

**SEXIST PREJUDICE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY
RELATED TO: THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

SGM KATHY S. PHILLIPS

L564 ETHICS THOUGHT PAPER

SMsgt HERRICK - R04

16 NOVEMBER 2005

SEXIST PREJUDICE IN THE ARMY:
RELATED TO: THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Sexist is a prejudice against gender. Prejudice is an attitude of stereotype against a group of people. Young women do not join the United States (U.S.) Army to prove anything about their gender role; but for patriotism of their country and to gain career opportunities. Yet, the Army's inequality of choice relates to gender and the role of women. It took from the 1700's to 1948 for all male Congresses, after much debate, to officially, admit women to the Army with limitations to the female gender role concerning career choice and number allowed. Congressional Policy Makers and Military Leaders who assisted in these policies, would like us to believe equal opportunity for women is improving and that we are making headway in reducing sexist prejudices of career opportunities; not so! It will only be equal when every person regardless of gender has equal choice. Women have been fighting sexist prejudices equal rights in the military for 200 years.

Of all the nations, the United States military is the most restrictive on women's roles. Like the great women warriors of Europe and Asia before them, American pioneer women with fighting skill volunteered to serve in the Colonial militia. These women refused to accept that their service to this country, and their patriotism to fight for its freedoms were not a needed service, simply because they were women. They went to great lengths to disguise their sex, and fought along side of the men. Their actions were as heroic as any man and without their service as spies, nurses, soldiers, and ammunition makers, wars would have been lost. Women are and have been a vital necessity and asset to the military. Yet, history had not counted them, almost forgot them, and most all of them, not recognized without a fight before the Congress and President. As late as the Vietnam War, the military did not count the women. A sexist prejudice that would discriminatively, leave out a vital part of our military history and breed a prejudice

attitude among male Soldiers, regarding the abilities of women Soldiers.

Sexual prejudice attitudes and cultural values of certain groups of male Soldiers regarding the role of female Soldiers, keeps the U. S. Army from being all that it could be. It stems from a long history of the Army holding women into submissive and limited roles instead of warrior roles..

In the first phase of the SGM Academy, when asked what was a “needs improved” area in the group dynamics of the first phase. My response, “A greater female presence,” as this would have improved the gender mix of insights into the military issues we discussed. One of the male Soldiers in the room quickly responded, “Hey this IS a man’s Army, always has been a man’s Army and always will be! You females just need to get used to it and accept it.” This SGM went on to say he had been in all male units his whole career, and would not know how to deal with a female.

He is a shining example of a cultural stigma of certain male groups the Army has nurtured because of the limited role of women. Following the Tailhook incident, the Navy Secretary O’Keefe admitted, “We know that the larger issue is a long standing cultural problem which allowed demeaning behavior and attitudes toward women in uniform to exist...”

It is a given, whoever has the power (majority) can control outcomes. The majority develop an attitude of being superior. These superior attitudes have reeked havoc on military missions and destroyed leader’s lives. Many of the historical roles of women have demanded women’s obedience to a majority of male Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). This lead to untold numbers of co-horsed sexual favors, sexual misconduct, and out right sexual harassment. Official research estimates over 70 percent of harassment goes unreported. I know it is much greater. Fellow female soldiers express their personal violations to each other, but not to the majority of the crowd within which they exist and work, because the

majority is male. There is a fear of speaking up in the majority male group and being labeled. Female Soldiers have learned that retaliation by the majority can be long lasting, especially if it includes your chain of command, because they control your Army career. Women endure the “good old boy” system, to attempt to fit in to preserve their career, even when sexist behavior and harassment hurts deeply.

Saying all this, how do we effect change in the sexist prejudice system of the U.S. Army? First, change to the military cultural stigma regarding gender abilities, starts with complete equality for female Soldiers at the Recruiters office. New Congressional policies that continue to limit women’s roles and increasing Ethical Awareness behavior training (AR 600-20) have not been effective in a military society with deep-rooted cultural stigmas. Ethical training has enlightened and educated the population, but has also driven some male soldiers to be more discreet and “under the table” with bad behavior. Policies can effect change to the outward behavior related to its consequences, but they cannot effect change to the inherent values of some male Soldiers when inequality is the norm. The limited opening of career fields to meet Army recruitment quotas caused a greater resentment in what had traditionally been male units, because the old value system was still in place. Change that is abrupt, without the buy-in of the majority has never proved to have positive outcomes. Female Soldiers found themselves unwelcome in a hostile environment. The Army labeled them as having “issues” in combat. The truth is that the majority male units had “issues.” They did not know how to meet the needs, or understand the mindset of the female Soldiers in combat, as well as not being prepared for the change.

Second, the U.S. Army has a great need for the ethical Leadership of all men who value human beings as equals, and treat each gender with respect for what they bring to the team. Unfortunately, there are still certain groups of men that are not willing to make a change in

attitude regarding female roles. Young soldiers emulate what they learn from a Leader's behavior and attitude.

Third, female soldiers must be empowered to speak up against sexist prejudice behavior without retaliation. The senior female Soldiers are the most powerful role models to empower them and encourage other females to join the Army. Most have already endured years of the consequences of not speaking out for change. Rosabeth Kanter, Professor of Sociology at Harvard and author of 16 books, states that women lacked equality with men through the years because of the fear of speaking up. Mostly, because they were "shot down" by a man in their hierarchy, and could see no way to achieve their goals through the many levels of male bureaucracy and "good old boys club" that guard leadership positions from women. This is exactly what has been happening in the US military for two centuries.

In the movie G.I. Jane, the Congressional debate to give women complete freedom of choice, rested on whether "a" woman could endure the hardship of training as men. This was the wrong approach. The right approach is to set the physical and scholastic standards for all courses – let everyone equally compete for these positions. Then it is not about women against men, but about everyone equally in the team achieving the same standards. This would do two things 1) make it apparent that some women are not going to make it in combat units and 2) create camaraderie in mixed gender teams at the end of the day.