

ADDENDUM TO "PRIVACY IN THE PERSON-ENVIRONMENT TRANSACTION:  
IMPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE"

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This addendum to the above review addresses the report entitled "Canadian Forces (CF) Internal Survey on Homosexual Issues," prepared by Urban Dimensions Group, Inc., concerning the attitudes of members of the Canadian Forces about the possible enrolment in the Forces of known homosexuals. Some of the shortcomings as well as the strengths of the report are pointed out, and some additional interpretations are presented on the basis of the survey data summarized in the report. I have not seen the complete file of data tables that is available as an addendum to the report.

General Comments

The survey shows careful planning and analysis. The subject sample is a reasonably good approximation of the population in question (CF members), there is a wide range of topics including both factual and attitudinal items, and two standard scales as well as interviews with focus groups were used in addition to the survey instrument. The use of frequency tables as well as inferential statistics (including multivariate analysis) adds to the comprehensibility and reliability of the interpretations. All of these are strengths of the research project; the fact that I will point out shortcomings does not detract from these strengths, and my critique should be read with that in mind.

There are a few problematic issues that are relevant to all of the results and interpretations, and that must therefore be considered in relation to the report as a whole. These are: artifacts of the research situation, question specificity, and respondent characteristics.

## Research Artifacts

Artifacts are factors that can affect the results of research (either the data -- in this case, the survey responses -- or the interpretations of the data) but that are not intended to be variables of the research design. A characteristic of the research procedure can be either an independent variable or an artifact, as a function of the researcher's awareness and/or manipulation. For example, it may be that the rank of the interviewer administering a survey affects the respondent's answers: e.g., the respondent is likely to give conformist responses if the survey is presented by an individual of higher rank. The researcher may be unaware of, or ignore, this possibility, in which case the increase in conformity is a research artifact; or may systematically manipulate or otherwise control for the rank difference between the subject and the interviewer. The difference is the awareness of the possible distortion of the results because of artifacts.

The results of the current survey may have been influenced by artifacts in the following categories.

1. Ecological Validity. The term ecological validity usually refers to the degree to which the environment and materials of an experiment or a test resemble the real-life (i.e., nonexperimental, everyday) situations to which the study attempts to predict. Thus, for example, questions have been raised about the ecological validity of memory experiments using nonsense syllables in a laboratory setting if the goal is to identify factors that will affect students' memory for material presented in the classroom.

In the case of the survey, ecological validity is in some ways extremely high. That is, the subjects are actual serving members of the Forces and the test was administered at their base. However, it is unclear how

artificial the actual testing situation was. Obviously, it would be preferable to do some testing in the types of settings to which the questions refer: at the worksite, in living quarters, in recreational facilities, and so on. In measuring attitudes toward potential colleagues on the job, the responses of subjects tested where they normally work may be more valid than those obtained in a special office set aside for that purpose of testing.

More importantly, the Armed Forces engage in activities and operate in settings some of which are far different from the usual testing situation. These include not only locations that are geographically remote and climatically unusual, but also the "work" sites of operational units and individuals -- ships at sea, aircraft flying frequent missions, ground combat arm encampments. Again, administering the attitude survey in an office on base may represent low ecological validity if one wishes to predict behaviour toward homosexual soldiers with whom one is sharing a cockpit or foxhole. The highest level of ecological validity for the Forces would be a setting with emotional similarity to the situations where interpersonal privacy issues may loom largest: i.e., in operational units under stressful field (maneuver or combat) conditions. It may be noted, for example, that in the survey acceptance of homosexuals was found to be lower among naval and ground operations personnel and higher among air force and base personnel (Section 4.15). For these reasons, it would have been very informative to administer the survey to Canadian personnel serving in the Persian Gulf area and it is regrettable that a decision was made to pass up the opportunity.

2. Impression Management. Many studies in psychology have addressed to issue of impression management, which in this context means the

desire of research participants to show themselves in a good light. This tendency is not necessarily obviated by assuring the subject of anonymity.

The face validity of the survey questions is one factor here. The thrust of most of the attitude questions is obvious, and there is no attempt to make it less explicit. It is quite clear, for example, that many of the questions on the survey were essentially asking the respondent to characterize himself or herself as being tolerant vs. intolerant of known homosexual colleagues; in Canadian society, tolerance is a desirable trait and intolerance a derogated one. Respondents would therefore be likely to answer in the tolerant direction. Similarly, the real meaning of several of the questions was whether the respondent would accept military discipline and obey new policies in regard to homosexuals in the Forces. Clearly, career Forces personnel would perceive an affirmative attitude to this type of question as more socially desirable than a negative one. Note that survey respondents with more service and higher rank seemed more tolerant of homosexuals in the CF, but on a more subtle measure indicated that they would be less likely to advise others to join the Forces if the current policy were changed (Sections 4.12, 4.14).

Evaluation apprehension refers to the fact that research participants may be worried about a negative evaluation based on their responses, which may affect their access to some reward. When the subjects believe that their responses will be held in confidence by a researcher who is not connected with the organizational hierarchy, evaluation apprehension is much reduced. Nevertheless, subjects may be suspicious that professions of anonymity might be deceptive. Such suspicions may have existed here, given that the tests were administered on base, by the Base Personnel Selection Officer. Under such conditions, at least some respondents may

have worried that "wrong" answers could affect their military career. It would have been helpful to perform a check on their belief in this regard.

The last issue in this category is that of subject expectancy. How did the subjects interpret the purpose of the survey? Just as one possibility, some of them may have thought that the results of the study would affect the future policy of the Forces concerning homosexuality -- e.g., if the survey found no evidence of strong opposition to the inclusion of known homosexuals, the Forces may decide to abandon their current policies. People who took this point of view, and who would prefer the *status quo*, might tilt their answers to appear more negative than their feelings really are. Such individuals, for example, may feel some distaste toward working and living with homosexuals, but might be willing to do so if necessary; on the survey, however, they may indicate a complete rejection of the idea so as to discourage possible change in the direction of greater official acceptance.

### 3. Question Specificity

The level of abstraction at which questions are posed is a more important issue than one may think. It is well known that attitude surveys are often quite poor predictors of actual behaviour. Some of the reasons for this are obvious, and are quite relevant in the military setting: no matter how much one may dislike homosexuals (or members of a particular ethnic group, or those having any other characteristic), if the rules, command structures, and sanctions make the expression of such dislike costly, the likelihood of negative behaviour will decrease.

Another aspect of this slippage between measured attitudes and observed actions is the difference in their relative specificity. Behaviours are always specific and concrete within a situation, toward a particular other person (or a few people), in a particular time period, and

so on. Attitudes, in contrast, may be assessed in either a global or a specific way. If the attitude scales are phrased at too high a level of abstraction, they may lose immediate relevance to behaviour settings and thus become non-predictive. So, for example, it may be more valid to present a specific scenario of a supervisory problem situation and ask the respondent to describe how he or she would deal with a homosexual superior or subordinate in that situation, than to ask generally whether the respondent would supervise a homosexual fairly or obey orders from one (the alternative approach would also make the "right" answer less obvious, thus decreasing research artifacts as well). Similarly, asking specific questions about particularly sensitive interactions such as blood transfusions or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation may be more useful than an abstract question about accepting or rendering first aid.

#### 4. The Subject Sample

Although there was obviously a serious attempt made to get a wide distribution of respondents, departures from representativeness are in a troublesome direction. Senior officers and noncommissioned officers are more likely to accept the presence of homosexuals (Sections 4.12, 4.14), for several reasons. To begin with, senior officers and NCOs by definition are older than groups with shorter service and lower rank. Sexual identity issues are likely to be less salient and urgent to older people than to younger, particularly when the latter group -- as in the case of young enlisted personnel -- is partly comprised of individuals who may be still in the throes of adolescent concerns and conflicts about sex. More specific to the military environment is the fact that higher ranking personnel tend to have more privacy in work and living areas, so that invasions of privacy are not as troublesome or unavoidable for them. Last, they have been more thoroughly acculturated to, and have more thoroughly

accepted the general value of, carrying out policy decisions even if they personally disagree with them. This is reinforced by their investment of many years and much devotion to their military career.

In light of these factors, the overrepresentation of senior personnel -- small as it is in percentage terms -- may have biased the survey results in the direction of spuriously high apparent acceptance of a change in policy in favour of known homosexuals. Although the difference between the sample and the population is not large, all differences by category are in the same direction (i.e., overrepresenting older and more experienced personnel) so that we do not have biases in opposite directions canceling each other out.

There are three other points. One is that it would have been desirable to have a breakdown of the sample, compared to the Forces, in terms of more specific assignment categories than shown in Exhibit 2.1. A breakdown by type of station (e.g., isolated vs. urban setting, size of complement) would also have been useful. Last, a return rate of just over 40% from a normally cooperative subject pool is relatively low. The report should have provided a breakdown of nonrespondents, at least (if it can be retrieved from the data) as to MOC, rank, sex, and location of base. Any interpretation of the results should also explicitly indicate the limitations imposed by the fact that over half of those approached did not return the questionnaire.

#### Specific Comments

Comments on individual items or groups of items within the report will in general follow the same order as these were presented in the report itself. Some changes in order are made to increase the logic of the organization. These are noted by parenthetical reference to the relevant section of the original report.

## Attitudes toward Homosexuals

### 1. Experience with Homosexuals.

Most respondents had experience with mass media portrayal of male homosexuals (3.1). Over 60% of them indicated that their impressions were essentially negative, with less than 7% having a positive impression. The corresponding figures for female homosexuals were 49% and under 9%, the major difference being in the higher number of "neutral" responses in the latter case. These second-hand impressions are substantially more negative than first-hand reports of those (less than half of the sample) who have actually been acquainted with homosexuals (3.2), which indicated 37% negative vs. almost 25% positive for male homosexuals and 28% vs. 32% for female (the only case where positive impressions outnumber negative ones). Acquaintance with male homosexuals is more frequent in the sample than with females. However, the question was somewhat ambiguous: "knowing any males [or females] who engaged in sexual acts with other males [females]" does not necessarily identify predominantly homosexual individuals. In fact, a "Yes" response may be based on knowing someone has engaged in one homosexual act, probably a much more common category than consistent homosexuality.

With that limitation, we can summarize the data as showing that both media and personal experience with homosexuals are evaluated as more negative than positive, with a substantial "neutral" component. Given the importance of the media, this finding could be seen as a predictor that many current members would feel negative toward homosexuals in the CF.

In view of these findings, it is somewhat puzzling that both media and first-hand familiarity with homosexuals are associated with greater acceptance of homosexuals in the military, including the sharing of facilities (4.1-4.9). One may hypothesize that either first- or second-



hand contact is a function of somewhat greater sophistication about the issue, which could increase tolerance; conversely, people who are more tolerant to begin with may be more likely to accept either media or personal contact with homosexuals. In the same way, the data do not enable us to tell whether long and/or positive personal relationships with a homosexual lead to greater acceptance in the CF context, or whether it is greater tolerance that makes such personal relationships possible in the first place. It should be noted, though, that positive media impressions and long-lasting personal acquaintance do not decrease the proportion of respondents who feel that a change in policy would have a negative impact on military effectiveness.

Much of the remaining cross-tabulation data on this topic merely confirms the obvious: e.g., respondents whose contact with homosexuals had been positive are more accepting, more willing to share facilities, etc., than those whose contact had been negative.

The Attitudes Toward Homosexuals (ATH) Scale (3.11) indicates strong sex differences, in that male respondents are more hostile than females toward homosexuals, and unlike women are slightly more hostile to homosexuals of their own than of the opposite sex. Changes from the 1986 data collection show a very small decrease in hostility during the five-year interim, the changes probably not reaching statistical significance and therefore as attributable to random variation, sampling differences, and so on as to any real shift in attitudes.

The fact that female respondents are more accepting of homosexuality may reflect societal differences. It may also be due to a lower level of conservatism among women who choose a nontraditional career such as military service. However, since women still comprise a small minority

of CF members (and are slightly overrepresented in the sample), hostile male attitudes would not be outweighed by female tolerance.

## 2. Perception of Others' Feelings

As Section 3.3 indicates, the data show that most institutions and groups are perceived as negative about homosexuality. Importantly, this perception is highest for those agents that are psychologically closest to the respondent: his or her religious group, family, and CF colleagues and superiors. The less negative agents (the courts and mental health experts) are much more remote from the individual's emotional life. This datum has repercussions for the member's own attitudes, as both identification processes and social desirability or conformity would thus tend strongly toward the view that homosexuality is wrong. Incidentally, the fact that almost half of the respondents claimed not to know how their immediate supervisor and unit commander feel about homosexuals implies that senior CF personnel are appropriately reticent about their private opinions on this issue.

## 3. Self-Predicted Behavior (3.4)

Given that the data were collected from a volunteer force, and particularly from a sample in which career-oriented people are overrepresented, it is amazing that one third of the group said they would not cooperate with a known homosexual, and that only about half said they would do so. Similarly, only about equal numbers are willing and unwilling to work alone with such a person. More predictable were the majority's agreement that they would not disobey homosexual superiors (60%), would supervise homosexual subordinates fairly (62%), and would protect a homosexual comrade from verbal abuse (54%). Sixty percent would not leave the Forces, and 55% would still counsel others to join. But even in these cases, given the strong social pressure and disciplinary

sanctions existing in the Forces, the margin of conformity is surprisingly small. My inference is that there would indeed be considerable hostility toward known homosexuals were they to be enrolled. Further, the very similar percentage distributions imply that many of these responses tap the same individuals; therefore, it appears that about 60% of the sample would not show a high level of overt hostility to the presence of known homosexuals in the CF. About a third of the sample would, on most dimensions -- and almost one fifth go so far as to say they would disobey a superior if he or she were a known homosexual, surely a drastic statement from a serving member of the Armed Forces.

An anomalous case is that of receiving or giving first aid, which for some reason the report puts in a later section (3.9) but which belongs here. About one third of the sample would have difficulty in giving first aid to either a female or a male homosexual, while over half would have no problem with that. For receiving first aid from a homosexual, the respective proportions are 33-40% who would have difficulty and 50-58% who would not. As noted previously, the generality of the questions detracts from the usefulness of the answers, but even so this appears to be a high rate of problems in what may be life-endangering situations.

In off-duty settings, where discipline and social desirability pressures are reduced, negative reactions are freer to emerge. In accordance with my comment above, in order of increasing interpersonal intimacy about half of the sample would share messing facilities with a known homosexual and almost half would play with one on a team, but only a third or fewer would willingly share gymnasium change-rooms, shower facilities, toilet facilities, and sleeping quarters. The rejection of homosexuals as recreational partners and in situations where privacy is most of a problem is obvious and strong.

#### 4. Perceived Difficulty of Interaction.

These data (3.5) essentially confirm those presented in the previous section, except that they reveal even more negative attitudes toward known homosexuals. This is to be expected: one would have to have more negative views to refuse to do something than to assess doing it as "difficult". In most categories, about half (slightly more or slightly fewer) of the respondents would find it difficult or very difficult to engage in interaction with homosexuals as superiors, subordinates, co-workers, or off-duty companions. It should be noted that the most privacy-endangering interactions -- showering, toileting and sleeping in the same facilities -- show difficulty rates of 64 to 70%. The proportion of neutral responses in these cases hovers around 10-15%, so that only a small minority of the subjects would find little or no difficulty in these settings.

#### Perceived Impact of Policy Change

As would be inferred from the previous two sections, respondents are much more negative than positive about a change that would lead to the retention of known homosexuals in the military (3.6-3.8). Most feel that the effectiveness of the Forces would be reduced, almost half would be less likely to recommend that someone else join, and a substantial proportion are not certain that existing policies would be an adequate safeguard from harassment, either of heterosexuals by homosexuals (70%) or vice versa (87%). These are all very negative indicators concerning potential acceptance of a change in policy.

One highly crucial issue related to possible changes in military effectiveness is the concern of noncommissioned members, especially in land and sea operations, about privacy (6.4). This is the topic of my original report, and one that is probably underemphasized by officers and

by personnel in locations where personal privacy is not subject to serious infringement. As I stated previously, violations of the various dimensions of privacy can lead to substantial conflict, irritation, stress, lowered morale, and performance impairment. Thus, we could expect the argument of noncommissioned personnel in the current study that the enlistment of known homosexuals would damage the group cohesion needed in military operations, and could lead to violence among personnel especially under conditions where privacy is already limited.

#### Sociodemographic Characteristics (3.10)

The major demographic analyses would predict that the CF population (if the sample is reasonably representative) would be relatively unlikely to accept close contact with homosexuals. This is because they belong to categories that are generally more conservative than society at large: the majority come from small communities (57%) while less than 8% come from large cities, 75% percent attend religious services at least once a year, 61% profess at least moderately strong religious beliefs.

Surprisingly, there is no consistent positive association between these factors and attitudes toward homosexuals: in fact, there is evidence that respondents from religious backgrounds and those who are church-goers are more accepting (4.16, 4.17, 5.2.3), and people from rural backgrounds as much so as those from larger communities (4.13). However, strength of personal religious belief is negatively related to acceptance (4.18). It is important to note that once again (as in the case of personal acquaintance), greater tolerance appears to be compatible with feeling that the enlistment of known homosexuals would impair military effectiveness.

The general positive correlation between acceptance and education (5.2.3) is predictable. Education is highly confounded with other

variables, so that it is impossible to tell whether a more educated military establishment *per se* would necessarily be more tolerant.

Almost 97% of the sample describe themselves as exclusively heterosexual while only 0.2% admit to being exclusively homosexual. While the last datum may be affected by the CF policy of excluding and discharging homosexuals, it stands in striking contrast to population estimates varying from 3 to 10%. Thus, known homosexuals would be a salient and unusual minority among their fellow soldiers.

#### Conclusions

In my opinion, the survey gives a well-rounded view of the attitudes and other reactions of currently serving CF members to (a) homosexuals and (b) the possible consequences of a change in the policy that prohibits the enrollment or retention of homosexuals in the Forces. The methodology was generally good, although with some limitations and problems.

It is clear that while CF personnel are not universally hostile to homosexuals, the predominant view is negative. The presence of known homosexuals in the military would doubtless lead to considerable tension and discomfort, particularly among the largest and most vulnerable group of personnel: men with less service time and lower rank, stationed in ground and naval operational units. There is a general feeling that the effectiveness of the Forces would be damaged, and a significant minority of individuals would be sufficiently disaffected to bring into question their adherence to discipline, their continuation in the Service, and their advice to others about joining the CF. It should also be noted that there is scepticism as to whether current policies or simple orders would sufficiently protect homosexuals from harrassment by heterosexuals, as well as *vice versa*.

My reading of the results is that while the problems arising from a change of policy would not be overwhelming, they would be substantial and serious. There would be considerable disruption among currently serving military personnel if known homosexuals were incorporated in their units, although the degree of disruption would vary with a number of characteristics. Unfortunately, the available evidence is inadequate to judge whether attitudes are becoming more positive (in which case we might expect that the difficulties will decrease with time).