p. 40). Any kind of harassment will result in reassignment. Switzerland also has reported very few problems with its open door policy. Norway’s military not only admits gays but also has enacted specific laws to protect them from harassment. One rule states:

Anyone who in written or oral form is threatening, scorning, persecuting, or spiting a gay or lesbian person will be punished with fines or prison for up to two years (Konigsberg 1992 p. 12).

Even Poland would not prohibit a recruit from enlisting on account of his orientation. According to military sociologist and Member of Parliament Jerzy Wiatr, “In the Polish armed forces there are no laws discriminating against homosexuals. I have also found no instances of extra-legal discrimination” (Segal, et al. 1993 p. 40). Homosexuality is still quite taboo in Polish culture, however, so few troops are inclined to reveal that they are gay. Poland represents a case in which the military’s

policy approach to gays may actually be more progressive than that of the larger society's. The reasoning is that the Polish military is conservative on social issues insofar as they affect military effectiveness. Gays do not negatively affect military effectiveness, so the military has no reason to discriminate against them. The larger Polish culture, quite conformist in character, is of course more concerned with general social issues.

Even in countries that are regarded as more homophobic than the U.S., there are examples of famous military leaders who happen to be homosexual. An example that should be well known to U.S. policy makers and military leaders is that of Nicaragua, where former Sandinista leaders Jaime Wheelock Roaman and Dora Marfa Tellez are both gay. The two commandants participated in the overthrow of the brutal Somoza regime, and warded off rebellion by the Contras, who were partially trained and funded by the United States (Adam 1994 p. 105).

The data on Denmark and Holland seem to offer special insight. I will discuss the case of Denmark and conclude this section with a slightly deeper examination of Holland, which is an interesting example of taking the opposite approach of the U.S.

Denmark maintains a conscript army and is not eager to reject personnel. Any kind of sexual harassment or discrimination has been illegal in that country only since 1981, which is surprising given how smoothly and successfully the policy was implemented. Transgressions are "grounds for expulsion." In fact, since the policy was enacted there has not been a single recorded case of gay-bashing or any identifiable impact on the forces' morale or effectiveness. Kristin Andersen, a Danish air force general and military attaché in Washington, told the *Washington*

Post, "We don't have any ban and we don't have any problem. I don't understand why (the U.S.) have a debate on it Nobody cares about it" (Hoffman 11/30/92). Many high-ranking officers are known to be gay. In a separate interview with *The Washington Monthly*, Andersen was asked what kinds of problems gays caused in the Danish military. She was bewildered by the question, "Problems? No. Should there be? I've been in the air force since 1954 and I can't remember one problem caused by someone being a homosexual." Added Air Force Second Lieutenant Stephen, "It's not something you think about. Homosexuality - you know it's legal and it's not an issue" (Konigsberg 1992 p. 12). These quotes by Danish military brass strongly demonstrate Cobb and Elder's argument about how problem definition corresponds to and is created by symbol definition of the particular culture.

Case Study: The Successful Example Of Holland

In the case of Holland, an estimated 12,000 troops - roughly 10% of its entire force - are homosexual (Konigsberg 1992 p. 11). Gays were officially admitted in 1974 at the urging of interest groups. In 1987 tougher laws were passed to protect gays in the military from discrimination. There is also a well-known association of gay soldiers, loosely translated as the Foundation for Homosexuality in the Military. The organization is currently led by Lieutenant Colonel Rene Holtel, who was active in the effort to pass the anti-discrimination legislation. Much of the harmonious integration in Holland is credited to educational efforts, which include mandatory courses for all members of the military. The seminars are designed to sensitize troops toward minorities in the military, particularly blacks, women, and gays. The course is titled *It's in*

the Eye of the Beholder. Also, military doctors, priests, and psychiatrists are trained to provide support to soldiers who are considering “coming out” (Konigsberg 1992 p. 11).

Holland has also tried to welcome gays into the military with printed matter. Recently, the Dutch Ministry of Defense distributed a booklet on homosexuality that included pictures of troops returning from duty in Lebanon embracing their gay lovers. Another, older, leaflet asks:

Homosexuals within the armed forces, would that be conceivable? Yes of course it would. Even more: it is a matter of course. Because the armed forces should represent society, shouldn't they? Yet a lot people aren't sure this is a workable idea. A good reason to outline the argument and get rid of the hesitancies once and for all (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 205).

The leaflet represents official policy toward homosexuality. It not only seeks to prevent and quash discrimination, but also to help create the cultural conditions under which homosexuals “can be themselves” - even in the armed forces. Segal et al explain,

The approach in Holland is to avoid blaming homosexuals for reactions to them, and to sensitize heterosexuals to the rights of homosexuals through training and counseling (1993 p. 41).

Indeed, the Dutch Ministry of Defense regularly evaluates existing policies and reviews new social science research regarding homosexuality. (In the U.S., the practice is to disregard the research.) According to Boers and Muelen, the evaluations have “strengthened a policy aimed at promoting tolerance and integration” (1994 p. 214). In fact the Dutch military has aggressively targeted gays for recruitment. For example, ads have been run in the *Dutch Gay Journal* (Boers and

Muelen 1994). When asked to sum up the Dutch attitude toward gays in the military, Rob Saegar, a twenty-nine-year navy veteran, said, "Suppose you're on the beach in a skimpy bathing suit. The guy next to you might be gay. Does that harm your morale?" (Konigsberg 1992 p. 11). Much of the debate in the U.S. rages over the unique work environment of the military and the risks of "social experimentation." Boers and Muelen provide the rejoinder from the Dutch perspective:

The typical official Dutch answer would be that this kind of reasoning can be tracked back to stereotyping and to lack of knowledge. The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When the gay or lesbian is ostracized, indeed unit cohesion is strained. However Dutch policy suggests this self-fulfilling circle should not be broken by banning homosexuals in armed forces - which is impossible anyway - but on the contrary by stimulating a general change in climate and behavior. Admittedly this is not easy (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 214).

The normative context in Holland does not encourage viewing integration of gays into the military as any type of "social experimentation" but more as proper civil conduct. Further, the authors expect that in Dutch society these progressive attitudes will remain. They say policies regarding homosexuals in the Dutch military are "well grounded, institutionalized, and guarded" (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 216).

Earlier, it was pointed out how framing the issue as a "problem of gays" instead of as a problem of homophobia in the U.S. military informed and reflected cultural attitudes that made dropping the ban especially controversial in the U.S. It is clear from the above discussion how the same general issue - military policy regarding gays - was approached from an entirely different perspective in Holland, and, not

coincidentally, integration of gays has been relatively smooth in that country. Finally, the glorification of the warrior man is not as pronounced in Dutch culture. One of the military's slogans is "As civil as possible. As military as necessary" (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 215).

Taking a brief look at a society that has allowed for such successful integration might be worthwhile. Socialization - primarily formal education - and cultural development has enabled the Dutch to dramatically transform societal attitudes toward gays over a relatively short period of time. Scholars also point to the strength of the Dutch gay movement in the 1970's, which had benefited from a loosening of societal attitudes toward sexuality. During that time the women's liberation movement coalesced as well. Meanwhile the country continued to grow increasingly individualized and secular, and Christian political power was subsumed by the increasing popularity of neo-liberalism and socialism. This change in culture affected Dutch views of homosexuality, which served as a catalyst for the policy alteration.

According to a 1987 poll, 86 percent of Dutch believed that homosexuals should be treated with equality. That percentage had jumped 30 percent over 20 years. In a survey conducted in 1981 only 10 percent of Dutch reported feeling that homosexuality was "dirty, deviant, or abnormal." That percentage marked a 50 percent decline since 1968 (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 206). Finally, in regularly conducted polls throughout the 1980s over 90 percent of Dutch consistently concurred with the statement, "Homosexuals should have as much freedom as possible to lead their own lives" (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 206).

There are some important and telling distinctions between gay life in Holland and the U.S. that affect policy decisions such as whether to

officially admit gays into the armed forces. The biggest differences lie in the everyday intermingling of straights and gays, the nature of academic research, and the political clout of gay groups. In the U.S., gay ghettos have taken shape in major cities, whereas the gay population is more geographically dispersed in Holland. This brings to mind Stiehm's and Clinton's contention that as gays mix with the society, prejudices are likely to subside. Secondly, research on homosexuality in the U.S. tends to focus on subcultural lifestyles. Dutch researchers devote more attention to understanding the causes of discrimination and finding ways to eliminate it. (In fact there is a Gay Studies Department at the country's Utrecht University.) Moreover, Dutch academic studies have been actively employed in the development of that country's civil rights legislation. The social science research in the United States has been largely ignored in policy questions, especially, as I have argued, over the issue of gays in the military, where the military's professional judgment ignores academic findings. Finally, gays have gained political clout in Holland through forming coalitions with other groups, especially when fighting for civil rights issues (Boers and Muelen 1994 p. 215). Gays in the U.S. have not been as successful in forging powerful coalitions nor as savvy in expressing their interests. This has a cyclical effect. The audience that American gays market their ideas to are socialized to be skeptical of them, which in turn makes it harder for gays to marshal political support.

CHAPTER 5

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL AND THE PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

"For the most part, changes in the meaning of a culturally prominent symbol are gradual and serve to sustain its societal role."

---Roger Cobb and Charles Elder

"Don't ask, don't tell" is the epitome of the above Cobb and Elder maxim. The policy, born out of an incremental approach to change toward admitting gays into the military, has served only to reinforce existing symbols. Each year since its inception, more people have been discharged from the services under "don't ask don't tell." In 1998, for example, 1,145 people were discharged for being gay, up from 997 people in 1997 (Priest *Washington Post* 1/23/99).

Military psychologists have felt obligated to report patients. The military responded by encouraging gay servicemen to share their concerns with military lawyers, which only reinforces the notion that there is something criminal about being gay. Recruits have expressed a great deal of confusion about the policy. Many reported that they still felt they could be ousted for being gay without declaring so outright. Others believed that military honor codes demanded self-disclosure or that they could face imprisonment if their orientation were revealed.

The President himself recently conceded that the policy is “out of whack” (Williams *Washington Post* 12/12/99). His Vice President, Al Gore, opposes the policy, saying that it has “not achieved its stated objective” of allowing gays to serve (Williams *Washington Post* 12/12/99). Even Hillary Clinton, the President’s wife and current candidate for Senate in New York, supports gays serving openly, having declared that “don’t ask, don’t tell” “has not worked” (Williams *Washington Post* 12/12/99).

The Pentagon inspector general released a report in March claiming that harassment of gays occurs frequently and free of penalty in the military. Of the 71,500 personnel polled, 80 percent of the respondents acknowledged hearing inappropriate remarks about gays (Suro *Washington Post* 3/25/00). Well over a third had witnessed harassment but did nothing to stop it (Suro *Washington Post* 3/25/00). In the case of Private Winchell, he reportedly endured tremendous harassment from fellow soldiers in the months leading up to his horrific murder. Almost one in ten respondents admitted to witnessing assaults against gay service members (Suro *Washington Post* 3/25/00).

Similarly, any policy that does not recognize and protect the rights of gays to privacy and to non-discrimination because of sexual orientations is likely to reinforce and justify existing attitudes and stereotypes as well as to create an environment of distrust and suspicion towards gays in the military. To accord less than full rights to gays who serve in the military, as “don’t ask don’t tell” policy does, is to continue to stigmatize the gay community and to justify continued distrust and suspicion (Davis 1993 p. 28).

Meanwhile, the military has conceded that anti-harassment training is uneven throughout the branches of the armed services (Suro *Washington Post* 3/4/00). Confusion also abounds among enlisted soldiers, officers,

and military physicians and lawyers. Gays often cannot report harassment or seek medical care or legal assistance without risking expulsion themselves (Suro *Washington Post* 3/4/00).

“Don’t ask, don’t tell” wasn’t crafted by those who wanted to drop the ban, but rather those who wanted to preserve it, such as former Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA). The policy is a gradual change, as Cobb and Elder would have it, that actually serves only to reinforce the societal roles.

By yielding to bigotry, the policy endorsed it. It validated the homophobia that is so imbedded in our culture. At the very least it did nothing to contradict it ... The policy is doing precisely what the military intended: keeping gays out of the armed services . . . tolerated but hardly welcomed, and then only if they stayed in the closet. This was not a policy. It was a craven accommodation to bigotry (Cohen *Washington Post* 12/16/99).

Hillary Clinton has said her husband’s decision to institute “don’t ask, don’t tell,” was based on a political assessment that it was the best he could do at the time. Political prospects for dropping the ban altogether now hinge on the outcome of future elections. Dropping the ban would require bold, decisive executive action. Unless the make-up of Congress radically changes - and polls suggest it will not - it is unlikely that it would exercise the will or the leadership to revisit the issue on its own.

Congress is, by design, a deliberative body, and, in an ideal world, such a forum would effectively expose the irrationality of any kind of ban. However, congressional debates no longer seek to sway members, who are rarely even present for the debate, but rather the masses - public opinion. These debates, then, involve slick and broad manipulation of symbols, colorfully packaged to pique mass media interest, particularly

for television, and to capture the fancy and inflame the will of key constituencies. Policy debates become a clash of symbol-laced soundbites on the evening news. Images and symbols conform to these two-minute sound bites, reasoned arguments do not. Cobb and Elder contend that people's "world views" are created by "elements" that are "transmitted piecemeal" (1983 p. 84). These soundbites are the ultimate piecemeal transmission of worldviews. Though Cobb and Elder's writings on the influence of symbols pre-date our modern media culture, one cannot deny that media culture makes Cobb and Elder's theories more relevant than ever.

Cobb and Elder further teach that political symbols compel people to overlook "gaps, inconsistencies, even contradictions" while feeding and reinforcing their sense of "systemness," and their "historically accumulated...world view" of who people are and what roles they should play in society (1983 p. 84). Proponents of the ban argue in symbols, metaphors, and social constructs, whereas opponents find their arguments in reason, science, and human rights. In congressional debates, indeed, in national debates, this dichotomy favors proponents of the ban. If, in 1948, almost twenty years before the civil rights movement, Truman had allowed Congress to lead the debate on desegregating the armed forces and had he also deferred widely to the armed forces' own (as referred to in the gay ban debate) "inherently subjective judgment," critical policy change would have been long delayed. Policies would have remained consistent with the prevailing world view, justified by what Cobb and Elder would generously label as "internal logic" (1983 p. 84). Congress is simply not positioned to lead the effort.

Change will probably be initiated by the President. However, a conservative, likely a Republican, who follows a Reagan-esque path to the White House by tying the nation's strength and "machismo" to the armed forces, is probably not going to advocate dropping the ban. This is the type of leader who extends the aura of military power to help people feel a little more powerful in their own lives. Power only exists if it is asserted, and this kind of military externally asserts power against other nations, but it must also internally assert power against "others." Here Adam's statement comes to bear that the military "binds aggression, masculinity, and self-esteem" and that Americans carry a "culturally embedded view" that homosexuality represents a feminization that would weaken and soften the military (1994 pp.104,111). Those who seek to boost the national image (as well as their own) by speaking in terms of military power are, in culturally symbolic terms, implying support for anti-homosexual policies.

Moreover, conservatives have constituencies to appease who are typically anti-gay rights, and have traditional values and world views that would include conceptualizing the soldier as masculine-warrior. The Christian Coalition would be an example of this type of group. Likewise, one can assume that conservatives fare better politically in less progressive geographies, such as the Bible Belt and the Midwest. This is a core constituency of nationally elected conservative policy-makers. Not surprisingly, these regions, one can assume, have a small percentage of out-of-closet homosexuals. As Clinton stated, "People in this country who are aware of having known homosexuals are more likely to support lifting the ban" (1993 p. 1371). These constituencies would expect, as we all do, their admired public figures perpetuate comfortable storylines.

One can also expect that this type of leader, particularly with a majority in Congress, would spin the endless reports on the failure of “don’t ask, don’t tell” to justify reverting to a full-scale ban. Such a move would reward his supportive, conservative constituencies while punishing activist groups who opposed him.

In the current presidential campaign, Republican candidate Bush has argued that the Clinton Administration has softened and been antagonistic to the military, and, by suggestion, reminds sympathetic audiences, whom he needs to be motivated to go to the polls on election day, that it was Clinton-Gore who, wittingly or not, ushered issues like gays in the military to the front of the national agenda. Under an administration that advocates those kinds of policies, no wonder, he intimates, morale has sunk to an all-time low, readiness issues abound, and recruitment has missed the mark.

Instead, hope for dramatic policy change lies on the shoulders of a progressive who sees past his cultural lenses to understand that science supports dropping the ban. He must be passionate about civil rights. He must have an assertive leadership style, and he must be able to communicate with the antagonistic stakeholders in terms and symbols they can embrace.

Clinton deserves credit for tackling the issue, but he failed to fully drop the ban. In the end, both sides widely criticized his handling of the issue. We must hope that the next president who confronts the issue took careful note of how Clinton’s presidential honeymoon turned into a hazing party, hosted by his critics and the media, as Clinton struggled to forge a middle ground on the issue. The next candidate who makes the same campaign pledge to drop the ban ought to be prepared to actually

do so. Learning from the Clinton experience, he must know that supportive but increasingly impatient interest groups will demand he follow through and that the opposition would counterpunch mercilessly, all while using the issue as a symbol to coalesce their forces.

One advantage the current Democratic candidate, Al Gore, enjoys is that, unlike the “draft dodging” Clinton, he is a veteran, which should bolster his credibility. Moreover, Gore has demonstrated a capacity to make bold decisions that challenge the nation’s prejudices, such as his selection of Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), a Jew, to be his running mate. Still, issuing executive orders that are so passionately and fundamentally opposed by culturally revered stakeholders will require an even more profound act of leadership.

Political prognostications aside, the commander-in-chief, be it Gore or another leader of the future, who does move to drop the ban, should do so with Cobb and Elder’s theories in mind. He must adopt the tactics of those who have fought the ban. By politically using symbols, terms, and metaphors that the military can understand, the President would minimize angst while enhancing buy-in. For example, the military embraces clarity in mission. It is little wonder that it would struggle with “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a policy that on the surface may seem succinct but is, in fact, riddled with ambiguities, as its failed implementation painfully exposed. However, a directive issued by the commander-in-chief that ends the ban without equivocation or hand-wringing would, at least, put the situation in a context that the military understands. As an institution, it knows how to give orders and how to take them. It respects leadership, strength, and courage, and would see those characteristics in the form of a lucid directive even while expressing disgust at its content.

With “don’t ask, don’t tell” not only was implementation a minefield, but the policy itself filled with weakness and compromise. If the President feels he must assuage military leaders, then he should provide a give-back on a different issue. By compromising on the policy itself, he is really compromising on prejudice.

Moreover, the new policy must be explained in terms the military embraces. It must emphasize concepts such as freedom, dedication, teamwork, and diversity. The military defends these concepts in war; they must be accepted within their ranks. America’s warriors must embody what they defend, even if it is unwelcome. As long as soldiers adhere to the military’s strict codes of conduct, they must be allowed to serve their country free of discrimination. The military has defended its institutional bigotry by manipulating cultural symbols. Ultimately, “don’t ask, don’t tell’s” best chances for demise will also require using these symbols. Social science research insists there is no place for the ban, but it will take more than science to revoke it.

After issuing the directive, the President should tell the military, “I have done what I pledged, what I think is right and best for the military and the nation. I understand this action is unwelcome in some quarters. We must agree to disagree and move forward. We have the greatest military the earth has ever known, and I promise you I won’t let that change under my watch.” To his congressional critics, the President should exercise even stronger Machiavellian-like leadership. He must say, “I have made a decision in my capacity as commander-in-chief for that we all know every shred of research insists is right. Since this nation has bigger and more serious problems to solve, if you choose to waste this government’s precious time playing political football with this

issue, I will see to it that you regret it.” In short, the President must be presidential. He must assert his authority, because, as Cobb and Elder help us understand and history clearly demonstrates, the facts will not prevail over cultural manipulation.

Because the armed forces will be resistant, the President should ensure safeguards are in place. Frequent and fair-minded audits and investigations should be undertaken by credible agencies, such as the GAO, the military’s own inspector general, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. “Triggers” should be created that enable the Justice Department to intervene at bases that show patterns of refusal to comply. Military police should receive special sensitivity training above that which is administered to all military personnel, to enable them to thoroughly investigate harassment and hate crimes. These specially-trained officers should be held strictly accountable if they fail to properly act upon on a complaint. If necessary, special units could be created to address harassment involving racism, misogyny, or homophobia. Most importantly, an office should be created at the Pentagon to oversee implementation. The office should be headed by a Presidentially-appointed attorney and staffed by both civilian and military personnel whose mission would be to ensure successful implementation and triage complaints from gay personnel. The military will not welcome this level of oversight. The military should be promised that the oversight will dissipate once they prove that the oversight is not needed. The military prefers its missions to be swift and certain and supported by at least twice the personnel necessary to do the job. The same strategy should be employed as the ban is dropped in a hostile environment.

Cobb and Elder have helped us understand why the military clings so dramatically to a policy that enjoys no support in science, is not currently shared among comparable international armies and domestic hierarchies, and which history has proven to be wrongheaded vis-à-vis racial desegregation of the forces. The military was wrong then and it is wrong now. By applying Cobb and Elder's theory, a future President can avoid being trapped in the same cultural undertow that sabotaged Clinton's efforts to undo the policy.

The policy change will enable the nation to right a bad policy, one that carries the historically and particularly sinister taint of institutionally-sanctioned prejudice. By understanding the challenge in cultural terms, policymakers can act with the confidence, but not arrogance, that they have in a small way strengthened our nation's civic fabric and freed us to achieve our potential both as individuals and as a collective whole. The American experiment in democracy must continue to lead, not follow, the rest of the world.

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