

Running Head: THE ARMY SEXUAL HARASSMENT ETHICAL DILEMMA

The Army's Sexual Harassment Policy Creates Ethical Dilemmas for

Female Soldiers

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The Army's Sexual Harassment Policy Created Ethical Dilemmas for Female Soldiers

Though I give the military and the nation credit for trying to identify and eliminate sexual harassment, I feel that once a victim you are placed in a "no win" situation. It is unfortunate that the perpetrator in these acts cannot fathom the ethical dilemmas that they initiate in their victims. The whole process has left me cynical and weary. The mere mention of sexual harassment briefing used to set me off on a tangent. My classmates were privy to this in my base group. I can honestly say that talking with my male peers served to make me feel worse about the choices that I have made, instead of better. Their outlook was totally different than I thought it would be.

What to do, what to do? A male officer makes flattering remarks about my looks, is that sexual harassment? No. I smile and give him a look that says, "Was that flirting or just a compliment?" I dismiss it as just an innocent compliment. Later this same officer makes another remark that is blatantly sexual in nature. Red flags fly, I experience my first ethical dilemma in this situation. Do I let this pass, or do I discuss this with him? What will he think or do if I tell him that his remark is unwanted? I am a specialist new to the Army and he is a Major. I am scared to confront him, but I have gone through the Sexual Harassment Training. I decide to tell him that his comments are inappropriate, and I would appreciate it if he would stop making personal comments towards me. He doesn't stop; his comments only get more graphic. Now I feel that I am in another ethical dilemma. Morally and legally he is wrong, but as in every ethical dilemma, you have to take all knowledge into consideration. It comes down to cause and effect "if I do this, this will happen, if I do that, that will happen." I just want the comments to stop. This is what I know: I know that he has a wife and children. I know that he is well liked

by his peers and seniors. I know that a harassment suit could ruin his career. I know, that even though the regulation claims it will not, that filing a suit could ruin my career. Did I want to be labeled as “One of those women that can’t take a joke” or be ostracized by everyone? Would everyone be angry with me for turning this guy in? I was not prepared to make all of those decisions, especially as a specialist, so I chose to avoid this officer.

The Major finally made a comment to me that was just the last straw. I still did not want to deal with all of the repercussions of making a formal complaint, though the regulation states that there will be no repercussions. I decided that I would follow the lesser route and tell my supervisor, a Lieutenant Colonel. I report all the incidents and explained my reservations about bringing a formal complaint. I was hoping that my supervisor would just speak with the Major and maybe convince him to stop the harassment. The response³ that I received threw me in to a whole new ethical dilemma. My supervisor said, “Oh, that is just the way he is, he doesn’t mean anything by it.” Where do you go from there? I finally, in front of the whole office, loudly confronted the officer again and he finally left me alone. He changed duty stations shortly thereafter eliminating the chance⁴ of him repeating his behavior.

This was not the only time in my career that I experienced this scenario. The next time I was a Staff Sergeant and when I brought the claim to my supervisor, I got the⁴ same response. This time it was a civilian doctor that worked on base. My supervisor said, “That is just his bedside manner.” And laughed it off. I again just avoided that doctor until I left that station.

Did I do the right thing? My classmates here at the Sergeants Major Academy told me that I should have turned in formal complaints. In essence I had subjected other women to possible harassment by these people. That the program can’t work if people don’t step forward and prosecute. I still don’t know if I made the right decision, probably not. At the time, I just

didn't want to be labeled and ostracized. I feel my supervisors failed me, and that the program doesn't work. Now I am a senior leader and I look back at the way I handled these ethical dilemmas and wonder, by not filing a formal complaint, did I leave another female soldier to suffer the same ethical dilemmas? That is something that I have to live with."

In conclusion, everyone faces ethical dilemmas and each person will react differently. How you handle an ethical dilemma will depend on how you were raised, what your natural inclination are, and what you deem that the cause and effect will be. Most times you try to choose the lesser of two evils.