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Whitney Elizabeth O'Connell
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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**Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Inclusion in the Military:
A Qualitative Look at Military Culture a Decade after the
Repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell**

By

Whitney Elizabeth O'Connell

BA Sociology, Louisiana State University, 2010

BS Psychology, Louisiana State University, 2010

MA Clinical Forensic Psychology, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2014

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in
Sociology

May, 2021

This thesis was examined and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology by:

Thesis Director, Rebecca Glauber
Associate Professor, Director of Graduate
Programs

Michelle Dillon
Dean, College of Liberal Arts

Karen Van Gundy
Professor

On 18 April 2021

Approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.

The views expressed in this research are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, Department of Defense, or the US Government.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my brothers- and sister-in arms, with hope that this research will offer insights that enable us all to be better teammates and better leaders.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis became a reality as a result of the kind support and help of many people.

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all of them, but especially to:

My husband, James, for his tireless and unyielding support in helping me set and accomplish my goals.

Dr. Rebecca Glauber, my advisor, who always believes in me and whose compassionate encouragement kept me optimistic despite the multitude of road bumps along this journey.

My mentor and friend, TW.

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ABSTRACT

In 2010, the very controversial Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy was repealed, allowing lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) members to serve openly in the military without fear of legal persecution. Now that a decade has passed, this research seeks to find whether LGB service members feel safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks; whether some groups—perhaps those in more protected or privileged positions—feel more safe, whereas others feel less safe; and whether LGB military members are pressured to adhere to homonormativity to be accepted in the military.

I conducted a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews to answer these research questions. I used snowball sampling to find and interview 20 cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members who served either both during DADT's implementation and after its repeal, or only after DADT's repeal.

The research revealed that, while most LGB military members feel comfortable being gay and out now in a post-DADT military, some do not. Further, the militarization of hegemonically masculine ideals privileges certain LGB military members (i.e., lesbians, those in non-operational support units, those who are homonormatively performative) and disadvantages others (i.e., gay men in the Marine Corps and in special operations), allowing some populations to feel safer being gay and out in the military than others. Finally, LGB military members reproduce militarized masculinity by adhering to homonormativity through the performance of invisible labor in the form of emotional work.

“Service members will no longer be forced to hide who they are in order to serve our country. Our military will no longer be deprived of the talents and skills of patriotic Americans just because they happen to be gay or lesbian.”

Barack Obama, 44th U.S. President
Statement Released 22 July 2011

INTRODUCTION

As societies evolve, they begin to recognize and promote equality, human rights, and human justice (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). This continuing progression—albeit slow at times—toward modernity has been evidenced in America ever since its establishment as a nation in 1776. The Declaration of Independence states that all men were created equal (United States Department of State 1911); this founding American concept has transformed from being initially interpreted to include only Christian white men to the progressive inclusion of women, of those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, of people from diverse religious roots, and—most recently—of those who do not embody historically recognized sex and gender roles, such as those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered people. Dating as far back as desegregation in the late 1940s, the U.S. military has mirrored the social changes occurring in American society and, in some instances, has even set the national standard of egalitarian movement (United States Department of Defense 2020).

The American military has experienced a significant overhaul in the past decade with respect to the rights afforded to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members, overcoming an historical trend of homoerotic and homosexual oppression (Congressional

Research Service 2019). The repealing of the very controversial Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy in 2010 was a catalyst that initiated an organizational shift toward inclusion of a population that had been systematically exorcised, or otherwise forced to become a hidden population within the Service. Despite the military's long record of cultivating heteronormativity amongst its ranks, (Britton and Williams 1995) recent Command decisions—implemented after DADT's repeal and made in support of LGB service members—reinforced the military's position as a champion of meritocracy.

From a mile-high view, the military has made all of the right steps toward greater equality for its LGB military community—it has removed the bureaucratic red tape that previously restricted LGB service members from serving openly and has established policy requiring fair and equal treatment of all service members, regardless of sexual orientation (Congressional Research Service 2019; P.L. 111-321). A decade has passed since the military made a momentous leap toward greater inclusion. Now, the question becomes whether the military has truly established a cultural shift toward inclusivity of diverse sexual orientations or, conversely, whether DADT's repeal and the subsequent policies pushed down by military leadership have merely served as political lip service, using inclusion rhetoric at the institutional level to maintain the perception of the military as a meritocratic organization while reproducing its long-standing culture of homoerotic exclusion and oppression (War Department 1920; Wilson-Buford 2013) at the individual level. In other words, was the legislative repeal of DADT accompanied by a cultural shift within the military toward inclusion of sexual diversity?

Although some studies have explored the LGB community in a post-DADT military, they have either failed to look at whether the repeal effected a culture of inclusion for LGB

service members, failed to explore what, if any, social or structural barriers exist that may hinder inclusivity, or conflated results by analyzing LGB service member experiences together with transgender service member experiences (McNamara et al. 2020; Evans et al. 2018; Van Gilder 2018; Connell 2018; Connell 2017; Rich, Schutten, and Rogers 2012; Goldbach and Castro 2016; Johnson et al. 2015). This research will explore answers to the following questions: Do LGB service members feel safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks since the repeal of DADT? Do some groups—perhaps those in more protected or privileged positions—feel more safe, whereas others feel less safe? Are LGB military members pressured to adhere to homonormativity?

To answer these research questions, I used snowball sampling to find and interview 20 cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members who served either both during DADT's implementation and after its repeal, or only after DADT's repeal. Transgender service members were excluded from this study for three reasons. First, there has been a substantial amount of research published regarding the transgender military population in the last decade; after DADT's repeal, much of the focus and attention of researchers shifted away from the LGB community and toward the—at the time—much less researched transgender military community (for example, Alford and Lee 2016; Levy et al. 2015). Second, much of the findings of research that explore the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender military community tends to focus heavily on the transgender population, as it is more contested than the lesbian, gay, or bisexual community as a result of long-standing administrative policy directing LGB inclusion. As such, meaningful findings specifically surrounding the LGB community are limited. Finally, administrative policy regarding the inclusion of the transgender community in the military has been largely contentious and

inconsistent across presidential administrations (White House 2021). Cultural shifts in the military regarding inclusion of the transgender community should be researched once the newly lifted ban has had time to be implemented. Before exploring the literature surrounding LGB experiences in the military since DADT's repeal, it is important to understand the history surrounding the military institution's privileging of heterosexuality and oppression of homosexuality.

I: MILITARY HISTORY OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The history of homoerotic and homosexual oppression in the military can be traced back as far as the late 1700s, when General George Washington ordered Lieutenant Frederick Enslin to be drummed out of the Continental Army for the “abhorrent” crime of attempting to commit sodomy (Benemann 2006). This was the first documented case of a service member’s dismissal from military service for homosexual proclivity, and set a precedent of heteronormativity in the military that would come to be institutionalized. Although homophobia had very early roots practically speaking, homophobic policy was not officially enacted by the military until 1920 when Congress legislated the Articles of War, a document that governed the behavior of military members (Sinclair 2009; War Department 1920). Homosexuality itself was not forbidden by this set of rules; however, Article 93 comprised *Various Crimes*, which were punishable by court martial. Found among the very serious crimes that this Article outlined, such as manslaughter, arson, and larceny, was the crime of sodomy (War Department 1920), a crime that would come to be homosexualized through policy and practice.

In the 1940s, as the establishment of the Selective Service was taking place, sexual orientation of service members came directly into the spotlight (Selective Service System n.d.). Military psychologists tied homosexuality to mental illness and used it as a mechanism of exclusion, barring the LGB community from military service by labeling them mentally unfit to fight (Wilson-Buford 2013). Service members charged with

homosexuality were prosecuted either as Class I, II, or III homosexuals depending upon the offense. Wilson-Buford (2013:253-4) writes,

Class I homosexuals were considered the most dangerous to moral codes of decency because their perversity involved assaulting or coercing unwilling victims into homosexual acts, even minor children under age sixteen. Class II suspects included overt, confirmed homosexuals whose participation in at least one consensual act of same-sex sodomy could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. The regulations defined consensual acts of Class II homosexuals broadly however, prosecuting proposals, solicitations, and attempts at sodomy as equally criminal as committing the consensual act of same-sex sodomy itself and making no distinction between active and passive participants. Class III homosexuals consisted of those service members whose degree of latent homosexual tendencies (as determined by military psychiatrists) rendered them unsuitable for service, even though they either had never engaged in same-sex sodomy, or had refrained from doing so since entering the military.

This not only precluded those in the LGB community from assessing into the military, but also called for immediate separation of known or suspected LGB members who were currently serving without affording them any veterans' benefits upon their separation from duty. Although the Articles of War produced guidelines by which military leaders should enact discipline, they were often construed and enforced differently between branches of service and also between the leaders within each branch (Goodhart and Taylor 2020). In May of 1951, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) took effect. This unified all the newly formed Department of Defense under one overarching book of law, standardizing the interpretation of offenses across services (MCM 1951). The UCMJ formally institutionalized an already pervasive culture of heteronormativity by criminalizing any sexual encounters that deviated from heterosexual, procreative marital sex—this included, but was not exclusive to, acts such as fornication, forcible or consensual oral and anal sodomy, adultery, bigamy, viewing pornography, and abortion. By criminalizing these acts, the UCMJ afforded military leaders the authority to police the

sexual lives of *all* service members regardless of sexual orientation (Wilson-Buford 2013). Despite this, military leaders overwhelmingly targeted those perceived to be in the LGB community as offenders, thereby homosexualizing the construction of sexual deviance.

The UCMJ Articles that criminalized homoeroticism were act-specific (MCM 1951). That is, one could be prosecuted only if a non-normative sexual event occurred. However, Article 133, *Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman*, and Article 134, *General Article*—two comprehensive yet non-specific catchalls—enabled further oppression of the LGB military community. The lack of specificity in these Articles left sufficient room for their interpreters to apply heteronormative conceptualization to them, ultimately criminalizing behaviors that threatened gendered and sexually normative standards of discipline (Congressional Research Service 2019; Wilson-Buford 2013). This led to the prosecution of suspected homosexuals based on mannerisms alone; for example, a military man could be charged for having an effeminate gait or an excessively falsetto voice. These Articles were used to protect heterosexual, masculine hegemony—the standard that became compulsory amongst service members.

Although many of the Articles within the UCMJ proved to be a detriment to the LGB military community, one Article—Article 67—served as an ally. This Article established the Court of Military Appeals (CMA; redesignated as the United States Court of Military Appeals in 1968, and as the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces in 1989) (Military Legal Resources 2014). Although it was suggested as a three-judge General Officer court in the initially proposed version of the UCMJ, the final approved edition instituted the CMA as a three-judge civilian appellate court (increased to five civilian judges in 1989). The decision to include civilian, rather than military, judges on the Court

removed the in-group bias and undue Command influence that had historically impacted both punitive and appellate military discipline decisions (Wilson-Buford 2013). In the 1950s and 1960s, the CMA made a series of rulings that resulted in the dismissal, overturning, or reduction in sentence of nearly half of the estimated 100,000 guilty sentences faced by alleged homosexuals (Rogin 2020). These appellate decisions came during a time when there was a “nationwide epidemic of extreme homophobia” (Wilson-Buford 2013:270). Wilson-Buford (2013:270) writes,

[CMA’s] legal victories at courts-martial laid the conceptual groundwork for the repeal of DADT by acknowledging, on a fundamental level, that homosexuals were human beings equally deserving of the due process rights that heterosexuals enjoyed. By challenging the logic of liability in an era during which most people assumed without question that a person’s sexuality could undermine their job competency and character, military courts, ultimately, planted the seed for the idea of homosexual inclusion in the services.

Over the next two decades there would be wins, but also many losses for the military’s LGB community. In 1981, the Department of Defense published an Instruction dictating the process for administratively separating men and women from service. Third among the five reasons that were outlined as cause for separation was homosexuality (DODI 1332.14 1981). The opening line to this document states: “homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission” (DODI 1332.14 1981). This document was reissued with updates in 1982, 1993, and 2008—each update including verbiage outlining what constituted homosexual conduct, why it was exclusionary to service, and how Commanders should conduct fact-finding inquiries in order to separate homosexuals from duty. Discharging LGB military

members did not only impact the military from a manning perspective—it significantly impacted the Department of Defense fiscally. “Between 1980 and 1990, 16,919 service members were discharged for homosexuality, an average of about 1,500 annually [...]. for the year 1990 alone, these costs amount to some \$27 million dollars” (Britton and Williams 1995:4).

Despite continued administrative oppression, many Commanders recognized the paradox that was inherent in labeling dedicated, hardworking service members as detrimental to the mission based on their sexual orientation alone (Britton and Williams 1995). This paradox was also recognized empirically. In 1989, a federal court mandated the release of the Crittenden Report—a military research document that had been published 32 years earlier, but was hidden from the public because it challenged the military’s exclusionary regulations. It found that homosexual service members exemplified both ability and job performance commensurate to their heterosexual peers (Congressional Research Service 2019; Wilson-Buford 2013). Military commanders’ increasing propensity to support their LGB service members combined with the public discourse that was sparked by the Crittenden Report paved the way for the creation of policy aimed toward improving the rights afforded to LGB military members (D’Amico 1996). However, the policy that was created in 1993—Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT)—fell substantially short of its goal of LGB inclusion.

DADT Implementation and Repeal

On the presidential campaign trail, Bill Clinton advocated for the LGB community; he was adamant that, if elected, he would remove the barriers preventing homosexuals from

openly serving in the military (Spoeri 1994). Once elected, President Clinton encountered significant opposition to his cause. Senior military leaders—including the most senior at the time, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell—spoke openly in dissent, leveraging their positional power to strong-arm the Commander in Chief to make a compromise on his effort (Britton and Williams 1995). The settled upon compromise, rather than removing barriers for LGB military members, ultimately propagated further exclusionary rhetoric. The newly implemented Department of Defense Policy (1993) was widely marketed as legislation that would drive inclusion. Instead, it reinforced previously existing heteronormative regulations, identifying homosexual conduct as incompatible with military service. The DADT Policy (1993) stated, “Sexual orientation will not be a bar to service unless manifested by homosexual conduct. The military will discharge members who engage in homosexual conduct, which is defined as a homosexual act, a statement that the member is homosexual or bisexual, or a marriage or attempted marriage to someone of the same gender.” This policy—initially intended to make military service *more* accessible to LGB members—ultimately enabled the discharge of over 13,000 LGB military members during the 17 years it was in effect (Wilson-Buford 2013).

Ten years after DADT was put in place, the Supreme Court made a groundbreaking decision in favor of the LGB community in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). This case ruled that citizens have the right to autonomy of self, which “includes freedom of thought, belief, expression and certain intimate conduct;” therefore, trying a person on sodomy charges violates that individual’s substantive due process rights. This landmark case created an opportunity for the Log Cabin Republicans—an organization that works within the Republican Party to advocate for LGB people and their allies—to attack the

constitutionality of DADT in a lawsuit brought against the United States and then-Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates (Wilson-Buford 2013). It took ten years of court hearings until U.S. District Judge Virginia Phillips heard the case on 9 September 2010. On this day, Judge Phillips ruled in favor of the Log Cabin Republicans—DADT was unconstitutional.

In 2009, Barack Obama promoted the inclusion of the LGB community in the military in his presidential campaign, promising that, if elected, he would repeal the extremely controversial DADT and allow LGB members to serve openly in the military. Despite Judge Phillips' ruling, President Obama met similar political roadblocks to those President Clinton endured, hindering his effort (Wilson-Buford 2013). Judge Phillips' decision in *Log Cabin Republicans v. United States* seemed like a momentous win for the LGB military community; however, military leaders again took this opportunity to reproduce the heterosexual masculine hegemony that was so deeply reified within the military. Under pressure from senior military leaders, the Obama Administration asked Judge Phillips to stay her ruling, stating that "it threatens to disrupt ongoing military operations during wartime" (Egelko 2010). This would prove to be the last barrier to DADT's repeal. One month later, the Department of Defense released a report concluding the repeal of DADT would have minimal negative impact on military effectiveness. With this report in hand, the Obama Administration successfully repealed DADT on 18 December 2010 (Congressional Research Service 2019; Wilson-Buford 2013). Judge Phillips ordered the defendants—the United States of America and the Secretary of Defense—to immediately "suspend and discontinue any investigation, or discharge, separation, or other proceeding, that may have been commenced under the "Don't Ask,

Don't Tell" Act...on or prior to the date of this Judgment" (*Log Cabin Republicans v. United States* 2010; International Commission of Jurists 2018).

A Post-DADT Military

Two years after DADT's repeal, the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional (*United States vs. Windsor* 2013). This removed the gendered nature of the federal government's recognition of marriage, allowing marriages of same-sex couples to be federally recognized. The U.S. Military—an organization that had oppressed homosexuality since the inception of its force—became a leader in American society by ensuring fair and equal treatment for all military members by allowing the expansion of health, financial, and social benefits to same-sex spouses of homosexual service members (Congressional Research Service 2019). This policy—a step toward equity for the LGB military community—took effect during a time when only 12 states and Washington, D.C. recognized gay marriage (Reuters Staff 2013). In order to enable same-sex spouses' access to those benefits, Commanders were encouraged to authorize LGB service members up to 10 days of permissive leave—leave that would *not* count against their 30 days of leave allotted per year—to travel with their partner to a state that recognized gay marriage so they could wed, making their new spouse eligible to receive full military benefits (Congressional Research Service 2019). In a press release dated 14 August 2013, the office of the Secretary of Defense stated:

We recognize that same-sex military couples who are not stationed in a jurisdiction that permits same-sex marriage would have to travel to another jurisdiction to marry. That is why the department will implement policies to allow military personnel in such a relationship non-chargeable leave for the purpose of travelling to a jurisdiction where such a marriage may occur. This

will provide accelerated access to the full range of benefits offered to married military couples throughout the department, and help level the playing field between opposite-sex and same-sex couples seeking to be married.

Now, the policy exists for LGB military members to be equitably treated to their heterosexual peers. The question becomes whether military culture has similarly shifted toward inclusivity, or whether invisible structural barriers exist that continue to oppress this population.

II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to conceptualize the military's long history of homophobia, it is important to turn to sociological literature. Connell (1987) theorized that existing cultural norms and conceptualizations of professionalism inherently sexualize work. That is, to be considered a professional, one must be rational, unemotional, and be a technical expert. The qualities that are valued in a professional person are qualities that are generally considered to be masculine; as such, the concept of professionalism has become masculinized. There has been much research surrounding the gendering of professions, and particularly surrounding the military organization as a hegemonically masculine entity (Connell 2005). Connell (2017) used the term *warrior masculinity* to exemplify how military men are considered to be the epitome of a hegemonic male—aggressive, muscular, bloodthirsty, and dominant. Similarly, the term *militarized masculinity* has been used to conceptualize this same phenomenon since as early as the 1990s (Williams 1994).

Force, regulations, and control of consciousness were all used as control mechanisms to perpetuate the perception of the military as a hegemonically masculine organization—something that has been considered necessary not only for the execution of wartime operations, but also for protecting the public's trust in the military as an effective organization (Britton and Williams 1995). Through this perpetuation of masculinity, the military became a sexualized entity. The mechanisms of control by which hegemonic masculinity was fashioned created a culture of compulsory heterosexuality (Connell 2005). The regulations restricting non-normative sexualities became homosexualized; as such,

these laws, written with the intention of producing good order and discipline, legislated heterosexuality in practice. The punitive outcomes of violating those standards cultivated a homophobic atmosphere that became institutionalized. While regulations and punitive enforcement overtly reproduced heteronormativity, the concept of heteronormativity truly became reified through covert means, by control of consciousness. This was accomplished through a hegemonically masculine, heterosexual narrative, reinforced through the use of symbols—including pin-up girl paintings on planes, photographs of Marine trainees marching under signs that encouraged them to “rape, pillage and burn,” and, more recently, an American bomb bound for Afghanistan donning the words “HIJACK THIS FAGS”—and through the use of normative practices—such as the expectation of a female spouse to participate in the “wives club” in order for her military husband to be considered for promotion, a practice that was officially stricken in 1988 but unofficially endorsed through the early 2000s (Britton and Williams 1995).

In exploring the culture that has been instituted within the military, it becomes apparent that “the hegemonic masculine ideal perpetuated by the military conflates soldierliness, masculinity, and heterosexuality” (Wilson-Buford 2013:14). In the typical fashion of hegemonic masculinity, femininity is not valued, so men who embody typical feminine traits are interpreted as homosexual—that is, they portray a failed masculinity. Failed masculinity is counter to the narrative promoted by the military. Military men who embody the qualities of a hegemonic male are privileged; they also reproduce the ideal of heteronormative masculinity by rising through the ranks, thereby maintaining the ideological standard. This militarized version of heteronormative masculinity—militarized masculinity—is privileged, and is also the driving factor behind the historical belief that

expunging non-normative behavior—i.e., homosexuality—from the military ranks was essential to mission accomplishment (Williams 1994).

When LGB inclusion in the military became a topic of conversation, military leaders were adamantly opposed to the concept (Congressional Research Service 2019). In a Congressional Hearing in 1992, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell testified, “I think it would be prejudicial to good order and discipline to try to integrate gays and lesbians in the current military structure” (Swartz 2015). Wilson-Buford (2013:13) writes, “Presumably, bonding would become suspect if soldiers knew that there were gay men in the ranks. In a setting in which connections between men are seen as crucial in achieving the military mission and in which masculinity is synonymous with heterosexuality the presence of openly gay men appears intolerable.” Despite mass opposition, DADT’s repeal legislated inclusion of the LGB community in the military.

Recent literature has evidenced that, although the practice previously imposed upon homosexuals to remain in the professional closet has become antiquated, developing an identity as an LGB professional can still be difficult (Rumens and Kerfoot 2009). In researching the civilian community, Rumens and Kerfoot (2009:763) found that even though “gay men appear to be empowered by forms of agency to self-identify as professionals in ‘gay-friendly’ work contexts, they are by no means unaffected by dominant professional norms and discourses of heteronormativity that treat sexuality and professionalism as polar opposites.” Many LGB members negotiate the dissonance they experience in the identity of gay professional by adhering to homonormativity, a concept pioneered by Lisa Duggan (2002). While this concept—a play on heteronormativity—does not assume heterosexuality, it privileges homosexuality that is replicative of, or upholds,

heterosexual norms and values. Connell (2015) found that, despite the political movement toward greater inclusion and equality, lesbian and gay teachers' experiential reality was that coming out conflicted with socially accepted standards of professionalism. That is, being openly gay was regarded as professional only if their gender display and overt sexuality conformed to heterosexual norms.

There has been substantial research conducted regarding the culture of LGB inclusion—or rather, exclusion and oppression—in the military prior to the repeal of DADT; this research has been considerable in terms of both breadth and depth. The research ranges from studies exploring the estimated number of those comprising the LGB community within the Department of Defense (Gates 2004), studies showing the marginalization of those in the LGB military community (Oswald and Sternberg 2014); studies regarding the psychological distress experienced by LGB military members (Matarazzo et al. 2014), and studies that show how the military capitalizes on its conceptualization as a masculine entity by using gendered marketing to recruit its ideal type—the hegemonic male—and to discourage those who do not meet that ideal type to refrain from enlistment (Brown 2012).

Post-DADT Literature

Much sociological research has been produced surrounding the military's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and the resulting culture of exclusion that has historically affected those in the LGB community (Wilson-Buford 2013; Britton and Williams 1995). There has also been robust research concerning the real-world implications of the implementation of the DADT policy, particularly regarding its negative

effects on the retention and the psyche of LGB military members (for example, Gates 2007). However, since the repeal of DADT, there has been minimal sociological research published concerning the acceptance of homosexuality in the military. This may be due, in part, to the fact that transgender service members have become a much more controversial topic in recent years and, as such, have captivated the attention of researchers (for example, Levy et al. 2015). Further, the scarcity of recent sociological research focusing on LGB inclusion in a post-DADT military may be partly attributed to the fact that the policies mandating LGB inclusion are still relatively new and, thus, researchers may not have had sufficient time to dedicate toward exploration of this important topic.

Most post-DADT research on the military culture of LGB inclusion has been conducted by researchers in the fields of social work and psychology. These researchers have published robust pieces concerning the psychological repercussions that LGB military members might experience if there were to be continued homosexual oppression despite the organizational shift toward inclusion (Golbach and Castro 2016; Johnson et al. 2015). Most of this research was non-empirical in nature and oriented toward ensuring proper mental health precautions are taken and appropriate interventions are considered when issues arise.

Although most of the social work and psychology research has been primarily exploratory, some empirical work has been done in these fields. A recent social work article (Lee 2015) used qualitative research from various studies to show that LGB and transgendered military members still face oppression despite DADT's repeal. However, the studies that were referenced are specific to the transgender community and, as such, cannot be generalized to the LGB military community. Additionally, a quantitative study

recently published by a group of psychologists (Evans et al. 2018) considered the culture of acceptance within various military units and how that impacted the psychological wellbeing of LGB military members. This study focused on unit cohesion and levels of perceived support amongst LGB military members, using Likert Scale questions to collect data through online surveys. Although this research is extremely useful in correlating distress experienced by LGB service members with perceptions of unit cohesion and acceptance, the study failed to take a comprehensive look at the experiences of LGB service members and gave no attention to structural inequalities that may exist and contribute to negative experiences, or to what aspects of the military units made them perceptively more or less accepting of LGB members. Most recently, McNamara et al. published a qualitative analysis in 2020 exploring “outness” of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender military community nearly 10 years after DADT’s repeal. This research addressed the broader military’s culture of inclusion of these communities, the service members’ comfort levels with being out, and the driving factors that enabled “outness.” However, it failed to consider variables and sub-population military culture that might impact “outness.” It also analyzed findings of the LGB community together with those from the transgender military community, conflating the results.

Some post-DADT research has been conducted by researchers in other fields, such as sociolinguistics and communication. For example, Van Gilder (2018), a researcher in the field of communication, performed a qualitative study that focused heavily on identity work for LGB military members. While this research is useful, over one-third of the participants in the study served only before the implementation of DADT or only before the

repeal of DADT. Thus, the data is conflated if its intended use is to explore military culture in a post-DADT world.

The post-DADT literature published by sociologists is sparse. Some studies were purely exploratory in terms of highlighting the arguments for or against DADT's repeal (Connell 2017; Rich, Schutten, and Rogers 2012). Connell (2017) addressed the importance of considering unit-level responses to the DADT policy by exploring how leadership was the key to fostering a culture of inclusion and acceptance. To explore leadership perspectives, Connell focused her research on ROTC cadets in the Boston area. While this population certainly may allow researchers to project what military leaders' sentiments surrounding LGB service members may be in the future, ROTC cadets—though they are training to be officers—have no real-world experience in the military. Many of those cadets will not employ an influential leadership position until they are mid-level Captains or Majors—approximately six to ten years into their service. A command atmosphere is generally set by individuals much more senior in rank and, as such, surveying soon-to-be Lieutenants produces data that is purely conjecture and does not satisfy the underlying question of cultural acceptance of LGB service members.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, a gap in knowledge has been identified regarding whether DADT's repeal effected a culture of inclusion for LGB service members. This research will explore answers to the following research questions: Do LGB service members feel safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks since the repeal of DADT? Do some groups—perhaps those in more protected or privileged positions—feel more safe, whereas others feel less safe? Are LGB military members pressured to adhere to homonormativity?

III: METHODS

Personal in-depth interviews were conducted between March 2019 and October 2020 with 20 cisgender, homosexual (17) and bisexual (three) service members who served either both during and after the repeal of DADT (13 interviewees) or whose service began post-repeal (seven interviewees). Transgendered service members, cisgender heterosexual service members, and those who served only prior to DADT's repeal were excluded from the study. Interviewees were stratified by branch of service (five Air Force, six Army, four Navy, five Marine Corps), gender (12 male, eight female), rank (13 officer, seven enlisted), and ethnicity (nine white, five Hispanic, four Black, two Asian). See Table 1 below for consolidated participant demographics.

As an active duty service member, I leveraged my insider status to conduct snowball sampling (Berg 2007) as a means of obtaining participants for this study. The snowball sample began with my own current and former military LGB friends and acquaintances, who I met during my military service. The first people I reached out to were two gay and out active duty members and two gay and out military veterans. Two of those individuals are/were officers, and two are/were enlisted members. I also reached out to some of my heterosexual military friends and acquaintances, who were able to extend my network and enable recruitment from all four military branches. I used their contacts to recruit more participants by asking participants after our interview if they would provide potentially willing individuals with my contact information and the intent of my research. I used

purposive sampling as necessary to recruit additional respondents once patterns and themes emerged.

| Branch | Rank | Career Field / Unit Type | Gender | Sexual Orientation | Ethnicity | Service During / After DADT |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Army | Private First Class | Operational | Male | Bisexual | Hispanic | During & After |
| Army | Captain | Both | Male | Gay | Hispanic | Only After |
| Army | Major | Both | Male | Gay | Hispanic | During & After |
| Army | 1st Lieutenant | Operational | Male | Gay | White | Only After |
| Army | Sergeant First Class | Special Operations | Female | Lesbian | White | During & After |
| Army | Major | Support | Female | Lesbian | White | During & After |
| Marine Corps | 1st Lieutenant | Support | Male | Gay | Asian | Only After |
| Marine Corps | 1st Lieutenant | Operational | Male | Gay | Asian | During & After |
| Marine Corps | Corporal | Operational | Female | Lesbian | Black | During & After |
| Marine Corps | Captain | Support | Male | Gay | White | Only After |
| Marine Corps | Corporal | Support | Male | Bisexual | Hispanic | During & After |
| Navy | Petty Officer 1st Class | Support | Male | Gay | Black | During & After |
| Navy | Petty Officer 1st Class | Operational | Female | Lesbian | White | During & After |
| Navy | Lieutenant | Support | Male | Gay | White | Only After |
| Navy | Lieutenant Commander | Both (Special Operations) | Male | Gay | White | During & After |
| Air Force | Captain | Operational | Female | Bisexual | Black | Only After |
| Air Force | Captain | Support | Male | Gay | Hispanic | Only After |
| Air Force | Master Sergeant | Support | Female | Lesbian | Black | During & After |
| Air Force | Major | Operational | Female | Lesbian | White | During & After |
| Air Force | Lieutenant Colonel | Operational | Male | Gay | White | During & After |

Table 1: Participant Demographics

I was the sole interviewer for this study. The in-depth interviews I conducted followed a semi-structured format; I had some key questions to guide the conversation, but I often asked questions that were outcomes of the conversation as it developed. A list of key questions can be found below in Table 2. Most interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. With the permission of the interviewees, I audiotaped the interviews so I could

transcribe them after the interviews were complete. Every participant consented to audiotaping. Every interview took place over the phone, as all of my participants lived at various locations across the globe. Prior to the personal interviews, I emailed the participants a consent form for them to read and, if willing to continue with the interview, to sign. I also explained the consent requirements at the beginning of our phone calls.

| STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS | |
|---|--|
| 1. | Tell me about your decision to join the military. What influenced you? |
| 2. | The military has a very long history of homophobia. Was that a consideration when you were making the decision to join the military? |
| 3. | Did your sexual orientation influence your branch choice? If so, how? |
| 4. | Tell me about your active duty military experience so far. |
| 5. | Do you think your sexuality has impacted your military experience? If so, in what way? |
| 6. | Have you come out to your unit? If so, how was that experience? If not, why not? |
| 7. | How comfortable are you with visible sexuality in the military? This can be things like having pictures of your significant other in your office, bringing him or her to a military ball, etc. |
| 8. | This question addresses gender and sexual stereotypes. Have you ever felt like you needed to hide your sexuality in order to conform to military expectations? In other words, do you ever feel like you have to intentionally perform a certain role or partake in certain mannerisms that are heteronormative? |
| 9. | (If out at work) Do you feel as though your unit accepts your sexuality? What makes you feel that way? |
| 10. | Have you ever had any negative experiences in the military where people targeted you because of your sexuality? If so, can you describe them? |
| 11. | (If they have done more than one type of job) In your experience, was it easier or harder to be out in one career field versus another? Can you explain that dynamic? |
| 12. | Is there anything I haven't asked or covered that you'd like to share with me that you think may be useful to the research? |

Table 2: Structured Interview Guiding Questions

Interview recordings for this study were transcribed through Rev.com transcription services. Grounded theory methods were used to code and analyze the data. Grounded

theory is well suited to topics that are inductive in nature and enables researchers, through coding that organizes and examines data in multiple and dynamic ways, to deconstruct, reorganize, and form conclusions about complex social processes (Charmaz 2001). The major themes and trends that emerged during the interviews were coded by hand using Microsoft Excel. I started by coding for the three driving questions of this research, and as interesting themes began to emerge, I coded for those as well (for example, mentions of tokenism, examples of military peers policing homosexually suggestive behavior, or expressed differences in comfort being gay and out to peers versus superiors and subordinates). This allowed at me to create a total snapshot of the described experiences of the interviewees and revealed trends existing within the total population based on their demographics.

IV: FINDINGS

This qualitative study reports three new findings. First, while most LGB military members feel comfortable being gay and out in a post-DADT military, some do not. Second, the militarization of hegemonically masculine ideals privileges certain LGB military members over others, allowing them to feel more safe being gay and out. Lesbians in the military are privileged over gay men; LGB members in support career fields are privileged over those in operational career fields, and especially special operations; gay men in the Marine Corps are substantially more disadvantaged than those in the Army, Navy, and Air Force; and LGB military members who adhere to homonormative behavior are privileged over those who do not. Third, LGB military members reproduce militarized masculinity by adhering to homonormativity through the performance of invisible labor in the form of emotional work.

Serving Openly in a Post-DADT Military

The first research question I sought to answer was whether LGB service members have felt safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks since the repeal of DADT. As might be expected, most of the interviewees who served while DADT was in place felt largely hindered by the policy when it stood. The way in which the policy affected LGB service members at the time varied. Some interviewees talked about blatant homophobic remarks they would hear during that time, such as when service members would call suspected homosexuals “faggot” to their face or within earshot without

repercussion, or hearing senior enlisted leaders shout, “that’s sicker than two boys in bed!” in the vicinity of their entire shop.

Four of the 20 interviewees talked about inquisitions they faced during DADT when they were suspected of homosexuality. Three were a result of fellow service members bringing suspicions of homosexuality to their leadership in order to initiate investigations on their alleged homosexual peers. The other inquisition resulted from a civilian writing a letter to their former significant other’s military leadership regarding their homosexual relationship. The way the investigations unfolded were wholly dependent on the personality of the commander. Because one of the criteria for participation in this research project was that the service member must have served in the military after DADT’s repeal, all of these members ultimately were either not investigated, or the investigations did not find sufficient substantiating evidence to discharge the service member. Two of the four inquisitions—both peer-driven—were immediately terminated by the leadership, who backed the service member and refused to exercise their command directive to investigate and separate service members on the basis of homosexuality. One of the inquisitions—driven by the service member’s former significant other—resulted in an official investigation. The claims were ultimately unsubstantiated, but this interviewee discussed the embarrassment and trauma caused by both the personal life imposition as well as the anxiety associated with the prospect of being discharged from service. Although an official investigation was never initiated for the fourth inquisition, this service member was called into his leadership’s office and told to discontinue any off-duty “extracurricular” activities, eluding to homosexual behavior. This informal disciplinary incident started a chain of

events that led to a long trend of formal disciplinary action for that service member, with an ultimate discharge in 2016.

It was a terrible situation. They didn't find anything through the investigation of my "gayness." It was terrible, I don't wish that shit on anyone. And I was literally almost one of Don't Ask, Don't Tell's last victims. I was almost one of the last fucking victims, right before they were about to repeal it. I was scared to tell anyone after this. It was a long time before I said anything about this investigation, because I was SCARED the Air Force would flip with this repeal. [...] I was afraid that they would be like, "Psyche. Don't Ask, Don't Tell didn't repeal, it was just a way to out all y'all. You're out. Take the rainbow guns and get the fuck out of here."

Air Force Captain, Bisexual Female

I ended up actually getting called into our Sergeant Major's office. And he was just like... He couldn't ask and he didn't want to say it. He was just like, "Hey, whatever extracurricular activity you're doing outside when you're off, it needs to stop." And I was just like, "I don't know what exactly you mean, Sergeant Major." And he was just like, "Whatever you're doing needs to stop." And I continued to like, I don't know. Then it just got to the point where he was just cussing at me, just telling me it needs to fucking stop. And I was just like... I knew what he was saying, but at the same time, I was just like, I want that confirmation that's exactly what you're saying.

Army Private First Class, Bisexual Male

When I was in my first squadron, [...] there was a flight commander that suspected I was gay. So, you know, there's always rumors, and then there were people that knew. He wasn't anyone that knew for sure, but he had his suspicions, and he went to the squadron commander and talked to him about it, and said, "Hey, Sir, I think Captain [redacted] is gay. You need to start a Don't Ask, Don't Tell investigation to have him removed from service." So, the squadron commander told him he needed to mind his own fucking business, and leave his office, and never come back with anything like that again.

Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, Gay

In addition to experiencing overt homophobia during the time of DADT, most of the service members also discussed the impact of the systemic oppression caused by DADT. Systemic oppression places or keeps people of a marginalized demographic in conditions that withhold opportunities for equity and advancement (Kelly and Varghese 2018). For many interviewees, systemic oppression was experienced through the work environment

cultivated by the enforcement of this policy. Many interviewees expressed an inability to truly be themselves, forcing them to compromise their integrity—a core value of military service—by lying through omission and, sometimes, through commission. Many interviewees voiced that this culture also affected their ability to perform to their full, uninhibited potential. Further, these service members lost out on the important social capital gained through senior mentorship, peer networking, and relationship building in the military.

I didn't wear my wedding ring because I didn't want to be asked if I was married or have any reference to my "husband" because I didn't want to lie. I'm supposed to have integrity first, but all the while I'm not telling anyone about my actual life. It felt really bad to me; at the very core of what I'm doing, this isn't integrity...to have to hide your relationship and lie to every single person.

Air Force Major (National Guard), Lesbian

I mean, [DADT] kept me very closed off, especially in the first couple years, from really opening up. And I always felt like a liar, because I would lie. And it is a bad feeling. And I would feel paranoid a lot, that somebody would find out and that I would get kicked out. And I felt like all of my relationships in the military, even professional relationships, were based on a lie, even though I was just lying about one part of myself, it was who I was. So, it felt icky.

Army Major, Lesbian

I had to put up a persona during the Don't Ask, Don't Tell to, again, get all the attention away from me and to divert any attention, any questions for me onto another person. And that's pretty bad, but I feel like I needed to do that to save my career because I've witnessed Marines who were questionable about the sexual orientation and they eventually just left the command and I didn't want that to be me. So, I guess, forced myself to maintain that persona while Don't Ask, Don't Tell was still active. Which looking back now, I think is horrible and knowing what I know now, that was probably one of my biggest regrets.

Marine 1st Lieutenant (Prior Enlisted), Gay

For almost the entirety of 10 years in active duty... your guard is up, you don't really relate to people the way you otherwise would, constantly afraid. I don't know. I guess you either can't fully commit to what we're doing. You do so in a way that's so guarded. I don't know. I guess I'll never know what my full potential was because I never was able to fully commit.

Army Major (Reserves), Gay

In my early days I was maybe not as present as I should have been, because I was a little afraid of being found out, like if I hang around these people too much, they're going to learn more about me and find out that I'm gay, and I'll get kicked out of the Air Force, and that isn't what I want. So as far as letting myself be known by my peers and by my leadership at early stages in my career, I held back a bit and I was the guy that just showed up when they had to, and didn't really put in too much extra along the way, even though that's not who I am, or how I do business or conduct myself now.

Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, Gay

When DADT was repealed, it took some time for most, but not all (12 out of 20) of the interviewees who were serving to feel comfortable in knowing they would not be punished for their sexual orientation. For some, the lingering threat of forcible separation for homosexuality prevented them from coming out. Others understood the institution itself had changed its perspective, but were concerned that the hypermasculine culture within the military would still stigmatize them amongst their peers, leaders, and subordinates.

It took me a long time to come out to a lot of my peers and coworkers too, mainly because I wanted to see what they were like. You know, to make sure they were not homophobic or they would not look down on me. I think in some instances, I didn't feel like I needed to hide [my sexual orientation], but I felt like I needed to keep it to myself. And it was usually when meeting new commanders or people who were grading me because I didn't know how they were going to act. I was afraid.

Air Force Captain, Gay

I'd rather be judged on my merits as a Marine than on my sexuality. So that's generally why I tend to keep it close hold. Because if they're going to judge me, or look down on me, I want it to be for being a bad officer, not because I'm gay.

Marine Captain [Previously Reserves], Gay

Now, a decade post-DADT, most, although not all, of the interviewees feel comfortable being gay and out in the military. Ten of the 14 interviewees who were still serving at the time of the interview are largely comfortable being gay and out in the military today. This was primarily evidenced by the number of people who were out to

their unit, to include subordinates and superiors rather than just peers, and by the number of people who felt comfortable with visual sexuality in the military, such as bringing a significant other to a military ball or having pictures of family at work. Of the four who were not comfortable being out and gay in the military, all are male, three are Marines and one is in a special operations career field in the Navy. Of those four, one is completely comfortable being out to peers but remains closeted to subordinates and superiors; two are somewhat comfortable being out to peers but remain closeted to subordinates and superiors; one is completely closeted to everyone but close friends. The cause for hesitation amongst all interviewees to come out to those higher or lower in the chain of command—a common theme during the interviews—generally stemmed from the concern that respect would be lost due to the stigma of homosexuality. Some interviewees expressed worry that homophobia might bias their leaders' perception of their work performance, causing them to be rated lower against their peers and, ultimately, hinder their career progression. Some interviewees questioned whether homophobic perceptions of the LGB community might cause subordinates to lose respect for them as a leader.

I would say at times it affects my ability to be myself, if that makes sense. I think that being gay contributes to the unit, the uniqueness of the unit and I would offer a different perspective, but sometimes, especially in dealing with my superiors, I think that my personality doesn't necessarily come out as much because I'm afraid of... I don't know why necessarily, but I'm a little afraid of my superiors finding out that I'm gay. So yeah, I don't know if I can articulate where that fear comes from, but it could just be from my perception of the military in general. I really have no problem with people my own rank knowing, but it's mostly my superiors and enlisted members. Sometimes I feel like they may think of me differently or... I don't know, not necessarily not follow an order that I give them or something, but they might take it differently than they would from a straight officer, if that makes sense.

Marine 1st Lieutenant, Gay

The concern of being gay and out was not limited to those who served during DADT, as five of seven interviewees who served only after the repeal also voiced concern or hesitation regarding being gay and out immediately on entry into the military. This provides evidence that policies such as DADT have much broader consequences than strictly legal, and that their ramifications impact an audience much broader than the immediate intended group upon which the sanctions are imposed while these types of policies are enacted and enforced. Interestingly, all five interviewees who were concerned with being gay and out when they came into the military—despite never having served during DADT’s reign—were either in an operational unit or were in the Marine Corps. The two interviewees who expressed zero concerns being gay and out when they first joined the military were both in non-operational support career fields. While each branch of service tends to categorize operational career fields slightly differently, they are generally conceptualized as the career fields that use weapons against the enemy to create effects. While the Air Force does not consider aircraft maintenance to be operational, the Army does categorize aircraft maintenance as operational (Military Times 2015). Because some branches consider maintenance to be operational and because the culture and environment of maintainers tends to mimic operational career fields, it is considered operational for the purposes of this paper. It is important to note that service members in support career fields can sometimes be assigned to operational units, where they are enmeshed in operational culture.

In all, the interviewees largely agreed that progress has been made in the military, to include those who still had hesitations with being fully out. From an organizational standpoint, the military has implemented training to remove systemic barriers from

preventing equity of opportunity for those in the LGB community. Immediately following the repeal, the training was specific to the LGB community; now, this training exists in the form of mandatory classes on Equal Opportunity that cover equitable treatment of a number of marginalized populations. Some bases and ships have even participated in Pride month and have put on Pride parades to encourage awareness and inclusion of their local LGB community.

We had pride month when I was deployed [...] We did a pride parade [...] We had the Navy Band and we were authorized by the Director of Operations to make these rainbow tie-dye t-shirts to wear with our working pants.

Navy Lieutenant, Gay

I mean, the Army handled it pretty well in terms of just making sure the training was in place, that there was pretty seamless transition.

Army Major (Reserves), Gay

As time has gone on in the Navy, and as I get older, I just don't care if people know. So I'm a little bit more relaxed in how I carry myself. So if somebody asks me if I'm married, I used to be like, "How do they think I'm straight?" Now I have to think about, they may wonder if I have a husband.

Navy Lieutenant, Gay

In summary, most of the interviewees now feel safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks since the repeal of DADT. Eight of 20 interviewees felt immediately comfortable in being gay and out once DADT was repealed. Of the 12 who did not feel immediately comfortable, nearly half (five of the 12) never actually served while DADT was in place. All five of those members were either in an operational unit or were in the Marine Corps. Further, four of 14 interviewees who are still serving in the military are still hesitant to be out to their superiors and/or subordinates, while all but one interviewee is comfortable being out to his or her peers. Of those who still experience discomfort being gay and out in the military, all are male and are also either a member of the Marine Corps or a special operations unit. These findings suggest that gender, type of career field, and

branch of service are variables that may reveal the privileging of certain LGB military populations over others.

Privileged Positions and Serving Openly

The second question I sought to answer through this research was whether some groups of LGB service members—perhaps those in more protected or privileged positions—feel more safe serving openly in the military, whereas others feel less safe. Interestingly, positions typically thought of as those that are more privileged—for example, being an officer versus enlisted or being white—appeared to have no impact on whether the interviewees were comfortable being gay and out in the military. Instead, the findings revealed that lesbians appear to be privileged over gay men; LGB members in support career fields appear to be privileged over LGB members in operational career fields, and especially the special operations career fields; and gay men in the Marine Corps appear to be more disadvantaged than those in any other branch of service, as they largely remain a hidden population. The privileging of some LGB military populations over others can be conceptualized through the militarization of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that describes the social norm for stereotypically male traits to be idealized as the cultural standard of ‘rightness’. The literature review of this paper explored the conflation of soldierliness, masculinity, and heterosexuality in the military’s embodiment of hegemonic masculinity—militarized masculinity. This concept is particularly interesting when considering the apparent disparity militarized masculinity creates between lesbians versus gay men. All but one of the service members who discussed gender differences during their interview believed it

was easier to be out in the military as a lesbian than as a gay man, and most interviewees referred to some aspect of the concept of failed masculinity by its associated stereotypes as the foundation of their assertion.

I think it was a lot worse for ... Well, I mean, I don't know, but I feel like being a gay man at West Point was a lot worse, because at least the women ... A lot of the women that were straight also had some of the same stereotypes as lesbians, if you know what I mean. So it's not that hard to fit in as a woman, but a lot harder to fit in with the gay male stereotypes for our guy friends.

Army Major, Lesbian

From a cultural perspective, it seems more accepted to be a female lesbian than a gay male. And I think that comes a little bit to the hypermasculinity that is associated with the Marine Corps. Women can be a little bit more manly, and be a lesbian, and be more accepted, versus men who are gay, or seem to be more effeminate. [...] I think there are more, where I've seen, more out lesbians than gay men, which is great, interesting, from a statistical point of view. The numbers might be a little bit old, but at one point, 11% or 12% of females were officers, and it was seven or 8% for female enlisted, and the rest were men.

Marine Captain (Previously Reserves), Gay

I think people in my current unit would just be too terrified [to bring a same-sex partner to a military event]. Any operators would just be too terrified to... at least the males. There's openly gay women, but I think the males are just too terrified to not be "one of the guys," that it's just not going to be mentioned.

Navy Lieutenant Commander, Gay

Some of the interviewees went as far as suggesting the hegemony of militarized masculinity may benefit lesbians in the military environment. The foundation of these assertions generally stemmed from the belief that being lesbian meant those women would be better able to relate to their male peers. They shared a sexual attraction to females and often took on more stereotypical male traits that are valued by militarized masculinity, such as elite fitness. Being a lesbian meant embodying the hegemonic ideals that brought one closer to the military's cultural standard of 'rightness'.

I can say that I've seen a difference in my female troops who are gay than my male troops that are gay, because at [one assignment] I had a male troop that was gay and he had a husband and the whole nine. He definitely got made fun

of [...] he had an IG complaint, if I'm not mistaken, about people terrorizing and being terrible and that kind of stuff. But my girls, they almost get an attaboy situation. Like "Yeah, you like girls," kind of thing. It's like they're one of the boys because they like girls, if that makes sense. They almost have the complete opposite situation when it comes down to sexuality.

Air Force Captain, Bisexual Female

[Being a lesbian is] a way to have some camaraderie with the guys almost; in pretty much any shop in the military it's a population of a small number of females in general, so that's just kind of a way for a female to have some camaraderie with some of the guys. We like the same things, we're looking at the same things.

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class, Lesbian

While all female interviewees who talked about gender differences in the LGB military community believed the principle of militarized masculinity was a benefit to lesbians in the military, some of the female interviewees also discussed the pressure lesbians experience to be “good old boys” and partake in stereotypical male backstage (Goffman 1963) banter. The privilege afforded to lesbians in the military may be contingent upon their willingness to be masculine-performative and to publicly sexualize their same-sex relationships in the name of camaraderie.

I mean, jokes constantly. It was constant. It wasn't... I don't even want to say jokes, but it was just really... Some unsavory, inappropriate talk, where suddenly I'm not a person that's in a relationship with another person anymore. I'm somebody that has to openly talk about my sex life or that's expected. That's what it kind of goes to. Oh, you're in a relationship with a lady? That's for me to know about. So tell me everything. What's your sex life like? I was like, if it was another dude... I have a new girlfriend. You're not going to be "Oh my God, tell me everything what you guys do to each other."

Army Sergeant First Class, Lesbian

Only one interviewee felt it might be harder to be a lesbian than a gay man in the military. He attributed this to his belief that women were already disadvantaged in the military because it is such a hypermasculine organization; being a lesbian, then, was placing an additional stigma on an already marginalized population.

Militarized masculinity also created an apparent disparity between the experiential reality of LGB members serving in operational versus support career fields. As described in the previous section, all of the interviewees (excluding the Marines, which will be explored next) who expressed a continued hesitation with being gay and out immediately after DADT was repealed were either assigned to an operational career field or were serving in an operational unit. Sometimes service members who are in support career fields, such as administration, are assigned to operational units in order to assist that unit in mission accomplishment. When that happens, these support individuals are fully enmeshed in the operational culture. Many of the interviewees discussed how different the experiences can be for LGB members in operational versus support environments.

I have a one troop, her name is [redacted], but she absolutely looks the part in the sense of gay female, short hair. She even has a deeper voice. I can't remember if she said she was trying to transition, but she looks the part of like a very butchy female role. So she's never had to minimize anything or... Her look, you just can't hide it. She's like, "I'm out here. Hey, whatever." My male guy that's gay is the complete opposite, very feminine voice, very curly, beautiful hair. Very curly short, beautiful hair and very feminine mannerisms and stuff like that. And I think that has been like a detriment to him, meaning in the culture that we're in. So if he worked in medical or public affairs, he'd be all fucking fine and dandy, he'd be part of the crew, but in [operational career fields], it's hard. It's really hard to do. But [the female], she's one of the boys, like, "Yeah! Alright! Go Ahead!" that kind of stuff. For them, again, it's almost the opposite. Girls are okay to be gay. Guys are just not as much. Like I said, he's had some issues because there's dumb shitty people out there.

Air Force Captain, Bisexual Female

I just kind of stopped stressing over it if I did see people out, but at work it's still not mentioned. I just don't talk about it. I work at a [special operations unit], and I don't know how it's perceived as much. I've seen some people, some [support] personnel are out and they're fine, but the actual special operators I think would be completely ostracized if they were to come out as gay or trans or whatever. They sort of have their own code and, let's see, how can I phrase it? I think they would be, I just don't know that they would be accepted as much. I don't know that they would be actively discriminated against, but they would be definitely not given any... they wouldn't be cut any slack, whereas other people would.

Navy Lieutenant Commander, Gay

One reason for the career field disparity may be the lack of gender diversity that historically comprised operational career fields. As described above, operational units are generally conceptualized as those that employ weapons against the enemy to create effects. As such, most operational units are combat arms units—units that have been historically exclusively male and are still considered to be hypermasculine. It was only recently in 2016 that barriers were removed for women serving “on the front lines” in infantry and combat arms special operations units (Congressional Reporting Service 2018). A unit with higher levels of gender integration may be a protective factor that privileges LGB members serving in those units in terms of feeling comfortable being gay and out to peers, subordinates, and superiors.

I think the biggest divide comes from effectively the considered combat arms branches versus generally the support and logistical branches. I think there's definitely a heightened sense of masculinity that occurs in those combat arms branches, one, from the fact that for so long women weren't even allowed in those branches. It created that kind of, it's a man's world. But also given the nature of, those are definitely much more hyper adrenaline driven events of greater physicality requirements, there definitely seems to create a greater sense of having to be tough, having to be crass, that inappropriate humor helped define your ability to handle stressful situations, more so than in non-combat, in the support logistical branches, where yes, at the end of the day, I'm a soldier, however, my job is much more technical. There had been greater gender integration for a while so I think there was already a better sense of, this is not a necessarily masculine space, this is a professional space, that there was already a greater heightened awareness of those kinds of things.

Army Captain, Gay

Another reason for the disparity between the experiences of LGB members in operational versus support career fields may be differences in education levels required of those career fields. Operational jobs, particularly in the Army and the Marine Corps, are often compared to “blue-collar” jobs in the civilian world; generally speaking, they include grunt work, and people in these career field often refer to themselves as “knuckle draggers”

(Knuckle Draggez Veterans Club 2021). There is also a much larger ratio of enlisted members to officers in the combat arms branches. For example, the enlisted tactical, operations, and air/weapons specialists comprise nearly a quarter (23 percent) of the entire Army force (Data USA 2019). While some enlisted members obtain college level education, it is not a requirement for the enlisted force. So, the collective level of education in the combat arms branches is generally lower than that in support branches of service. Conversely, positions in support career fields sometimes require higher education to obtain those jobs, such as engineering, health care, law, etc. They also tend to have a higher officer to enlisted ratio, meaning the collective education level is higher in those career fields. Being in an environment where there is a larger population of people with higher education may be a protective factor that privileges LGB service members over those who are in career fields where individuals are less exposed to higher education.

I spoke about my coming out experience. I mean, I've had an overwhelmingly positive experience, being out. I don't know if that's the Navy. I don't know if that's Navy medicine, being in the medical community people are just a little more educated, a little more aware. Our Hippocratic Oath, we care for all people. I don't know if my peers are just kind of predisposed to being more open minded or not. I don't know.

Navy Lieutenant, Gay

Oh, yeah. Well, at my previous command I was at a health clinic, and when you're around a bunch of educated people, especially in the [redacted] field, it's filled with gay people, you know? I'm not trying to... just being realistic. But then you go to the operator side of the house and it's like, I mean, I'm sure there's probably gay people there, but they're not out. It's still pretty much an old boys' club. [...] It depends on the environment where you are. It's just how open you are, and some people are just terrified to come out. I've experienced both sides. I've experienced a very academic environment where it's filled with [people with higher education] and nobody cares. Whereas in the actual operational environment, very few, I haven't met one openly gay man.

Navy Lieutenant Commander, Gay

A final factor to consider in exploring the differences between operational and support career fields is the level of interaction with civilians. Because of the mission set of operational units, it is rare that a civilian workforce would be employed. However, civilian leadership and a civilian workforce is commonplace in the support career fields. This exposure to a non-military population in the workplace may inherently make that work environment less masculine from a military hegemony perspective, thereby creating an environment that is more amenable to being gay and out.

Definitely in infantry, the stigma [of homosexuality] lasted for way longer and it was a lot harder to get over than in any intel job because most intel guys are also dealing with civilians. So because of that, there was a lot less room to be like, "Oh no, I don't like that," because you'd probably get shut down by a civilian, who in this case would out rank you.

Marine, Bisexual, Corporal

The Air Force flying community is an interesting paradox to these trends, though. The flying community, especially the pilot community, is the pinnacle of the Air Force operational career fields. In the Air Force, you must be an officer to be a pilot, which means the entirety of this operational community is educated at least with a bachelor's, and typically with a master's degree within the first ten years of service. Additionally, even though pilots use weapons (bombs, missiles, etc.) against the enemy to create effects, they are removed from the battlefield. As a result, women have been flying combat missions since 1991, meaning they have experienced gender integration for 15 years longer than their ground-force combat counterparts (Forer 2011). It appears that the militarized masculinity associated with being in an operational unit either minimizes or negates the protective factors of education levels and gender integration that otherwise demasculinize the support career fields.

A third area in which militarized masculinity apparently created disparity in the experiential reality of LGB military members was between the different branches, and the Marine Corps in particular. Gay men in the Marine Corps remain a largely hidden population. The Marine Corps is socially accepted as the most hypermasculine Service; it has the lowest male to female ratio of any military branch, has the highest enlisted to officer ratio of any branch by nearly double, and has the lowest levels of collective education by an average of over four times (Department of Defense 2018). As such, the Marine Corps could be argued as the model of militarized masculinity. The type of career field in which Marine LGB members served appeared to have no bearing on their experiences. This may be, in part, to the Marine Corps mentality that you are a rifleman first and foremost, and whichever career field you happen to be in is a distant second. The Marine Corps considers every Marine to be in a combat arms, or operational, career field and, as a result, every Marine interviewee experienced the same operational-like cultural environment during their time in service (Smith 2019).

Okay. See this is the psychology of the Marine Corps and everything, because I did feel that certain things in me were arising, I never wanted to have the doubt from my parents or society, that I was not a man because of my sexual orientation. It was also a way to prove that whatever opinion you think of my physical attributes or in any way, shape or form, my emotions, I have done things that not many other men can do. So that was like a fuck you to anyone that would ever say that.

Marine, Bisexual, Corporal

It's certainly not a big thing to be a gay man in the Marine Corps. I've met very few, like I said, and they're kind of all spread out all over the country.

Marine 1st Lieutenant, Gay

So, in high school I did junior ROTC as well, and they distribute to the Marine Corps and out of all the branches, the Marine Corps we're known as the hardest, the most bad-ass, and in a way that was one of the reasons I chose the Marine Corps because if I made it through boot camp, and become a Marine, there's no way that I could be gay. So just knowing how hard it is in boot camp to go

through it, eventually become a Marine, that made it a lot easier to use that as a defense mechanism I guess, to where yes, I made it through the same training as everybody else, there's no way that I could be gay. And yeah. So I guess in a way that was probably one of the reasons why I chose the Marine Corps over the Navy or the Air Force and the Army.

Marine 1st Lieutenant (Prior Enlisted), Gay

Of course, there's always the joke about the Navy being gay, so once you join, you find out it's actually the Marine Corps. [...] I mean, that is more than just a joke, that is experience. [...] It is one of those stereotypes that we actually make fun of, and the theory is that because Marines are seen as the alpha male, the really strong ones, that's where a lot of gay men who aren't comfortable with themselves go into because they want to protect that masculinity ideal because no one's going to call a Marine weak.

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class, Gay

Interestingly, even in branches within the Marine Corps that require higher levels of education, gay Marines expressed feeling uncomfortable being gay and out. This is another example of militarized masculinity minimizing the protective effects that environments of collectively higher education seem to offer support units. An Airman also gave her perspective of the Air Force being the “friendliest” branch regarding LGB acceptance, which might be expected since the Air Force has the lowest ratio of enlisted to officer force and, as a result, the highest levels of collective education.

I knew that I was very lucky that I was in the Air Force, because I think it would have been a completely different situation in other places. I didn't really know anybody, I just knew I was in the friendliest branch.

Air Force Major (National Guard), Lesbian

I do kind of wish that I was, at times, wish I was in a profession where I could just be out and be completely comfortable in that. Having been in college and in [higher education] school where I was totally out and everybody just knew into a world where I live a little bit in the closet every day and I don't know if I'd be comfortable with at least my leadership finding out, even through the grapevine, that I'm gay. So I have a hard time sharing my personal life, even in little things, like I'll go out on a weekend before the whole coronavirus thing. I'd go out on the weekends to a gay bar in DC, people would be like, "Oh, what'd you do this weekend?" And it's like, "Oh, I just went to DC. I went to a bar or two." And they're like, "Oh, what bar?" And it's like, "Oh shoot." Now if I tell what bar it is they

might find out and they might know that it's a gay bar or like whenever. So it sort of hampers, at times, even my ability to have open conversations with people that I think if I were straight, it would just be something that wouldn't even be an issue.

Marine 1st Lieutenant, Gay

In summary, the militarization of hegemonically masculine ideals has led to the privileging of certain LGB military populations over others. Of those who discussed gender differences, all but one interviewee believed lesbians experience the benefit of militarized masculinity and are privileged over gay men. Similarly, militarized masculinity disadvantages LGB members in operational career fields. A history of gender integration, higher collective education levels within units, and the presence of a civilian workforce may all be protective factors that privilege LGB members serving in support units. Finally, the entirety of the Marine Corps appears to mirror the culture engrained in operational career fields, despite the role in which a Marine serves. This is a result of the Marine-first mentality and makes the Marine Corps the model of militarized masculinity. As a result, gay Marines are disadvantaged compared to the other services, as they remain a largely hidden population despite a decade having passed since DADT's repeal.

Homonormativity in a Post-DADT Military

The third question I sought to answer through this research was whether LGB military members are pressured to adhere to homonormativity. Homonormative performativity was a dominant theme that emerged through the interview process and was typically revealed through the LGB service members' expression of a want or a need to navigate their professional selves as separate from their sexual identity. This seemed to manifest from the fear, perception, or even experienced reality that being an LGB member

was still stigmatized in the professional military setting despite DADT's repeal. The apparent stigma surrounding homosexuality caused invisible labor for many of the interviewees as they managed microaggressions, navigated heteronormative assumptions, and fought the stigma associated with homosexual stereotypes. Invisible labor, or invisible work, describes unpaid work performed by a marginalized population that is unnoticed, unacknowledged, and, therefore, unregulated (Daniels 1987). The invisible labor the interviewees described was emotional labor (Hochschild 1983); that is, they expressed how they managed their feelings and expressions during professional interactions in order to adhere to militarized masculinity.

I definitely felt I needed to hide [my sexual orientation], especially just from actual base commanders and anybody really, really high ranking because of my job it dealt a lot with public affairs and, if people didn't want to deal with you, you didn't get anywhere, and you couldn't do your job. So I didn't want to be ineffective at my job. I definitely was very, very straight edge. I tried to be hetero performative as I could, I guess.

Marine Corporal, Lesbian

For me the tough thing is, you don't want to put anything in anyone's face, so while I am not going to lie to you and tell you that I'm not married...it's always just, especially initially, it's a constant balance of like, how much did you talk about it, and trying to read their cues as to if they were interested in talking about it or to what their feelings were on it.

Air Force Major (National Guard), Lesbian

So being an officer and having so many troops and stuff like that in [an operational career field], I do try to make sure that I'm not super flamboyant and super Gay Pride Norris, if that makes sense. Because if I had to give somebody paperwork, I don't want them to think, "Okay, this gay bastard is giving me paperwork because of X", whatever the case is. I try to stay hardcore in the middle and not be too visible with that kind of stuff, because I don't want anybody to think that I'm being biased or looking at them crazy or this or that. I try to stay very much in the middle.

Air Force Captain, Bisexual Female

A lot of this emotional labor was performed as a way to manage microaggressions that occurred during daily interactions with other military members. Microaggression is a

term that describes an encounter where a person says or does something that shows unconscious and unintentional bias against a marginalized group (Sue 2010). Most of the microaggressions the interviewees described centered around others assuming their heterosexuality. This ranged from the use of non-inclusive gendered pronouns such as “husband” or “wife” to the outright encouragement of the LGB member to ‘hit on’ or have a sexual interaction with an opposite sex person. Some interviewees described microaggressions that were more overtly homophobic, such as suggestions that parts of a city with gay bars should be avoided. Two interviewees experienced microaggressions in the form of back-handed compliments, where either a peer or superior conveyed they were a solid military member even though or despite the fact they were gay.

Any time we do a unit function, specifically, my boss is married, is a few years older than me. If there's an attractive female bartender, or if we're dealing with, if we're catering a service, like a venue for a conference out of town, and with the rep, I'll be encouraged to get after it, or things of that nature, because everyone knows that I'm not married.

Marine Captain (Former Reserve), Gay

There were two Captains I was talking to and they went down to do [work at a base I was moving to] and I mentioned I'm excited to go down to [redacted base] because I've never been there and I'd really like to get the chance to explore the city a little bit. And they were like, "Oh no, you don't want to go to [redacted city]. It's crap down there." And I was like, "Well, what are you talking about?" And they were like, "Well, you know..."; There was a lot of talk about like how the building that they had to be in was not in a good part of [the city]. But they said that at one point they started walking around and I guess they passed some part of [the city], they passed over a street or something, and there were all these gay bars and like, "I'll tell you right now, that's not someplace you want to be." Or, comments to that effect. And I was like, "mm-hmm."

Marine 1st Lieutenant, Gay

They'll say like, oh, well, no disrespect... or make comments like that. Like, "oh, no disrespect, but hey, so how did you and your wife have a kid? We don't want to offend you."

Air Force Master Sergeant, Lesbian

One of my experiences coming out, I didn't tell the person and he was the Deputy Commander of my squadron. He was doing my promotion party. I brought [my partner] with me, he pinned me on and then we went to the party after. And [my partner] told him. And it's funny, because he looked at me and he said 'hey, I know.' And I was like, okay... and he was like 'yea, but I don't think any less of you. In fact, you're a great officer and that doesn't change who you are.' And I thought that was great to hear from someone, especially higher ranking and someone who was grading me."

Air Force Captain, Gay

So, I do my Commander's In Brief [briefing by a new commander to his or her unit] and, you know, I was talking about the commander's intent, my vision and all of that. [...] And afterwards my, my [Equal Opportunity] advisor came in my office and was like, "Hey sir, can I talk to you?" I said, yeah, sure. It's like, "I just wanted to clarify something because a few of the Soldiers thought they heard you say that your husband was in the military. And they were like, you know, I, I want to be sure how to react to that because I didn't know what to tell them." Like, not really sure what to tell you. You're the EO advisor so whatever you need to tell them, that's it. He was like, "Oh yeah, yeah. Right, absolutely." So then afterwards, one of the conversations, he was like, "Hey, we just want to, you know, through that, that we support you and have your back." I was like, I'm not sure what you're talking about. "Well, you know, about being LGBT we just want you to know that you had our support." Like, I, I kind of appreciate what you're trying to do, but what you have to realize is, I don't need your support. I am the commander and I am gay and that's it.

Army Major (Reserves), Gay

Some of the invisible labor performed by LGB military members is spawned from the policing of militarized masculine norms. Five of the 20 interviewees described experiences they had after DADT's repeal where their peers attempted to regulate their behavior in order to ensure adherence to the heteronormative status quo.

I'm very masculine and I don't give off a gay vibe. And I have asked [my work friends], "If I was flamboyant and if I acted the way, the stereotypical gay man would act, would you still be my friend?" And some of them are saying, "Maybe not so much."

Marine 1st Lieutenant (Prior Enlisted), Gay

I was with [my military] friends, just at their house, drinking beers from a bottle. I remember holding a bottle up to my lips, and I licked the rim of the glass. One of my peers looked over at me and says, "[Redacted], you can't do that, that's gay."

Army 1st Lieutenant, Gay

I don't know if it comes off on the phone, but I tend to [have a] slightly like, gay, a bit more of a feminine voice. And so I've been told by people, when you're doing briefings and things like that, you need to talk more with your chest and talk deeper and project more so you sound more masculine as you're talking because people won't take you as seriously [otherwise].

Army Captain, Gay

Further, the privileging of LGB military members who adhere to homonormative behavior over those who do not (i.e., those who espouse promiscuity rather than being coupled, or those who are effeminate or flamboyant) was evidenced in the experience one interviewee had while planning and executing Pride Month for his unit.

There was a brief period during the pride month, where there was this main hallway [...] that I'd walk by every day to go to my workspace. There was a glass trophy case that was there. It displayed mementos from the history of the [unit], and there was one section of it that was a display for diversity. In May on deployment, it was the Pacific Islander heritage. When June came around, they had all these different variations on the rainbow flag. This was 2015. But flags I had never heard of. You know how you get the rainbow flag, and then there's the one that I'm becoming more familiar with now, for trans? It's the kind of white, pink, and blueish hues. [...] One was for like lipstick lesbian pride. I'm like, "What the? What is lipstick lesbian pride? I don't even know what that is." Then there was like bear pride. Some of it was very specific to sex. Which, if I'm out in LA or DC or San Francisco, awesome. But I was just feeling, "Oh god, this is not going to go well." [...] There were pride posters posted throughout the [area], but I did hear that some of the posters had been ripped down. Then I heard that there were complaints from the civilian staff [redacted] about the flag display. But to my memory, I'm pretty sure the display stayed up. You know what? No. We changed it. no, I take it back. I got involved. I went to them, and I said, "Look, I don't know if anybody on your committee is gay, but can we put a little bit more historical reference on here? Maybe focus on some historical gay people who were in the military, as opposed to just focusing on sex."

Navy Lieutenant, Gay

While some interviewees described their efforts to subvert militarized masculinity by expanding the collective use of LGB-inclusive language in the military community and pushing the boundaries established by the military's privileging of heteronormative masculinity, others described the efforts they took to avoid that subversion, to include

attentive adherence to heteronormative language and—for some male Marines—to deflect suspicion of homosexuality despite a decade having passed since the repeal.

More times than not, I wear my wedding ring at work. I'll mention I'm married. I tend to not bring it up at first. I've been trying to figure out if it's better for me to say up front, I'm married to my husband or wait till it naturally comes up in the conversation. So, a lot of people tend to default to the heteronormative, "Oh, you're married so what does your wife do?" Which is fine, I really have no issue with that. I tend to just respond with, well, my husband does this. Which usually gets an awkward look and a very quick apology of just assuming and stuff like that. It's happened both just in conversation, when I went to go register my dependent. After we got married, we had to register in the dependent system. A woman at the office said, "Hey, what's your wife's name?" And I was like, "My husband's name is [redacted]." She felt terrible and apologetic. So for her, because she's part of the system I said I'm fine with it. In the statistical likelihood of people coming into this office who are married, I would say the majority of them are going to say their wife. However, I would recommend in the future just asking your spouse's name or your spouse's information just so it's not an issue in the future, because I'm being really cool about this. There will be a time and a place somebody will not take this as well as I do. So, consider this your freebie learning lesson before this becomes an issue. But I literally had this conversation yesterday as we were doing our transaction, one of the other captains, we were just kind of BS'ing, talking and I said I'm married and my spouse is back in the States. And they're like, "Oh, is your wife also in the Army?" I was like, "Well, yeah my husband's in the Army. He works at this unit." And there was like this brief pause of like, oh, no, I fucked up. I was like, no man you're fine. Again, statistically, you're okay in saying wife, just you're wrong this time.

Army Captain, Gay

And I think it's also the misperception of what it means to be gay in a military culture. And one of the reasons why it took me so long to come out, even after Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed, was you see mainstream media of how gay people are portrayed, we're talking about the stereotypical, what the general public normally sees, a gay man, maybe they're more flamboyant, maybe they talk a certain way, they walk a certain way. And generally, I don't fit that stereotype and I don't want to fit that stereotype because, again, being gay is very small part of who I am and I don't want to make it all about me, but I think there's a balance there where I still have a hard time just saying, "Yes, this is my boyfriend." Or "Yes, I'm gay." And when I talk to the Marines and I'm very, very cautious about referring to their spouses I always try to include the male pronouns or the female pronouns. I don't know, it's weird for whatever reason, I still have a hard time with it.

Marine 1st Lieutenant (Prior Enlisted), Gay

Before, when I first got to my first military police unit here in [redacted], I was very open. I was very out there myself and I was like... I had pride shirts, I wore a rainbow belt. My civilian attire. But then once I started running into problems and I noticed that it was because of me wearing stuff and me being who I am, I actually started working out more. I actually started trying to beef up some more and be like, "No. Don't worry about that." I would change my entire wardrobe. I ended up throwing away a lot of my colored shirts and stuff like that. Just wearing strictly black, gray, white. Just neutral colors. And then I couldn't really be who I was around people, especially when I dressed as a civilian. I was just like, "All right. You guys are making me feel this way. So if all right, fine. What I'm doing is wrong."

Army Corporal, Bisexual Male

Navigating the stigma associated with homosexuality in the military is not the only challenge LGB members face. Four of the interviewees expressed their struggle with tokenism. As LGB military members work hard to excel, there are sometimes lingering thoughts as to whether the accolades they receive are truly a result of their hard work, or are a result of leadership bolstering marginalized populations in an apparent effort to be more inclusive. All of the interviewees who expressed this concern were also members of other marginalized populations; three were Black and three were female. This may suggest that a schematic precedent for tokenism was already established for these interviewees and, therefore, was also a concern regarding their sexual orientation. Interestingly, one of the interviewees described members of support career fields as being in a marginalized population. This is evidence of the reification of militarized masculinity.

Like I said, being in the squadron I'm in, I'm already a minority, I'm support, and then I'm gay. My troop is actually gay as well, so it kind of was a running joke. When I first got here, like, oh, you're going to have the best supervisor ever, because y'all can relate to so many things, but I really didn't take it as a joke at first. First of all, I've been in for 13 years. I'm not a child. Don't treat me like a child. I'm actually his supervisor. I don't care if he's gay, straight, or whatever.

Air Force Master Sergeant, Lesbian

Whether it's a true acceptance or a fear of getting in trouble if they do anything wrong. That's the interesting part because I'm not sure how much... You never know what people say behind you or what another person says, because for me

it was kind of like, I don't ever want to wonder, did I get this [award or honor] because I am the token gay Black guy? Or was it something I honestly earned, or did I not get that? Because sometimes you know that people have those kinds of conversations.

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class, Gay

An important perspective expressed by two interviewees was that, while the military professes a culture of diversity, what it actually values is a culture of photo-diversity. This means that the military values racial diversity and gender diversity because those are types of diversity that can be seen, whereas diversity of sexual orientation is much harder to overtly recognize. These interviewees suggested that, in order to combat the culture of militarized masculinity and remove the constraints that privilege LGB military members who adhere to homonormativity, the accomplishments of gay and out military members should be recognized similarly to other marginalized populations.

I say it's kind of like most people don't know that when Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed that the highest ranked gay officer was an Admiral in the Coast Guard. I forgot his name right now, but in those cases, no, but it's like we don't have a history of gay people in the military because it was something you could hide. We don't know who was the first lesbian or gay man or transgender person to achieve something.

Navy Petty Officer 1st Class, Gay

Whether it's the first female fighter pilot, or the first female to serve in combat, or the first black Marine to receive the Medal of Honor, those are very well-documented and always published, whatever month is recognizing that particular aspect of military life, if it's Black History Month, if it's Women's Month, whatever it may be. To my knowledge, there's no recognition of the accomplishments or deeds done by gay or lesbian Marines. That's not to say the next time a gay Marine gets into a fight, they should automatically be awarded the Medal of Honor or anything like that. But the first openly gay pilot to fly combat missions is something.

Marine Captain (Former Reserve), Gay

In summary, militarized masculinity privileges LGB military members who adhere to homonormative behavior. The interviewees revealed that homonormative performativity generally manifests through the invisible labor LGB military members

implement to maintain the hegemony of militarized masculinity. This invisible labor, usually in the form of emotional work, is a tactic used to manage the microaggressions and policing of non-heteronormative behavior by other military members. By adhering to homonormativity, LGB military members reproduce militarized masculinity and contribute to the reification of its hegemony.

V. LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations in this research, which generally fall into the categories of methodological limitations and limitations of the researcher. From a methodological perspective, one limitation of this study is the inability to generalize these results to the broader LGB military population. I was unable to determine whether significant relationships exist, as statistical tests require a larger sample size and a probability sampling design. However, the 20 interviews that were conducted enabled the research to have a level of depth and varied nuance that a generalizable survey would not have offered. Second, trends that emerged from specific sub-populations within the total pool of 20 interviewees could have been more accurately and robustly explored if there were more interviewees who were part of that smaller sub-population for which I did not originally stratify my participants (for example, the special operations career fields). Third, because the data collected for this research was self-reported, it cannot be independently verified. Variables such as selective memory; telescoping, or recalling events that happened at one time as having happened during a different time; attribution errors, where events that are recalled are inappropriately or inaccurately attributed to certain causes; or exaggeration, such as embellishment of events may have impacted the data.

From a researcher perspective, one limitation of this study was my own conscious and unconscious bias. Despite my concerted effort to objectively approach the research, bias likely impacted both the way in which I conducted the interviews as well as the lens through which I formulated conclusions. One bias may stem from my outsider status in the

LGB community. As an example, I noticed my own feelings of discomfort when exploring certain questions or topics with the interviewees. This discomfort stemmed from a concern that I might offend my participants by using less accepted verbiage to describe their experiences or perhaps ask questions that are perceived as ignorant. Further, my own experiences in the military may have biased the perspective through which I conceptualized the data. For example, I have a construct, based on my own experiential reality, of the nuances of the various branches of the military as well as the career fields within each branch. It is possible that my bias shaped my questioning, as well as the dialogue surrounding these topics. Finally, the access I had to the population may have impacted the results. I was reliant on colleagues and their contacts, and used snowball sampling to obtain participants. Given this wasn't a random sample results may be skewed.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations are suggested in order to add depth to the findings in this research. (1) Conduct quantitative analysis to determine if the apparent disparities between lesbians and gay men in the military; LGB members in support career fields versus those in operational career fields or units, and especially those in special operations career fields; and gay men in the Marine Corps versus gay men in other branches of service exist on a statistically significant level. This is not only key to ensure generalizability of the findings but could also have important policy implications for the Department of Defense and military as a whole. (2) Conduct in-depth qualitative analysis on the differences of experiences between LGB service members in the active component versus those in the reserve component or the National Guard. There may be variables, such as location of the unit, that impact those in the Guard or Reserves whereas those in the Active Duty community are protected because of the transient nature of their assignments. (3) Conduct in-depth qualitative analysis on the experiences of gay men in special operations career fields and in the Marine Corps. The results of this study show they may remain a largely hidden population in the military today, despite its stance as a non-discriminatory organization. Systemic barriers in these organizations specifically should be explored to ensure this population is not marginalized or culturally suppressed.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research explored the current culture of acceptance of the LGB community in the military one decade after the repeal of the very controversial act, Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Specifically, it explored whether LGB service members feel safe and comfortable serving openly in the military ranks; whether some groups—perhaps those in more protected or privileged positions—feel more safe, whereas others feel less safe; and whether LGB military members are pressured to adhere to homonormativity to be accepted in the military. The research revealed that, while most LGB military members feel comfortable being gay and out now in a post-DADT military, some still have hesitations to be out to their superiors and subordinates, while one interviewee remained closeted to all but his closest friends. Those who experienced discomfort being gay and out were all men and were all either in the Marine Corps or in a special operations unit.

The militarization of hegemonically masculine ideals—militarized masculinity—privileges certain LGB military members over others. Lesbians are privileged over gay men; LGB members in support career fields are privileged over those in operational career fields or those serving in operational units; and gay men who are homonormatively performative are privileged over those who are more effeminate, flamboyant, or promiscuous. Militarized masculinity also disadvantages gay men in the Marine Corps when compared to gay men in other branches of service. The privileging of these populations allows some LGB member to feel more safe being gay and out in the military than others. Finally, many interviewees discussed how they adhered to homonormative

military boundaries through the performance of invisible labor in the form of emotional work. This adherence to homonormativity reproduces militarized masculinity and reinforces its hegemony.

These findings expand on previous research exploring the military's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and its historical culture of exclusion of the LGB community by examining whether the repeal of DADT subsequently effected a culture of inclusion for this population. It also expanded on previous quantitative research that identified differences in levels of distress of LGB military members based on their career fields by qualitatively examining the structural inequalities and nuances that may cause lead to that distress. This research also explored how those structural inequalities result in the privileging of some LGB members over others through the lens of militarized masculinity. This research offered findings that tighten the knowledge gap regarding DADT's repeal and its effect on creating a culture of inclusion for LGB service members.

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