

American Psychological Association

Briefing Sheet

Sexual Orientation and Military Service

This briefing sheet has been prepared by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns Office as a resource for advocacy regarding the current US policy on sexual orientation and military service. For further information, please contact the Office at APA, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 336-6041, or lgbc@apa.org.

The American Psychological Association (APA) opposes the current U.S. policy of discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons in military service. This stance reflects the APA Policy Statement on Sexual Orientation and Military Service, adopted by the APA Council of Representatives in July 2004. In this policy statement, the association reaffirmed its opposition to discrimination based on sexual orientation and its commitment to disseminating scientific knowledge to ameliorate the negative effects of the current law through training and education.

The APA strongly recommends the enactment of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2009 (H.R. 1283).

This legislation would:

- Repeal the current “Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces” (10 U.S.C. § 654), which mandates administrative discharges:
 - If “the service member has engaged in, attempted to engage in, or solicited another to engage in a homosexual act or acts”;
 - If “the member has stated that he or she is a homosexual or bisexual, or words to that effect”;
 - If “the member has married or attempted to marry a person known to be of the same biological sex”.
- Institute a U.S. military policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation in accession, recognition, promotion, and any other administrative actions based on sexual orientation, consistent with non-discrimination policies regarding race, gender and disability status.
- Allow qualified gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who have been involuntarily discharged based on sexual orientation to resume military service.

Why the current U.S. policy on sexual orientation and military service should be repealed

Military success does not depend on service members’ sexual orientation. America’s allies, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, and Australia, allow openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons to serve in the military, and this has no adverse effect on military readiness or discipline (Belkin, 2001, 2003; Belkin & Bateman, 2003; Belkin & Levitt, 2001; Belkin & McNichol, 2001). In contrast to the 24 countries around the globe that officially welcome gay, lesbian, and bisexual military service members, the U.S. is now in the minority, even in NATO, where only Turkey and Greece have similar prohibition policies.

Some openly gay or lesbian service members have served in the U.S. military with no ill effects. In fact, a stop-loss policy during the Persian Gulf War prevented discharges for homosexuality, strongly suggesting that the U.S. military believed that service by openly gay or lesbian people during wartime was no threat to military effectiveness. Most experts believe that military effectiveness is related to military service members' shared commitment to a common goal that motivates them to work together to achieve the goal (MacCoun, Kier, & Belkin, 2006; MacCoun, 1996). Leadership of the group is also considered crucial. Sexual orientation is irrelevant to task cohesion, the only type of cohesion that critically predicts the team's military readiness and success (c.f. Herek & Belkin, 2005).

The policy is costly. No useful purpose is served by spending millions of dollars each year to investigate and discharge qualified and patriotic Americans who wish to serve their country. Since the U.S. military enacted the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy in 1993, about 12,000 lesbian, gay, and bisexual military personnel have been involuntarily discharged solely because of their sexual orientation, at least 8% of whom had mission-critical skills. In a 2005 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, implementing the DADT policy was estimated to cost U.S. taxpayers at least 200 million dollars (GAO-05-299, 2005). However, a 2006 Blue Ribbon Commission that included former Secretary of Defense, William Perry, corrected several calculation errors in this estimate and concluded that the financial cost associated with the DADT policy implementation was much higher than previously estimated, i.e. at least \$364 million during its first decade (Blue Ribbon Commission Report, 2006).

Repealing the policy would improve mental health in the military. The military can be a highly stressful environment, especially in wartime. It is important to encourage military personnel to seek mental health services when appropriate in order to promote their well-being and effectiveness. The DADT policy, however, works against effective mental health access for gay, lesbian and bisexual military personnel for at least three reasons. First, workplaces that are not supportive of non-heterosexual orientations are strongly correlated with stress and depression (Smith & Ingram, 2004). Second, since disclosure of sexual orientation is officially prohibited, gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members are liable to avoid accessing mental health services when they need them (Johnson & Buhrke, 2006). Third, it is reasonable to assume that forced secrecy and the fear of being exposed as gay, lesbian or bisexual are likely to disproportionately increase anxiety and disrupt optimal performance.

Women and young service members are harmed disproportionately by the policy. Armed forces personnel between 18 and 25 of age, as well as women, are discharged at much higher rates than their respective percentages in the Military. In 2005, 30% of all persons discharged as a result of the DADT policy were women, despite the fact that only 14% of military staff is female (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2004). During the year of 2002, 83% of all DADT-related dismissals by the Air Force affected service members below 25 years old, although the staff percentages of this young age group amount to only 35% (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2003).

Why repealing the policy is unlikely to pose a problem for the military

Knowing lesbian, gay or bisexual service members is linked to reduced prejudice toward them. Consistent with a long-standing body of social psychology research based on Allport's (1954) *contact hypothesis*, scientists have repeatedly found evidence for reduced prejudice levels

toward gay, lesbian or bisexual people among heterosexuals who are acquainted with openly gay, lesbian or bisexual members of society (e.g., Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Schneider & Lewis, 1984).

The authors of a comprehensive recent meta-analysis of the last six decades of research in this area demonstrate that the correlation of contact between heterosexuals and gay and lesbian persons with lower levels of sexual prejudice is significantly higher than prejudice reduction linked to contact with any other target group, e.g. differing in race or age (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

This is reflected in a representative recent survey of military personnel, in which 23% of respondents stated they were certain they worked with a gay or lesbian individual in their military unit. Out of these, 64% reported no adverse consequences for their military unit's morale and 66% stated that their personal morale was not affected in any way either (Zogby, Bruce, Wittman, & Rogers, 2006).

The majority of people in the public, and in the Military, support gay, lesbian and bisexual people in the military. Public opinion polls in recent years have consistently shown that two-thirds of the public, on average, believe that gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members should be allowed to serve openly in the U.S. military (CNN, 2007; Greenberger, 2005). The percentage of military service members strongly opposed to allowing gay and lesbian persons serve in the military has declined considerably over the last decade, with only 5% of personnel in the military in a 2006 poll stating that they are "very uncomfortable" interacting with gay and lesbian persons in the military, contrasted with 73% who were somewhat or very comfortable in this regard (Zogby et al., 2006). In 2007, 28 retired generals and admirals issued a letter to Congress, requesting the repeal of the DADT policy, and this perspective is also shared by current Joint Chiefs chairman Adm. Mike Mullen (Knickerbocker, 2007).

The U.S. military is capable of successfully implementing a change of this sort. The military has proved itself willing, able, and effective in attacking prejudice and stereotypes within its ranks based on race and gender. This experience can and should inform efforts to eliminate barriers based on sexual orientation. Likewise, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the National Security Agency (NSA) do not discriminate against gay, lesbian or bisexual persons. The experience of these federal agencies and of those American police and fire departments that hire lesbian, bisexual, and gay officers can be drawn upon in implementing the change.

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