Fraternization Issues in the Army

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Thesis Statement: The makeup of the American military membership changes as much as the “rules of engagement” on the battlefield. The current Army policy on fraternization needs new rules of engagement.

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Introduction

Although our ethics will guide us as Soldiers to do what is right both on and off duty and at times when no one is around to influence our actions, there are still policies in place to guide us. To ensure good order and discipline in our units the Army has specified guidelines and regulations that advise Commanders to interpret and set guidelines for “fraternization”. There are Soldiers that feel fraternization is a form of discrimination. Is the current policy on fraternization fair and impartial for all?

The current Army policy defines fraternization as a relationship between Soldiers of different rank if said relationship appears to compromise authority, discipline, or morale in the unit or the Army. However, the Officers and enlisted personnel married before 1 March 2000 when the policy was revised or placed into action allows these marriages to stand. The new policy now outlines for Commanders that no new relationships between Officers and enlisted members will be allowed. If an Officer wishes to date or marry an enlisted member, then they must wait for one or the other to exit the military. Dating or marrying between enlisted members is based on rank and position but again the Commander has the authority to make the determination if that marriage is coercive or in some way advantageous. However the policy is interpreted, it is designed to ensure a solid and ethical working environment for all Soldiers and Officers regardless of age considerations.

Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) has expanded their policy on fraternization by prohibiting Soldiers that are assigned or carried in a school environment from having a relationship with their peers (other Soldiers attending the same training) or with cadre permanent party Soldiers until after the completion of training.
Body

Due to the approved increase to the number of Brigade Combat Teams and the requirements to support the Global War on Terrorism the Army has recently changed its policy on the age of enlisted members coming into our ranks. There are new and conflicting issues that surround the current policy on fraternization due to the age differences of new enlisteees after arrival to their permanent duty station. The current policy allows Soldiers to enter into the Army as late as forty-two years of age. The Army obviously feels that older Soldiers entering the service are stable and smart making them assets to the nation. If a female PFC is forty-two years old should she be allowed to marry a nineteen-year-old male not in her unit? What if it was the other way around? Should a forty-two-year-old male PFC be allowed to marry a nineteen-year-old female PFC not in his unit? Are these relationships considered unethical? The American public that we protect and represent is not held to these standards and in fact these types of relationships are considered normal.

Is Officer fraternization considered a bit different? Is there a double standard when dealing with Officer and enlisted? I have known Colonels to marry Captains and their age differences were 15-17 years. Should a Colonel be allowed to date or marry a Captain that is not in his or her Chain of Command and if so, what is the required age difference and or rank difference? What Commander at what level examines and approves the relationship. Will unintentional influence be a career booster or an assignment advantage? We trust the Colonel to lead and command a Brigade Combat Team so is it assumed we can trust him or her to have a proper relationship? Does any leader at any level track their success rates?

The same double standard question could be asked when discussing enlisted relationships that involve senior enlisted members and junior enlisted members. Should Sergeants be allowed
to date Sergeant Majors not in their unit or not in their Noncommissioned Officer Support Channel? What would the upper leadership levels think of a 40 year old, female, Command Sergeant Major marrying a 25 year old, male, Sergeant? What if they met at church services? Would the relationship cause unfair advantages for promotions and assignments further down the career path? Should their ages be a factor or just whether or not they are in the same unit? The guidelines simply have wide boundaries that put Commanders in tough situations.

There is also the issue with Officers and Soldiers interacting with sister services. The Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps all have different regulations and guidelines in dealing with fraternization. Will the Commanders of other services agree or disagree with each other over the relationship and where will that leave the inter-service relationship? With all the joint missions currently conducted within the Department of Defense (DOD) should not a new policy be adapted that covers all services to include the Reserve and National Guard? The new DOD policy should also cover interacting with services of other nations because of the Northern Alliance Treaty Organizations missions and our interaction with foreign forces. Does General Order #1 cover all those avenues of approach and is it fair?

We can agree that there are disadvantages to allowing personal relationships within a combat zone. Some of those could be irrational behavior from both Soldiers from jealousy or breakup and unscheduled pregnancies. Unscheduled pregnancies also affect unit combat readiness if a Soldier becomes pregnant while deployed. General Order #1 prohibits relationships while deployed between any deployed Soldiers or Officers. Many Soldiers, NCOs and Officers have seen their careers go down the drain because of deployed relationships in Iraq and Afghanistan.
One possible solution to this issue could be to reassign married Soldiers to adjacent units within the same post instead of simply refusing to allow the interaction. Commanders must seek additional solutions that do not always end with UCMJ actions. Soldiers are not perfect and will find ways to circumvent the policies if they want to seek out a relationship.

**Conclusion**

The Army and it’s values based fraternity along with outstanding leadership promotes a healthy family life style and what better way to do this than to encourage relationships between Soldiers that demonstrate the same set of ideals? My thoughts are that we should encourage marriages between Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines that are fair and equitable with age and rank considerations. Counseling and education are the path we should take toward establishing successful family living between all marriages. There are failed marriages in all walks of civilian and military life. Often times we stereotype these failures and assume our subordinates attempts will never work out. We share ideals and values such as selfless service that have made us great Americans. Americans with similar ideals should be able to explore relationships and create families of patriots that will perhaps someday in the future proudly serve our nation as adults.

The current policies and regulations concerning fraternization are outdated and seemingly unfair. The Department of Defense needs to address the issues concerning relationships in the military that are fair and equitable for all concerned. Just as the current age limit requirement has been adjusted to forty-two-years old, the current policies should also be adjusted to reflect a new policy that contributes to better life styles and healthy relationships between military members.