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“Being Straight in the Army Is Pretty Easy, Being Gay Is Not”: The Communicative Resilience of Lesbian and Gay Military Service Members

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“BEING STRAIGHT IN THE ARMY IS PRETTY EASY, BEING GAY IS NOT”: THE COMMUNICATIVE RESILIENCE OF LESBIAN AND GAY MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

by

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ABSTRACT

"BEING STRAIGHT IN THE ARMY IS PRETTY EASY, BEING GAY IS NOT": THE COMMUNICATIVE RESILIENCE OF LESBIAN AND GAY MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

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The U.S. Military has 1.9 million individuals serving across five branches, and official policy permits anyone to serve regardless of sexuality (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Despite the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT), the culture of the U.S. military remains unfriendly to Lesbian and Gay service members (McNamara et al., 2021b), which influences service members' decisions to disclose sexuality or be "out" in the military (Evans et al., 2019; McNamara et al., 2021a). Lesbian and Gay service members are situated in a heteronormative and masculine culture in the U.S. military and as a result experience disruptions that may necessitate the enactment of resilience. Using the communication theory of resilience (CTR) this study identified post coming-out (in the military) triggers experienced by Lesbian and Gay service members and their communicative responses to such triggers that enact resilience. Through qualitative interviews (n = 12) this study's findings illustrate the heteronormative culture experienced by LG service members and challenges they face related to their sexuality. This study also identified five communication processes of affirming identity anchors, maintain, and use communication networks, use alternative logics, and finally legitimize negative feelings and engage in positive actions.

Keywords: Sexuality, Military, Resilience, Communication Theory of Resilience, Coming Out, Qualitative Interviews

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, my partner, and all LGBT military service members.

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Chapter One: Introduction & Literature Review

The official policy of the U.S. Military allows anyone to serve regardless of sexuality (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). However, this has not always been the case. DADT was a federal policy that barred gay and lesbian service members from "disclosing a nonheterosexual sexual orientation during their enlisted service" (Wilder & Wilder, 2012, p. 628). The justification behind the policy was that such a disclosure would harm unit cohesion and was not in line with military expectations (Lynch, 2008). Under DADT around 13,000 service members were discharged because of the policy (Letendre & Abramson, 2022). Seventeen years after it was enacted, Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) was repealed by President Obama's administration. Then the policy was repealed but, after the repeal of DADT (Quam, 2015), it still retained heteronormative and masculine mentality (Steidl & Brookshire, 2019; Wood & Toppelberg, 2017). The unfriendly culture (McNamara et al., 2021b) influences a LG service member's decision to disclose their sexuality or be "out" in the military (Evans et al., 2019; McNamara et al., 2021a).

As a result of a heteronormative culture, LGBT[1] service members have experienced discrimination, harassment, and bias while serving (Belkin et al., 2013). These negative behaviors may serve as triggers or disruptions and have the potential to lead Lesbian and Gay service members to enact resilience (Trivette, 2010). Resiliency strategies might be used by queer[2] service members to persevere after challenging times and work to create a resilient culture for other Lesbian and Gay service members. This study uses Buzzanell's (2010) communication

[1] LGBT/LGB/LG-This study focuses on LG, however when citing literature, the terminology of their population of study is used.
[2] Queer- this term is used to refer to the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. This study focuses on LG but has implications for the queer community.

theory of resilience (CTR) to understand how Lesbian and Gay (LG) service members experience military life after they come out, and to identify (a) triggers they experience, such as harassment or differential treatment, and (b) their communicative responses to enact resilience. CTR is a useful theory to approach the study of LG individuals living in a heteronormative culture such as the U.S. military, as the culture serves as a source of triggers.

Resilience

Previous research on LGB military has often focused on negative outcomes of LGB military service, such as medical and mental challenges (Mark et al., 2019), discrimination (Van Gilder, 2019b) or harassment (Alford & Lee, 2016). Studies should look at the resilience strategies of LGBT service members to distinguish between what allow them to thrive versus coping during their service. Resilience refers to how an individual handles and perseveres through challenging or stressful experiences (Buzzanell, 2010).

CTR is focused on the "communicative process of adaptation and transformation, reactivity and proactivity, stability and change, disruption and reintegration, destabilization and restabilization" (Buzzanell, 2018, p. 99). CTR seeks to understand how the communicative processes in combination with material resources are used by individuals to respond to disruptions, trauma, loss, and disaster (Buzzanell, 2018). CTR consists of three components: "trigger events, a focus on anticipatory and reactive resilience, and five core processes that enable humans to enact control or empowerment in their lives when confronting disruptions and shaping new normal that ensues" (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 68). Before enacting resilience an individual experiences a triggering event (Buzzanell, 2010). A trigger may occur during or as the result of a relational turning point, such as physical loss or relational termination, or involve a cascade of triggers (Buzzanell, 2018). Resilience triggers can also include physical distance,

cultural differences, and bureaucratic obstacles (Scharp et al., 2021). Triggers can emerge from systemic or situational disruptions (Scharp et al., 2022). In this study, I label triggers as challenges. This is because trigger works more for large life events, and not encapsulating of the smaller cascading situations that lead individuals to enact resilience. Resilience can be understood as a proactive or reactive process that individuals, families, or communities use in surviving or preserving through hardships (Buzzanell, 2018). Proactive resilience is also referred to as anticipatory resilience, and refers to "a communicatively constituted story logic, or system of reasoning about the world, through which they understand the possibility of future normal" (Betts et al., 2022, p. 212). Anticipatory resilience occurs after a disruption is experienced, and an individual uses that disruption to prepare or makes sense of future disruptions. This study will seek to uncover reactive resilience. CTR posits that resilience emerges from five processes: crafting normalcy, affirm identity anchors, maintain, and use communication networks, use alternative logics, and finally legitimize negative feelings and engage in positive actions (Buzzanell, 2010). These processes can occur on their own or overlap with one another (Buzzanell, 2018). Ramirez and Sterzing (2017) outlined four strategies of strength and resistance that LGBT military might use in a heteronormative environment: (a) the act of queering military trainings, values, resources and spaces, (b) managing being in and out of the closet, (c) creating underground support groups, and (d) engaging in activism outside of the military. These four strategies of strength and resistance may emerge as resilience processes in the current study.

Crafting Normalcy

The first resilience process is crafting normalcy, which refers to the process of establishing a new routine despite hardships experienced. Crafting normalcy occurs in both

implicit and explicit ways, through actions that allow individuals to maintain a sense of regularity (Buzzanell, 2010) and occurs though actions like individuals engaging in normal life as much as possible despite the occurring hardships (Lillie et al., 2018). Crafting normalcy may involve creating new relationships (Scharp et al., 2020) and routines, such as those of sanitizing and masking during the COVID-19 pandemic (Turner et al., 2022). Rossetto and Martin (2022) demonstrated that mentors normalizing the struggles their students were facing was one way they helped students be resilient. LG military might craft normalcy by discussing their experiences with others and normalizing the struggles, which may help other LG service members enact resilience. The presence of an active queer support community improves the ability of LGBT individuals to craft normalcy (Scharp et al., 2023).

Affirming Identity Anchors

The second process, affirming identity anchors is the idea that individuals and communities draw on their identity discourses. Identity anchors are the aspects of a person's life and the groups that they draw on when describing themselves to others (Buzzanell, 2010). Identity anchors have included maintaining religion/spirituality as well as focusing on the identity of being a parent (Lillie et al., 2018). Van Gilder (2019b) explained participants efforts to reconcile identity after the repeal of DADT by coming out to more people and merging the divide between work and private life. Military wives during the COIVD-19 pandemic engaged in resilience by using military language to affirm their military identity (Fanari et al., 2023).

Maintaining and Using Communication Networks

A third way resilience is enacted is by maintaining and using a communication network. Support groups, romantic partners, and counselors are sources used when creating and maintaining communication networks (Lillie et al., 2018; Scharp et al., 2020). The act of sharing

stories and connecting with others experiencing similar situations enacts resilience (Pangborn, 2019). Potter (2023) showed after a hurricane that women activated their relational network to organize relief efforts. Maintaining and using communication networks includes sharing resources for support and making connections with different communities (Rossetto & Martin, 2022). LG service members may seek out support from other LG service members, as well as different communities. Scharp et al. (2023) found LGBT individuals already connected to LGBT communities utilized communication networks more than LGBT individuals without strong existing connections to the communities.

Alternative Logics

The fourth resilience process of putting alternative logics to work refers to how "resilient systems incorporate seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work through development of alternative logics or through reframing the entire situation" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 6). Storytelling can identify areas of alternative logic, by allowing individuals to recognize and use grief to reconnect with family after a disruption (Pangborn, 2019). Mantras provided an alternative logic, cliché sayings becoming a way of reframing a situation (Fanari et al., 2023). Humor has been used as an alternative logic to reframe disruptions (Lillie et al., 2018). The idea of using alternative logics has been seen in other non-CTR studies. For example, LGB service members say the act of coming out as benefitting other LGB service members, and that the positive act of being out, outside of the military made up for negative aspects in the military (McNamara et al., 2021). Alternative logics have also included engaging in actions that were once thought of as irrational and done so as a form of resistance (Potter, 2023). Mentors have helped students engage in alternative logics by encouraging them to reframe challenges. Another way alternative logics have been enacted is by reframing the situation, and speaking positive

futures into being for example, Scharp et al. (2023). For others challenges like COVID-19 allowed them to enact alternative logics such as spending more time with family, learning to live with less, or being thankful for what they have because the pandemic caused them to lose their job or income (Turner et al., 2022).

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

The last resilience strategy of legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action which involves recognizing the negative feelings during a hard time but focusing on productive action (Buzzanell, 2010). Productive action may create back up plans and the ability to be flexible (Fanari et al., 2023). Legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action has been enacted by recognizing the disruption and its negative aspects, but engaging in positive actions (Lillie et al., 2018). When foregrounding productive action while backgrounding negative feelings, alienated parents focused on being a good parent to their non-estranged children in hopes this would convey to their estranged child that they were a good parent (Scharp et al., 2020). Mothers in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria felt anger and frustration toward the injustices, they and others faced but decided to channel those feelings toward helping other mothers (Potter, 2023). When experiencing difficult times, mentors helped students develop skills and make something out of challenging experiences (Rossetto & Martin, 2022). LGBT individuals who were afraid to come out, engaged in productive action of searching for answers online that could help address those fears (Scharp et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, mothers worked to get their families to focus on positive actions and making the home environment fun (Turner et al., 2022).

Houston and Buzzanell (2018) argued that future studies on resilience should examine local, national, and global resiliency. This approach to future research could be beneficial as it

could “interrogate the ways in which individuals, organizations, media systems, and governments construct and depict resilience, to better understand common perspectives regarding resilience as used by people and systems” (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018, p. 27). This study will seek to uncover how LG individuals are interact with their queer, military, and other communities, to enact resilience. Bowen et al. (2013) argued that future resilience studies look more at the community context, looking at how heredity, development, economy, history, and culture are connected to disruptions and the resilience enactment (Bowen et al., 2013). The U.S. military is a community that consists of a conglomerate of communities. This provides the context for studying the different areas discussed by Bowen et al. as they are experienced differently across the communities within the military. This study will address the LG communities in the military.

Future studies on LGB service members and families should focus on how to create pathways for positive change within the military (Sahlstein Parcell & Romo, 2022) and the everyday acts of resilience engaged in by LGB service members (Ramirez & Sterzing, 2017). Oswald and Sternberg (2014) noted that the inequity experienced by LGB service members, and the military’s neutrality in correcting these inequities is problematic as it results in the lack of LGB resources. This in turn might reduce the number of individuals enlisting in the military. CTR provides an opportunity to uncover ways in which the military creates a culture that leads to trigging events and how LGB service members engage in resilience strategies. An understating of these occurrences can be useful for other LGB service members experiencing or entering the military, to prepare them for possible disruptions.

Buzzanell (2019) called for future studies of CTR beyond looking at how individuals and communities use identity anchors when enacting resilience and instead to “consider the ways in

which difference (e.g., gender, age, ability, class, nationality) constitutes how people enact resilience processes and with what consequences" (p. 78). For example, Scharp et al. (2020) identified four resilience constraints of ideological power: ideological, institutionalized, interactional, and psycho-social constraints. The military, and queer service members are a way in which to study the local, national, and global intersections of resilience as well as community context. LGB service members come from different backgrounds, which provides the opportunity to study the intersections of identity and power systems. Tian and Bush (2020) argued "continuous obstacles, inequalities, and adversities that women in politics face necessitate understanding how they enact resilience or reintegrate after disruptions, involving for example, reassignment and socialization compounded with everyday negotiation of gender and misalignment" (p. 71). For women in Tian and Bush's study, resilience emerged in four practices: resistance, (re)alignment, transformation, and network achievement, and LG service members may face similar obstacles and inequalities compared to the women in their study.

History of LGBT Service in the U.S. Military

The history of sexuality-based discrimination in the military dates to the revolutionary war, however, not until the 1920s did the U.S. military start criminalizing homosexuality (Connell, 2015). During the early 1900s, homosexuality was viewed as something to be treated or cured, an illness that made an individual unfit for service (Barrett, 2020). During the 1960s homosexuality was starting to be de-medicalized, meaning it was no longer seen as an illness (Connell, 2015). Despite this, the U.S. military still maintained its ban on LGBT individuals serving (Frank, 2013). In 1993 DADT came into U.S. law, which allowed LGBT individuals to serve in the military (Borch, 2010). Under this policy LGBT individuals were not allowed to disclose or express their sexuality while serving (Borch, 2010). DADT also prevented others

inquiring about another person's sexuality (Kearney, 2018). DADT created a "hyper-private space that relegate[d] homosexuality to the closet to protect the heteronormative ideology and identity of the solider" (Rich et al., 2012, p. 281). Before DADT LGBT individuals were barred from serving, so if they did join then they would have to remain deeply closeted. This and life under DADT had implications for the communication of LGBT service members. They were not allowed to communicate about their identity or many aspects of their personal life.

Under DADT, LGB service members lived with the stress of hiding queer identity and their personal relationships (Mount et al., 2015). This stress prevented LGB service members from seeking mental health care due to fears of confidentiality (Barber 2012; Mount et al., 2015). Those serving under DADT faced sexual stigma (negative attitudes about LGB individuals) and pressure to conform to traditional gender norms (Burks, 2011). This policy impacted on the mental health of LGB veterans and resulted in higher levels of depression, PTSD, alcohol use, and suicidal tendencies compared to their heterosexual peers while serving under DADT (Cochran et al., 2013). The above outcomes are what make it important to study LG military, and specifically their resilience strategies. Studies have focused on the negative outcomes mentioned above, which is pertinent in understanding what LG service members face and the health outcomes related to those experiences. While LG service members may experience these negative outcomes, they still need to find ways to continue serving. The current study works to document not just the challenges but how service members communicatively respond to those challenges in ways that develop resilience.

U.S. Military Culture

The culture of the U.S. military has immense influence on every aspect of its members' lives. As the U.S. military is a total institution, it engulfs much of an individual's life, both

professionally and personally. There are three ways the U.S. military culture situates LG service members to experience tensions which include heteronormativity, identity, and health and wellbeing. The three are separate from each other but connected in myriad ways. For example heteronormativity can impact the perception of one's identity, which can then impact the health and wellbeing of LG service members.

The first way the U.S military is a site in which tensions arise, is through heteronormativity, which refers to the privileging of heterosexuality and "a pervasive force in which heteronorms are linked to social oppression" (Marchia & Sommer, 2019, p. 275). The U.S. military has a presence of heteronormativity (Wood & Toppelberg, 2017) and a high collectivist character which contrasts with the individualist nature of U.S. civilian life (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). The heteronormative and masculine nature of the U.S. military is connected to the warrior identity, which is the idea that service members are expected to uphold the values of "loyalty, discipline, strength, self-sacrifice, and courage" (Knobloch & Wehrman, 2014, p. 60). The values can be held and identified with any individual regardless of identity. However, there is an assumption that one must be heterosexual to adhere to the values, and anyone outside of that assumption cannot uphold those values in the military. The collective culture of the U.S. military comes from its core values and "cultural norms that powerfully control its members behavior and also create cohesiveness within the group" (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016, p. 2061). This can also be referred to as primacy of the mission, which places military duties above all other priorities (Knobloch & Wehrman, 2014). This means that those who do not adhere to heteronormative expectations are perceived as not adhering to the norms and interfering with the priority of the military. Those perceived as being feminine as well as displaying feminine actions, are seen as being a threat to the effectiveness of the military (Van Gilder, 2019a) and

therefore military cohesiveness. Femininity in the U.S. military is looked down on, women and non-heterosexual males feel the need to communicate in a way that is in line with the masculine identity of the military (Van Gilder, 2019a). Masculinity in the military is defined as "toughness, power, stoicism, aggression, and superiority over others, even other groups within the military" (Schaefer et al., 2021, p. 612). However, even when those labeled as others communicate in a way that aligns with masculine and heteronormativity, they are still labeled as other and seen as not fitting in with the culture of the military. The heteronormative and collectivistic culture of the U.S. military means that LG service members navigate the tensions of individual and military identity and feel pressure to conform to military cultural norms. The military collectivistic culture exists because "military life provides a structured lifestyle through rules, guidelines, and expectations that frame members' adherence to core values determined via the branch of service" (Lane, 2019, p. 92). The collectivist nature is tied to the masculine nature of the military and is important to understand as it can demonstrate why military culture treats some individuals in negative ways.

As Rich et al. (2012) explained, the U.S. military culture is highly heteronormative and LGBT individuals feel the need to conform to the social norms to fit in. In a study on LGB service members, Evans et al. (2019) reported that the service members in their study all came out to at least one person in the military. However, the level of outness of the LGB service members was higher in their civilian life, compared to their disclosures within the military. Another study showed LGB service members reported to be out to at least one other individual in the military (McNamara et al., 2021a). While these studies showed LGB military members were out, these disclosures were only to a certain degree, which means that stigma surrounding sexuality remains. This is further shown by Oblea et al., (2023) who examined barriers for LGBT

service members in accessing and utilizing healthcare. Participants in their study reported several barrier experiences, which included lack of support from military healthcare providers, lack of privacy which resulted in them being outed, discrimination from religious leadership or chaplains, harassment, bulling and abuse, issues with the Veterans Administration (VA), and feeling pressure to leave the military.

LGB service members who participated in Van Gilder's (2017) study engaged in several identity management strategies when making the decision to reveal or conceal their identity. One strategy used was identity concealment and was used before and after the repeal of DADT. This was done by gauging the language of others to determine if they were someone who would positively respond to disclosures about non-heterosexuality. After the repeal of DADT, participants engaged in three identity management strategies of combating microaggressions, correcting misconceptions, and discontinuing overt fabrications. The act of combating microaggressions involved correcting heteronormative assumptions of others and derogatory language used against GLB service members. GLB service members engaged in another identity management strategy of correcting misconceptions which "refers to the intentional process whereby participants attempted to deconstruct hegemonic discourses about GLB persons, challenge dominant stereotypes, and educate heterosexual comrades about other sexualities" (Van Gilder, 2017, p. 167). This is different from correcting heteronormative assumptions as it was focused on misconceptions about GLB people. This includes heteronormative assumptions, however the act of correcting heteronormative assumptions sought to correct other ways heteronormativity occurs. The final identity management strategy of discontinuing overt fabrications is when LGB service members stopped lying about their queer identity. This did not

mean those individuals came out, but when asked, they would provide information about themselves.

The second site of tension created by the U.S. military culture, is the impact on identity. While in place, DADT created paradoxes of identity for LGBT service members these paradoxes are sites of tension in which the policy of DADT had an opposite impact than what it intended, as gay spaces were created instead of outlawing them. One example of this was the creation of queer spaces in the military (Trivette, 2010). These queer spaces are acts of resistance and arose because LGBT service members defied the mandated silence and openly discussed their queer identity. GLB service members experienced an identity incongruity, meaning they felt their military and GLB identity were incompatible (Van Gilder, 2019b). Strategies included, suppressing sexual identity over role identity, segmenting personal and professional lives, and attempting to reconcile sexual and military identity (Van Gilder, 2019b). These may emerge as a resilience strategy. LGB service members did not see their LGB identity and their military identity as being able to coexist, but instead they had to manage their LGB identity. GLB identities faced repudiation through dehumanization, discrimination, and stereotype proliferation (Van Gilder, 2019b).

Dehumanization of GLB service members came from others treating them as subhuman, through the act of physical and verbal violence (Van Gilder, 2019b). GLB service members also experienced discrimination by not being able to serve under DADT, negative performance reviews, and not feeling a part of the military family (Van Gilder, 2019b). Stereotypes that GLB service members faced included the perception that one will contract HIV by touching a GLB individual, hypersexuality of GLB people, and that they are weaker than heterosexuals (Van Gilder, 2019b). One argument for the ban of gay troops was that they would be a health burden

to the military, as gay men with HIV would be considered undeployable, and that they would spread the disease to others (Brouwer, 2004). The experiences described above may act as triggers, leading to the enactment of resilience by LG service members. Resilience is not something that someone has but something that is enacted or always occurs (Buzzanell, 2010), and yet resilience processes are not always productive (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018). The nature of the military requires a time commitment that civilians do not experience to the same extreme. If an individual experiences challenges but knows their time within an organization or situation is limited, they may not enact resilience. However, those in the military may be locked into years of service and not be able to leave their job without serious repercussions. This makes it particularly to study resilience of LG service members.

The third way in which a tension arises out of the culture of the U.S. military is the health and well-being of LGBT service members (Mark et al. 2019). The act of being out has a positive impact on one's life and is associated with lowers levels of depression among LGBT service members (Evans et al., 2019). Service members who disclosure their sexuality have reported the perceived higher levels of social and task cohesion within their units (Moradi, 2009). Military culture and environment can shape the experiences of LG service members which may influence their decision to come out and shape their experiences as a queer service member. The policy of DADT is one feature that created and maintained a specific culture within the military. An example of this can be seen in a study by Kirby and Krone (2002) who studied work-family policies in an organization. The participants in their study described the policies as creating "conditions of inequity and preferential treatment" between those who did not have families and those who did (Kirby & Krone, 2002, p. 67). This tension illustrates "that both 'micro' structures, such as coworker interactions, and 'macro' level structures, such as traditional

separations between public and private, gendered expectations, and orientations of individualism and meritocracy, impacted the system of how work-family benefits were constructed" (Kirby & Krone, 2002, p. 69). The study by Kirby and Krone, show the interplay between organizational policies and the behavior and communication of its members. While serving in the military LGBT service members often experienced jokes, offensive comments, and harassment targeted toward LGBT individuals (Alford & Lee, 2016). These types of experiences create a stressful culture for LG service members. Minority stress, which consists of negative experiences, rejection and discrimination, and internalized homophobia (Bos et al., 2004), is something LG individuals face in the military. One of the main stressors of LG individuals was disclosing of sexuality in different settings (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). This led to problems developing a healthy sense of self. Stressors such has harassment, bullying, stereotyping, and dehumanization can trigger or create a cascade of triggers which lead to LG service members engaging in resilience strategies. LG service members may engage in resilience behaviors to cope with these stressors, and work to build resilience for other LG service members. One of the triggers for resilience may be the act of having to come out while service in the military. Those who do not come out in the military still face challenges and could engage in resilient practices, however the focus of this study is those who came out during their service.

Coming Out

Research on LGBT populations has focused heavily on coming out and the act of self-disclosure (Helens-Hart, 2017; King et al. 2008; Venetis et al., 2017; Wells & Kline, 1987). Disclosures of sexuality can occur through explicit messages, such as use of same sex partners pronouns, or implicitly using nonverbal communication such as artifacts or appearance (Helens-Hart, 2017). Other studies have explored how organizational culture influences coming out. The

climate of an organization contributes to a positive or negative experience of coming out (King et al., 2008). The ability to be out at work influences employee satisfaction with their work and the organization and helps them to feel supported by management (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). When coming out in the workplace individuals must navigate the culture of the organization, the context of the environment, the risks and benefits, and the motivations for coming out (McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2015). The presence of antidiscrimination policies and a supportive organizational climate are factors considered in the risk analysis of LGBT individuals who decide to come out (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Helens-Hart, 2017). Wells and Kline (1987) noted that LGBT individuals were motivated to come out as they desired to be true to themselves and to build relationships with their colleagues.

Studies that have focused on self-disclosure of sexuality have looked at the motivations and the risks associated with coming out (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Helens-Hart, 2017; Li & Samp, 2019; Wells & Kline, 1987). The feelings of fear and rejection are factors that prevent individuals from coming out and fulfilling a positive queer identity (Wells & Kline, 1987). The stigma surrounding sexuality shapes both positive and negative experiences of coming out (McDonald et al., 2020). The risk of losing one's jobs is often a consideration when deciding to come out in the workplace (Helens-Hart, 2017; McNamara et al., 2021a; Wells & Kline, 1987). Even when queer individuals come out of the closet at work, they still perceive risks. Gay men have been found to not fully discuss their personal life and sexuality for the risk of being "too out" and hurting their careers in the process (Tindall & Waters, 2012).

Military Coming Out

Power structures such as homophobia and heteroideology (Tindall & Waters, 2012) also influence the decision to come out. The military has as authoritarian structure, and an

individual's rank determines their power (Knobloch & Wehrman, 2014). Relational power has been shown to be a contributing factor when deciding to come out (Li & Samp, 2019). Evans et al. (2019) studied LBG military and found that almost all their participants came out in the military to some degree but did not serve fully out of the closet. LG service members also reported anxiety in being out to others in the military. Levels of outness were lower in the military compared to level of outness outside the military (Evans et al., 2019). This means that the culture of the U.S. military is still unfriendly to LG service members. McNamara et al. (2021a) studied the extent of outness and determined LGBT service members came out at the institutional, interpersonal, and individual level (McNamara et al., 2021a). On an institutional level, LGBT service members felt a reluctance to come out, as they perceived an unsafe culture in the military. When looking at interpersonal disclosures, participants looked for red, green, and white flags in other individuals, which would influence disclosures. Red flags were the perception that others were not LGBT friendly because of their age and rank, green flags included seeing other LGBT service members being accepted in their unit, others coming out to them, level of education, and age. White flags involved any communication from others that signaled it was a safe environment. On the individual level, LGBT service members did not want to disclose their sexuality to avoid being a burden by being different, while other participants explained they disclosed their sexuality to be true to themselves, and to be positive force in military.

The heteronormative assumptions of society means that a person is never fully in the closet or out of the closet, it is instead a continual negotiation of identity, a performance (Ward & Winstanley, 2005). DiDomenico (2015) argued that coming out is a lifelong process, and a performative act as it is repeated throughout a person's life because heterosexuality is assumed

and not homosexuality. Coming out is not one act, but a reiterative process, which can happen in situations and contexts that are stressful and contain risks. This provides an opportunity to examine resilience over long periods of time. As discussed above the research has covered coming out and the impacts of doing so. The above studies show that while LGB service members might be out, they do not live fully out of the closet and still experience negative events. This current study seeks to explore the act of being out in the military and the responses of LGB service members to enact resilience. The arguments by Ward and Wistanley (2005) and DiDomenico show future studies need to examine the process of being out, and how in the process of living out LG individuals respond to disruptions. LG military is a coculture in a heteronormative world and those, who are out, chose to come out and experience stressors, which may act as triggers which lead to resilience being enacted.

To explore these experiences, I asked the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do LG service members experience military life post coming out?

RQ 2: What challenges do LG service members encounter?

RQ 3: What resilience processes do LG service members draw upon in response to triggers?

Chapter Two: Methods

In this chapter I review my positionality and how I approach research on queer populations as a gay individual. I also present the reasons why qualitative methods were chosen. I then review the methods I engaged in including procedures, participants, recruitment, interview procedures, and data analysis. I conclude the chapter by reviewing the traits of quality research and how my study complies with those traits.

Positionality/Philosophical Commitments

I align myself under the interpretative paradigm. In acknowledging my position as a researcher, privilege, and power I present my positionality. I am a gay white cis male. I am the son of a military veteran. I am connected to these two aspects of my research. However, I am also an outsider as I have not served in the military. These factors may shape how I approach my research, and how I interpret the experiences of my participants. The environment of higher education is generally more accepting of LGBT individuals, and as a result my experiences of being gay in that space is different from the experiences of LGBT service members. Nelson (2020) discussed five aspects of studying queer participants as a queer individual. These five aspects are euphoria of connection, relationships with participants, retraumatization through listening, finding oneself on the outside, and the researchers shifting identity.

The euphoria of connection refers to the connections with participants, pride in researching queer topics, and satisfaction with one's own identity (Nelson, 2020). I experienced this while conducting this study, as I was able to talk to a wide range of Lesbian and Gay individuals who told stories that related to my own. There were times when it seemed like there were universal gay experiences that created this feeling of queer camaraderie. The second aspect, relationships with participants refers to those instances of connection, where relational lines

between researcher and participants becomes blurred and can lead to mutual disclosure of content that strays from the intended purpose of the interview (Nelson, 2020). In this the researcher has the power dynamics and must steer the interview back on track (Nelson, 2020). While conducting interviews, especially in the beginning and at the end, I would mention my partner who identifies as Gay and served in the Navy and how his experiences are part of what inspired my study. I disclosed this to express my commitment to the queer community and goodwill toward them as individuals and the stories they shared with me. Though at times I was tempted to disclose more or converse about other topics, I would have to reorientate myself back to the interview schedule. The third aspect of retraumatization through listening refers to the chance of hearing challenging stories that the researcher may have also experienced (Nelson, 2020). In my study I heard several instances of encountering homophobia, but I did not encounter any retraumatizing instances. The fourth aspect of finding oneself on the outside involved engaging in the research from an emic perspective, and then realizing or becoming an outsider. This happened to me as going into the interviews I felt a part of the community as a Gay man, and the son of a veteran, however I very quickly came to realize when it comes to being a gay service member, I am very much an outsider. I had difficult instances of coming out, but none as stressful as coming out in the military and being surrounded by such a total institution. Having been in school for over 10 years, I have been in a bubble of mostly like-minded people, forgetting that my experiences is not what it is like for everyone. For this reason, I assumed my participants would share many of the same values as myself. However, there was one participant who stated they did not care about social issues or politics, and I found myself judging this individual and being upset with them for not caring more. I did not like the participant at first and realized that I did not want to read or code his interview. Through self-

reflexivity I realized how my positionality was or could affect my research. I had to try to read and code their interview without judgment and make sure I gave them an equal voice. As I read through the transcript, I was able to see why this individual felt certain ways about politics and social issues. One of their reasons was that in the military you must serve no matter who is the president. While I understood this statement, I still felt like he could be doing more. However, this same individual went on to say he flies a pride flag at his house, never hides his sexuality, and makes it known to others he is gay because he wants others to feel like they could come out. He also stated he wanted to feel more a part of the gay community but never felt like he fit in. It was after this I realized that it was because of my thinking and people like me that might make him feel like he isn't a part of the gay community. There is no right or wrong way to be gay, but I ended up judging him for not being how I thought he should be. The fifth and final aspect of the researchers shifting identity consisted of the impact that doing research has on our own identities (Nelson, 2020). My identity did not change as Nelson's (2020) identity changed, but I did feel a sense of pride in my identity as I conducted my research.

Qualitative Rationale

Interviews were the chosen method for this study because they provide researchers with the ability to explore and discover unseen phenomena (Tracy, 2020). Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewee; for example, the interviewer can adapt their interviews as they progress to fit emerging themes (Tracy, 2020). Interviews allow for the interviewer to ask questions that stray from the interview schedule and allow "for the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the constraints of scripted questions" (Tracy, 2020, p. 158).

Tracy (2020) outlined three advantages of qualitative research, self-reflexivity, context, and thick description. Self-reflexivity refers to how researchers reflect on how their life experiences, views, and position, influence their interactions and perceptions of others (Tracy, 2020). Engaging in qualitative research involves "immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it" (Tracy, 2020, p. 3). These contextual observations are then used to inform the claims made in our research (Tracy, 2020). Finally, thick description refers to how qualitative researchers compile these observations into greater statements, without separating claims from context (Tracy, 2020). Self-reflexivity is not a singular act, but something that should be done continually throughout the study. By doing this, researchers can be more aware of their power and position, and how those are contributing to our understanding of our participants and the interpretation of the data. It allows us to make changes, which result in better research quality. By immersing in the context of our research, taking note of every small detail, and processing claims from them, is a holistic approach to representing the populations of our research. Thick description helps to ensure that we have gathered an accurate depiction of the lives and challenges of our participants.

Before engaging in qualitative research Tracy (2020) advises considering the compatibility, yield, suitability, and feasibility of a topic or study. When considering the compatibility of a research project, we must think about how they connect to their research, the topic, and the participants (Tracy, 2020). The yield of a research project refers to the outcomes of such research (Tracy, 2020). A project must also be suitable, meaning that the context of the project should be able to fulfill the theoretical undertaking of the topic (Tracy, 2020). When researching marginalized populations, it should work to fulfill a need (Parson, 2019). This need could be building the literature on marginalized populations and giving the voice of participants

a platform. The last consideration of feasibility refers to if a project is practical or feasible for a researcher (Tracy, 2020). This could involve time considerations or access to a research population (Tracy, 2020).

Procedures

Upon gaining IRB approval, I conducted semi structured in-depth interviews face-to-face, on the phone, and through Microsoft Teams. To be eligible for this study participants must have met four criteria for inclusion. First, they must have been currently serving in the military and/or have served after the repeal of DADT. Those no longer serving were eligible to participate if they served after the repeal of DADT. Second, participants must have identified as being Lesbian or Gay. Third, they must have been out in the military. Lastly, participants must have been 18 years or older at the time of the interview.

Participants

I interviewed 12 individuals (8 males, 4 females) who ranged in age from 29 to 55 years of age. Participants served in the U.S. Army (n = 4), Army Reservist (n= 2), Army National Guard (n= 1), Navy (n = 1), and Air Force (n = 4). Participants reported being Asian American (n = 4), Hispanic (n = 3), and White (n = 5). The racial breakdown of those serving in the military are as follows, White 70%, Black 16.8%, Asian 4.7%, Hispanic or Latino 16.1%, American Indian or Alaska Native 1%,, Multi-racial 2.5%, and other/unknown 3.8% (DOD, 2020). The gender breakdown of active duty enlisted members is 83.1% male and 16.9% female. A total of seven individuals served during and after DADT was repealed, and the remaining five joined after the repeal of DADT. One participant had children. Five participants were married, two were dating someone, and five were single. Of the five participants who were single, one was divorced, and one was widowed. The years of service ranged from one and a half years to 26

years, with an average of 13 years served. Eleven of the participants were currently serving and one had recently left the service after 10 years.

Recruitment

Three tactics were used to recruit participants. First, I used network sampling by reaching out to existing contacts who either meet the inclusion criteria and/or who might know others who did and/or were willing to share the study information (See Appendix A). I contacted the members of their network who serve(d) in the military and identified as LG. Second, participants were asked to share the study information with others who might be willing and able to participate (i.e., snowball sampling). Snowball sampling involves "identifying several participants who fit the study's criteria and then ask these people to suggest a colleague, a friend, or a family member" (Tracy, 2020, p. 84). One limitation of snowball sampling is data skewed toward one group or demographic (Tracy, 2020). This limitation can be addressed by recruiting the maximum variation of participants and using those participants to create several smaller snowball samples (Tracy, 2020). Third, the recruitment message along with the flyer was posted to social media to personal networks and on public LGB military pages (Appendices A & B). I interviewed one individual from my personal network. Three individuals responded to posts on reddit. Four individuals reported they learned of the study from a friend who shared the flyer. Four individuals responded to Facebook posts.

I sent participants a $25 electronic Amazon gift card after the interview concluded. I received a $500 award through the Department of Communication and used the funds to purchase the gift cards. After each interview had ended, I asked participants to confirm their email or if they would like the gift card sent to a different address.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview Procedures

After potential participants expressed interest in sitting for an interview, I verified that they met the inclusion criteria and then scheduled a place and time that was mutually agreeable. The screening occurred first through email; however, I received many spam emails. I created a screening survey that filtered out spam, and helped to identify individuals who did not qualify for the study. I received many emails from scammers who were interested in the incentive of the study but did not qualify for it. The screening survey was able to catch scammers pretending to be many different people reaching out to me. It included detailed questions and attention check questions to weed out bots. I sent the screening survey to those who reached out to me. If they qualified for the study, they recorded their name and email. I then reached out to them to schedule the interview. Before the interview occurred, I sent the informed consent form (Appendix C) and asked them to read it before the scheduled interview.

Interview Locations

Interviews took place in person or via Microsoft Teams. One in person interview took place in a private office on the university campus where the interview was conducted in confidence and without outside distractions. Interviews that took place over the phone or via Microsoft Teams were scheduled during non-work hours for active-duty military service members. It was also recommended that if they were in their living quarters on base that they be aware of their surroundings and/or complete the interview in another location. This was done to protect their privacy to prevent others from hearing their answers during the interview. The interview was about their service, and it would not be appropriate or safe for them to discuss

these topics while at work. While the study had minimal risk, it may have brought up uncomfortable memories which the interviewee would not have wanted to deal with at work.

Interview Schedule

The interviews began with me thanking participants for agreeing to the interview and then reviewing the consent form and answering any questions from the participants. I addressed interviewee questions before asking if the participant was ready to begin. Then I started the recording and began the interview. The interview schedule consisted of three main sections, background questions, generative questions, and closing questions. A total of 27 main questions and 30 follow up/possible probing questions were asked (Appendix D). One benefit of semi structured interviews is the ability to ask questions not on the interview schedule. I asked questions not on the interview schedule as needed or to clarify or probe participant's answers. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe the thematic and dynamic properties of interview questions. Thematic questions are those designed to grasp knowledge related to the content, topics or theory being explored through the research. On the other hand, dynamic questions are used to bolster the interpersonal rapport between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The first section asked more dynamic questions to establish a connection. Participants were asked background questions such as "So, tell me about your service?" and "What were the factors that contributed to you joining the military?" I also asked them about what branch of the military they joined and how long they had been serving. These questions helped the participants to share some of their experiences in their service before moving to the second section of the interview.

The second section of generative questions included subsections of trigger questions, and five other subsections to capture the resilience processes of crafting normalcy, affirming identity,

maintaining and using communication networks, alternative logic, and legitimizing negative feelings. To gather information about possible triggers participants were asked generative questions like “What was the general culture of the military and/or the branch you served in?”, “How ‘out’ are/were you in the military?” and “What things were said or done by others that helped you to disclose your sexuality or to conceal it?” These questions were designed to elicit possible challenges or difficult experiences that Lesbian and Gay service members faced, without labeling the experience as a challenge. These questions were able to pinpoint more of the micro disruption discussed in some resilience literature such as (Turner et al., 2022). Then I asked questions that were designed to address possible larger triggers. I asked participants “What if any challenges did you experience because of your LG identity?”, “Were you treated differently by others?”, and “How has your sexuality impacted your career in the military?” These questions were designed to help get a better understanding of the environment that the service members found themselves in.

To understand participants resilience enactment in the military questions were created to address the five resilience strategies. Crafting normalcy questions included “When you experienced challenges related to your identity how would you respond” and “how did you take care of yourself.” Questions to address affirming identity anchors were “What factors contributed to be out in the military” and “How important was it for you to be out in the military and why?” Maintaining and using communication network questions included “While serving who were you close with” and “Did you have any queer friends in the military?” To gain insight into alternative logics, questions such as “When you experienced different treatment or anti-LG scenarios what was your thought process?” and “How did your thinking about your LG identity and military identity evolve?” The last resilience strategy of legitimizing negative feelings and

engaging in positive actions was addressed through the question of "What strategies/actions or behaviors did you use during difficult times?"

The final section of closing questions involved asking catch-all questions to ensure topics were thoroughly addressed. Closing questions included "What would you want others to know about your experiences with being a queer service member?" And "What advice would you give to another queer service member?" Demographic information was collected at the end of the interview. Participants were asked their age, gender identity, and ethnicity/race. Demographic information was asked at the end of the interview to reduce the chance of interview fatigue. This was also done to build rapport in the beginning of the interview instead of asking clinical type questions.

Data Handling

All interviews were audio or video recorded. After interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim. A transcription service was also used to transcribe four of the interviews and was paid for using funds from a communication department award. Interviews conducted on Microsoft Teams were transcribed by the automatic transcription feature. I then would listen to the interviews and correct the transcripts. I removed repetitive words and disfluencies such as "umms" and "uhhs" which did not add meaning. I assigned each participant a pseudonym in order to camouflage their identity. This was also done for any other names participants mentioned during the interview. Specific locations mentioned by the participants were also removed and labeled as location x. This was done to prevent someone from identifying participants from the stories and locations they discussed. This resulted in 169 typed single spaced pages of interview data.

Saturation

Saturation was reached with 12 interviews. Saturation is when new information does not produce change to the data (Tracy, 2020). The topic of saturation has been widely discussed and the number of interviews needed is different for each study (Saunders et al., 2018). However, Guest et al. (2006) argued that saturation can occur with 12 interviews. Tracy (2020) outlined three ways in which researchers can approach their study to achieve saturation. The first way is by narrowing the criteria for sampling (Tracy, 2020). In this study, the sample population was narrowed to LG individuals and not those on other parts of the sexuality spectrum. It was also narrowed to military individuals who had to have served after the repeal of DADT. The second dimension mentioned by Tracy (2020) was that the number of interviews needed "depends on the distribution of knowledge of participants" (p. 174). My study had a wide range of individuals who served at different times and were able to offer their knowledge based on that time period. This was strengthened by interviewing multiple people from those time periods. This allowed for a comparison, and confirmation of similar experiences, which pushed the data toward saturation. The third dimension of reaching saturation involved type of interview format and engaging in sequential interviewing. Tracy (2020) explains that "what" research questions are better answered with formal interview schedules. I used a more formal interview schedule, only straying as needed for probing or follow up questions. I also started transcribing and coding transcripts after each interview which according to Tracy, allows for saturation to be reached sooner. Tracy (2020) also encourages researchers to ask, "Does the emerging analysis attend to my research foci in an interesting and significant way?" (p. 227). As I interviewed participants and transcribed and coded them, I started to see the resilience processes emerge from the data.

Thematic Analysis

This study used a thematic analysis approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six steps to a thematic analysis: familiarizing yourself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the analysis. The first step of familiarizing oneself with the data involves transcribing, reading, rereading, and writing down notes, and initial thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I transcribed, edited, read, and took notes of each transcript.

The second step of a thematic analysis involves generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this step I chose to use in-vivo coding. In-vivo coding was chosen because it "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 65). I also used sensitizing concepts from CTR as a starting point for data analysis: the dimensions of disruption (material, discursive, and symbolic) and the five resilience processes (Hintz et al., 2023). The data was analyzed to almost exclusively identify the resilience strategies/processes. I coded the data for challenges and/or anticipatory challenges and used the five processes as codes. In the second cycle of coding I used axial coding, which is used to reassemble the data after the first cycle coding (Tracy, 2020). The initial codes were used to create categories which could then be grouped into themes in the next step of a thematic analysis. Throughout this process a codebook was kept. A code book is a list of codes, along with their definitions and examples from the data (Tracy, 2020). I used Excel to create a codebook of all the codes used and the page number they were found on. I then reviewed the codes and if codes were similar, I would condense them into one. I then reviewed the codes and relabeled them as I saw fit.

The third step of a thematic analysis involves searching for themes from the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I used the concepts of challenges, crafting normalcy, affirming identity anchors, maintaining and using communication networks, legitimizing negative feelings while engaging in positive action, and using alternative logics as a base for themes. I also generated the themes of coming out, policies, anticipatory resilience, and intersectionality. The fourth step is reviewing the themes and "checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 35). During each coding process I would create a new excel sheet as I condensed, reviewed, and edited the codes and initial themes.

The fifth step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis is defining and naming the themes. Using the sensitizing concepts, the themes were mostly defined, however the themes of coming out, policies, anticipatory resilience, and intersectionality were not defined. Upon reviewing them I decided that policies and intersectionality could be placed under the different types of challenges, and not as themes of their own. Coming out was defined as stories or instances where participants mentioned coming out, either voluntarily or forced. Anticipatory resilience consisted of actions or behaviors that participants engaged in to avoid possible challenges. The final themes were challenges, coming out, anticipatory resilience, affirming identity anchors, maintaining, and using communication networks, legitimizing negative feelings while engaging in positive action, and using alternative logics as a base for themes. Theme of crafting normalcy was determined not to be salient as a theme. This is discussed later in the limitations. I created a final excel spreadsheet in which each theme had its own page. I listed the theme, codes used, and exemplar quotes with page numbers from the data. The final thematic

analysis step is writing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this step I selected the most illustrative quotes that best highlighted themes present in the data.

Chapter Three: Findings

In this chapter I present answers to my three research questions, which were: 1) How do LG service members experience military life post coming out? 2) What challenges do LG service members experience? 3) And what resilience processes do LGB service members draw upon in response to triggers?

The findings presented review the military life experienced by LG service members after they came out, which show the masculine nature of the military and how that impacted participants (RQ1). This section also reviews military culture and how it has changed over time. The coming out experiences are also reported. This study identified the challenges experiences which included firsthand challenges and observed challenges (RQ2). This section the reports the resilience strategies used by LG service members which include affirming identity anchors, maintaining and using communication networks, alternative logics, and finally legitimize negative feelings and engage in positive actions (RQ3).

Twelve participants shared their motivations for joining the U.S. armed forces and their military branch's culture, both in terms of when they started and how it changed over time. Some participants experienced more challenges than others. Whatever their experiences as service members, they each shared stories where they exhibited resilience, and the findings reflect both individual and community level enactments.

Military Life Post Coming Out

My first research question asked: How do LG service members experience military life post coming out? To answer this research question I asked participants, in part, to reflect on the culture of the military and their experiences joining. I also asked them about when they came out to another military service member. Two themes about military culture emerged in the

interviews. The first theme is that they experience/d the military as a masculine, male dominated, and heterosexual environment; however, the second theme reflects how certain branches, like the Air Force, are viewed as more "progressive" relative to other branches that lack progress.

U.S. Military as Masculine

Pre-DADT Repeal Culture

Seven participants served before the repeal of DADT, and they described U.S. military culture as one where individuals behave according to masculine norms and marginalize femininity, as well as marginalized LG individuals. The upholding of these norms was accomplished through the way service members communicated, either through derogatory comments or jokes. The culture of the military before the repeal of DADT was described by James, a 41-year-old gay male in the Air Force, as having a "a lot of testosterone," full of "locker room" talk, and a "male dominant" environment. Otto who joined right before DADT was repealed reported, "When I went to [my base], it was a lot of like, 'You got to be a man.' You know, a man's man, and that means not being gay." Becca, a female participant in the Air Force, explains when she first joined, she was told that "women didn't belong on a flight line. Women didn't belong as mechanics." Sophia, who joined when DADT was in place, was outed by another individual and reported to their superiors. This occurred right after 9/11 and Sophia explained that after she was reported, her drill sergeant announced to the group:

> I don't care who you sleep with or who you do what with. We are a country at war. We need all the bodies we can get. I don't plan on telling anybody who you sleep with. Stop caring who sleeps with who here, because I can guarantee you within the next year all of you will find yourselves overseas." And that was the end of that, which made me feel great.

While Sophia encountered the challenge of being outed, she was supported by her superiors in an indirect way, with her superiors not reporting her and making reassuring comments to her unit. This encounter provides a unique insight into the military culture at that time. It was still anti-gay in its official policies, and the attitudes of other service members. However, because of the larger culture issue of a war beginning, Sophia's superiors overlooked the official policies of LG individuals serving in the armed forces.

There are notable differences between civilian and military life, but the social culture of the U.S. is reflected in the military. This means that just like in civilian life, LG service members are subject to the larger cultural aspects and challenges of being queer. Noah explained that the military is "kind of like living in a mirror universe…there is a perception that everything is equal and the same and everybody has the same access. No not really. There are subtle very subtle differences." Participants explained how they were either on the receiving end of gay jokes or slurs or heard them being used by others. Jokes came from various sources, with some coming from strangers or work associates, but others came from friends. The jokes that came from friends were not seen as offensive as explained by one participant. Otto felt some of these gay jokes were endearing stating:

> I can tell you what happens in the military. Often, and it comes from a good place, I mean, and maybe, that's a weird, twisted way of thinking it, but there are…gay jokes that are often said, right? And…it's…supposed to be endearing. I personally feel it as endearing, but of course it's not professional. I don't condone it if I hear it from others. But if it's like me and my peers, or me and someone I'm close with…I think of those gay jokes as endearing because it's, in my opinion, seems like they've opened up to me or felt

> safe enough to joke around like that. Maybe that's Stockholm syndrome, but I don't know.

Todd also had an opinion on the topic of jokes saying:

> You know at the end of the day, we try to kill people and we can't get offended by every single little joke, and we'll stamp those jokes out, you know. We'll make an example of them and say, "This is not okay."

Otto and Todd had differing views on gay jokes compared to others who have zero tolerance for those kinds of jokes. Otto allows jokes from friends, while Todd suggested having a thicker skin, while also maintaining actions against those who engage in using gay jokes. Todd might not be offended by the jokes, but he doesn't see them as endearing or professional.

Participants also viewed the pre-DADT repeal military culture as varying by branch, with the Air Force being described as more educated than other branches and the Army being the most diverse in terms of its demographics. Those serving in the Air Force were seen as having more education, and smarter because of the jobs they perform in the military. Participants reports reflect how military culture varies between branches. There was agreement among participants about the culture of each branch. George a 55-year-old gay male who served in the U. S. Army explained:

> I was fortunate being in the branch that I was in because [it was] generally populated by intellectual and intelligent people and that group as a whole tends to be more accepting and tolerant but the military culture as a whole is very hyper masculine and frowns upon homosexuality.

It was also noted that the culture of the military had changed over time and has become more accepting. Sophia agreed:

> Instead of ignoring things, [the U. S. military is] starting to learn it's better to have the hard conversations instead of just ignoring what goes on in the civilian world. That what goes on in the civilian world also impacts what we do here.

Sophia sees the military as progressing, however that does not mean it is perfect, and the military still contains negative elements towards LG individuals. More examples of the military culture and how it has changed is discussed below.

Post-DADT Repeal Culture

Five participants served after the repeal of DADT, and like those who served pre-DADT repeal, they described the culture as one where they felt they needed to adhere to traditional masculine norms but also as a culture shaped by stories told to them by their parents and a culture of change.

With respect to the masculine culture that remained post-DADT repeal, participants share their stories. Oliver, a gay man who joined the Army in 2012, served in a combat arms unit and described the culture as being "hyper focused on being a man," which made him hesitant to come out as he felt like he was "already fighting for respect" This was because he went into the military as an officer at "23 years old, zero experience, and was in charge of 35 year old men that had been in for 15 years." Oliver also reported:

> My first unit was a combat arms unit, very masculine. So it had no women in the front and in the vast majority of the positions. About a year prior to me joining, the unit had just undergone its first women, in the Army WIDA program. So where they were putting female senior enlisted and senior officers into headquarters positions. They didn't go any lower than headquarters and, with women [in leadership roles], there was definitely, a culture shock.

Even though this was before Oliver had joined the unit, those events left a lasting impact on him.

Adam, who joined after the repeal of DADT, had a different experience in the Air Force. The military environment that Adam was confronted with tried to or at least appeared to try and place an emphasis on inclusivity. He explained:

> The Air Force is definitely the more quote unquote, progressive branch. They do try to emphasize to certain extent inclusivity and recognizing things like pride month in June. In terms of really recognizing, you know, diversity including LGBT people, Air Force for the most compared to other services is definitely a little bit more ahead, but what I say that it's the culture is compared to, let's say, Silicon Valley or private sector, probably not, because you know the military itself as an organization, an institution, it definitely leans a little bit more conservative.

Oliver and Adam joined after DADT, but Oliver saw the lingering effects it had and experienced a progressive military. Adam recognized the progress made, but also mentions the limitations of that progress.

Todd, who joined the Army in 2014 described his experience joining the military as "terrifying" because of the stories his father and others told him about the military, and how it was not friendly to gay soldiers. Todd's thinking changed after he realized those around him did not care about his sexuality. Todd did note that there were left-over cultural impacts of DADT such as gay jokes. Todd explained the Army as "a microcosm of American society. You know, it's all the good, bad, indifferent from America that join the Army." Todd explains that this means there is a mixture of different backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions and that conflict or disagreement are prone to happen. The stories mentioned above show how the different lived experiences between those serving in the different branches. Participants noted their branch as

being better or more accepting than others, but that the U.S. military is representative of diverse backgrounds.

One common opinion of those who served both before and after the repeal of DADT was that the military has made progress, but the topic of transgender soldiers has caused controversy. James who joined the Air Force in 2000 explained the military was very anti-LGBT back then, and he has seen and experienced the progress made for LG service members. However, this progress has stalled with the issue of trans individuals. Those who might be okay with lesbian and gay service members, are against trans individuals serving, and since trans individuals are included in the LGBT spectrum, that hate is targeted at the whole community. Sophia talked about her trans friend in her unit saying, “I don’t know how they do it” and just the comments that are made and people don’t know about it and I’m just like man he can make so many complaints and get so many people in a lot of trouble.” Sophia who is deployed with an all-female leadership team has encountered pushback from some males in her unit. Sophia has heard them make statements such as “If you aren’t a lesbian in this unit nothing benefits you” and that they “feel as white, hetero, Republicans that there’s a target on their back.” Sophia went on to describe how this man's sentiment made her feel. For her entire military service, she felt as if it was a heterosexual males’ environment, now with the inclusion of more people, this man felt like he was being unfairly treated.

In sum, participants reported that the culture of the military, and certain branches like the Air Force, have improved. However, this does not mean service was devoid of challenges. Participants in this study experienced firsthand and observed challenges. These challenges are discussed in the sections below.

Coming Out Experiences

Whether they joined the military before or after the repeal of DADT, participants had similar coming out experiences within their branches. Participants from both eras stated they came out to a small number of people who they trusted and/or knew were also gay. While this is like coming out experiences in civilian contexts, the military environment adds another layer of considerations and risks. Before DADT queer individuals could lose their jobs. This is something civilians may fear, however in the military this means having a dishonorable discharge on one's record. After DADT individuals had to deal with an environment with a higher concentration of masculinity compared to nonmilitary environments. An example of this comes from Adam, "I'm only really out to my peers that I work closely with. I usually won't mention my personal life, unless I actually kind of know you within the workplace." Becca described her experience as, "We could come out to small pockets of people and they could come out to us, but outside of our tiny little grouping, you couldn't really be yourselves outside of that."

Participants also recalled recognizing when someone used supportive language, such as talking about their LGBT friends, using gender neutral pronouns, or mentioned they were more liberal in their politics. When someone used such language, they were motivated to come out to those individuals. Adam discussed people he felt he could come out to because "they talked about their sibling, who was transgender" or others would "talk about their friends gay wedding" and a supervisor who "had a LGBT ally lanyard." These signaled to Adam that they were safe individuals to come out to. In Becca's case others would say things like "why you should bring your friend over next time she's in town. That indicated to me that they knew she was really my significant other." Another indicator for her was people would stop trying to pair her up with their male friends. The difference between Adam and Becca is Adam saw signs that people were

generally LGBT friendly whereas Becca received signals that they knew she was a lesbian and were indicating they were okay with it. The above are examples of indicators that people could come out or that it was a safe environment between them However, there was also indicators that led Lesbian and Gay individuals to conceal their sexuality.

Before the repeal of DADT lesbian and gay service members would avoid engaging in conversations about who they were dating, the type of people they were attracted to, and/or what they did on the weekends out of fear that it would out them; therefore, picking up on subtle cues helped them to decipher who was safe to come out to and who was not. Otto said he would come out on a "need-to-know basis" and even now he still has a "split second hesitancy" when mentioning his sexuality to someone new. Others like Adam engaged in mental calculations on who and why he should come out to others. Adam shared he only came out to peers he was close and/or worked closely with. Adam recounted his experience:

> Within the military I'm only really out to my like peers that I work closely with. I usually won't mention my personal life, unless I actually kind of know you within the workplace. That is how I approach it, because I just really feel like in the workplace you have to be sometimes in some cases depending on where you are, on your leadership, you do have to be maybe a little bit careful just because again, I've definitely encountered people with the military who they may not think it, but they definitely have a clear unconscious bias towards things like diversity, inclusion, and minorities.

Like Adam, Kyle, an Army Reservist who joined in 2021, was not comfortable with how the information might be spread and the impact it could have on his reputation and his career. Kyle explained this fear stating:

> I think one of the things from a professional standpoint is that I don't promote or announce my sexuality in the workplace because I can't control what other people perceive or maybe any of their biases. I don't ever want that to be a factor in whether or not I can execute any of my responsibilities. I feel like, there have been times where I've felt anxious about like, since they know that I'm gay, or if they think that I'm gay, then like, do they doubt that I'm going to be able to be a sufficient soldier or a sufficient man or, uh, a leader and so on and so forth.

Kyle felt as if his sexuality meant that others would not see him as capable of performing his duties, living up to the notion of what it is to be a man, or even a leader. This prevented him from coming out because he would lack control of that information.

While Otto, Adam, and Kyle explained how they keep their sexuality under wraps depending on their surroundings, other service members, like Todd and Oliver, were surprised by the reactions of others, which motivated them to live out of the closet. Todd described being afraid to come out to others, but this changed when a friend said to him:

> "Nobody gives a shit. Like, you're a soldier. Nobody cares, man. Just chill out." And from then on, I kind of realized that, "Yeah, no one cares. It's the Army and we're here to accomplish a mission."

Oliver was not told by someone else that he should not be worried about being out but observed others coming out and the responses to those individuals. Oliver, hesitant to come out, saw junior soldiers come out and not experience the harassment he had anticipated they would, which then motivated him to come out. As explained by Oliver:

> I was like, well, if a junior soldier can [come out] and get married and survive in a combat arms unit, why can't I just admit it if someone asks me? So, I did a small baby

> step where if someone asked me, I'd tell them directly….seeing junior soldiers making that choice, exposing themselves to harassment, and then subsequently not really seeing as much harassment as I had assumed would happen…seeing that and then realizing that I was becoming a senior leader and was too afraid to do that myself while they went through it without the, the privilege and protection of rank, I think started to shame me to be honest.

The act or process of coming out changed for those who served during DADT and the years following its repeal. Instead of looking for signs from others that they were a safe person to come out to, individuals like Noah would openly indicate to others they are gay. Noah shared that in the years since DADT was repealed, he has made a point in every situation to "always drop a hint" about his sexuality and relationship status. He would insert references to his spouse by using a gendered referent such as, "Oh yeah my husband." Adding in such references allowed him to come out in indirect ways, something that he would not have been able to do before DADT was repealed. Noah joined in 2005 and would have been discharged from the military for making references like these. These types of comments would not have been well tolerated in the months and years following the repeal either. However, as time has progressed and through the resilience of LG service members, Noah makes conscious efforts to be visible to others. Emma, a trans lesbian serving in the Army, had one of the more poignant instances of coming out in the military post DADT repeal. Emma came out to her therapist who was also her peer in the military stating:

> I remember I put on my best uniform, I made sure I looked sharp as could be, as we say, squared away. I had a therapist that I had been talking to who was a Lieutenant Commander in the public health service and who knew because of our therapy sessions

> but I made a point and said I want to talk to you outside of the office and said can we go out to the hallway, please... and we were about halfway there and I could see a slight grin...I think he start to pick up what might be happening. We get out into the atrium, which is about as public as I can pick...I face him, I square up I come to a position of attention, and I looked at him and said, "Sir, I am transgender, and I am a lesbian." And [he had] just a little flash of a smile and then he stiffed up as he came to his position of attention and it was very, simple he said, "Thank you." Which is really all that was necessary because there is nothing else. I'll never forget that because, I've been in at that point, gosh, 13 years and I couldn't say those words openly [before]. I certainly couldn't say them to an officer or any military person, and there is so much empowerment, so much freedom, so much authenticity all of that that comes from not having to hide who you are anymore, just we have to say, "This is me."

Coming out to her therapist was a major moment in Emma's life. Unfortunately, a short time later President Trump's administration placed a ban on transgender individuals serving in the military. While Emma came out before the ban and therefore could remain in the military, the ban presented challenges for her and others, which is discussed later in the findings.

Although some participants came out on their own in both direct and indirect ways, other individuals were either outed, or put in a situation where they felt compelled to out themselves. For example, Hilda shared a situation where she had to come out to her boss. Hilda proposed to her then girlfriend on vacation. Upon return to work she shared the news with others in her unit. During a meeting, her boss asked about it and used language implying her fiancé was a man:

> He just started all of a sudden saying, "So what does your fiancé do? Is he a pilot?" He automatically assumed that I was straight. Then all I said was, "I'll tell you about it later"

> [to] just to stop the conversation and I didn't want to talk about that in front of everybody. After the meeting one of my staff sergeants was talking to me about work and my boss comes up to me and he said, "So your fiancé, is he in the military?"

Hilda was out to some peers but was uncomfortable with discussing her sexuality with her boss, but he was asking her a direct question about 'him', and she did not want to lie to him. After she shared that her fiancé was a female, Hilda recalled, "You could see the gears turning in his head when I said that…it was the most awkward situation, and the most awkward reaction." A similar example comes from Oliver, who when interviewed for a command position was asked if he had a girlfriend or wife. "It was a direct question of course. It was, 'Do you have a girlfriend or wife?' They were asking about my living situation, and it was 'Nope. I've got a boyfriend, long-term boy boyfriend. We live together.'" Oliver explains that in this situation he felt brave enough to come out but reflected on the past:

> [P]rior to that it was a few years before I struck up the courage to not lie about it. For the first three or four years, if anyone asked me, I would just flat out lie. I kind of considered myself chicken at that point.

Oliver recognized this subordinate's courage to come out and get married in the open, which encouraged him to come out in future instances. LG service members who served during and after the repeal of DADT came out in a variety of ways and contexts. Some came out of their own volition, while others were asked directly or indirectly about their sexuality.

Challenges of Lesbian and Gay Military Service

My second research question asked: What challenges do LG service members experience? In answering RQ2, I identified two types of challenges: (a) those participants experienced themselves (i.e., firsthand), either pre or post DADT repeal, and a subcategory of

identity challenges, and (b) those they witnessed other lesbian and gay service members experiencing (i.e., observed). Each are broken down further into sub-categories. There are four firsthand challenges: a) fear of discharge, b) identity issues, c) lack of community support, and d) fear of sexual assault. Observed challenges include three types: a) gay jokes/derogatory comments, b) differential treatment, and c) death/death threats.

Firsthand Challenges

Firsthand Challenges Pre DADT Repeal. Participants recounted several challenges they experienced firsthand while serving pre-DADT repeal: a) fear of discharge, b) identity issues, c) lack of community support, and d) fear of sexual assault.

Fear of Discharge. For those who joined before the repeal of DADT, the fear of discharge from the military was a primary challenge. Participants worried about being outed and about the "longevity" of their jobs. Participants who were out before they joined the military discussed having to go back into the closet when they joined. George, a 55-year-old gay man in the Army said, "At the beginning if anyone in a leadership position found out, I could be tossed out and it was not an honorable discharge." Sophia also feared being kicked out and the potential it had to affect every aspect of her life, pointing out, "The dishonorable discharge always being on your record every time you try to get a job, that was number one [concern] always." Noah's concern "was being dragged through a kangaroo court, a court martial, or a disciplinary review board [and having] all these strangers yelling at you, screaming about you, how your identity or your orientation is not conducive to the military life." This process of being "humiliated" and sent packing is what scared Noah the most and made him conceal his gay identity. Noah's fear was solidified with the signing of his contract as he "had to initial that [he was] not a homosexual and [he] did not engage in homosexual activities, and [he was] not currently married to a

member of the same sex." For an individual already struggling with their identity and joining the military, signing this contract was the source of much concern.

Identity Issues. Another firsthand challenge experienced by gay and lesbian service members before DADT was repealed was in reference to their gay and military identities. Becca described her early years of service as "repressive" and stated, "I remember telling myself in my late teens and as I joined the military that I can't be gay because I'm in the military." This quote from Becca illustrates the notion that one cannot be gay and a member of the military (i.e., these two identities are mutually exclusive). In contrast, George had accepted his sexuality but engaged in identity management to keep the two separate. George explained:

> Initially the challenge was to enjoy my social life, as myself, and then keep that compartmentalized from military life. And then when it was acceptable for me to be open it was difficult to sort of integrate those two because I had spent so many years keeping them you know completely separate.

Becca and George both struggled with their gay and military identities in different way. Becca denying the fact that she was gay, and George understanding that others perceive the fact that you cannot be gay and serve in the military. Even when there were times people seemed accepting of gay individuals in the military, it was stressful for those who were closeted. Several participants explained that others would make comments assuming they were gay, and being closeted they would deny it and think, "Why do people keep thinking I'm gay?" (Sophia). Becca explained it was difficult to navigate conversations when others would try and set her up with a male friend of theirs, leaving her unsure on how to reject their offer. Becca also noted that in the military your peers and superiors have "so much access to your significant others" either in

conversations at work or at functions where partners usually attend or dinners at their bosses' houses. Becca explained her struggle saying:

> I can't take them to the function...I couldn't bring my full family with me so it was, there was always one foot in the military and one foot out and neither of them could see the other, um which made it quite challenging to have any kind of real sense of who I was.

While Becca's heterosexual peers enjoyed the ability to include their significant others in social events, Becca could not. This lack of inclusion impacted her gay identity and how it interacted with her military identity. Not being able to fully be oneself in any setting had significant impacts. Noah also had issues with the separation of gay and military identity. He has a Human Rights Campaign (HRC) equality sticker on his car and was told to remove it because "they knew what it meant, and it was political." Noah summarized his experiences explaining:

> Imagine running a marathon and being told not to breathe. That was the analogy I would. use, and people would immediately get it, and that's what it was like. It was like, "Oh, Jesus. So OK, we're going to do our daily jobs and we're going to continue living this facade for the next three years, I guess."

The example given by Noah reflects LG service member experiences of small interpersonal challenges throughout their time in the military and highlights that they do enact resilience to persevere during their service. The separation of gay and military identity is the challenge that most Lesbian and Gay service members experienced before the repeal of DADT. It was a constant struggle with their internal identities and what they portrayed to others.

Identity challenges not related to the separation of their gay and military identity were also present. Some participants were targeted because of stereotypical ideas of what Lesbians look like, for example having short hair, which was seen as being a trait of lesbian service

members. Sophia discussed how she was told to cut her hair short to make getting ready in the morning quicker. However, at the time she did not realize that this would "put a target" on her back. Sophia went on to say, "But when I got there, there were several others with their haircut, acted the same way I did. I'm not stupid. I knew exactly what it meant." The short hair signified that they were lesbians. While this was true for Sophia, it was also a stereotype that placed her at risk of being targeted. Sophia chose this hairstyle because of functionality, but others saw it as her projecting her sexuality. Sophia was also outed and reported to her superiors as being a lesbian. However, her superiors did not pursue any actions against her. During another encounter, Sophia was reprimanded for violating DADT. When she was shipping out to Iraq her unit was short on space and told to leave behind anything they did not immediately need because it would arrive on another plane. Sophia described the experience saying:

> When we got to Iraq, that damn Conex wasn't there when we got there. It was November when we got there. But the air conditioning was blowing super strong in the tent. The female that I spoke about earlier, the one who was sleeping with her male leader, got up in the night and saw that I had no sleeping bag. So she unzipped it completely to make it a blanket instead of a sleeping bag and got into the bed with me and split the blanket. We woke up the next morning to a negative counseling stating that we had violated DADT for sleeping in the same bed and being women. I think that's the only time I've ever gotten anything negative said to me.

Her challenge has two layers, the first being her and her friend receiving negative counseling because of DADT policies. The other part of the challenge was that Sophia was reported by a male who was interested in the other woman, and jealous of their friendship. Because of Sophia's identity and the man's assumption of that identity, he retaliated against Sophia.

Sophia experienced more challenges because of her gay identity. Sophia noticed she was being treated differently by a male superior and it would often occur after he would catch her and her bisexual friend spending time together. Sophia recalled, “When he would catch us together, he would yell at me for odd reasons. I would do a lot of pushups for him and a lot of random exercises. He would find whatever reason to get me in trouble.” Sophia later discovered that her friend and the male superior were sleeping together, and he was “threatened” by Sophia’s presence around her and the perception that because she was Lesbian, and the other girl was bisexual that Sophia would try and sleep with her. However, Sophia and her friend remained close. Sophia explained:

> Once [Sophia’s superiors] found out that she had been spending time with us outside of work hours. They punished her, gave her extra duty, which is once she got done with her Monday through Friday, nine to four, they made her work until midnight every night for like a month straight and they said it was because she was hanging out with us. Even though all the guys hung out with all the older guys of higher ranks, and we knew it was because the chain of command was homophobic and racist.

Even though their straight white peers and superiors broke this rule all the time they were reprimanded for doing the same thing, preventing them from forming a sense of community among LG service members.

James who moved to a base in the Midwest experienced challenges because of his gay and ethnic identity. James described his experiences as, “Sometimes I feel like it was a double whammy, one because I’m Hispanic and two because I’m gay.” James summarized his experience and worries as a gay Hispanic male saying:

> I felt that people would think that I couldn't do something based off of my skin color versus my sexuality. So, when it came to sexuality, they felt like a homosexual wouldn't be able to do something because they're acting like a female and they wouldn't be able to protect them. I know guys have said in the past "Hey, I don't want to be deployed with that fairy because what am I going to do? What is he going to do if something happens with the weapon?" So that was the stereotype with military men that were flamboyant and going into deployments and stuff. When it came to race, race was "Hey, I was judged based off of the color of my skin and that's it." There was nothing else that they judge me on other than the color of my skin that has, to be honest, is worse than judging my sexual orientation.

James felt it was worse to judge someone based on what they looked like, compared to an identity he could hide. James was also aware of his dual minority identity and may have felt like his gay identity was something he had more control over but couldn't control his ethnic identity. The issue of sexuality and ethnic identity was also mentioned by Adam and will be discussed in the section after the repeal of DADT.

Lack of Community Support. This next firsthand challenge refers to the lack of interpersonal support and lack of a sense of community within the military. This challenge also includes the lack of benefits for partners. Otto observed that there was (and still is) no community organized *by the military* for LGBT members in the military. Otto explained it feels like, "'Hey you're protected, but were not going to, there's no actions right now to celebrate that policy, celebrate your community.'" George described not being able to feel the full community of the military. George said, "in the military there is a strong focus on what we like to call masculine traits, so I think it's more stressful and more difficult, and made it harder to sort of

fully feel that camaraderie." This example shows how it was hard for LG military to feel like they were fully apart of the military culture and the brotherhood that is felt by others.

While LG individuals were free to serve in the military this did not equal full inclusion or support from the military. An example of this comes from Noah who got married following the supreme court ruling. After gay marriage was legalized by the supreme court, it took some time for the military to catch up with changing its policies. Noah married his partner immediately after the legalization and explained:

> When my husband and I got married, we had to travel all the way up to Washington DC, get married there, drive all the way back to North Carolina. Even then, because we knew marriage equality was going to be the law of the land the Marine Corps was like "Well we can't give you BAH because, yeah, the decision came down from the Supreme Court and everybody knows it but we're still waiting for official word from Marine Corps headquarters" and I'm like it's the Supreme Court there is no other higher authority than that. They even said it in the news just go ahead and execute. So, for about six months, I had to maintain a barracks room while paying for an apartment out in town, without getting the same benefits as everybody else as a married couple. So that was difficult and that's one thing that I still hold against the military to this day, well that and you know, Carl wasn't able to get health care at the time and me as being the sole provider that kind of hurt my ego a little bit.

This example from Noah shows how even when the law had changed, it was slow to be incorporated into practice. Noah and his partner did not have full inclusion but had to live separately for some time. This put a strain on Noah who felt like he should have been able to provide for his spouse.

Fear of Sexual Assault. The final firsthand challenge was the threat of being sexually assaulted. This challenge, like the fear of discharge, loomed in the background for Lesbian service members. Becca and Sophia had a fear of being sexually assaulted, at first because they were a woman and then because they were afraid of someone wanting to "turn them." Becca exclaimed:

> I had not really thought that [sexual assault] would happen to me because I was gay. There's always a concern about someone trying to overpower you for control, but it's because I'm a woman, not because I'm gay. So that, that kind of changed a little bit on how I watched out for my own protection.

Unfortunately, Becca was sexual assaulted during her service but did not expand on the situation. Becca felt supported by her superiors in the military as the situation was handled immediately and effectively. Sophia also had a fear of being sexually assaulted and this fear was heightened when she learned of serial rapist on her base. Sophia was deployed overseas and upon arrival was told, "There is a serial rapist running around don't go to the bathroom by yourself at night." Sophia went on to explain:

> I've always been afraid that the wrong men finding out that I'm gay and they are going to want to teach me a lesson. I've always been afraid of that, so I will always feel people out first before I just go and tell them that I have a wife.

Becca and Sophia experienced challenges related to both their sexuality and their gender identity. As women they were already worried about possible sexual assaults but did not have a fear until after joining the military that they would also be raped for being lesbians.

Firsthand Challenges Post DADT Repeal. Lesbian and Gay service members continued to face challenges after the repeal of DADT. The challenges were like those experienced before

the repeal, but the fear of being kicked out of the military was no longer present. Participants talked about firsthand challenges post-DADT repeal most clearly with respect to identity issues.

Identity Issues. In the post DADT repeal military, challenges with identity were still prevalent. This is summarized by Oliver who stated, "I wanted my life to be easy and being straight in the Army is pretty easy, being gay is not." Kyle explained his struggle with identity saying:

> I still felt like there were moments where I just needed to blend it and not be an individual, I guess, in that regard. So, um, I don't know. I also didn't come out until later in life. And so that was something that I still felt like it was easy for me to revert back to.

This example shows what Kyle went through despite joining the military after the repeal of DADT. The heterosexual ideologies and assumptions about gay people in the military still existed. This resulted in Kyle managing his identity and concealing parts of it when needed. Todd explained his challenges revolved around his own fears of joining the military and "understanding" his own sexuality and being accepted. Todd also felt like it was hard for him to connect with the LGBT community as a whole and especially with those not in the military. Oliver had a struggle of being able to connect with his peers because he was hiding his identity for so long. Oliver recalled an experience saying:

> And I remember a few times we would go on some therapeutic runs around the camp, and they would confide in me because there are other people going through relationship issues with the distance and I remembered them just kind of bearing their soul to me about their relationship issues and me commiserating with them, but not being able to share my own back because I felt like it would burden, it would change our relationship.

> It would, taint things. I'd lose them as a friend. I got another six months with these guys, and I don't think I can survive, not physically survive, but I don't think that I can mentally take both relationship issues and also coworkers. So it hemmed me in and it, it did make me feel, not angry at my sexuality, but very frustrated that I felt like I couldn't, it was such a little thing that I could recognize every single issue they were having in their relationship was the same kind of issue I was having. But I couldn't share that with them and they couldn't offer me help in return. It was self-imposed though. That was probably the period when I had the hardest time, was not being able to share with my coworkers in shared pain and shared relationship difficulties.

Todd and Oliver both had trouble connecting with other LGBT individuals serving in the military but for different reasons. Todd felt like he was not like other gay people and Oliver was in the closet for a long time. Both resulted from societal ideas of what it is to be gay, and how being gay is perceived. Todd's way of being gay is no less correct than any other way of "being gay." Oliver was afraid to come out because of his perception of others perception about gay people.

Other participants explained that they feel their race has been more of a factor in how they have been treated compared to their sexuality. Adam who is Asian American shared his experience:

> I wouldn't say [I've experienced] explicit racism and these were things that I started realizing as I got older. I'm an officer, and the image of a military officer is not a short little Asian guy, you know and there is kind of a unconscious, just in general you know, I even see it among Asian Americans too where that we are very easily walked over and we're very submissive. I don't want to say submissive. I would probably say very like

> compliant and like to be told what we're supposed to be doing. We won't take charge. I definitely felt that in some instances. I kind of noticed where some of my white male peers get a little bit quote unquote like more immediate respect than me. Once you prove yourself and show, "Hey I'm the person in charge", and you set everyone to the same standard. They are going to treat you just like the guy next to you. I would probably say, the racial part kind of... not angered me, but made me fight a little bit. more than like my gay identity.

Just like James who was discussed earlier, Adam had ethnic and sexuality identities contributing to his challenges. Adam experienced individuals making assumptions based off how he looked and worried about how that would impact him and his interactions if they knew about his gay identity.

Participants also encountered those who held biases against queer individuals and treated service members differently because of their gay identity. Adam encountered an individual who had a "clear bias" against him and three lesbians in their class. Adam stated:

> So, this individual would always give us the shit work. It was very, very targeted. And then this individual would always for some reason, group us together and kind of disparage us in private to our other classmates and vast majority of other classmates.

Adam reported this individual for the treatment they experienced, but since there was nothing that was officially documented, nothing was done about the situation.

Emma experienced an extreme case of being encountering those who hold a bias against LG individuals. Emma described one instance where she stated:

> I've even gone outside to my car at the beginning of day and found bullet holes [in her car]. It's literally dangerous to be out [here]. The part of the country I live in right now is

> not a friendly part of the country…That's the worst feeling in the world is the feeling that you're absolutely all alone and throughout the military, even to this day with open service I see this with the advocacy work I do, that there are people who are convinced that they're the only ones and they're terrified to come out.

In this instance Emma did not know who engaged in this action but described the culture in the area she lived, because of being stationed there. This culture was unfriendly to people like her and shows the ideology of the environment around her. Emma also explained how it is instances like this that contribute to identity issues and prevent people from feeling like they can come out.

Observed Challenges

A second challenge category of challenges I identified from the data was challenges observed by service members. LG service members not only experienced challenges firsthand but witnessed other LG service members experiencing them, as well. They reported three types of observed challenges: a) gay jokes/derogatory comments, b) differential treatment, and c) death/death threats.

Gay Jokes/Derogatory Comments Being Targeted at Others

LG service members reported colleagues telling gay jokes and using words like "faggot." An example of these types of jokes and derogatory statements was given by Kyle who said:

> We were at a restaurant and [someone] made some, homophobic, suggestions. And I remember, feeling uncomfortable in that moment. And then I remember thinking like, "Oh wow, not only am I on this training for two weeks, but I have this problem the next like nine months with this individual." So then I just made an intentional decision to not engage that person unless it's work related and I kept things very professional and I did not share any personal information with that individual.

Kyle went on to explain these comments weren't directed at him, and they didn't know he was gay, but that this situation made him cautious of those around him. Hilda also noticed others telling gay jokes saying:

> I feel like a lot of my guy friends, they're like quote unquote, "OK with" lesbians but they may be uncomfortable with someone who's gay, because of, I don't know, some masculinity thing going on, but there's definitely jokes that get thrown around here and there and it shouldn't be taken lightly but I think just the military culture that's just how it is and it's not an excuse to do that, but it's just something that that happens all the time.

Hilda was frustrated with this double standard, and how it had more to do with the men's sexual ideations of two women being together, and not about how it is because they are accepting of gay individuals. Otto observed derogatory comments being made online about a transgender service member recalling:

> I was on Facebook, and I was reading this article and I was really happy and interested and I saw some guy, a friend of a friend. So that's why his comment was highlighted in that article. It was like a Washington Post article. He said, "It's absolutely disgusting how…how this [transgender] person mutilated himself. He should not be around children."

Finding this kind of behavior unacceptable, Otto reported the individual to his superiors who launched an investigation. The investigation went as follows:

> When that investigation occurred, they pretty much asked me, "What are your demands?" My demands were, "He'd never be in a leadership position, his entire organization has to redo EEO transgender training, and his, for his performance review, to make note of this incident." I was actually denied, two out of three of them. [They said,] "Hey, he's going

> to progress how it is." He got a slap on the wrist. His boss was aware of what happened because it was an investigation, but he ended up getting a slap on the wrist. They asked me if I wanted to send the investigation even higher to the National Guard Bureau in DC. When I did that, it took a couple months, but they got back to me and said, "Hey, we still stand by what they said as far as a slap on the wrist. I'm going to send it back to the state to reassess if you'd like." I said, yes. Then it just went cold after that. So it was kind of just like, "What the hell? "You know, it was just like being turned around in circles and nothing was actually prevented. So, you know, I say policies help protect us, but I think, it protects us as a deterrent, not necessarily a part of the process when, when actually reporting, because a lot of personal input can go through it when going through the investigation and punishment.

It must be noted that the example above is a combination of firsthand and observed challenges. Otto observed hateful language being directed from one service member to another and reported it himself. Nothing came of the investigation, which sent a message to Otto and others that the policies meant to protect them might not do so. Hilda also reported seeing hateful comments on social media as she works as a public affairs officer. Hilda says:

> When it comes to pride, months and you look at the comments, you know if you see the U.S. Air Force Facebook page and they'll put 'happy pride' and you see like the comments it's really disturbing and disgusting as of what some people say and that could I feel I could deteriorate lot of LGBT members to do something like that in the bases because there's so many so closed minded people out there unfortunately.

The comments on social media observed by Hilda didn't affect her, but she understood how it could affect other members of her community.

Others Receiving Different Treatment

The subcategory of others receiving different treatment includes what services members reported seeing others experience as a result of their sexuality. At times this overlapped with observing others at the receiving end of jokes. For example, Oliver who was closeted for some time after joining the Army observed another gay service member who was on the receiving end of jokes and differential treatment. Oliver describes the situation as:

> We had a somewhat effeminate, well very effeminate, personnel clerk. I remember very specifically, he got in trouble for wearing nail polish at work one day. I do remember a lot of jokes being cracked at his expense. He was fairly easy to become emotional, so he cried at work a few times. I remember distinctly, my boss at the time, cracking jokes…[My boss would say things like] "I better not tell him. He'll just bawl his eyes out." The nail polish incident kind of went through the ranks.

Oliver observed how his effeminate coworker was treated, and how other gays were treated. This sent a message to him as to how he would be treated if he were to come out.

James observed an instance where a gay male came out after the repeal of DADT and was treated differently. James said:

> I remember right after DADT was going on there was a gay guy, I'll tell you right now he acted 100% straight. I remember seeing it, he was fine. Then a month after DADT it completely switched. He was in a building where there was very high leadership there. And then as soon as he came out, they saw it as a bad thing. A bad image for them. So, what they did is, he was an admin person. They had a closet there that had a shredder and they basically stuck [him] into the closet…shredding stuff until he decided to get out.

James observed this individual being treated significantly differently and relegated to a literal closet, and eventually that person decided to leave the military as a result. Otto recalled seeing other gay service members being rejected by others and individuals refusing to work with them because of their sexuality.

Becca shared an experience on her base where a lesbian service member was sexually assaulted:

> …because somebody knew or found out that she was gay and they raped her. "Hey, I will show you you're not gay" or something. You know, it's a weird thought process behind that. But she was raped for being gay.

This made Becca concerned for her safety not just as a woman but a gay woman. This challenge highlights the intersectional nature of challenges that LG service members face during their service.

Death/Death Threats Lodged at Other LG Service Members

The third type of observed challenge included witnessing someone being killed for their perceived sexuality and hearing about death threats against another gay service member. Some service members feared for their lives like George who shared a story from his first post where a service member was murdered:

> Some guy was beaten to death in one of the barracks for being [perceived as] gay... It made me very concerned for my own safety. It was very difficult because at that point I did not have anyone that I could actually talk about it with where I could just express myself freely and discuss how that made me feel. So, it was a very challenging introduction to my first duty station you know, very anxiety producing and yeah, I was kind of scared after I got to know people in my unit.

The individual George spoke of turned out not to be gay, but was dating a trans individual, and labeled as gay, and killed as a result.

Noah also observed comments being made about a gay service member, but instead of it being on social media, it was carved into the ship he was serving on. The observed challenge went as follows:

> On my ship we had an incident where the most openly gay person that we knew of, one of the Marines had scrawled a death threat to that person. I came across that that piece of graffiti...So, I reported it to my immediate leadership. But they didn't do anything about it, right there and then. Which I thought was wrong, so I gave the picture to the person the graffiti was targeted to, and they then took actions into their own hands. They told this very, very crusty female Lieutenant who used to be a chief and you know she didn't give any fucks. She just walked into the CO stateroom and said, "This is what's happening in your ship. This needs to stop because this is wrong." And within 20 minutes of me giving that a copy of that photo to my friend the CO got on the main speaker said, "Listen, if any of my sailors or any of my Marines write anymore homophobic shit in my ship, we are not going to Florida. We will just stay off the coast of Florida and just float there for a week and see how you guys like it. It's not going be tolerated on the ship." So, I'm like, "Oh, that was kind of cool…. My leadership found out about it and were like "Why didn't you give us the chance to help out? Why didn't you trust us to do what we could do to address the situation instead of just going over our head?" So, I got a slap on the knuckles.

This example from Noah shows how LG individuals observe instances targeted at someone else, but it still affecting them. Noah reported it, but it was not addressed quickly by his immediate

superiors, which can send the message to LG service members that they their experiences, and ultimately their protection, is not a priority to the U.S. military.

Above I reviewed both firsthand and observed challenges reported by my participants. The outcome and responses of each of the experiences varied, but all were impactful enough for them to remember. In the next section, I present the resilience processes participants engaged in response to their challenges while in the military.

Resilience Processes

My third research question asked what resilience processes LG service members draw upon in response to triggers. To answer this research question, I asked participants about strategies they use/d as a LG individual to persevere and thrive during their service. I crafted my questions and present my findings around the resilience processes of a) affirming identity anchors, b) maintaining and using communication networks, c) alternative logics, and d) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action.

Affirming Identity Anchors

One of the identity anchors that participants drew upon in response to challenges was being a leader, or a good leader. LG service members affirmed their identity by living out of the closet, being a good leader, and by being the best they can at their jobs. They decided that to be a good leader that they needed to be true to themselves and live proudly out of the closet. One step in being a good leader was living openly and not hiding one's sexuality. Doing this, allowed them to live an authentic life, which they saw as being integral to being a strong leader. Hilda said:

> Being part of the LGBTQ community made me a lot more proud of myself and my peers who are going through the same situation because it's kind of like, "You know what? I

> don’t give an F like what you guys think. I’m going to do the best that I can and then if you guys have an issue with that then that’s your problem.” So, it definitely made me more confident and that, yeah, I don’t have to hide who I am.

Hilda decided to not be influenced by the negative notions of being gay. A similar sentiment was expressed by Todd who asserted:

> I think I’d be a terrible leader if I couldn’t be true to myself. If you’re going to lead men and women to combat, if you're going to lie about who you are or change, your self-perceived identity to fit in you're going to get people killed because you’re not true to yourself.

Oliver’s sentiment was, “I have to be an example, good or bad. I have to be, I have to be present. I have to have people know this so that they can see that you can be gay in the military.” Oliver affirmed his gay identity by connecting it to being a good leader. If he wanted to be a good leader, he needed to be authentic in how he presented himself to his peers and subordinates.

Adam who is Asian American and identifies as gay saw these two identities not connected to his military identity. Adam felt like he had to prove himself more than his white peers, part of which was done by being “proficient” at his job. Adam explains:

> Within my 20s getting more comfortable with myself that gay identity became a little bit more solidified, on top of also being Asian American too. So, I definitely say my identities, both military identities, gay identity, racial identity have definitely become a lot more sort of solidified as time went on.

Though Adam once saw his identities as separate, as he grew as a person and became more comfortable as a gay Asian American, serving in the military his identities were no longer

separate. As the three identities solidified, he was able to draw on them and be more comfortable and reassured with himself as a Gay Asian American serving in the military.

These three examples reflect how service members affirmed their gay identity by connecting it to their military identity and affirming both by being a good leader. Striving to be an example for others helped them through their service, and they did so in hopes of helping other queer service members.

Maintaining & Using Communication Networks

Participants discussed finding and/or relying on other LGBT friends after coming out in the military which helped them when they were experiencing challenges. Maintaining and using communication networks included using codewords to identify other queer friends, seeking out new queer friends within the military, relying on friendships before joining the military, and joining nonprofit LGBT organizations. LG service members used these networks as a safe place where they could be themselves, could talk about their relationship issues, and their time in the military. These networks are what led some individuals to feel comfortable coming out and gave them a support network they could rely on after coming out.

Before participants could maintain and use communication networks, they had to identify network members. A way that participants identified 'friendlies' was through using codewords. Having served before the repeal of DADT, Becca described a code word that was used by queer individuals to try and find people like them without getting in trouble. This code word was 'family' and if someone assumed someone else was gay, they would ask if they were family or indicate that others were safe by labeling them as family. Becca explained how this would unfold when she first heard it. "When we met other military people that were more obviously gay, they told us, you know, 'Hey, you are family. You're a cousin. He's a cousin. We're all cousins.'" As

discussed earlier, Sophia, who cut her hair and was targeted because of a perceived lesbian identity, came to find an identity and connection with others with short hair like hers. Sophia explained, "Those of us with short haircuts, we all became friends. Well, you quickly have the conversations, you know? 'Hey, are you family?' We all know that means, "Yes. I'm family.'" The short haircut was a signifier that led to the asking if she was family and allowed her to connect with others who shared a similar identity. This codeword allowed LG service members to identify one another and maintain and use those communication networks. Participants also sought out queer friends without the use of codewords. Hilda reported that she looks for queer friends whenever she is in a new place:

> Every base that I get stationed at I try to find the LGBT community in the military and there's not an abundance of us, but every time I do find the handful I usually try to get to know them if possible and become friends because I think having that bond and knowing that community is out there doesn't really make you feel so isolated... it just gives me peace of mind that there are other people out there whose going through exactly what I'm going through and it's definitely made me feel a lot more happier.

Unlike Hilda who had to seek out friendships with other service members, Oliver had existing support established before joining the military. Some participants relied on support networks they had made before joining the military. This included gay friends they made in ROTC or gay friends they made in their unit. Some participants also utilized gay spaces such as bars to connect with other queer individuals or by joining LGBT nonprofits.

Oliver made friends during his time in the Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) and made new friends during his service. Oliver felt it was extremely important to have other gay friends, both in and outside of the military:

> My refuge was, I had a very good group of gay friends, so I didn't hang out with any straight people for like two and a half, three years. It was a, a big group of like nine gay friends...two of them were also in the military. They were other officers in the military. So that was extremely helpful, having other gay service members...Having that in person, we can get a drink and talk about our jobs because our spouses or significant others, that aren't in the military try their best but there are certain military things you need to vent about. And so for me, what saved me through those years was having other military officers that were also gay and were part of, part of a close friend group.

In addition to Hilda and Oliver, other participants found solace in having a queer friend group. Sophia explains she has a trans solider that she looks out for and has really connected with. After a particularly bad day Sophia remembered:

> …thinking about who I wanted to go to cry in front of, and he was who I wanted to cry in front of….When he finally showed up to the office, I went in and I had wrote down what I wanted to talk to him about and when I saw him...I walked up to him and he's like, "Are you okay?" I started to cry, and I handed him the piece of paper with what I wanted to talk to him about it.

Sophia, along with George, also talked about finding a queer community at gay bars or places in town near their bases. Both joined before the repeal of DADT, and the bars offered a place away from base that was a safe place. "When [Sophia] was younger, like any other gay youth, [she] hit up the [gay] bars." George recalled his time stationed abroad where there was, "[a gay bar that] would have a big disco once a month. And so [that was] how we met each other. Through those venues…makes it easier to hang out then identify with people." George explained it was easier to connect with other gay individuals because he did not have to overcome the language barrier.

They were in queer spaces, so there was no need to worry about coming out or explaining their identity.

The last way that LG service members maintained and used communication networks is by joining nonprofits focused on advancing LGBT military. Noah found a sense of community by joining a national nonprofit that worked to advance the rights of LGBT service members. Noah reflected on joining the nonprofit:

> When repeal happened. I joined the military nonprofit group Outserve. I became super involved so much so that I ended up becoming a board of director for the national organization six years later, I became the Treasurer for it, oversaw the whole transition from Outserve, to new incarnation, the Modern military Association of America, where they merged LGBTQ family issues and open service. So you wouldn't know I was gay at first until I start talking about what I do in in my time off, as it were, or if I brought my husband along to an event.

Noah joined this organization before the repeal of DADT and continues his membership today. It has become one of his main communication networks. Otto also joined Outserve and utilized it for social connections. Otto explained his experiences with the organization saying "we used it to always help each other out. It's very helpful as far as administratively and socially using their Facebook page. You could ask about friendly housing or what does the gay scene look like socially." Otto also said people would post about experiences they or others were going through related to their sexuality and ask for advice. Otto stated, "It could be about LGBT policy and there'll be someone there to provide advice because they have experienced it." Participants used their communication networks, but mainly with other LG service members.

Alternative Logics

Participants in this study engaged in three alternative logics a) being good at their job, b) being protected by rank, and c) appearing straight. Individuals felt if they performed well at their job, then it would protect them from retaliation based on their sexuality. Some participants achieved a certain rank which they felt would protect them when they came out. Finally, some participants described themselves as having the ability to appear straight or naturally having a straight disposition.

Being Good at Their Job. An alternative logic that participants enacted in response to (and in anticipation of) challenges was being good at their job (while also being queer). Participants explained seeing other queer individuals being treated differently or feeling worried about being treated differently themselves. From this they also noted that those people and themselves were always good at their job and that acted as a protective factor. By observing differential treatment and the performance of these individuals, this led LG service members to engage in an alternative logic. This was done to protect them from their fear of being kicked out or treated differently. This alternative logic seemed to function by accepting the fact that they are gay, but that they are protected because they are good at their jobs, or do not act like other gay individuals serving in the military.

Becca discussed how enacting this alternative logic was likely not a productive strategy for her. Instead of living out of the closet and connecting with others:

> It actually allowed me, probably to my detriment, to be immersed in work almost all the time. It seemed better for my career, but it did not keep me on an even level in comparison to maybe my male counterpart who had a wife and a kid at home, who needed to be there for homework, who needed to sleep, whatever, when I could stay. It

was great for my career, but not as great for my emotional maturity and emotional connection with people.

Adam used "being good at his job" as less a distraction and felt instead that he needed to perform higher than others to gain respect for his community:

> I mean the best thing that…I could do is just be proficient at my job and then… you know, the golden rule. "Treat others how you want to be treated"…and then do a little bit and then on top of that do a little bit more...It's important [as a gay service member] to be viewed in a positive light. So, I do try to take a little bit more responsibilities or volunteer more for things than maybe the average person might not. So, I think that's the best way to, for me as a gay person and additionally as an Asian American, to kind of gain respect that way.

Emma also felt that her and her community had to adhere to higher standards saying, "You have to perform much higher. It is not sufficient to just meet a standard. You have to exceed every standard every time."

Being Protected by Rank. Other participants discussed the confidence they had in themselves and the privilege of their rank protecting them. This is an alternative logic because participants feared what could happen if others knew they were gay, but this fear was mitigated when they reframed it as being protected by rank. If someone had an issue with their sexuality, there was little they could do because of the power difference. Todd's logic was "I have some street cred. I'm a combat veteran, with a lot of awards so that, that could help." This logic used by Todd is an alternative to the mainstream logic or notion that being gay means one cannot be in the miliary or fulfill the duties of the military. Oliver summarizes his experience as:

> I felt confident enough in my job and in my position that somebody losing respect for me because I was gay, wasn't as impactful to my job because I still had the authority I required. I still had the confidence in my job. So, I became a lot more comfortable in that. But still, there was some lag time between feeling comfortable, because I wanted my life to be easy, and being straight in the Army is pretty easy. Being gay [in the Army] is not.

While it took time for Oliver to feel safe and comfortable, this did not occur until he was a certain rank, and the power that comes with it. Being good at his job made him feel safe, but he needed the protection of rank.

Otto faced similar dilemmas as Oliver and did not always feel safe, but he now says, "I think I can be myself at this point especially with my rank and all that power." It is this power and rank that gave him the courage to report individuals for making offensive comments on Facebook, as discussed in an earlier section. George also felt protected due to his rank after the repeal of DADT recalling, "I was already fairly senior once they repeal DADT. I think that proved to be some advantage because even the people that outranked me, they're not going to do anything that would negatively impact performance of their troops." Otto engaged an alternative logic of rank and power to reframe his fear of being gay in the military. While this was a strategy that helped him through his service, it is unproductive as it enforces the notion that one cannot be gay in the military. Otto knew this protection came from his superiors wanting to have their troops portrayed in the best possible light. However, this portrayal could not occur with openly gay individuals serving in their unit.

Appearing Straight. Another alternative logic was acting or appearing straight. Some participants felt they acted or appeared to act more like a straight person rather than a gay person. Whenever they witnessed differential treatment, they engaged an alternative logic by framing it

as appearing different from other gay individuals because they appear or act straight. In other words, they do not act stereotypically gay. By appearing straight, James said, “I don’t feel like I’ve been impacted because I acted like a straight guy.” Oliver explained, “For me, because I am generally [cisgender] masculine presenting, it was easier for me to fit in.” Todd described himself saying, “I definitely give off a lot of what I guess [are] the stereotypical straight vibes.” Sophia mentioned because of her uniform “you can’t tell that I am a gay female unless I tell you, so I feel like the military helps hide me unless I chop my hair off.” Sophia is not saying she acts straight but that the uniform itself helps her to appear straight because it takes away the individuality of choosing one’s clothes in which according to her, she would then look like a stereotypical “butch” lesbian.

These participants saw this as a feature that separated themselves from those who are more gay appearing. The alternative logic here was that while they are gay, they should not (or do not) appear gay, and this protected them from negative treatment. This logic, while possibly making them resilient to potential challenges (e.g., microaggressions), functions as a hegemonic logic which perpetuates the assumption that gay individuals are not fit for the military. This logic is not productive overall, or for the resilience of the queer military community.

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

Another way participants enacted resilience was to legitimate negative feelings while foregrounding productive action. This occurred in making references to their sexuality or relationships and by living openly to create a better military and environment for peer and future queer service members. This productive action was accomplished through acts such as openly discussing their partner/spouse and sending the message that LG service members exist and

succeed and wearing a pride lanyard. Participants, because of their firsthand or observed experiences, decided to engage in productive action to change the culture they experienced.

Todd expressed his reasons saying, “Everybody knows I’m gay. I make sure it’s known. I want to be that example for younger versions of me to know it’s okay [to be gay in the military].” Noah expressed himself and fought for LGBT rights by joining a nonprofit and spending his free time dressing up in cosplay and running marathons in the costume to raise money and awareness for LGBT military. Noah is also nearing the end of his service and plans to get a pride tattoo. He explained these actions:

> The primary reason why I…make those little inferences and little hints to people and to mixed group or a new command is it’s my own personal revenge of saying, “Hey this establishment tried to push us out. I joined the insurgency, and we fought the government, and we won three times. So now this is my big ‘fuck you’ to you guys and you will now deal with it” as it were.

Becca expressed her desire to live openly by saying:

> It was a conscious decision with my wife at the time. We were going to be as out and open as probably possible so that we could be a beacon for others to come to us if they had questions or weren’t feeling very positive about themselves. We were in positions of authority, we were officers, we were well respected within our own communities...we had a platform of sorts that we could encourage others to ask questions about the LGBT community if they didn’t understand or to come out to get ideas from on how to resolve problems.

Oliver had similar sentiments about wanting to use his position to help others. However, this was not always the case. Oliver explained that he stayed closeted for a while, and saw others come out without the privilege of the rank that he had:

> It was seeing examples of other people openly gay helped me and I wanted to eventually use my position and rank and privilege to be able to display that for other people…Eventually I became confident enough in my position that I could then also not just prevent [jokes and bullying] from myself, but also correct it when I heard it. But that took a long time, for me to get there.

Oliver was closeted for some time, even though he had protective factors such as acting straight and eventually rank. However, it was not those alone that motivated him to come out and be an example for others. He saw others setting an example for him, and felt he needed to do the same. Emma also had experiences that led to her living out and proud. Emma expressed her reasoning for living proudly saying:

> I took it upon myself that I wanted no one else to have to feel that way. I was out and proud. I wear proudly when in uniform, I don't because I respect the uniform in the boundaries. But I work in hospitals, I've got a hospital badge on my hospital badge holder is the pride flags, I've got trans flags. I've got lesbian flags. I just go through various ones of them. I make it known that I'm a safe place for others to come and talk to and so I've had a lot of people come out to me whether they're military or civilians or they've come and ask me for advice on, but they have a gay friend or they have someone who's queer or they don't know how to handle it or things like that.

It was though these actions that Emma not only lives openly with pride but engages in productive action to create resilience for the queer military community.

Adam does not currently express his identity through artifacts but says when he gets promoted and is supervising other service members that he will start wearing a LGBT pride lanyard. Adam stated, "I'm going to start wearing that just you know, it's the whole type of 'Hey, this is a safe space' or…telling people who may not be out, 'Hey, you're in a safe space.'" Todd says he makes his identity known and fights for an inclusive space for others by flying a gay pride flag at his house.

Anticipatory Resilience

In addition to enacting resilience processes in response to firsthand and observed challenges, LG service members also reported that they anticipated possible challenges and prepared for their possible arrival (i.e., anticipatory resilience). This is different from other types of resilience as it is anticipatory and does not fall under the resilience processes. Examples of this include a) changing appearance or voice to appear heterosexual, b) avoiding topics such as religion, and c) avoiding individuals who might not be accepting.

The act of changing appearance or voice to appear heterosexual was done to protect oneself from appear gay. An example of this comes from Becca who explains:

> If I felt there was a situation where I was going to be judged or felt there was somebody that was less safe than normal, about my LGBT community, I would overdo it towards the feminine side on purpose to mask.

Adam would also engage in behaviors to mask his sexuality and in doing so enacted anticipatory resilience:

> I would be very, very careful with how I use my hands and then additionally, maybe I might drop my voice a little bit more. In room full of men who have been in the military for such a long time, because that's kind of the demographic that you know, may or may

not, have some unconscious biases, that's the only time where I kind of feel like I kind of have some of my struggles. Like I kind of have to quote unquote tone down the gay.

Participants would also change how they communicated about their spouse/partner when interacting with unfamiliar individuals. Sophia's thought process is:

> Every time I go somewhere it's not 'Hey, I'm married to a woman.' It's, 'I'm married,' it's not 'I'm married to a woman.' It's just 'I'm married.' So I keep to myself when I go somewhere new until I get a feel of people. Until I can see if you are normal or do you have biases?

Another form of anticipatory resilience was avoiding taboo topics (e.g., religious or political talk). Participants would make note on who discussed politics and what their political leaning might be. This was also the same for religion, if someone appeared or discussed religion it was an indicator that they might be unfriendly to LG individuals. We see this in Adam's experience who disclosed:

> I conceal it when I definitely heard comments about a supervisor or someone who said like 'Oh yeah, they're very socially conservative. They very regularly attend church.' Those people I would probably really try to conceal my sexual orientation and you can always get a vibe from people you know if they're open or not. You know it's one of those things like in the workplace, you just kind of navigate.

The final anticipatory strategy was avoiding anyone or any conversations with those who are not LGBT friendly. Hilda had a similar concern and would avoid having conversations with certain people "if they're religious or just not okay with that [LGBT individuals]." However, Hilda also didn't want to assume the worst and pass judgment on others, because that is what she worried about others doing to her. This led Hilda to the thought process of:

> Hey, you know what? I'm just going to act the way that I always do. I'm going to keep it professional and if I see that they treat me differently because of being a lesbian, that's when I'm going to have an issue.

Noah was also aware of the people who might be around noting:

> I don't like talking about politics and religion in mixed company because you never know who's listening and those typically are triggers for conflict just like in the real world. I don't like talking about that sort of stuff, and If I know you well and you know me well, then there's a certain rapport or trust, then we can talk [about politics].

The actions by Adam, Hilda, and Noah act as anticipatory resilience as they engaged in behaviors to prevent challenges from arising. However, in doing so they had to hide all or part of who they are, which, as seen above, can act as a challenge itself. The anticipatory resilience of LG service members can be dysfunctional. In the moment they are used and work for individuals, however, it does not create culture change and resilience for the queer community in the military. The strategy they used allowed them to survive the moment but in terms of enacting community resilience, the strategy falls short.

Chapter Four: Discussion

This study sought to understand how LG service members experience U.S. military life after they come out, what challenges they face during their service, and what are their resilience responses to these challenges. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with LG service members to answer three research questions, 1) How do LG service members experience military life post coming out? 2) What challenges do LG service members experience? 3) And what resilience processes do LGB service members draw upon in response to triggers?

I analyzed the interviews using a thematic analysis. The findings of this study support CTR (Buzzanell, 2010) and serve as the basis for my recommendation to include in the theory interpersonal challenges that lead to the enactment of resilience strategies by Lesbian and Gay individuals. This chapter discusses the culture experienced by Lesbian and Gay service members, their coming out experiences, and the resilience strategies they engaged in. It will also review the limitations of this study, the practical implications, and future directions.

U.S. Military Life Post Coming Out

U.S. Military as Masculine

With respect to my first research question, there were two themes that emerged from the data. First, participant reports reflect how, pre and post DADT repeal, the U.S. military was and is a masculine, male dominated, and a heterosexual environment. Second, U.S. military culture has changed over time and functioned differently among the branches. Before the repeal of DADT participants discussed how the military was very male, and heterosexual dominated. Women were not in as many positions of power, and femininity was not a desirable trait. This is consistent with the findings of Goldstein (2018). The resistance to women in the military, and in specific roles has been a sight of tension, Goldstein studied this resistance as it pertained to

women in combat roles. This resistance is the result of "men who have been conditioned to stake their identity and power in a zero-sum game where masculinity is predicated on subordinating femininity and other masculinities, women in a protected proving ground of masculinity pose a direct threat" (Goldstein, 2018, p. 399). Women in this study discussed experiencing such resistance not because they were trying to enter combat roles but simply for being a lesbian woman in a position of power. Goldstein states, "For men who have been conditioned to stake their identity and power in a zero-sum game where masculinity is predicated on subordinating femininity and other masculinities, women in a protected proving ground of masculinity pose a direct threat" (p. 399). This "other masculinity" refers to gay men, who might present as masculine, but because of their gay identity are placed in this other category. Van Gilder (2019a) explained that gay military and women felt they needed to communicate in a way that was more masculine. While they are not women, gay men can be seen has having this other masculinity which is not consistent with the idealized notion of masculinity that has pervaded the military.

Before the repeal of DADT, LG service members were subject to hearing jokes or derogatory comments about the LGBT community. This is consistent with previous research such as Alford and Lee (2016) who found LGBT service members were the target of jokes, derogatory or offensive language and in the most extreme cases, harassment. Those who served after the repeal of DADT also felt the need to adhere to traditional masculine norms. This expectation came from the messages they received from parents who had served themselves, or from observations and stories of others about what queer individuals in the military faced. Participants from both branches reported that they did observe such things or felt like the military had changed over time, with some branches being more progressive than others. Richard and Molloy (2020) found that while service members communicated that inclusion and diversity

was beneficial to the military, this was inconsistent with other language within the military that upholds hegemonic masculinity.

Participants also described the different culture of each branch, how some are more progressive than others. The military culture was also described as changing over time. Sports is another field in which LGBT acceptance has been and is slow. MacCharles and Melton (2021) studied gay men working in sports and how their perception of stigma influenced them to come out. The participants in their study came from a wide age range like the present study. MacCharles and Melton note that there has been progress in this field, but gay individuals still face challenges. Gay men in athletic careers can is somewhat comparable to the military culture. During their career the men in their study looked for organizational indications and practices and for social signals to determine if it was safe to come out.

Those who served after the repeal of DADT in my study reported feeling the need to adhere to traditional masculine norms. It was also thought by participants that the military was unfriendly to LGBT individuals, this was due in part to stories they had heard from others. Participants also explained they could still see the lasting impacts of previous policies, such as including women in certain positions. Pressure to adhere to masculine norms exists in organizations, and is learned through different means such as orientations, clothing of others, and initial interactions with others (Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2021). Participants in this current study observed the organizational impacts of DADT, even years later, and were socialized to behave in a manner consistent with the military culture.

Coming Out Experiences

The participants in this study came out in a variety of ways and contexts, and there was little difference before and after the repeal of DADT. The way in which service members came

out were in small groupings that were intentional moments. Participants like Adam came out to people they worked in immediate proximity and consistently with. Others looked for signs that others were accepting of LGBT individuals, such as using inclusive language, or talking about other queer individuals they know. This is consistent with the findings of McNamara et al. (2021a), who found that LGBT individuals look for green, white, or red flags to people they are considering disclosing their sexuality to. Participants in Van Gilder's (2017) study also noted the language of others and looked for inclusive communication. Some participants made sure they no longer hid their sexuality after they came out of the closet. They made it a point to mention their partner, or their work in LGBT advocacy. This is related to the argument of DiDomenico (2015) who argued that coming out is a constant performative act, done throughout an individual's life. What makes the findings in this study different is that at times coming out served as a form of resilience.

Challenges of Lesbian and Gay Military Service

Participants reported several challenges both pre and post DADT repeal, which could be clustered into firsthand and observed challenges. One firsthand challenge of those who served before the repeal of DADT was the fear of being discharged from service. For some participants this meant staying in the closet and for others it meant going back into the closet. This led to service members repressing certain feelings because they could not openly be themselves. The military culture prevented participants from connecting with their coworkers, enjoying a full social life, and made them unsure about the future of their career. DADT was implemented as it was assumed LG individuals would weaken the cohesion of the military (Trivette, 2010). However, DADT had the opposite effect as it led to LG service members hiding their identity

from some coworkers, and connecting with only certain others (Trivette, 2010). This was seen in the current study in both pre and post DADT participants.

Participants discussed concealing their queer identity and not discussing that aspect of their life to portray a sense or idea of being masculine. The participants in this study also explained how they viewed their gay and military identities as separate, and how that changed over time. MacCharles and Melton (2022) also reported gay athletes segmented their sexuality, having an identity as an athlete, and another one as a gay man. For some they kept them segmented to conceal their sexuality, and some were stuck with notions that you can't be gay and in the military and worried about the consequences for being out. Under DADT LG service members were forced to form their own version of a gay and military identity, one that didn't align with the mainstream identity of the military (Trivette, 2010). In my study, James who is Hispanic, experienced racial challenges as well. James had to deal with racism or racial stereotypes as well as gay stereotypes. James felt more of an emotional response to racial challenges because people made judgments about him based off his skin color without knowing anything about him. This racism has an impact on the military readiness of that individual (Daniel et al., 2021). Those who experienced racism in the military are less likely to stay in the military, are less satisfied with their work, supervisors, coworkers, and it affects their performance (Daniel et al., 2021).

Lesbian and Gay service members serving before the repeal of DADT did not experience full inclusion in the military, and even after the repeal were not equals with their peers. Otto explained that socially there was no support system for queer service members. Participants described not being able to receive housing or medical benefits for their partners. As explained

by Brocco (2010), this was experienced by others who were allowed to serve but were married in states before it was federally legal and therefore did not receive benefits.

Several participants described challenges that were intersectional. Sophia and Becca discussed being sexually assaulted, or observing others being sexually assaulted because they were lesbians. As women, this fear already existed for them, however they did not anticipate that it would happen because they were lesbians until they were in the military. Sexual assault is common in the military with 58.7% of female veterans 4.1% male veterans report being sexually assaulted during their service (Pritchard, 2023). When lesbians are targeted because of their sexuality, it is known as corrective rape (Doan-Minh, 2019). As described by Doan-Minh (2019):

> Corrective rape is a weapon used by men to teach lesbians how to be 'real' women. It acts as a reminder to lesbians, and others who choose not to follow patriarchal and heterosexual behavioral norms, that they will be punished for failing to conform. (p. 170)

This is something that was experienced by a participant and was feared by another one. In a study about the resilience of mothers in Puerto Rico enacted after Hurricane Maria, Potter (2023) noted the women's stories, "demonstrated the invisible but interwoven conditions that continued to intensify the historical oppressions that these women faced" (p. 27). The stories in this dissertation highlight the interwoven conditions of the masculine and heteronormative military, the challenges faced by women in the military, and the challenges of being a lesbian. The women faced challenges not connected to just one aspect of their identity but multiple. They also had to contend with systems which have historically excluded women and lesbians. Connell (2022) studied sexual harassment and military policies related to LGBT service members. Lesbian women were afraid to report any sexual harassment or assault in fear of being discharged. Participants in Connell's study also described experienced racism and homophobic bullying, and

from this felt they could not report their mistreatment without negative consequences being imposed on them.

Participants who served after the repeal of DADT were subject to hearing gay jokes, or slurs, not always directed at them, but still a challenge as it is directed at their identity. Participants encountered individuals who had a clear bias towards gay people and treated them differently as a result. This upholds the findings of other studies such as Mount et al. (2015) whose participants experienced stress as a result of hiding their identity and the relationships they had with others. Some participants felt they had to prove themselves more because of the image of their racial identity. This included feeling a need to live up to or overcome racial stereotypes. Assalone and Fann (2016) found that Asian Americans often experience microaggressions that were a result of the model minority stereotype that Asian Americans must be smart. Adam related this to the military, and that the model service member was not the same as the model Asian. This had impacts on how he saw his military identity, and affected his behaviors as he was worried about how he would be perceived.

Observed Challenges

LG service members observed other gay individuals at the receiving end of gay jokes, receiving different treatment, death, and death threats. As noted by Alford and Lee (2016) LGBT individuals serving in the military are subject to jokes, offensive comments, and harassment. While studies mainly focus on the individuals who experienced these directly, it is important to study the impact the observation of these has on an individual. LG service members who observed jokes, but were not the target, were still affected by those behaviors. It instills a fear that such actions could happen to them. This can lead participants to remain closeted and not engage with their peers.

Participants also observed others being relegated to doing undesirable tasks away from peers, being ridiculed because of painted nails, and others refusing to work with LGBT individuals. Some participants became aware of others being raped because of their sexuality or extreme events, such as being stationed at a base where someone was just beaten to death for being perceived as gay, and seeing others receive death threats. These types of scenarios communicated to LG service members that the culture they were immersed in, was not friendly or safe to people like them, which has implications on how participants communicated to others. It also has implications on what participants feel they are able to communicate about their identity. Isolation resulting from the military culture contributes to the lack of social support reported by participants in this study.

Resilience Processes

CTR has five established processes of 1) crafting normalcy, 2) affirm identity anchors, 3) maintain, and use communication networks, 4) use alternative logics, and finally 5) legitimize negative feelings and engage in positive actions (Buzzanell, 2010). In the current study the processes that emerged as most salient were a) affirming identity anchors, b) maintaining and using communication networks, c) using alternative logics, and d) legitimizing negative feelings and engage in positive actions. The resilience process of crafting normalcy has been reported in other studies but was not one that surfaced in this study. This could be due to the interview study designed to capture normalcy after a single challenge. What emerged in this study was many micro challenges and it was harder for participants to comprehend the questions focused on larger challenges.

Affirming Identity Anchors

Participants talked about finding an identity as a good leader which motivated them to come out or be out of the closet. They explained that lying about one part of their identity was not in line with being a good leader. Lillie et al.'s (2018) participants focused on identity anchors like religion and also being a good parent. In my study participants say being a good leader is intertwined with their gay identity. This is what motivated some to come out. For other participants, they said when they get to a leadership position, they would do more to be open with their sexuality to be an example for others. This can be seen as a form of mentoring. Rossetto and Martin (2022) studied campus support leaders and how they mentored students in a way that led them to enact resilience. One way they helped students affirm identity anchors was through self-reflection, valuing students and their uniqueness. Lesbian and Gay military affirmed their identity anchors by striving to be a good leader part of which was to show other gay individuals they could do it too.

Maintaining & Using Communication Networks

Participants found friendship and sources of support in queer friendships in and outside of the military. Some participants talked about preferring to hang out with other gay people and did not interact with straight friends as often, and specifically gay military friends because they have similar experiences. This resilience process emerged previously in Fanari et al.'s (2023) work which found that participants enacted resilience and affirmed their identity by "using specific military language, vocabulary, and memes as anchors to affirm their military identity" (p. 9). Participants in my study relied on other gay military members and sought out other gay military friends. This seeking out similar others was because they could talk about their similar

experiences, and understand the military lingo, and affirm their gay military identity, while maintaining and using their communication networks.

Two participants also discussed code words that were used in the gay community before the repeal of DADT to identify and communicate with other gay service members. This is consistent with the findings of Trivette (2010) in which LG service members were able to connect with each other using discreet methods such as a handshake to identify a queer space where they could be free. Engaging in this behavior as an act of resilience aligns with the findings of Pangborn (2019), which indicated that sharing stories as a way to connect with others with similar experiences enables resilience. One participant, Noah, joined and become very involved with a LGBT military nonprofit to help advance his community. Potter (2023) described a participant who felt conflict between their expected roles, and they channeled this conflict into action. This productive action was "an attempt not only to fight her marginalization, but the marginalization she was witnessing around her" (p. 30). Noah's story of joining a nonprofit is placed under maintaining and using communication networks, because he joined after he came out and was trying to connect with other LGBT service members. However, this nonprofit does advocacy work, and can also be placed under productive action. This highlights how resilience strategies can overlap. Otto was a part of the same nonprofit as Noah but utilized it more for social connection such as asking about housing or gay culture at different bases. Rossetto and Martin's (2022) participants shared supportive resources and enabled connections across students. This is how the nonprofits Facebook page was used by Otto, and how he observed it being used by others.

Alternative Logics

An alternative logic used by LG service members was reframing their fears, such as being discharged or being treated differently through a different lens. They chose to view themselves being good at their job, as a protective factor against their fears. Participants observed that those who were openly gay, despite possible retaliation, were always good at their job. However, as noted by one participant this was not always a productive strategy. While it protected them from retaliation, it also can at a cost of focusing on their personal life and mental wellbeing because they were engrossed in their work. For others performing work well was not a distraction or a protective action but a sense of duty to portray the LGBT community in the best light. There was also the feeling that LG members had to live up to higher standards than straight or white peers. Another alternative logic was being protected by military rank. Participants were at a point in their career where they held authority and others could not belittle them because of their sexuality as they had the power to enforce consequences. Gay men who work in the sport industry also reported feeling more protected in coming out as they moved up in their career. It was also noted that gay male athletes felt their athletic performance minimized the stigma and importance they put on the negative reactions to their sexuality (MacCharles & Melton, 2021).

Other participants explained they came off as straight or acted straight, which protected them from others making assumptions or being treated differently because of those assumptions. Buzzanell (2010) explained resilience occurs from "seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work through development of alternative logics or through reframing the entire situation" (p. 6). Lesbian and queer service members reframed the context in which their queer identity interacts with their surroundings. Payne (2007) explains the act of straight acting in non-queer spaces is:

> An attempt to prevent being recognized as (perhaps by) the undesired other: the hegemonically constructed figure of the shamefully spectacular and excessively feminine gay man. The feared magnitude of his spectacle may threaten to envelop others by association or proximity and is all too often blocked by violent force. To pass, gay excess must be contained and removed from legible view, hidden in some version of closet. And rather than being a return to some neutral state of mere being-the cessation of a performance-the containment is itself actively performative and hence not a containment at all. (p. 533–534)

While it may be how they normally come across, the gay men in this study who discussed acting straight phrased it in a way that distanced themselves from other gay individuals. Participants described how they were not like other gays, and therefore would be treated differently, or not outed. It is interesting to note that the women in this study did not discuss this, or at least not as a form of resilience.

The participants in my study felt protected describing that they acted like a straight person or came across as straight passing. While one might argue that if that is how they act then it is not acting. However, Payne (2007) argues that noting one acts straight means not acting stereotypically gay, and in doing so treats those who do act gay as an undesirable trait. The alternative logic of acting straight exemplifies the argument by Payne because the participants framed their fears as being mitigated because they did not act or appear as a stereotypical gay male. This kind of thinking was beneficial to the individual in the moment but overall reductive and not productive to the LGBT community in the military because it holds up the started that to serve one must be straight. The results of Richard and Molloy's (2020) study "indicated that the successful military member is one who fulfills this emphasized hypermasculine hegemonic

identity and participants reinforced negative perceptions of certain groups of women" (p. 694). By appearing as straight and using that as an alternative logic, gay service members enacted an unproductive resilience strategy. In this study, instead of negative perceptions of women being reinforced, they were reinforcing the notion that one cannot "act gay" and be in the military. One alternative logic enacted by military spouses during COVID-19 was using military mantras about what was going on. These included cliché sayings like, "Hope for the best, plan for the worst" (Fanari et al., 2023). In my study participants enacted military ideologies including the idea that one cannot be gay in the military. They also enacted and used a heterosexual mask to conceal themselves and to give the appearance of enacting a proper military ideology.

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

The resilience strategy of legitimize negative feelings while foregrounding productive action was also present. This took the form of living openly so that others would be able to see it and feel safe coming out. The participants recognized the challenges they faced when closeted and/or before the repeal of DADT and how hard it was for them. Potter (2023) studied resilience of women after Hurricane Maria and their participants recognized their feelings of anger and frustration from their experiences but were not able to voice this publicly. For Lesbian and Gay service members, they could not voice any of this anger before the repeal of DADT and due to the nature of the military could not voice this anger after the repeal. From this they decided to engage in the productive action of making sure others did not experience what they experienced. Potter went on to note the productive action performed by the women in her study "once seemed unsafe or worrisome became sensible" (p. 28). Before the repeal of DADT queer individuals would be punished for talking about their sexuality or signaling it with artifacts such as rainbow flags and lanyards while on duty and possibly in their personal life.

Similarly in my study, Lesbian and Gay service members engaged in this productive action because they experienced and/or observed challenges. Betts et al. (2022) examined anticipatory resiliency and explained their "project demonstrates the value in theorizing anticipatory resilience as an ante-narrative process that shapes how individuals understand the future in terms of the disruptive events they have already experienced" (p. 227). Betts et al. further explained, "Individuals may not always be aware of the prospective logics that inhere their narratives" (p. 227). While Betts et al. was seeking to understand anticipatory resilience, these findings can help explain the actions of participants in my study. Lesbian and Gay service members were thinking about others around them and the culture they existed in and based on those past challenges decided to engage in productive action to prevent challenges or create better experiences for other gay individuals. Participants in this study sought to change the culture of the military, and make it known that other LGBT individuals exist and are successful in the military. This is like how Scharp et al.'s (2022) participants described their student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic by noting the negative things happening around them but also focusing on being successful in their studies. Military participants recognized both past and present struggles and engaged in positive actions to work on creating a better military culture.

Anticipatory Resilience

The participants in this study enacted anticipatory resilience processes by a) changing their appearance or voice to appear heterosexual, b) avoiding topics such as religion, and c) avoiding individuals who might not be accepting. These were done to fit in, as a fear of being treated differently which came from how they saw others being treated differently and/or from their own personal experiences. Some participants like Adam and Sophia would change their

appearance or their voice in order to pass as straight. Multiple participants also stated they avoided topics such as religion or politics, or those from a cultural background that are unaccepting to LGBT individuals. Scharp et al. (2023) found that "perceived ideological differences pertaining to religious beliefs and/or (inter)cultural values were also a trigger" (p. 11). The participants in my study sought to avoid this being a trigger leading to a challenge that they might experience during their service.

Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study contribute to the CTR in several ways. The first way it contributes to CTR is through the study and understanding of smaller challenges that individuals face, also known as cascading triggers. These smaller triggers, build up and lead to a major disruption that individuals enact resilience in response to. Turner et al., (2023) studied mothers and how they managed their jobs and family during COVID-19. In Turner et al.'s study, COVID-19 served as the macrodisruption, and the participants faced microdisruptions, such as employment issues and childcare. My study supports the idea of larger macrodisruptions, such as COVID-19, and the nature of smaller microdisruptions that can cascade, leading Lesbian and Gay service members to enact resilience, and anticipatory resilience. While some Lesbian and Gay service members experienced direct and serious challenges, they and others are and were subject to smaller tribulations. In my study, the act of being gay while serving in the military is considered the macrodisruption, and participants experienced microdisruptions throughout their service. Turner et al. noted that when participants experience microdisruptions, it made their job harder. The same can be said for Lesbian and Gay service members who must negotiate their existence in an unfriendly environment. These smaller but impactful experiences build up over time, and to survive in a culture such as the military requires resilience. Tian and Bush (2020)

uncovered that the women in their study faced “continuous obstacles, inequalities, and adversities” (p. 71) and future studies should also examine the resilience strategies of others who face similar smaller obstacles. The present study uncovered examples of these smaller obstacles and the resilience strategies that LG service members engaged in to preserve through the cascading challenges. These cascading challenges led to the enactment of resilience. Participants might not have been enacting resilience during their entire service but engaged in the strategies when needed. This was not a linear process but one that required participants to reestablish resilience with every base or location they were sent to, and changed over time as they grew as a queer individual and with their rank.

A second contribution this study makes to the CTR literature is that it provides another example of how resistance functions as a resilience process. Hintz et al. (2023) argued for adding a sixth process, critiquing and resisting the status quo. In my study participants engaged in behaviors that were described by them as resistance or revenge at the military. This involved getting a pride tattoo, living opening, discussing their sexuality or talking about their partners when they could. In my study these were labeled as productive action because they were done at creating a better culture for other queer service members. However, future LGBT miliary and CTR studies could examine the resistance aspect further. Participants talked about these actions as getting back at the military for how they were treated. They saw it as a form of resistance to those who would rather see them not serve. A different interview schedule than the one in the present study could be used to capture more of the notion of resistance in these actions performed by LG service members.

A third contribution to the CTR literature is that this study highlighted the community aspect of challenges and resilience. Those who served only after the repeal of DADT saw or

heard what others had experienced before them and enacted anticipatory resilience. This was done because they had seen what others in their community had experienced and felt they needed to prepare for the same. Fortunately, the anticipated challenges did not occur, or were not as severe as anticipated. This could be because of the progress made in the military, and because of the communicative productive action of those who had served before the repeal of DADT and wanted to make a better culture and set an example to others.

Practical Implications

This study has practical implications that can be used to improve the experiences of other queer service members. Regardless of whether they reported joining the U.S. military before or after the repeal of DADT, my participants reported similar challenges and experiences. The findings show those experiences and how those service members enacted resilience. Participants would feel like they couldn't come out or that they did not have a gay community to connect with. This is partly due to a lack of community support from the military itself. The military could incorporate more support or support groups for LGBT individuals. Individuals who are unaware of other queer people around them and afraid to come out might benefit from military organized LGBT events. These events could allow for visibility of LGBT service members and provide an open space for them to be around similar others. By hearing the experiences mentioned by participants in this study individuals may also feel comfortable in knowing others went through it as well. It can also provide them with knowledge on how to identify other queer individuals, allies, and strategies on how they can preservers through their own challenges. Fanari et al. (2023) argued a practical application of their study was that by helping families to reflect on what they went through they could come up with positive strategies to use in future situations. The participants in my study might not have been aware of the resilience strategies,

specifically their productive action. By having participants reflect and converse with fellow queer service members they can share how they remained resilient during their service.

One of the issues discussed by participants was there are policies and trainings that exist in the military, either involving LGBT military, sexual assault, or diversity, but these don't have larger implications on the culture of the military. Participants discussed how harassment policies, while comforting to have, act more as a deterrent for behavior, and when such behaviors occur no real action is taken. Some participants experienced or observed reporting homophobic behaviors, but not seeing any real consequences for perpetrators. The same was said for instances of sexual assault, however, others experienced instances of those policies being enforced heavily. Some noted that this is partly due to what they called commander roulette, as it was up to them how much or little to enforce policies when issues arise. This shows a need for further policy reform and changes in practice within the military.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study includes diversity of the sample, including race, gender, and sexuality. Seeking out African American voices in the future will strengthen this study. The second was a lack of representation for all the U.S. Military branches. The third limitation was how the interview schedule approached the topic of resilience, concerning macro versus micro disruptions. The fourth limitation is the lack of crafting normalcy did not emerge in this study which could have resulted in how the interview scheduled approached collecting data on the strategy. The fifth limitation is that the population of this study might be skewed toward resilience. This study had a somewhat diverse sample including white, Hispanic, and Asian Americans the latter significantly not represented in research enough (Chu et al., 2021). However, this study was lacking in its representation of other ethnicities/races. There were more

gay men represented and individuals who served before the repeal of DADT. This could have caused some issues with recalling certain events as they happened many years ago. This is a common critique for retrospective interview techniques. For example, participants could remember it being a hostile time for LGBT individuals but could not recall specific jokes or examples at times. However, they were still able to describe how their experiences impacted them and the resilience strategies they used. There was a trans individual who identified as a female and a lesbian which is why they were included in this study. Future CTR studies could focus on the experiences of trans individuals as well as individuals who define as bisexual. The Marines were not represented in this study and multiple participants suggested that branch would be or is the most hostile to LGBT individuals. The Navy was also underrepresented in this study with only one participant serving in that branch.

Another possible limitation of the study was how I phrased certain interview questions. Micro and macrodisruptions were mentioned and discussed, but sometimes they came out through follow up questions. One example of how the interview schedule could have been improved was the question, "What challenges did you face?" At first participants would not mention any challenges. It may be that they did not understand what was meant by challenges. This lack of understanding could have hindered the gathering of challenges experienced by Lesbian and Gay individuals. However, some challenges came out later in the interview as other questions were asked. This also might be why the resilience strategy of crafting normalcy did not emerge in the interviews.

The questions designed to address how service members crafted normalcy were worded as if a major life altering event occurred. The participants in this study mainly discussed micro disruptions and when asked how they take care of themselves they thought the question was odd.

Many of them said they worked out, talked to friends, and some went to therapy. However only one discussed going to therapy regarding their sexual/gender identity. These are important outlets for individuals, but crafting normalcy was not one discussed. It may also be that a military life is very regimented, and being gay while serving can be a marcodisruption, is something that is ongoing, and military life provides that constant normal. Also, if homophobia is the normal, then other resilience strategies might prove more productive. It could be that smaller disruptions don't lead to crafting normalcy because it isn't necessary. Another possibility of why it didn't emerge could be because of a positivity bias. I was looking for positive ways in which they crafted normalcy. It wasn't until later when I realized there could have been negative examples of crafting normalcy. A recoding of the data may bring this process out of the interviews.

The fourth limitation is that the population of this study might have been skewed toward resilience. A number of the participants were more outgoing and involved in the military and/or LGBT community. Some participants are a part of LGBT military nonprofits/organizations. These individuals might be more likely to enact or have the ability to enact resilience. This might contribute to the difference between resilience and those who just cope during their service.

Future Directions

This study supported the idea of microdisruptions experienced by Lesbian and Gay service members. A future direction this line of study could take is focusing more on the sources of those disruptions and breaking down the system that allowed them to occur such as Scharp et al (2021) and Scharp et al. (2022). These studies identified and labeled the sources of triggers such as bureaucratic, cultural, or financial. This would involve a more critical approach to research, and one that is needed in future LGBT military studies. Future LGBT military studies

could look at both macro and micro disruptions. One participant in this study who identified as trans and served before DADT came out as a female and lesbian after it was announced they would be allowed to serve, and then they served during the Trump era, where transgender service members were no longer allowed to serve. This required resilience on her part in an already stressful career requiring even more resilience. Future studies could focus on more stories such as Emma's and of other transgender service members. Their experiences are unique, and because of the back and forth with the allowance of their service, the resilience of these individuals needs to be understood. This could be done through studied focusing exclusively on transgender service members, and not focusing as much on sexuality.

One area that could be explored is the focus on LGBT service members upbringing and their family communication growing up. It would be insightful to understand the messages they received about being queer and about the military itself and how that influenced their communication, perspective of self, behavior, and resilience in the military. Some participants described experiences of their families expressing worry because of what they saw during their own service. Using a storytelling perspective, a future study could look at how family stories shape perception of joining the military as a queer individual.

Most participants mentioned current or former partners and spouses but only one individual indicated they had children. Future studies could look at resilience of queer military families and/or strategies used by the children of the service members. This could be done by interviewing multiple family members. It could also be done through an ethnographic study, spending time with military families during different aspects of their lives.

A couple of participants mentioned their race/ethnicity impacted them more than their queer identity. Future studies could explore the issue of race in the military from an

intersectional perspective. Connell (2022) showed the issue of race and sexuality, but noted this was experienced by only one of their participants. Future studies could make this a focus of their research.

Future studies can address the application of resilience processes when analyzing data. Data can be messy and during the coding process there were times where quotes could fall into multiple categories. I would pick which one best applies to the quote but when writing up the findings it would become complicated again and recoding was needed at times. Future studies could tease out this messiness and address the overlapping nature of resilience processes. During the interview it also became apparent that certain questions designed to elicit answers about a certain process would instead highlight another process than the one intended. In this study questions about alternative logics brought up more stories about productive action. Questions aimed at identity, instead brought up stories about alternative logics. One approach future research could take is looking at the co-occurrence of resilience processes. Looking at co-occurrences of resilience processes was recently done by Geary et al. (2023). Future studies should approach CTR research in this way.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the experiences and resilience strategies of LG service members. In this study participants expressed both micro and macro challenges related to their sexuality and their military service. In response to these challenges LG service members enacted the resilience strategies of affirming identity anchors, maintain, and use communication networks, use alternative logics, and finally legitimize negative feelings and engage in positive actions. This study contributes to the CTR by supporting the idea that individuals do not have to encounter one major challenge to enact resilience. This study shows smaller challenges build up

and leads individuals to enacting resilience. There is no lack of military studies, and this study contributes to that body of study. However, it adds to this study by showing the history of LG experiences, how the evolved overtime, and the current state of what it is like to serve in the military as a queer individual. This study also highlights how resilience strategies are not always productive in the long run. Participants in this study engaged in alternative logics that were helpful in the moment but were not helpful to their community and changing the culture of the military. It was clear the participants in this study wanted to make a difference for other queer service members based off their own experiences. This leads to the practical implications of this study as it can provide not only ideas for resilience strategies, but show common experiences, and how to deal with them. This study was limited in its number of gay versus lesbian participants, and the distribution of branches. Another limitation was how the interview scheduled was phrased, focusing on larger challenges, when what emerged were the smaller challenges. Future studies can focus on other resilience aspects of military service, families, and LGBT individuals. CTR was useful in determining the strength and perseverance of LG service members and not focusing on the victimization which is often done in research on LGBT individuals. This study shows the strength and resilience of LG service members have and continue to enact.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Statement

Recruitment Statement

Hello,

I am doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and I am conducting research for my dissertation about the experiences of queer service members.

Participants must be

- Identify as Lesbian or Gay.
- Be currently serving or retired from the U.S. armed forces.
- 18 years of age.

Interviews will be audio-recorded, conducted in person, over the phone, or by video conference, and last 60-90 minutes. Participants will be compensated with a $25 gift card after the interview.

Do you qualify for the study and are interested in participating? If so, we can discuss setting up an interview.

Do you know anyone who might be interested in participating? If so, please share with them my contact email (dnsii@uwm.edu) and information about the study.

Thank you,

Dathan Simpson
dnsii@uwm.edu
UWM IRB# 23.124
Approval Date: 1/13/23

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Research Study with Lesbian & Gay Military

I am conducting interviews with U.S. Service Members who identify as Lesbian or Gay to understand their experiences while serving

I am looking for Active Duty or Retired Service Members:

- Who served after the repeal of DADT in 2010
- Who identify as Lesbian or Gay
- Who were out to at least one other person in the military
- Are 18 years of age or older

Qualifying participants will receive a $25 Amazon gift card after the interview (lasting approximately 1 hour). Interviews will be confidential.

For Questions or to Schedule an Interview Please Contact:
Dathan Simpson
dnsii@uwm.edu
325-340-8552

IRB #: 23.124
APPROVED: 1/13/23

Appendix C: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY of WISCONSIN
UWMILWAUKEE

Informed Consent for Research Participation
IRB #: 23.124
IRB Approval Date: 1/9/23

Study title	Exploring the Experiences of LGBT Service Members Using the Communication Theory of Resilience
Researcher[s]	Dathan N Simpson / MA / Communication Erin Sahlstein Parcell/ PhD/ Communication

We're inviting you to participate in a research study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

What is the purpose of this study?

Gay and Lesbian individuals serving experiences jokes, offensive comments, harassment dehumanization, discrimination, and stereotypes. This creates an unfriendly culture that gay and lesbian service members have to navigate and persevere through. We are using interviews to learn more about these experiences. We are interested I the perspective of Gay and Lesbian service members to better understand and represent their experiences in military literature.

What will I do?

You will participate in an audio-recorded interview via phone or Microsoft TEAMS, where I will ask you questions about your lesbian or gay identity, your military service, and how these interacted. After the interview and with your permission, we might follow-up with you to ask further questions and/or discuss our findings. The total time you will spend on the study will be between 60-90 minutes. To ensure your privacy, if the interview is being conducted virtually, please make sure to be in a private space or be aware that others around you might overhear the questions and your responses. You should not be at work during the interview. If you are on base be aware of your surroundings.

Risks

Possible risks	How we're minimizing these risks
Breach of confidentiality (your data being seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it)	• All identifying information you might share during the interview will be camouflaged (e.g., names are changed to pseudonyms) upon transcription and the recordings will be immediately deleted once the transcription is verified for accuracy. We'll store all data and your contact information (for sending the gift card) on password-protected, encrypted computers as well as in a UWM Teams folder that only the research team has access to.
Some questions may be personal or upsetting	You can skip any questions you don't want to answer. You are encouraged to seek counseling and/or reach out to a support group if you become distressed as a result of this interview. Resources are listed at the end of this form. With your permission date from interview that were ended early will still be used. Participants will only be withdrawn at their request.

There may be risks we don't know about yet. Throughout the study, we'll tell you if we learn anything that might affect your decision to participate.

Other Study Information

Possible benefits	You might gain insight into how your experiences affect you It might also be cathartic to express these experiences.
Estimated number of participants	30
How long will it take?	60-90 minutes
Costs	None
Compensation	You will be offered a $25 gift card at the end of the interview. You will still be compensated if you withdraw from the study during the interview. After in person or virtual interviews the gift card will be emailed to you. The email will not include any language that divulges the nature/topic of the interview. It will indicate that you are receiving the gift card for participation in a research study.
Future research	De-identified (all identifying information removed) data may be in other studies. You won't be told specific details about these future research studies.
Recordings / Photographs	Your interview will be audio recorded. The recording is necessary and will be used to create a transcript for analysis. Once the transcript is made and verified for accuracy, the recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be recorded, then you should not be in this study.
Funding source	Departmental funding (Amelia Lucas Trust Fund Award)

Data Security

What identifying information will be collected and why?	We will collect names and email addresses to send the gift card after the study.
How long will my data be kept?	The de-identified data will be kept for five years.
How is data kept secure?	• All identifying information is removed and replaced with a study ID. • We'll remove all identifiers after the data has been collected. • We'll store all electronic data on a password-protected, encrypted computer. • We'll store all paper data in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. • We'll keep your identifying information separate from your research data, but we'll be able to link it to you by using a study ID. We will destroy this link after we finish collecting and analyzing the data. • As with any data collected online, there is always a risk of data being hacked or intercepted. We're using a secure system to collect this data, but we can't completely eliminate this risk.

Who might see my data and why?

The researchers	To conduct the study and analyze the data.
The IRB (Institutional Review Board) at UWM	To ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines.

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) or other federal agencies	
Anyone (public)	We plan to share the findings in publications or presentations. You will not be identified by name. If we quote you, we will use a pseudonym.

Mandated Reporting

We are mandated reporters. This means that if we learn or suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, we're required to report this to the authorities.

Contact information:

For questions about the research, problems, or complaints	Dathan N Simpson Erin Parcell	325-340-8552/dnsii@uwm.edu eparcell@uwm.edu
For questions about your rights as a research participant, problems, or complaints	IRB (Institutional Review Board; provides ethics oversight)	414-662-3544 / irbinfo@uwm.edu

Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. By participating in this interview, you are indicating that you have read the consent form, you are age 18 or older and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. Do you have any questions about the study? Do you agree to participate?

Thank you.

Resources for LGBT Veterans:

U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
Mental Health Resources
Website: https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/lgbtq-plus/index.asp

Modern Military Association of America
Website: https://modernmilitary.org

Service Women's Action Network
Website: https://www.servicewomensactionnetwork.org

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study I appreciate you taking time out of your day to talk to me. Before we start can you please read the consent form. Do you have any questions about the study or the consent form? Please verbally indicate your consent to participate in the study:

Today I am going to ask you to tell me about your experience as a Gay or Lesbian individual serving in the military. There are no right or wrong answer to these questions and I am interested in your experience as you saw it.

Background questions:

1. Would you please start by telling me about your service. *[potential follow ups below]*
    a. Why did you join the military? What were the factors that contributed to you joining the military?
    b. How old were you when you joined the military?
    c. What branch of service did you join? (This answer may be provided in their answers above but is included here in case it is not)
    d. How long have you been serving? Or how long did you serve? And why did you leave the military?

Generative Questions:

Trigger Questions:

1. What was the general culture of the military and/or the branch you served in?
2. What was it like for you being gay and in the military?
3. Did others know you were gay?
4. Were you out or did you identify as Lesbian or Gay before joining the military?
5. How "out" are/were you in the military?
6. What things were said or done that help you to disclose your sexuality or to conceal it?
7. Can you tell me a story of a time you came out to someone while serving?
    a. Who was the first person you told?
    b. Why did you tell that person?
    c. Did you ask them to keep that information privately?
        i. Why or why not?
    d. Who did you tell after that?
8. What is a concern you had about being gay in the military?
9. What if any challenges did you experience because of your LGB identity?
        i. Was there anything or anyone that made the experience difficult?
        ii. Can you give me an example or two of this?
10. Were you treated differently by others while serving?
    a. Was it everyone who treated you differently or a specific person?
    b. What rank was that person?
        i. How did you respond to this treatment?
    c. Did you notice other LGB individuals being treated differently?
        i. How did they respond to this?
        ii. What were reactions to your response?

11. How has your sexuality impacted your career in the military?
12. Have you been excluded from anything work or socially related based on your sexuality?
    a. Can you give me some examples?
13. How was your experience compared to heterosexual service members?
    a. Can you give me some examples?

Crafting Normalcy:

1. When you experienced challenges related to your identity how would you respond?
    a. What was your daily life like after you experienced challenges?
2. How did you take care of yourself?
    a. How did you take care of others?
3. What were the things you said or did day to day to continue working in the military?

Affirming identity Questions:

1. What factors contributed to your decision to be out in the military?
    a. How important was it for you to be out in the military and why?
    b. Did you feel like you could be yourself?
        i. If so, why or why not?
        ii. Can you give me an example?

Maintaining and using communication network questions:

1. While serving who were you close with?
    b. How did they help or support you during your service?
2. Did you have any queer friends in the military?
3. Were you around those friends when experiencing the mentioned challenges?
    a. What role did they play in your response to those challenges?
4. Did you avoid any people or conversations?

Alternative Logic Questions:

1. When you experienced different treatment or anti-LGB scenarios what was your thought process?
2. How did your thinking about your LGB identity and military identity evolve?

Legitimizing negative feelings/engage positive actions:

1. What strategies/actions or behaviors did you use during difficult times?

Closing Questions:

1. What would you want others do know about your experiences with being a queer service member?
2. What advice would you give to another queer service member?
3. Is there anything else you would like me to share?