

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Marines

Attitudes of Military Personnel Toward Homosexuals

Estrada, A. X., & Weiss, D. J. (1999). Attitudes of military personnel toward homosexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(4), 83-97. doi:10.1300/J082v37n04_05

SUMMARY: Seventy-two male Reservist Marines were surveyed to examine Marine attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. The role of various demographic variables in predicting attitudes toward homosexual was examined. The Marines' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in general were mildly negative, but their attitudes toward gays in the military were somewhat more negative.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The Marines' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were mildly unfavorable; attitudes were more negative toward gay men compared to lesbians.
- Marines with more negative attitudes were more likely to have had no contact with a gay or lesbian person than those expressing less negative attitudes.
- More negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were significantly correlated with conservative political ideology and greater religious attendance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide classes to gay men and lesbians in the military to help them cope with possible discrimination and microaggressions they may encounter from others who possess negative attitudes toward sexual minority Service members
- Offer information in their staff training about the challenges faced by some sexual minority Service members when confronted with discriminatory behavior
- Educate service providers about the resources available to help sexual minority military personnel

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote awareness campaigns on military installations regarding the necessity of treating all Service members and families, including those who are sexual minorities, with respect and dignity
- Continue to support programs that provide help to gay men and lesbians in the military
- Encourage collaboration between DoD and community-based programs that offer support to sexual minority Service members to provide confidential and streamlined service

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METHODS

- With permission of the unit commander, participants were recruited during a regular workday.
- Marines completed measures of attitudes toward lesbian and gay men and attitudes toward homosexuals in the military.
- Mean scores were calculated and correlations were run with demographic variables.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample consisted of 72 male Marine Reservists all from the same unit in Southern California.
- Participants' mean length of military service was 4.20 years.
- Mean age = 23.4 years; 78% were single, 14% married.
- Eighty-four percent had a high school diploma, 77% some college, 4% college degree.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample consists of primarily Latino, only male Reservist Marines in Southern California; the results may not generalize beyond this sample.
- The scores on the self-report measures were not compared to established norms; therefore it is unknown how these attitudes compare to other military or civilian samples.
- The measures of political ideology, contact with gay people and religious attendance were not explained.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate this study with a larger sample, including members of other military units, officers, and females
- Examine possible changes in attitudes over time in the wake of the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"
- Explore how the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" influences Service members' operational readiness

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