

Testimony on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” by Gary J. Gates
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I am a demographer and Senior Research Fellow at the Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy, UCLA School of Law. Prior to taking my position at the Williams Institute three years ago, I served as a Research Associate at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC. I have studied the geographic, economic, and demographic characteristics of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) population for more than fifteen years and have a particular expertise in analyses of same-sex couples using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

As a demographer, I have a particular interest in counting people. Under the constraints of “Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell” (DADT), it is virtually impossible to easily enumerate LGB people currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Because the policy clearly restricts military personnel from discussing their sexual orientation, it would be impossible to conduct a random survey of military personnel that asks them to reveal their sexual orientation. However, data from Census 2000 coupled with standard statistical methods provides a way to estimate the number of lesbian and gay individuals serving on active duty, in the ready reserve, and veterans. This was the focus of my research brief entitled “Gay Men and Lesbians in the Military: Estimates from Census 2000”.ⁱ

A large body of research has shown that same-sex “unmarried partners” identified in the U.S. Census are primarily composed of lesbian and gay couples. The Census includes questions about both current and past military service. My estimates for the military service rates of LGB men and women are based on these responses and assume that the military service patterns of men and women in same-sex couples are the same as those for the entire LGB population. I should note that this likely provides a conservative estimate with regard to active duty service since it seems reasonable to assume that single gay men and lesbians would be more likely than their coupled counterparts to serve on active duty. This is true for heterosexual men and women and further, the constraints of

the DADT policy would place an added burden on coupled individuals who would be forced to hide the nature of their relationship.

My analyses provided a range of estimates using various statistical assumptions, but the mid-range estimates suggest that more than 36,000 gay men and lesbians are serving on active duty, representing 2.5% of active duty personnel. When the ready reserve is included, nearly 65,000 men and women in uniform are likely gay or lesbian, accounting for 2.8% of military personnel. Other key findings of this research brief include:

- There are nearly one million lesbian and gay veterans in the United States.
- These lesbian and gay veterans have served in all military eras in the later part of the 20th century.
- Military service rates for women in same-sex couples far exceed rates for other women in every military era of the later 20th century.
 - Nearly 10% of women in same-sex couples who were age-eligible report serving in Korea, compared with less than 1% of other women.
 - In the Vietnam era, 6% of age-eligible women in same-sex couples served, compared to only 0.8% of other women.
 - In the most recent service period available in these data (from 1990 to 2000), service rates among age-eligible women in same-sex couples are more than three times higher than rates among other women.
- Women in same-sex couples report longer terms of service than other women. Among all women age 18–67 who report military service, nearly 82% of those in same-sex couples. Less than 74% of other women report serving more than two years.

Drawing on this research, I have also considered how service patterns of gay men might change if the DADT policy were lifted.ⁱⁱ My research shows that the estimated proportion of gay men in the military falls below the estimated proportion of gay men in the general population (the proportion of lesbians among women in the military exceeds their proportion in the general population). An estimated 1.2% of men on active duty are

gay or bisexual, implying that there are approximately 14,500 gay/bisexual men on active duty.

In the absence of DADT, it seems reasonable to assume that the proportion of these men in the military would eventually mirror that of the population. A nationally representative government sponsored survey (the National Survey of Family Growth, 2002) found that 4% of men identified as gay or bisexual. If that figure held among those on active duty, then there would be approximately 48,500 gay/bisexual men or an additional 34,000 gay/bisexual men among those on active duty. Using the same procedure for men in the ready reserve implies that an additional 7,000 gay/bisexual men would serve. All told, this suggests that if lifting DADT restrictions raises the portion of gay men in the military to that within the population, then the military could raise their numbers by an estimated 41,000 men (see attached Williams Institute press release).

I have also considered how lifting DADT restrictions could affect retention of military personnel.ⁱⁱⁱ A recent survey of LGB veterans found that when asked about why they left the military, 20% said that it was because they could not be open about their sexual orientation. My estimates suggest that by adding exiting active duty and ready reserve service personnel who would otherwise stay in military service to those who are discharged under DADT, the military would retain at least 3,000 trained personnel per year in the absence of DADT.

To summarize, my research has focused on developing credible estimates of the size of the LGB population in the U.S. military. Using those estimates, I have also considered the impact that lifting DADT would have on recruitment and retention. I find that:

- An estimated 65,000 LGB people are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- In the absence of DADT, I would expect that an additional 41,000 gay and bisexual men might eventually join the military.
- The military could expect an additional 3,000 personnel to retain their positions each year if they could serve openly and not be subject to DADT restrictions.

ⁱ http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411069_GayLesbianMilitary.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/press/PressReleases/ImpactOfLiftingDontAskDontTell.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/publications/EffectsOfDontAskDontTellOnRetention.pdf>