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Ethics Of Relationships Between Soldiers Of Different Ranks

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The fraternization policy is not an ethically sound policy. The fraternization policy is ethically deficient in the prohibited relationship portion of the policy. Prohibited relationships, specifically applies to personal relationships between officer and an enlisted Soldiers. Army Regulation (AR) 600-20 states:

“Certain types of personal relationships between officers and enlisted personnel are prohibited. Prohibited relationships include dating, shared living accommodations other than those directed by operational requirements, and intimate or sexual relationships between officers and enlisted personnel.” (AR 600-20, 2006)

The intent of the policy is to maintain good order and discipline within units. The policy impacts the civil liberties of Soldiers. The policy excessively regulates relationships between officers and enlisted Soldiers. Specifically, the fraternization policy prohibits sexual or intimate relationships between officers and enlisted Soldiers. We are all entitled to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This policy is an example of undue or unjust governmental control. The Army updated AR 600-20 again on 7 June 2006. We identify prohibited relationships by determining if they adversely impact discipline, morale, or the mission.

The issue of a relationship between an officer and an enlisted Soldier is simply an organizational or leadership challenge. The same challenges apply to the relationship between a Lieutenant Colonel and a Captain or a Sergeant Major (SGM) and a Private First Class (PFC). AR 600-20 does not specifically prohibit relationships between a Senior Officer and a junior officer or a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) and a junior enlisted Soldier. This is only a prohibited relationship if it impacts discipline, morale, or the mission. The same should apply to relationships between officers and enlisted Soldiers. Sound leadership and management skills are the only things required to work through this situation. An intimate relationship between a SGM

and a junior Soldier in the same NCO support channel could negatively impact unit morale. A prudent command would simply ensure the junior Soldier and the SGM are not assigned within the same battalion or brigade. The same decision process would work in the situation where an officer has an intimate relationship with an enlisted Soldier. The fraternization policy is too restrictive. It creates an unnecessary disparity in treatment between officers and enlisted Soldiers. These relationships could present a major problem if they were initiated within the same chain of command. The chain of command has the tools available to correct this issue if the relationship impacts good order and discipline.

Leaders are required to treat all Soldiers with fairness, dignity, and respect. We must ensure standards and policies apply consistently, and are enforced across the board. We cannot have a double standard. If the fraternization policy does not apply to a senior NCO in a relationship with a junior enlisted Soldier or a senior officer in a relationship with a junior officer, it should not apply to a captain in a relationship with an NCO. It almost gives the impression that enlisted soldiers are second-class citizens and should not have an option of dating someone in another socioeconomic class. This is a primitive way of managing social class within the Army. Creating disparate social policy is not a primary function of the military. I believe the military has overstepped its bounds by creating such a policy at this point in our history. We have some bright, talented, and intelligent enlisted Soldiers who make major contribution to the Army on a daily basis. They fight and die for their country and Army policy should not prevent them from dating someone who happens to be an officer.

The Army policy was changed because it was considered too liberal compared to the other services. The Army was pressured to change the policy. The policy also applies to relationships between officer and enlisted Soldiers of different services. Our systems easily accommodate

situations where Soldiers of different ranks are married. Generally, leaders and personnel managers are able to identify appropriate units or sections of assignment that would eliminate adverse effects on discipline, morale or the mission. Army leaders make these types of decisions on a daily basis. The standard supplied a grandfather status to the officer and enlisted Soldiers who were already married. AR 600-20 also established a suspense date of March 1, 2000 for Soldiers to comply with the regulation. The policy gave Soldiers two options; they could get married or stop the relationship. The regulation also addresses the situation of two dating enlisted Soldiers when one attends OCS. The couple only has two options; get married within one year of the start date of OCS, or permanently terminate the relationship. This appears to be an intrusion on basic American civil liberties. How would Soldiers in this situation negatively impact discipline, morale, or a unit's mission? This is another reason why I say the policy is not ethically sound. The enlisted Soldier may have played a central role in motivating, assisting, and encouraging the other Soldier to reach the goal of OCS attendance. It's not appropriate for an Army policy to dictate or put a mandate on the future status of this relationship. That is a deeply personal issue and should be decided between the two Soldiers involved. What if they had children together prior to OCS but they were not ready to get married. I don't believe the Army should influence such things through broad policies.

The regulation does not specifically prohibit marriage between an officer and enlisted Soldier. The regulation prohibits fraternization or intimacy leading up to the marriage. I have heard of two seemingly aggressive ways to bypass the policy. I have heard of a situation where an officer and an enlisted Soldier wanted to date each other. The enlisted Soldier decided to leave the Army continued a relationship with an officer. The two got married and the enlisted Soldier reentered active duty. This was an unnecessary hardship on the Soldiers. Another option available to

Soldiers is to just get married without an intimate relationship preceding the marriage. This is an unrealistic expectation for most people to comply with. If I could choose one word to describe this policy, it would be hypocrisy. There are numerous officers currently serving who are married to enlisted Soldiers. These same leaders may serve in positions that require them to enforce the standard and prevent the same type of relationship that they themselves enjoy.

Soldiers who fail to comply with the policy could face a wide range of consequences. Leaders may reassign, reprimand or counsel the Soldiers and issue a no contact order. If the officer and enlisted Soldier are from different commands, the commander in each command could counsel the Soldiers. Both Soldiers are equally responsible for the relationship. AR 600-20 states, "The senior member is generally in the best position to terminate or limit the extent of the relationship." Commanders also have the option to impose adverse action. Adverse actions could include adverse evaluation reports, non-judicial punishment, or bar to reenlistment. Other severe punishments include demotion, denial of promotion, separation or court martial. Any of these options would be appropriate if the relationship had a negative impact on the unit and the Soldiers continued with the relationship. These are drastic measures to take against Soldiers if their relationship does not have a negative impact on morale, discipline or the mission of their units.

In conclusion, the fraternization policy is an unethical, oppressive and hypocritical policy. The policy establishes a double standard. This double standard should not exist in the Army of today. Unit commanders have several administrative, and punitive tools available to deal with any relationship that negatively impacts the unit or the mission. We cannot measure the effects or impact of the improper relationship policy. A number of officers and enlisted Soldiers are married and have been for many years. They function on a day-to-day basis without causing

turmoil within their respective units. There is no need for the hypocrisy to exist. Simple management practices easily mitigate the potential issues and concerns that go along with any relationship. We all have a right to the pursuit to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Army policies should not inhibit that right. We have bright, talented, and intelligent enlisted Soldiers who make major contributions to the success of the Army. They are first-class citizens and we should treat them as such.