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Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Service Members' Experiences as Undergraduates: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

This article discusses results from a qualitative case study that examines the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members in higher education. The purpose of the study is to examine the institutional supports and constraints experienced by LGB-identified, active duty, military service members during their undergraduate enrollment. Findings are discussed under three themes related to experiences related to LGB identity, experiences related to military status, and the intersection of the experiences between LGB and military status. Implications for supporting military-affiliated LGB students in higher education are also discussed.

Keywords: LGB veterans, college students, qualitative case study, higher education

Definitions of diversity in higher education have expanded to include many sub-populations of students, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB)[1] and military-affiliated students. Although they are becoming more recognized by administrators and scholars in higher education, LGB and military-affiliated students remained underserved (Gomez, 2014; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). The chilly campus climate reinforces the need for specialized supports and services aimed at welcoming and supporting both LGB and military-affiliated students (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2011; Burleson, 2010).

Several factors affect the supports available to LGB and military-affiliated students. For example, geographic location, such as proximity to an urban area, may affect the overall climate and availability of community resources for LGB students (Rankin et al., 2010); similarly, proximity to military installations may affect the campus climate and availability of resources for military-affiliated students (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). While some colleges offer services and programs for either or both LGB and military-affiliated students, there is a lack of support for collaborative work between these resource areas (Mitstifer, 2012). In two comprehensive studies about these seemingly divergent student populations, there is mention of intersections of race, class, nationality, and generational status, but not across the two aspects of identity that focus the current study: LGB and military-affiliation (McBain et al., 2012; Rankin et al., 2010). In other words, researchers and practitioners alike have treated these two populations as disparate and separate with little attention paid to the intersections of these identities. Despite advances for LGB individuals in the military (i.e., the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell), tension between LGB and military-affiliated groups persist on many campuses (Strand, 2011).

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[1] While there are many populations within the queer community and many corresponding letters of the acronym such as LGBTQQIAA, for the purposes of this study the authors will only be using LGB, as the authors are not focusing on gender identity. This decision was made due to the fact that the U.S. military did not recognize the gender identity of transgender individuals at the time of this study (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2011).

Thus, the current study sought to examine the institutional supports and constraints experienced by LGB-identified, active duty, military service members during their undergraduate enrollment. The authors identified three themes from the interviews conducted: experiences specific to an LGB identity, experiences specific to a military identity, and experiences specific to the intersection of LGB and military identities. The next section reviews literature related to LGB and military services on college campuses that informs our study.

Literature Review

Social Context on US College Campuses

Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) units are a prime example of militarized presence on college campuses and the inherent tension that has historically been present between these two populations (Grasgreen, 2011; Fuller, 2010). The authors understand ROTC to be a military officer training program that high school students and college students with less than 30 credits can apply to enter. This program pays for college tuition and fees, while preparing the student (or cadet) to become an officer in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force. A minimum length of duty after graduation is required to "pay back" the college costs provided by the program (Naval Service Training Command Officer Development, n.d.). For years, there were students identifying as LGB who were unwilling to join the ROTC program because they were also "out" as part of the LGB community. These students refused to go back in the closet to join the program and thus the military (Fuller, 2010).

Because of the homophobic policies of the military and ROTC programs, many colleges and universities banned ROTC from campus. Since the repeal, some universities, notably Yale and Columbia, have expressed interest in inviting ROTC back to campus (Strand, 2011). Historically, LGB students who did join the ROTC program were forced to live double lives. Openly showing support of LGB people through speaking about it or posting images in their professional spaces, much less openly identifying as LGB, could have led to suspicion and eventual discharge (Grasgreen, 2011). An academic dean at Tufts University expressed that more LGB students will participate now that they will not have to sacrifice their identities (Strand, 2011). Since the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell in September 2011, there has been a steady group of 20 or more LGB and straight cadets at Norwich University, the military college that birthed the ROTC program, who attend meetings for their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Allies Club. Club founder and President Cadet Josh Fontanez, stated that now he and his fellow cadets can live Norwich's Cadet Honor Code, which is shared with other military colleges and service academies: "A cadet will not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do" (Grasgreen, 2011, p. 1). Overall, the climate on US college campuses for LGB and military has mirrored what has happened in general society: a gradual and difficult struggle to be identified and supported.

LGB Campus Services

Regardless of military-affiliation, the climate for LGB students has progressed, at least in terms of dedicated resources and inclusive policies. There are currently 190 post-secondary institutions that offer support offices dedicated to the LGB population on college campuses throughout the United States and Canada (Consortium, n.d.). While noteworthy, this represents only 6.8% of the total number of four-year colleges and universities in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012.). The majority of the institutions are located in the Northeast and Midwest on predominantly white campuses (Consortium, n.d.). Out of the 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, only seven have an LGB center and only 24 have an LGB or Ally student

organization (Campus Pride, n.d.; Thurgood Marshall College Fund, n.d.). Thus, services are limited relative to the overall size and diversity of institutions of higher education in North America.

Complicating the climate for support is the varying levels of support and programming at LGB Centers. The scope and range of these programs is somewhat determined by the number of professional, paraprofessional, student, and volunteer staff members (A. Schlag, personal communication, April 2, 2014). As an example, the University of California Irvine's (UCI) LGBT Resource Center has three professional staff members and multiple student workers; whereas the University of North Carolina Wilmington has one professional staff member. Some of the programs UCI's center offered included: Safe Zone ally trainings, a LGBT peer mentor program, topical seminars, Queer History Week, weeks of programming that highlight specialized populations such as bisexual, asexual, and transgender, speaker's bureau training, Pride Week, Coming Out week, and several others (UCI, n.d.). Programs offered regularly are: Safe Zone ally trainings and a discussion group. (UNCW, n.d.) Effective advocacy for LGB-inclusive policies and resources from faculty and staff begins and ends with current information about these offering at similar institutions (Messinger, 2009).

The Professional Standards for LGBT Services on College Campuses (Mitsifer, 2012) articulated guidelines for what constitutes quality program and services for LGB populations. Among the many services and programs that are the direct or indirect responsibility of an LGB office or center include: (a) promoting learning opportunities on issues regarding sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, (b) the exploration of intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity/expression with race, class, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, and age, (c) advocacy for sexual orientation and gender identity issues across campus, (d) individual and group counseling (e.g., gender identity transition), (e) health services (e.g., safer sex supplies and hormone therapy access), (f) career services (e.g., LGB-friendly employer information), (g) public safety (e.g., bias incident training), (h) admissions and registration (e.g., preferred name change policies), (i) housing and residential life (e.g., gender-neutral housing options), (g) library services (e.g., resources of LGB research), (j) facilities (e.g., gender-inclusive restrooms), (k) recreational and intercollegiate sports (e.g., inclusive policies regarding gender-specific sports), and (l) student life (e.g., supportive culture for LGB students). There are many other topics outlined as the responsibility and purpose of this office; however, there is no explicit mention of supporting LGB students who are military-affiliated or military-interested (Mitsifer, 2012).

Military Campus Services

Military-services have progressed on college campuses, with increased resources and policies that are more inclusive. Within the past 13 years of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the number of military-affiliated students on college campuses has increased substantially (McBain et al., 2012). Providing services for these students has been a priority for many schools and the demand for these services is continuing to increase as enrollment grows. 427 of the 690 institutions that participated in a recent study indicated that they provide services and programming for military-affiliated students (McBain et al., 2012). The University of California Irvine's (UCI) Veterans Services Center provided programs and services that include: a physical office space with student lounge, the VetNet Ally Program (a program that increasing faculty and staff knowledge about the military-affiliated student population), student mentor program, military partner program, financial aid processing assistance, and other assistance with campus life. This center had one professional staff member and several student workers (UCI, n.d.).

The Professional Standards for Veterans and Military Programs and Services provided guidelines for what constitutes quality program and services for this population (Mitstifer, 2012).

The leadership of the services and programming office was given several direct responsibilities that included: (a) supporting transitions from military-service to higher education, (b) issues related to deployment of active duty students or call up for student affiliated with National Guard or Reserve units, (c) integration into institutions and campus life, (d) reintegration following activation, and (e) establishment of procedures to facilitate progress toward educational goals. Other responsibilities of this office included (f) advocacy efforts to streamline campus administrative procedures for student veterans and military service members, (g) providing support and advisement for student veteran groups and advisory groups, (h) providing education and training for faculty and staff on related issues, and (i) work with the veteran certifying official to make this paperwork available for all applicable educational benefits. Amongst the several other topics covered, there is no specific mention of serving LGB students who are military-affiliated or military-interested (Mitstifer, 2012). While campuses have endeavored to support LGB and military-affiliated populations as separate groups, they have failed to adequately address the intersection of these groups in both social and academic services. The next section will examine what is known about the intersection of these identities.

Intersections of LGB and Military Services

Recognizing the importance of intersecting identities, particularly those marginalized, is vitally important in conducting social research (Grollman, 2012). In the context of this study, intersections of LGB and military refers to students and other entities who identity with both categories. Serving both communities, with the recognition of intersecting identities, will reflect post-DADT support in the Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Administration (VA).

LGB people have served in the United States military since the American Revolution, but it was not until the repeal of the DADT in September 2011 that these individuals could be open about their sexual orientation without fear of discharge (Bumiller, 2011). While there is little research or journalism about LGB military-affiliated college students, there are some discussions about how military academies are adjusting to the repeal of DADT, which includes both social and academic aspects.

Student organizations intended to serve LGB cadets and alumni organizations are flourishing for current military personnel who can now serve openly, while those who could not serve openly can now connect as alumni (McBain et al., 2012). For example, all three U.S. military academies formed Spectrum student organizations for LGB cadets. Additionally, all three academies now have LGB alumni association chapters. Cadets from service academies are also allowed to bring their partners to official school functions, such as dances (Swarms, 2012). Regardless of these advances, there is still stigma present within academies as fear of being characterized as weak due to sexual orientation (Swarms, 2012). This stigma is likely due to the self-described conservative culture still present where hegemonic masculinity is prevalent. This model of masculinity is based on social norms of male-identified dominance, specifically over women and men who do not conform to the hegemonic standards, such as the idea of men being tough, unemotional, aggressive, and perceived to be stereotypically heterosexual in nature (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This culture discourages the open expression of LGB identity, where gender expression may not match that that is encouraged by mainstream cisgender, heterosexual society (Edwards & Jones, 2009).

However, some administrators and faculty are fully embracing all policies dictated by the Department of Defense regarding LGB cadets. Dr. Morten G. Ender (2011), a sociology professor at West Point periodically conducts research to gauge the percentage of fellow cadets who support openly LGB cadets. The professor admits that older staff members and retirees would like to bar

openly gay cadets, but he is in the camp of wanting more acceptance (Swarms, 2012). An issue that still lingers for alumni and current students from these institutions, is the now-unfounded fear of discharge. While 17,000 service members were discharged for identifying as LGB during the DADT era, there was no record kept of how many cadets were pushed out of academies for the same reason (Swarms, 2012; USNA Out, 2013). With a rich, albeit secret, history of serving in the military, LGB cadets are now able to claim that legacy and become military leaders while living openly.

Methods

A qualitative case study methodology was used for this study. Qualitative methods were chosen to go deeply into subject matter that is widely individualistic and complex (Creswell, 2013). A case study methodology was chosen to gather information from several sources that also allowed us to triangulate findings across multiple data points (Yin, 2014).

One advantage of employing a qualitative approach was that it provided the opportunity to humanize the data by asking questions in a naturalistic interaction (Yin, 2014). Participants discussed their experiences with a veteran (i.e., Kinchen), which allowed for greater comfort during interactions. Another advantage to this method is the depth reached during interviews by asking follow-up questions and getting unintended anecdotal information (Yin, 2012). The advantage that was most helpful in data collection is the quality of information from subjects can be based on the credibility of the researcher: Kinchen's status as a veteran allowed the subjects to feel a greater sense of connection and purpose for joining and participating in the study. This study dealt with highly sensitive and personal information about LGB military members' lives and careers. Understanding that this information could potentially help future LGB military-affiliated students affirmed their choice to participate (Creswell, 2013).

According to Yin (2012), a case study methodology is appropriate when the research questions are explanatory or focused on how or why something happened. The research questions in this study were explanatory in nature and sought to explain the supports and constraints of LGB service members in their undergraduate enrollment. Additionally, a case study methodology is the correct choice due to its favoring data collection in natural settings (interviews), rather than responses in a survey, and emphasis on study in a real-world context. Also, this approach privileges participants' voices by emphasizing their words, experiences and viewpoints in study results (Yin, 2014). As LGB service members and veterans are now recognized by the U.S. Government but may not be given the necessary support on college campuses, a real-world context is vital to understanding the details of participants' experiences through interviews rather than impersonal survey data (Yin, 2012).

Data Collection

Data collection began immediately after receiving Institutional Research Board (IRB) Human Subjects approval in Spring 2014. Potential participants were solicited through email list-serves and social media contacts for an LGB service member-specific organization called Service Members, Partners, Allies for Respect and Tolerance for All (SPART*A). The gatekeeper for SPART*A was the Director of Communication, agreed to send out a call for subjects through email and social media posts. Despite multiple attempts to work with the gatekeeper of SPART*A to recruit participants, communication was unsuccessful, prompting the authors to seek out leaders from other organizations. The contact from OutServe-SLDN (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network), another LGBT service member organization, responded immediately and sent out an email to the members of the organization. A total of nine participants from OutServe-SLDN agreed to be interviewed from this communication.

Due to the unanticipated difficulties in recruiting participants who identified as LGB and active military, the authors revised the study to include college administrators who worked with LGB and/or military-affiliated students. The professionals were intentionally selected because of their job experience and previous interactions. An IRB Amendment Form was submitted and approved in April 2014 to allow for the addition of college administrators as interview participants. Additional details about all participants is included in the section below.

Participants

Recruitment of participants occurred in two waves. The first wave of recruitment focused on LGB individuals who were service members that participated in an LGB service member professional organization. A survey was developed using Google Forms that was embedded in the emails distributed to potential participants. This survey was intended to confirm that potential participants met each of the following criteria: (a) identified as LGB, (b) affiliated to the military (or active service), (c) attended a brick and mortar institution of higher education within the past three years; thus, criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013) framed this wave of recruitment.

Nine total responses to the survey were received; three from the SPART*A social media post and six from the OutServe-SLDN email distribution. However, only three participants met the criteria for participation included above. Due to the limited number of participants eligible for participation, research parameters were altered so that individuals beyond the "attended within the past three years" requirement described above could also participate. The participants were specifically interviewed about their experiences as undergraduates, even if they had attended graduate studies since that time. This change allowed for eight participants who responded to the survey to be contacted for an interview. Four of these participants established communication and were scheduled for interviews via Skype. Skype interviews lasted approximately 30-75 minutes, and three of the four interviews were recorded using a program called Evaer. Due to technical issues, one interview was not successfully recorded. The interviews that were successfully recorded were transcribed prior to analysis. Extensive notes were recorded for the fourth interview in lieu of the recording.

The second wave of data collection focused on college administrators who work with LGB and/or military-affiliated students as part of their job responsibilities. These interviews were an intentional part of the study as the researchers are Student Affairs/Higher Education practitioners and/or faculty. These professionals' inclusion in the study provides context of current supports on campus for populations discussed. Additionally, these professionals' experience informed implications based on their expertise and experiences. The authors reached out to individuals with whom they have worked with on previous occasions. Three individuals agreed to participate and share their perspectives on the populations that were the focus of the study. Two participants could not schedule real-time interviews but responded to interview questions via email. One participant was interviewed face-to-face and recorded for later transcription using a smartphone application called Super Voice Recorder. This interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was transcribed for analysis.

Ultimately, recruitment resulted in a total of seven participants. There were four LGB-identified service members and three higher education administrators included in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to ensure their anonymity. All three administrators interviewed worked at a mid-sized, public master's level institution in the Southeast. Tables 1 and 2 below provide a full overview of the identities and institutions represented among our participants.

Table 1: *LGB service member participants*

Pseudonym	Rank	Pay Grade	Branch	Identity	Institutional Type	Location
Jay	First Sergeant	E-8	Army	Bisexual, Male	Public, Master's Level	Southeast
Edward	Sergeant	E-5	Army	Gay, Male	Public, Master's Level	Midwest
Sandy	Senior Airman	E-4	Air Force	Lesbian, Female	Public, Master's Level	Midwest
Phillip	Captain	O-3	Army	Gay, Male	Private, Baccalaureate	Midwest

Table 2: *College administrator participants*

Pseudonym	Identity	Professional Area	Institutional Type	Location
Lola	Bisexual, Female	Military-Affiliated Center	Public, Master's Level	Southeast
Grace	Heterosexual, Female	Military-Affiliated Center	Public, Master's Level	Southeast
Audre	Lesbian, Female	LGBT Center	Public, Master's Level	Southeast

Data Analysis

Coding maps were designed to describe themes across the interviews using a constant comparative coding method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method allows for the development of a theory based on patterns in data, in order to explain how something works. The coding process used was open coding, which is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). After the interviews were completed, transcriptions were completed, with the exception of the unrecorded session. Transcripts, interview notes, and emailed responses were reviewed multiple times before the authors engaged in an opening process that helped refine initial codes into the final themes discussed below. On the first coding map, 22 initial codes were refined into 14 codes. After reviewing the initial codes and data sets, the authors developed the second coding map where 14 codes were organized into three themes that best represent the findings. This process of combining codes to create themes utilizes a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998). Finally, the authors re-read transcripts and shared them with expert and peer reviewers who helped confirm the final set of themes.

Trustworthiness

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis process, both peer and expert review were performed. Yin (2014) describes the process of allowing several "critical colleagues" to examine your data, while still in the collection phase. He stated, "colleagues should offer alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection … the likelihood for bias will have been reduced" (p. 76). Peer review was accomplished by working with another researcher who was not connected to the present study to review transcribed interviews and data analysis. Additionally, an expert reviewed the data and findings (Creswell, 2013). DeVita, provided expert review as someone with professional experience with the LGB and military population. This process legitimized the research

methodology (Stake, 1995) and provided valuable insights about the findings. Likewise, DeVita joined in revisions to this work for publication.

Limitations

This study was limited by access to participants via voluntary professional/social organizations, in which the vast majority of members are openly LGB. This limitation lowered the number of possible interviewees. Additionally, the sample drew from only two service branches and the ranks of participants were mostly enlisted. The authors also failed to collect total years in service from the participants. Finally, one of the four interviews failed to record and the authors had to rely on detailed notes rather than a transcript. Due to these limitations, the study is not generalizable to all LGB service members, students, campuses, or contexts; however, findings are still useful in providing insights about the intersections of LGB and military identities and strategies for support. Future research could address the limitations discussed above, particularly by seeking a larger and more diverse sample that includes saturation among several identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, rank, years in service).

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the institutional supports and constraints experienced by LGB-identified, active duty, military service members during their undergraduate enrollment. Findings suggest that LGB service members were largely unsupported through institutional diversity centers or programs during their undergraduate enrollment. However, all participants felt as though the post-DADT military was a supportive environment where their LGB identities are mostly celebrated and protected. College administrators who participated in this study reported that diversity centers with dedicated resources are the most effective way to support LGB military-affiliated students. There were three themes identified from the data: (1) experiences specific to an LGB identity, (2) experiences specific to a military identity, and (3) experiences in the intersection of LGB and military identities. Several sub-themes are also discussed.

Experiences Specific to an LGB Identity

This theme relates to experiences that were specific to an LGB identity through lived experiences. The five sub-themes found within this theme were: (a) being LGB is advantageous, (b) orientation not forefront of identity, (c) conflict with religion, (d) experiences with family, and (e) lack of university/college support. All five sub-themes aligned with experiences specific to an LGB identity of each participant. These experiences suggested that an LGB identity could both be a struggle, and also promote resilience.

Being LGB is advantageous. In two of the four LGB service member interviews, there was discussion about how having an LGB identity was an advantage, both personally and as a generalized idea. Edward remarked, "I think it has made me more intelligent, to be homosexual." This success was also seen as a result of overcoming adversity. To this point, Jay said, "I think LGBT people are incredibly motivated and are goal-setters, maybe because they are told they can't do so many other things." For both Jay and Edward, LGB identity was seen as a positive aspect of themselves that was directly linked to other characteristics that they valued.

Despite their positive affirmation of their identities, it is important to note the stereotypes reified by their comments that identification as LGB aligns with more intelligence and/or more highly motivated individuals. This was an unanticipated finding as most literature focuses on the negative

stereotypes associated with LGB identity that often leads to internalized homophobia (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009).

Orientation not a forefront identity. Several participants discussed their LGB identity as not a forefront aspect of their lives, both within the military and in college. Phillip said, "Being gay is not even in my top five things about myself, if were to describe myself." Jay had a similar comment when discussing his orientation: ". . . honestly, I don't think about it too much."

For both Phillip and Jay, their LGB identity was seen as just a part of their overall self and not the defining characteristic of their personality. It is important to recognize that Phillip completed ROTC training in law school and Jay had been in the military for over a decade. Both men discussed how hiding their sexuality during these time periods informed their current identity in not discussing this part of themselves as often as they could.

Conflict with religion. Across all four LGB service member interviews, there was a recurring discussion about the impact religion had in each person's life. Primarily, faith communities or clergy members were seen as a negative or unsupportive. Sandy and Phillip experienced environments that were not conducive for living openly LGB in a Catholic high school and college, respectively. Sandy said, "I went to 13 years of Catholic school . . . so I wasn't out . . . "

Phillip discussed being out in college, but didn't "act" on his sexual orientation, and instead pursued student leadership, "I didn't really have time to date, as I was the Student Government President amongst other leadership roles."

Jay and Edward both discussed the Chaplain Corps as being problematic. As Jay states, "Chaplains affect the military. . . they are officially ordained and connected to their churches, so if their church's view is not supportive, they are limited in what they can do." Edward's remarks agreed with this sentiment, even more strongly, "The Chaplain Corps, I think that is really an issue, I don't think the military is doing a good job [in regulating] the Chaplain Corps." These experiences affirm the military culture of institutionalized conservatism by way of having religious personnel as a part of every unit, even if these individuals' faith is unsupportive of LGB people.

Experiences with family. Discussions about family were brought up in both positive and negative contexts throughout the interviews. Both Edward and Jay discussed a family tradition of military service. Jay said, "As far as the military, my grandfather served. I was following in my grandfather's footsteps . . . " Edward noted, "My brother and twin had both gone into the service." Edward also had the negative experience of being disowned by his family for being gay, "About 16, I was kicked out for being gay . . . one of the things my mother told me when she told me to get out of the house was that I would never be successful at anything."

Despite the lack of family support for his LGB identity, Edward has had a positive experience with his supervisor and he expressed how the military has become a surrogate family. He said, "My boss is phenomenal. She is an excellent woman, she is a tremendous agent, and she told me that she loved me the same and that I was still one of her favorite agents after discovering his gay identity and I do my job extraordinarily well."

Sandy spoke about her family supporting her lesbian identity and warned her to be cautious in the Don't Ask, Don't Tell-era military. She said, "my parents sat me down and they were like, 'Don't tell anyone, 'cause you are going to be kicked out or they are not going to let you join.'" Family can inform identity development and self-image. It should be noted that Edward uses language that alludes to his family as playing a role in his internalized homophobia (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009), which can lead to a negative self-identity as LGB. On the other hand, Sandy's positive family experience reinforced her positive self-identity (Heine et al., 1999).

Lack of university/college support. The lack of university/college support for both LGB and military identities took several forms throughout the conversations with both service members and

administrator participants. One of these forms was a neutral or ambivalent view of LGB students and issues, as stated by Jay, "There was not an LGBT Center . . . they actually did have some LGBT [student-run] support groups that were there . . . It had a small amount of support mechanisms, though I don't think they were outright institutionalized by the university." Phillip had a comparable experience at his religiously-affiliated college, "Support of LGB students did not exist. Inclusion wasn't actively discussed or promoted whatsoever." Edward had a similar experience of no official university support, but finding support from an openly gay staff member. He said, "[My] university . . . did, a little bit, because . . . the man who headed up the position at the university for organizing events for the college, like fun runs or parties or anything like that. He was gay, so he did promote [the student group] at [my] university."

Sandy's experiences ran parallel to these examples and she also noted that she did not participate in these support structures, "Umm … if I remember right, they did have a [student] group there that I never attended, it was just never much in my schedule to do." Her school also had no LGB center. Audre, an administrator who works with LGB students noted the fact that there may be the appearance of progression or inclusion on paper in non-discrimination policies, but the practice of serving these students is lacking. She said, "I feel the institution opens the doors up to these students and lists people on webpages and says they are military-friendly or that they are . . . have LGBT students in their non-discrimination statement, but they really haven't made the institutional changes that make those individuals as successful as they can be on campus." As stated by all the LGB service members, they were not able to develop their LGB identities in college due to a lack of recognition, resources, and sometimes reluctance. They were also aware of the campus climate as it related to LGB support, and knew that dedicated resources for LGB support was not a priority for their institutions (Burleson, 2010).

Experiences Specific to a Military Identity

This theme relates to experiences that were specific to military identity. Two sub-themes found within this theme were: (a) hegemonic masculinity and (b) military strain on relationships. Both sub-themes aligned with experiences specific to a military identity through lived experiences of each participant.

These codes revealed that there is a culture largely based on hegemonic masculinity. Also, regardless of orientation, the military puts strain on any partnered relationship through the hardships of distance and bureaucracy.

Hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is based on social norms of male-identified dominance, specifically over women and men who do not conform to the hegemonic standards. Conforming to set patterns of behavior, speech, and attitudes are features of hegemonic masculinity, usually those associated with the idea of men being tough, unemotional, aggressive, and perceived to be stereotypically heterosexual in nature (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Several participants implied norms presented this concept through their phrasing and definitions. For example, pne participant frequently referred to the LGB student organization at their university as the "homo" club. The participant also made the assertion that he joined the military to live up to a very stereotypical and hegemonic model of masculinity. He stated, "the military to me, offered me the opportunity to prove to people that gay men are men. That they are not pansies and float their wrists up and down all the time. So I would say that I joined the military . . . also to exemplify my masculinity."

Another participant spoke more indirectly about his ability to blend into a traditional perception of masculinity, thus being mistaken for being straight. He said, "unless I wanted to 'flame on', no one would have had any idea." This culture reinforced the internalization of negative stigma—

internal homophobia—in one of the participants, which informs his current language when discussing LGB topics, including his own identity (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009).

Military strain on relationships. The military has the possibility to strain any and all relationships, but additional stressors for same-sex couples adds to the issues military couples/families face. For example, Sandy discusses how her relationship suffered and eventually failed due to the additional paperwork needed to get her fiancée to move with her. She said, "I was engaged in South Korea and obviously my fiancée couldn't come there. So I had to fill out a hardship letter to be able to come back stateside because I had a follow-on to Japan and she wouldn't be able to come there. It all got approved, like a month before we broke up, so … The whole distance thing is super hard, because you can't just have a random person who is not going to have benefits move across the country or to another country."

Edward said that there is an easier, more informal process to get an opposite-sex couple together on a duty-station or to delay orders to another country for a wedding. He argues that there is a risk to your career if you attempted to do the same thing with a same-sex partner who is also in the military, in relation to communicating through official channels. He stated:

> Being gay and being the situation where you are not married, but in a relationship or have a fiancé or plan to get married, it is very difficult, because you know there is a backlash in a lot of peoples' minds, especially in the military. If I were to call [Headquarters] branch and say something like 'My boyfriend and I were going to get married in October, is there any way we can get on the same orders, we don't want to rush the marriage or whatever,' you potentially just ruined your career.

While the military is attempting to implement policies that are inclusive for all families and partnered relationships, hardships still exist for same-sex couples where they do not for opposite-sex spouses (Jowers, 2014).

Experiences Specific to the Intersection of LGB and Military Identities

This theme relates to experiences that were specific to both an LGB and military identity. The six sub-themes found within this theme were: (a) severed/bifurcated identity in college (b) sexuality not expressed or hidden, (c) no sense of LGB community, (d) sexuality stifled in military, (e) positive view of repeal & post-DADT military, and (f) self-disclosure in college. All six sub-themes aligned with experiences specific to an LGB and military identity through lived experiences of each participant. These experiences suggested that LGB individuals are proud to serve in the United States military, yet there are still significant challenges for LGB individuals in finding community and support at some colleges, even in their military-affiliations.

Severed/bifurcated identity in college. In several conversations, the idea of having a severed or bifurcated identity in college may lead LGB and military-affiliated students to feel as though they lacked a sense of community with either community, thus not take part in resources or services. Lola spoke about many military-affiliated students wanting to adopt a new sense of identity in being a student, rather than a member of the military. She felt the same for the LGB military community. She said, "many students, military-affiliated and/or LGB, just want to be a student and do not want the label. We consistently have issues with students self-identifying as military-affiliated, let alone LGB."

Grace discussed how the perception of rejection due to these overlapping identities may be the reason these students don't partake in community-building groups or resources. She said, "They may want to shed that [military-affiliated] identity as other students who are not LGB want to do as well. There could be the perception that services/events/socials are not for them or they wouldn't be welcomed there or that somebody wouldn't understand them."

Audre expressed a similar thought about students who have an LGB and military identity feeling denied access to both communities. She said, "I'm going to go with, something that goes along with any group that feels a sense of bifurcated identity, a real severing of their intersections of identities."

No sense of LGB community. Finding others that have an LGB identity or had similar interests was a challenge for this study's participants, specifically in college. Edward discussed the fact that the LGB student organization did not appeal to him, because it focused too much on social activities rather than identity development or activism. He said, "I felt like their focus wasn't on progression, it was on doing things like dinners and going skating and things like that, but it wasn't on individual progression through life."

Sandy speaks about a similar feeling on disconnectedness from the LGB student organization and the larger LGB activist movement, "Umm . . . if I remember right, they did have a group there I never attended . . . I don't like to do anything now, I just live my life." Group identity development is a part of LGB personal growth and the lack thereof can hinder the positive self-image of the individual (Fassinger & Miller, 1997; Heine et al., 1999).

Sexuality stifled in military. Identity development or lack thereof, was a common thread of conversation throughout the interviews. Several participants spoke about the military and conservative college areas stifling their growth as LGB individuals. Jay spoke about both of these incidences. He first said, "I think, due to location, I was in West Texas. It was not the most open community to anything at [my university], being bisexual was fine because . . . I turned the gay side off; being bisexual gave me other avenues."

Speaking about his military experiences he said, "it arrested my sexuality development." Phillip discussed how even though DADT was repealed, the strict fraternization rules and the limited access to a larger community when stationed somewhere remote made it difficult to find dates.

He said, "It is hard to get hook-ups, when 85% of the military is already off-limited [referencing enlisted population] and the other 15% or civilians may not be available due to location." Again, both Jay and Phillip stated the need for identity development.

Positive view of repeal and post-DADT military. There was an overwhelmingly negative view of the pre-DADT repeal military and its treatment of LGB service members. Jay spoke about the difference between pre-DADT repeal military and how if he were ever found out to be engaging in same-sex relationships of any kind, he could be discharged regardless of any other factors. Thus, he stifled his desire to engage with same-sex partners. He said, "I knew what the current policy was, I knew how things were, and so there was nothing there, if there were to be a trial nothing would be found. With no acts or statements, there was no cause for discharge. But in the back of my mind, I always had the knowledge that all that could be done with one act. It has changed things with the repeal." This negative view did not dissuade Jay's need to be involved with meaningful work in the military. It should be noted that despite his negative experiences, he has been in the military for over a decade, largely due to this desire to make a safer world.

In contrast, there was overwhelming agreement about the improvement of lives due to the DADT repeal. Sandy said, "I feel like recently it has been better, because like with the Air Force, they actually give you 10 days of leave if you want to get married and you can't get married in that state . . . It has almost become a norm."

There was some hesitation from Edward in discussing how the military is gradually becoming more accepting. He said, "I feel as though the military, the Army itself, is doing a good job in policy, but not in leadership. It is a double-edged sword." However, he personally has had a very positive experience with his direct supervisor. He said, "[My supervisor] told me she knew I was gay and that

it didn't matter to her. She didn't want me to feel like I needed to hide that in the office or hide a relationship, or out of fear for them knowing I was gay, distance myself from work events."

Edward spoke about how being openly LGB is even encouraged in the post-DADT military. He said, "Being open is very encouraged in the 'new' military. Marine Corps recruiters are even going to Gay Pride celebrations to recruit!" Audre expressed, "I think it is getting better . . . I think the overturning of DADT really had an impact."

Self-disclosure in college. All of the administrators interviewed discussed there being no structures for identification of LGB students through the admissions process or in subsequent official communications, besides the individuals self-disclosing through personal communication. This lack of institutional identification is problematic when allocating resources to serve these students. Grace discussed this same point, "We do not, in our office [military-affiliated resource center], identify students unless they self-disclose." Lola talked about how admissions also did not identify LGB students either.

She said, "Unless it comes up in conversation regarding admissions and enrollment at the university during face to face meetings, emails or phone calls, our office does not identify LGB students in any capacity." Audre also concurred in her statement, "Umm . . . I think we really mostly rely on them to self-identify." The lack of inclusive policies to account for LGB students may be in part of administration's lack of priority for these students, even though faculty, staff and students have advocated for these changes. According to these interviews, the consequence of not counting these students was the lack of resources resulting from a proven need, based on numbers (Messinger, 2009).

Implications for Military-Affiliated Practices

Studies by McBain et al. (2012) and Gomez (2014) reinforce the need for more and effective military-affiliated resources and services on college campuses. Some of their recommendations reflect the need for dedicated resource centers that included: (a) providing counseling and peer support groups, (b) referral services to the Veterans Administration, (c) civilian-to-military and military-to-civilian transition services, (d) military-focused disability support services, and (e) training for faculty and staff to better support military-affiliated students through education about language and specific issues. Additionally, there is a need evidenced by AMPA and OutServe-SLDN, that on-campus services be inclusive of military families, including same-sex spouses. The preparation of both service members and their families in how to navigate military policies, such as overseas relocation, could alleviate some of the additional pressures of being LGB in the military and stressors of a military relationship.

As for future members of the military, promotion of more inclusive commissioning programs, such as ROTC and service academies, could be accomplished through the implementation by faculty and staff of more inclusive policies. This could include beginning or expanding Safe Zone training programs that teach campus communities about the language, issues, needs of, and supports for LGB students (Messinger, 2012; Swarms, 2012). Inclusion of LGB supports and topics into the Professional Standards for Veterans and Military Programs and Services in the CAS Standards would help military-affiliated resource professionals, as well as ROTC and service academy allies, advocate for these programs and policies (Mitsifer, 2012). The presence of these programs on college campuses would create the link for positive interactions and impressions of those LGB students who were entering the military from institutions who implemented them, possibly lessening attitudes of internalized homophobia (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). Training future military leaders during commissioning programs in how to be inclusive of LGB people in policy and practice may eventually

change the culture of hegemonic masculinity, which may be the stem of many issues in the military related to LGB acceptance and support.

Conclusion

Interviews conducted with LGB-identified and military-active college students revealed three themes: experiences specific to an LGB identity, experiences specific to a military identity, and experiences specific to the intersection of LGB and military identities. Several sub-themes were discussed under each theme and suggest the need for more attention to the intersection of LGB and military identities throughout support services in higher education. Institutions and national organizations can both identify ways to be inclusive of LGB and military identities through collaborative support services. Additionally, future research should seek to examine the intersections of multiple identities both social (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class) and military (e.g., rank, years in service) for LGB-identified military service personnel.

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