

Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, Judith Reppy, eds.. *Beyond Zero Tolerance*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. viii + 300 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8476-9316-0.

Reviewed by Regina Titunik

Published on H-Minerva (October, 2000)

Discrimination and Military Culture

As compilations of collected articles go, Katzenstein's and Reppy's *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discrimination in Military Culture* is admirably coherent. The twelve chapters and the lengthy introduction by the editors consistently deal with the main theme expressed in the title of the book. The contributors consider the disparity between military regulations which prohibit bias and mandate "zero tolerance" for sexual harassment, on the one hand, and the apparent persistence of discriminatory practices in the military, on the other. Attention is given to racial, gender and sexual orientation issues, but discrimination against women in the military is the main focus of the book as a whole. The essays address the question of why rules proscribing hostile behavior toward perceived out-groups are seemingly ignored and transgressed in an institutional environment otherwise characterized by a high-level of obedience to rules. Most of the chapters explain this inconsistency by pointing to a military culture which condones and promotes bigotry and animosity toward women. The institutional culture of the military, then, evidently does not support the official military policies prohibiting discriminatory behavior. The overall conclusion of the book, taken as a whole, is that laws and formal regulations do not go far enough to restrain discrimination in the military, rather a fundamental reorientation of military culture is required.

In many respects this is a very fine collection of essays. Much useful and fascinating information is presented regarding military dress codes, cross-national patterns of diversity in military forces, attitudes toward minority women in World War II, the changing status of military families and so on. But the work as a whole is significantly flawed insofar as its basic premise is never examined in any depth or convincingly proven. For the most part, it is simply presupposed or merely asserted that the military is a white, male, heterosexual culture inherently hostile to minorities, women and gays. The distortions resulting from this unexamined assumption are particularly egregious in relation to the issue of racial discrimination.

Many of the book's contributors, insofar as they simply accept the book's main premise, suppose that racial bigotry is pervasive or at least prevalent in the military. Significant work on blacks in the military, however, calls this assumption into question. Charles Moskos and John Sibley Butler have shown, for example, that blacks generally excel in the military environment and find more satisfaction and success in the military than in many civilian occupations. No attempt, however, is made to engage or refute this substantial and creditable research. Rather some of the authors, such as Elisabeth L. Hillman in her otherwise fascinating essay on dress codes in the military, simply assume that the more a service mem-

ber deviates from the white, male heterosexual standard, the more this individual is viewed with suspicion (p. 68). The inference drawn by a number of the authors is that black women must be particularly marginalized in the military culture since they deviate from the standard in two respects.

In her article calling for subgroup analysis of black women in the military -- "Intersectionality: A Necessary Consideration for Women of Color in the Military?" -- Gwendolyn Hall briefly refers to the results of a study that shows that 47 percent of black women in the military are satisfied with their work as opposed to 25 percent of black women in civilian jobs (p. 151), a rather significant statistic that neither Hall nor any of the other authors attempt to square with the view that black women experience particular difficulties in the military. Indeed Hall goes so far as to suggest that the lower attrition rates for black women as compared with other groups in the military can be explained by the likelihood that black women "have children for whom they are the sole support" (p. 151). This explanation seems to me to slight the achievements of black servicewomen. It is conceivable that black women have actually performed superbly well in the military. We should both acknowledge their achievements and consider the possibility that the military culture is a complex environment aspects of which make these achievements possible.

Regarding the situation of military women generally, the notion that the military represents a masculine "warrior culture" which necessarily promotes aggression and hostility to women is repeated as an article of faith throughout the book without ever being adequately scrutinized or explained. The chapter by Madeline Morris, substantially drawn from her 1996 article "By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture," exemplifies this tendency to unreflectively resort to stereotypes of aggressive masculinity when talking about military culture. Morris presents data

which shows that while rates of all types of violent crime -- including rape -- in the military are lower than civilian rates, military rates of rape are diminished less from civilian levels than other types of violent crimes. She then undertakes to explain the cause of this "rape differential." The possibility that rapes are not as under-reported in the military as in civilian life is discounted by Morris on the basis of a quote from Navy staff level advisors who evidently "perceive that most female victims would not report a rape" (p. 166). She attempts to shore up this rather insubstantial evidence by observing that until 1992, the military excluded marital rapes in their statistics while civilian statistics included marital rape, thus the military figures are estimated as conservatively as civilian figures (p. 166).

It is not demonstrated, however, that inclusion of marital rape figures make any significant difference in the civilian statistics. Be that as it may, Morris dismisses other factors which might explain her findings and argues that the culture of the masculinist military accounts for the rape differential. She claims that the military culture encourages attitudes which correlate with a rape propensity. These attitudes include "dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks" the internalization of which result in the rejection of "characteristics such as compassion, understanding and sensitivity"(p. 174). The idea that the military seeks to instill these qualities and exclude sensitivity, understanding and compassion might come as something of a surprise to anyone who has gone through basic training. The values of obedience, submission and teamwork -- not independence, assertiveness, etc. -- are drummed into recruits.

In their fine essay "Diminishing Core Values: The Consequences for Military Culture of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue,'" which will be discussed shortly, Michelle Benecke, Kelly Corbett and C. Dixon Osburn note that West Point plebes

must commit the following words to memory which express the core qualities the army expects: "courage, candor, compassion and competence" (p. 216, my emphasis). Any serious consideration of military culture must take these explicit expressions of that culture's values into account. Far from rejecting compassion, the army considers this a core quality. Indeed it is absolutely necessary for soldiers to be sensitive and compassionate to each other within a unit precisely because group cohesion is essential to organized warfare.

In contrast to the prevailing assumption of this book, the military culture in many ways discourages the so-called masculinist characteristics of independence, assertiveness and aggression because these qualities conflict with the communitarian values promoted within the military. Rather than getting rid of "all traces of the female," as Carol Burke expresses it in her chapter on military folk culture (p. 60), military training actually fosters qualities which are stereotypically associated with femininity including compassion, protectiveness, self-sacrifice, obedience and submissiveness. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that when individual warrior battle shifted to massed infantry battle in both ancient Greece and China, warfare was depicted in these ancient civilizations as a feminine activity in order to facilitate the movement away from "the celebration of masculine courage and strength" and toward a "model of feminine obedience and compliance."

The suppression of qualities associated with individual hero battle and the calling forth of qualities conducive to discipline and teamwork continues to be characteristic of the military (the more individualistic culture of the fighter pilots is an exception to this general rule). To be sure idealizations of masculinity are evident in the military culture, but there are also countervailing values which include, in addition to the "feminine" qualities I have listed, the value of merit and the

priority of rank over race or gender. It is only in view of the complex combination of competing values in the military culture that we can account for the varied experiences of women and minorities and give due consideration to their successes as well as to the obstacles they encounter.

The article on the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy by Benecke, Corbett and Osburn refreshingly reverses the pattern of the other chapters. Rather than showing that an equitable law conflicts with a discriminatory culture, this article takes the view that an inequitable law -- the policy on gays in the military -- conflicts with the military's estimable value standards. Specifically, the authors contend that this policy, which encourages deceit and subterfuge, undermines core military values such as "loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honesty, integrity and personal courage" (p. 216). The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy is inconsistent with the promotion of trust and thus necessarily weakens the core values of the military culture. I was also particularly impressed by Paul Roush's essay "A Tangled Webb the Navy Can't Afford." Roush provides a systematic, point-by-point refutation of James Webb's well-known arguments against women in the military. The tone of the article is a bit strident, but the points are well made. In addition Roush shows that Webb's brand of macho posturing and his politics of resentment reflect only a marginal element of military culture, albeit this element is having an increasingly pernicious influence on military hearts and minds (p. 82).

Interestingly, in significant respects, Webb's myth of the macho military is a mirror version of the feminist view of the masculinist military presented in many of the articles in this volume. Both outlooks simplistically view the military as fundamentally a masculine institution and both outlooks must be questioned in order to achieve a more balanced and accurate understanding of military culture.

Notes

[1]. Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler. *All That We Can Be*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.

[2]. See Mark Edward Lewis. *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 112, and Plato *The Republic of Plato* Allan Bloom trans. New York: Basic Books, 1968.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net and MINERVA: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military. All rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given. For other permission contact MinervaCen@aol.com.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-minerva>

Citation: Regina Titunik. Review of Katzenstein, Mary Fainsod; Reppy, Judith, eds. *Beyond Zero Tolerance*. H-Minerva, H-Net Reviews. October, 2000.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4590>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.