

## Wanted: Homosexuals who know how to behave

**■ OUR OPINION:** The U.S. military's policy on homosexuality is inherently prejudiced

America loves celibate homosexuals. After all, they're non-threatening and add a certain color to social, academic and professional environments.

Heterosexuals got to espouse how liberal and hip they are by talking about their "gay friend, Michael" or "Sue, who happens to be a lesbian" without their buttons being pushed.

It's only when gay men and lesbians actually want to live as gay men and lesbians (i.e. love someone of the same sex, have sex, kiss and hold hands in public, talk about their spouses, etc.) that many people become uncomfortable, disgusted or afraid.

This gulf between theoretical and actual homosexuality (and America's discomfort with the latter) forms the foundation of the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy.

For the uninitiated, the official policy for voluntary enlistment in the armed forces says it is OK for soldiers to be gay or lesbian as long as they don't acknowledge it.

Currently, Navy Lt. Richard Watson is taking the U.S. government to court, after the Navy tried to discharge him for telling a commanding officer that he is gay. He can stay, of course, as long as he swears that he does not engage in "homosexual behavior."

Watson's lawyer is arguing before a federal judge that the military's policy violates Watson's constitutional rights of free speech, due process and equal pro-

tection. Judge Thomas Zilly is expected to rule on the case within the next few weeks.

In the meantime, Watson, who wants to be a submarine commander, is pushing papers at his desk. The Navy has said it does not discriminate because Watson can be openly gay at his desk, just not 20,000 leagues under the sea.

Why? Because Watson's sexual orientation would make the men under his charge uncomfortable, and his presence would undermine "group cohesiveness and morale."

The irony is that if Watson has just kept his mouth shut about which gender he is attracted to (something that would eliminate 90 percent of barracks conversations if it were applied to straight soldiers), he would have his command. He would still be gay, of course, but nobody would have to hear about it; he would be gay in theory.

The military policy endorses prejudice. It says, in effect, that the U.S. government cannot denounce bigotry because the bigots won't go for it.

Can we imagine applying the same argument to racism and sexism? The military did, actually. But eventually, it made the morally right choice, and the armed forces and the nation are better for it.

Unlike every other minority group in this country, gay men and lesbians are asked to deny an essential part of who they are to pursue their career of choice. They are rewarded for not disrupting other people's comfort zones.

It's no surprise that the military feels that the policy is just. America does, too.



## Abortion debate still dividing the nation

**M**ention the word abortion in almost any public forum, and you might find yourself right smack in the middle of an impassioned discussion.

As a pro-life person (gasp! choke — cough, sputter!), I don't usually initiate discussions on the subject simply because I, well, I know that I am usually outnumbered and don't feel it necessary to be verbally crucified on a routine basis.

I understand the concerns and arguments of the pro-choice position.

A pro-choice person will usually say that the government and other opposing groups have no business interfering with a woman's right to make decisions concerning her own body.

Another pro-choice point is that abortion is a medically safe procedure conducted by professionally trained medical people.

Abortion is also legal. The Supreme Court made it the law of the land in 1973. Since then, Americans have mandated this law through majority opinion.

Finally, there is still debate as to whether a fetus should be considered human, instead of the "fetal tissue" or embryo or any other number of labels used to define its development at any given time.

This brings us to the heart of the pro-life position.

If the fetus is indeed not human, then there is no longer a debate for pro-lifers.

However, modern science clearly reveals that the fetus is human.

Human male sperm each have 23 chromosomes, as does the female egg. After a single sperm wiggles its way into the egg, the combination is no longer two separate units of 23 chromosomes each, but a brand-new entity containing 46 complete chromosomes. In other words, it has all the DNA coding that gives us our physical characteristics.

If this zygote is allowed to develop and mature, it will come screaming and kicking into this world in about nine months.

But, wait a minute, I called it a zygote, didn't I? Well, yes. And since we are talking about human reproduction here, let's go one step further and call it a human zygote.

After all, it's not a banana zygote, or a Tasmanian Devil zygote.

It is human in every way, except that at this early stage it certainly isn't recognizable as human.

But it is a brand-new life form. A human life form. A human being.

The only difference between a zygote and you and I is that we (young and old alike) are, for the most part, fully developed. We are out of the womb. We are "viable."

As you may recall, the Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision said that abortions were to be allowed only in the first two trimesters (up to six months) of the pregnancy, allowing later term abortions only if the mother's life was in danger.

The question is, why is the fetus considered non-human in those first six months, then suddenly human, or viable, in the last three months of gestation?

Does the fetus go through some magic transformation that allows it to be called "human" a split second after midnight on the evening of the sixth month? For that matter, is the fetus any less human as it travels through the birth canal just before being born?

No, it isn't less human. More frail and perhaps unable to survive outside the womb after only six months of development, yes. But the fetus is just as human at 24-weeks-old as it is at nine months.

In the 1994-95 Yellow Pages, the All Women's Health Services in Eugene advertised "abortion services to 21 weeks." In the 1996 pages, the clinic has a new ad that says "1st and 2nd Trimester Abortion Services." Following the guidelines of the law, the clinic can legally abort an unborn baby that has developed a full six months in the mother's womb. Keep in mind a fetus already has brain waves after a mere six to eight weeks after conception.

By the end of the first trimester (11-12 weeks), the unborn baby already has eyes, fingers and toes, a beating heart, a working brain, and a functioning nervous and respiratory system. It moves, and it can feel pain.

It is a functioning human being, although still quite dependent on its mother for food, shelter and survival.

This is why the abortion debate isn't just a matter of a woman's right to choose. There is another life at stake. A human being that has a right to live.

As far as abortion being a medically safe procedure, it certainly isn't safe for the fetus. The truth is, many women die every year from botched abortions (see *The Register-Guard*, Aug. 9, 1995, p.10A).

Finally, we have the legality question. Yes, abortion is legal. The majority of America wants it that way — otherwise it would change.

However, just because a law exists doesn't make it right or truthful. Hitler and the entire nation of Germany convinced us of that.

Roe vs. Wade, in essence, declared unborn human beings to be "non-persons," much as the slave laws up to the end of the Civil War declared African-Americans to be less-than-human and mere "property of their masters."

And like early American slavery, the abortion issue is something that will continue to divide our nation.

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