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SEXUAL ETHICS, ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE, AND  
THE AIR EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

by

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***Abstract***

The established Air Force standards prohibiting adultery, fraternization, and unprofessional relationships have long recognized these acts as counter to good order and discipline due to the resulting negative impact on unit cohesion and morale. In the last 10 years, three major factors have combined to make sexual misconduct an increasing topic of concern for the USAF—the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) rotation cycle, the steadily increasing gender mix serving on active duty, and additional combat roles that have opened to women. Focusing on AEF deployments and Air Force military members, this paper explores societal attitudes and value systems influencing sexual ethics, the Air Force’s current approach to instilling values as compared to other military branches, whether there’s a better ethical model to help members internalize existing standards, and to tie together some practical actions the commander can take at deployed locations to encourage upholding of established standards.

Research for this paper included reviews of Air Force doctrine, operating instructions, and publications; sister service publications; technical articles and books in the fields of ethics, sociology, and philosophy; and general magazine/newspaper articles.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Adultery, fraternization, and unprofessional relationships have long been recognized by the military as counter to good order and discipline due to the resulting negative impact on unit cohesion and morale. Yet every year the press reports on one or more high profile violations of these standards involving consensual sexual conduct; this results in an ensuing debate on the true potential for harm to the service and whether the military should be intruding into its members' personal lives. Regardless of popular opinion, these are in fact the established and tested standards. One may ask that if these relationships can be so harmful to the military organization, why are the standards so often violated—many times by people who should know better?

The percentage of women serving in the Air Force has continued to grow over the last 10 years, while at the same time Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) deployments have replaced garrison operations of the Cold War period. The amount of time male and female Air Force members are spending together away from home and family suggests increased opportunity to violate existing standards. These romantic liaisons can not only have a negative impact during the deployment, but can later impact home station morale both within the duty organization and the base community at large due to spouses' concerns of perceived/tolerated TDY activity.

Understanding the societal forces impacting personal conduct as well as relevant ethical models and reasoning can aid the commander in influencing his unit's culture. Focusing on AEF deployments and Air Force military members, this paper will explore societal attitudes and value systems influencing sexual ethics, the Air Force's current approach to instilling values as compared to other military branches, whether there's a better ethical model to help members internalize existing standards, and to tie together some practical actions the commander can take at deployed locations to encourage upholding of the established standards.

## **Background**

A cursory review of several high profile stories covered by the Air Force Times over the last 10 years gives some indication of the varied nature of inappropriate sexual relationships involving male and female Air Force members. In 1995, a married Air Force Major (and surgeon) pled guilty to adultery and was fined \$51,000 for having a relationship with a married E-3 operating room technician (Compant, 1995, 4). In 1996, there was a highly publicized case involving a married lieutenant colonel fighter squadron commander (3-time below the zone promotee) who was court-martialed and convicted of having a relationship of inappropriate familiarity with his first lieutenant intelligence officer during a squadron deployment in Europe (Bird, 1997, 12). In 1997, there was another highly publicized case where the Air Force's first female bomber pilot (first lieutenant) was charged with fraternization, adultery, lying, and disobeying a lawful order involving her relationship with the civilian spouse of an enlisted airman (Nobel, 1997, 3). In 1999, an Air Force recruiter (master sergeant) was charged with 14 criminal counts including attempting to develop an inappropriate relationship with a female recruit (Palmer, 1999, 13). In 2005, a

staff sergeant technical training instructor was court-martialed and pled guilty to having an unprofessional relationship and violating a no-contact order with her senior airman student (Gaudiano, 2005, 12). And finally, in 2005, The Air Force Judge Advocate General (2-star general) received Article 15 non-judicial punishment (reprimanded and fined half a month's pay for 2 months) on charges of conduct unbecoming an officer, engaging in unprofessional relationships, fraternization, and obstruction of justice for engaging in consented and unconsented misconduct over the previous two years with nine women; he was later forced to retire in the permanent grade of colonel (Gaudiano, 2005, 14-16).

Over the years, these violations have helped to refine and articulate the standards for adultery, fraternization, and unprofessional relationships as spelled out and codified both in the Uniformed Code of Military Justice and applicable Air Force operating instructions.

The Manual For Courts-Martial (MCM) United States (2002 Edition) states adultery is clearly unacceptable conduct and defines its elements as “That the accused wrongfully had sexual intercourse with a certain person; [t]hat, at the time, the accused or the other person was married to someone else; and [t]hat, under the circumstances, the conduct of the accused was to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces or was of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces”. It goes on to say “Adulterous conduct that is directly prejudicial includes conduct that has an obvious, and measurably divisive effect on unit or organizational discipline, morale, or cohesion, or is clearly detrimental to the authority or stature of or respect toward a servicemember” (MCM, 2002, IV-97).

Fraternization is a form of unprofessional relationship and is defined in AFI 36-2909 as “a personal relationship between an officer and an enlisted member that violates the customary bounds of acceptable behavior in the Air Force and prejudices good order and

discipline, discredits the armed services, or operates to the personal disgrace or dishonor of the officer involved. The custom recognizes that officers will not form personal relationships with enlisted members on terms of military equality, whether on or off duty” (AFI 36-2909, 1999, 2). Further, the 2002 MCM states “The acts and circumstances must be such as to lead a reasonable person experienced in the problems of military leadership to conclude that the good order and discipline of the armed forces has been prejudiced by their tendency to compromise the respect of enlisted persons for the professionalism, integrity, and obligations of an officer” (MCM, 2002, IV-109).

Concerning unprofessional relationships, AFI 36-2909, *Professional and Unprofessional Relationships*, states “Relationships are unprofessional, whether pursued on or off duty, when they detract from the authority of supervisors or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of, favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals for personal interests. Unprofessional relationships can exist between officers, between enlisted members, between officers and enlisted members, and between military personnel and civilian employees or contractor personnel” (AFI 36-2909, 1999, 2). Further, the *USAF Core Values Strategy* says “Those who allow their appetites to drive them to make sexual overtures to subordinates are unfit for military service” (Core Values Strategy, 1997, 6). And while unprofessional relationships and fraternization can include nonsexual conduct, this paper is focused on violations involving sexual conduct.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What's the Big Deal Anyway?**

In the last 10 years, three major factors have combined to make sexual misconduct an increasing topic of concern for the USAF. First, the deployment tempo has increased significantly given the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) rotation cycle responding to current world events. Second, the proportion of women in the USAF has been on a steady increase rising from 16% in 1995, to 19.6% in 2004 (IDEAS, 2005); given that women make up almost 51% of the population, it is not inconceivable that this ratio has room for further growth in the USAF. Third, more and more combat roles have opened to women. Collectively, these three factors have resulted in a military force where men and women are spending much more time together in the confines of a deployed location for periods of 90-180 days at a time; under these circumstances, is not unreasonable to expect increased occurrences of normal biological attractions between the sexes.

In commenting on the work of Edelwich and Brodsky, CMSgt Robert Lewallen, then Superintendent of Strategic Air Command's NCO Professional Military Education Center observed in 1991, "There are several principles to keep in mind about the biological magnetism between men and women. First, such attraction is normal; it should not inspire guilt or attempts to rationalize it away. Second, individuals have a choice in deciding whether or not this attraction will lead them into unethical conduct. Third, refraining from unethical

conduct is an absolute professional imperative” (Lewallen, 1991, 5). The words of two oft quoted statesmen taken together spell the recipe for disaster in this area. Lord Acton’s dictum “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, coupled with Henry Kissinger’s quip “Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac”, illustrates the strong relationship between sex, power, and ethics.

While some continue to argue whether men and women should serve together in combat roles, the fact is in the 21st century men and woman are serving together—and in increasing numbers. Commanders at every level must ensure a climate where mission effectiveness is achieved under these circumstances. Mission effectiveness requires an impeccable group ethos. As former Secretary of the Navy, James Webb, stated “Those who serve together must behave toward one another according to a set of unassailable and equally enforced standards—honesty, accountability, sacrifice, and absolute fairness in risk, promotions, and rewards. The military is, in this sense, a socialist meritocracy...It functions not on money but on nonmaterial recognition...In this environment, fairness is not only crucial, it is the coin of the realm. Fairness is the guarantee that puts credibility into rank, awards, and recognition. And such recognition determines a person’s future” (Webb, 1997, 1). The potential powder keg created by sexual conduct within professional relationships is recognized by many professions. For example Stanford University’s policy on consensual sexual or romantic relationships states “There are special risks in any sexual or romantic relationship between individuals in inherently unequal positions...Because of the potential for conflict of interest, exploitation, favoritism, and bias, such relationships may undermine the real or perceived integrity of the supervision and evaluation provided...They may, moreover, be less consensual than the individual whose position confers power or authority

believes. The relationship is likely to be perceived in different ways by each of the parties to it, especially in retrospect...Relationships in which one party is in a position to review the work or influence the career of the other may provide grounds for complaint by third parties when that relationship gives undue access or advantage, restricts opportunities, or creates a perception of these problems. Furthermore, circumstances may change, and conduct that was previously welcome may become unwelcome” (Stanford University, 2002, 6).

How big of a problem is this for the USAF? In the macro sense, it is very difficult to find empirical evidence that measures the causal impact of unethical consensual sexual conduct on mission accomplishment (whether in terms of reduced unit effectiveness, troop retention rates, divorce rates, etc). Most evidence tends to be accumulated tactical-level anecdotes, coupled with various authors’ first-hand experience within affected organizations. In 2004, after a high-profile case involving systemic sexual assault at the Air Force Academy, the Air Force tasked each Major Command (MAJCOM) to conduct an assessment of their installation Sexual Assault Response Programs (SARP), report findings, and recommend improvements. The resulting report stated “Evidence indicates the majority of sexual assaults occurring in the Air Force are never reported. In this finding, the Air Force mirrors the society it protects...Research conducted by the government and academic institutions consistently shows that the majority of sexual assault victims choose not to make formal reports to law enforcement. This research shows that between 68% (national sample of general population) and 95% (national sample of college population) of sexual assault victims are not reporting the incidents, for a variety of reasons...Not surprisingly, the Air Force assessment indicates many Air Force sexual assaults may not be reported” (SAF/MR, 2004, 42). “Commanders all believe or want to believe that they have created an

environment in which people are comfortable reporting. The reality is a significant percentage of people say they would not report” (SAF/MR, 2004, 43). The point here is not to categorize all unprofessional consensual sexual activity as sexual assault; it is rather to suggest that in an organization where sexual assault is up to 95% underreported, it may not be unreasonable to expect other types of unprofessional sexual conduct go unreported. The resulting negative feelings toward participant’s behavior are then allowed to fester beneath the surface of the workplace environment. For example, the report from Air Combat Command’s 2004 command-wide assessment stated, “Anecdotal information from AOR [area of responsibility] returnees is that the environment at deployed locations may inhibit reporting [of sexual assaults]. Observed misbehavior by mid- and senior-level NCOs (and officers), participating in consensual sex even when married, undermined victim confidence in their supervisors, both in the AOR and when they returned home” (ACC, 2004, 13).

By analyzing the above statement, one can see the implications for two critical components of military culture— hierarchy (with its system of position, power, and authority), and the imperative known as “good order and discipline” required to successfully execute the Air Force mission. First, the USAF is a hierarchical organization bound in common values visibly expressed by wearing a uniform (Toner, 1995, 108). This hierarchy is broadly subdivided into two corps—the officer corps and enlisted corps—further refined into several strata of position (e.g. flag grade, field grade, SNCO, NCO, etc). By virtue of their respective rank and date of rank, everyone has an exact position in the hierarchy and with that position comes a certain amount of power and authority over other members within the hierarchy. Although issues concerning fraternization and unprofessional relationships tend to focus on liaisons between members of the different major strata of position (i.e.

officer/enlisted, flag grade/field grade, SNCO/airman, etc), it's important to remember that even a senior airman exercises a certain amount power over a 1- or 2-striper (or a 1-striper over a no-striper). In short, wearing rank (a visible sign of power potential and authority) on the uniform (the visible sign of common values) provides a visible manifestation (or artifact) of a person's impact on the common values critical to the organization's culture. Second, the power and authority that comes with rank helps to ensure what is commonly known as "good order and discipline". As Chief Lewallen stated "A person in a position of power...incurs the ethical responsibility for setting the example in behavior and conduct because our subordinates learn from us the meaning of right and wrong as defined by our institution"; and relevant to this particular issue he further says "biology can become a powerful motivator to wrong behavior" (Lewallan, 1991, 4).

Broadly speaking, the ACC anecdotal information demonstrates that when subordinates observe unethical conduct by those responsible for setting the example, their trust and confidence in the leadership (and thus the organization) to effectively deal with serious issues can be shattered.

This is not to say that all physical relationships between men and women military members impact good order and discipline. However, when a unit embarks on an AEF deployment, the dynamic becomes suddenly more restrictive because military members are typically billeted at close quarters, confined to a relatively small piece of real estate (the deployed base), and usually in smaller numbers than home station conducting a more focused mission away from normal family and social life. Under such circumstances it becomes rather easy for everyone to know everyone else's business (some call it the "fishbowl effect"). In such an environment, standards of professionalism must be kept impeccable in

order to maintain unit cohesion and morale both for short-term mission accomplishment, and the long-term organizational health once the deployment is over.

## Chapter 3

### What Does Society at Large Say?

The men and women comprising Air Force membership are drawn from the service's parent society. Since the "sexual revolution" of the 1960s, popular culture in American society has steadily pushed the limits of acceptable sexual conduct between men and women.

As a Newsweek Magazine special report framed the issue in November 1967:

"The old taboos are dead or dying. A new, more permissive society is taking shape. Its outlines are etched most prominently in the arts in the increasing nudity and frankness of today's films, in the blunt, often obscene language seemingly endemic in American novels and plays, in the candid lyrics of pop songs and the undress of the avant-garde ballet, in erotic art and television talks shows, in freer fashions and franker advertising...they are breaking the bonds of puritan society and helping America to grow up (Newsweek, 1967, 74)."

A cursory review of mainstream media from the 1960's through the 1990's demonstrates the increasing willingness by the media to push the boundaries of what constitutes acceptable sexual behavior in an effort to move to the next level of "buzz" as yesterday's sensations become boring and staid. In the "information age" households now have access to over 70 cable TV channels and internet information at their fingertips, allowing unprecedented access and quantities of sex-related media to be piped into the home. Sex has been used to sell just about anything from beer to cars, and thanks to reality TV, sex has even become a spectator sport. Consider MTV's television show *Real World*, now in its 15th season. The MTV website bills it as "the true story of seven strangers, picked to live in a house and have their

lives taped, and find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting REAL” (MTV website, 2005). A *San Diego Union-Tribune* commentary described the show’s preoccupation with sex (including homosexual activity) and stated “now it’s little more than a Peeping Tom snatching glimpses of what happens when people stop being polite and start getting drunk and naked” (Graham, 2004, 2).

One needs to consider the impact of such a constant barrage—especially from television—upon the collective American psyche. Examining this relationship within the United States, Dr. Jeremiah Strouse says, “[T]he most widely supported model of television viewing effects, the cultivation theory, states that television shapes viewers’ conceptions of social reality, such that their estimates of real world events becomes skewed toward TV’s portrayal of similar events. In other words, viewers’ perceptions of normativity take on a television slant. As one would expect, heavy viewers of music videos have been found to estimate a significantly higher incidence of a variety of sexual behaviors in the real world than that of low volume viewers” (Strouse, 1994, 2).

This steady desensitization to traditional values by popular culturists has reached the point today that any type of sexual activity is viewed as okay as long as it “doesn’t hurt anybody” or takes place between consenting adults (any number and gender mix is acceptable)—or, to chant the hedonistic 1970’s mantra “If it feels good do it”. This attitude is symptomatic of the principle of emotivism. According to philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, “What emotivism asserts is in central part that there are and can be no valid rational justification for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards...it is important to note how often in widely different modern philosophical contexts something very like emotivism’s attempted reduction of morality to

personal preference continually recurs in the writings of those who do not think of themselves as emotivists. The unrecognized philosophical power of emotivism is one clue to its cultural power” (MacIntyre, 1984, 18).

Clearly, it was not always this way in American society. This country was founded on 2,000-plus year old Judeo-Christian philosophical principles that more or less helped the country and its citizens develop the standards of ethical and moral conduct in dealing in with social discourse. It’s important to note the word philosophical because this Judeo-Christianity served as society’s system of motivating values, concepts, and principles (even for it’s non-religious members). A key component of this philosophy is recognition that certain behaviors enhance one’s relationship with other members of society, while other behaviors can have a detrimental effect on those relationships. One of the main tenants of this philosophy is the Decalogue. While the first tablet governs man’s relationship with God, the second tablet exclusively governs man’s relationship with fellow man. It is not without significance that these commandments are engraved in the physical fabric of the US Supreme Court. Two relevant laws within the second tablet are the prohibitions against adultery and covetousness. The first recognizes the binding nature of publicly declared marriage vows between a man and a woman—that a man and women have publicly given their word to remain faithful to one another (with the corollary that not do so is cheating). The second recognizes the societal disharmony created by excessive desire of other peoples’ belongings (spouse, property, etc). About 800 years ago, the philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, further codified in his *Summa Theologica* a list of seven deadly (or capital) vices—pride, avarice (greed), envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth. The overall thread that links these together is the recognition that intemperance of appetite and emotion leads to an individual’s selfish

disposition that carried to the extreme, ultimately makes the individual oblivious to the needs of other members of society. As Aquinas said “These vices are called capital because others most frequently arise from them” (Aquinas, 1952, 178). For over 1600 years, these vices had been recognized as counter to promoting good society; that is not to say transgressions did not occur, but the standards were there as the benchmark.

But since the 1960’s this basic premise has been in steady decline. For example, in 1993 MTV and PBS both ran a program entitled the Seven Deadly Sins. In part, this program interviewed a variety of high-profile popular culture figures on this subject—their overall conclusion—these concepts aren’t vices and it’s dumb to think so. According to Chuck Colson, “The program was intended to show that people still grapple with the same sins that have plagued human nature for millennia. But what it really showed is that modern young people are woefully ignorant of basic moral categories...[T]here was not one word about moral responsibility, repentance, or objective standards of right and wrong” (Colson, 2000, 26). This lack of moral clarity seems to extend to our nation’s high schools and universities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics for 2003, the percentage of sexually active high school twelfth graders nationwide was 46.5% of males and 51% of females; and the percentage of twelfth graders reporting four or more sex partners in their lifetime as 22.2% of males, and 17.9% of females (CDC, 2004, 18-19). A recent Time Magazine article discussed novelist Tom Wolfe’s background research of college campuses for a new book stating that he observed “was a kind of boot camp where teenagers are initiated into the social matrices of sex and power against the autumnal backdrop of what Wolfe describes as ‘the gradual—maybe not so gradual—disappearance of conventional morality’ “ (Grossman, 2004, 74). A Newsweek article published one month

earlier, discussed the phenomenon of adolescent hookups—one-time sexual encounters—anything from kissing to intercourse—between acquaintances having no plans to even talk afterward. The early research confirmed just how widespread the behavior has become. A survey of 555 undergrads found that 78% of students had hooked up and that they did so usually after consuming alcohol. Said one researcher, “It’s generalized...now it’s the campus norm” (McGinn, 2004, 44).

Popular culture seems to have promoted what was once viewed as a special, almost sacrosanct act between men and women into a purely recreational activity devoid of consequences. The statistics concerning this activity among the young suggest that this view is now prevalent in our high schools and universities. In this respect, it is not without significance that from these institutions of learning the Air Force draws the majority of its new recruits.

## Chapter 4

### **Ethical Systems, Culture, and Organization**

Culture appears to have a strong influence on a society's moral values and principles. An explanation of ethical systems can aid in understanding the nature of this relationship. Richard Shweder, a cultural anthropologist and cultural psychologist, refers to the "Big Three" of ethical discourse—autonomy, community, and divinity in defining a society's ethical framework. The ethics of autonomy relies on regulative concepts such as harm, rights, and justice; the ethics of community relies on regulative concepts such as duty, hierarchy, interdependency, and souls; and the ethics of divinity relies on regulative concepts such as sacred order, natural order, sanctity, and tradition. While these three discourses on morality can culturally co-exist, he states the US is an expert on ethics of autonomy (e.g. even extending rights to children and animals). He describes the purpose of the ethics of autonomy as "To protect the zone of discretionary choice of individuals and to promote the exercise of individual will in the pursuit of personal preferences". He further states autonomy is "Usually the official ethic of societies in which individualism is an ideal" and where there exists "a conceptualization of the self as an individual preference structure, where the point of moral regulation is to increase choice and personal liberty" (Shweder, 2003, 98). According to Frank Kirkpatrick, "The first language for most Americans is that of individualism, private property, individual rights, self-reliance, and the sacredness of one's

freedom to be left alone by others”. He goes on to say that this American individualism has at its core “a belief that only by exercising the greatest possible degree of personal freedom could the individual protect himself against...the unwarranted intrusions into his life by other people’s imposition of their values and interests...[o]ne consequence of this individualism is the radical separation of one’s private and public lives” (Kirkpatrick, 2001, 60).

Schweder’s ethics of community aims to protect the moral integrity of the various stations or roles that constitute a society or a community—a corporate entity with an identity, standing, history, and reputation of its own. A prerequisite for this concept is a conceptualization of the self as an office holder—that “one’s role or station in life is intrinsic to one’s identity and is part of a larger interdependent collective enterprise with a history and standing of its own” (Shweder, 2003, 98-99). Ethics of community provides a model whereby a society’s members don’t just see themselves and their actions in an autonomous, individual, private-versus-public self. Using the military society as an example, its members are bound up in a corporate society based on an oath, common uniform, and position within the organization. In a sense, each member’s actions (to a degree based on their rank and position) serve to reinforce or detract from adherence to the corporate standards for the rest of the membership. This is not to say that individuals no longer matter (such as in totalitarian communism), but as Frank Kirkpatrick has said “[I]t is a community that takes seriously the notion of a common good that both transcends as well as preserves the worth and dignity of each individual”. He further says “[A] good ethics of community must be one that affirms...the individual (in all his or her uniqueness or ‘otherness’) without succumbing to the false view that only by making our relationships with others tentative, provisional, and utilitarian can we protect the inner core of who we really are. Public and private are not

dichotomous” (Kirkpatrick, 2001, 61). The ethics of community model can be used within the framework of the Air Force to explain the importance of character formation; and how it’s not just John Snuffy the individual that violates a particular standard, but Major John Snuffy the squadron commander, or Master Sergeant John Snuffy the flight chief, or Senior Airman John Snuffy the crew chief, that has violated the standard—with a resulting degree of impact to the other members and common good of the organization.

One of the basic challenges of character formation for the US Air Force has always been to transform raw civilian recruits (individuals) into effective team members of a cohesive military organization. This transformation process generally begins by inculcating the recruits with Air Force values during initial entry programs such as basic military training for enlistees and commissioning programs for officers. The overarching goal of these two programs can be summed up by their respective mission statements. The stated mission of the Basic Military Training School at Lackland AFB is “To transform civilian recruits into disciplined, dedicated, physically fit warriors ready to serve in the USAF”, (BMTS website, 2005) and the stated mission of the Air Force Academy is “To develop outstanding young men and women to become Air Force officers with knowledge, character, and discipline; motivated to lead the world’s greatest aerospace force in service to the nation” (USAF website, 2005). Interestingly enough, the enlisted training mission statement doesn’t really address character development (perhaps because it’s only a 6-week course), and although the Air Force Academy mission statement does mention “character”, it doesn’t appear as strongly worded as the respective sister service academies mission statements.

Other service academy mission statements seem to place stronger emphasis on the expected quality of character formation and individual development. The US Military

Academy West Point mission statement says “To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country; professional growth throughout a career as an officer in the United States Army; and a lifetime of selfless service to the nation” (USMA website, 2005). The US Naval Academy mission statement says “To develop midshipmen morally, mentally, physically, and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty in order to provide graduates who...have potential for future development in mind and character to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship, and government” (USNA website, 2005).

In today’s social environment, character formation can require Herculean effort. Popular culture’s progressive attitude toward sexual conduct coupled with an ignorance of basic moral categories can make it challenging for the Air Force to effectively articulate a sexual ethics policy that gains buy-in from all its members; especially since Air Force members do not divorce themselves from the larger society once on active duty. In this respect, for the Air Force not to effectively address individual character formation can result in a stagnation of members’ already held values and beliefs to the extent that a violation of the Air Force policy is only wrong if one is caught in the violation. Major General Perry Smith somewhat addressed this when he said “[M]any people feel that the values they developed in their youth are the ones that they will have for the rest of their lives. We all need to strive for moral ideals and, as we grow, to move the ideals to a higher level. People of character and integrity should seek to improve as they move to higher responsibility. Unfortunately, the opposite often occurs. As individuals climb up the slippery pole to

success, they often sell their souls incrementally—making small compromises to their personal integrity to serve their ambitions or their egos” (Smith, 1993, 130).

The argument comes back to whether the Air Force and its leaders at all levels can effectively instill the values of an effective organizational culture and promote adherence to long held policies that appear counter-intuitive to the larger society’s cultural attitude toward sexual ethics. Edgar Schein, a social psychologist, said that culture can be analyzed at several different levels and described three levels of organizational culture—artifacts (readily observable, hard to interpret); values and beliefs (can be distilled from how people explain and justify what they do); and underlying assumptions (the foundations of culture which are so widely shared that people are largely unaware of them) (Schein, 1992, 17). Air Force examples of these levels include uniform and rank (artifacts), USAF Core Values (values and beliefs), and—for example—the idea that the US military will not attempt to overthrow the government (underlying assumption). Schein further discusses the concept of “embedding mechanisms” as a means by which leaders influence the culture of the organization. These embedding mechanisms essentially communicate to the organization what the leader thinks is important in terms of expected team focus and behavior. Three of the six he outlines are pertinent to this issue—what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis; deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching; and observed criteria by which leaders recruit, select, promote, retire, and excommunicate organizational members (Schein, 1992, 231).

Examining the issue of sexual ethics through the lens of Schein’s model may help to highlight both strong and weak points regarding the current Air Force approach to this issue. For example, there is an on-line video game associated with an MTV television show (MTV

website, March 2005), involving the *Real World* cast, and sponsored by the United States Air Force (see figure 1). While the Air Force Recruiting Service may only be attempting to gain name recognition with a large segment of the young population, an unintended consequence is the endorsement of MTV values—or at least sowing seeds of confusion in the minds of those who’ve adopted Air Force Core Values.

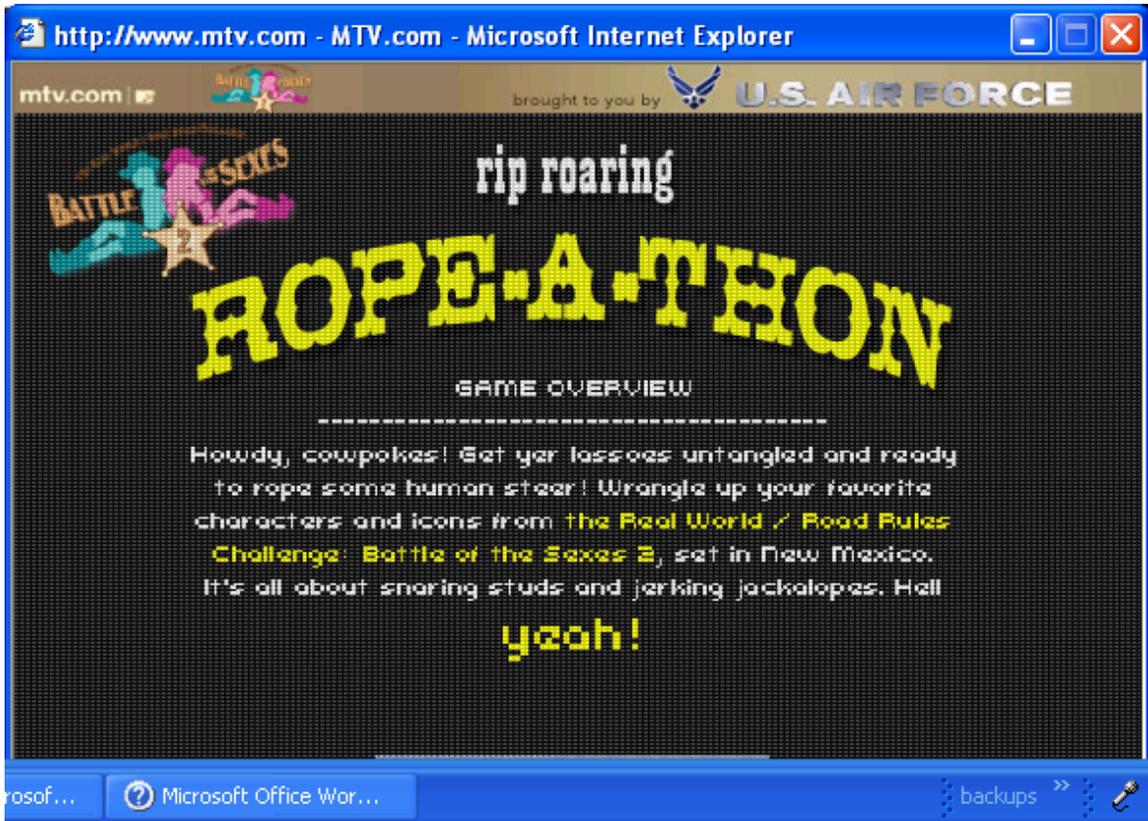


Figure 1.

## Chapter 5

### What is the Current Air Force Policy and Approach?

In addition to the already-cited MCM and AFI excerpts defining adultery, fraternization, and unprofessional relationships, the corporate Air Force view on inappropriate sexual relationships between Air Force members is also based on long standing custom and experience further covered in USAF doctrine, policy documents, and operating instructions. Air Force Leadership Doctrine (AFDD 1-1, 18 Feb 04) says “Leaders are guided by a deeply held sense of honor, not one of personal comfort or uncontrolled selfish appetites. Abuse of alcohol or drugs, sexual impropriety, or other undisciplined behavior is incompatible with military service. It discredits the profession of arms and undermines the trust of the American people. All Airmen maintain proper professional relationships with subordinates, superiors, and peers”. It goes on to say “Leaders understand an organization can achieve excellence when all members are encouraged to excel in a cooperative atmosphere free from fear, unlawful discrimination, sexual harassment, intimidation, or unfair treatment” (AFDD 1-1, 2004, 6-7).

Further, AFPD 36-29 (1 Jun 96), *Military Standards*, says “All Air Force members will refrain from relationships between Air Force members that violate the customary bounds of acceptable behavior, to include fraternization and other unprofessional relationships, due

to the impact on good order, discipline, respect for authority, maintenance of unit cohesion, and mission accomplishment (AFPD 36-29, 1996, 1).

Concerning relationships between civilian employees and Air Force military members, AFI 36-703 (1 Aug 99), *Civilian Conduct and Responsibility*, states “While personal relationships between Air Force employees or between Air Force employees and military members are normally matters of individual choice and judgment, they become matters of official concern when they violate existing law or impede the efficiency of the service”. This instruction defines unprofessional relationships as “those relationships, whether pursued on or off-duty, which detract from the authority of supervisors and managers or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of, favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals, and adversely affect the efficiency of the service” (AFI 36-703, 1999, 5).

The above passages indicate how the Air Force has corporately identified its values and beliefs concerning this topic, and by publishing them in writing has provided an artifact upon which to base the culture. The main source document for describing the instillation process for Air Force values is *The Core Values Strategy* also known as the “*Little Blue Book*”. This publication makes several important points about the Core Values Strategy such as the leader being key to the moral climate of his/her organization; leaders’ status as role models and the requirement to avoid the appearance of improper behavior; and that a culture of conscience is impossible unless all Air Force personnel understand, accept, internalize, and are free to follow the Core Values (excellence, service above self, and integrity). The document also discusses the importance of core value education and training starting in the accession schools and continuing through all levels of instruction to senior professional

military education schools. It states Core Values must also be taught and practiced in the field and makes the point that if we don't live by these values, it will do little good to educate our people. The guidance makes leaders at all levels fully responsible for implementing the Core Values Strategy in their organizations through continuous education of all persons in the operational environment. Most interestingly, it also states "Our first task is to fix organizations; individual character development is possible, but it is not a goal" and then goes on to explain "If a culture of compromise exists in the Air Force, then it is more likely to be the result of bad policies and programs than it is to be symptomatic of any character flaws in our people. Therefore, long before we seek to implement a character development program, we must thoroughly evaluate and, where necessary, fix our policies, processes, and procedures" (Core Values Strategy, 1997, 11). This last statement seems to primarily make the organizational environment responsible for unethical behavior, and further, seems somewhat dichotomous given that it's people who make policy—and that lacking proper character formation, people can make bad policy. If a lower echelon leader waits for policies and programs to be fixed before embarking on a character formation and mentoring process, an entire generation of people will be overlooked in the process.

Discussing the mentoring process, AFI 36-3401 (1 Jun 2000), *Air Force Mentoring*, says mentoring "includes knowledge of the ethics of our military and civil service professions and understanding of the Air Force's Core Values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Commanders and supervisors must encourage subordinates to read and comprehend air and space power literature such as Air Force doctrine and operational war fighting publications and the books in the CSAF Professional Reading Program...[s]uggested reading lists from each of the PME schools are also good sources for

professional readings” (AFI 36-3401, 2000, 2). As a matter of interest, the current Chief of Staff Reading List (16 Apr 04) contains a total of 13 books; of the three leadership and organization books listed, only one deals with character—*American Generalship Character is Everything: The Art of Command*. There is no book listed specifically dealing with the subject of ethics—of course if one was listed, it’s questionable how many people might actually read it. But, again reflecting on Schein’s model for organizational culture and its related embedding mechanisms, culture is shaped by what the leader pays attention to (Schein, 1992, 231).

## Chapter 6

### What is the Approach of Sister Services?

The Army and Marine Corps approaches are similar to the Air Force's except that these two services seem to place more emphasis on individual character development. In FM 22-100, *Army Leadership*, the Army says "People come to the Army with a character formed by their background, religious or philosophical beliefs, education, and experience", but that "character development is a complex, lifelong process". It further states "People of character must possess the desire to act ethically in all situations. One of the Army leader's primary responsibilities is to maintain an ethical climate that supports development of such character" (FM 22-100, 1999, E-9). The Army does also recognize the organization's impact on character building saying "You build character in subordinates by creating organizations in which Army values are not just words in a book but precepts for what their members do", but follows with "You help to build subordinates character by acting the way you want them to act. By holding everyone to the highest standards, the values spread throughout the team, unit, or organization like waves from a pebble dropped into a pond" (FM 22-100, 1999, 2-92). In discussing how leaders shape the ethical environment, this publication says "Ethical conduct must reflect beliefs and convictions, not just fear of punishment...while individuals are responsible for their own character development, leaders are responsible for encouraging, supporting, and assessing the efforts of their subordinates...leaders of character can develop

only through continual study, reflection, experience, and feedback” (FM 22-100, 1999, Appendix E).

The Marine Corps also focuses on individual character development. Marine Corps publication MCWP 6-11, *Leading Marines*, says “Ethical behavior is action taken specifically in observance of a defined standard of conduct. For Marines, ethics are the standards of our Corps. They set forth general guidelines about what we ought to do. As a result, the individual is obligated to apply judgment to a given set of circumstances. Judgment, and therefore choice, is at the center of ethical conduct. Every Marine, regardless of grade, has this responsibility” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 39). It further says “Our obligations as Marines to society are different. Marines adhere to a moral philosophy based on these special obligations that is also separate and more demanding than those of the larger society we serve” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 32). Setting a personal example requires “high moral standards reflecting virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination in personal behavior and in performance” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 36). When Marines “are moral, the moral power that binds them together and fits them for action is given its main chance for success...When people conduct lives built on high moral standards and physical fitness, they tend to develop qualities that produce inspired leadership and discipline” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 58-59). The publication defines moral responsibility as “Personal adherence to high standards of conduct and the guidance of subordinates toward wholesomeness of mind and body” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 94). On the subject of enlisted formation “These men are in the formative period of their lives, and officers owe it to them, to their parents, and to the nation, that when discharged from the services they should be far better men physically, mentally, and morally than they were when they enlisted” (MCWP 6-11, 1995, 98).

The above broad overview of Army and Marine Corps leadership principles makes it clear that both institutions value individual character formation aligned with their respective service values as the bedrock of their service ethos. This formation is the responsibility of leaders at all levels of the organization and offers additional insights to the Air Force leader.

## **Chapter 7**

### **What Should the Air Force Commander Do?**

An understanding of popular culture's influence on sexual ethics, a look at some cultural ethics models, examination of the leader's role in shaping organizational culture, and consideration of methods for instilling values into members of the organization provide the commander with a framework to address the issue of sexual ethics. The question comes back to how can the commander best influence adherence to Air Force standards concerning adultery, fraternization, and unprofessional relationships, relative to sexual conduct, in order to prevent breakdown of unit cohesion and morale, particularly during AEF deployments?

The solution to this problem lies first in recognizing its existence, its serious potential for harm, and its capacity to escalate and thus erode unit cohesion if left unchecked. Second, leaders at all levels must undertake an education program to explain the implications of this problem—that while it is perfectly healthy and normal to have feelings of attraction toward members of the opposite sex, acting upon those feelings in the deployed environment can be detrimental to maintaining the morale and unit cohesion required to effectively execute the mission. Part of this education should focus on how Air Force members aren't only autonomous agents, but are also united to each other through common values (articulated by wear of the uniform)—that one member's violation of standards can negatively impact the rest of their unit (be it shop, flight, squadron, wing, or higher). The earlier discussed ethics

of community model can help in this effort. Finally, leaders should undertake practical actions at deployed locations to reinforce Air Force standards and to assist personnel in adhering to expected conduct.

Recognition of the nature of the problem is the first step towards its solution. Observed leader reaction to this issue has run the spectrum from trivialization, to embarrassment (out of sight, out of mind), to doing nighttime checks of common areas for violations. When one commander was asked by a reporter several years ago about the high pregnancy rate of his unit returning from an overseas deployment, the gist of his comment was “No one should be surprised when healthy men and women behave like healthy men and women”. As this issue involves one of the most private and intimate actions between men and women, many times leaders feel uncomfortable talking about it or they gloss over it hoping it will just go away. Equally as bad is the caricature of the over-zealous commander skulking around camp at night with a flashlight looking for violations in every corner. Another deficiency in recognizing the nature of the problem is focusing only on the physical health and reproductive aspects of the issue. During a deployment to a forward regional combatant command headquarters—a sequestered population of military members with virtually no downtown contact—I observed a large salad bowl of condoms placed on the waiting room coffee table in the medical facility. Recalling Schein’s artifacts, it is not unreasonable to think that soldiers and airmen lining up for immunizations wouldn’t view that action as tacit approval by the organization to engage in sexual activity (I would argue that the condoms sold at the local troop store ensured similar availability as at home station and should have been sufficient). Indeed it seems the problem must be considered in terms of how this activity ethically impacts the community at large. Describing Aristotelian

philosophy in the formation of a community, MacIntyre says the community “would need to recognize a certain set of qualities as virtues and the corresponding set of defects as vices. They would also need however to identify certain types of action as the doing or the production of harm of such an order that they destroy the bonds of community in such a way as to render the doing or achieving of good impossible in some respect at least for some time”. He further says “a violation of the bonds of community by the offender has to be recognized for what it is by the community, if the community is not itself to fail” (MacIntyre, 1984, 142).

The second step in helping to resolve this issue is education. This education should not only be included in basic/technical training programs and professional military education schools, but must also be addressed within the unit by commanders, officers, and senior NCOs—especially squadron and flight leadership—because success with this issue will come to those who are closest to the immediate working and living environment (as long as they know they have the support of the higher echelons). Again feelings of attraction to the opposite sex are perfectly normal, but our military members need to understand why sometimes acting upon them—especially in the deployed environment—can be detrimental to mission effectiveness (short and long term). Like other types of ethical education, examples and case studies should be used to help members analyze the boundaries of right and wrong. (For example, is it okay to go jogging with a married member of the opposite sex?—maybe; What about holding hands with that person while walking to the dining facility?—probably not; Would you be comfortable with your actions back at home station in front of family and friends?—hmm...).

As stated earlier, the ethics of community (which in part views the individual as an office holder) can provide a useful framework for ethical behavior. Major General Perry Smith says “Integrity is not something that can be put on and taken off as we go to and from work” (Smith, 1993, 130); I would add that integrity is not something you take off when you deploy with an AEF. Recognizing the strong pull to act upon mutual feelings of attraction within the professional environment, education should include the idea of sacrifice of personal pleasure for the greater good of the organization. As Martin Cook says “[T]he rhetoric of a strong moral basis of the military profession should be taken as a testimony to real and powerful aspirations...[these aspirations] should be honored however far short of them we sometimes fall in experience...[because they] are the foundation of the military virtues that preserve and sustain the noblest of human values: to serve others even at the cost of personal sacrifice, and to discipline one’s mind and body so that it serves a purpose larger than self and the pursuit of pleasure” (Cook, 2004, 40). To not discuss this issue properly within the organization will result in Air Force members getting their education from elsewhere, which may include church or chapel, but more likely will be from MTV and other popular media.

The role of the leader in shaping the organizational climate is key to the success of any education program. Returning to Schein’s theory of creating organizational culture, Schein refers to primary embedding mechanisms that a leader can use to form or alter the organization’s culture. “If leaders are aware of this process, then being systematic in paying attention to certain things becomes a powerful way of communicating a message, especially if the leaders are totally consistent in their own behavior” (Schein, 1992, 231). As Perry Smith said “If [leaders] have a commitment to integrity, both personal and institutional, if

[they] talk about it, write about it, mean it, and live it, there is a good chance that institutional integrity and personal integrity throughout the organization will remain high.” (Smith, 1993, 96). The discussion of these principles is not meant to gloss over the fact that some Air Force members will more readily accept this message than others. For example, the involuntarily called-up reservist who has just had to leave a high-paying civilian job may prove a tough case to motivate toward additional self-sacrifice. However, the unit-level commander should ascertain who might constitute the particularly difficult cases, attempt to motivate them with the most effective methods of instruction and discipline, and if all else fails isolate them to where they’ll produce the least harm to the rest of the organization (e.g. separate like-minded members into different work centers or staffs). Also organizations with a diverse mix of contractors, government civilians, and military members can produce additional challenges that, due to space limits, cannot be fully addressed in this paper.

Finally there are several practical applications of these embedding mechanisms that the leader may undertake to reinforce Air Force standards and to assist personnel in adhering to expected behavior at deployed AEF locations. These actions start back at home station by setting the tone for deployed operations and dispelling any existing notion of “what happens TDY, stays TDY”—that AEF deployments are not an opportunity to engage in behavior not otherwise acceptable at home station. Members must understand that unacceptable behavior is a form of cheating, not only on spouses and family (as applicable), but also on other members of the organization through a violation of the standards. At the deployed location, the commander should consider limiting (not necessarily stopping) alcohol consumption given a significant number of reported sexual assaults involved the use of alcohol by one or more of those involved. The commander should also consider requiring deployed personnel

to wear either the duty uniform or the official physical training (PT) uniform (once it's issued). This will help members' to maintain their professionalism during those periods when biology may be tempting a person to rationalize away established standards. One recalls the AP photo published from a 2005 New Year's Eve party in Afghanistan; an Army O-6 in uniform is depicted dancing/grinding with an Army E-5 in civilian clothes (ranks and names properly identified in the photo's caption). Additional actions should also be taken to provide members with appropriate means of relieving stress and/or boredom through intramural sports programs, talent shows, physical fitness activities, movie tents, and/or other recreational activities. All of these actions taken collectively address the problem proactively by establishing a culture conducive to Air Force standards of ethical conduct. However, when incidents of standards-violating impropriety do occur, the commander must deal appropriately with those involved (based on the circumstances) by meting out appropriate disciplinary action—this too serves as a cultural embedding mechanism for the rest of the organization.

How much is too much? How far is too far? What is a leader to do? Perhaps a 1997 Air Force Times commentary nailed it best when it said “Zero tolerance is not the solution because it leads to witch hunts, unworkable absolutes, and unreal expectations by the public that misconduct can be stamped out with a simple direct order. The only solution for these problems is good and consistent leadership over many years. Leaders must be clear about military values and adhere to them rigorously. They must not automatically blame their young officers and enlisted troops. They must not overreact. And when things go wrong, they must look to themselves and be willing to take responsibility for their own mistakes” (Pexton, 1997, 54).

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

So what's the bottom line? It is the commander rather than the doctor, lawyer, or chaplain who is responsible for the ethical tone of his unit. As the percentage of women in the Air Force continues to increase at the same time deployed operations become the norm, the pressures on men and women in dealing with sexual attraction in the professional environment will increase. Unless Air Force leaders at all levels address the issue of sexual ethics between Air Force members, popular culture will continue as a dominant force for shaping behavior. Left unchecked, this will result in the degradation of mission effectiveness, morale, and unit cohesion with consequences evidenced only in part by the high-profile cases that make the newspaper. While Air Force policy talks in general terms about this issue, Air Force leaders must take charge of their environments, discuss with and educate their personnel through the framework of concepts such as ethics of community, and use embedding mechanisms to set the organizational tone. This will not only to ensure good order and discipline, but to also ensure all Air Force members can excel in an environment free from fear, harassment, intimidation, or unfair treatment. In summary, the only real solution in dealing with unprofessional sexual conduct is strong and consistent leadership, based on long-standing principles, lasting over a period of many years.

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