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Sex and Gender in the Military

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Gender and Sexual Orientation:

A question often raised about women serving in Western militaries is whether or not they are physically capable of performing in combat. Although most of the world's warriors have been men, there is growing evidence that women have performed the role of warrior in every historical epoch. Historical legend and current archeological studies reveal that women actually led troops into battle as far back as antiquity. According to the King James' version of the *Holy Bible*, Judge Deborah, ruler of Israel from 1209 to 1169 B.C., led men into battle against Sisera's troops (Judges 4-5). Rock drawings in the Sahara reveal that women were among the first nomadic warriors (De Pauw 1998). There are widely disseminated stories of fighting women of ancient Greece known as Amazons. It was believed that removal of their right breast would make it easier for them to draw a bow and to throw a spear (Alpern 1998). Legend has it that these women lived in gender segregated communities, were trained in warfare from childhood, and were superb warriors on the battlefield (Alpern 1998).

History reveals that several warrior queens ruled in Egypt. For example, Queen Maryyet-Nit reigned as early as 3000 B.C.; and Queens Khenkaues, Nefrusobek, Ahhotep, and others, ruled in Egypt between the 25th and 16th Centuries B.C. (De Pauw 1998). It is also reported that women fought in the Greek Trojan Wars; and that women of Sparta fought in battle along side of men. Women rulers and warriors are said to have been common among the ancient Celtic and Germanic tribes; wives went into battle with their husbands and fought fiercely (Alpern 1998).

Similar stories about women warriors have surfaced in Asia and Africa. Historians assert that the Assyrian Empire was led by a warrior queen named Summuramat from 811 to 806 B.C. (De Pauw 1998). During that period, Summuramat is said to have conquered Babylonia, and had launched an unsuccessful attack on India (De Pauw 1998). Nubian Queen Candace of Meroe, fought against the Romans in the first century; and women of Monomotapa were renowned for their bravery (Alpern 1998). Ruling during the seventeenth century, Queen Nzinga of Matamba raised an army and fought several wars against the Portuguese (Alpern 1998).

Documented cases of women combatants are seemingly endless, and continue to grow. We learn from a recent archaeological study that the nomadic Sarmatian women actually fought on horseback (Davis-Kimball 2002). Studies illustrate that peoples of diverse cultures have relied upon women fighters throughout the world (Jesch 1991, De Pauw 1998, Alpern 1998). Women combatants were prevalent among the Scandinavians,

Arabs, Berbers, Kurds, Rajputs, Chinese, Indonesians, Filipinos, Maori, Papuans, Australian aborigines, Micronesians, and Amerindians (Alpern 1998).

In nineteenth century England, a new Victorian role emerged for middle class women, defining them as delicate exhibit of leisure, used to show off their husbands' economic and marital success. Women were considered to be property of their husbands, and were treated as second class citizens. Subsequently, this Victorian gender role defined the role of women in other Western nations to include the United States.

Homosexuals have always participated in Western militaries but usually under concealed identity. This differs from the militaries of antiquity where homosexuality among military men was often encouraged. In both Athens and Sparta, sexual relations between adult men and adolescent boys (pederasty) were accepted. It was not uncommon for ancient Greek warriors to have same-sex love relationships. Organized in 378 BC, the "Sacred Band of Thebes," was a Greek military unit reserved for homosexual lovers (Dover 1978, Burg 2002). The men of this unit were known for their military valor. It was believed that same-sex relationships between soldiers enhanced their fighting spirit, and boosted their morale. Similarly, during the early Roman Empire, homosexual relationships were accepted. The emperor Nero, was the first of many emperors of Rome to marry a male (Gibbon 1970).

By contrast, in ancient Israel sexual intercourse between men was viewed as an abomination, punishable by death (Leviticus 20:13). Likewise ancient Christianity

condemned male homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). During the middle ages in Western Europe, the Catholic Church emerged as a political power forming a legal system which ultimately served as the foundation of modern systems. Homosexuality was a punishable crime during this Era. Barry Burg (2002) asserts that the Order of Knights Templar, founded in Jerusalem in 1120, was the first military order of the Western world. Members of the military were exclusively men, who in addition to their fighting role, vowed to religious norms of chastity, poverty, and obedience (Burg 2002).

Militaries of Western democracies have been male dominated institutions based on a culture of masculinity (Enloe 1981). Traditionally, service in the military was both a right and an obligation of citizens (Marshall 1950; Janowitz 1975); and full citizenship with all of the accompanying rights was reserved exclusively for men. Stereotyped as being genetically inferior to men, women were recruited to serve in the military only when a crisis erupted. Today, many of the legal barriers barring women and homosexuals from the military have been challenged and are in the process of being removed. No where are these changes more apparent than in the United States, the Netherlands, and Israel.

The United States:

Women have served in all of America's wars. During the Nineteenth Century, they served mostly as nurses, cooks, and laundresses. A few disguised themselves as men and served as soldiers in male units, only to be removed from service after their sexual identities were revealed (Holm 1982; Segal 1989). None of these women were officially

members of the armed forces and, regardless of how well they performed, they did not receive recognition. U.S. women had slightly more of an opportunity to serve during World War I, as the Navy and Marine Corps allowed them to enter as reservists to fill clerical occupations. Most of the women that served were nurses.

World War II was a turning point in the representation and participation rates of women in the U.S. military as the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was established, giving women temporary, but full military status. Women were also recruited to serve as reservists in the Navy, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. Most of these women were assigned in clerical and administrative jobs to free men for combat. However, a small percentage of them served in nontraditional roles, such as parachute riggers, aircraft mechanics, and intelligence (Treadwell 1954). Some 350,000 American women served in the military during World War II, both in the United States and in combat theaters overseas (Segal 1989). These women were patriotic, and for the most part did not question their role as noncombatants.

Racial segregation was a contentious issue in the U.S. military during World War II and did not change until the postwar years. African American women were accepted for service in the WAAC/WAC from its inception, but were forced to live and work in racially segregated facilities (Putney 1992; Moore 1996). Japanese American women were not accepted for service in the WAC until 1943 (Moore 2003). Many of them were recruited from internment camps. Unlike African American women, Japanese American women served in a fully integrated setting (Moore 2003).

Following World War II, women were given permanent military status through the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. For the next two decades the representation of women in the American armed services was restricted to 2 percent. In 1967, the 2 percent restriction was removed. When the military draft ended in 1973, women were encouraged to join the military to help meet personnel goals. By 1974 women made up 3 percent of the active-duty forces, and five years later the number of women in the military had increased three-fold.

In the last three decades, changes in U.S. military laws and policies, largely influenced by a climate of equal employment opportunity for women in the broader society, has allowed for women to fill a wider array of military occupations. Women were admitted to the three major service academies in 1976. Two years later, Congress passed legislation abolishing the Women's Army Corps as a separate unit. In more recent years Army women have been deployed in increasing numbers to combat zones. In 1991, over 26,000 women soldiers were deployed to the Gulf region during Operations Desert Shield and Storm. Shortly thereafter, Congress lifted the ban on women flying combat aircraft and serving on combat ships. Today, approximately 15 percent of the U.S. active forces are women, and an unprecedented number of them have been deployed to war zones. These women play a major role in the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Still, American servicewomen are barred from serving on naval submarines, and in such elite units as the Army's Special Forces, the Navy's Sea-Air-Land unit (SEAL), and the

Air Force Special Operations Command (*PJs*). Perhaps the most controversial issue concerning women in the U.S. military today is whether or not they should serve in direct combat. Although women are assigned to combat units, they are assigned at the level of Brigade Headquarters or higher, and they do not serve in direct ground combat. Further, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2006 requires notification to Congress at least thirty days prior to the implementation of any change to the current Department of Defense's Direct Ground Combat Assignment Rule.

Advocates against women serving in combat roles emphasize biological differences between men and women. They argue that women are physically weaker than men, are at risk of becoming pregnant, and have an overall negative effect on the fighting capabilities of the American armed forces (Mitchell 1989; 1998). Others maintain that it is simply more important for women to bear and raise children than to go off to war (Bruen 1991). On the other hand, advocates for women serving in combat assert that women's capabilities to perform effectively in war are equal to and sometimes surpass those of men (Segal 1982; Roush 1991; Holm 1991). Others make the case that the combat exclusion law cannot protect military women from danger during wartime, but rather limits their chances for career advancement (Segal 1982; Schroeder 1991).

U.S. military women are divided over the issue of whether or not they should serve in combat (Miller 2001). Enlisted women and women of color are more likely to oppose assigning women to combat (Miller 2001). There are greater advantages for women officers, than enlisted women, to serve in combat as they are more likely to plan a career

in the military, less likely to have children, and more likely to perceive their command opportunities to be limited without combat experience. Most of the Army women surveyed were in favor of women being able to volunteer for combat if and only if they can meet physical requirements (Miller 2001).

Sexual orientation was not addressed in U.S. military law until World War I; the act of sodomy was treated by the military as assault. Prior to World War II, homosexual men perceived to be effeminate were admitted into the military and assigned to jobs that did not require a lot of physical strength (Berube 1991). During World War II, homosexuality was considered to be mental illness and military policies were based on a treatment and retention model (Burrelli 1993). In 1951, an Article banning sodomy was introduced into the Uniform Code of Military Justice (Burrelli 1993). By the late 1970s, the U.S. military began to view homosexuality as being incompatible with military service, and grounds for separation (Snyder and Nyberg 1980; Burrelli 1993).

This policy became a very divisive issue in 1993 when then President William J. Clinton attempted to lift the ban on gays in the military. Congress and the Department of Defense both opposed opening the military to gays. In 1994, the current, *Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue*, policy was implemented. This policy forbids the military to inquire as to a service member's sexual orientation, and forbids a service member to reveal his/her sexual orientation. Homosexuals who are not discrete and reveal their sexual orientation, can be legally discharged (Moskos 2000). Since this new policy has been implemented, service members have been involuntarily separated as a result of their

admission alone (Segal, et. al. 1999). Women soldiers have been more likely to be discharged than men (Moskos 2000). Many homosexuals have stated that the U.S. military has betrayed their trust (Benecke, et. al. 1999; Belkin and Bateman 2003). Some argue further that the military's intolerance toward homosexuals violates their civil rights, and undermines the norms that the military seeks to uphold (Shilts 1993).

Sexual orientation remains a very controversial issue in the U.S. military today. The issue of women serving in the military seems to be lessening over time. Evidence show that the United States military has made more progress in integrating women than homosexuals

The Netherlands

Women have served in the Royal Netherlands Armed Forces since 1944. The Women's Corps was created in the United Kingdom and comprised of Dutch women who fled the Netherlands during World War II. Following World War II, the Netherlands had three separate Women's Corps for each of the branches: Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Dutch sexual equality act of 1979 led to the integration of women into the Dutch regular military (Chapkis 1981), and by 1982, all Women's Corps were disbanded.

Since 1993, the Dutch military changed from a conscripted to a volunteer force. Unlike the United States, combat duty is open to women so long as they pass the physical entrance test. However, women generally do not pass the physical entrance test and are usually assigned in traditional female occupational roles, such as clerical, medical, and

administrative (Segal et. al, 1999). Women are officially barred from service in the marines, and on submarines. One issue concerning women in the Dutch military today is their low representation among the high ranking officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO) (Segal et. al, 1999).

The Dutch military is most tolerant of Western nations toward homosexuals (Segal, et al., 1999). Prior to 1974, homosexuals were not allowed to join the Dutch military; their lifestyle was viewed as being immoral. In 1974, the Minister of Defense removed the gay ban, and the Dutch military became the first Western nation to allow gays to serve in the Army. Since 1986, the Dutch military has actively worked toward integrating homosexuals into the armed service through an educational foundation funded by the Minister of Defense (RAND 1993). A recent survey administered to Dutch military personnel revealed that while most heterosexual service members agreed that homosexuals should have the same rights as heterosexuals, they preferred to keep their relationships with homosexuals at a psychological and social distance (RAND 1993). Many homosexuals in the Dutch military conceal their sexual orientation as they feel they are not fully accepted (RAND 1993). Still, the Dutch forces have made greater strides integrating homosexuals than they have women

Israel

Israel has the distinction of being the first Western nation to conscript women into the military during peace time as well as war. Jewish women eighteen years of age are liable for conscription, and for the reserves following their duty. Women are assigned to a

separate Women's Corps, *Chen*, (which means charm in Hebrew). They receive less military training than men, and are drafted for shorter periods (Segal, et al. 1999).

Female soldiers are assigned to all units in the military to include combat units, but they do not serve in combat specialties and do not deploy with the unit when it goes to war.

The majority of Israeli female soldiers serve in secretarial and clerical jobs (Gal 1986).

Women are more likely than men to be exempt from military service for marriage, having children, and religion. In addition, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) does not take all eligible eighteen year old women, but rather selects the number of women it needs to meet personnel quotas each year (Gal 1986; Yuval Davis 1981). Therefore, the entrance score requirements for women are generally higher compared to those of men (Gal 1986).

Homosexuals have always been allowed to serve in the IDF, but in previous years were restricted to units where they could live at home. They were also prohibited from occupying intelligence and other sensitive positions (Gal 1994). In 1993, the IDF implemented a new nondiscriminatory policy and lifted all restrictions on homosexuals in the military. Today, individuals are not asked about their sexual orientation as part of the military accession process (Gal 1994; RAND 1993). Homosexuals no longer face legal restrictions on their careers, assignments, or promotions (RAND 1993). Unlike the Netherlands, the IDF does not conduct training to dispel stereotypes or to address matters concerning sexual orientation (Gade, et al. 1996). Due to the social stigma placed on homosexuals in the broader society, those serving in the IDF usually remain covert in

their behavior (RAND 1993). While Israel has made considerable progress, the integration of women and homosexuals is far from ideal.

Conclusion:

History is replete with examples of women and homosexuals who performed the role of warrior, and performed it well. Clearly, the issue of gender and sexual orientation in the armed services is a cultural one; not biological. When nations are at war and in need of personnel, cultural norms are temporarily suspended. This was quite evident in the Twentieth Century when American and European women were recruited for military service in unprecedented numbers. Nearly 800,000 Soviet women served on the front lines as members of aircrews, tank crews, and gun detachments (Saywell 1985). The exigencies of war outweigh cultural mores.

Still, culture determines the extent to which nations will integrate women and minorities into their militaries. For example, while the militaries of Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands have made noticeable progress in integrating both women and homosexuals (Segal, et. al. 1999), such is not the case in the United States. Integration of homosexuals in the American armed services has not progressed rapidly due to the cultural opposition of a homophobic nation. On the other hand, the United States has surpassed most other nations when it comes to integrating women.

Today, Western nations are in a process of extending citizenship rights to societal members whose rights have been previously denied. Among the privileges of citizenship is the right to bear arms; as it leads to social, political, and economic rights in the civilian sector (Janowitz 1975). The degree of tolerance a military has for social differences is influenced by the cultural values of its broader society.

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