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# (DE)CENTERING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE U.S. MILITARY: IDENTITY (RE)NEGOTIATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE FOLLOWING THE REPEAL OF "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL"

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(DE)CENTERING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE U.S. MILITARY: IDENTITY (RE)NEGOTIATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE FOLLOWING THE REPEAL OF "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL"

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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*To Mom and Dad, for your unconditional love and your continuous support during this process.*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ..... iv

List of Tables ..... viii

Abstract ..... ix

Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 1

Statement of Problem ..... 3

Purpose of Present Study ..... 4

Chapter 2: Literature Review ..... 7

U.S. Military Culture ..... 7

Military Masculinities ..... 11

Heteronormativity in the U.S. Military ..... 15

A History of Sexuality-Based Discrimination ..... 20

Social Identity ..... 30

Stigma ..... 39

Identity Management ..... 42

Dialogues and Dialectics ..... 47

Chapter 3: Research Method ..... 53

Sample ..... 53

Research Design ..... 58

Data Analysis ..... 60

Chapter 4: Identity Incongruity and Reconciliation ..... 66

GLB Identity Repudiation ..... 67

Identity Incongruity ..... 78

Chapter 5: Identity Management Processes .....85
Identity Management Prior to the Repeal of DADT .....85
Feelings Associated with Identity Management Choices .....102
Identity Management after the Repeal of DADT .....107
Feelings Associated with Strategies of Openness .....112
Chapter 6: (De)Centering Heteronormativity in the U.S. Military .....114
Discursive Constructions of LBG Military .....115
De(Centering) Heteronormativity in Talk .....124
Chapter 7: Discussion .....141
Study Overview .....141
Summary of Findings .....143
Implications .....147
Limitations .....151
Directions for Future Research .....152
Conclusion .....155
References .....156
Appendices .....169

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Overview for GLB Participants…… 56

Table 2: Demographic Overview for Heterosexual Participants……... 58

Table 3: Coping with Identity Incongruity…… 173

Table 4: Identity Management Strategies Before Repeal of DADT……. 175

Table 5*:* Identity Management Strategies After Repeal of DADT……177

Table 6: Feelings Associated with Identity Management Choices……178

Table 7: Discursive Constructions of GLB Military ……179

Table 8: Discursive Practices (De)Centering Heteronormativity ……. 180

## ABSTRACT

This study assesses: (1) cultural stigmatization processes and their influence on self-concept clarity for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the United States military, (2) the identity management strategies employed by GLB persons before and after the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and (3) the individual communication practices that reinforce and/or decenter heteronormativity in talk. In-depth interviews were conducted with GLB ($n$ = 15) and heterosexual ($n$ = 13) current and former military service members. Findings revealed that *GLB identity repudiation* incites feelings of identity incongruity for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military. Further, because homosexuality was viewed as seemingly incompatible with military identity, many participants struggled to integrate their two social identities effectively. Second, findings revealed that all participants made thoughtful and deliberate decisions about whether or not, and to whom, they would reveal their sexual identities. Strategies of closedness were found to incite feelings of *shame, isolation,* and *stress*. Identity management strategies remained relatively consistent even after DADT was repealed. Three new strategies emerged (strategies of openness) after the repeal of DADT, which incited reduced stress, feelings of inclusion, and increased self-liking. Third, findings revealed that GLB military persons were discursively constructed as both a *threat to military effectiveness* and also as *valuable assets to the military organization*. Findings also demonstrated a potential for social change in that dialogic communication practices worked to decenter heteronormativity in talk.



*Keywords*: identity, dialectics, heteronormativity, sexuality, military

# CHAPTER 1.

# INTRODUCTION

> *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. The presence of such members adversely affects the ability of the Military Service to maintain discipline, good order, and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among service members, to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the Military Service; to maintain the public acceptability of military service; and to prevent breaches of security*.
>
> -U.S. Department of Defense directive 1332.14 dated January 28, 1982 (Obtained from Zeeland, 1993)

The military has traditionally been characterized by conservatism, with a homogeneous male force, and exclusionary laws and practices aimed at maintaining masculine values (Dunivin, 1994). Historically, justifications for the unequal treatment and exclusion of women, gays, lesbians, and others, have included: inapt mental characteristics, lack of intelligence, poor fighting abilities, and psychological illness among others (King, 1993; Shawver, 1995). Despite such claims of biological inferiority being repeatedly falsified by scientific research, exclusionary practices have remained and have been justified instead, time and time again, by the U.S. military "on the grounds of preserving combat effectiveness" (Dunivin, 1994, p. 535).

Proponents of the military's exclusionary policies have argued that combat effectiveness and cohesion are best achieved in homogeneous combat units (Dunivin, 1994). Of course, we have observed profound social change over time, which has slowly, but drastically, shifted military policies and practices. In fact, to meet the cultural demands of our evolving society many of the discriminatory and exclusionary

laws implemented by the U.S. military were either overturned or adapted; segregation laws have been abolished, policies prohibiting women from service have been revoked, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) has been implemented, and finally, DADT has been repealed.

Although different groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, disabled persons, mentally ill persons, women, transgender individuals, and sexual minorities, among others) have been the target of discrimination and/or exclusion from the armed forces over the years, the focus of the current investigation is sexuality in the U.S. military. The prohibition on gays and lesbians from participating in the armed forces has been one of the most widely supported exclusionary practices within the Department of Defense (Britton & Williams, 1995). Such policies have never really prevented gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from serving their country; rather, such prohibitions have merely prevented them from serving their country *openly*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have concealed their sexual identities and have unremittingly served their country throughout history, even before the United States was a nation (Shilts, 2005). In more recent years, however, particularly in the past 20-25 years,

> As the gay community has taken form in cities across the nation, a vast gay subculture has emerged within the military, in every branch of service, among both officers and enlisted. Today, gay soldiers jump from the 101st Airborne, wear the Green Beret of the Special Forces, and perform top-level jobs in the 'black world' of covert operations (Shilts, 2005, p. 3).

And, since September 20, 2011, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have been allowed to serve openly for the first time. Although different branches actually "opened" to GLB persons on different dates, September 20, 2011 was the date on which DADT was officially repealed for *all* branches of the U.S. armed forces.

## Statement of Problem

According to a 2010 report published by the Williams Institute[1], "An estimated 48,500 lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are serving on active duty or in the ready reserve in the U.S. military and an additional 22,000 are in the standby and retired reserve forces, accounting for approximately 2.2% of military" (Gates, 2010, p. 1). Of the estimated 48,500 gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military, approximately 13,000 were serving on active duty in 2010. These estimates have likely increased drastically since DADT was repealed (Gates, 2010). Given the increasing numbers of GLB service personnel, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military warrant further investigation.

Since the repeal of DADT gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have been granted the right to serve openly in the U.S. military, with the promise of being protected from organizational discrimination. However, the inclusion of diverse bodies is not enough to change military culture (Braswell & Kushner, 2012). Military life continues to be governed by masculine ideologies that marginalize GLB persons. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals continue to be viewed as a potential threat to unit cohesion and military effectiveness. As Braswell and Kushner (2012) explain, unit cohesion is considered essential to a unit's operational efficiency. Given the growing numbers of GLB persons in the military, then, it becomes essential that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals be socially integrated in positive ways such that they, and other minority groups, feel included within the cultural community.

[1] The Williams Institute is a think tank at UCLA Law dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy.

Despite the recent repeal of DADT, military culture has been traditionally homophobic, and thus presents a series of challenges to those serving as they "come out" to fellow comrades and military leaders (Mackay, 2012). In fact, the military is one of the most repressive structures in the United States (Mackay, 2012). Further, as Mackay (2012) explains, "masculine combative warrior" remains the ideal image for service members. Service personnel who do not fit into this dominant paradigm, such as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, are thus considered cultural outsiders (Mackay, 2012). This means that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals who chose to serve openly, are likely to be excluded from military culture and may face ostracism, harassment, abuse, or violence from their fellow service personnel (Mackay, 2012). Furthermore, as a result of the repeal act, group cohesion may be disrupted unless a cultural change is initiated that focuses on "a shift in the concept of a '[combative] warrior' that is all-inclusive of gender, race, age, religion, and sexual orientation" (Mackay, 2012, p. 111).

## Purpose of Present Study

As stated, since the repeal of DADT in 2011, gay, lesbian, and bisexual service persons have been able to serve openly without the threat of discharge. Although other threats continue to exist, identities are now being renegotiated within the military cultural context. As such, a goal of my dissertation is to examine the lived experiences of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military and to uncover the communicative practices that continue to shape normative expectations in the military culture.

Gay and lesbian issues in the Military have been the focus of a multitude of research studies. For instance, historians have sought to trace homosexual identities and behaviors to earlier historical periods within the U.S. military (e.g., Shilts, 2005). Other

scholars have critically analyzed the exclusionary policies that have worked to prohibit gays and lesbians from service (e.g., Buford, 2014; Evans, 2002). Others have critically examined the claims that such exclusionary policies preserve combat effectiveness (e.g., Barkawi, Dandeker, Wells-Petry, & Kier, 1999; Kier, 1998). However, many prior research studies have excluded the voices of the gays and lesbians that they describe. Further, few studies have examined these identity processes in the military from a communication perspective. A communication perspective would shed light on the communicative practices that work to shape and maintain shared meanings within the military context.

Weinstein and D'Amico (1999) emphasize a need for citizens "to understand the relationship between the military and society because the military both reflects the larger society and serves as one avenue to change society" (p. 3). As such, there is a need to understand the policies that have governed who can be included, and who is excluded. Policies such as DADT affect *all* service persons, and also the goals and values of the military organization. To more holistically understand the experiences of GLB military service persons, and the continued processes of heterosexual normalization, this study explores the perspectives of both GLB persons and heterosexuals in the military. This study fills an important gap in literature by exploring the negotiated processes of meaning-making via symbolic communication. This study also includes people who had served at all stages of the DADT policy reform. Because experiences of GLB military, and the perspectives of their heterosexual counterparts, are likely different depending on the political contexts in which they served, their

diverse experiences offer unique and important insights into the changing nature of the military institution.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, I aim to uncover the cultural stigmatization processes that GLB persons experience in the military. Specifically, I hope to discover the ways in which these larger communication patterns influence self-concept clarity and feelings of belonging for GLB persons. Second, I aim to examine the identity management strategies employed by GLB persons before and after the repeal of DADT. Additionally, because behavioral tactics in self-presentation have been found to affect the social actor's private views and self-views (Cioffi, 2000), I also seek to examine the feelings associated with GLB individuals' identity management choices. Third, I seek to examine language in use to uncover the ways in which GLB military identities are discursively constructed. I also aim to uncover the specific communication practices that work to uphold and/or destabilize systems of heterosexual privilege in talk.

In addition to the study objectives, this dissertation also advances a dialectical approach to the study of intercultural communication. This study employs various approaches to facilitate interparadigmatic discussion (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). According to Martin and Nakayama (1999), "A dialectical approach offers us the possibility of 'knowing' about intercultural interaction as a dynamic and changing process" (p. 14). As such, I attempt to move beyond paradigmatic constraints to acquire a more holistic understanding of the GLB experience in the U.S. military by including literature from functionalist, interpretive, and critical perspectives.

# CHAPTER 2.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I begin by first describing military culture, and more specifically military masculinity. I also explain the notion of heteronormativity by offering a brief overview of the history of sexuality. Then, in order to contextualize my dissertation study, I provide a historical overview of sexuality-based discrimination in the U.S. military. Finally, I introduce several concepts, theories, and perspectives that inform my study, highlighting the current gaps in literature.

## U.S. Military Culture

The military presents a unique way of life, and is hence understood as a distinctive culture, with its own set of rules and norms (Dunivin, 1994; Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2003). As Reger, Etheridge, Reger, and Gahm (2008) explain, in the military cultural group members have their own language and maintain their own code of manners. Military service persons also adhere to particular norms of behavior, belief systems, dress, and rituals, thus constituting a unique cultural group (Reger et al., 2008). Further, Dunivin (1994) argues that the military meets all four qualities that define "culture" in that military culture: (1) is learned through socialization, (2) is shared by its members, (3) is adaptive to changing conditions, and (4) is symbolic in nature. Therefore, in this dissertation, I examine the U.S. military as a distinctive culture; those who are serving are described as cultural group members.

As stated, military servants utilize their own specialized language and must become competent in this language. Further, all active duty military personnel receive regular specialized training, in specific schools or academies (Soeters et al., 2003).

Military service personnel also wear the uniform of the branch of the military they serve, which distinguishes them from most civilians (Soeters et al., 2003). The uniform is a symbol that represents the United States Military—serving country and fellow citizens—that separates military individuals from civilians in a very distinct way. On their uniforms, they also wear their rank, which influences, in many ways, the communication patterns observed in military culture. In the following paragraphs, I will describe three key characteristics that distinguish military culture: authoritarian structure, detachment from non-military life, and the importance of the mission.

The first, and perhaps the most pervasive characteristic of military culture, is that this culture is "maintained by a rigid authoritarian structure" (Hall, 2011, p. 8). Those who participate in the military adapt to the rigidity, regimentation, and conformity that is required of military servants. The military system is defined by clear rules with narrow boundaries (Hall, 2011). Further, organizational control in the military extends to various aspects of individuals' personal lives, more so than other organizations (Soeters et al., 2003).

In the military, there is a heavy emphasis on hierarchy, thus perpetuating an authoritarian ideology. There is a rank system with little tolerance for questioning authority (Hall, 2011). There is a great deal of discipline and control in the military, which is executed through a formal chain of command (Soeters et al., 2003). The military also requires a great deal from its personnel. Active duty service men and women are on 24-hour call. They can be ordered to distant locations on short notice, their leave is subject to cancellation, and their jobs can be dangerous and/or life

threatening (Soeters et al., 2003). Those in the military experience frequent violations of privacy, and must adhere to expectations for conformity (Hall, 2008, 2011).

Another characteristic that distinguishes military culture is detachment from non-military life. As Soeters and colleagues (2003) explain, service men and women not only work at various bases, but also often live on these bases, sometimes with their relational partners and children (Soeters et al., 2003). The bases are comprised of the various units that make up the particular duty station at which military individuals work in their particular Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). In addition, bases often contain most of what an individual or family might need to live as one would in any established community. As such, military service persons are often isolated from mainstream society. The military lifestyle is also very transient. Individuals move numerous times throughout their service career, they face multiple deployments, and they have varying degrees of exposure to civilian life, depending on their role and location (Janowitz, 1971). As Hall (2011) explains, the need for extreme mobility often deters military service persons and their families from developing strong connections in the non-military world.

While many individuals enlist in the military for only a few years, others serve for much of their lives. For many service persons, then, the military is considered more than "just a job," it is a way of life (Soeters et al., 2003). Military service persons are often fully oriented toward the military institution in such a way that the military, and the values for which it stands, come to dominate their lives; "military and personal life tend to overlap, transforming the job into a part of communal life," (Soeters et al., 2003, p. 241).

The final cultural characteristic I will address is the mission focus of military culture. As Martin and McClure (2000) explain, the military demands "a total commitment to the military—typically a commitment to one's unit, the unit's mission and its members" (p. 15). All training activities are centered on this idea of military effectiveness. This commitment to the mission is the very essence of military unit cohesion (Hall, 2011). As Houppert (2005) explained, basic training is even designed to shift a recruit's sense of dependence from their family to their military team. The desired effect then, is to create "a proud cult that fewer and fewer outsiders want to join" (Gegax & Thomas, 2005, p. 26). Dedication to one's country and one's fellow service members is fundamental to military culture. The dire need for unit cohesion is a major reason for which individuality is discouraged in the military.

Now that I have provided a brief summary of military culture, I move on to discuss military masculinities. Research has demonstrated that culture has a profound influence on the ways in which individuals come to learn, understand, and interpret gender and sexuality norms and expectations. In fact, meanings and values of identities such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other identity types are defined through pervasive cultural value patterns (Ting-Toomey, 2005). So, in order to understand gender and sexuality within military culture, one must first recognize the ideological assumptions that are embedded in the cultural socialization processes of the military institution, and also the values, beliefs, and behaviors expected of, and perpetuated by, cultural group members. In the following pages I explain the U.S. military culture as it is characterized by the combative masculine-warrior paradigm in an effort to demonstrate the cultural construction of masculinity within this context. Once this

notion of *military masculinity* has been unpacked, I move on to explain how this relates to military sexualities. I then offer a brief history of the policies that have aided in the preservation of a heteronormative and highly masculine armed forces.

## Military Masculinities

Important to the present study, the U.S. military perpetuates a conservative, moralistic ideology that is reflected in its ethics and customs (Dunivin, 1994). Gendered ideologies are made evident by clear and identifiable gender roles that are performed within and around military bases. For instance, soldiering is understood as a masculine activity performed by masculine men. As McSally (2011) explains, "war and the military ethos required to fight and win wars have traditionally been considered masculine in nature" (p. 149). Alternatively, peace and the need to be protected are typically defined as feminine. McSally (2011) explains how these conceptions have characterized military culture and the varying gender roles ascribed to men and women,

> Men take life and women give life. Men protect and women are protected. Men are strong and courageous and women are weak and emotional. Men are responsible to the state and women to their family. Men are motivated to function in the horror of war by the thought of returning to the normalcy of the home signified by the mother, wife, sweetheart, and the nurses who care for them in battle (p. 149).

Enloe (1983) further exclaims, "The military, even more than other patriarchal institutions, is a male preserve, run by men and for men according to masculine ideas and relying solely on man power" (p. 7). Consequently, "a deeply entrenched 'cult of masculinity' (with accompanying masculine norms, values, and lifestyles) pervades military culture" (Dunivin, 1994, p. 534). Further, combat, which is understood as men's work, is the military's core activity and is said to define the very existence and meaning of military culture (Dunivin, 1994). Military structures are built around

combative activities (i.e., ground combat divisions, fighter air wings, naval aircraft carrier combat groups) and each branch of service is organized and trained according to their combative roles (Dunivin, 1994). Consequently, "military man" becomes symbolic of "combative masculine warrior" (Dunivin, 1994). Military masculinity "is characterized by the interrelationship of stoicism, phallocentricity and the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness and heroic achievement" (Hopton, 2003, p. 112).

The conception of "masculine warrior" described above is maintained and reproduced by the military structure itself. As Gardiner (2013) explains, "Persons proper are not born but made, produced, raised, and grown" (p. 7). As a socializing institution, the military reinforces masculine values and norms through aggressive conditioning. During training military service members are taught to perform masculinity, to march in unison, to stand with their heads tall, to obey commands, and so on. The acquisition of competence in these performances is also the acquisition of social and cultural competence. Recruits typically end up internalizing much of the ethos of masculinity (Dunivin, 1994) and are provided the opportunity to prove their manhood by taking on the military role and by performing the role effectively. Such performances are then met with support from broader society, which serves as a public endorsement of these masculine values and the institutionalization of hegemonic masculinity in national culture (Hopton, 2003). Importantly, this dominant paradigm remains the essence of military culture, even with the presence of others who do not fit the stereotypical image of combative masculine warrior (Dunivin, 1994; Herbert, 1998).

This notion of military masculinity is not restricted to the United States, but is also observed abroad. One example of how the military functions as a masculinizing

force cross-culturally is the Bolivian military. Gill (1997), an anthropologist at American University, examined military masculinities in Bolivia. Similar to the U.S. military, the military institution in Bolivia *produced* masculine males. As Gill (1997) explains, basic training is a gendered process in which the "armed forces define the parameters of appropriate male behavior and link masculinity and citizenship to the successful completion of military service" (p. 533). Militarized male Bolivians are thus created by "the imposition of acceptable forms of masculinity that prize aggressivity, male camaraderie, discipline, autonomy, and obedience to authority" (Gill, 1997, p. 534). Certain performances of masculinity are then granted approval, whereas other performances of collective and individual identities are denied legitimacy. Of course, this masculinizing process is dependent upon both the acceptance of those engaging in military service, and the ritualized socialization process of brutalization, "an aspect of the 'civilizing' experience that is central to military training" (Gill, 1997, p. 534).

As Gill (1997) explains, "Military service is one of the most important prerequisites for the development of successful subaltern manhood, because it signifies rights to power and citizenship and supposedly instills the courage that a man needs to confront life's daily challenges" (p. 527). In Bolivia, military service was (at the time Gill's work was published) a legal obligation of able-bodied men, and was recognized as a prerequisite for urban employment. The state thus attempts to create "'citizens' out of 'Indians' and 'men' out of 'boys'" (Gill, 1997, p. 527). Importantly, this notion of military masculinity was not simply the consequence of legal discourse (or, pressures of the state), but was a deeply embedded ideological presumption that was continuously perpetuated by the military participants themselves as they adhered to militarized

conceptions of masculinity in order to advance their own positions within the social hierarchy (Gill, 1997). Military service men “advance[d] a positive sense of subaltern masculinity tied to beliefs about bravery, competence, and patriotic duty” (Gill, 1997, p. 527). They did so to earn respect from the women (e.g., mothers, wives, sisters, and girlfriends) and men of the Bolivian citizenry. They wished to be recognized as both defenders of their nation, and, as strong, responsible male citizens, decision makers, and leaders.

Interestingly, young male military recruits in Bolivia typically come from the most powerless sectors of society (i.e., poor peasant communities). As such, the military, to them, means opportunity. Military service enables them to contest their exclusion from Bolivian society and to challenge the alternative notions of masculinity that are often associated with upper-class Bolivian males who avoid military service. As such, draftees often assert hyperaggressive notions of masculinity that degrade women, "weaker" men, and civilians in general. In the Bolivian military context maleness is associated with citizenship, and citizenship with military service. As such, the military creates and reproduces masculinities by linking military service to notions of power, success, and maleness.

Important to this dissertation study, notions of military masculinity extend beyond one’s service, to one’s personhood. In studying U.S. veteran organizations in the Midwest, Gardiner (2013) found that the military *makes* people. Normalization, hierarchies of valor, and sacrifice are central to the social construction of military service persons. Service members will encompass all three features, in varying intensities, when performing a military masculinity. As Gardiner (2013) explains,

service members are also expected to perform masculinity in other capacities, "especially toughness, obedience, courage, and mission-focus, as they perform their gendered identities in a military context" (p. 75).

This idealized, hypermasculine image of the militant warrior permeates cultural discourses about manhood. Such notions of hegemonic masculinity pervade much of U.S. culture, and thus maintain the dominance of men over women (and other gendered identities that are perceived as "feminine") in a given society. Important to this dissertation, hegemonic masculinity cannot be separated from heteronormativity as sex, gender, and sexuality are interrelated (Butler, 1990; Mead, 2001; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). As such, the military has actively excluded both women, and gay men, as both are perceived as a threat to military masculinity. In the following section I describe heteronormativity as it is negotiated in U.S. and military culture.

## Heteronormativity in the U.S. Military

Heteronormativity is the concept used to define heterosexuality as it is constituted as the norm in sexuality. The perceived "normal" and "natural" status of heterosexuality is presumed through the process of normalization. The normalization of heterosexuality is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life. Thus, the normalization of heterosexuality is a social phenomenon that is actively negotiated in our culture, with the dominant discourses working to construct a cultural binary of heterosexual (us) versus homosexual (them) (Robinson, 2005). Institutionalized heterosexuality thus becomes "legitimate" and the norm by which all other sexualities are defined as illegitimate and abnormal (Robinson, 2005).

Within this culture, "the normalization of heterosexuality is rendered invisible

and diverts attention and critique away from the macro and micro social, economic, and political discursive practices, including those operating in educational institutions that construct and maintain this hierarchy of difference across sexual identities" (Robinson, 2005, p. 20). Given this idealized notion of military masculinity, and the embedded assumptions of maleness and heterosexuality, alternative genders and sexualities have been denied legitimacy in the military context. Alternative identities are considered a threat to the idealized warrior image that has characterized the U.S. armed forces throughout history. As such, the military institution has typically excluded those who do not adhere to this hypermasculine, "combative warrior image." This includes women, and gay and lesbian identified individuals, who were historically denied access to, and identification with, military culture.

In order to understand the heteronormative ideology that pervades military discourse, one must first understand the ways in which sexuality emerged within a system of power relations. Foucault's work on discourse and sexuality, which sought to challenge the binaries that are often perpetuated in Western thought, demonstrated how identities are produced within systems of power. For Foucault, discourse is a set of meaning making practices (Wilchins, 2004). Foucault's notion of discourse stems from his work on madness and his desire to recover the perspective of the subject, or those whom are classified as insane, as opposed to hearing only what others say about them (Loomba, 1998). Foucault thus began to think of madness as a "category of human identity [that] is produced and reproduced by various rules, systems and procedures which create and separate it from normalcy" (Loomba, 1998, p. 38). Foucault refers to these systems as "the order of discourse," or the conceptual ground on which

knowledge is constructed. Discourse is thus a domain within which language is used in specific ways; it is rooted in human practice, institutions and actions (Loomba, 1998). For example, the discourse on madness in modern society is rooted in institutions such as madhouses, and in practices such as psychiatry (Loomba, 1998).

As explained above, discourse is the conceptual ground on which knowledge is constructed. Discourse is a set of rules for producing knowledge that determines what kind of intelligible statements can circulate within a given economy of thought (Wilchins, 2004). In explaining the discursive constructions of knowledge, Foucault highlights the categorical thinking of Western societies. In Western culture, we create artificial binaries and thus tend to see the world's complexities in terms of simplistic binaries (Wilchins, 2004). Specifically, individuals tend to cast any difference into opposing binaries such that anything in the middle that does not fit is lost. Within the discourse of gender, for instance, we can only say meaningful things about two kinds of bodies that will make sense. Importantly, Foucault focuses on the discursive productions of knowledge and power (Sullivan, 2003), and notes that knowledge and science are highly politicized rather than neutral. They are not objective truths, but are subjective truths. So, through the institutionalization of knowledge, discursive mechanisms function as an exercise in power and control (Loomba, 1998). The dissemination of knowledge, then, works to maintain specific power relations.

Foucault's (1970) *History of Sexuality* examines the category of homosexuality as it emerged through discursive practices. In this book, Foucault (1970) makes the powerful assertion that homosexuality is a modern concept, an invention of the 19$^{th}$ century. Homosexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life, but a constructed

category of experience, which has historical, social, and cultural, rather than biological origins (Spargo, 1999). Foucault is not ruling out any biological dimension, but rather prioritizes the crucial role of institutions and discourses in the construction of sexuality. His concern was less with what sexuality is (biological or otherwise). Rather, he was concerned with how sexuality functions in society. So, much like his work on madness, Foucault explores the ways in which discourses produce sexuality (i.e., the discursive construction of sexuality).

While many other historians sought to trace homosexual identities and behaviors to earlier historical periods, Foucault insisted that the category of "homosexual" grew out of a particular context in the 1870s and that it must be viewed as a *constructed* category of knowledge rather than a *discovered* identity. Foucault did not suggest that sexual relationships between people of the same sex had not existed before the 19th century, but instead emphasized that restrictions and regulations on sexual activity before the 17th century were simply regulations for a category of behavior. In the 17th century there was a shift in which the categorization of sexual behavior became instead a category of human identity. Homosexuals came to be identified as a "species," an aberrant type of human being defined by perverse sexuality. So, while 16th century men and women might have been urged to confess that they had indulged in shameful sexual practices, the 19th century man engaging in similar sexual activities with another man would be seen, and be encouraged to see himself, as "homosexual" (Spargo, 1999).

With this construction of homosexuality as an identity, the homosexual was pathologized as a perverse or deviant type (Wilchins, 2004). He was subject to the disciplining, marginalizing, and subordinating effects of social control. As Foucault

argues, language and meaning create what is *True*. As such, knowledge is power. Discourses do not study gender transgression, but create them through the use of specialized vocabularies (e.g., gender dysphoria, pre-homosexual behavior, ambiguous genitalia), through professional procedures (e.g., physical exams, psychotherapy, field research), and through methods of documentation (e.g., scholarly articles, clinical charts, therapy notes) (Wilchins, 2004). This is made evident in the U.S. military, as policies have been implemented as a means of controlling sexual desire and behavior.

Heteronormative discourses are not unique to the military, but are embedded in the social structures and institutions of the broader U.S. culture. While homosexuality as a category of human identity has been examined, challenged, and adapted throughout history, homosexuality remains stigmatized. In fact, a great deal of research has examined homosexuality as it has been categorized as a type of sexual deviance (e.g. Goode & Troiden 1974; Hensley & Tewksbury 2003; Schaffner 2012; Ward, Laws, & Husdon 2003). According to Hensley and Tewksbury (2003), deviance refers to behaviors that do not fit the accepted standards or social expectations for appropriate behavior, and "definitions of deviant behavior vary depending on time, place, and individual" (p. 1). Importantly, the behaviors deemed "deviant" within society change to accommodate the social and political agendas of those in power (Hensley & Tewksbury, 2003). Sexual deviance then, refers to any sexual acts that do not conform to societal standards for appropriate sexual behavior. By categorizing homosexuality as deviant, those who engage in heterosexual sex are deemed normal. As a result of such categorizations, sexual minorities remain marginalized as the dominant social structure works to maintain heterosexual dominance and non-heterosexual inferiority.

As Lancaster (2011) explains, sex panics are a fixture and fixation of U.S. culture. Lancaster (2011) argues that sex panics relate to other forms of institutionalized fear in the U.S., as policies of fear have ruled for a long time. For instance, in a time of rising divorce rates, changing gender roles, and a vast increase in the number of working mothers, family was positioned as a central concern for politics, which crystalized the pervasive anxieties about the decline in the heterosexual nuclear family. These fear politics are particularly pervasive in the military context, where discourses are centered on potential threats (e.g., threats to the nation, threats to the lives of soldiers, threats of terrorism, etc.). This extends to matters regarding sexual behavior, as non-normative sexual identities pose a threat to notions of military masculine identity, which, in turn, may threaten the military institution as whole and the safety of the public. In the following section, I outline the history of DADT to demonstrate the ways in which gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have been prohibited from serving their country.

## A History of Sexuality-Based Discrimination in the U.S. Military

As emphasized in the previous section of this chapter, gender boundaries, as reflected in both the military and society, establish and maintain a division in political power (Weinstein & D'Amico, 1999). Traits considered masculine in this society are generally more valued than those considered feminine. Through policies of exclusion, the military has played an important role in the creation and maintenance of gender and sexuality relations in broader U.S. society (Weinstein & D'Amico, 1999). Such policies have been designed and maintained to preserve the masculine warrior ethos of the U.S. military.

While many exclusionary practices have been overturned in past decades, the

ban on gay and lesbian identified individuals has been strictly enforced throughout much of U.S. history and has been one of the most widely supported exclusionary practices within the Department of Defense. Such restrictions on the participation of non-heterosexual men and women function as a means to institutionalize a preference for heterosexuals (Britton & Williams, 1995). Proponents of these exclusionary policies have maintained that the presence of homosexuals in the military is detrimental to the accomplishment of the overall mission (Britton & Williams, 1995).

This preoccupation with sexuality in the military is a relatively new phenomenon. In fact, gay military men have served in every war since the birth of the nation. It was not until 1778, that Lieutenant Enslin became the first known soldier to be dismissed from the army for homosexuality (Shilts, 2005). Despite the case of Enslin's dismissal, gay soldiers continued to serve throughout the Civil War and up to World War I without suffering many dire consequences. During World War I punishments for service persons engaging in same-sex sexual behavior were written into American military law for the first time, when sodomy was specified as a military offense in 1919 during the revisions of the Articles of War (Belkin, 2001; Shilts, 2005). In the 1920's and 1930's, homosexuality was treated as a crime, and a significant number of gay military personnel were imprisoned (Belkin, 2001).

Then, during World War II, War Department regulations changed, and homosexuality began to be viewed as an identity. New recruits were asked about their sexual identities as opposed to simply being asked whether or not one had committed sodomy (Bailey, 2013; Belkin, 2001). This preoccupation with the elimination of gay military personnel grew more intense during the McCarthy era, consistent with

perceptions of homosexuality as a disease (Belkin, 2001; Shilts, 2005). At this time, almost all psychiatrists categorized homosexuality as a pathology, which prompted the armed forces to formulate regulations that banned all individuals with "homosexual tendencies" from military service (Bailey, 2013; Shilts, 2005). In 1941, the first discriminatory regulations were implemented, instructing psychiatrists to classify homosexuals as unfit for military service (Shilts, 2005). As such, individuals suspected of homosexual acts began to be discharged under Section VIII, "discharge for unsuitability," as opposed to being court-martialed for sodomy under Articles of War (Haggerty, 2003). Then, in 1942, "the final regulations were declared, banning homosexuals from all branches of the military" (Shilts, 2005, p. 17). These regulations remained in place for half a century.

The military, more than most other organizational structures in the U.S., perpetuates institutionalized homophobia (Belkin, 2001). For many years, there were persistent "witch hunts" aimed at uncovering gay service personnel. The "methods employed by military investigators in identifying and disposing of queers resemble tactics used by the KGB, or the Gestapo. Grueling interrogations involving threats and intimidation are standard operating procedure, with promises of leniency in exchange for names" (Zeeland, 1993, p. 13). Gay soldiers lived each day in fear of the consequences of being discovered. The regulations banning homosexual individuals from military service centered primarily on arguments of military efficacy and unit cohesion, rather than on issues of morality, which is similar to the justifications used for banning women and blacks from serving throughout U.S. military history (Bailey, 2013).

Importantly, these policies had an effect on the entire nation by implying that gay men and women were dangerous to the well-being of other Americans, and that they were undeserving of the most basic human rights (Shilts, 2005). During World War II, for instance, homophobic slurs were prominently used amongst military men (Belkin, 2001). Moreover, the Pentagon stalled for years before finally instructing military leaders, psychologists, and doctors not to turn in gay and lesbian victims of harassment who seek help (Belkin, 2001). There are even reports of lesbian women in the military who had been beaten and/or raped but did not report the violence because they feared their sexual identities would be uncovered (Belkin, 2001).

Zeeland (1993) found that military service persons describe military masculinity as a mythic super-masculinity and that gay soldiers had their own relationship with this mythic masculine identity. Effeminate soldiers are forced, at least to some degree, to conform to this image (Zeeland, 1993). Effeminate male soldiers were found to modify their movements purposefully and adjust their speech to convey convincingly the "butch drag of their uniform" (Zeeland, 1993, p. 14). Interestingly, this military masculinity is recognized prior to enlistment for many, as some enlist with the hope that the military will masculinize and/or heterosexualize them.

Zeeland's (1993) found that gay men in the U.S. military experience feelings associated with internalized homophobia. Homophobic jokes and gay bashing stories were a prominent component of military culture. Further, there was a pervasive heterosexist discourse that equated homosexuality with AIDS. This, in conjunction with media reports on service members being discharged on the grounds of their sexual behaviors breeds prejudice and homophobia. As Zeeland (1993) argues, too many

soldiers rely on these discourses and representations to tell them what it means to be gay.

Lesbian women have faced additional challenges in the military. Due to the intense scrutiny of *all* women in the military, lesbians were far more likely to be detected than their gay male counterparts (Shilts, 2005). For example, in 1979, women received one in ten of the discharges for homosexual conduct in the Navy, despite the fact that they comprised one in twenty-five of the overall enlisted (Shilts, 2005). In 1987 and 1988, women accounted for 10 percent of the armed forces, but represented 26 percent of gay discharges (Shilts, 2005). As Shilts (2005) explained, this trend was more pronounced in the Navy and Marine Corps, as these branches had been historically most resistant to women.

**"Don't Ask, Don't Tell"**

Throughout the early 1990's, public support for lifting the ban on homosexual military personnel grew, and the government began to face immense pressure (Frank, 2013). In 1993, President Bill Clinton, for the first time in U.S. history, promised to end the discriminatory policies based on sexual orientation by lifting the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the military (Gatchet, 2007). The newly elected President's promise however, sparked immense controversy. Congress raised concerns regarding the lifting of the ban. An interim compromise was made allowing the Department of Defense an opportunity to study the issue more closely and develop a "Draft Executive Order" that would eventually end the sexuality-based discrimination in the armed forces (Burelli & Feder, 2008).

By May of 1993, a congressional consensus emerged in favor of a "don't ask,

don't tell" approach (Burelli & Feder, 2008). Under the approach, the Department of Defense would no longer ask questions about sexual orientation, and sexual minorities would be required to keep their sexual identities to themselves. The compromise agreed to by the Clinton administration and passed by Congress read as follows:

> Applicants for military service will no longer be asked or required to reveal if they are homosexual or bisexual…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 (as cited in Britton & Williams, 1995, p. 3).

Although DADT was considered a major feat toward equality, at the time, the new policy implicitly defined the status of homosexuality as a dischargeable offense (Britton & Williams, 1995).

As Zeeland (1993) explains, being in the military and being queer is like being transported to an earlier, less tolerant era. Over time, much remained constant as opposed to being transformed. Despite the victories of the gay rights movement in the United States since the Stonewall riots, the isolation of gay men in the military had not been obviated. Consequently, gay men in the military often lived out their sexual identities privately, seeking support and community outside of their organization. For instance, as Zeeland (1993) explains, Frankfurt was sought out as a safe space for gay and lesbian service personnel stationed all over Germany and beyond. They would "come from posts as remote and distant as the French and Czechoslovakian borders to patronize gay bars catering especially, if not exclusively, to GI's, who were able to derive from the city's cold anonymity a sense of protection" (Zeeland, 1993, p. 5). In fact, many of the participants interviewed by Zeeland noted the relaxed attitudes toward

sex in German culture. The U.S. is a prude culture, when compared to other Western European contexts. United States culture permeates a discourse centered around sex, and this preoccupation with sex and sexuality, and the politics of fear, motivate the state and its institutions to police sex and sexuality in order to maintain the heteronormative mandate.

Another facet of military culture that Zeeland (1993) discusses in his book, are the secret networks formed by gay soldiers. From his fieldwork in Frankfurt, Zeeland found that gay men who were out and recognizable to each other often formed cliques, referred to by the code word "family." These cliques functioned as support groups for those involved, provided a means and opportunities for meeting one another, engaging in gossip about one another and other cliques, and warning each other of potential dangers. What is especially fascinating about these secret networks is the collaborative development of new rules and norms created within a larger social structure. For instance, because military personnel were aware that phone calls are monitored, gay soldiers referred to other male soldiers using the feminine pronoun in conversation on military telephones. Further, lesbian women and gay men serving in the military often arranged marriages of convenience to pass as strait and to capitalize on the financial benefits from the military's subsidy of heterosexual marriage. Closeted soldiers, however, have limited avenues for self-expression or support.

Although the new policy ended the "witch hunts" against gays and lesbians, gay and lesbian military service personnel were only able to serve their country under conditions of deception and were, again, required to conceal their sexual identities. Therefore, discriminatory practices against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals remained and

the dominant political ideologies were further advanced by the implementation of DADT. Moreover, ruthless investigations and trials were still held for the purpose of encouraging gay soldiers to resign or to accept military discharge. If they were officers, they were asked to leave quietly for "conduct unbecoming" (Shilts, 2005). After the implementation of DADT, the total number of discharges for homosexuality actually increased (Burelli & Feder, 2008). Between 1995 and 2005 alone, as many as two thousand gay and lesbian service personnel were silently discharged and replaced each year (Shilts, 2005).

Even under DADT, lesbian women appeared to be specifically targeted. In 1996, women comprised 13 percent of the Armed Forces, but 29 percent of those discharged under the DADT policy. In the Army, they accounted for 41 percent of the gay discharges (Osburn & Benecke, 1997). As explained by Weinstein and D'Amico (1999), "sexuality is so closely tied to preferred gender norms, […] targeting lesbians [was] used as a means of eliminating women" (p. 109). As such, the exclusionary policies were used to uphold the pro-masculine status quo (Weinstein & D'Amico, 1999).

Due to the underlying implications of Clinton's policy, military service under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" upheld assumptions of non-heterosexual inferiority. Hence, the military identity under this policy remained that of the heterosexual, combative, masculine, male warrior. Even with the growing number of gay servicemen active in the military at the start of the twenty first century, the military moved even more aggressively against homosexuality than in decades prior (Shilts, 2005). As Haggerty (2003) argued, the DADT policy was simply a continuation and elaboration of former

military policies that continued to deny equal rights to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

**Repeal of DADT**

In 2008, during his presidential campaign, Obama promised to end DADT. Legislation to repeal DADT was then enacted in December of 2010, and DADT officially ended on September 20, 2011. Of course, even in 2010, many vocally opposed the repeal. Senator John McCain, for instance, voiced his opposition and stated that he would consider supporting the repeal if and when military leaders supported the repeal (Rich, Schutten, & Rogers, 2012). Although polls showed that most Americans were in favor of lifting the ban, many still believed that open service would undermine military readiness (Belkin et al., 2012). In March of 2009, a statement was released by more than 1,000 retired generals and admirals that claimed the repeal of DADT would undermine recruiting and retention, negatively affect leadership at each level of the military, and eventually break the all-volunteer force all together (Belkin et al., 2012). However, in a study assessing the one-year impact of the repeal, Belkin and collegues (2012) reported that there was no negative impact on readiness, cohesion, recruitment and retention, assaults and harassment, or morale.

Since DADT ended, persons who are openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual have been able to serve. Despite the new policy, however, the Uniformed Code of Military Justice continued to define sodomy as an illegal act (U.S. Congress, 2008) until 2014. As such, non-heterosexual stigma remained codified in federal law (Johnson, Rosenstein, Buhrke, & Haldeman, 2015). Today, the military continues to be defined by an ideology of hegemonic masculinity. The practices following the repeal of DADT have not fostered positive integration, but rather, have reproduced the conditions that

marginalize non-heterosexual persons (Rich et al., 2012). Rich and colleagues (2012) offered a critical feminist critique of the repeal implementation. They argue that the irrationalities of DADT and its repeal do little to destabilize structures of male dominance and heterosexual normalcy (Rich et al., 2012). Openly gay men, particularly, continue to pose a threat to the idealized image of the military warrior. Gay service men continue to be relegated to the closet in many ways. Women appear to be afforded a little more flexibility because they are not discursively constructed as feminized, nor as predatory in the same ways that "flamboyant" or hypermasculine gay men are. So despite the repeal of DADT, the military culture itself continues to encourage concealment, to uphold heteronormativity, and to maintain an idealized masculine military ethos (Rich et al., 2012).

Importantly, in my literature search I only located one piece of literature that focused exclusively on lesbians in the military. Most studies mentioned lesbians, but maintained a focus on gay men. Although women make up only about 14% of active duty personnel, "they comprise more than 43% of GLB men and women serving on active duty" (Gates, 2010, p. 1). As Shilts (2005) explained, women in the military have faced excessive challenges. As such, their stories warrant further investigation. Additionally, I was not able to locate any specific information with regard to bisexuals in the military. Bisexuality, more than other sexual identities, is often denied legitimacy, as dominant cultural discourses endorse heterosexuality and homosexuality as the only legitimate sexual identities, with bisexuality upsetting the balance of this binary (McLean, 2001). The experiences of bisexuals should also be explored further in future research.

Now that I have contextualized the present study by providing a brief historical overview of DADT, I will introduce several theories and concepts that inform my research questions. These theories move beyond cultural constructions of identity to individual psychological processes associated with identity. In the following section, I explain social identity theory (SIT), as SIT is an important theoretical framework that connects the psychological experiences of group membership to intergroup relations. I will then discuss two distinct, but related theories that are pertinent to the present study.

## Social Identity

Understanding *identity* "involves two criteria of comparison between persons or things: similarity and difference" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 17). *Social identity* refers to a person's sense of who they are based on their group memberships. In other words, the groups to which an individual belongs (e.g., family, ethnic group, organization, etc.) make up an important part of a person's self-concept or identity. Group membership gives us a sense of social identity, or a sense of belonging to the social world (McLeod, 2008). Knowledge of belonging to a certain social group, together with the emotional value significance of group membership, makes up *social identity* (Tajfel, 1972).

Social identity theory (SIT) is pertinent to the study of intercultural communication as group processes are often at play in intercultural encounters. SIT embraces a number of interrelated concepts and sub-theories that focus on social-cognitive, motivational, social-interactive and macro social facets of group life (Hogg, 2006). SIT is a social psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in group membership, group processes, and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2006). SIT has multiple components, each serving various explanatory functions. Together, these components

form the basis of social identity theory and explain the relationship between self-conceptions and group processes by linking individual cognition, social interaction, and societal processes (Hogg, 2006). I will explain these varying components in the following paragraphs.

The first two components of SIT are *social identity* and *personal identity*. According to the theory, a social group is more than two people who share the same social identity. They identify and evaluate themselves in the same way and have the same definition of who they are, what attributes they have, and how they relate to and differ from people who are not in their group. Group membership is, therefore, a matter of collective self-construal (i.e., "we" or "us" versus "them"). Importantly, an aggregate of three individuals is only considered a "group" if they identify with the group. Identification is the psychological process underlying group phenomena (Hogg, 2006). Alternatively, personal identity is a self-construal defined in terms of idiosyncratic personality attributes that are not shared with other people ("I") or personal dyadic relationships ("me and you"). Although personal identity has little to do with group processes, group life often frames the development of personal identities and interpersonal friendships and/or hostilities.

According to SIT, people have many personal and social identities as they belong to a variety of social groups and are involved in a multitude of personal relationships. Social and personal identities, however, vary in their subjective importance and value with regard to the accessibility of these identities and the salience of these identities in any given situation (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). In any situation, only one identity is psychologically salient to govern self-construal, social perception,

and social conduct (Hogg, 2006). As the situation or context changes then, so does the salient identity, or the form that the identity takes. Important to the present study, due to the pervasiveness of the military organization in the personal lives of its members, the military identity is most often salient. Further, the way military socialization processes are designed encourages group dependency, which is essential for unit cohesion.

Another component of SIT is *social categorization*. Social categorization refers to the cognitive basis of social identity processes (Turner, 1987). From this theoretical perspective, people cognitively represent a category or group as a *prototype.* Prototypes capture similarities within the group and differences between the group and other groups (or people who are not in the in-group; Hogg, 2006). Prototypes describe categories, evaluate them, and prescribe membership-related behavior. Prototypes maximize perceptions of group cohesiveness and group distinctiveness, thus accentuating in-group similarity and out-group differences (e.g., military versus civilian and heterosexual versus non-heterosexual).

Important to this theory, the act of categorizing someone as a group member transforms the way one sees that person (Hogg, 2006). What this means is that one no longer sees the idiosyncratic individuals, but rather sees them as a prototypical representative of one's group, thus depersonalizing them. Depersonalization simply means that one begins to view someone as having the attributes of a category. So, if the attributes are positive within that category (in-group attitudes are almost always positive) depersonalization produces favorable perceptions. However, if the attributes one ascribes to the individual are negative (often out-groups can be viewed this way) then perceptions are unfavorable and may lead to discrimination. Depersonalization of

an out-group can also be understood as stereotyping. For social categorization to affect behavior, the social identity must be psychologically salient as the basis for perception and self-conception.

The next component of social identity theory is *motivation*. Two key motivations in intergroup communication are self-enhancement and positive distinctiveness. In fact, one of the most distinctive features of group life and intergroup relations is positive distinctiveness. This is the belief that "we" are better than "them" (Hogg, 2006). Groups go to great lengths to protect or promote this belief. Groups and their members strive for positive intergroup distinctiveness because in salient group contexts, the self is defined and evaluated in group terms (i.e., social identity). This means that the status, prestige, and social valence of the group become attached to the self. This motive for positive social identity reflects one of the most basic human motives.

The final component of SIT is *intergroup relations*, which explains how the factors described previously influence the relationships and communication between groups. According to Hogg (2006), social identity is anchored in valence-sensitive social comparisons that strive for similarity within groups and differentiation between groups. In-group favoritism is characteristic of intergroup relations. In fact, groups typically compete for status and prestige. The strategies used in this competition, however, are influenced by people's beliefs about the nature of intergroup relations. For example, Hajek and Abrams (2005) point out that heterosexuals often appropriate language and categorical labels such as "gay" and "queer" to define members of their own group, but in a derogatory fashion to insult someone for displaying undesired

characteristics of an out-group. This is part of a process of social categorization in which a member of the majority group (heterosexual male) uses social comparisons to the minority group (gay men) in an effort to enhance positive distinctiveness from the out-group.

Important to the present study, despite increasing social acceptance of the GLB community within larger society, GLB persons continue to live as minorities in a largely heterosexual social system and must therefore deal with the consequences of negative attitudes held by the heterosexual majority (Hajek et al., 2005). As explained by Hajek et al. (2005), negatively communicated attitudes toward gay people can impact their self-esteem negatively. In the military, the continued negative attitudes held about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, will largely shape the experiences of GLB individuals in the military. Such negative attitudes are also likely to influence the self-perceptions of GLB military service persons.

**Self-Concept Clarity**

Scholarship has stressed the importance of self-concept clarity. As Usborne and Taylor (2010) explain, knowing oneself and experiencing identity continuity are essential for well-being. The importance of identity coherence was emphasized in the classic definition of personal identity (Erikson, 1968). More recently however, researchers have moved to examine more closely collective identity coherence, or social identity coherence. Researchers have explained that certainty or clarity of an individual's collective identity is affected by the norms that pervade an individual's social environment. Because individuals possess multiple social identities, they often have to negotiate multiple norms related to their collective identities. Sometimes, the

norms associated with various social identities are in conflict. The consequences of this negotiation process warrant further investigation, particularly with regard to social identities in conflict.

In recent years, researchers have attempted to fill this gap in literature by exploring the effect of negotiating multiple collective identities. The focus of this body of literature has been on "collective identity integration, whereby individuals are challenged to reconcile a number of different collective or cultural identities into their sense of self (e.g., Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005)" (Usborne & Taylor, 2010, p. 884). Findings have suggested that integrated collective identities are associated with greater psychological well-being for individuals (Berry, 2005). When the norms and values of one collective identity interfere with those of another collective identity (i.e., greater collective identity interference), however, lower levels of well-being are experienced (Settles, 2004). Collective identity integration is thus presumed to produce a more coherent sense of self (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Existing literature builds a strong case for the importance of identity integration, yet most studies fail to fully address the problems or challenges individuals experience when their varying social identities are seemingly incompatible.

Several scholars have examined collective identity incongruities. For example, Faulkner and Hecht (2011) examined the identity negotiation processes of GLBTQ identified Jewish Americans. The authors emphasized the multiple identities at play, noting that the Jewish identity is a cultural identity, an ethnic identity, and a religious identity, simultaneously. Thus, participants reported that "the communal representations of being GLBTQ and being Jewish in the media and surrounding communities often

conflicted with personal and relational constructions" (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011, p. 840). The conflicts described by the respondents centered on not feeling "Jewish enough," or queer enough, to be considered "a good Jew or out GLBTQ, not living in a Jewish and/or GLBTQ community (or the right community) and not fitting a prescribed checklist" (p. 840). Faulkner and Hecht describe this as a fear "of having to account for who you felt you were in contrast to others' expectations" (p. 840). Further, other scholars examining similar populations have found that many GLBTQ Jews experience their identities as a divided rather than integrated relationship, such that individuals may have to choose between being Jewish or GLBTQ, depending on the context of the interaction.

Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) offer another examination of conflicting identities. The authors examined the ways in which British Pakistani men who identified as both Muslim and gay, cope with two potentially incompatible social identities (i.e., their religious identity and their sexual identity). The authors argue that the cultural processes of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality in Islamic religious contexts may generate expectations for discrimination and rejection for those that reveal their stigmatized sexual identities. Findings from this study revealed several strategies for understanding and defining these incompatible identities: making sense of the gay identity, invoking religious discourse to explain sexual identity, fear of divine retribution, and external attributions and British national identity. Further, participants in this study described a need to ensure a sense of coherence between these two opposing identities.

Similar to Jaspal and Cinerella's (2010) study, Abdi and Van Gilder (2016) also explore the identity negotiation processes of individuals with seemingly incompatible identities. Specifically, their study explored the ways in which non-heterosexual Iranian women coped with being both Iranian and queer. Participants struggled to integrate their sexual and ethnic identities as the two appeared seemingly in conflict. Consequently, queer Iranian women reported feelings of cultural isolation. Participants coped by creating cultural distance between themselves and the Iranian community in which they experienced this isolation (Abdi & Van Gilder, 2016).

The present study also explores this phenomenon within the military context, as non-heterosexuality conflicts, in many ways, with the values and norms of military culture. As such, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military must attempt to negotiate these competing sets of ideas. My interest lies in exploring the ways in which individuals make sense of their potentially conflicting social identities.

**Minority Stress Theory**

In addition to dealing with multiple, and potentially competing, sets of values and norms associated with their sexual and military identities, GLB military are also likely to experience stress as a result of their minority status. Stress researchers have identified both individual and social stressors. Stressors can include events (e.g., losing a job, death of a partner) and non-events pertaining to conditions in the social environment (Meyer, 2003). Stress is likely to have a significant impact in the lives of individuals belonging to stigmatized social categories (Meyer, 2003). In the military, prejudice and discrimination related to homophobia are common, thus heightening the experience of stress for GLB persons.

Minority stress theory (MST) is an elaboration of stress theory that distinguishes the "excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer, 2003, p. 675). Further, this theory emerged from SIT, as processes of social categorization provide an understanding connecting intergroup relations to their impact on the self (Meyer, 2003). Although minority stress has been applied most frequently in studies exploring racial and economic disparities, scholars have, more recently, explored the causes and effects of minority stress in GLBTQ populations (e.g., Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Carter II, Mollen, & Smith, 2014; Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013; Waldo, 1999).

Meyer (2003) advanced a minority stress model that describes stress processes for GLBTQ persons, "including the experience of prejudice, expectations of rejection, hiding and concealing, internalized homophobia, and ameliorative coping processes" (p. 675). This theoretical approach has been applied in a number of studies exploring GLB experiences. For instance, Barnes and Meyer (2012) examined the minority stress experiences of GLB persons as related to religiosity. Findings revealed that participants who identified with non-affirming religions (religious affiliations that do not affirm homosexuality) had higher levels of internalized homophobia (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). Findings from this study supported MST in that the theory suggests that disparities in mental health are explained by differential exposure to stigma and prejudice. Non-affirming religious environments produce heightened exposure to stigma for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Because the military also presents a non-affirming environment, GLB military are also likely to experience negative mental health outcomes.

Other studies have explored minority stress for GLB persons working in heteronormative workplaces. For example, a study conducted by Waldo (1999) revealed that heterosexist experiences in the work place were associated with adverse psychological, health, and job-related outcomes. Similarly, in a study conducted by Velez and colleagues (2013) minority stressors (e.g., discrimination, expectations of stigma, etc.) were associated with greater distress and lower job satisfaction for GLB individuals. Because the military is characterized by heteronormativity, the military presents an organizational context in which GLB persons are likely to experience high levels of minority stress.

In sum, SIT, theories of collective identity clarity, and MST inform my first research question. Because the military identity is pervasive, military identity is likely salient in everyday workplace interactions. For GLB persons, however, their sexual identities, which are not affirmed within the military organizational context, are likely to conflict with their military identity, creating a sense of incoherence. This incoherence is likely exacerbated by experiences of stigma, prejudice, and heterosexism. As such, this study seeks to explore the ways in which cultural communication patterns influence self-conceptions for GLB military persons.

## Stigma

As noted by Goffman (1963), "differentness" is the primary means by which individuals become aware of identity assumptions. While most human differences are ignored and thus inconsequential, other differences are highly salient in the U.S. (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) and, in these cases, social difference becomes socially significant (Link & Phelan, 2001). In specific cultural communities within the U.S.,

where there is greater homogeneity amongst community members (e.g., religious communities, ethnic communities, organizational communities), certain social differences (e.g., sexuality) may become more salient, thus resulting in significant social consequences. Importantly, because the dominant group determines the boundaries of normalcy, certain groups become categorized as "deviant" (Goffman, 1963).

Stigmatization is a challenge to one's humanity, as "a person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some social category, calls into question his or her full humanity—the person is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others" (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998, p. 504). Stigma is a powerful social phenomenon, "inextricably linked to the value placed on varying social identities" (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000, p. 3). According to Link and Phelan (2001), stigma occurs when labeled differences are linked to stereotypes. Goffman (1963) describes stigma as a sign or mark that designates the stigmatized person as valued less than "normal" people.

As labeling theorists explain, once a person is assigned a stigmatizing social label, this labeling process connotes a separation of "us" from "them," which often leads to discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). And, while some stigmatized identities are easily identifiable (e.g., skin color, physical disabilities, developmental delays), others are invisible stigmas (e.g., mental illness, homosexuality). This study focuses specifically on sexualities, identities that are not easily identifiable by others.

Labeling theory is a theory that explains how a stigmatized label influences behaviors and outcomes for the labeled person. According to Link, Cullen, Struening,

Shrout, and Dohrenwend (1989), individuals are socialized early on to develop certain attitudes toward behaviors, attributes, and identities. As a result of the socialization process, members of society (whether stigmatized or not) will share similar beliefs about the devaluation and discrimination that certain stigmatized persons (e.g., gays and lesbians, racial minorities, disabled people, etc.) are likely to encounter (Link et al., 1989). For instance, given the explicit condemnation of homosexuality that permeates military cultural discourse, military service persons become consciously aware of the stigma associated with homosexuality, and understand that many people are likely to devalue, discriminate against, and reject homosexuals. So, when GLB military persons are ascribed the homosexual label, suddenly the attitudes of the community toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals become personally relevant.

People are stigmatized when they are labeled, set apart, and linked to undesirable characteristics, which leads them to experience status loss and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). Labeling theory explains how the stigmatization process produces negative consequences for those who are stigmatized. As noted by Link et al. (1989), negative outcomes may arise directly from one's beliefs about community attitudes toward the status of the stigmatized group, or they may follow from attempts to protect one's self through coping behaviors such as secrecy or social withdrawal. For instance, withdrawal has been found to increase social isolation, discourage pursuit of employment, and increase demoralization (Link, 1987). As a result of stigmatization, labeled individuals also tend to lack self-esteem (Dovidio et al., 2000). As Allport (1979) explains, when stigmatized persons hear over and over again that they are inferior, their personality changes, as "group oppression may destroy the

integrity of the ego entirely, and reverse its normal pride, and create a groveling self-image" (p. 152). Stigmatized individuals also are found to lack social network ties and employment as a consequence of their own and others' reactions to the stigmatizing label. Further, stigmatized individuals often experience increased levels of stress, decreased health, and reduced psychological well-being (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Given that stigma is a social construction, it is important to explore how stigmatization occurs within military culture. As such, my first research question addresses the communication patterns directed at, or indirectly targeting, GLB persons in the U.S. military. Further, stigma has a profound effect on the psychological functioning of those who are stigmatized. Because the military presents a unique situation in which two social identities (sexuality and military) are in conflict, I also hope to uncover the ways in which processes of stigmatization might influence self-concept clarity for GLB persons serving in the military. As such, the following research question is posed:

> **RQ1:** How do cultural communicative practices influence self-concept clarity for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military?

## Identity Management

In addition to examining the cultural communicative processes of stigmatization and the ways in which such processes influence self-concept clarity, I also aim to understand the ways in which individuals manage their stigmatized identities in their everyday interactions. The notion of identity management was originally developed by Goffman (1963) and refers to the ways in which individuals control information about their identities. According to Cioffi (2000), self-presentation refers to "the process by

which individuals try to affect the impression that others form of them" (p. 194). When engaging in identity management processes then, people rely on cultural scripts and schemas in order to make self-presentation decisions. Individuals must evaluate the context in which they are presenting themselves and also the audience to whom they are presenting (Cioffi, 2000). Once a number of additional episodic features have been evaluated, individuals must consider their behavioral options. When individuals belong to a stigmatized social category then, particularly when that stigma is concealable, they have a variety of behavioral options.

As explained by Smart and Wegner (2000), given the choice, most individuals would prefer their stigmas remain secret. Because the stigmatized are often aware that their social stigmas would likely result in discrimination and ostracism, along with shame and embarrassment, the ability to hide one's stigma would appear to be a good option. However, research has found that concealing one's stigmatized identity comes at significant personal cost. Goffman (1963), for example, described the psychological strain involved in concealing one's true identity. On a social level, withholding personal information about one's self can inhibit the development of personal relationships, resulting in feelings of isolation (Smart & Wegner, 2000). On an intrapersonal level, concealing a stigma can lead to "an inner turmoil that is remarkable for its intensity and its capacity for absorbing an individual's mental life" (Smart & Wegner, 2000, p. 221).

Unlike heterosexual individuals, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals engage in a lifelong process of information management regarding their sexual identities (Cain, 1991). While gay and lesbian individuals may be overt about their sexuality in their interactions with particular individuals or in certain types of social exchanges, they may

choose to remain covert in other social situations due to the potential damage that may result from such disclosure (i.e., being socially excluded; Cain, 1991). Therefore, for queer men and women, the decision to reveal one's sexual identity is especially difficult (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001).

The SIT framework aids understanding of how GLB individuals manage their sexual identities. As explained by Hajek and Abrams (2005), negative communicated attitudes toward gay people can negatively impact their self-esteem. Therefore, GLB men and women may adopt one or more coping strategies to cope with negative social identity. For example, *individual mobility* attempts often result in individuals *passing*, such that GLB individuals may attempt to pass as heterosexual. However, as scholars have noted, passing comes at significant personal costs, such as emotional and communicative problems associated with denying one's true nature (Goffman, 1963). Researchers have found that lack of disclosure about one's sexual identity is associated with physical and emotional distress. As such, in most cases, this coping strategy can only be achieved short term. Another strategy purported by the SIT framework is *social creativity*, which refers to GLB persons attempting to change the negative values assigned to their group into more positive ones. For example, gay men could change the negative values placed on the gay identity, by instead, celebrating it. This is potentially one of the goals of disclosing one's sexual identity to others (Hejek & Abrams, 2005).

Research has demonstrated that "coming out" is important for identity achievement. Several researchers have examined the outcomes of disclosing one's sexual identity, specifically in the workplace context. However, findings from these studies have been contradictory. For instance, several researchers have found that being

open about one's sexuality in the workplace may have positive consequences, such as greater psychological adjustment and well-being, as well as increased perceptions of closeness with co-workers (Cain, 1991; Cass, 1979; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003). Others have found negative consequences associated with being open about one's sexuality in the workplace, such as increased stress or self-consciousness due to minority status, physical harm, and social disapproval (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003). Due to the pervasiveness of homophobia in many organizational contexts, particularly in the Department of Defense, "coming out" is especially risky.

Although a variety of approaches have been employed in studies of queer identities, research examining the social negotiation of queer identities has been limited. In fact, such research has been restricted primarily to the context of the classroom or other educational settings (Berry, 2012; Rasmussen, 2004). Gray (2009), however, examined identity negotiation for gays and lesbians in an online context, specifically for rural youth living in areas of the country in which gay visibility was limited. For gay youth living in rural America, the discovery of online forums for gay and lesbian youth functioned as a pivotal moment in the understanding of their own sexual identities (Gray, 2009). Importantly, identity was discovered and negotiated as these individuals navigated the "politics of visibility's master narrative event, coming out" (Gray, 2009, p. 1162). Gay youth found that the narratives of authenticity they encountered online were more fundamental to the shifts in their own identities than the fictional narratives that had often seen on television, thus demonstrating the significance of realness in the negotiation of queer identity.

**Sexual Identity Management in the U.S. Military**

Important to this study, the dynamics of individuals' group membership identities and personal identities are formed via symbolic communication with others (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Therefore, communication can be defined as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed" (Carey, 1989, p. 17). As defined by Chirrey (2003), "coming out" is the moment of asserting one's gayness. Along with "coming out" is an attempt to confront and come to terms with the heterosexism that pervades our society; a society in which gay identities have generally been ignored, denied, or stigmatized (Chirrey, 2003).

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities in the military have remained "buried under the baggage of community norms and expectations" (Gray, 2009, p. 1164) and importantly, have remained hidden due to exclusionary laws that threatened GLB persons' positions within the Department of Defense. So, the emergence of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities within the military context, particularly since the repeal of DADT, can be understood as remnants of complicated dialogues and coming out narratives (Gray, 2009). Although the repeal of DADT has presumably created a space for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to re-negotiate their identities, GLB persons remain marginalized. Heteronormative discourses continue to infiltrate the military organization. Pressure to conform then, may motivate gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military to remain closeted.

As stated, heterosexist attitudes and behaviors have been deeply embedded in military culture throughout history. It is unlikely that the repeal of DADT could instantaneously change the culture of heterosexism in the military (Johnson et al.,

2015). According to Johnson and colleagues (2015), when workplace heterosexism is high and the environment is unsupportive, GLB persons are more likely to engage in identity concealment strategies. Therefore, decisions about revealing one's sexuality remain complicated. Even those who were confident about their sexualities, but concealed these identities at work under DADT, may experience anxiety following the repeal (Johnson et al., 2015). Therefore, this study seeks to examine the identity management decisions of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals prior to, and after, the repeal of DADT. Additionally, as explained by Cioffi (2000), behavior choices in self-presentation will also affect the social actor's private view and self-views. As such, identity management strategies also come at significant personal costs. That being said, I also seek to explore the feelings associated with individuals' identity management choices. The following research questions are therefore advanced:

**RQ2a:** How do GLB military manage their sexual identities pre- and post-repeal of DADT?

**RQ2b:** What feelings are associated with identity management strategies for GLB military?

## Dialogues and Dialectics

In addition to examining cultural communication patterns as they influence identity conceptions for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military, I also hope to explore individual communicative practices that, both intentionally and unintentionally, reinforce heteronormativity. As explained throughout this chapter, heterosexist attitudes are likely still prominent within military culture. In fact, Burks (2011) asserts that, in

accordance with societal norms and military tradition, heterosexuality remains the prevailing and expected norm in the military.

Ideologies present themselves in talk (Bakhtin, 1984). As Applebaum (2003) explains, "speech that supports and is supported by dominant ideology becomes, at the moment of its utterance, the reproduction of power" (p. 157). This is reflected in both policies prohibiting GLB persons from serving, but also in the terms used to categorize GLB persons as deviant and in the linguistic choices made in everyday speech. Austin (1962) contends that these types of speech acts "work" only because they have been and continue to be repeated over time. "In this sense illocutionary utterances not only depend on certain social structures, but they also sustain and perpetuate them at the same time" (Applebaum, 2003, p. 156). In terms of heterosexist speech, such utterances perpetuate social structures that subordinate entire social groups. Moreover, as Butler (1997) explains, these utterances are never a single moment, but rather are a moment of condensed historicity and a continued reproduction of power.

Therefore, a goal of my study is to examine the language practices of everyday talk that work to uphold heterosexual privilege in the military by normalizing heterosexuality. I begin by exploring communicative constructions of identity, using relational dialectics theory (RDT) as a guiding framework. Then, I explore the discursive practices of GLB and heterosexual participants to uncover the ways in which heterosexual privilege is reinforced and/or decentered in talk.

**Discursive Constructions of Identity**

Researchers acknowledge the significant role that communication plays in sense-making, particularly regarding identities as situated in specific political historical

contexts. According to Baxter (2011), "the social world is potentially rich with multiple, competing sets of beliefs and values associated with a given object of meaning" (p. 58). In other words, meanings are not the result of isolated unitary discourses, but are created from the struggle of competing discourses (i.e., systems of meaning; Baxter, 2011). These competing discourses are then given voice when individuals engage in communication (Baxter, Scharp, Asbury, Jannusch, & Norwood, 2012).

According to Bakhtin (1981), social life is the product of "a contradiction-ridden, tension filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (p. 272). The interplay of these competing discourses is what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as the centripetal-centrifugal struggle, and this struggle constructs meaning in an utterance (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2012). As Bakhtin (1981) contended, discourses do not typically hold equal power. Rather, centripetal discourses are generally more dominant in contrast to marginalized centrifugal discourses. The centripetal is the centered, more privileged discourse, which is easily legitimated as normative (Shotter, 1992). The centripetal thus functions as the basis from which everything else is evaluated (i.e., all else is a deviation from the center). In the context of U.S. military life, a heteronormative conception of sexuality appears to be the centripetal viewpoint. The centrifugal is the marginal, deviant discourse; it is positioned as a deviation from the center (Shotter, 1992).

Essential to relational dialectics theory (RDT) is the concept of an utterance chain (Baxter, 2011). An utterance is defined as "a verbal site where a multitude of competing discourses intersect to make meaning" (Baxter, 2010, p. 372). Importantly, "utterances do not stand in isolation; instead, they occur in chains consisting of both prior utterances and anticipated subsequent utterances" (Suter, Baxter, Seurer, &

Thomas, 2014, p. 63). Prior utterances consist of the cultural discourses that surround the given utterance. Prior utterances thus function as "a backdrop with which a given story can be understood as a rejoinder" (Suter et al., 2014, p. 63). Therefore, one should not simply examine the position being advanced, but also the positions that are being criticized or countered in a statement. Through the interplay of competing discourses meanings are constructed. As such, I advance the following research question:

> **RQ3a:** How are GLB military identities discursively constructed in military culture?

**Reinforcing Systems of Privilege in Talk**

In addition to exploring the discursive construction of GLB military identities, I am also interested in barriers and facilitators of change presented in talk. According to Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007), discourse analysis allows for the identification of barriers and facilitators of change and allows researchers to "discover the reasons for the success or failure of interventions" (p. 1372). In the following pages, I conceptualize privilege. Then, using Bakhtin's dialogism/monologism, I explain the ways in which language can reinforce and/or decenter heteronormativity.

**Privilege.** According to McIntosh (2000), there are two types of privilege. The first is "unearned entitlements," which are often restricted to certain groups offering an unearned advantage. The second is "conferred dominance," meaning that one group has power over another (McIntosh, 2014). Although privilege is passive and often unconscious, privilege is always at the expense of others (Johnson, 2006). In almost every social setting, privilege saturates people's everyday lives.

As explained by Johnson (2006), privilege is more about social categories than *who* people are. This often results in the paradoxal experience of *being* privileged without *feeling* privileged. Dominant groups, then, have a tendency to not view privilege as a problem for a number of reasons (e.g., they don't have to, they don't know it exists at all, they view it as a personal problem, etc.; Johnson, 2006). As explained by McPhail (2004), privilege is inherently monologic because it excludes minority voices and experiences. Furthermore, Johnson (2006) states, "Denying that privilege exists is a serious barrier to change" (p. 21).

**Monologism/Dialogism.** According to Bakhtin (1984), *monologism* "denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness" (p. 292). When a monologic orientation is advanced then, the *other* is only "an *object* of consciousness and cannot constitute another consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 292-293). The monologic conception of ideology is unitary, or single-voiced (Shotter, 1992).

Counter to monologic communication practices, dialogue requires individuals to face their own assumptions in an effort to appreciate difference (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Intercultural dialogue is "the process of constructing connections through discourse by communicating across difference" (MacLennan, 2011, p. 148). According to Wood (2004), "the critical possibilities of dialogue lie in its refusal to privilege any single voice, perspective, or ideology" (p. xx). For dialogue to be possible, "people—particularly those who enjoy relative privilege—must take responsibility for identifying and reducing socially determined asymmetries that dictate who gets to speak, what forums and forms of speech are deemed legitimate, whose speech counts, and to whom it counts" (p. xx). Importantly, dialogue has transformative potential.

Bakhtin's dialogue of "ideological becoming" involves complex meaning making processes including selecting, assimilating, and agreeing or disagreeing with others' words, which exist in "other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). In every claim, at least two sides exist. Dialogic communication is open-ended (Shotter, 1992) and a dialogic orientation emphasizes interacting with diverse voices (Lee & Brett, 2015).

The ways in which individuals use language to communicate about sexuality is key to understanding individuals' self-other orientations. In discussions about sexuality, individuals' language choices are likely representative of the ways in which they perceive, organize, and interpret sexuality differences. Striley and Lawson's (2014) discourse analysis of Australians' talk about race at a 2009 gathering of Australia's Citizens Parliament revealed that language practices functioned to (re)produce and decenter whiteness. The authors found that in 95% of the conversations observed, interlocutors used language that served anti-dialogical functions that inhibited transformative thinking. Similarly, I aim to discover the ways in which GLB and heterosexual military service members use language in conversations about sexuality to reinforce or challenge heterosexual privilege. In understanding how military service persons engage systems of privilege in *talk*, I seek to identify strategies for more effective communication practices that foster understanding across differences. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

**RQ3b:** How do GLB and heterosexual military members reproduce and/or decenter heteronormativity in talk?

# CHAPTER 3.
# RESEARCH METHOD

The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of GLB military service persons and also the perspectives of their heterosexual comrades, prior to and after the repeal of DADT. In order to capture the lived experiences of military service persons, it was necessary and important to learn about such experiences from those involved. As such, I approached this study qualitatively by utilizing in-depth interviews with both GLB and heterosexual military service members and veterans. In this chapter, I describe my sampling procedures, my participants, my research design, my data collection processes, and my data analysis procedures.

## Sample

Sampling procedures were designed to elicit participation from both GLB and heterosexual military service persons and veterans. Further, to better understand GLB identity constructions and GLB identity management processes prior to and after the repeal of DADT, sampling procedures did not restrict participation to those serving during any particular time frame. Participants, therefore, varied in in respect to their service period (in relation to the DADT policy).

As noted by Yip (2004a), a representative sample of a hidden population, such as the population of interest in this study, is unobtainable. Therefore, I constructed a convenient sample. Participants were solicited in a variety of ways. First, recruitment announcements were sent to over one hundred organizations and/or chapters of organizations in the hope that organizational leaders would disperse recruitment announcements to their members/followers. Organizations included GLBTQ centers, civil rights organizations, GLBTQ military organizations, veterans' organizations, and

GLBTQ veterans' organizations. In attempting to create variation in my sample, these centers were located in states all across the United States, and a special effort was made to recruit in states with large military bases and/or veteran populations. Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating.

Second, snowball sampling was employed. Snowball sampling included respondent-driven sampling, in which primary contacts were made with those who responded directly to the recruitment announcement (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). During interviews, participants were asked to spread the word to others that might be interested in participating. Finally, participants were also solicited through the researcher's informal networks. Friends and colleagues were asked to disperse recruitment announcements via email and/or to post announcements about the study on their various social networking sites.

**Participants**

Participants included 28 current and former military service members, both GLB identified individuals ($n$ = 15) and heterosexual individuals ($n$ = 13), from various locations across the United States. The sample was diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, military branch, and years of service. Additionally, participants varied in their ranks (ranging from cadet to E9) and military occupational specialties (e.g., mechanic, interrogator, administration, infantry, military police, physician assistant, and others).

**GLB participants.** Of the participants that identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, four identified as gay men, nine identified as lesbian women, and three identified as bisexual women (See Table 1). Two of the participants in this study

identified as trans male, but both reported that they had identified as lesbian females during their time in the military and were therefore categorized as lesbians in Table 1. Ages ranged from 26 to 69 years. Eleven of the GLB participants identified as white, three identified as Hispanic, and one identified as mixed race (Native American and white). Seven participants served in the Army, three served in the Navy, one served in the Air Force, and two served in the National Guard. The remaining two participants served in more than one branch.

Participants also varied in terms of their duration and dates of service in the military. One participant served during the time in which gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were excluded from military service (prior to DADT). Three participants served only under DADT (between 1993 and 2010). One participant served only after the repeal of DADT (after 2010). Two participants' service careers extended into all three eras (i.e., prior to, under, and post- repeal of DADT). Two participants served both prior to, and under, DADT. Six participants served under DADT and continued to serve after the repeal. Finally, participants' military service ranged from less than one year to 30 years.

Table 1.
*Demographic Overview for GLB Participants*

| Pseudonym | Age[2] | Sexuality | Race | Branch | Years in Military | Time period(s) in Military[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alfred | 70 | Gay | White | Army & Navy | 10 | P |
| Bill | 50 | Gay | White | Navy | 30 | P, D, R |
| Carla | 35 | Lesbian | White | National Guard & Army | 18 | D, R |

[2] Participants' ages were rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality and to protect participants' identities.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Danni | 30 | Lesbian | White | NJ National Guard | 9 | D, R |
| Avery[a] | 45 | Lesbian | White | Army | 14 | P, D, R |
| Casey[a] | 40 | Lesbian | White | Army | <1 | D |
| Jackie | 40 | Lesbian | White | Navy Reserve | 8 | D |
| Joanna | 30 | Bisexual Female | Hispanic | Army | 11 | D, R |
| Kevin | 30 | Gay | White | Army | 10 | D, R |
| Lauren | 40 | Lesbian | Native American & White | Army | 4 | P, D |
| Maria | 30 | Bisexual Female | Hispanic | Army | 13 | D, R |
| Rae | 40 | Lesbian | White | Army | 3 | P, D |
| Rylie | 25 | Bisexual Female | White | VA National Guard | 6 | D, R |
| Tony | 30 | Gay | White | Navy | 4 | R |
| Yvonne | 30 | Lesbian | Hispanic | Airforce | 5 | D |

*Note:* Letters presented in column, "Time Period(s) in Military," stand for: P = Prior to DADT (Before 1993); D = DADT Era (Between 1993-2010); R = After the repeal of DADT (after 2010)
[a] Participant is trans male, but identified as lesbian female during time in the military

**Heterosexual participants.** Of the 13 heterosexual participants, nine were male and four were female. Ages ranged from 25 to 59 years. Two heterosexual participants identified as white, seven identified as Hispanic, two identified as Asian, one identified as African-American, and one identified as mixed race. Two participants served exclusively in the Army, four in the Navy, two in the Air Force, three in the National Guard, and one in the Marine Corps. One participant served in multiple branches. The duration of their military service ranged from four years to 15 years. One participant served only prior to DADT, and four served during the DADT era. Three began their

service in 2010 and 2011, and had served only post- repeal of DADT. The remaining five participants served both under DADT and after its repeal (See Table 2).

Table 2.
*Demographic Overview for Heterosexual Participants*

| Pseudonym | Sex | Age [3] | Race | Branch | Years in Military | Time period(s) in Military[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alicia | Female | 25 | Hispanic | National Guard | 6 | R |
| Carlos | Male | 35 | Hispanic | Navy | 4 | D |
| Chris | Male | 60 | Asian | Army | 5 | P |
| Emilia | Female | 25 | Hispanic | Army National Guard | 6 | R |
| Jim | Male | 35 | Mixed Race | Army | 14 | D, R |
| John | Male | 50 | White | Army & National Guard | 15 | D, R |
| José | Male | 35 | Hispanic | Marine Corp | 7 | D |
| Nathan | Male | 25 | Hispanic | National Guard | 5 | R |
| Samantha | Female | 25 | Asian | Navy | 4 | D, R |
| Samuel | Male | 40 | Hispanic | Navy | 4 | D |
| Steve | Male | 45 | White | Airforce | 12 | D |
| Tiana | Female | 30 | African American | Airforce | 10 | D, R |
| Zeek | Male | 40 | Hispanic | Navy | 10 | D, R |

*Note:* Letters presented in column, "Time Period(s) in Military," stand for: P = Prior to DADT (Before 1993); D = DADT Era (Between 1993-2010); R = After the repeal of DADT (after 2010)

[3] Participants' ages were rounded to the nearest 5 to ensure confidentiality and to protect participants' identities.

## Research Design

In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the identity negotiation processes of GLB individuals serving in the military. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe interviews as "well suited to understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews" (p. 173). This method was chosen because narrative is key to understanding identity conceptions and identity shifts. Narratives are personal and meaningful, and must therefore be shared from an individual's perspective. Interviewing allows participants to share their stories, thoughts, and feelings in a way that quantitative approaches cannot accommodate. Importantly, this approach allows for themes to emerge from interviewees' responses, as opposed to the utilization of other methods, which tend to be more restrictive.

### Procedures

As explained earlier, recruitment announcements were sent to various organizations via email and through social media. Friends and colleagues were also asked to assist in my recruitment efforts. Recruitment announcements included a brief explanation of the study, the researcher's contact information, and a link to an online form (i.e., a copy of the oral consent script) that provided additional information about the project.

Due to the social stigma associated with homosexuality, potential participants may have perceived some risk involved in disclosing their sexual identities, particularly because the repeal of DADT has occurred recently. Participation in this study was voluntary. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, participants were compensated with a $20 gift card for completing the interview.

Because participants were geographically spread across the U.S. and abroad, phone interviews were used. Phone interviews were a convenient method because they allowed individuals that were geographically dispersed to participate, while also making the process simple for interviewees who could participate without leaving their homes. One participant partook in a Skype interview (with video) as opposed to a voice call because the participant was stationed overseas.

For gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, interview questions focused on identity disclosure decisions and experiences, perceptions of self and other, and larger cultural communication practices influencing identity management choices. Questions addressed identity concerns prior to the repeal of DADT, identity management choices after the repeal of DADT, and the aftermath of coming out (or not) in the military. For heterosexual participants, interview questions were designed to gauge their perspectives on the policy changes, their perspectives about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military, and their own experiences with GLB persons in the military (see Appendix A for interview protocols).

Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. Interviews were audio recorded on an audio recording device. At the start of each interview, participants selected a pseudonym, which was used throughout the duration of the interview. Each recording was labeled using the participants' pseudonym, with no connection to their real names. All electronic data and records were stored on a password protected hard drive. Audio files were transcribed for analysis. Participants are identified using their pseudonyms (and not real names) in the transcripts.

Data were analyzed using NVivo software. NVivo assists researchers to collect, organize, and analyze content from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, audio, social media, videos and webpages. Importantly, the software does not actually analyze the data, but rather provides a set of tools to assist the researcher in the process. The use of NVivo thus increases effectiveness and efficiency in the process of learning from the data (Bazeley, 2007).

## Data Analysis

### Grounded Theory Analysis

Grounded theory analysis was employed in answering the first two research questions (RQ1, RQ2a, and RQ2b). Constructionist grounded theory is a systematic, inductive process of data collection and analysis aimed at developing theory grounded in the data themselves. As Charmaz (2006) argues, grounded theory procedures should be understood as a set of flexible guidelines rather than a set of formulaic rules. The constructionist approach further highlights the versatility of this method, as it can be adapted for a variety of research projects. As such, I adapted the approach for my particular research project. I detail this process in the following paragraphs.

To begin, I first uploaded interview transcripts into NVivo. Two separate NVivo projects (i.e., files) were created, as I separated the GLB transcripts and heterosexual transcripts. Only GLB data were analyzed to answer RQ1, RQ2a, and RQ2b. Importantly, data collection and data analysis overlapped. Once three interviews had been transcribed and uploaded, I began the initial coding process. Thus, I was coding while still collecting data.

According to Charmaz (2006), "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 46). Charmaz (2006) argues that coding should be done at least at two levels: (1) initial coding and (2) focused coding. In the initial coding phase, I coded only data that were of theoretical interest for the present study, or data related to the phenomena of interest in this study (e.g., identity management, stigmatization, etc.). I coded each segment of data (i.e., sentences and/or statements) using codes designed to capture the essence of the data segment (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2013). During this process I remained open to "analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Further, while engaging in this phase of coding, I continuously revisited and renamed codes, as needed. This is what Charmaz (2006) described as the "constant comparative" method, which was used at each stage of the research process.

In the second phase of data analysis, I engaged in focused coding. In this phase, I used the most significant or frequent initial codes to "sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). I collapsed categories using frequently occurring earlier codes. I continuously compared data with data to develop the focused codes. I then compared data to the focused codes in order to refine them (Charmaz, 2006). This process was therefore provisional, as I continued to remain open to alternative understandings of the data. Categories were combined until the categories were comprehensive, or until all data were accounted for within the theoretical framework.

Beyond initial and focused coding, I developed subcategories of categories and "showed the links between them as I learned about the experiences the categories represent," which reflect how I made sense of the data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61). I also examined the interrelationships among codes and categories in the advancement of theory, or the production of contextualized knowledge claims. This is what I refer to as theoretical coding. Theoretical coding was used to specify possible relationships between the categories constructed during focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). (See Appendix B for coding schemes).

**Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analytic procedures were used to answer RQ3a and RQ3b. Interview transcripts from both GLB and heterosexual participants were analyzed to accomplish this goal. As Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) explain, "Discourse analysis is concerned with language-in-use; that is, how individuals accomplish personal, social, and political projects though language" (p. 1374). Discourse analysis can "shed light on the creation and maintenance of social norms, the construction of personal and group identities, and the negotiation of social and political interaction" (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). In the present study, discourse analytic procedures were used to uncover discursive constructions of GLB identities, and to examine the normalization of heterosexuality in talk. Again, NVivo was used to assist with the coding process and to increase effectiveness and efficiency (Bazeley, 2007).

For RQ3a, a modified version of contrapuntal analysis was used (Bakhtin, 1984). Contrapuntal analysis is a type of discourse analysis method appropriate to RDT-based research questions that focuses on examining the interplay of competing

discourses (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al. 2012). Discourse analysis of interview transcripts allows researchers to examine participants' language use, particularly as participants reference or appeal to discourses in talk (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This specific type of discourse analysis involves two key analytic steps: (1) the identification of discourses and (2) an analysis of how these discourses interplay (Baxter et al., 2012).

In the first stage of coding, I examined the interview transcripts to locate and code primary discourses. A discourse is defined as "a system of meaning—a set of propositions that cohere around a given object of meaning" (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). In this study, I focused on the discourses relevant to the construction of *GLB military identities*. This first phase of data analysis is a type of thematic analysis that attends specifically to discourses at both manifest and latent levels (Baxter, 2011). I went through the data and coded all utterances containing elements of larger cultural discourses, and utterances containing elements of more marginal discourses. This process, too, was provisional as I continuously went back to earlier codes and refined and collapsed categories, as needed. In the next phase of data analysis, I had to identify whether discourses identified in Phase 1 were in competition (Baxter, 2011). Ultimately, I identified two primary discourses about the meaning of GLB military and found that these discourses were in competition. I found several themes constituting each competing discourse. Finally, I examined the ways in which participants centered one discourse over another (or not) in any given utterance (See Appendix B for coding schemes).

To answer RQ3b, a discursive analytic procedure was used to identify language practices that work to reinforce or decenter heteronormativity. I first used a form of

thematic analysis to identify dialogic and monologic orientations as presented in participants' statements. Specifically, I coded all utterances advancing dialogic and monologic orientations, or open-ended versus single-voiced utterances, pertaining to heterosexuality (and/or non-heterosexuality). Dialogic communication orientations include the voice of the Other, which is crucial for a better and more holistic understanding of cultural discourses (Hsu, 2010) and can also promote transformative dialogue and positive social change (Striley & Lawson, 2014). An utterance is defined here as "a verbal site where a multitude of competing discourses intersect to make meaning" (Baxter, 2010, p. 372). Utterances are thus "positions of various subjects as expressed in discourse" (Hsu, 2010, p. 202).

In the next phase of analysis, I used a constant comparative method to identify language practices comprising each orientation; that is, language practices that work to reinforce and/or decenter heteronormativity. This phase of coding also included the categorizing, grouping, and combining of categories to locate core categories (i.e., types of discursive practices). This process was also iterative, as I continuously went back to earlier codes to refine, clarify and synthesize until the codes were comprehensive (See Appendix B for coding schemes).

**Verification**

Creswell (2007) recommends qualitative researchers use at least two methods of validation in any given study. In accordance with this recommendation, I used thick rich description and member checking. Thick description was achieved by uncovering the deep contextual meanings and providing abundant detail (Tracy, 2013). Additionally, I engaged in member checking which entails presenting my findings and

interpretations to the participants so as to allow them to question, critique, clarify, and provide additional feedback. Two GLB participants partook in follow-up interviews. Each follow-up interview lasted approximately one hour. No changes to the results were necessary after member checking.

# CHAPTER 4.

# IDENTITY INCONGRUITY AND RECONCILIATION: HOW *GLB IDENTITY REPUDIATION* INFLUENCES FEELINGS OF BELONGING FOR GLB MILITARY

The first research question inquired about the cultural communicative practices that influence feelings of belonging for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military. To answer this question, I first examined the types of messages that participants reported hearing about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals while serving in the U.S. military, and also the communicative behaviors targeting gays, lesbians and bisexuals (or those perceived to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual) in the U.S. military. To accomplish this goal, interviews with gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were analyzed using grounded theory analysis. Findings revealed that even after the repeal of DADT, cultural communication patterns continued to exclude gays, lesbians and bisexuals from fully identifying with military culture. I use *GLB identity repudiation* as a concept that encompasses these cultural communication patterns. Gay, lesbian and bisexual identities are repudiated within the military context through the communicative practices of *dehumanization*, *discrimination*, and *stereotype proliferation*,

Importantly, *GLB identity repudiation* was found to incite feelings of *identity incongruity* for GLB military service personnel. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants overwhelmingly experienced feelings of *identity incongruity*, such that their military and sexual identities are seemingly incompatible. Therefore, participants attempted to manage the tensions between two diametrically opposed identities. Participants attempted to manage these tensions in three ways: (a) by *suppressing their sexual*

*identities in favor of their role identities*, (b) by *segmenting their personal and professional lives*, and (c) by *attempting to reconcile their sexual and military identities*. This theoretical framework is further explicated in the following pages.

### *GLB Identity Repudiation*

I first explored the types of communicative behaviors observed by gay, lesbian and bisexual participants that were directed at (or that indirectly targeted) gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the military context. Findings revealed that communicative behaviors worked to *repudiate GLB identities* within the military organization. I conceptualize *GLB identity repudiation* as a collection of observed communicative behaviors that function to de-legitimize gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities in the military; to reject them as deviant. *GLB identity repudiation* can also be understood as a collective process of stigmatization.

As explained by Iantaffi and Bockting (2011), behaviors, identities and choices that do not fit within the limited repertoire of cultural scripts that regulate and reinforce normative social functions are seen as deviant. And, as Rubin (1984) explains, only a small set of sexual practices and norms are perceived to be acceptable, or morally good, within mainstream society. These normative sexual practices are considered natural, while all others fall to the outer limits and are thus deemed illegitimate (Rubin, 1984). Upon analyzing interview data, I found that GLB identities were repudiated in three distinct ways: (1) *dehumanization*, (2) *discrimination*, and (3) *stereotype proliferation*.

#### Dehumanization

The first category of *GLB identity repudiation* is *dehumanization*. In this study, participants reported that GLB persons were often described, and/or treated, as sub-

human. Alfred, a 69-year-old, gay, male veteran who served during the Vietnam era, described this issue by stating, “We were not human beings; we were hunted like witches. No matter how many levels you had on your chest, if you were found out you were an enemy. It's just like policemen thinking that black people are not human and it's okay to shoot them.” Alfred further exclaimed, “We were regarded as not human and we didn't count.” Although the witch-hunts ceased (to some degree) when DADT was implemented, dehumanization processes continued.

Examples of the dehumanization described by participants included physical and linguistic violence. Importantly, both forms of violence can create psychological distress, as victims of violence are made to feel insecure and vulnerable. This can also lead GLB persons (or other victims) to question their own worth (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990). Physical violence was an extreme form of dehumanization reported by participants. Casey is a 37-year-old, trans male Army veteran. During his time in the military he had identified as a lesbian female, but has since transitioned. As a lesbian female serving under DADT in the early 2000’s, Casey reported an example of dehumanizing violence that he had observed. Casey described what was called a “blanket party”:

| | |
|---|---|
| Casey: | Where the males were all put together, there was one individual who was accused of being gay and he was not ... his platoon mates did what was called a blanket party, I don't know if you're ever heard of that, it's awful… |
| Interviewer: | No |
| Casey: | They take pillowcases and put bars of soap in it, tie a knot around the other end, and while the person is sleeping in a bunk, wail on them... |
| Interviewer: | Oh my gosh! |
| Casey: | With these pillowcases that have soap ... and you get bruises and all that stuff. This individual, as far as I understood it, was not gay, but they thought that he was and they let him have it. |

Although Casey's example involved physical harm, many other participants reported linguistic violence.

Language is inseparable from the distribution of power in society (Gay, 1998). This theory of "language as power" is grounded in the work of Bourdieu, who asserted that an analysis of language cannot be separated from an analysis of the relative social positions of participants within a communication exchange. Another theorem pertaining to the power of language is that language shapes human consciousness and behavior (Gay, 1998). Language is also frequently used as "an instrument in covert institutional violence" (Gay, 1998, p, 138). *Linguistic violence*, then, refers to any "situation in which individuals are hurt or harmed by words" (Gay, 1999, p. 303). Linguistic violence includes the employment of derogatory terms, slurs, and other forms of language that harm or attack GLB persons intentionally or unintentionally. This form of violence can often result in significant emotional harm. As such, the damaging effects of 'mere' words should not be minimized (Garnets et al., 1990).

As Gay (1999) explains, language can be used to affirm diversity or to demean differences. The linguistic violence reported by participants represents the latter. Yvonne, a lesbian Air Force veteran that separated from the military in 2010 (the same year DADT was repealed), reported linguistic violence. She even expressed concerns that this linguistic violence could have potentially turned physical. Yvonne described what she had observed when a fellow comrade made the decision to serve openly as a lesbian. Yvonne explains,

> [My coworkers] would just say a lot of derogatory things to her and they might've at some point been pretty physical towards her and so then that's when

> I was concerned that if they found out, that I'd be treated the same way. So I made a point to conceal that part.

As Garnets and colleagues (1990) attest, linguistic or symbolic forms of violence often serve as a reminder of the ever-present threat of other forms of violence as well. In fact, derogatory language such as that described by participants in this study, work to reinforce a person's sense of being a socially acceptable target of physical violence (Garnets et al., 1990). Although participants explained that after the repeal of DADT the threat of physical violence had somewhat ceased, or had at least been reduced, linguistic violence persisted.

Importantly, the forms of linguistic violence that emerged from participants' stories can be understood as speech acts, or more specifically, injurious speech acts (Butler, 1996). Such acts echo prior acts, and thus accumulate authoritative force through the repetition of such acts. "The act is itself a ritualized practice" (Butler, 1996, p. 206). The historical force of these speech acts is what allows such terms (e.g., fag, dyke) to function performativity and to cause injury. Such acts *create* reality and work to institute a power hierarchy in which heterosexuals hold power and privilege.

Delgado (1982) offered a critical examination of legal doctrine highlighting the ways in which the law has failed to provide adequate protection from *words that wound*. Although Delgado's work centered on racial insults, much of Delgado's arguments are applicable to the insults directed at, or indirectly targeting GLB individuals in the military. As Delgado (1982) explains, "the racial insult remains one of the most pervasive channels through which discriminatory attitudes are imparted" (p. 135). Language such as racial insults, or insults grounded in discriminatory attitudes towards non-heterosexuals, injures the dignity and self-regard of those targeted. Such language

communicates the message that sexuality distinctions are “also distinctions of merit, dignity, status, and personhood” (Delgado, 1982, p. 136). In demonstrating the power of racial insults, Delgado (1982) asserts, “Not only does the listener learn and internalize the messages contained in racial insults, these messages color our society's institutions and are transmitted to succeeding generations” (p. 136) A similar case can be made for targets of sexuality insults, as heterosexist ideologies remain deeply ingrained in society’s institutions. Butler (1996) attests, “It is not simply that the speech act takes place within a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice” (p. 206). Importantly, the psychological responses to such forms of stigmatization include feelings of humiliation, isolation, and even self-hate (Delgado, 1982).

Almost all participants in this study reported linguistic slurs that directly and indirectly targeted gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Avery is a trans male, who identified as a lesbian female while serving in the U.S. Army. Avery served prior to the implementation of DADT, under DADT, and after the repeal of DADT (a total of 14 years). He described the linguistic violence that he frequently observed in the Army,

> I think that there are still harassment that goes on. You know, fag jokes or queer. I know like the Marines they still, in basic training, they'll call you a faggot or you know, "Come on, faggot. You can do more than that." There's just little things like that that are still ingrained in the culture that it's going to take some time to actually ... It's actually going to take people at the top pushing this down that it's not okay to discriminate or use those type of slurs.

Similarly, Rae, a lesbian female that served prior to the implementation of DADT and under DADT, explained, “Just like some people say the word ‘gay.’ ‘You're so gay.’ But they'd say, ‘You faggot.’ They'd always use stuff like that. Derogatory terms.” Important to the present discussion, power relations dictate the type of language appropriate within a given context. As Giles and Coupland (1991) explain, the

establishment dictates what is to be considered an appropriate language behavior in a given situation. The linguistic slurs targeting gays, lesbians, and bisexuals used within the military (e.g., "That's so gay," "faggot," etc.), have been normalized within the military institution. The danger lies in the fact that language shapes perception and behavior; language constructs reality. Kevin, a 31-year-old veteran that served prior to and under the repeal of DADT, explains that he left the military, in part, because of the negativity directed at gays. He says,

> My choice to leave took place after the fact of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Technically in reality, when they repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell, it gave the ignorant, straight people, a chance to belittle and humiliate those who are openly gay. Personally, I didn't want to be a part of it.

As Kevin's statement demonstrates, the dehumanization of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military continued even after the repeal of DADT. Such communicative practices work to deny legitimacy to queer identities in the armed forces.

Words like "faggot," "dyke," and others, often convey raw hatred and prejudice, and are often used (like the N-word and other racial epithets) by oppressors, to remind the oppressed of their subordinate status (Garnets et al., 1990; Unger, 1979). As Garnets and colleagues (1990) argue, such forms of anti-gay verbal abuse constitute a symbolic form of violence and serve as a routine reminder of the ever-present threat faced by GLB persons. Further, this form of symbolic violence reinforces a target's sense of being an outsider within the cultural community in which such language is expressed. Targets, or GLB observers then, are reminded of their status as a disliked and devalued minority (Garnets et al., 1990), which can evoke feelings of alienation for those targeted.

**Discrimination**

The next category comprising *GLB identity repudiation* is *discrimination*. Discrimination is the acting out of prejudice, or the behavioral counterpart of prejudice (Allport, 1979). Discrimination has serious and immediate consequences, and comes about when we deny individuals or groups of people equal treatment (Allport, 1979). In this study discrimination was observed at the organizational, collective, and interpersonal levels.

Policies excluding gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from serving present the most obvious form of discrimination. Such discriminatory policies include those that initially prohibited gays and lesbians from serving, the more recent DADT policy, and the existing policy that continues to deem sodomy as a dischargeable offense. These discriminatory policies and practices exemplify the ways in which power relations shape and normalize only certain types of sexualities (Warner, 1993). Laws and guidelines such as those described above work to legitimize heterosexuality. These policies, even today, define who, and what relationships, are seen as legitimate from the institutional standpoint (Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011; Warner, 1993).

A number of participants serving before DADT witnessed others being discharged due to their sexualities. For example, Bill, a 50-year-old navy veteran who retired in 2015 shared a story about a comrade who was discharged. He said, “One guy that propositioned another guy … ended up leaving the boat the next day. They kicked him out of the service.” Other participants explained that they, themselves, had been personally investigated. For instance, an active duty soldier named Carla (35-year-old, lesbian) was investigated by her command under DADT. She explains,

> Before repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" I underwent an investigation for being a lesbian, and being active duty. My supervisor had an inclination that I was, and

> kind of pursued down that route, filed charges with my commander, with legal, and there was a huge investigation that happened.

As explained by Johnson et al. (2015), GLB military service persons could experience vicarious traumatization from observing GLB comrades suffering from adverse career consequences.

Two participants in my study were, themselves, discharged on the basis of their sexualities. One outed herself because she wanted to get out of the military. The other was forced out upon being discovered. Lauren, a 41-year-old Army veteran was kicked out of West Point when her ex-girlfriend's room was raided and a journal was discovered that included information about their relationship. Lauren and her ex-girlfriend were arrested and charged. This went to trial and they were separated from the academy and from the Army. As explained by Johnson and colleagues (2015), more than 13,000 military service persons were discharged on the basis of sexual orientation under DADT. This form of institutional discrimination enhances the experience of minority stress of GLB persons (Johnson et al., 2015). Residual anxieties stemming from these earlier exclusionary policies are likely to influence current GLB members' feelings of belonging as well.

After the repeal of DADT in 2011, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals can now serve openly in the U.S. military without the threat of discharge. Interestingly, however, legal discrimination persists. "Sodomy" continued to be listed as a dischargeable offense until 2014. Bill explained this by stating,

> It's like, you can be a homosexual as long as you never have sex. That's what the bill was. You can be gay, but just never do anything with it. You can't have sex. After the law was explained, I was like, well, that's kind of silly. Okay, you can come into the military and be gay, but you can't have sex for 4, 6, 8 years, however long you're in the military. It was kind of silly. At first I was excited,

> because I thought it was going to be a great step, and then later as everything got explained to everybody, it was like, okay, so we can put people who are gay in the military, but they can never have sex.

Many people, military and otherwise, are unaware of the contradictory policies that continued to reject homosexuality after the repeal of DADT. Although GLB people were allowed to serve openly, they were not permitted to have sexual relations unless such relations were "heterosexual" in nature. Non-heterosexual forms of sexuality remained codified in federal law as an illegal act until 2014, thus legitimating GLB stigma (Johnson et al., 2015).

Along with legal discrimination, other forms of organizational and social discrimination persist. For example, Tony, a gay male currently serving openly in the U.S. Navy, reported discrimination with regard to his performance evaluation. Tony explained,

> Every year in the Navy we have evals that come out and we're ranked against the other people in our same category. Everyone in the rank right above me, they submit their recommendations for the ranking order of who should be ranked number one and number two. I was unanimously the choice for the number one spot. Ultimately, the military is not democracy, it's run by the top person. The top person, it is from a community that is traditionally more conservative… They feel that I was unjustly given the number two spot which actually really affects how we make promotions. It was 2 out of 20 people, but it wasn't number one, and they felt that it was because I had come out.

Tony went on to explain,

> Getting number two is really unfair… I felt cheated, not necessarily because of what I thought my performance was but because all of my supervisors said I was the top recommendation by all of them… Getting number two, it meant I missed out on a promotion. It affected not only my feelings about my life but my actual professional life as well as my income because you get more money as you get promoted. That affects a lot of aspects in my life, not getting the higher rank.

Although legal discrimination was no longer an issue (Tony's service began at the time DADT was repealed), personal prejudices still influence how evaluations are conducted and promotion decisions.

Along with legal and organizational discrimination, the most commonly reported form of discrimination was social discrimination. Many participants reported that they, themselves, or others that were perceived to be gay, were often excluded from membership into the "military family." Those perceived to be homosexual were made fun of, looked down upon by peers and superiors, and were even excluded from gatherings or events. The active steps taken to exclude GLB military present a form of social/interpersonal discrimination that can have a profound effect on the targets of such discrimination (Allport, 1979).

**Stereotype Proliferation**

*Stereotype proliferation* is the third communicative practice constituting *GLB identity repudiation*. A stereotype is a characteristic perceived to be shared by members of a social group (Reid & Anderson, 2010). Of the three forms of identity repudiation described by participants, stereotyping was the most commonly reported, with stereotypes varying drastically in terms of their content. For example, two participants reported stereotypes associating gays with HIV or AIDS. For example, Kevin described some people's beliefs about gays, stating, "'If I look at someone, if I talk to someone, or if I touch someone who's gay…,' the perception of a lot of homophobic, uneducated people is, 'I'm going to get HIV by looking at him.'" Kevin, a gay Army veteran, thus made it a point to come out after the repeal of DADT and used his coming out as an opportunity to educate his peers.

The most prominently reported stereotypes were those associating gay identities with hypersexuality or perversion, with femininity or flamboyancy, and with weakness. The *fear of feminization* will be discussed further in a later chapter, but here, I focus on some of the specific stereotypes that participants reported. First, several participants reported the common stereotype that gays or lesbians were hypersexual or perverted. Rylie (bisexual female), for instance, explained her own observation, stating,

> I remember a woman that I didn't know personally, but that I guess looked like or performed a certain type of sexuality. I remember other women in my unit would be like, "I'm going to wait until they're done showering before I go in there because I don't want them to check me out or see me naked or anything like that."

Rylie went on to explain that some of the heterosexual women were afraid that the lesbians would "check them out" in the showers or make "a move on them when they're sleeping at night." As explained by Enteman (2003), "the combination of stereotypes with prejudice and discrimination is lethal" (p. 16). This is particularly the case when stereotypes are used to categorize certain individuals or groups as lying outside the boundary of what is considered moral (Tileagă, 2007). In stereotyping GLB persons as perverted, or morally inept, GLB identities are delegitimized.

Perhaps the most detrimental stereotype to affect gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were those that associated being gay with weakness. Rae, a 42-year-old, lesbian female stated, "It's the way their mindset is in the military. It's very strong. I think a lot of the guys think the men who are gay are weak." Similarly, Kevin explained, "The perception is that gay men and women are wimps and wussies and they can't perform to a macho person's standards of being in the military." This stereotype essentially associates GLB persons with an inability to perform their job functions, thus categorizing them as

incompetent soldiers, airmen, and so on. This type of stereotype has been used historically as grounds for excluding gays and lesbians from service. Before DADT and other GLB exclusionary policies, similar stereotypes were used to deny women from participating in the military. Historically, stereotypes pertaining to intellectual and physical abilities were also used to justify slavery (Connolly, 1998). Given the centrality of the mission focus in military culture, this stereotype casts sexual minorities as culturally incompetent.

## Identity Incongruity

Identity repudiation (described above) significantly influences gays, lesbians, and bisexuals' feelings of belonging within the military. In fact, nearly all participants reported feelings of *identity incongruity*, such that their sexual and military identities were in conflict with one another. Participants described an inability to be gay *and* be in the military, simultaneously. This inability to reconcile their competing identities took a toll on many participants. As Casey explained, "I just felt like I couldn't be me."

*Identity incongruity* is a concept meant to capture some of the challenges associated with possessing competing social identities (Liboro Jr., 2015). Although all individuals have multiple social identities, challenges can arise when two or more identities are seemingly incompatible, as individuals have to negotiate multiple, competing sets of norms related to their collective identities. Because gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military are socialized into a culture that advances heterosexist ideologies, they are particularly vulnerable to the experience of *identity incongruity.*

Importantly, prior research has found that when the norms and values of one collective identity interfere with those of another collective identity, lower levels of

well-being are reported (Settles, 2004). Further, given the heterosexist culture of the U.S. military, GLB members are also vulnerable to internalizing that homophobia (Liboro Jr., 2015). In the present study, I attempt to investigate individuals' coping strategies and the challenges that arise from them.

***Suppressing their Sexual Identities in Favor of their Role Identities***

The first coping strategy observed was *suppressing sexual identities in favor of military role identities*. Several of the participants in this study struggled to accept their sexual identities at the time they had entered the military. For these participants, many saw the military as an escape from dealing with their sexualities. This was particularly true for those who grew up in conservative families or that came from religious backgrounds. Tony, for instance, denied that his sexual identity existed at all. He said, "My thoughts on Don't Ask Don't Tell, I didn't really have thoughts on it because I pretended [my sexuality] didn't exist. Just like I pretend anything gay or bisexual didn't exist before that. I didn't really allow myself to think about it."

Danni, a 27-year-old currently serving in the National Guard, explained that she consciously made the decision to suppress her sexual identity and serve her country. She said,

> For me, the service to my country and to my state as well, it came around a time to where I knew I was struggling with who I was. I had grown up in a place where my parents always said that being a homosexual was wrong and that it was disgusting. At that time, I realized that I was and I thought, "Well, I'm not going to be able to get married. I'm not going to be able to do any of those things, but at least I can protect the ones I love."

Similarly, Casey described his decision-making process when he signed up for the military. He says,

> My personal life was falling apart, I had ended a 4-year relationship that was not good, it was not good and I was lost. I always wanted to do it, and at that point because I wasn't with anybody and I figured well you know, if I sign, if I join the military police, the obligation was 5 years. I figured I'd just be celibate, I wouldn't do anything, I didn't want to be with anybody, I wasn't thinking about hooking up with anybody, I ... at that point, I wanted escapism, and I wanted to tap into something that I always wanted to do.

Both Danni and Casey made the decision to join the military, in part, to avoid dealing with their sexualities. To them, the military would keep them busy and they could avoid coming to terms with their sexual identities. Of course, one cannot escape from their sexual identity. For many participants, the military context actually prompted their sexual identities to become more salient. Gays, lesbians and bisexuals, at times, became hyper aware of their sexualities, resulting in overwhelming experiences of fear, stress, and insecurity. These findings are consistent with prior studies. For instance, Yip (2007) found that those who experienced identity incongruity found it easiest to discard (or attempt to discard) one of the identities in conflict. However, this strategy may lead to additional psychological distress, as sexualities cannot be discarded.

For other gay, lesbian, and bisexual military participants, there was some degree of acceptance regarding their sexual identities. However, due to policies that were in place, and cultural and social stigmas associated with homosexuality in the military, these participants explained that they *chose* their career over their personal relationships (or the possibility of a relationship). Thus, this coping strategy involved a weighing process, where participants came to choose one identity over the other because they could not be/do both at the same time. For example, Carla explained, “Coming in [under DADT], I looked at it as, it was going to benefit me and if I had to sacrifice a relationship or I guess who I was, in order to get where I wanted to be in life, that it was

worth it." Some eventually made the decision to choose relationships over the military, thus deciding to separate from the armed forces. As Alfred explained, "I was big re-enlistment material as they call it, but I had my secret and I wanted to get out. I escaped. That was more to live freely as a gay man." Sexual identity suppression was not an effective strategy for any of the participants, as all struggled in some way with feelings of inauthenticity.

***Segmenting their Personal and Professional Lives***

Although some participants felt that they could not be gay and in the military, others believed they could be both, just not at the same time. These participants attempted to segment their personal and professional lives. For example, Bill explains that once he was "out" (not in the military), he ended up maintaining two separate groups of friends. He said,

> As the years grew on, you find that you have ... I developed at-work relationships and then I developed not-at-work relationships. The people I had relationships outside of work were people that knew I was gay, or they themselves were gay. Then the people I had friendships with or whatever at work, it was basically at work only.

Carla further described the segmentation of her work and personal life. She said,

> It was 1999, or year 2000, when I actually started identifying more as a lesbian, and it was difficult. I had two separate lives, pretty much. I'd go to work and put on my uniform, and I never ... there was always a personal life and a work life, and they never intertwined with one another, because they couldn't. There was a lot of secrecy, there was a lot of battling between me being able to be who I wanted to be outside of work, and putting on the uniform and completely changing to be somebody else.

Carla struggled with her two competing identities. She went on to explain,

> I've always kept things very separate from work and my personal life ... for me, coming out was never an issue. It was never something I was concerned about, it was never something I hesitated on. When it comes to my family, I have a very supportive family, I never hesitated ... the first moment that I actually had a

> revelation that this actually feels good. […] When I had my actual first girlfriend when I was 19, it was ... I was super excited, it felt really good, and I actually felt like I was in a place where I wanted to be. My first thing was to go home and tell my mom ... who's extremely supportive, and I've never doubted that. When it comes to quote "coming out", I didn't hesitate. It was something that was very joyous to me. I can't say the same for the military, but like I said ... I think I've always done a really good job of keeping them separate and trying not to let it affect me.

Although Carla was very much "out" in her personal life outside of the military, she did not reveal her sexuality to others in the military. Compartmentalizing identity domains was also a strategy observed in Yip's (2004a) work, which examined the coping strategies of gay Muslims.

Those attempting to separate their two competing identities, however, described this strategy as effective, at least for a while. Military culture is pervasive and affects individuals' lives outside of it. Further, military service persons often develop close friendships in the military, which can make segmentation difficult. As Liboro Jr. (2015) explains, "For the most part, this strategy remains as a temporary measure until a more acceptable form of identity integration can occur" (p. 1211).

***Attempting to Reconcile their Sexual and Military Identities***

The final coping strategy observed was *attempting to reconcile sexual and military identities*. Only one participant (Tony) reported complete *identity integration.* This participant did not begin his service until the year that legislation to repeal DADT was enacted. Tony made the decision to serve openly after the DADT was officially lifted, despite the potential danger of discrimination. He was met with support and has been serving now for four years as an openly gay man in the U.S. Navy. Tony was the only participant in this study *not* to report significant feelings of *identity incongruity*.

For most, attempts at identity reconciliation meant either leaving the military or making the decision to "come out" (after the repeal of DADT). For those that did "come out" while serving, it was often only to a few trusted companions (which will be explained further in the next chapter). Coming out was typically met with support and identity affirmation (though not always), making some participants feel whole for the first time. Bill stated,

> I was happy finally. I was like, this is okay. People who are gay grew up gay. People who are straight grew up straight. It's not like people who acted straight ... I don't know, I finally accepted myself and I could love myself. I guess that was the biggest part of it. I can love myself again and be who I am.

Danni also described the sense of relief she had in being able to be authentic. She stated,

> For me, a long time, I felt reserved. I felt like I was keeping some stuff back I couldn't be the whole person that I could be and ever since coming out, I've felt so much better about myself. I felt like I wasn't hiding something and I felt like I could really be who I wanted to be without being judged.

Danni and Bill both attempted identity reconciliation by coming out (to some) after the repeal of DADT, and both now feel as if their competing identities are no longer in conflict.

For others, identity reconciliation came after separating from the military. For example, several participants described a need to live authentically, and, since separating from the military, have become involved with GLBTQ veterans' organizations and activist work. This has allowed them the opportunity to proudly identify as gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender veterans. For example, Alfred now exclaims that he is "Proud as hell. I served my country and proud to be gay." Casey, Avery, and Alfred have all immersed themselves in advocacy work since being "out." They are being true to who they are and are living authentically as GLBT veterans, thus

reconciling their military service and sexual (and gender) identities. Even those who did not report any attempts at reconciliation expressed hope for a future in which individuals can all experience social identity integration.

In sum, despite policy changes that have enabled GLB persons to serve openly in the armed forces, communicative practices of dehumanization, discrimination, and stereotype proliferation continue to prevent GLB individuals from being able to fully integrate their sexual and military identities. As prior research has demonstrated, identity integration is crucial for psychological functioning and overall well-being (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). As such, the persistent experience of identity incongruity reported by participants is disconcerting, as most reported strategies of identity suppression and segmentation. As one might expect, the repeal of DADT did not instantaneously change the culture of heterosexism in the U.S. military. GLB persons thus remain vulnerable to the negative psychological consequences associated with identity concealment, stigmatization, and prejudice and discrimination. In the following chapter I examine more closely the identity management strategies employed by GLB service persons.

# CHAPTER 5

# IDENTITY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES PRIOR TO, AND AFTER, THE REPEAL OF "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL"

To answer the second set of research questions, I analyzed interview transcripts with GLB identified participants using constant comparative analysis. Specifically, I examined the sexual identity management strategies employed by gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military prior to, and after, the repeal of DADT. Findings revealed a number of strategies including avoiding, strategic disclosure, and passing, among others. Interestingly, these findings suggested that identity management choices have remained relatively consistent, even after the repeal of DADT, as cultural communication patterns continue to deny and reject GLB identities within the military context. In the following pages, I outline the identity management strategies employed by participants and the feelings associated with their identity management choices.

## Identity Management Prior to the Repeal of DADT

For GLB military, the decision to "come out" or remain closeted is often motivated by the feelings associated with being a member of a stigmatized group and the potential consequences of one's stigmatized identity being discovered. Through the coding process, I found that all participants made thoughtful and deliberate decisions about whether or not, and to whom, they would reveal their sexual identities. Identity management strategies included: *cultivating network ignorance, preserving underground networks,* and *disclosing strategically*. In the following paragraphs I describe each of these strategies, in turn, and the categories that comprise them.

**Cultivating Network Ignorance**

*Cultivating network ignorance* refers to the calculated measures that were taken by GLB military to ensure that individuals within their organizational network (i.e., the military) remained ignorant of their sexual identities. In this study, *cultivating network ignorance* is comprised of five categories: *withdrawing, performing heterosexuality, fabricating "truths," avoiding,* and *stage-managing*. Importantly, the *cultivating of network ignorance* is an identity management strategy grounded in secrecy. As Smart and Wegner (2000) explain, keeping one's stigma a secret can become a significant burden because keeping the secret "can become a preoccupation" (p. 222). Lane and Wegner (1995) explain that attempts at secrecy can often activate a set of cognitive processes that then lead stigmatized individuals to think obsessively about their secret. This occurs because, when people attempt to keep a secret, they also try to suppress their thoughts about the secret. Although this approach can be an effective strategy for a while, Smart and Wegner (2000) explain that, eventually, such attempts at suppression lead to thought intrusion. Although thought intrusion may not occur, periodic intrusions are likely. In the following pages I describe each category comprising this identity management strategy. I also offer sample excerpts as illustrations.

**Withdrawing.** The first category comprising *cultivating network ignorance* is *withdrawing*. *Withdrawing* refers to the intentional seclusion or isolation of one's self from military culture. This was a common practice for those attempting to segment their personal and professional lives. Any effort to have a personal life, or take part in a romantic relationship, required one to pull back from the military. Seclusion enabled some participants to pursue personal relationships without the risk of being discovered

by those in the military. Bill, for example, a 50-year-old Navy veteran that served for 30 years who has recently retired said, “I did find that what I did was I actually pushed a lot of my military friends away, just so I could do what I wanted to do and still keep it a secret.” Similarly, Casey, a trans male Army veteran that identified as a lesbian female during his service explained, “I would say I kept pretty quiet. I had the two friends that I talked to, but I didn't talk about anything personal.”

Many participants reported that they had kept to themselves for fear of being discovered. Danni presented another example of withdrawal in her interview. She explained,

> I guess that's more of a confidence thing. I was always like an introvert, I guess, when I was naturally like a bubbly, spontaneous kind of person before realizing who I was. There's probably a good maybe 6 to 8 years where I just kept that hidden because I felt like I couldn't get close with people because when I got close with them, then obviously this is something that would have to come up.

As Danni became aware of her sexual identity, she also became more introverted. She avoided getting close to people for fear that her sexuality would eventually come up in conversation. For many, this identity management strategy inhibited the potential development of the close friendships and bonds that are so often developed within the military, and which are essential to military effectiveness (Moradi, 2009). As such, the strategy of withdrawal can actually harm the overall effectiveness of one’s unit.

**Performing heterosexuality.** The next category comprising the broader theme of *cultivating network ignorance* is *performing heterosexuality.* Goffman (1959) asserts that individuals consciously pursue specific goals and interests. “‘They seek to ‘be’ – and to be ‘seen to be’ – ‘something’ or ‘somebody,’ to successfully assume particular identities” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 42). The type of identity performance I describe in this

section is *passing*. Goffman (1963) defined *passing* as managing the visibility of a trait (i.e., sexuality). Yoshino (2006) described passing as not only a set of performances, but also as a set of demands society makes; it is an expectation for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to minimize their "gayness." Several participants, for instance, noted that they carefully considered their identity performances and made conscientious efforts to be seen as straight by fellow comrades. For example, Jason, a 31-year-old Air Force veteran that served under DADT and also after its repeal, explained, "I guess I also tried to act like a straight guy. I'm not very feminine. I conditioned myself to get rid of this kind of gesture and that kind of thing."

For some, performing heterosexuality also involved a performance of hyper-masculinity. For example, Alfred, a Navy and Army veteran who served prior to the implementation of DADT in the late 1960s to the late 1970s, explained that he performed the role of a hyper masculine (and even homophobic) warrior in an effort to diminish any possibility of becoming suspect. He stated,

> These straight boys got antsy after a couple of weeks without women and they start grabbing each other as a joke. It didn't mean they were gay. They were releasing tension so it was very common to be grabbed. Every time somebody would do that with me, I would push them away angrily and act very straight and say "Ah, don't do that!" because I was afraid I was going to get excited and reveal the truth. I inertly got a reputation and it just got around.

Along with this hyper performance, Alfred also explained that he would laugh along with homophobic jokes in order to be "one of them." He says, "When somebody made a joke and everybody laughed crudely, you had to laugh along with them so they would think you were one of them." And, as Alfred explained, he earned a reputation for being particularly straight and especially masculine. Alfred manufactured this image for himself. He effectively played this role, as he was later asked by leadership to aid in the

hunting down of gay men in the military. He was asked to report anyone he suspected of being gay so that leaders could move to have those individuals discharged.

**Fabricating "truths."** The next strategy that was designed to ensure fellow comrades remained ignorant of participants' sexual identities is the *fabrication of truths*. This strategy involved deception, fictionalization, and the fabrication of reality. Many participants reported lying directly when they were questioned. Additionally, participants reported developing cover-up stories to ensure they went undetected. Some lies were more explicit, whereas others were lies of omission. For example, Rae reported that she frequently lied to her comrades. Rae is an Army veteran who served prior to and under DADT. Rae explained, "I had to hide calls, hide conversations, hide that I was maybe in love with someone, or, like I said, act like I was interested in someone else there who I wasn't."

Jason explained that in attempting to segment his personal and professional life, he often had to fabricate reasons for leaving work events or outings with his comrades so that he could spend time with his gay friends. He explained,

> When I would go out with my co-workers, I would leave the party at a certain time and I would have to meet up with my gay friends right after that party. I also remember that they would be mad ... Not mad, but they would be disappointed, because they didn't want to tell me "Why are you leaving so early? Come on and hang out some more." I guess it wasn't too bad because I would lie to them.

Carla served for 18 years in both the Army and the National Guard and is still serving today. She explained her constant lies and the struggles that came with having to lie. She stated, "It was always a constant story or a constant lie, or just avoiding making friends with people in the military, that happened a lot. It hasn't been an easy road." While some lies were more blatant, Carla also reported lying by omission. She said,

> It was one of those, you know, you talk about who you're with and it was basically people just assumed that I was with a guy, so they'd refer to them as male and I just wouldn't correct them and continue on with a normal conversation just as either in a third person type of reference, or, they were related to being a male and they really were female.

Here, Carla explains that she refrained from correcting people when they used the wrong pronoun. Sometimes, she actively employed the male pronoun to reinforce the perception that she was heterosexual so as to not risk outing herself in conversation.

**Avoiding.** Another category of behavior reported is *avoiding*. Avoiding, in this case, refers primarily to conversational avoidance. In the military, individuals tend to develop close friendships, often sharing intimate details about their personal lives with fellow comrades (whom they often refer to as "family"). For example, Jason described instances when men in his unit talked about their sex lives and joked about the women with whom they had slept. Jason laughed along, but then made attempts to avoid participating. The exchange below exemplifies this:

> Interviewer: When people would be having conversations about who they were having sex with, did these conversations, are those situations where it was especially difficult or ...
> Jason: Yeah. It made me very uncomfortable, so I would have to laugh along with them. I remember I would step out of the circle and start doing my work.
> Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever participate in the conversation at all?
> Jason: No, I wouldn't dare. I would just laugh along with them, and then I would think of certain things to just get out of the circle, like make an excuse, like "Oh, I have to pick up my friend," "Oh, I have to get back to work."

The exemplar above reveals that Jason attempted to escape situations in which he might be asked to disclose information about his own sex life. So, rather than blatantly lie, some participants simply disengaged from conversations about their personal lives.

Participants also reported avoiding participation in GLBTQ related discussions.

Many participants, as explained in the previous chapter, described instances when people around them made disparaging remarks targeting members of the GLBTQ community. Those attempting to manage their sexual identities would often actively avoid participating in these exchanges. For example, Yvonne, an Air Force veteran that served from mid to late 2000s, explained, "I basically would stay out of the conversation or walk away from the conversation because I knew if I would've come to [their] defense then things would've just been [difficult] for me. Typically that was the way that was handled." In another exchange, a similar approach was reported:

| | |
|---|---|
| Interviewer: | Yeah. When you hear this type of talk going on around you, do you respond to it? |
| Avery: | No, I don't. I try to give a positive view on the GLBTQ community without outing myself. |

Avery explains that he would carefully navigate these types of conversations and try not to give too much away.

**Stage-managing.** The final category of *cultivating network ignorance* is *stage-managing*, which refers to attempts at controlling the scene to ensure secrecy. This strategy involved sneaking around, manipulating the scene, and upholding appearances of heterosexuality. Bill explained an instance where he attempted to manipulate the scene. He stated, "I remember the first time I went to a gay bar, I parked like a mile away from it because I was afraid somebody would see my car." In parking his car away from the gay bar, he avoids the possibility of being uncovered by comrades in the area. Danni shared another example of how she was able to manipulate the scene to maintain her heterosexual appearance. Danni's example included allies, or others in the military who knew about her sexual identity and who aided in her performance. She explained,

> 2010 I guess it was. We had the military ball and all men with the military ball you always bring your significant other to that and at the time I was dating my first girlfriend and she had just gotten kicked out of ROTC for medical reasons, but at the same time, we were dating and I wanted to bring her and she was also really good friends with everyone else in our company because she had been involved in ROTC for 3 years prior to that. We had to have her be a date of another one of the guys in the company just so that she could come. This made it really awkward with other people of the company that were aware. I didn't feel right doing it.

In this example, Danni's girlfriend acted as a heterosexual and attended the ball as a male comrade's date. In this scene, all participants performed roles to ensure that others in the military organization remained ignorant of Danni's sexual identity. Danni controlled the scene by ensuring that everything appeared to be in order.

To summarize, *cultivating network ignorance* is an identity management strategy grounded in both closedness and secrecy. Prior researchers have documented the dangers of maintaining secrecy with regard to identity stigmas. In fact, Smart and Wegner (2000) have conceptualized the inner experience of those attempting to hide their concealable stigmatized identities as "private hell." That being said, the strategies highlighted in this section could be potentially harmful to the GLB participants that employ them.

**Preserving Underground Networks**

In addition to *cultivating network ignorance* participants also *preserved underground networks.* Due to the *GLB identity repudiation* described in the preceding chapter, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military are typically denied identity affirmation within the military context. This lack of sexual identity affirmation can inhibit minority identity achievement for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, which, in turn, can have negative effects on their psychological well-being (Ghavami, Fingerhut,

Peplau, Grant, & Wittig, 2011). These negative psychological effects, however, can be buffered through positive social interaction. As Branje, van Aken, and van Lieshout (2002) explain, social support is crucial to an internal sense of support. As such, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals can benefit from the development of communities in which they can acquire the necessary support and affirmation.

*Preserving underground networks* is an identity management strategy that enabled participants to be themselves with other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Covert communities were developed in an effort to cope with social stigmas and as a way to manage sexual identities without feeling completely isolated. By interacting with other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, GLB military persons could develop relationships without feeling threatened. *Preserving underground networks* was comprised of: *seeking safe spaces and/or similar others, adhering to unwritten rules,* and *protecting ingroup members*.

**Seeking safe spaces and/or similar others.** *Seeking safe spaces and/or similar others* refers to seeking out other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, either within or outside of the military. Participants actively developed relationships with those who also identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. For example, Carla stated,

> I had, but the only ... this is going to sound ... I guess it's going to sound bad, but the only true relationships I had were with females who were ... who also identified as lesbian, whether it be just friends or an actual relationship. Anybody that didn't identify that way with, I wouldn't exactly ... they may have considered me their friend, but they had no idea.

Similarly, Avery, who had identified as a lesbian female during his time in the Army, explained the he sought out similar others by joining a softball team at another post. He explained,

> I joined a softball team, which was actually in another town, at another post. I was in Germany at the time and so, I would go and it was like a 45 minute drive to get to this other post and I actually met some friends there. I could be myself outside of my own environment.

Avery and Carla both felt that they could truly be themselves within their networks of GLB military.

Other participants reported that they attempted to seek out similar others *outside* of the military organization. They felt much safer when networks were formed off base. For example, Alfred explained that he would try to locate gay bars, or other gay spaces, off base so that he could be himself. In the following excerpt, Alfred explained that he had to strategically ditch the younger men in the military so that he could find gay spaces when they were overseas. He said,

> Most of these kids were dumb farm boys and they already knew that I could speak in other languages. They thought that was absolutely amazing. Frequently when we planned to go off [in the city], they would follow me and stick with me to feel safe. I would guide them through this strange part of land and keep them from getting killed. The first thing I often had to do was get rid of them by dropping them off in a straight bar near the port, near the warmth, where they can find drinks and prostitutes, which is what these dummies were after. Then I could sneak out and go to a gay bar.

Alfred also explained that he had be creative in locating gay places:

> I was deployed in Europe. This was before the Internet, before cellphones that you could look everything up on, you have to find gay places the hard way. Of course there was no Internet so it would occur to me of doing things the hard way. On my off duty time in Europe, in various different ports, I knew what to do. There was no Google, there was no anything, I would just get off the ship and take a bus into the part of whatever city we were in at dusk. I would stand on the street corner and wait, watching for a gay person to walk by. Then I would follow them and in 10 minutes I'd be in a gay bar. This is without Google […] Back then it was just flying by the seat of your pants, doing thinks the old fashioned way and using what we call gaydar. I would just stand and wait, right. Finally "Oh, there's a gay person and he looks like he's out for the evening. I'll just follow." And sure enough, there's a gay bar.

Alfred knew he could not simply ask around for fear of being discovered. He had to

watch and observe his surroundings to locate spaces in which he could find other gay men with whom to interact.

Bill, a 50-year-old Navy veteran also described this situation. He explained that the secrecy was emotionally and mentally draining. Bill had also struggled for a long time in coming to terms with his gay identity. Bill got to the point where he *needed* to do something. So, he sought out someone to talk to about it:

> In the job that I was actually working in at the time with the Navy, I actually had to travel to Austin, Texas, quite a bit. I got online, I started talking to somebody online, and then we met up in Austin, Texas, and that was, my first encounter, was actually there.

Bill too, expressed a need to find similar others off base. In doing so, Bill was provided the opportunity to explore his sexuality.

**Adhering to unwritten rules.** The next category comprising *preserving underground networks* is *adhering to unwritten rules.* Several participants reported that within their covert networks, there were a number of unwritten rules to which gays, lesbians, and bisexuals abided by in an effort to preserve their communities. For example, Rylie explained,

> It was like a secret silent pact that we had amongst each other in training. I knew stuff was going on in our bays and the showers and where we slept, but we had this sort of silent, almost like agreeing with each other that we haven't really talked about it, particularly in front of drill sergeants or any of our instructors or any of the ... not faculty, but any of the people that were over us in terms of ... especially in terms of basic training, because if you make one wrong move or you do one thing wrong you could easily get kicked out […] It's like we had this almost silent agreement with people that I knew to really not talk about it. I knew it was going on, they knew stuff was going on, everybody did. It was something that you really didn't talk about that much.

In this example, Rylie discusses her "silent pact" with other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to preserve their community. Alfred discussed another unwritten rule:

> That seems to be the unwritten rule, as an officer ... See, we had to wear our uniforms. You weren't allowed to have civilian clothes on this deployment because it was a silver flag tour. Being in every foreign port, we were intending to walk around in our uniforms to reassure Europeans "We're here to keep you safe." You weren't even allowed to have civilian clothes. If an officer walked in [to a gay bar] there seemed to be an unwritten rule of noblesse oblige. […] It's where a superior royalty gives into the [inaudible]. If an officer walked in and saw an enlisted sailor, he would leave. You had the privilege of being there. You couldn't talk to each other, it was just too dangerous.

In the excerpt above, Alfred described an unwritten rule whereby a higher-ranking officer would leave the scene to avoid putting the underground network at risk.

**Protecting ingroup members.** The final category comprising *preserving underground networks* is *protecting ingroup members*, which refers to the active participation in protecting those within one's underground network. For example, once a person within a network became suspect, that person would separate from the group to prevent suspicions about others. Another example of *protecting ingroup members* is not "snitching" when being asked to give up others' names. For example, Alfred had convincingly performed the role of a hyper masculine and heterosexual warrior while in the military. He performed this role so convincingly that he had been asked to aid in the hunting down of gays in the Navy. He explained this,

> One day during enrichment, which is what they did when jobs are clear occasionally, the officers called me in and said, "Alfred, you're the only one we can be sure of. You're the only one we're absolutely sure is straight. Will you help us find these people so we can get rid of them?" This is terribly funny but it wasn't for me at the time, it was terrifying. I knew what was going on but I also always knew what to say on every occasion. I pretended to be much stupider than I was and I said, "Ah, I don't know nothing about that," just pretending to be a dumb, straight sailor. They said, "Get out of here." because I wasn't going to be any use to them. I didn't even understand what they were talking about, so they thought.

Alfred continued to act out his role in order to protect others who were also in hiding. Similarly, Avery explained that he, too, had been asked to share the names of gays and

lesbians with his superiors. Avery, formerly identifying as a lesbian female, explained,

> A CID investigator, Criminal Investigative Division, he said, "We'll make all these charges of homosexuality go away if you list all of your known associates that are gay or lesbian." I didn't buckle under that and I stood my ground because I knew they didn't have anything firm against me so, I guess I got lucky and ballsy enough that I didn't get kicked out.

Despite being offered an out, Avery remained silent to defend his community and protect other gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military.

In sum, although *preserving underground networks* is also an identity management strategy grounded in closedness, this strategy provides some level of openness, at least for those possessing a similar stigma. As Smart and Wegner (2000) explain, the presence of a safe and supportive audience can be highly beneficial for those possessing a stigmatized identity. This also provides GLB persons with some form of community, which can aid in reducing feelings of social isolation. However, when employing this strategy, secrecy remains at the collective level. The collective secret, which each community member is responsible for keeping, can also incite feelings of anxiety.

**Disclosing Strategically**

The final identity management strategy reported by participants was *strategic self-disclosure*. *Disclosing strategically* refers to the careful and calculated disclosure decisions made by participants. Several participants indicated that they hit a breaking point, where they could no longer engage in hiding. These participants made the decision to disclose their sexual identities, but only to a few trusted companions. Importantly, identity disclosure decisions were not made lightly. *Disclosing strategically* was comprised of four categories: *reciprocating admissions, gauging*

*opinions, evaluating relationships,* and *appraising trustworthiness.*

**Reciprocating admissions.** A stated previously, some participants only developed relationships with others who were also gay, lesbian, or bisexual. But, how were gays, lesbians, and bisexuals able to find one another? Some relied on stereotypes to identify others they perceived to be gay also. And, several participants described a mutual or reciprocal exchange during which both individuals came out at the same time. For example, Lauren explained,

> Well, I think the first person that I self-disclosed to was another cadet and again we were off post we were coming back from maybe an army, maybe football game, something like that. I self-disclosed to her because I kind of thought that she was too and we've been good friends since I was pleb. We were in the band together so we kind of self-disclosed at the same time. It was just the two of us in a car driving back.

Lauren described her first "coming out" exchange while in the military and expressed that she made the decision to disclose largely because she had anticipated that her friend was also a lesbian. They both disclosed to one another in the same exchange.

For some participants, reciprocating disclosure was perceived to be the safest option because it meant that their interactant had the same secret. Rae, a 41-year-old Army veteran, explained, "If they disclosed to me, then that was something that's different. I could trust them. That would usually prompt me to disclosing back later." As these exemplars demonstrate, reciprocating admissions was a strategic method of disclosure, as it allowed participants to disclose their sexual identities (let them out of hiding) while also allowing them to feel safe in disclosing.

**Gauging opinions.** Another type of strategic disclosure reported by participants was *gauging opinions*. Participants reported that they engaged in observation, through which they attempted to gain insights into others' opinions about homosexuality. Once

they were able to gauge others' opinions they would then decide which comrades appeared to be accepting, as these would be the ones to whom they would disclose. For example, Bill explained,

> I think it's one of those things that you have to know who they are and you have to understand what their position is on that issue, on homosexuality, before you come out to them. If you have somebody who just makes gay jokes all day long, that's probably not somebody to come out to, but if there's somebody who maybe has a brother or sister or cousin or uncle, is gay or lesbian, or that talks positively about the community or says, "I think it's unfortunate that the Navy has this policy." Things like that influenced me to come out to them.

Similarly, Danni explained that she, too, paid close attention to people's language choices and behaviors to get a feel for who they were before making any decisions about coming out. This is demonstrated in the following exchange:

> Danni: It just depends on who it is, how well I know them. [...] It's when I get a little bit of a sense of who they are. I just figure out what the type of person they are and how they will respond first before I tell them.
>
> Interviewer: Can you elaborate a little bit on that? What type of person they are?
>
> Danni: If they seem to be more of a person that's accepting of gays and lesbians, GLBT members, then it's probably someone I will tell. A person at my church, it's not something that I would disclose to them unless I was very comfortable with them.

Danni, and others, also explained that there were significant generational differences regarding the acceptance of homosexuality. This, too, influenced decisions about whether or not, and to whom, they would come out.

Even after the repeal of DADT, participants reported the use of this identity management strategy. Danni, for instance, continues to serve today. So, in her interview she described her current identity management strategies since DADT had been lifted:

> I'm still a little bit more careful about who I tell. In my new unit now, we have a lot more people in the older generation, so I'm a little bit more hesitant around them to say anything, but with people that are my age or younger, it's second

nature for me. I'm not afraid to say anything.

As evidenced by the excerpt above, since the repeal of DADT, Danni has become much more open about her sexuality in the military, but continues to make strategic decisions because she recognizes the generational differences in opinion.

**Evaluating relationships.** Another category comprising *strategic disclosure* is *evaluating relationships*. *Evaluating relationships* refers to the evaluative process whereby gays, lesbians, and bisexuals consider the strength of their relationships (relational closeness) before making disclosure decisions. For example, Yvonne explained that she felt especially close with those she had served with on her first assignment. She said,

> Initially it was the people I went on my first assignment with. If I had known them for a few years, I'd watch they interacted with other people and how they felt about the topic in general. If I felt safe around them as far as the way they conducted themselves, it was something that I would disclose.

In this excerpt, Yvonne explains that she evaluated her relationships and gauged opinions before making identity disclosure decisions.

Rylie explained that she, too, would disclose to certain people in the military, particularly, "people that [she] was close to [she] would disclose that information to." Jason further exemplified this evaluative process. He stated, "I was just open to people who knew me personally. I don't advertise myself like 'Oh, yeah. I'm gay.' I don't do that." When asked to explain further he stated, "[It's] the relationship. These people that I came out to for the first time ever were my co-workers. I think they were very close to me […] So that closeness enabled me actually to come out to them." Almost all participants indicated that relational closeness was key in their decision-making processes.

**Appraising trustworthiness.** Similar to *evaluating relationships,* participants also explained that they *appraised trustworthiness.* Participants explained that they cautiously evaluated people to determine whether or not they could be trusted with their secret. For many, their *close* friends were also perceived to be those that they could trust. But, for some, they felt they could even trust others whom they did not consider close friends. For example, Rylie said, "It absolutely depended on who the person was, that I felt like I could trust them or not."

Maria also explained that trust was key. Maria became more open about her sexuality during the 12 years she served, but she explained that trust was a key factor when it came to her introducing her wife (or whomever she was dating at the time). She explained, "Once I introduce them to my family, then that was me taking that next step saying, 'I trust you. This is who I am, this is who I'm dating.'" Rae presented a different example, but explained a similar process when she found herself interested in a fellow comrade. Before making any decision about disclosing she reported that trust needed to be built:

> For us at that time, you just felt things out and then you build a trust. I know one of them, we just built this trust with each other and told each other about everything. Then when the moment finally came, do you jump off the bridge or not? Do you risk getting caught and saying something or not? You do and we were and then you start supporting each other and knowing that you like each other and write letters in basic.

In the excerpt above, Rae explains that once trust was built, then she could make the decision to tell someone that she liked them.

In sum, *strategic disclosure* was a communicative identity management strategy whereby participants made careful and calculated decisions about whether or not, and to whom, to disclose their stigmatized identities. Again, there was some level of

closedness, but also a small degree of openness in engaging this strategy. Researchers have found numerous benefits that result from disclosing secrets to a supportive audience (e.g., Lepore, 1997; Smart & Wegner, 2000). However, those employing this strategy still expressed concerns about their secrets being shared or discovered by others outside of their trusted networks. Stigma continued to weigh on those engaging this identity management strategy in potentially harmful ways.

## Feelings Associated with Identity Management Choices

Identity management practices result from the continuing social demands for assimilation and conformity (Berry, 2012). Although covering and passing are common practices, particularly when identities are highly stigmatized, this often comes at significant personal cost. In fact, Cain (1991) explains that identity disclosure is part of a healthy identity development process. The revelation of one's sexual identity to others is an important milestone event in the lives of GLB individuals (Cain, 1991). For those who feel unable to disclose, the continued concealment of one's sexual identity can produce negative self-feelings. In this study, participants reported feelings of *shame, isolation,* and *stress* as a consequence of their identity management choices.

### Shame

Even for those who accepted their sexual identities, the decision to suppress their sexual identities began to weigh on them. Many began to feel ashamed for hiding who they were. Those who identified strongly with their military role experienced dissonance. They explained that the military identity is characterized by honor and courage, and yet, by not being true to themselves, they felt they were not fulfilling their military duty. For example, Danni stated,

> I just fell like one of the big principles of the military, part of the ethics is integrity and I feel like integrity is extremely important especially when you're putting your life on the line or you're giving time away for the military that if you're not living ... If you keep part of yourself from the military, you're not as effective and you can't fully trust the person next to you which is extremely important. I feel like it just makes us a weaker army or just a weaker force in general when we can't trust the next person beside us.

Bill exemplified this further by stating,

> It really, you kind of feel dirty, because the Navy saying is honor, courage, and commitment, and one of those is being honest with everybody, including yourself, and that's something you couldn't be honest about. You couldn't sit there and tell people you're gay, because you could get kicked out, so you're keeping a secret. Once you've been in the military a while, your military family is your family, so it's like keeping a secret from your own family.

Lauren also described the shame she felt lying everyday when she was at West Point. She explained,

> I think people have this idea that military officers are of higher standard. Especially at West Point of that level, that's the elite military academy of the army. It's the oldest military academy for the United States. It's very prestigious to go there. The best officers, the best professors, the best students get there and everybody is the best there. I think that my experience there kind of undercut my idea of what the army was because people there have this cadet owner-hood. A cadet does not lie, steal or cheat or tolerate those who do. That sounded great, but I was violated all the time. People didn't get in trouble for that and some people did. There was a lot of what I considered violations of [inaudible] and lying and cheating that got me removed from the academy.

Danni, Bill, and Lauren's statements demonstrate the shame they felt when having to conceal part of themselves to *be* military.

In addition to the shame resulting from the experience of identity dissonance exemplified by the excerpts above, many participants simply felt ashamed for being *cowardly.* In fact, a number of participants reported regretting their identity management choices, indicating that they wished they had been "more brave" or come out sooner. For example, Carla reflected back on her time in the military and explained,

> I would like to say that I would have been more courageous, and been able to actually stand up for it, and maybe help push it through a lot sooner, because I wasn't. I accepted things the way they were, and continued on just trying to make something of myself. I'd like to say that I wish I could have been more courageous, and been able to stand up like some of the amazing officers and NCOs that I've met in the military that have done that.

Carla's statement here demonstrates a desire to have lived authentically all along. This excerpt illustrated an admiration for those who have stood up for themselves, and for those responsible for the changes seen.

**Isolation**

Another feeling associated with the identity management choices described in the earlier section of this chapter was the feeling of isolation, or loneliness. Participants struggled to develop the family bonds that so often characterize relationships among comrades. For many members of stigmatized groups, this feeling of isolation is common. Participants are often left feeling as if they are alone in their experiences and as if they have nowhere to turn for social support. Lauren expressed this:

> I think it's got to be a huge isolation factor because while I was at West Point and going through all of this there was nobody that I could talk to about it. They had counseling services and all that kind of stuff but you could not have told that to somebody even in counseling setting.

Avery explains this challenge further. He stated,

> The military is all about unit cohesion and, in order to keep that cohesion, you need to have a military family but I didn't feel like I could trust any of my coworkers, other soldiers. I didn't feel like I could trust them with that information so, I stayed away from unit functions. I stayed away from post as much as I could. I lived maybe thirty miles away so that I would be outside of that community as much as possible and it was really tough.

As demonstrated by the excerpt above, attempts at identity segmentation (noted in the previous chapter) and the accompanying identity management strategies (e.g., secluding oneself, passing, lying.) make it difficult to develop and maintain close friendships

within the military. As Moradi (2009) asserts, this social isolation resulting from concealment and non-disclosure can be especially dangerous in the military, as "interpersonal connection, support, and trust among unit members are thought to be paramount to unit cohesion and effectiveness" (p. 515).

In addition to challenges associated with developing *intra*military relationships, personal/romantic relationships were also constrained when individuals attempted to segment their lives. The military organization is known to be a strong supporter of families as an integral part of an active duty service person's work life (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007). In fact, military programs provide parental support, family support groups, social support components, and support for separation from deployments and other training (Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011). However, such support is only offered to heterosexual couples and families. Gay and lesbians relationships become strained without such support. For example, Avery stated,

> The Army would move you and I didn't really have any incentive for whoever I was with at the time to move with me. I can't say, "All right, just leave your job and your insurance to come live with me. I can't offer you [inaudible 07:46] that I have, which is really great. There's no incentive for you to come with me," so essentially, every two to three years depending how long I stayed at my station was the length of my relationships. It really took a toll personally on me.

Avery could not consider the possibility of long-term relationships, because without assistance from the military, he and his partner(s) would need to separate each time he was relocated. As such, Avery felt perpetually lonely.

**Stress**

The final feeling associated with participants' identity management choices was stress. This is consistent with MST, as the hiding of one's sexual identity is a proximal stressor (Meyer, 2003). The stress of hiding was evident for most participants. During

the time preceding DADT, for instance, witch-hunts were underway. Even under DADT, linguistic violence, stereotyping, and other communicative behaviors targeting those perceived to be gay or lesbian made some participants hyper aware of their sexualities. Many reported the constant fear of being discovered. Alfred even described posttraumatic stress disorder, stating,

> The results of course, which you don't realize is happening, is that every single waking moment you're either treasonously or subconsciously hiding and it creates PTSD. It creates stress and builds up over the years, that kind of paranoia and hyper-vigilance. I was in a hostile environment but I was part of that environment.

Rae, who served under DADT, expressed a similar experience. She explained,

> It definitely takes a toll on your sanity, really, because what you're doing is already difficult and hard and you have to have your head in the game and focused, and you're dealing with a lot of high stress situations. The post I was at, we always carried three weapons on us and a lot of rounds, and yet you're hiding a part of yourself and that's the part that makes you the happiest. If you can talk about like all these other people then it keeps you more focused on what you have to do. Instead, you're trying to figure out in your head what you shouldn't say or what you can say or what not to say with who and when. It takes a toll on you.

From the excerpts above, it is clear that the continued threat of being discovered and/or discharged, having to continually manage identities, having to be careful careful about what one shares and whomever one shares with, elevates stress levels. This type of stress can be dangerous given the job itself is already stress invoking. This finding supports MST, as Herek (2007) noted that minority group members are at risk for some kinds of psychological problems because "they face unique, chronic stressors as a result of their disadvantaged status in society" (p. 360). Such stressors include the burden of continued secrecy and identity concealment (Smart & Wegner, 2000).

## Identity Management after the Repeal of DADT

In 2011, DADT was repealed and gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the military were finally able to serve openly without the threat of discharge. Although there was no longer a threat of discharge, participants continued to perceive threats of discrimination and rejection. Joanna described this as a "*cultural* Don't Ask, Don't Tell" that persists even after the repeal of the formal policy. Rylie, who served in the National Guard prior to and after the repeal, also explained this. She said, " It was both. I think Don't Ask, Don't Tell being repealed… I knew that legally nothing was going to happen. Nobody could do anything. I knew that there was social repercussions. […] The stigmas and the social pressures absolutely are still there." Carla further noted that, like herself, the soldiers that had been in for a while (i.e., those who has served prior to the repeal) continued to hold back even after the ban was lifted. She said,

> It didn't mean that you went to work, and I said hey, supervisor, hey, boss, this is the case, this is my girlfriend ... it just didn't happen that way, because you still had to protect yourself, you still have to know who is it okay with it and who is not okay with. That's still there today, because unfortunately, I get graded, I get evaluated by these people, so there is a bias.

The stigmatization of homosexuality persists in the military, even today.

Due to the continued social demands for conformity, most participants did not make the decision to serve openly. Nearly all participants serving after the repeal of DADT reported similar identity management strategies to those serving before. However, participants serving after the repeal of DADT described three additional identity management strategies that they employed once DADT had been lifted, including: *combatting microaggressions*, *correcting misperceptions,* and *being honest.* Importantly, these are strategies of openness (as opposed to closedness). In the

following pages I describe these new strategies and the feelings associated with them.

**Combatting Microaggressions**

Throughout the course of the interviews, participants frequently reported being confronted with everyday microaggressions. Microaggressions refer to "subtle forms of discrimination, often unintentional and unconscious, which send negative and denigrating messages to various individuals and groups" (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, Wong, Marshall, & McKenzie, 2015, p. 147). Microaggressions reported included the heteronormative assumptions embedded in everyday talk and also the use of linguistic markers (i.e., gay, fag, queer) that were continuously used in a derogatory way. After the repeal of DADT, some participants reported that they finally felt comfortable combatting these microaggressions.

The most frequently reported example of *combatting microaggressions* was correcting others when they insinuated the wrong gender pronoun when asking about participants' romantic partners. Carla, for instance, described her identity management decisions after the repeal of DADT. She stated, "I will correct somebody if they, like I said, if they say husband, I will make sure to correct them about wife, that it's my wife, not husband." For Carla, this was the extent of the change made to her identity management after the repeal of DADT. She continues to conceal her sexual identity today. Danni reported a similar strategy. She explained, "It wasn't something that I sat down and talked to people about, but they're like, 'Is your boyfriend coming to this event.' I'm like, 'No. I have a girlfriend that's coming now.' It just wasn't something that I hid anymore." Although both Danni and Carla did not make the decision to serve openly, they were able to combat the microaggressions that they had previously not felt

comfortable enough to address.

**Correcting Misperceptions**

In addition to challenging microaggressions, participants also engaged in *educating*, or *correcting misconceptions*. Educating is a common coping strategy for those with stigmatized identities. This refers to the intentional process whereby participants attempted to deconstruct hegemonic discourses about GLB persons, challenge dominant stereotypes, and educate heterosexual comrades about homosexuality. For example, Kevin reported that he made the decision to come out to members of his unit immediately following the repeal of DADT. At the time, they were deployed. Kevin felt that this type of honestly was important in a high stress situation (i.e., in combat), as trust is essential for survival. Kevin explained that as soon at the ban was lifted he came out:

> Being in combat, which I do have my combat action badge, I explained to them, "Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean I'm not going to have your back in a fire fight. Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean that I'm going to wimp out when bullets are flying at my head. Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean I'm going to pull you to safety if you're wounded or injured. Just because of my sexuality, does not degrade me as a person and as a trained American Army soldier." I got a lot of respect from fellow soldiers that just needed a little bit of education and understanding because they were brought up on a certain way, brought up on a certain culture. That was very important for me to speak up and say, "I'm going to have your back whether I'm gay, straight, transgender, or whatnot. I still have your back in combat."

Although Kevin did not make the decision to serve openly, he did make the decision to come out to those in his combat unit. He described his coming out as an opportunity to educate his comrades and to let them know that homosexuality does not mean weakness. He described this encounter as especially positive in that he was able to challenge misperceptions while also gaining respect for his honesty and integrity. He

took this moment to assure his comrades of his competence and to challenge dominant stereotypes.

Carla was much less open about her sexuality in the military. However, in challenging microaggressions (described in previous section), she opened a space for transformative dialogue:

> Especially when people find out that I have a wife and that I identify as a lesbian. It does, especially if they're unafraid to talk about it. You know, the ones that don't really I don't know ... the ones that are against it, I should say, tend not to ... but those who are kind of neutral, or are all for it, they tend to want to talk about it. They tend to want to talk about it with somebody who is of the orientation. They sit down and it sparks all kinds of conversations, and trying to understand.

When Carla corrected people and informed them that she had a wife, some of her interactants responded by asking questions. Carla was happy to engage in these conversations with those that genuinely wanted to understand and learn. These exchanges served as educational opportunities.

**Being Honest**

The final identity management strategy reported by participants after the repeal of DADT was *being honest.* Although the vast majority of participants did not make the decision to serve openly, some reported that they just stopped lying about it. Carla expressed this. When asked about her disclosure decisions after the repeal of DADT, she replied,

> Well, I will say ... I don't ever speak out, disclosing ... I will say that, it's kind of, I guess it's kind of embarrassing to say out loud, but I usually try not to disclose it, to any one in the military, just because you don't know their stance on it, you don't know how they're going to feel about, so I try not to. What I don't do is, I don't lie about it anymore. […] Or if they ask, I don't have a problem actually telling them the truth, but it's not something that I usually tend to volunteer information on.

Carla expressed some shame and embarrassment about her decision to remain closeted, but described some small changes in her identity management behaviors such as the fact that she stopped lying blatantly. When asked, she is now willing to tell the truth.

Of the participants in this study, only one participant made the decision to serve openly. Tony, of the U.S. Navy, began his service the same year that legislation to repeal DADT was enacted. On the day that DADT was repealed, Randy, of the U.S. Airforce, posted a video to YouTube. The video was a recording of him calling his dad on that day. In the video Randy came out to his father for the first time. The video quickly went viral on YouTube. This video changed Tony's life. As he explained,

> Watching that video particularly the part why he was so scared that his dad would not love him and I felt like a coward because I knew my parents would. I was like if he can do it, why can't I, so that was pretty much the changing point.

He went on to say,

> It's interesting, I joined DEP while I was still in the closet and before I watched that video, in April. Then because I'd watched that video the day it came out, which was I guess the day that Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed, it was all kind of one linked process for me… joining while I was in the closet, coming out before I went active duty, and then going active duty.

Tony explained that, within five days of watching that video, he was out to everyone.

> I remember having many panic attacks because it feels really different when a lot of people go through to have sort of the gradual process. When I came out to myself, to me I have this feeling that I had to come out. I had to tell people like my parents; I couldn't live a double life. I was having panic attacks and I would need to go walk outside all the time to just get fresh air and calm down a bit until I was completely out to everyone.

Tony felt a need to live authentically. He could not live a double life. Tony is the only participant in this study to report effective identity integration and feelings of identity security. Interestingly, he is also the only participant whose entire time in the service has been *after* the decision was made to repeal DADT. As such, it may be possible for

future generations of GLB military to experience identity integration and the psychological well-being that comes with it.

In sum, identity management strategies reported in this study, particularly prior to the repeal of DADT, were designed and implemented in an effort to conceal and or manage stigmatization. These strategies were employed even after the repeal of DADT. Importantly, such identity management strategies were found to incite negative feelings of *isolation, shame*, and *stress.* These feelings demonstrate the common experiences of psychological distress and negative self-image that many gays, lesbians, and bisexuals report. The identity management strategies reported also inhibited relational development in both professional and personal relationships, causing GLB military to feel isolated and alone.

**Feelings Associated with Strategies of Openness**

After the repeal of DADT, three new identity management strategies were reported that enabled participants some relief from their negative self-images. In fact, many participants reported that coming out relieved much of the debilitating stress they had been experiencing. Jason said, “I felt more free, definitely. After I came out, I felt really that also ... I thought that it really wasn't a big deal at all. Like, it's not a big deal, everyone's cool about it.” Consistent with Morris, Waldo, and Rothblum’s (2011) findings, in coming out, or in at least engaging in some level of openness, GLB participants learned to cope with and overcome some of the adverse effects of minority stress.

In addition to reduced stress levels, many participants reported positive self-feelings after their initial disclosures (though disclosures continued to be strategic and

carefully calculated). Participants no longer felt quite as isolated. Alfred, for instance, explained that even though he only disclosed to one person while in the military, the acceptance he felt in the moment made him feel "good to have a friend that [he] can tell everything to." Similarly, since coming out to her close friends in the military Carla reported,

> Before, it was ... I didn't express who I was, or like I said, my life outside of the military ... it literally was like living a double life. People that I met within, inside the military were not involved in my life outside of the military. I don't have that anymore, I've got plenty of amazing people that I've been able to actually introduce into my personal life from the military, and that was something that I couldn't do before.

Carla was able to begin the reconciliation process by coming out and allowing her military life and personal life to intersect.

In addition to no longer feeling isolated, participants also reported a new sense of confidence and self-liking after coming out. Bill said, "I finally accepted myself and I could love myself. I guess that was the biggest part of it. I can love myself again and be who I am." Similarly, Danni explained,

> I definitely think it's important and very helpful. For me, a long time, I felt reserved. I felt like I was keeping some stuff back I couldn't be the whole person that I could be and ever since coming out, I've felt so much better about myself. I felt like I wasn't hiding something and I felt like I could really be who I wanted to be without being judged.

As these excerpts demonstrate, coming out was important for the GLB military in this study. Such disclosures are important in the military, as this organizational context promotes family-like bonds. The military is also a high reliability organization where close ties, trust, and honesty are important for unit cohesion and military effectiveness.

# CHAPTER 6.

## (DE)CENTERING HETERONORMATIVITY IN THE U.S. MILITARY

To answer the third research question, data were analyzed using a discursive analytic approach to first identify the competing discourses surrounding GLB military, and then to identify the communication practices that work to reinforce and/or decenter heteronormativity in the U.S. military. As Foucault (1970) had attested, homosexuality as a category of human identity is produced and reproduced by rules, systems, and procedures; such practices, which Foucault referred to as "the order of discourse," work to create and separate homosexuals from normalcy. Discourse is thus a domain within which language is used in specific ways (Loomba, 1998). Because all cultural group members engage in discursive productions of knowledge, all transcripts (i.e., GLB and heterosexual data) were analyzed for the purpose of uncovering the ways in which military service persons engage in processes of heterosexual normalization in talk.

Findings revealed that GLB military persons were discursively constructed as both *valuable assets to the military organization* and as a *threat to military effectiveness and unit cohesion*. Further, findings also revealed that despite policy changes, and the lifting of the ban on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, communicative practices work to center heteronormativity, thus upholding systems of privilege that continue to marginalize GLB persons in the military. However, several communicative practices were observed that actually decentered heteronormativity by opening a space for other voices, perspectives, and experiences. These findings are detailed in the following pages.

## Discursive Constructions of LBG Military

Researchers acknowledge the significant role communication plays in sense-making, particularly regarding identities as situated in specific political historical contexts. The dialectical perspective in communication was advanced by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), and was inspired by the work of Bakhtin (1981). The central premise of the dialectical perspective is that the "social world is potentially rich with multiple, competing sets of beliefs and values associated with a given object of meaning" (i.e., discourses; Baxter et al., 2012, p. 58). In other words, meanings are not the result of isolated unitary discourses, but are created from the struggle of competing discourses (i.e., systems of meaning) (Baxter, 2011). Meaning making is thus complex, consisting of a multitude of different propositions that collectively form a discourse, or a coherent web of meaning. When individuals engage in communication, competing discourses are given voice (Baxter et al., 2012). In interviews, two primary competing discourses emerged. For some participants, GLB military persons were discursively constructed as *valuable assets to the military organization*, whereas others constructed GLB military as a *threat to military effectiveness.* Importantly, some participants gave voice to both competing discourses simultaneously. In the following pages I explain these two primary discourses and the themes that comprise them.

### GLB Military as Threat to Military Effectiveness

The discourse positioning GLB persons as a *threat to the military* functioned as the presumed, taken-for-granted, hegemonic cultural discourse. This dominant discourse privileges heteronormativity, and rejects those that do not conform to the heteronormative mandate. The *GLB military as a threat* discourse is constituted by two

key themes that emerged from the interview data: (1) *homogeneity enhances unit cohesion*, and (2) *homosexuality threatens military masculinity.*

***Homogeneity enhances unit cohesion.*** The first theme comprising the more hegemonic cultural discourse was that *homogeneity enhances unit cohesion.* Although dominant discourses in the broader U.S., more recently, have celebrated diversity, the military has traditionally been characterized by conservatism and homogeneity (Dunivin, 1994). Uniformity has been an important element of military culture, and individuality is said to disrupt military effectiveness and unit cohesion. Many participants advanced this ideological position during interviews. For example, Jim, a 36-year old, heterosexual Army veteran that served both prior to and after the repeal of DADT, indicated,

> The big thing about military culture is that we look down upon people who are trying to stand out as individuals, simply because of the fact that we have to function as a cohesive, you know, unit. We have to function as one, and there's really no place for individuality. Off duty, that's totally fine, but when you're on duty, you know, nobody cares if your gay, straight, male, female. You do your job and that's what you do, you know? Yeah, I think there is a place as long that place is doing your job and being apart of the cohesive team and not trying to promote some kind of agenda or change within the organization.

In some ways, Jim gives voice to both competing discourses, which is what Baxter (2011) refers to as synchronic interplay. Synchronic interplay refers to an utterance that contains elements of more than one discourse, although not necessarily with equal representation or validation. In the excerpt above, Jim indicates that diversity is fine (outside of work), but then centers the hegemonic discourse more, indicating that, at work, individuality is problematic.

John, a 51-year old Army veteran, expressed that GLB persons could be disruptive to military effectiveness. He stated,

> Well, it was an inconvenient policy for me because I was a non-commissioned officer, and I had, from time to time, soldiers under my command that I had a very strong feeling were probably gay, and on the one hand, I didn't care, but on the other hand, I knew that if they were out, it would be disruptive to my unit's effectiveness.

John explained his position further, stating,

> On a personal level, I have no issue with a person's sexual identity, but because some do and because there's no ... and people are entitled to their own feelings on the matter, I still find that it poses the potential of being a disruption to unit integrity because you just have to be able to count on people, without reservation, in order to effectively do that job. I don't feel that the military is an appropriate venue for social experiments or social engineering just because of the nature of the job, it's wrong to risk people's lives.

John explains that his concern was with diversity in attitudes towards gays and lesbians. He worried that those negative attitudes could disrupt unit cohesion. As such, he argued that the military can be more effective when gays and lesbians do not serve, or at least do not serve openly.

***Homosexuality threatens military masculinity.*** The second theme comprising the more dominant cultural discourse was that sexual minorities pose a threat to military masculinity. As explained in an earlier chapter, the military ethos, which is believed to be necessary to engage in combat and win wars, is generally considered to be masculine (McSally, 2011). Upon analyzing interviews, I found that participants advanced a discourse that associated femininity with incompetence, and homosexuality (for men) with femininity. As McSally (2011) explained, the need to be protected is typically defined as feminine. As such, those perceived to be feminine (e.g., gay men and heterosexual women) could potentially threaten the military ethos. Samuel, for example, stated

> They would do things different, just more feminine like a woman. I was fine with it but a lot of other guys, they probably didn't like it because you're

> supposed to depend on each other. Six men on a ship, if there's a fire or something, we got a mine, everybody has to be equally capable of performing their job to save each other's life or somebody else's life. If you're acting feminine, is that going to jeopardize [inaudible] to perform.

Samuel is a 41-year old, heterosexual, Navy veteran that served from in the mid 1990s. In the excerpt above Samuel describes gay men as being feminine, or "like a woman," and then goes on to say that femininity can jeopardize military performance.

Chris is a 59-year old, heterosexual, Army veteran. Chris served in the military before the implementation of the DADT policy and he explained,

> Well, it surprised me in the sense that on this one guy, he was rough and tough, talked a lot of trash to everybody but it surprised me because I couldn't believe he was attracted to other men but I didn't let it persuade me as far as not communicating with him or trusting him. It's just I wasn't totally uncomfortable with it, it was just that if it came down to war being deployed, I just wondered whether or not I'd have to be the one to support him or him support me.

This excerpt demonstrates synchronic interplay such that Chris acknowledges his own prejudices, challenges his own stereotypes, but then goes on to advance those stereotypes again when he indicates a concern that he might have to support the gay soldier (in need of saving).

Tiana is 27-years old and continues to serve in the U.S. Air Force. She began her service in the mid 2000s, prior to the repeal of DADT. When I asked her about her thoughts on the repeal, she stated, "I honestly think it makes our military look weak when you see two men or two women walking down the street hand in hand in uniform. […] I don't feel like it shows dominance." Tiana states that same sex couples in particular can weaken individuals' perceptions of military masculinity. Rae, a lesbian Army veteran explained this too, noting, "It's the way their mindset is in the military. It's very strong. I think a lot of the guys think the men who are gay are weak." Although

Rae did not advance this discourse in her own interview, this excerpt demonstrates an awareness that this cultural discourse predominates in the U.S. military.

The exemplars above illustrate a discourse that positions the feminine as weak. Importantly, this implies that women, too, weaken the military. In fact, many women in this study reported being discriminated against and being perceived as less competent despite their achievements. For instance, Samantha explained,

> Yeah. Basically, to the military in general, it's a male dominated career path, as you would say. You don't have to be a gay or a lesbian person to even experience discrimination. I would hear comments about me being a female, feeling that I can't pull my weight. […] Of course, I felt like I had to work twice as much, or maybe way more than other people, more than the guys would, to prove myself, that I am just as capable as they are. Maybe even better than they are.

Interestingly, even gay men advanced a discourse discrediting the feminine. Kevin, a gay Army veteran that made the decision to come out to the members of his unit after the repeal of DADT stated, "I knew that just because I'm gay doesn't mean I'm going to wimp out in a fire fight. Or, when I was thrown in a combat situation am I going to scream like a little girl and run away and hide in a corner? No." Kevin says that his sexuality cannot, and should not, be associated with femininity. Further, he even uses the statement "like a little girl," which further associates girls (or females) with weakness.

A double standard was reported that privileges lesbian women in the military because lesbian identities were associated with masculinity, while gay identities were often conflated with femininity. Carlos, a heterosexual Navy veteran explained this during his interview:

> Carlos: I actually give the lesbians respect a little bit more. They actually ... I was only to exposed to ... When I worked in engineering I

only worked with maybe 3 lesbians that everybody knew about. They were the girls that held their own with the guys. They would lift the tool bags, they would do the hard work just like regular men. They weren't as feminine as the other females where they wouldn't want to get dirty, they wouldn't want to oily, they wouldn't want to get greasy. They would be working right next to you. For me, it was mostly ... I didn't really have anything against them because they worked a long side me really well.

Interviewer: Did you feel like the lesbian women fit into the Navy culture better than straight women?

Carlos: Yes.

As this excerpt demonstrates, because lesbians are often perceived as more masculine, they also tend to be perceived by heterosexual participants as more competent. In sum, *GLB military as threat to military effectiveness* presents the more hegemonic discourse in this study. This discourse was advanced frequently in participants' talk, which works to uphold systems of privilege that oppress non-heterosexual persons both in the military and in broader society. However, a counter discourse was also advanced during interviews, which is detailed in what follows.

**GLB Military as Valuable Assets to the Military Organization**

Although many participants advanced the hegemonic discourse, a competing discourse was also advanced. The competing discourse constructed *GLB persons as valuable assets to the military*. This competing discourse is constituted by three key themes that emerged from the interview data: (1) *Sexuality has no bearing on ability to perform job functions*, (2) *Diversity can enhance military effectiveness*, and (3) *Honesty is central to unit cohesion*.

***Sexuality has no bearing on ability to perform job functions.*** The first theme constituting the discourse positioning *GLB persons as valuable assets to the military* is *sexuality has no bearing on military performance*. Most participants, GLB and

heterosexual, advanced this discursive position, noting that sexuality, and other demographic characteristics, are not associated with performance abilities. For example, Jim, a heterosexual Army veteran, stated, "As long as male, female, gay, straight, whatever, I didn't care as long as the person could fulfill their duties." Steve, a 45-year old Airforce veteran, also stated, "My personal opinion is that I didn't have a problem with it so long as they could perform the functions of their job."

Steve served from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s, under the DADT policy. He went on to explain that the DADT policy was illogical:

> A person's been doing the job for ten or fifteen years and then all of a sudden revels that they are gay or lesbian and now they are out. Why? Because they can't perform their job or because you don't like their sexual orientation? It's stupid. It's ridiculous.

Here, Steve explains that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals had been effectively performing their job functions for years, so it is illogical to believe that their being "out" could somehow be associated with poor job performance. Zeek, a heterosexual Navy veteran advanced this argument as well, stating,

> That didn't bother me one bit, either. My mindset was, if you can do the job required, that you're called to do, then gender, like race or religion, have no [inaudible 00:06:16]. To me it's no big deal, as long as you can do the job that you need to do.

The excerpts presented here demonstrate the *sexuality has no bearing on ability to perform job function* theme, which constitutes the larger counter discourse constructing GLB service members as valuable assets to the military. A majority of participants in this study advanced this perspective, centering job performance as essential to military effectiveness. As such, the danger of DADT, or GLB exclusion, is the exclusion of capable and effective military service persons at the expense of military effectiveness.

***Diversity can enhance military effectiveness.*** The second theme constituting the larger discourse was *diversity enhances military effectiveness*. Many participants advanced the larger U.S. cultural discourse that positively endorses diversity in organizations. Joanna, a bisexual female, is currently serving in the U.S. Army, and has been serving since mid 2000s (before the repeal of DADT). She stated, "Diversity can do nothing except help the Army. Different people who see the world in different ways is exactly what the Army needs to continue to progress and move forward and be a force for good in the world." Similarly, Danni, a lesbian currently serving in the National Guard, explained, "I think they've just become more aware of ... Not everyone's the same. People are different, but that's also, people being different is a good thing because that's what makes the experience that much better or that much different." Similarly, Joanna, explained,

> I think it's going to be great for the military. I think that the military has always been one of the forerunners in social change in America except for the inclusion of women. […] Including women means you're including people who are less physically strong, and people in the Army have a hard time seeing past physical strength and seeing other strengths, like the different types of intelligence that diversity will bring you and things like that. Just seeing that the Army is going to be a better, stronger Army for the inclusion of women. It's slowly getting there, I've seen minds change just with me and my friends working with them over the past ten years. I think it will be slow but it'll happen, it'll be good.

These participants explain that diversity not only enhances the experience of serving, but is also important for the military to progress as an organization and better accomplish their mission. Diverse perspectives are essential for organizational achievement as they provide new ways of viewing a situation, and new and innovative solutions to complex problems.

Participants also explained that diversity can encourage acceptance and inclusivity. Jackie is a lesbian veteran of the Navy reserves. She explained,

> I think that the military as a whole needs to grow and realize that this is going to open up a lot of doors, I think for a lot of people. I think it's going to open up the door for women in positions in the military, I think it has ... I think it's going to open up a lot of opportunity. The military needs to realize that nothing's changed. We're still serving, and we're still going to serve when it gets ugly out there, and we're still going to serve in the good times, but it doesn't matter again, who I want to love. What matters is can I do my job? Am I willing to do my job? There's a lot of homosexuals in the military that ... they're willing to do their job, so I think this is a good thing for the military, but they need to do a little growing up. A little catching up.

Similarly, Samantha, a heterosexual Navy veteran, explained, "The military should be, or would be more accepting of people. Not just for gay men or gay or lesbians, but also for females. The males aren't the alpha, or whatever. They're basically not the center of the military." Jackie and Samantha explain that visible diversity is important for progress, as such diversity pushes people to recognize the contributions of those who are often "othered" in the U.S. military. In recognizing the contributions of *all* service persons, the military can work to capitalize on these individuals' strengths, which, in turn, would strengthen the military.

***Honesty is central to unit cohesion.*** Many participants refer to fellow comrades as family. These family-like bonds are essential to unit cohesion and combat effectiveness, as military service persons need to be able to work together as a team. Of course, family-like bonds require openness and honesty. For example, Jim (a heterosexual Army veteran) explains,

> When you're in a combat unit, especially, and you're trusting each other with your lives, I think that your relationships develop where you can trust each other with anything. Everything else, below trusting someone with your life is, at least in my experience, seems inconsequential.

Jim expresses the important of these family ties in this excerpt. John, a 51-year old Army veteran, also advances this position, stating:

> For an infantry squad, its foundation is the sort of brotherhood and trust you have with the soldiers that are serving with you. You have to have pretty complete confidence in their ability to sort of watch your back while you're watching theirs, to work together as a team. That's the infantry squad, or fire team, are the foundational elements of the US Army, and it has to be very cohesive and work together as a sort of a single unit. Having people from different backgrounds, some of whom were very anti-gay, some of whom weren't, would have disrupted that sort of trust.

Although John gives voice to both competing discourses, centering the hegemonic discourse that positions GLB persons as a threat to military effectiveness, it is clear from his claim that trust is essential to unit cohesion. Danni further explained that honesty is essential for military effectiveness:

> I feel like integrity is extremely important especially when you're putting your life on the line or you're giving time away for the military that if you're not living ... If you keep part of yourself from the military, you're not as effective and you can't fully trust the person next to you which is extremely important.

As Danni explains, being open and honest is fundamental for the military to function effectively. In the previous chapter, GLB military reported that they experienced stress and isolation as a result of their identity concealment practices. Feelings of stress, shame, and isolation can negatively impact an GLB individual's ability to perform. Further, this type of stress can be potentially dangerous in a combat situation. As such, openness can enhance both unit cohesion and also military performance.

### De(Centering) Heteronormativity in Talk

In addition to exploring competing discourses, I was also interested in examining the specific communication practices that worked to reinforce and or destabilize heteronormativity (or heterosexual privilege) in the U.S. military. I focused

this part of my analysis on the linguistic choices of participants during interviews, as discursive practices offer unique insights into constructions of meaning. Further, such analytic procedures allow for the identification of barriers and facilitators of change (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Although the majority of the participant statements reinforced heteronormativity, many statements were also observed that worked to decenter heteronormativity. Findings, therefore, demonstrate that, although small, the repeal of DADT has prompted *some* social change by creating spaces for *other* voices, perspectives, and experiences.

Important to this chapter, privilege is more about social categories than *who* people are, resulting in the paradoxical experience of *being* privileged without *feeling* privileged (Johnson, 2006). Dominant groups have a tendency to not see privilege as a problem for a number of reasons (e.g., they don't have to, they don't know it exists at all, they view it as a personal problem; Johnson, 2006). As explained by McPhail (2004), this privilege is inherently monologic because it excludes minority voices and experiences. Johnson (2006) states, "Denying that privilege exists is a serious barrier to change" (p. 21). In this paper, I argue that talk (everyday talk—demonstrated in interview responses) continues to reinforce the oppression of sexual minorities by reproducing heteronormativity.

Counter to monologic communication practices, dialogue requires individuals to face their own assumptions in an effort to appreciate difference (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Intercultural dialogue, then, is "the process of constructing connections through discourse by communicating across difference" (MacLennan, 2011, p. 148). According to Wood (2004), "the critical possibilities of dialogue lie in its refusal to privilege any

single voice, perspective, or ideology" (p. xx). For dialogue to be possible, "people—particularly those who enjoy relative privilege—must take responsibility for identifying and reducing socially determined asymmetries that dictate who gets to speak, what forums and forms of speech are deemed legitimate, whose speech counts, and to whom it counts" (Wood, 2004, p. xx). Importantly, dialogue has transformative potential.

*How* individuals use language to communicate about sexuality is key to understanding individuals' self-other orientations. In fact, in conversations about sexuality, individuals' language choices are likely representative of the ways in which they perceive, organize and interpret sexuality differences. Upon analyzing the discursive practices of participants during interviews, I found that many participants, both heterosexual and GLB identified, advanced a monologic orientation that worked to reinforce heteronormativity. However, several dialogic practices were also observed that worked to decenter heteronormativity, thus creating communicative spaces for change. In the following paragraphs I describe these two orientations and the communication practices that comprise them.

**Monologic Orientation**

As explained by Baxter (2004), "monologic wholeness is a oneness or unity achieved through the hegemony of a single voice over other voices" (p. 118). Monologic communication is inherently anti-dialogic, as *other* voices are silenced. When considering heteronormativity, one must consider that monologic orientations of privilege exclude minority voices and experiences. Upon analyzing interview transcripts I observed five communication practices within the monologic orientation: *negating difference, refuting responsibility, victimizing majority group members, trivializing*

*heterosexism*, and *denying the persistent problem of homophobia*. I detail these communicative practices in the following pages.

***Negating difference.*** Similar to the "colorblind" approach to understanding race, *negating difference* refers to a communicative strategy that denies the reality of the non-heterosexual experience. *Negating difference* is inherently monologic because this view assumes that the taken for granted assumptions of the dominant group, which are grounded in their own realities as heterosexual beings, resonate with GLB persons as well. When asked about the importance of coming out, John (heterosexual Army veteran) employed this communicative strategy, stating, "I know that it's certainly treated as a significant event, but I never came out as a heterosexual person, and I'm not sure why such significance is attached to it. It's none of my business whether you like boys or girls, or both." Similarly, Zeek (heterosexual Navy veteran) stated, "Honestly, I don't ... To me, they're people, so it's no importance at all. It's like me telling someone, hey, I'm heterosexual." John and Zeek are both heterosexual men. Although both adamantly assert that they are not homophobic during their interviews, their communicative practices work to reinforce heterosexual privilege. As heterosexual men, those with whom they interact have always assumed and affirmed their sexual identities. They have never had to consider asserting their sexual identities because, as heterosexuals, their sexual identities conform to normative expectations and, as a result, are continuously affirmed in everyday interaction.

Zeek engaged in *negating difference* again during his interview when describing an encounter with a close a friend who identified as gay:

> Yeah, actually, one of my really good friends, he's gay, and he actually had a little trouble coming out to me, I guess if you want to call it that. I spotted him a

> mile away, and it took him a few months before he told me he actually was. ... We became really close ... That he was gay. His one big concern was telling his parents, because of their religious views. I encouraged him to tell them. I told him, any parents that love their child, no matter what they choose in life, is going to love their child no matter what, and we would have many conversations about that. He finally actually told his mom and dad.

Having never had to cope with this type of fear (fear of being rejected by one's family), Zeek offers advice to his friend. Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that acceptance is actually a rare response in a "coming out" encounter with a parent. Robinson and colleagues (1989), for instance, found that two-thirds of parents reacted negatively to their child's coming. In another study, a sample of young adults (GLB) reported that their parents' most frequent reaction to their identity disclosures included: shock, shame, and guilt (Ben-Ari, 1995). As Selekman (2007) explains, parents also may judge themselves or feel judged by others. When parents discover that their child is gay, lesbian, or bisexual they can often feel others will judge them for their poor parenting skills (Selekman, 2007). Some parents may even force the child to leave home (Selekman, 2007). Further, GLB participants were found to perceive less support from their parents than their heterosexual counterparts (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013). Zeek, as a heterosexual, invokes a monologic orientation in failing to recognize the diverse experiences of non-heterosexual persons.

***Refuting responsibility.*** One of the most commonly invoked communication practices working to center heterosexual privilege was the *refuting of responsibility*. Dominant group members often engage in monologic communication such as a way to "get themselves off the hook" (Johnson, 2006, p. 108). Many participants, particularly heterosexual participants, quickly asserted they did not participate in discriminatory practices targeting GLB military. They asserted that they had "no problem with" GLB

persons participating in the U.S. military. This rejection of responsibility however, works to uphold systems of privilege by denying the role that all dominant group members play in the normalization of heterosexuality. Carlos, for example explained that he tried to keep his distance from those he believed to be gay in the military:

> I kept my distance from them. I wasn't sure about them because everybody would make fun of them or they would tease them or harass them. I wouldn't participate in the teasing or harassment. I would just keep my distance. It was one of those things where your crew will either be, you're either with us or you're against us or you're apart of them, so I didn't want to be teased or made fun of as well.

Carlos is a heterosexual Navy veteran. In his interview, he explained that he did not participate in the discriminatory practices targeting gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, but also contradicts his claim by stating that he actively kept his distance.

Although some participants acknowledge the existence of a problem, many deny their role in this problem. Jim, for example asserts that he played no role in the discrimination of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals:

> Personally, I never participated and so far as using the same words or responding in kind of a positive manner towards the person using them. I don't recall ever standing up and saying, "Hey, that's inappropriate," or anything like that. When I was a younger, I want to say younger soldier as in between around 2000-2004, but as I gained rank and responsibility when I would hear it I would say, "Hey, that's no appropriate. We're not supposed to be talking like that. If you're going to use a slur use something that's, I know this is as stupid as it sounds, use a non-affective slur. […] I wouldn't participate because I just didn't think using the words were necessarily right, but at the same time I realized that they were just doing it in a manner that wasn't discriminatory towards an individual, I guess.

Similarly, Steve, a 45-year old, heterosexual, Air Force veteran reported that he, personally, was not fearful or ignorant, but others were. He explained,

> [DADT] didn't bother me I went through basic training just like everybody else. There wasn't any fear. I don't think I was ignorant. I think there was a lot of ignorant people, you know that go into the military with some kind of male

> machismo or whatever other word you want to use. It's a males environment. That's just not the case. In my opinion. My opinion was that it was fine that it was there or not there it didn't make a difference to me.

Like Steve, many participants were quick to assign blame to older generations and uneducated individuals, rejecting their involvement in the existing system. However, individuals must recognize their privilege and understand their role in upholding the status quo in order to engage in effective dialogue.

***Victimizing majority group members.*** When discussing the repeal of DADT, many heterosexual participants framed this legislative decision as being harmful to the heterosexual majority. During his interview, Samuel stated,

> Before I [inaudible] I thought it was a choice. Nothing against them, the main thing, the main fear, for me was is he going to find me attractive or is he going to tray to make any moves on me. I wouldn't like to have answered and I wouldn't know what to do, tell him to stop or something. That was my big thing. Never happened, but that was my fear.

Here, Samuel expresses a self-concern. Similarly, Carlos stated, "Serving in the military ... It was mostly, you trusted these guys, you would party, you didn't really want to go out with these guys and then, something happens and it would put you in an awkward situation." Here, Carlos and Samuel both situate themselves as potential victims of gay men.

Tiana is a 27-year old heterosexual woman currently serving in the U.S. Air Force. Tiana expressed her concerns when DADT was repealed, stating, "I personally thought, oh my God this just popped open a can of worms. Not because I had a problem with it. It's because I honestly don't want to see people making out." Tiana expresses her dislike of public displays of affection, but the concern expressed here is a heightened discomfort in seeing same-sex couples kiss. Steve also expresses a concern regarding

displays of affections among same-sex couples. He explains that, seeing same sex couples displaying affection while in uniform could harm morale, “because unfortunately people are small minded. And you have to think about that.” From these excerpts it is evident that some participants feel threatened by changes to the status quo. They categorize themselves as becoming threatened, or being made to feel uncomfortable. Yet, in making such statements, participants fail to acknowledge their own unearned entitlements in having always been afforded the privilege of being able to kiss their romantic partners, hold their partner’s hand, etc.

***Trivializing heterosexism.*** Another communication practice observed during interviews was the trivializing of minority experiences. The trivialization of minority experiences was communicated in a variety of ways. Some of the most common examples of this included participants describing homophobic slurs as playful, rather than as incendiary. For example, Jim explained,

> For the most part, I recall people using different slurs and things like that in almost a joking manner with each other. Using the terms gay, faggot and stuff like that, but not in a disparaging term towards a person who was actually homosexual. That was there. The joking around and kind of messing with each other.

Similarly, Zeek explained,

> Kind of like gender calling as a name, and somebody said, oh, the guys are horsing around, and somebody called you gay or used the word "fag," they didn't mean it in a derogatory manner, but because of the Don't Ask Don't Tell, you couldn't use those type of words.

Tiana even admitted to participating in these types of exchanges, stating,

> More broadly, I'm pretty sure I was a user of the term faggot a lot. Not in ... we used it in the mean sense like when someone was doing something stupid you know we'd say about being a faggot or whatever, or we'd say, "Oh you're such a fag." In a derogatory term. It wasn't good. It wasn't that I had malice against gay men. It's just how we joked around. I don't know.

In framing linguistic violence as "play," participants fail to account for the damaging effects of such language use on those whose identities are being disparaged.

In addition to minimizing the harmfulness of heterosexist language use, Tiana also implies that targets who report such discrimination are "babies." She explained,

> The military has changed so much in just the 9 years that I have been there. Right now the military is suffering from cry babies like the younger ranks are coming in because everything is Don't ask, Don't tell. It's more of a kinder, gentler military. If something happens that you don't like they can just go run and tell the first Sargent, or run and tell someone else. Verses when I was in you know I was suppose to shut up and color, and if I don't like it still shut up and color. It wasn't ... I'm not saying that's right. I'm not saying that was right, I am saying that there needs to be a balance of knowing, "Hey, if something happens that you don't like. Then yes I want you to feel comfortable enough to speak on it, but still do what you're told unless it's going to kill you." That's what it comes down to. Right now a lot of people are suffering ... they're really selfish and they don't really want to work. That doesn't have anything to do with their sexuality. It's what's acceptable right now. There's been so many scandals within the military and all these sex stories, like people pimping out the younger ranks and stuff like that. People are just afraid to do their jobs. The military also suffered through cuts. A lot of the good old school mentors that we had are not longer in.

Here, Tiana implies that heterosexism, and other similar issues in the military, are not "that bad," in that these behaviors are not "going to kill" anyone. As such, Tiana implies that targets of discrimination should get over it and do their jobs. In trivializing the experiences of sexual minorities in the military, the needs of minority group members are delegitimized. This works to reinforce heteronormativity, by taking minority groups less seriously.

***Denying the persistent problem of homophobia.*** The final monologic communication practice observed was *denying the persistent problem of homophobia*. Some participants were quick to frame homophobia as an issue of the past that no longer exits in contemporary society. For instance, Jim stated, "I don't think they

understand that in today's society, nobody really cares who is what, you know?" Similarly, John stated, "I think they have the same opportunity that anyone else does if they want to. There may be additional hurdles in different areas of the military, but everybody that wants to serve is going to have their own particular hurdle to jump." John described the challenges faced by gays and lesbians to be no more significant than the hurdles that *any* individual must face in their lives.

Participants often described the significant social change they have seen in recent years. For instance, Alfred, a 69-year old, gay Army veteran stated, "I began discovering myself in junior high school and today people come out in junior high school. They even come out as transgender. Kids are used to it, it's no big deal." Recognizing social progress is important, so long as individuals also recognize how much further we need to go to achieve equality. By denying the existence of persistent problems and continued systematic inequalities, participants work to uphold systems of oppression that maintain heterosexual privilege. This is an inherently monologic communication practice because it denies the lived experiences of minority group members today and negates opportunities for continued change.

In sum, the monologic orientation was employed more frequently in talk than the dialogic orientation, particularly among heterosexual participants. Interestingly, even non-heterosexual participants had a tendency to engage in monologic talk that reinforced heteronormativity. This is consistent with other research as well, as heteronormative discourses are prevalent in mainstream society. As Iantaffi and Bockting (2011) explain, socially accepted sexual scripts have remained relatively consistent despite the diversity of human sexuality becoming more visible. However,

there were participants who advanced a dialogic orientation in talk (mostly non-heterosexual participants) that works to challenge and refine these dominant cultural scripts.

**Dialogic Orientation**

The dialogic orientation is demonstrated when participants use language in a way that creates a space for alternative voices, perspectives, and experiences. As Striley and Lawson (2014) explain, dialogic communication is a discursive practice whereby the interlocutor can move beyond the intergroup divide through talk. Observing communication practices that advance a dialogic approach to understanding relations between heterosexuals and sexual minorities sparks some hope for change. Individuals communicating in this orientation practiced transcendent discourse (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Four communication practices within this dialogic orientation are: *admitting one's own prejudices, acknowledging privilege*, *recognizing that heterosexism persists,* and *perspective taking.* These practices are described in the following pages.

***Admitting one's own prejudices.*** Denying prejudicial attitudes is a major factor that inhibits social change. In fact, Cargile (2011) asserts that, in attempting to embrace one's prejudices and one's emotional responses to stimuli (e.g., fear of gay men, discomfort, etc.) with awareness, human beings can practice mindfulness in their communication. In this study, some participants acknowledged instances in which their preconceived ideas and stereotypes had been challenged. Carlos, for instance, explained,

> No, I was going to say that when I went in I was very respective of women in the military and they were more of a distraction than they were there to serve. It

> was mostly like ... When you have 1,000 sailors on the ship, like mine, I was on a helicopter carrier, and you have 1,000 sailors and 100 of them are women and you are deployed for like 9 months at a time, they become a distraction because it turns into kind of a love boat, who is going out with who now, who is dating who now. Instead, of the women working and holding their own, but my perception changed when my sister joined the military and she was an actual police officer for the Air Force. I saw pictures of her with assault riffles, grenade launchers, and I changed opinions on that.

Tiana engages in this communication practice during her interview as well, but also describes the prejudices that she continues to hold. She explains,

> I think the culture needs to be changed and more accepting. My self included. Like I said when I think ... I can sit here and tell you that I don't have a problem with gay men serving, but I can also tell you that I don't want to know if a Marine is gay. Both of those statements are the truth.

Tiana asserts that she believes in equal treatment of sexual minorities, but, at the same time, she also recognizes that she holds negative prejudices about gay men. She went on to say,

> If you ask me or tell me that a Marine is gay, it instantly changes my whole demeanor of him. Not that he does any less of a job. It's just like oh my God. All I can think of is him having sex with some other guy. It's just like oh my God. That's not a Marine. Marines don't do that. Obviously I'm stupid and know that there are some gay Marines and stuff like that. I do know better that it shouldn't affect, but it does to me. It does make a difference. I don't know want to know.

Although her statements are blatantly heterosexist, Tiana's discursive choices demonstrate an awareness (mindfulness) that can actually facilitate positive change.

As explained by Cargile (2011), "mindfulness attempts to extend conscious sensing beyond the surface of our reactions to their deep, tangled, and conditioned roots" (p. 17). For instance, if a feeling of discomfort arises when an individual encounters an outsider, the individual should attempt to recognize the feeling they are experiencing, and reflect on that process. By openly acknowledging that she holds negative stereotypes, despite knowing that she should not, Tiana is engaging in

mindfulness. Ting-Toomey (2012) defines mindfulness as "a readiness to shift one's frames of reference, the motivation to use new categories to understand cultural or ethnic differences, and the preparedness to experiment with creative avenues of decision making and problem solving" (p. 46).

***Acknowledging privilege.*** Privilege is relative, so no one is completely privileged, or completely oppressed, in *all* situations and contexts. Johnson (2006) stated that, "denying that privilege exists is a serious barrier to change" (p. 21). Recognizing one's privilege is essential to transformative dialogue and social change. Several participants engaged in this communication practice. For example, Chris, a 59-year old Army veteran, said, "If it wasn't from the peers making jokes, it was a time when I could recall a staff sergeant or a higher ranking enlisted sergeant making decisions and I could tell he was biased towards us that were straight, giving us more flexibility." In this excerpt, Chris not only describes prejudicial behaviors he had observed, but also acknowledges that he received unearned entitlements (i.e., flexibility) as a result of his heterosexuality.

Interestingly, GLB participants also employed this discursive strategy, recognizing the relative nature of privilege. For instance, Yvonne, a lesbian Air Force veteran stated,

> I didn't know if the Military culture was ready to have people openly serve, especially men. I think that it was definitely tougher for men than for women. So I didn't really know if things were going to be different or if it was just a formality.

Although Yvonne is a lesbian, she still acknowledges that she has some privilege relative to gay men within the cultural context of the U.S. Air Force. The following exchange with Lauren demonstrates a similar communication strategy:

Lauren: The general theory where I was was that women in the army were either lesbians or whores. You were determined, that is what they thought about you, you were one of those two categories because why else would you be in the army? I definitely disagreed with that. There were some people there that were not gay or lesbian and they were not whores. Women were treated very well there I was only like the sixteenth class there to have women. The first class was 1980 so I was class of 1986. It's very much a boy system.

Interviewer: What about for gay men in the military?

Lauren: That was even worse. Worse. Way worse. I knew a few but it would have been way worse for them.

Lauren was oppressed in many ways during her time in the U.S. Army. In fact, she was even separated from West Point and from the Army for being gay. Yet, she still acknowledges that her treatment would have been far worse had she been a male.

Another example of *recognizing privilege* was observed in Casey's interview. Casey is a trans male, but identified as a lesbian female during his time in the Army. Casey served for less than one year in the military due to an injury that resulted in a medical discharge. When discussing his transition (female to male) Casey explained,

> They noticed it [inaudible]. I've heard that it goes backwards, they quote unquote, especially if the person is Caucasian, the term "White Privilege", or male, white, privilege, I've had those terms thrown at me by trans women sitting on [inaudible 31:38] at GLBT centers, that I quote unquote "had it easier." I'm not going to deny that the fact that I can move through the world without being detected.

Being transgender, Casey represents one of the most disenfranchised groups in the military. However, Casey is still able to recognize the relative privilege he now has as a white male. The acknowledgment of one's own privilege is essential to productive intergroup dialogue, as change is only possible when we can understand and acknowledge our own position within persistent systems of oppression.

***Recognizing that heterosexism persists.*** Another communicative practice observed that advanced a dialogic orientation was *recognizing that heterosexism persists.* In recognizing that underlying systems of oppression still influence the lived experiences of minority group members, this communication practice creates a space for *others*' experiences and perspectives. Carlos employs this communicative strategy when asked if there was any organizational discrimination. He replied, "Yes, because if they were showing it and, let's say, you were the supervisor and you didn't like that you wouldn't give a positive review to help them get promoted to the next level, the next pay grade." Here, Carlos acknowledges that heterosexist attitudes continue to exist. Consequently, non-heterosexual military persons face real and material consequences.

Chris also employed this communication practice during his interview. He explained,

> I remember the one gay individual, he was […] I guess in the barracks one time by himself and he was caught doing something with himself and since then they discriminated him as far as being able to serve with the rest of us in these field exercises.

Chris went on to explain, "If the gay soldier couldn't march, they discriminated as far as throwing him into the back of the platoon with the rest of those that couldn't march which was known to be the women or the ones that couldn't keep up." Finally, Chris stated, "If you are gay or lesbian and you make it openly known, there's a lot of conservative high ranking officers enlisted out there that use that against you. It's like a [inaudible] I know that for a fact." The excerpts presented here demonstrates a recognition and an appreciation of diverse experiences.

Casey (trans male Army veteran) explains the tremendous progress that has been made. Casey said,

> There's been a lot of a change since I've been in, I mean, since Obama-administration has come in, it seems like progress has been rolling out, even though you have hurry up and [inaudible 21:42], there's still major, major progress being made. I've seen through my advocacy work, not only changes for trans service members ... well, let me take that back, not trans service members, but transgender veterans. There has been a lot of movement, I mean, the VA does have a directive. The problem is enforcement of that directive isn't there. What I see, is inconsistencies in the care.

Importantly, Casey engaged a dialectical approach to acknowledging heteronormativity. He recognizes the progress that has been made, but also addresses the importance of continuing that progress.

***Engaging in perspective taking.*** The final communicative practice advancing a dialogic orientation was *engaging in perspective taking.* Participants demonstrated empathy in their communication. For example, Jim said,

> You know, from a layman's perspective I would say it's probably important [to come out] because the person would probably feel like they're not being honest with themselves until they do. Looking at it as a social worker, it'd be important to them for that reason and also because their mental health would suffer if they did not. Not being real with yourself and not being open and honest with your family, friends, coworkers, you'd be constantly hiding something inside and would lead to their detriment. Whether it makes them develop the thoughts whether they are developing some kind of depression I think would be most common. I'd say it's really important for someone to come out eventually.

Similarly, Steve asserted,

> I think it’s huge. Can you imagine every day you go into your house you close the door and then you are allowed to be there person you are? Every day you walk out your front door and you're having to be somebody you're not? That is a terrible way to live. Unfortunately I think it was up to 90 percent of society that's the way that they would keep it. I think that that is really unfortunate.

Importantly, these participants do not attempt to speak on behalf of GLB military, but rather, they attempt to engage in perspective taking. In perspective taking, participants give voice to differing experiences and recognize the challenges that GLB persons

might encounter. This communication practice creates a space for transformative dialogue.

In summary, these findings shed some light on the (im)possibility of transformative intergroup dialogue. Although a monologic orientation predominated in participants' talk (particularly heterosexuals), which works to uphold existing systems of oppression by reproducing heteronormativity, I also observed a dialogic orientation advanced by some participants. The communication practices comprising the dialogic orientation work to decenter heteronormativity. As such, these findings reveal a possibility for more effective dialogue in the military, dialogue that can promote self-reflection and understanding across the group divide.

# CHAPTER 7.

# DISCUSSION

Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have served in the U.S. military, in some way, since the birth of the nation. However, GLB military persons have been forced to conceal their sexual identities in order to serve their country throughout history. In 2011, DADT was repealed by the Obama administration, which meant that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals could serve openly for the first time without the threat of discharge. Of course, heteronormative discourses continue to infiltrate the military organization. As such, GLB service persons continue to struggle with competing social identities and the continued demands for conformity. Sexual identity disclosure decisions remain complex, as the decision to reveal one's sexual identity is a decision that continues to put GLB persons at risk of stigmatization and discrimination.

## Study Overview

Gay and lesbian issues in the military have been the focus of many research studies. Historians, for instance, have sought to trace homosexual identities and behaviors to earlier historical periods (e.g., Shilts, 2005). Other scholars have offered critical analyses of the exclusionary policies that have prohibited gays and lesbians from serving in the armed forces (e.g., Buford, 2014; Evans, 2002). Others have critically examined, tested, and even falsified the claims that such exclusionary policies maintain combat effectiveness (e.g., Barkawi, Dandeker, Wells-Petry, & Kier, 1999; Kier, 1998). Since the repeal of DADT, other scholars have examined the impact of the repeal on feelings on inclusivity (Rich et al., 2012), or have examined and critiqued the integration of LBG persons into the military (Johnson et al., 2015). Finally, researchers

have even examined the impact of the repeal on military readiness and effectiveness (Belkin et al., 2012). However, this study offers new insights into the communicative processes of stigmatization, the decision making processes surrounding sexual identity disclosures in the U.S. military, and the communicative practices in everyday talk that work to reinforce heteronormativity in the U.S. military. Further, this study fills a significant gap in literature by exploring the lived experiences of both GLB military and also heterosexual service persons and their participation in processes of normalizing heterosexuality.

For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 current and former military service members, 15 of which identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The remaining 13 participants identified as heterosexual. Participants shared their stories and experiences, offering important insight into the social constructions of identity and the normalization of heterosexuality within the military context. Data were analyzed in two ways: grounded theory analysis and discourse analysis. These methods of data analysis were selected to effectively answer the research questions advanced in this project.

The objectives of this study were threefold. First, I aimed to uncover the cultural stigmatization processes that GLB persons experience in the military. Further, I sought to uncover the ways in which these larger communication patterns influence self-concept clarity and feelings of belonging for GLB persons. Second, I sought to examine the identity management strategies employed by GLB persons before and after the repeal of DADT. Because behavioral tactics in self-presentation have been found to affect a social actor's private view and self-views (Cioffi, 2000), I also sought to

uncover the feelings associated with GLB person's identity management choices. Third, I sought to examine language in use to uncover the ways in which GLB military identities are discursively constructed. In analyzing discourse, I also sought to uncover the specific communication practices that work to uphold and/or destabilize systems of heterosexual privilege. In the following pages, I offer a brief summary of my research findings.

## Summary of Findings

The first research question asked, "How do cultural communicative practices influence self-concept clarity for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military?" To answer this question interview transcripts were analyze using grounded theory analysis to identify the cultural communication patterns that influence GLB individuals' feelings of belonging in (or identification with) the military. Findings revealed that *GLB identity repudiation* incites feelings of identity incongruity for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. Military. Three communicative stigmatization processes constituted *GLB identity repudiation*: dehumanization, discrimination, and stereotype proliferation. Such processes of stigmatization were reported both before and after the repeal of DADT. Such processes work to create a hostile environment in which GLB identities are continuously delegitimized.

Important for RQ1, military identity was salient, or central, to many GLB people's core sense of self. Because homosexuality was viewed as seemingly incompatible with military identity, many participants struggled to effectively integrate their two social identities. Instead, they attempted to manage identity tensions in three ways: (a) *suppressing their sexual identities in favor of their role identities*, (b)

*segmenting their personal and professional lives*, and (c) *attempting to reconcile their sexual and military identities.* Identity suppression and segmentation were often ineffective, and actually heightened feelings of alienation for many. The experience of alienation can be detrimental to both the military person's psychological well-being, but also to unit cohesion and military effectiveness (Moradi, 2009). Most of those who reconciled their sexual and military identities, most reported a stronger sense of self-concept clarity. Identity integration appeared to be transformative, in a sense, in that participants finally felt that they could be who they were. These findings support identity clarity research and MST.

The second set of research questions asked about the identity management strategies of GLB military prior to and after the repeal of DADT. Upon analyzing interview data with GLB participants using constant comparative analysis, I found that all participants made thoughtful and deliberate decisions about whether or not, and to whom, they revealed their sexual identities. Prior to the repeal of DADT, identity management strategies included: *cultivating network ignorance, preserving underground networks,* and *disclosing strategically*. These strategies remained relatively consistent even after DADT was repealed. As a consequence of these identity management choices, participants reported feelings of *shame, isolation,* and *stress.* Such findings support prior research indicating that minority stressors (e.g., discrimination, expectations of stigma) are associated with greater distress and more negative self-feeling (e.g., Smart & Wegner, 2000; Velez et al., 2013).

Participants serving after the repeal of DADT described three additional identity management strategies that they employed once DADT has been lifted, including:

*combatting microaggressions*, *correcting misperceptions,* and *being honest.* These new strategies (strategies of openness as opposed to closedness) actually stimulated positive self-feelings. Not only did participants begin to feel less isolated and less stressed, but they also reported a new sense of confidence and self-liking after coming out. This is important, as researchers have found numerous benefits that result from disclosing secrets to a supportive audience (e.g., Lepore, 1997; Smart & Wegner, 2000; etc.). Further, in engaging in some level of openness, participants in this study were able to overcome some of the adverse effects of their minority stress. Not only are these findings important for better understanding the experiences of GLB military, but also *all* service persons can benefit from an environment in which GLB individuals can engage in more open identity management behaviors. In reducing some of the minority stressors (e.g., secrecy) and in fostering an environment of inclusivity, military effectiveness and unit cohesion can be strengthened (Moradi, 2009).

The final set of research questions asked about: (a) the discursive constructions of GLB military, and (b) the communicative practices that work to reproduce and/or decenter heteronormativity in talk. To answer these research questions, I employed a discursive analytic approach when analyzing interview transcripts. I focused this analysis on language *in use*. I first explored participants' discursive constructions of GLB persons by examining the ways in which competing cultural discourses were centered in talk. I uncovered two primary competing discourses. The more hegemonic discourse positioned *GLB persons as a threat to military effectiveness*. The more marginal, competing discourse, however, challenged dominant constructions of GLB persons by positioning them as *valuable assets to the military organization*. The

centering of the more marginal cultural discourse by many participants in this study demonstrates a space for change. GLB identities are already being redefined and reconstructed within U.S. military culture. As GLB identities become more visible within the military, it is likely, then, that this more marginal discourse may gain strength to eventually become the more centripetal discourse, while the counter discourse falls to the margins.

Next, I examined the more nuanced communicative practices that participants employed in talk. Interview transcripts were analyzed for the purpose of identifying communicative practices that work to reproduce and/or decenter heteronormativity. Five communication practices were identified that advanced a monologic orientation of privilege (i.e., worked to uphold existing systems of privilege). Alternatively, four dialogic communication practices were identified. Dialogic communication is a discursive practice whereby an interlocutor can move beyond the intergroup divide through talk (McPhail, 2004; Simpson, 2008). Such findings demonstrate a potential for social change in that dialogic communication practices promote transformative dialogue.

In sum, participants' stories and experiences demonstrated that identity management choices, and their consequences, are largely influenced by organizational identification and cultural context. And, importantly, identity disclosures have the potential to shape and redefine the military organization while challenging normative constructions of sexual identities within military culture.

## Implications

Now that I have briefly summarized the findings of my dissertation project, I will explain how these insights contribute to three bodies of literature: stigma, identity, and dialectics. In the following pages I highlight several important theoretical and practical implications.

### Theoretical Implications

The notion of *identity repudiation* contributes to stigma literature in several important ways. First, it demonstrates the capacity of communicative stigmatization processes to delegitimize social identities within a given context. As Bar-Tal (1989; 1990) explains, delegitimization is an extreme form of social categorization in which social groups are categorized "into extreme negative social categories which are excluded from human groups that are considered as acting within the limits of acceptable norms and/or values" (p. 65). This is especially dangerous when individuals are categorized as immoral (Tieagă, 2007). Such processes of stigmatization make it difficult for GLB persons to achieve self-concept clarity. Second, attempts at coping with and managing stigma produce feelings of stress, which can be detrimental in an already high stress work environment. Third, stigma also constrains GLB individuals' personal and professional relationships within the military, which can be harmful to unit cohesion and military effectiveness.

Identity repudiation incited feelings of *identity incongruity*, such that military and sexual identities were seemingly incompatible. In this study, most participants attempted to suppress and/or compartmentalize their sexual identities. This is important, as such strategies can often lead to additional psychological distress (Liboro Jr., 2015;

Yip, 2007). Findings from this study support prior research, which has found that identity interference is associated with a number of significant negative outcomes. Most participants in this study were only able to achieve identity integration after separating from the military. In fact, only one participant reported complete identity integration while *in* the military.

Findings from this study also contribute to identity management literature in a meaningful way. Upon examining the identity management strategies employed by GLB participants I found that such strategies did not change significantly after the repeal of DADT. However, three new strategies (strategies of openness) were reported after the repeal of DADT. Although only one participant made the decision to serve *openly*, findings revealed that even small changes to self-presentation behaviors (e.g., combatting microaggressions) had a profound effect on individuals' self-feelings. So, despite being relatively closeted, participants who came out to even just one person reported reduced stress, greater self-acceptance, and more confidence. This demonstrates the importance of social support networks for those with minority (or stigmatized) identities. Even the availability of one outlet, one person with whom an GLB person can share their true self, was associated with reports of increased well-being.

Findings from this study also contribute to dialectics literature. Although relational dialectics theory, as set forth by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and Baxter (2011), is intended to explain the ways in which discourses constitute relationships, I use the dialectical perspective to examine the dialogic nature of individual identities as they are constituted in discourse. Halliwell (2015) posits, "A theory's potential rests in

the hands of those willing to test its limits and explore new avenues […] Communication researchers must rise to the challenge and explore all of the promising avenues relational dialectics theory has to offer" (p. 92). As such, I utilized dialectics in a broader sense, and extended its scope to explore constructions of identity within a specific organizational/cultural context.

Additionally, by examining the specific communicative practices employed by participants, I was able to uncover the ways in which heteronormativity is reinforced and/or decentered in talk. This, too, contributes to dialectics literature. By analyzing language in use researchers can uncover how systems of privilege are upheld in simple everyday talk. This aligns with prior research that has theorized about the power of language. Findings from this study shed light on the ways in which individuals, both privileged and oppressed, participate (often unintentionally) in the reinforcement of privilege and in the normalization of heterosexuality.

Finally, this study advances a dialectical approach to the study of intercultural communication. This dissertation employed various approaches in a way that facilitated interparadigmatic discussion (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). Although, more recently, many intercultural communication scholars have begun to acknowledge the value of varying paradigmatic approaches in their own research, they have done little to connect ideas across research paradigms (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). In this dissertation project, I attempted to move beyond the paradigmatic constraints. According to Martin and Nakayama (1999), "A dialectical approach offers us the possibility of 'knowing' about intercultural interaction as a dynamic and changing process" (p. 14).

**Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical implications described above, there are also several practical implications that arise from this study. A goal of qualitative research is the production of contextualized knowledge claims, stated at a level of generality so that insights can be transferable to like contexts (Christians & Carey, 1989). Therefore, qualitative research seeks consensus and convergence of understandings and the transferability of findings. Although this study examined the identity management processes of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the U.S. military, these experiences are likely to resonate with other GLB persons whose various social identities are influenced largely by conservative values. Findings from this study are likely to transfer to other contexts in which individuals' role and sexual identities are seemingly incompatible. Further, findings from this study are also likely to resonate with GLB persons whose workplace environments are largely non-affirming of sexual minorities.

As stated in the theoretical implications, this study also demonstrated the importance of having some degree of openness, no matter how small. The findings from this study point to the importance of social support networks for those belonging to stigmatized social categories. As such, GLB persons in the military, and in other organizations or communities, could benefit greatly from the creation of a space (e.g., GLB centers, support group meetings, or even GLB socials) where individuals are able to speak openly, without feeling the weight of their stigmatizing label.

Findings from this study also point to the on-going problems of GLB integration into the military. Although DADT has been repealed, the policies set forth with the repeal have not led to effective integration and have not been conducive to positive

change. For instance, Johnson and colleagues (2015) report that the "reality of the DADT repeal may include heightened stressors and risks for GLB military personnel, including continuation of sexual stigma and prejudice and resistance to the policy change, [… and] difficult decisions about remaining concealed or disclosing sexual orientation" (p. 107). Therefore, the military, and other organizations, should critically evaluate their current strategies for reform and use communication in a way that more effectively promotes transformative dialogue. Communication should be used to develop and maintain inclusive spaces. Findings from this study demonstrate that diversity is not enough, rather the goal should move beyond diversity to inclusivity.

Finally, findings from the study demonstrate the ways in which systems of oppression are reinforced in talk. Although the dialogic orientation was observed far less frequently in my data, particularly among heterosexual service persons, the communication practices comprising this orientation did work to decenter privilege in some ways. So, despite McPhail's (2004) assertion that members of the dominant group may lack the collective capacity to engage in intercultural dialogue effectively, my findings demonstrate that this type of intercultural dialogue is possible. That being said, once inherently dialogic patterns of communication are normalized, systems of oppression can begin to be dismantled. Future research should uncover ways to facilitate effective intercultural dialogue within organizations, such as the military.

## Limitations

Although this study produced important findings that are vital to our understanding of the struggles experienced by sexual minorities with stigmatized identities, several factors may have limited the overall effectiveness of the study. One

potential limitation of this study was the use of phone interviews. Although this procedure attributed to a greater number of participants, face-to-face interactions tend to be more personal, making it easier to develop rapport and put the participants at ease. As such, face-to-face interviews may have resulted in richer data. Of course, phone interviews aided my ability to locate participants that were geographically dispersed, thus diversifying my sample in a meaningful way.

Additionally, GLB identities remain highly stigmatized within the U.S. military, which was made evident by my research findings. As such, many LBG persons are uncomfortable sharing their stories. This was also true for heterosexual military persons, as many are uncomfortable talking about what they considered to be a "sensitive" topic. Due to the sensitive nature of my research topic, recruitment was difficult. Despite reaching out to thousands of individuals that met the recruitment criteria (though organizational listservs), over more than six-months, the number of volunteers was small. Although there were only 28 participants, 15 of which identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, the sample was theoretically driven and the findings make a significant theoretical contribution.

## Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore the experiences of GLB military further. For instance future research should explore the coming out exchanges of GLB military. In the moment when one asserts their identity as gay, lesbian, or bisexual for the first time, one is engaging in an identity renegotiation process whereby the sender of the message embarks on a journey, moving from identity security to identity insecurity, and from identity membership inclusion to exclusion (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Identity negotiation

is a mutual communication activity, through which individuals attempt to assert their own desired self-images while simultaneously challenging or supporting the other's identity. Through listening, perspective taking, and awareness, individuals may promote positive self-image, encourage psychological growth, and develop intercultural relationships.

Future research should also more closely examine the experiences of lesbians and bisexuals in the military. According to Gates (2010), lesbians "comprise more than 43% of GLB men and women serving on active duty," despite the fact that women make up only about 14% of active duty personnel (p. 1). Lesbians have also faced additional challenges in the U.S. military, compared to their male counterparts. In fact, due to them being women and non-heterosexual, "targeting lesbians [was historically] used as a means of eliminating women" (Weinstein & D'Amico, 1999, p. 109). There are even reports of lesbian women in the military who had been beaten and/or raped who did not report the violence for fear of having their sexual identities uncovered (Belkin, 2001). Thus, the experiences of lesbians in particular warrant further investigation.

Future research should also explore bisexual identity de-legitimization in the military. In my literature search, no studies were located that addressed bisexuals' experiences specifically. Bisexuality, more than other sexual identities, is often denied legitimacy, as dominant cultural discourses endorse heterosexuality and homosexuality as the only legitimate sexual identities, with bisexuality upsetting the balance of this binary (McLean, 2001). Therefore, many bisexuals do not feel that their identities are affirmatively valued making the coming out process more complex. Future research

should explore the ways in which perceived devaluation influences likelihood for self-disclosure, coping strategies, and self-stigma for those who identify as bisexual. Researchers should also explore the ways in which bisexuals navigate the coming out process, the ways in which targets of bisexual identity disclosure affirm and/or reject bisexuality when responding to identity disclosure, and the ways in which such responses influence perceptions of self and other for the interactants.

There is also a need to explore trans related issues in the U.S. military. Beginning this year, in 2016, openly transgender people will be able to serve in the U.S. military. However, trans people are among the groups most frequently targeted by hate crimes. They are also the most likely to experience depression and attempt suicide in the United States. As such, the integration process requires a mindful approach. Further, trans veterans have faced tremendous challenges when acquiring access to medical benefits (as expressed by the trans veterans in this study). Thus, the challenges and experiences of this group require further investigation.

Beyond GLBTQ military service personnel, GLBTQ military families also warrant further investigation. Given the many constrains, such as the former DADT policy, restrictions on spousal benefits and dependents, and other policies of exclusion, GLBTQ military families have had to cope with and navigate various relational challenges that heterosexual couples and families have not experienced. Therefore, future research should explore relational decision-making processes, relational turning points, and identity management for GLBTQ military couples and families.

Finally, as explained in the section highlighting the practical implications of my study, future researchers should uncover ways to facilitate effective intercultural

dialogue within organizations such as the military. Scholars should engage in more applied research to develop strategies that work to normalize more dialogic modes of communication. They should use the insights gained in this study, and future research, to develop training programs that more effectively advance inclusivity as an organizational value. Scholars and practitioners alike need to move beyond diversity to inclusivity in order to enact real change and to promote transformative dialogue.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that in the five years following the repeal of DADT, many issues remain unresolved as GLB identities continue to be constructed as abnormal or deviant. Stigmatization processes remain, which function as a means of delegitimizing GLB identities within military culture. The stigma attached to GLB identities influences self-concept clarity and feelings of belonging for GLB service persons in detrimental ways. While the military presents a unique, and perhaps an extreme, context in which to observe phenomena of stigmatization, identity management, and the unintentional reinforcement of privilege in talk, findings from this study are also reflective of larger U.S. cultural discourses and everyday communicative practices. Therefore, this line of research should be pursued further, and in varying cultural contexts, to build upon existing theory.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

### Interview Protocol: Interview with GLBTQ Military Personnel

**Opening Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. Where are you from?
    b. Do you have a family?
2. Why did you join the military?
3. What does your military identity and experiences mean to you?
4. How long have you been in the military? What is your MOS? Rank?
5. Have you been deployed? Where? How many times?
6. How would you describe your sexual identity?
7. Tell me how you came to understand your sexual identity?
    a. Describe your upbringing. How did this inform your understanding of gender or sexuality?

**Prior to repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"**

1. How did you feel about being _____(gay/lesbian/bisexual) in the military prior to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"?
2. How did you feel about the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy?
3. How did you feel about having to conceal your sexual identity?
    a. Were you comfortable concealing this aspect of yourself? Explain.
    b. Share some situations in which you found it especially difficult to conceal your identity?
4. How did your sexual identity influence your experience during deployment?
5. Did you feel threatened regarding your (gay/lesbian/bisexual) identity? Explain.
    a. Were you worried that others would find out? Explain.
6. Did you develop close friendships while in the military?
    a. Did you feel as though you could be yourself with these individuals? Explain.
    b. How did you manage the concealment of your sexual identity with these close friends? Or did you?
    c. How did you navigate situations in which people asked questions about your personal life?
7. Did you disclose your sexuality to close friends within the military? Explain
    a. If yes, were you concerned that others would find out?
    b. If no, did you experience discomfort in concealing your sexuality (or gender identity) from these individuals?

**After Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or in last 5 years**

1. How did you feel when DADT was repealed?
2. After the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" did you decide to serve openly in the

military? Why or why not?

3. How did you come out to comrades or military leaders? Explain.
    a. Do you disclose your sexuality to some and not others? Explain.
    b. What influenced your decision when deciding whom you would come out to?
4. Did you plan how you would disclose your sexual identity to your heterosexual comrades? Explain.
5. Share one instance of coming out to a heterosexual comrade that specifically stands out to you.
    a. Was this difficult?
    b. What was the outcome? Explain.

**Identity negotiation**

1. After coming out, how did comrades react?
2. Was there a dialogue in which you discussed sexuality?
    a. Did comrades ask questions?
    b. Were they understanding?
3. How were you treated after coming out? Explain.
4. How do you feel about your decision to come out? (Regretful, content, relieved, etc.) Explain.
5. How did the act of "coming out" change your self-concept? Do you view yourself differently?
    a. Did you act differently after coming out?
    b. Do you *feel* differently now? Explain.
6. Do you feel that the conception of "Soldier/Marine/Sailor/Airman" has changed since the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell?"
    a. Has the military identity changed? In what ways?
    b. Do you feel the military is more inclusive?
    c. How has coming out lent to this shift?
7. *How do you currently feel about being (gay/lesbian/bisexual) in the military?
    a. Do you feel isolated? Accepted? Rejected? Respected?
8. What do you think these recent policy changes mean for the future of the U.S. military?
9. What advice would you give to a gay/lesbian/bisexual today if they were considering joining the military?

**Interview Protocol: Interview with Heterosexual Military Personnel**

**Opening Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself.
    a. Where are you from?
    b. Do you have a family?
2. Why did you join the military? What does your military identity and experiences mean to you?
3. How long have you been in the military? What is your MOS? Rank?
4. Have you been deployed? Where? How many times?
5. How would you describe your sexual identity?
6. Tell me how you came to understand sexuality?
    a. Describe your upbringing. How did this inform your understanding of sexuality and gender?
    b. How did you come to understand homosexuality?

**Prior to repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"**

1. What were your perceptions of gay men prior to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"? What were your perceptions of lesbians prior to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"? What were your perceptions of bisexuals prior to the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"? Explain.
2. Explain your previous experience with gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals?
    a. Do you have friends or family members who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual outside of the military? Explain
3. How did you feel about gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals serving in the military? Explain.
    a. What are you thoughts on "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"? Explain.
    b. Do you feel as though gays/lesbians/bisexuals people "fit in" to military culture? Explain.
4. Did you suspect that comrades you were close with might have been gay, lesbian, or bisexual?
    a. If so, how did you feel about this? Explain.
    b. Did this effect your actions? Your relationship?
5. Did any gay, lesbian, or bisexual comrades disclose their sexuality to you while serving under DADT?

**After Repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"**

1. When comrades "came out" after the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," how did you feel?
    a. Did you feel uncomfortable? Upset?
    b. Does it bother you?
    c. Did you feel happy? Why?
2. How did you react/respond to comrades as they came out to you? Explain.

3. Describe, in detail, one encounter in which a comrade came out to you?
    a. What did they say?
    b. Were you surprised?
    c. How did you respond?
    d. What were you thinking during this interaction?
4. Do you consider the interaction in which a comrade "came out" to you a pivotal moment in shifting your understanding of gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual individuals?

**Identity negotiation**

1. What are you perceptions of gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual individuals now that comrades have come out to you, or now that you are aware of their presence in the military?
    a. Do you feel differently about gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals now? Explain.
    b. Have your perceptions changed? Why? In what ways?
2. Did this disclosure make you feel differently about the person that came out? Explain.
    a. Do they seem to act differently toward you?
    b. Do you see them differently?
    c. Do you act differently toward them?
3. How did this disclosure influence your relationship? Explain.
4. Do you feel you have changed in any way through the experience of someone coming out to you?
    a. Did you act differently?
    b. Do you *feel* differently?
5. How do you currently feel about gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals serving in the military? Explain.
6. Do you feel that the conception of "Soldier/Sailor/Marine/Airman" changed through this experience? Explain.
    a. Since the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," has the traditional military identity shifted?
    b. Do you feel that gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals fit into Military culture?
7. What do you think the repeal of DADT means for the future of the military?

## APPENDIX B: CODING SCHEMES

Table 3.
*Coping with Identity Incongruity*

| Higher Level Code | Cultural Comm. Patterns | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Identity Repudiation** | *Dehumanization* | Where the males were all put together, there was one individual who was accused of being gay and he was not ... his platoon mates did what was called a blanket party, I don't know if you're ever heard of that, it's awful… They take pillowcases and put bars of soap in it, tie a knot around the other end, and while the person is sleeping in a bunk, wail on them...With these pillowcases that have soap ... and you get bruises and all that stuff. This individual, as far as I understood it, was not gay, but they thought that he was and they let him have it. (Casey) |
| | *Discrimination* | Every year in the navy we have evals that come out and we're ranked against the other people in our same category. Everyone in the rank right above me, they submit their recommendations for the ranking order of who should be ranked number one and number two. I was unanimously the choice for the number one spot. Ultimately, the military is not democracy, it's run by the top person. The top person, it is from a community that is traditionally but more conservative…They feel that I was unjustly given the number two spot which actually really affects how we make promotions. It was two out of 20 people but it wasn't number one and they felt that it was because I had come out. (Tony) |
| | *Stereotype Proliferation* | I remember a woman that I didn't know personally, but that I guess looked like or performed a certain type of sexuality. I remember other women in my unit would be like, "I'm going to wait until they're done showering before I go in there because I don't want them to check me out or see me naked or anything like that" (Rylie) |
| **Identity Incongruity** | *N/A* | It definitely created some resentment afterward. At the time, I wasn't think about it too much, but at this point of my life it still gets you a little frustrated because you're serving a country that doesn't support or care for your rights. (Rae) |
| **Coping with Identity Incongruity** | *Suppression of sexual identity* | I always wanted to do it, and at that point because I wasn't with anybody and I figured well you know, if I sign, if I join the military police, the obligation was 5 years. I figured I'd just be celibate, I wouldn't do anything, I didn't want to be with anybody, I wasn't thinking about hooking up with anybody, I ... at that point, I wanted escapism, and I wanted to tap into something that I always wanted to do. (Casey) |

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| *Segmentation of personal and professional lives* | I developed at-work relationships and then I developed not-at-work relationships. The people I had relationships outside of work were people that knew I was gay, or they themselves were gay. Then the people I had friendships with or whatever at work, it was basically at work only. (Bill) |
| *Identity Integration* | For me, a long time, I felt reserved. I felt like I was keeping some stuff back I couldn't be the whole person that I could be and ever since coming out, I've felt so much better about myself. I felt like I wasn't hiding something and I felt like I could really be who I wanted to be without being judged. (Danni) |

Table 4.
*Identity Management Strategies Before Repeal of DADT*

| Identity Management Strategies | Practices | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Cultivating Network Ignorance** | *Withdrawing* | There's probably a good maybe 6 to 8 years where I just kept that hidden because I felt like I couldn't get close with people because when I got close with them, then obviously this is something that would have to come up. (Danni) |
| | *Performing heterosexuality* | I guess I also tried to act like a straight guy. I'm not very feminine. I conditioned myself to get rid of this kind of gesture and that kind of thing. (Jason) |
| | *Fabricating "truths."* | I had to hide calls, hide conversations, hide that I was maybe in love with someone, or, like I said, act like I was interested in someone else there who I wasn't. (Rae) |
| | *Avoiding* | I basically would stay out of the conversation or walk away from the conversation because I knew if I would've come to [their] defense then things would've just been [difficult] for me. Typically that was the way that was handled. (Yvonne) |
| | *Stage-managing* | I remember the first time I went to a gay bar, I parked like a mile away from it because I was afraid somebody would see my car. (Bill) |
| **Preserving Underground Networks** | *Seeking safe spaces and/or similar others* | I joined a softball team, which was actually in another town, at another post. I was in Germany at the time and so, I would go and it was like a 45 minute drive to get to this other post and I actually met some friends there. I could be myself outside of my own environment. (Avery) |
| | *Adhering to unwritten rules* | It was like a secret silent pact that we had amongst each other in training. I knew stuff was going on in our bays and the showers and where we slept, but we had this sort of silent, almost like agreeing with each other that we haven't really talked about it, particularly in front of drill sergeants or any of our instructors or any of the ... not faculty, but any of the people that were over us in terms of ... especially in terms of basic training, because if you make one wrong move or you do one thing wrong you could easily get kicked out […] It's like we had this almost silent agreement with people that I knew to really not talk about it. (Rylie) |

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| | *Protecting ingroup members* | A CID investigator, Criminal Investigative Division, he said, “We'll make all these charges of homosexuality go away if you list all of your known associates that are gay or lesbian.” I didn't buckle under that and I stood my ground because I knew they didn't have anything firm against me so, I guess I got lucky and ballsy enough that I didn't get kicked out. (Avery) |
| **Disclosing Strategically** | *Reciprocating admissions* | If they disclosed to me, then that was something that's different. I could trust them. That would usually prompt me to disclosing back later. (Rae) |
| | *Gauging opinions* | It's when I get a little bit of a sense of who they are. I just figure out what the type of person they are and how they will respond first before I tell them. (Danni) |
| | *Evaluating relationships* | Initially it was the people I went on my first assignment with. If I had known them for a few years, I'd watch they interacted with other people and how they felt about the topic in general. If I felt safe around them as far as the way they conducted themselves, it was something that I would disclose. (Yvonne) |
| | *Appraising trustworthiness* | Once I introduce them to my family, then that was me taking that next step saying, ‘I trust you. This is who I am, this is who I'm dating. (Maria) |

Table 5.
*Identity Management Strategies After Repeal of DADT*

| Identity Management Strategies | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|
| **Combatting Microaggressions** | I will correct somebody if they, like I said, if they say husband, I will make sure to correct them about wife, that it's my wife, not husband. (Carla) |
| **Correcting Misperceptions** | Being in combat, which I do have my combat action badge, I explained to them, "Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean I'm not going to have your back in a fire fight. Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean that I'm going to wimp out when bullets are flying at my head. Just because I'm gay, doesn't mean I'm going to pull you to safety if you're wounded or injured. Just because of my sexuality, does not degrade me as a person and as a trained American Army soldier. (Kevin) |
| **Being honest** | Well, I will say ... I don't ever speak out, disclosing ... I will say that, it's kind of, I guess it's kind of embarrassing to say out loud, but I usually try not to disclose it, to any one in the military, just because you don't know their stance on it, you don't know how they're going to feel about, so I try not to. What I don't do is, I don't lie about it anymore. […] Or if they ask, I don't have a problem actually telling them the truth, but it's not something that I usually tend to volunteer information on. (Carla) |

Table 6.
*Feelings Associated with Identity Management Choices*

| Identity Management Strategies | Feeling | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Strategies of *closedness.*** *Prior to Repeal of DADT | *Shame* | It really, you kind of feel dirty, because the Navy saying is honor, courage, and commitment, and one of those is being honest with everybody, including yourself, and that's something you couldn't be honest about. You couldn't sit there and tell people you're gay, because you could get kicked out, so you're keeping a secret. Once you've been in the military a while, your military family is your family, so it's like keeping a secret from your own family. (Bill) |
| | *Isolation* | I think it's got to be a huge isolation factor because while I was at West Point and going through all of this there was nobody that I could talk to about it. They had counseling services and all that kind of stuff but you could not have told that to somebody even in counseling setting. (Lauren) |
| | *Stress* | The results of course, which you don't realize is happening, is that every single waking moment you're either treasonously or subconsciously hiding and it creates PTSD. It creates stress and builds up over the years, that kind of paranoia and hyper-vigilance. (Alfred) |
| **Strategies of *openness*** *After Repeal of DADT | *Reduced Stress* | I felt more free, definitely. After I came out, I felt really that also ... I thought that it really wasn't a big deal at all. Like, it's not a big deal, everyone's cool about it. (Jason) |
| | *Inclusion* | Before, it was ... I didn't express who I was, or like I said, my life outside of the military ... it literally was like living a double life. People that I met within, inside the military were not involved in my life outside of the military. I don't have that anymore, I've got plenty of amazing people that I've been able to actually introduce into my personal life from the military, and that was something that I couldn't do before. (Carla) |
| | *Self-Liking* | I finally accepted myself and I could love myself. I guess that was the biggest part of it. I can love myself again and be who I am. (Bill) |

Table 7.
*Discursive Constructions of GLB Military*

| Primary Discourses | Themes | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **GLB Military as Threat to Military Effectiveness** | *Homogeneity enhances unit cohesion* | The big thing about military culture is that we look down upon people who are trying to stand out as individuals, simply because of the fact that we have to function as a cohesive, you know, unit. We have to function as one, and there's really no place for individuality. (Jim) |
| | *Homosexuality threatens military masculinity* | I honestly think it makes our military look weak when you see two men or two women walking down the street hand in hand in uniform. […] I don't feel like it shows dominance. (Tiana) |
| **GLB Military as Valuable Assets to the Military Organization** | *Sexuality has no bearing on ability to perform job functions* | A person's been doing the job for ten or fifteen years and then all of a sudden revels that they are gay or lesbian and now they are out. Why? Because they can't perform their job or because you don't like their sexual orientation? Its stupid. Its ridiculous. (Steve) |
| | *Diversity can enhance military effectiveness* | Diversity can do nothing except help the Army. Different people who see the world in different ways is exactly what the Army needs to continue to progress and move forward and be a force for good in the world. (Joanna) |
| | *Honesty is central to unit cohesion* | I feel like integrity is extremely important especially when you're putting your life on the line or you're giving time away for the military that if you're not living ... If you keep part of yourself from the military, you're not as effective and you can't fully trust the person next to you which is extremely important. (Danni) |

Table 8.
*Discursive Practices (De)Centering Heteronormativity*

| Orientations | Communicative practices | Sample Quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Monologic Orientation** *Reinforcing heterosexual privilege | *Negating difference* | I know that it's certainly treated as a significant event, but I never came out as a heterosexual person, and I'm not sure why such significance is attached to it. It's none of my business whether you like boys or girls, or both. (John) |
| | *Refuting responsibility* | Personally, I never participated and so far as using the same words or responding in kind of a positive manner towards the person using them. I don't recall ever standing up and saying, "Hey, that's inappropriate," or anything like that. (Jim) |
| | *Victimizing majority group members* | Nothing against them, the main thing, the main fear, for me was is he going to find me attractive or is he going to tray to make any moves on me. I wouldn't like to have answered and I wouldn't know what to do, tell him to stop or something. That was my big thing. Never happened, but that was my fear. (Samuel) |
| | *Trivializing heterosexism* | Kind of like gender calling as a name, and somebody said, oh, the guys are horsing around, and somebody called you gay or used the word "fag," they didn't mean it in a derogatory manner, but because of the Don't Ask Don't Tell, you couldn't use those type of words. (Zeek) |
| | *Denying the persistent problem of homophobia* | I don't think they understand that in today's society, nobody really cares who is what, you know? (Jim) |
| **Dialogic Orientation** *Decentering heteronormativity | *Admitting one's own prejudices* | I think the culture needs to be changed and more accepting. My self included. Like I said when I think ... I can sit here and tell you that I don't have a problem with gay men serving, but I can also tell you that I don't want to know if Marine is gay. Both of those statements are the truth. (Tiana) |
| | *Acknowledging privilege* | If it wasn't from the peers making jokes, it was a time when I could recall a staff sergeant or a higher ranking enlisted sergeant making decisions and I could tell he was biased towards us that were straight, giving us more flexibility. (Chris) |

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| *Recognizing that heterosexism persists* | If you are gay or lesbian and you make it openly known, there's a lot of conservative high ranking officers enlisted out there that use that against you. (Chris) |
| *Perspective taking* | Can you imagine every day you go into your house you close the door and then you are allowed to be there person you are? Every day you walk out your front door and you're having to be somebody you're not? That is a terrible way to live. Unfortunately I think it was up to 90 percent of society that's the way that they would keep it. I think that that is really unfortunate. (Steve) |