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TITLE: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Couples in the Military: A Post-DADT Examination of Relationship Health, Perceived Community Acceptance, and Mission Readiness

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Jeffrey A. Cigrang (Lt Col, USAF, retired)

CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: Wright State University

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PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The purpose of our study was to deliver a current, evidence-based understanding of the functioning of LGB couples in the Air Force community to U.S. military and civilian leadership. We anticipated that improved understanding would help focus efforts, make improvements, and ultimately contribute to a more effective armed force. In terms of scope, we planned to use a two-stage, mixed methods design. Stage 1 would have been a qualitative study of 50 LGB Air Force using semi-structured phone or video. Stage 2 would have been a quantitative study testing hypotheses regarding risk and protective factors (at multiple ecological levels) predicting relationship and individual outcomes. Unfortunately, obtaining necessary approval to ask questions of active duty service member related to sexual orientation took most of the time in the period of performance. The study is being closed without any data collected.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS military, couples, LGB, relationship, health, readiness					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
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1. INTRODUCTION:

Military readiness has been characterized as a three-legged stool built on training, equipment, and family; when one leg weakens, the entire stool is compromised. Although research is in its infancy, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members and their partners may be at greater risk for relationship distress and occupational impairment than are heterosexual couples (Oswald & Sternberg, 2014). However, the absence of research severely hinders any firm conclusions concerning risk and protective factors for LGB couples in the military. The objectives of the proposed study were to (1) Complete semi-structured phone or video interviews with a sample of Air Force LGB couples and conduct qualitative analyses of interview responses. (2) Complete a quantitative survey of a sample of Air Force LGB couples using a broad range of general and LGB-specific measures of community, workplace, relationship, and individual risk and protective factors. (3) Complete a similar quantitative survey of a sample of heterosexual Air Force couples that are matched to the LGB couple on demographic variables. (4) Develop and test a multi-level, community model of health and functioning for Air Force couples that compares heterosexual and LGB participants and identifies key predictors and mediators of occupational functioning.

2. KEYWORDS: military, couples, LGB, relationship, health, readiness

3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

a. What were the major goals of the project?

	Timeline	
	Months	% complete
Major Task 1: Complete all preparatory work for project start.		
Major Task 1: Complete all preparatory work for project start.		
Complete qualitative assessment measure for LGB phone interviews	1-3	100%
Finalize strategies for reaching LGB couples with study recruitment effort	1-3	100%
Obtain necessary Air Force approvals for recruitment advertisements	1-3	50%
Develop strategy for accurately linking partner to partner responses	1-3	100%
Complete regulatory documentation for IRB/HRPO submission	1-3	100%
Develop on-line consenting and survey administration procedures	4-6	100%
Establish process for conducting participant incentive payments	4-6	100%
Complete near-final quantitative (on-line) survey for LGB couples	4-6	100%
Obtain review by Air Force Survey Office (AFSO) and judgment that project does not fall under AFSO authority, i.e., not an attitudinal/opinion survey	4-6	100%
Obtain final IRB, HRPO, and OUSD/HA (if needed) approval for study implementation	6-8	100%
<i>Milestone Achieved: IRB/HRPO/OASD study approval obtained</i>	8	100%
<i>Milestone Achieved: LGB couple recruitment strategies approved by Air Force</i>	8	100%

IMPACT:

- a. **What was the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**
Nothing to Report.
- b. **What was the impact on other disciplines?**
Nothing to Report.
- c. **What was the impact on technology transfer?**
Nothing to Report.
- d. **What was the impact on society beyond science and technology?**
Nothing to Report.

5. CHANGES/PROBLEMS:

- a. **Changes in approach and reasons for change.**

Closed study at end of PoP (June 28 2022)

- b. **Actual or anticipated problems or delays and actions or plans to resolve them**

- See Appended manuscript

- c. **Changes that had a significant impact on expenditures**

Nothing to report

- d. **Significant changes in use or care of human subjects, vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents**

Nothing to report

- e. **Significant changes in use or care of human subjects**

Nothing to report

- f. **Significant changes in use or care of vertebrate animals.**

Nothing to report

- g. **Significant changes in use of biohazards and/or select agents**

Nothing to report

6. PRODUCTS:

a. Publications, conference papers, and presentations

Nothing to report

b. Journal publications

See Appended manuscript

c. Books or other non-periodical, one-time publications.

Nothing to report

d. Other publications, conference papers, and presentations.

Nothing to report

e. Website(s) or other Internet site(s)

Nothing to report

f. Technologies or techniques

Nothing to report

g. Inventions, patent applications, and/or licenses

Nothing to report

h. Other Products

Nothing to report

7. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

a. What individuals have worked on the project?

Name	Project Role	Nearest person month worked	Contribution to Project
Dr. Jeffrey A. Cigrang	PI	1	Served as the Principal Investigator for the project. Led effort to prepare, submit, & obtain IRB approval for protocol. Coordinated all regulatory aspects of study with Air Force and other higher headquarters.
Maj Jordan Simonson	Co-I	1	Air Force co-PI. Our POC at the study sponsoring agency – HQ USAF/A1Z. Responsible for developing the Air Force-approved plan for study advertisement. Responsible for all communications with Air Force Survey Office and HQ A1Z. Has assisted significantly in our work with Health Affairs Office to prepare responses to

			USAD (P&R) OGC.
Dr. Amy Slep	Co-I	1	Senior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Assisted with all aspects of developing IRB protocol and helping prepare responses to USD (P&R).
Dr. Rick Heyman	Co-I	1	Senior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Assisted with all aspects of developing IRB protocol.
Dr. Danielle Mitnick	Co-I	1	Junior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Helped write the method and data management section for IRB protocol.
Dr. Kristin Lindahl	Co-I	1	Senior Investigator at partnering University (MU). Led selection of LGB-specific measures for quantitative survey and qualitative interviews.
Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin	Co-I	1	Junior investigator at partnering University (BU-SUNY). Consultant for selection of LGB-specific measures for quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Helped establish protocol and scripts for qualitative interviews and training of others in the project in conducting interviews.
Ms. Kelsey Lorko	Graduate Research Assistant	1	Served as GRA for Dr. Cigrang at WSU. Coordinated team meetings, dictated meeting minutes, helped edit portions of research questionnaires, helped establish protocol and scripts for conducting qualitative interviews and engaged in training and practicing conducting interviews.
Ms. Avantika Gupta	Graduate Research Assistant	1	Served as GRA for Dr. Cigrang at WSU. Coordinated team meetings, dictated meeting minutes, created web-based versions of research questionnaires, helped establish protocol and scripts for conducting qualitative interviews and engaged in training and practicing conducting interviews.

b. Has there been a change in the active other support of the PD/PI(s) or senior/key personnel since the last reporting period?

- **None**

c. What other organizations were involved as partners?

- Organization Name: NYU
Location of Organization: New York City, NY
Partner's contribution to the project:
Collaboration: NYU staff contributed to IRB protocol development.

- Organization Name: BU-SUNY
Location of Organization: Binghamton, NY
Partner's contribution to the project:
Collaboration: Assisted in the selection and development of quantitative and qualitative measures in preparation for IRB approval.

8. SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

- **QUAD CHART attached**

9. APPENDICES:

- Quad chart
- Manuscript
- PAO Approval of Manuscript

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) Couples in the Military: A Post-DADT Examination of Relationship Health, Perceived Community Acceptance, and Mission Readiness.

Log No. BA150488

Award No: W81XWH1820027

PI: Jeffrey A. Cigrang, Ph.D.

Org: Wright State University

Award Amount: \$1,053,094

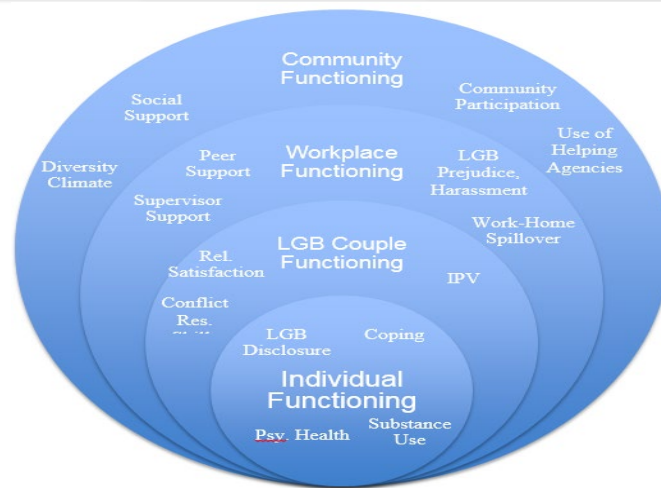


Study/Product Aim(s)

- Complete qualitative and quantitative surveys of a sample of AF LGB couples using a broad range of measures of community, workplace, relationship, and individual risk and protective factors.
- Complete a similar survey of a sample of heterosexual AF couples that are matched to the LGB couple on key variables.
- Test a multi-level, community model of health and functioning for AF couples that compares heterosexual and LGB participants and identifies key predictors of occupational functioning.

Approach

We will use a two-stage, mixed methods design. Stage 1 will be a qualitative study of 50 LGB Air Force couples using semi-structured interviews. Stage 2 will be a quantitative study testing hypotheses regarding risk and protective factors ((ns = 250 couples) predicting relationship and individual outcomes.



Accomplishment: Obtained USD (P&R) waiver approval to ask questions related to sexual orientation of active duty members.

Timeline and Cost

Activities	CY	18	19	20	21
Study preparatory work					
Complete LGB interviews					
Complete quantitative surveys					
Complete data analysis/report					
Estimated Budget (\$K)		\$150	\$338	\$377	\$189

Updated: 18 July 2022

Goals/Milestones

CY18 Goal – Study start-up

- ✓ Obtain final IRB/HRPO approval for study protocol
- ✓ Prepare, submit other regulatory approval requests

CY19 Goals – Complete all approvals; begin data collection

- ✓ Obtain USD (P&R) waiver for sexual orientation questions
- Complete qualitative interviews of LGB couples
- Initiate on-line survey for LGB couples

CY20 Goal – Complete data collection

- Complete on-line data collection for LGB couples
- Obtain matched group of heterosexual couples.
- Recruit, survey heterosexual sample

Comments/Challenges/Issues/Concerns

- Research team made decision to close study due to end of PoP.

Budget Expenditure to Date

Projected Expenditure: \$912,371.38

Actual Expenditure: \$912,371.38

American Psychologist

Still “Don’t Ask” More Than a Decade Later: The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	
Full Title:	Still “Don’t Ask” More Than a Decade Later: The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families
Abstract:	Despite the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) over a decade ago, military processes and policies continue to function as significant structural and institutional barriers to research aimed at optimizing resources for military couples and families with marginalized sexual identities. Such research is essential given preliminary evidence indicating mental health and related disparities among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and those with other marginalized sexual identities (LGB+) service members (SMs) as well as the absence of appropriately tailored resources to support these members of the military community. In this paper, we advocate an intersectional socioecological framework for conceptualizing the experiences of LGB+ SMs and their families in the United States (U.S.) military with an emphasis on exo- and macrosystem influences (e.g., ideologies, policies, cultural values, and customs). A review of the scant empirical literature on the experiences and psychological health of LGB+ military individuals reveals severe limitations in our understanding of these diverse military families, especially from a relational perspective. Process-related barriers to conducting this essential research are illuminated through an illustrative case example. Our review concludes with specific recommendations for reform and advocacy distinguished by coordinated efforts inclusive of all four military branches, policy makers, military leaders, researchers, and LGB+ stakeholders.
Article Type:	Regular Article
Keywords:	LGB; sexual orientation; military; couples and families
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Author Comments:	
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	

Manuscript Region of Origin:	UNITED STATES
Suggested Reviewers:	Carl Castro, Ph.D. University of Southern California Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work cacastro@usc.edu Dr. Castro has served in a variety of research and leadership positions relevant to the topic area covered in the submission including implementing research examining health outcomes among LGBT service members. Ian W. Holloway, Ph.D., LCSW, MPH University of California Los Angeles holloway@luskin.ucla.edu Dr. Holloway is a leading expert in the domain of health disparities research among sexual and gender minority populations, including LGBT service members. Kathrine Sullivan, Ph.D., MSW New York University kate.sullivan@nyu.edu Dr. Sullivan's expertise on the impact of trauma on the children and families of military service members overlaps meaningfully with the focus of the submission.
Opposed Reviewers:	
Order of Authors:	Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D. Jeffrey A. Cigrang, Ph.D., ABPP Douglas K. Snyder, Ph.D. Avantika Gupta, Psy.M. Amy M. Smith Slep, Ph.D. Richard E. Heyman, Ph.D. Aleja M. Parsons, Ph.D. Jordan Simonson, Ph.D. Kristin M. Lindahl, Ph.D. Leah Pound, Ph.D.
Manuscript Classifications:	clinical psychology; couples therapy; discrimination; disparities; families; military; sexual orientation; stigma



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Harris Cooper, Ph.D.
Editor, *American Psychologist*

October 17th, 2022

Dear Dr. Cooper:

Accompanying this cover letter, please find an electronic copy of our manuscript entitled, "Still "Don't Ask" More Than a Decade Later: The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families." This manuscript is co-authored by Jeffrey A. Cigrang, Douglas K. Snyder, Avantika Gupta, Amy M. Smith Slep, Richard E. Heyman, Aleja M. Parsons, Jordan Simonson, Kristin M. Lindahl, and Leah Pound.

Despite military policy changes related to the disclosure of sexual orientation over a decade ago, structural and institutional barriers to research with LGB+ military couples and families persist. This original manuscript describes the severe limitations in our understanding of diverse military couples and families and provides an illustrative case example of the process-related barriers impeding research inclusive of those with marginalized sexual identities in the military. Moreover, this paper highlights the consequences of these military policy- and process-related constraints which have not been well documented in the extant literature. Specific recommendations for reform and advocacy are emphasized. Consistent with the goals of the *American Psychologist*, this topic is current, timely, and of interest to the broader field of psychology. This contribution is also consistent with the *American Psychologist's* commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. This work has not been published previously and is not under review for publication elsewhere. This manuscript has been reviewed by all contributing authors, all of whom have contributed to the manuscript in a meaningful way and have agreed on the order of authorship. Additionally, this paper has been reviewed by the Department of Defense and Air Force Public Affairs Offices and has been granted clearance for submission for publication.

Correspondence regarding this manuscript during the editorial review process can be sent to me at:
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Thank you for considering our work for publication in the *American Psychologist*.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Christina B Durbin".

Christina Balderrama-Durbin, Ph.D.
(and on behalf of all the co-authors)

**Still “Don’t Ask” More Than a Decade Later:
The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families**

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Still “Don’t Ask” More Than a Decade Later:

The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families

Abstract

Despite the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) over a decade ago, military processes and policies continue to function as significant structural and institutional barriers to research aimed at optimizing resources for military couples and families with marginalized sexual identities. Such research is essential given preliminary evidence indicating mental health and related disparities among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and those with other marginalized sexual identities (LGB+) service members (SMs) as well as the absence of appropriately tailored resources to support these members of the military community. In this paper, we advocate an intersectional socioecological framework for conceptualizing the experiences of LGB+ SMs and their families in the United States (U.S.) military with an emphasis on exo- and macrosystem influences (e.g., ideologies, policies, cultural values, and customs). A review of the scant empirical literature on the experiences and psychological health of LGB+ military individuals reveals severe limitations in our understanding of these diverse military families, especially from a relational perspective. Process-related barriers to conducting this essential research are illuminated through an illustrative case example. Our review concludes with specific recommendations for reform and advocacy distinguished by coordinated efforts inclusive of all four military branches, policy makers, military leaders, researchers, and LGB+ stakeholders.

Keywords: LGB; sexual orientation; military; couples and families

Still “Don’t Ask” More Than a Decade Later:**The Impact of Research Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families**

A recent consensus report called on the United States (U.S.) Department of Defense (DoD) to “take immediate steps to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of today’s military families and their needs, well-being, and readiness to support service members” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019, p. 327). A primary concern highlighted in this report and elsewhere is how “military families” are defined—with an enduring narrow focus on heteronormative couples with a male service member (SM) and a female civilian partner (Gribble et al., 2020). Policies such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) failed to eliminate the barriers to disclosing and openly living in congruence with one’s marginalized sexual identity without risks of military discharge. Despite the repeal of DADT (2011), our understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or those with other marginalized sexual identities (LGB+) SMs and their couple and family relationships remains woefully deficient due, in large part, to an absence of research examining the experiences of military couples with marginalized sexual identities.

Recent surveys have estimated that 74,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals are serving in the U.S. active-duty military, with approximately 5-6% of SMs identifying as LGBT (11%–17% of female-identifying SMs report being lesbian or bisexual, 2%–5% of male-identifying SMs report being gay or bisexual, and <1% of SMs report being transgender; Davis et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2015). There are as many as 16,000 LGBT families with children in the U.S. military (Oswald et al., 2014). Emerging evidence suggests that LGB+ SMs disclose their identity at higher rates since the DADT repeal, with as many as 72% of LGB+ SMs being “out” to at least one fellow SM (Evans et al., 2018). Indeed, the prevalence

and visibility of LGB+ couples and families in the military continue to expand. Thus, our understanding of their experiences and unique needs must expand accordingly.

Couple and family well-being is critical to both military readiness and SMs' overall functioning. Distress experienced at home impacts SMs' morale, job performance, retention, and mental health (Mental Health Advisory Team 6, 2009; Joint Mental Health Advisory Team 7, 2010; Joint Mental Health Advisory Team 8, 2013). Protective factors and appropriate primary and secondary prevention resources are central to mitigating stressors experienced by military couples and families. Although a shift in policies has resulted in structural benefits for LGB+ military families (e.g., health care coverage, life insurance, housing allowances), various psychological and social stressors and challenges (as well as strengths and resilience) unique to LGB+ military couples and families remain largely unexamined—primarily due to structural and institutional policies that constrain research efforts with this population.

This paper adopts a socioecological perspective to frame the experience of LGB+ SMs and their families in the U.S. military. A brief overview of the scant empirical literature on LGB+ individuals in the military illuminates limitations in our understanding of these diverse families. Challenges and barriers to conducting research with LGB+ SMs are highlighted as primary limiting factors to advancing our knowledge base. An illustrative example from our own research team is detailed to illuminate these challenges. We advocate for more transparent and equitable research review processes essential to the development of programs and resources for LGB+ military couples and families. Finally, we promote an ecological framework emphasizing the inclusion of diverse military families from multiple intersecting identities (e.g., sexual identity, gender identity, racial and ethnic identity) to foster inclusive studies examining the experiences and needs of LGB+ SMs and their couple and family relationships. Such research is

essential to evidence-informed policies and practices offering potential to better serve SMs from marginalized backgrounds.

A Socioecological Perspective on LGB+ Military Couples and Families

Embeddedness—a key principle of multicultural research and practice—guides our understanding of adversity and growth (David et al., 2014; Sue et al., 1996). Embeddedness refers to the importance of interpreting experiences in reference to multiple levels (individual, group, universal) and across multiple familial, institutional, cultural, and societal contexts (David et al., 2014). To appropriately account for embeddedness, Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) classic socioecological systems perspective provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of LGB+ military couples and families. This comprehensive conceptual model takes into account interactive biological, psychological, and social influences at multiple levels (e.g., individual, family, workplace, and community). Important influences on mental and physical health emanate from and interact across multiple ecological levels. Ecological systems are complex and dynamic. Traditional approaches to research and practice tend to deemphasize the exo- and macrosystem influences (e.g., government agencies, attitudes, ideologies, cultural values and customs) while focusing largely on mesosystem and microlevel influences (e.g., the individual’s biological, emotional, and cognitive experiences; the family; and their interactions) in part because these lower-level influences are more directly measurable and more readily modifiable by psychologists and other healthcare professionals (see Figure 1).

Additionally, as a part of the chronosystem, all levels of the socioecological model are influenced by human development (i.e., changes that occur over the life course). Systems are not static. Developmental and life course factors (e.g., couple and family life course, military life course) also inform our understanding of the particular needs and unique experiences of LGB+

couples and families. Other scholars have discussed military career and family life-course models (Segal et al., 2015; Wilmoth & London, 2013). In this paper, we focus primarily on the exo- and macrosystem influences (i.e., military-specific influences such as attitudes, ideologies, policies, cultural values and customs) that impact LGB+ SMs.

Adversity emanating from social influences has long been conceptualized in Meyer's (2003) minority stress model. The social adversities experienced by individuals who identify as LGB+ are unique and include chronic stressors not shared by heterosexual people (e.g., homophobia, harassment, discrimination, stigma, or prejudice). Moreover, forming a same-sex partnership or being a part of an LGB+ family is a visible indicator of a marginalized identity, frequently resulting in greater adversity (e.g., safety considerations regarding public displays of affection, stigma, discrimination directed toward the couple or family, questioned legitimacy of relationships, negative assumptions and interactions; LeBlanc et al., 2015). Additionally, those with a bisexual identity (even when partnered with a different sex individual) may experience adversity and discrimination from both the heterosexual and other monosexual communities (often termed double or dual-discrimination, Doan Van et al., 2019; Mereish et al., 2017), such as denial and invalidation of their identity by others, misattributing their sexual identity to the gender of their current romantic partner, or attributing their romantic or sexual interest in both genders to sexual "confusion". Thus, substantive heterogeneity exists within the LGB+ community and those individuals in romantic relationships may face unique couple- or family-level stress (LeBlanc et al., 2015).

Exo- and Macrosystem Influences on LGB+ Military Couples and Families

The military community serves as a unique macrosystem influence on LGB+ military couples and families. The military institution has its own history, collective attitudes, customs,

traditions, and values, as well as policies and regulations. Largely comprised of men, the military reinforces a highly masculinized and heteronormative culture. Indeed, the military has a history of explicit messages of rejection directed at those with marginalized sexual identities, thereby fostering a culture that increases the minority stress of LGB+ SMs. Relevant policies impacting LGB+ SMs are discussed in greater detail later in this paper. Moreover, explicit policies restricting the disclosure of one's marginalized sexual identity have severely limited research efforts aimed at expanding our understanding of the experiences of LGB+ couples and families.

Although LGB+ SMs and their families have access to universal military resources and programs (military human-service programs and military-sponsored health insurance programs such as TRICARE) and utilize routine medical care at similar rates compared with non-LGB+ SMs (McDonald et al., 2020; Meadows et al., 2015), no formal services or resources have been developed or adapted by the military to meet the specific needs of LGB+ military couples and families. Ideally, the development or tailoring of mental health or other couple or family relationship resources for LGB+ SMs would be accomplished through a “bottom-up” approach—first by building an empirical basis of understanding the experiences of LGB+ military families. These foundational steps toward effective, evidence-based care have been critically constricted by policies and processes within the military (described below in the section on barriers to research).

The limited data available suggest that military healthcare providers explicitly want further guidance and training to address the needs of LGB+ SMs and their couple relationships more effectively. For example, in a small study (N = 40) of primary care providers at one U.S. Army base, almost two-thirds of respondents reported being comfortable discussing sexual health with active-duty LGB+ SMs, yet only 5% actually inquired about same-sex sexual

activity. Slightly less than one-third reported prior training in LGB+ healthcare topics and nearly four-fifths desired clear guidance from the DoD regarding the process for screening and documenting SMs' same-sex sexual activity (Rerucha et al., 2018).

Overview of LGB+ Military Couple and Family Literature

LGB+ military members experience high levels of minority stress including victimization, institutional discrimination, and stigma (Klemmer et al., 2022). SMs with marginalized sexual identities also report greater mental, physical, and behavioral health disparities compared with their heterosexual peers, especially for those with greater levels of outness and internalized stigma (refer to Mark et al., 2019, for a narrative review for serving and ex-serving military personnel). The following section focuses on the extant literature regarding LGB+ active-duty SMs (as opposed to LGB+ Veterans) and does not review the even smaller literature on the experiences of gender minority SMs (e.g., transgender, gender non-conforming, gender fluid). Moreover, our current knowledge is entirely based on the individual-level experiences and perceptions of LGB+ SMs (as opposed to the inclusion of romantic partners or family members). The importance of embeddedness and intersectionality in research and practice is emphasized in a later section in this paper.

To date, only a few non-DoD directed studies of LGB+ military SMs have been conducted with a nearly exclusive focus on individual mental health and functioning, without attention to relationship functioning. The Millennium Cohort Study, the largest longitudinal study to follow individuals through their military service career and after separation from the military, obtained DoD approval to assess sexual identity. In the 2016 survey, 3.6% ($n = 3,438$) of the total sample of SMs ($N = 96,930$) identified as gay/lesbian or bisexual (1.9% and 1.7% respectively) and only 700 of those LGB SMs were active-duty (Carey et al., 2022). Information

on sexual identities outside of lesbian, gay, or bisexual (e.g., pansexual, queer, demisexual) and gender identity were not reported, hence the acronym LGB instead of LGB+ is used in reference to this study. Consistent with the narrative review by Mark et al. (2019), findings demonstrated greater mental [i.e., depression or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)], physical (i.e., obesity and poorer physical functioning for LGB military women), and behavioral (i.e., smoking and problem drinking) health disparities among lesbian, gay, and bisexual SMs compared with heterosexual SMs, especially for lesbian women and bisexual SMs (Carey et al., 2022). Importantly, these associations were stronger for active-duty and Reserve/National Guard personnel relative to Veterans (Carey et al., 2022). A smaller study of 67 Army LGB SMs receiving academic training also demonstrated a higher proportion of LGB SMs screening positive for anxiety, PTSD, and suicidality compared with their heterosexual peers (McDonald et al., 2020).

A more recent research group who successfully garnered permission to inquire about sexual identity conducted a DoD-funded study on *Improving Acceptance, Integration and Health among LGBT Service Members* (also referred to as the Military Acceptance Project) (see Holloway et al., 2021 and Sullivan et al., 2021). Data were collected from active-duty Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force SMs between August, 2017 and March, 2018. This study comprised two phases: Phase 1 consisted of qualitative interviews with 42 LGBT SMs, and Phase 2 was an online survey of 544 SMs with slightly under half identifying as LGB (45.6%, $n = 248$). Results were largely consistent with the findings from the Millennium Cohort Study with some notable gender differences. The Military Acceptance Project found that cisgender (those who identify with the gender that corresponds with their sex assigned at birth) lesbian/bisexual women SMs were 6.6 times more likely to meet criteria for problematic alcohol

use and six times more likely to smoke tobacco compared with cisgender heterosexual women (Holloway et al., 2021). Cisgender gay and bisexual men were nearly five times more likely to report high suicidality than were cisgender heterosexual men. Unlike the larger Millennium Cohort Study, the Military Acceptance Project revealed no health differences among gay and bisexual male SMs and heterosexual male SMs related to alcohol use, anxiety, depression, PTSD, or cigarette smoking (Holloway et al., 2021). Of note, the Millennium Cohort Study used random sampling from military rosters with results stratified by sex whereas the Military Acceptance Project used convenience sampling—including respondent-driven sampling and seed recruitment—and reported results based on gender identity. These methodological differences may help explain differences in results, especially those related to sex or gender.

As a part of the Military Acceptance Project, researchers gathered qualitative and quantitative perspectives of LGBT military parents or partnered SMs on aspects of family acceptance within the military. These data serve as the field's sole source of empirical evidence related to the experiences of LGBT military couples and families (Sullivan et al., 2021). Of the 248 LGBT active-duty members in the Military Acceptance Project, 115 were partnered (either married or domestic partnership), had a child, or both (i.e., 97.5% were partnered and 20% had at least one child). Although many LGBT SMs reported feeling that their families were acknowledged by their leadership and their unit (86.4% and 68.3%, respectively), and that they felt safe at their current duty station (86.5%), qualitative findings suggested that acknowledgement from leadership and military unit peers was mostly experienced by married SMs. Differences in experiences of acceptance between married versus unmarried LGBT SMs may point to the pressures to “legitimize” their relationships through heteronormative traditions (i.e., legal marriage). Additionally, most LGBT SMs in this study (62.5%) perceived that

military family resources were not meeting the needs of LGBT families. SMs expressed concerns related to a lack of appropriate services for LGBT families—namely, deficits in assisted conception and an exclusive focus on heteronormative couples in military programs.

With limited understanding of the experiences of LGB+ SMs, we are constrained in our ability to foster resilience and retention or tailor adequate resources for health and functioning of LGB+ military individuals, couples, and families. LGB SMs in the Millennium Cohort Study reported lower unit camaraderie, lower confidence in leadership, and lower levels of support from the military compared with heterosexual SMs. Again, compared with heterosexual SMs, LGB SMs also expressed greater negative feelings about the military and more missed days of work in the past month. Regarding separations from the military, LGB Veterans had a greater proportion of unplanned separations from the military compared with heterosexual Veterans. Moreover, bisexual SMs were more likely to separate due to dissatisfaction with leadership.

Taken together, the vast majority of empirical findings regarding active-duty SMs who identify as LGB+ derive from three non-DoD directed studies with a total of 1015 LGB+ active-duty SMs (700 from the Millennium Cohort Study, 248 from the Military Acceptance Project, and 67 from Army SMs receiving academic training). Only a small subset (115 partnered or parenting military members) constitutes the totality of our empirical knowledge of couple and family experiences for LGB+ military SMs. No perspectives on relationship functioning or psychosocial stressors were gathered from SMs' partners, a notable oversight given that a sizable portion of LGB+ SMs are partnered (e.g., 46.4% were partnered from the Military Acceptance Project). From a socioecological and minority stress perspective, and considering the health disparities and concerns regarding the absence of tailored programs or resources for LGB+ military families, more basic and applied research must be conducted. In the next section, we

review structural and policy-related barriers within the military that impede researchers' capacities to conduct this critical research even when adequate funding, expertise, and strong rationale are in place to implement this essential work.

Barriers to Conducting Research with LGB+ Military Couples and Families

In 1993 President Bill Clinton entered office with the intention of ending the prohibition against LGB individuals serving in the Armed Forces. Historically, the military's policy was grounded in the belief that homosexuality was incompatible with military service and interfered with mission accomplishment (Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces, 2006). Objections from Congress and military leaders to ending the ban outright led to a compromise known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT). Under the DADT policy, the military was barred from asking SMs about their sexual orientation (which included sexual identity, sexual or romantic attraction, and sexual behavior). LGB+ SMs were required to keep their sexual orientation private. However, if publicly known, their status as LGB+ invited investigation and they risked dismissal from the military. DADT remained in effect for 18 years (1993-2011) (National Defense Research Institute, 2010). Not surprisingly, research efforts to understand the health and functioning of LGB+ SMs serving during DADT were severely restricted and peer-reviewed research publications on the topic were largely absent (Burks, 2011). Of note, a few years after the repeal of DADT the DoD added questions on LGB and transgender identity to their periodic health-related behaviors survey (Meadows et al., 2018). Consistent with the existent peer-reviewed literature, LGBT SMs were more likely than non-LGBT SMs to have engaged in certain health risk behaviors (e.g., binge drinking, smoking), experienced mental health issues (e.g., depression, suicide attempt), and reported a history of abuse.

In 2010, President Barak Obama signed legislation that led to the repeal of DADT and

permitted LGB+ members of the military to serve openly (Lowrey, 2021). The privacy of sexual orientation in the DoD was codified in the following repeal implementation guidance:

Sexual orientation is a personal and private matter. DoD components, including the Services are not authorized to request, collect, or maintain information about the sexual orientation of Service members except when it is an essential part of an otherwise appropriate investigation or other official action. (Under Secretary of Defense, 2011, p. 4)

An important consequence of the prohibition against collecting information on sexual orientation is that it established a high barrier to overcome for any research endeavor focused on LGB+ SMs. Specifically, including questions about sexual orientation in a study conducted with military personnel requires permission (a “waiver”) from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD P&R). The process for seeking a DoD waiver to ask LGB-related questions is lengthy and has no guarantee of success irrespective of having a research grant awarded, study approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), and support from other offices within the DoD. Best-practice guidance for investigators include pre-coordinating the study concept with review officials and obtaining a high-level military sponsor to take responsibility for the study and use of the results (Rosenfeld, 2016).

The requirement for a waiver from OUSD (P&R) applies to all studies asking about sexual orientation that are conducted within the DoD. In addition, if a study proposes to limit the focus to a single military service, the investigator must navigate the survey approval process for that service. For example, the Air Force Survey Office (AFSO) provides oversight to all attitude and opinion surveys conducted within the Department of the Air Force (Office of the Assistant Secretary, 2021). More specifically, the AFSO “protects Airmen’s time from surveys and/or survey items that are not actionable, not mission essential, or may be detrimental to the Air

Force” (p. 63). The term “survey” is applied very broadly to include self-report measures used in research including those already approved by an IRB. Without AFSO item-by-item review and approval, an investigator will not be permitted to conduct the study in the Air Force.

A Case Illustration

We include here an instructive narrative of our own efforts to navigate the OUSD (P&R) approval process that were ultimately unsuccessful. Our research team comprises individuals with a long history of conducting research with active-duty SMs, much of it on marriage and family topics (e.g., Authors, 2015, 2017; Authors, 2014, 2015, 2021; Authors, 2009; Authors, 2011; Authors, 2012). We also have active-duty SMs and retired Veterans as team members. We submitted a pre-proposal to the DoD Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) for Extramural Research (U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command, 2015). The BAA included “persons of nontraditional sexual orientation” in the areas of interest for research applications. We proposed to test a socioecological model of individual, couple, workplace, and community functioning for LGB+ Air Force couples (see Figure 2). The purpose of the study was to “deliver a current, evidence-based understanding of the functioning of LGB couples in the Air Force community to U.S. military and civilian leadership” (Authors, 2018). A full proposal submission followed. In 2018, we received \$1.2M in funding with a 3-year period of performance. Our research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Air Force IRB at [location masked for blind review], and our respective university IRBs.

The routing path for seeking OUSD (P&R) waiver approval to ask questions related to sexual orientation in the Air Force began with obtaining a review and approval of our study measures from the AFSO. The first change we had to make was to limit our study participants to married couples. Unmarried civilian partners of active-duty SMs were considered outside of the

Air Force and thus not under the approval authority of the AFSSO. There was an avenue for seeking approval to enroll unmarried civilian partners via the DoD Office of People Analytics (DoD Instruction Number 1100.3) but, at that moment, we believed the time required to pursue that approval was too excessive to fit within our period of performance. The AFSSO also required that we obtain a high-ranking Air Force officer (i.e., General) to sponsor the study who would take responsibility for data collection and use and respond to Freedom of Information Act requests (Office of the Assistant Secretary, 2021). Specifically, the AFSSO concluded that the public release of the results of our study risked being detrimental to the Air Force. With significant effort and advocacy on the part of our active-duty team member, we were eventually able to obtain a General Officer sponsor though this was no small task.

The second change the AFSSO required was to remove various questions essential to understanding SMs' individual and relationship well-being from our study measures. Our research protocol included questions about intimate partner aggression, infidelity, suicide-related thoughts and behaviors, and drug use. The AFSSO considered these topics "sensitive" and would not approve their use with Air Force SMs without higher authority approval. After we reluctantly accommodated these required changes, the AFSSO approved our waiver request package to continue through the Air Force to OUSD (P&R). Pending OUSD (P&R) waiver approval, the AFSSO indicated it would permit us to conduct the study. The time required to traverse the AFSSO from initial engagement to approval was about 10 months.

Routing our waiver request through the remainder of the Air Force required that we first obtain approval from the commander of the military base where our IRB of record was located ([location masked for blind review]). From there the package moved at a slow pace through multiple layers of Air Force offices (e.g., Air Force Medical Readiness Agency, Office of the Air

Force Surgeon General, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force) with periodic requests for additional information or clarification from the research team. Persons reviewing the package were often unfamiliar with the waiver process; moreover, both the protracted delays and nature of requests for further clarifications suggested a succession of cautious responses. After seven months the Department of the Air Force ultimately approved the waiver request package and passed it on to OUSD (P&R).

Obtaining OUSD (P&R) waiver approval took an additional 19 months. We requested and were granted supplementary funding and a one-year extension to our three-year period of performance. Much of that time was spent waiting on an update from OUSD (P&R) without a means to check on the status of our request. We were asked to further justify the value of our study to the Air Force. In addition, we responded to questions about confidentiality, participant payment, record keeping, and other logistical matters, some of which required us to amend our original research protocol. Our “sensitive” items that had been prohibited by the AFSO were reviewed for use by subject matter experts at multiple DoD agencies (i.e., Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, Defense Suicide Prevention Office, and Family Advocacy Program). The feedback from these agencies was positive and supported restoring those items.

With OUSD (P&R) waiver approval in-hand, we returned to the AFSO expecting a green light for study implementation. However, at that point we were informed that recent policy changes necessitated that we seek additional approvals. Specifically, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) now required that certain types of information proposed to be collected from military personnel be submitted to OMB’s Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs for approval (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-regulatory-affairs/>). The AFSO now concluded that, despite our receipt of DoD-level approval to reinstate the “sensitive” items, the

nature of the questions (i.e., intimate partner aggression, infidelity, suicidality, drug use) warranted OMB review. The OMB review process requires preparation of a detailed package that includes supporting statements, copies of study measures, calculations of respondent burden, a records plan, and other documents with no assurance of approval. The process also entails a public comment period of at least 30 to 60 days. There is an avenue for requesting an expedited OMB review, but that option requires an emergency letter signed by a Political Appointee. At this point we had only four months left in our already-extended four-year period of performance. For multiple reasons both practical and principle-based, our team reached the difficult decision to close the study.

In summary, multiple components of the DoD agreed on the importance of our research aimed at understanding how to best support LGB+ SMs and their partners. Our proposed research was well-received by Department of the Air Force research partners and DoD funders. After a rigorous scientific and programmatic review process, our proposal was funded. Our research protocol was approved for implementation by both military and academic IRBs. Despite the successful navigation of these initial hurdles, we experienced years of iterative and conflicting reviews with unclear justifications underlying either policies or the process. Moreover, we faced barriers to our research with the stated intent to reduce the risk of negative publicity for the military. Rather than protect the best interest of service members and their families, this additional oversight proved to be insurmountable and markedly different from any challenges we had previously encountered when conducting research with heterosexual military couples and families.

A Call to Action

Current military processes and policies continue to serve as significant structural and

institutional barriers precluding progress in research and practice for LGB+ military couples and families. Our capacity to implement research on the unique experiences of LGB+ military couples and families has been severely constrained despite initial evidence of health disparities and the absence of appropriately tailored resources within the military community (e.g., Carey et al., 2022; Holloway et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021). The lack of clear guidelines for conducting research with LGB+ military families has resulted in contradictory, redundant, and overly cautious responses from official reviewers. To better serve our LGB+ military members, there is an immediate need to clarify, streamline, and shorten the approval process for inquiring about sexual orientation. Despite policy changes within the military (i.e., the repeal of DADT), process-related barriers to conducting this essential research have persisted over a decade later.

Meaningful changes to the research approval processes will require a coordinated effort across all service branches of the DoD, the involvement of senior policy makers, military leaders, and participation in this effort by representatives from the LGB+ military community. Reviewers across offices (e.g., OUSD (P&R), OMB, AFSSO) must have clear and accessible guidelines so that researchers are adequately equipped to effectively navigate the review process regardless of the military branch of primary focus. Moreover, guidelines must be formulated in collaboration with stakeholders (e.g., LGB+ military couples and families and those invested in their well-being) to appropriately reflect the concerns and interests of those whom this research intends to benefit. There is a clear and immediate need for advocacy in our research and practice. Progress is long overdue.

Some recent guidance provides a potentially more optimistic outlook bearing in mind that reform and its benefits are often arduous. Recent Executive Orders (Exec. Order No. 13988, 2021) and updates to DoD Instructions (DoD Instruction 1350.02, 2020; DoD Instruction

1020.05, 2020) provide renewed guidance on the establishment of equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion programs in the DoD. Development and implementation of such programs would undoubtedly benefit from evidence-based strategies for reducing systemic social and health inequities for LGB+ military families. Programs facilitating equity, diversity, and inclusion in the military hold promise in improving the experiences of LGB+ SMs and would require providing cultural competency training for leadership and health providers to improve the military and health care experiences of LGB+ SMs, thereby fostering greater wellness and retention.

Moreover, a noteworthy development occurred in 2021 when President Joe Biden directed the DoD to establish a 90-day Independent Review Commission (IRC) to study and make recommendations on ways to reduce the high incidence of sexual assault in the military (U.S. Department of Defense Official, n.d.). The IRC final report (Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Assault in the Military, 2021) highlighted the elevated risk for sexual harassment and assault faced by LGB+ SMs and included the following in a list of key recommendations:

DoD needs to improve data collection, including qualitative research and quantitative survey tools, to better reflect the experiences of Service members whose intersecting identities, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity, may place them at higher risk for sexual harassment and sexual assault. (p. 32)

Indeed, the IRC report took specific aim at the requirement for OUSD (P&R) approval for studies asking questions related to sexual orientation, stating that “this bureaucratic hurdle remains an obstacle for prevention experts and other researchers who wish to study the unique risks and experiences of LGBTQ+ Service members” (p. 48). In September, 2021 the DoD

announced a strategy for implementing all of the IRC recommendations (Cronk, 2021). The recommended policy changes have evoked cautious optimism from researchers focused on LGB+ SMs. However, the extent to which these changes will truly lessen barriers for future research remains unknown. Consistent efforts and advocacy toward improvement are essential for continued progress.

Promoting An Intersectional Ecological Model

Quality and timely research is required to understand the needs of LGB+ military couples and families and to effectively tailor prevention and intervention services based on sound evidence. The socioecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) serves as a guide for selecting dynamic, multifaceted, and interactional domains of functioning to assess ranging from aspects of the microsystem (individual, couple, and family) to the macrosystem (military culture). Our current and limited knowledge is largely based on only two studies with a primary focus on the mental health and well-being of LGB+ SMs at the individual level—without attending to relationship well-being or including perspectives from SMs' partners. From a systems perspective, we must advance our research and practice by centralizing the principle of embeddedness (e.g., couples and families), especially when the social marginalization of the individual is targeted at one's romantic partnerships. Moreover, LGB+ couples and families are embedded in the military; thus, research must also take into account the uniqueness of the military culture including its policies, resources, restrictions, demands, and expectations. Current military processes and policies continue to serve as significant structural and institutional barriers precluding progress in research and practice for LGB+ military couples and families.

Moreover, there are broader principles that should guide our future research and practice with LGB+ couples and families. To understand the experiences of marginalized groups, it is

critical to consider the intersectionality of identity. Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the importance of considering how experiences of marginalization and discrimination vary based on the intersection of one's identities. To fully capture one's experience, aspects of one's identity cannot be considered in mutually exclusive categories (e.g., sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or gender) in isolation; rather their interactive dynamics need to be considered. Couples and families from marginalized LGB+ groups will encounter unique experiences of both risk (e.g., discrimination and oppression) and resilience (e.g., greater access to resources and capabilities) based on the distinct configuration of their identities. Indeed, different experiences with regard to minority stress and health disparities have been demonstrated among LGB+ individuals as a function of sex, gender, age, race, and ethnicity (McConnell et al., 2019).

Gender identity is a particularly important consideration within the military context. From a socioecological perspective, the military is a male-dominated career field (82.8% of the active-duty military identify as male; Military OneSource, 2020) in which masculinity (or even exaggerated masculinity) is valued and reinforced. This is particularly relevant considering that LGB+ military families are more likely to be female headed, of minority race/ethnicity, and in interracial partnerships than non-LGB+ military families (Oswald et al., 2014). In 2016, the DoD lifted restrictions on open transgender service only to be reversed from 2017-2021 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Currently, transgender SMs meeting certain psychological and physical requirements are able to serve openly and receive medical services (Exec. Order No. 14004, 2021). However, research efforts remain constrained in asking about gender identity outside of the gender binary categories. From the little empirical work that has been done, unique mental and physical health disparities exist for transgender SMs including a greater risk for depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidality than cisgender peers (Holloway et al., 2021). Because

of current policy restrictions, research and prevention or intervention development efforts will lag even further behind that of sexual orientation.

Heteronormative values and expectations continue to be imposed on sexual minority military families. The experiences of married LGB+ SMs compared with those who are partnered but unmarried differ in meaningful ways. Aside from lacking access to benefits and other resources in the military, unmarried LGB+ military members, their partners, and their families may be met with less acknowledgement or acceptance of their relationship (Sullivan et al., 2021). Military and civilian LGB+ couples have had the federal right to legally marry since 2015 (i.e., since the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). However, fears of legislative changes to equal marriage rights have become a growing concern in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (e.g., Justice Clarence Thomas inviting new legal challenges to same-sex marriage; Foster-Frau, 2022). In a recent public statement, the Air Force expressed their commitment to supporting LGBT families in need of medical and legal help when relocating to states with restrictive laws (Youn, 2022). This is particularly relevant to LGB+ military couples and families who experience frequent relocations and may not reside in any one state for extended periods. The ways in which we conduct our research and practice as well as how we form our policies must take into account our conceptualization of a "military family" (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2019); otherwise, we risk having heteronormative values and assumptions preclude an evidence base for optimizing resources for sexual and gender minority service members and their families.

Conclusions

Effectively implementing essential research with marginalized groups is inherently difficult, especially within an institution in which policies that foster discrimination have

persisted until recent history. LGB+ military couples and families have been able to serve openly for over a decade. Despite this, current research review processes and policies continue to impede critical research limiting our effectiveness in developing appropriate resources for this marginalized group. Based both on the limited literature as well as our own experiences and collective expertise, we offer the following recommendations:

- (1) Researchers must be able to ask about sexual orientation in the military population.

Sexual orientation has important health and social implications. Without the capacity to assess sexual orientation, we miss the opportunity to understand the unique needs, strengths, and barriers faced by LGB+ military couples and families. Moreover, because sexual identity is not static, researchers need to have the ability to inquire about sexual orientation across multiple time points. To this end, the approval process for including questions about sexual orientation needs to be clarified and streamlined. Clear, consistent, and equitable guidelines must be developed and disseminated within the DoD and across all service branches to facilitate progress in our understanding of the experiences and needs of LGB+ military couples and families. The development of guidelines and reformed review processes should be a collaborative effort inclusive of all four military branches, policy makers, military leaders, researchers, and stakeholders (e.g., LGB+ SMs and their families).

- (2) The DoD's review, selection, funding, and implementation of this research should be conducted in collaboration with LGB+ SMs. Stakeholders of this research need to inform every step of the research process from conceptualization through review and implementation to dissemination of findings. It is important to build sustainable and effective partnerships with those in the community whom this research aims to serve.

Recruiting LGB+ SMs and their partners is made more difficult when formal programs or resources do not exist for LGB+ military couples and families.

- (3) Research and practice with LGB+ military couples and families must incorporate a socioecological, intersectional, and developmental perspective to adequately capture the diverse and dynamic experiences of those within this marginalized population. This includes gathering the perspectives of partners and family members to capture the experiences of the family system both in terms of challenges (e.g., individual, couple, or family-level minority stress such as lack of acceptance, stigma, or discrimination from those within the military community) as well as resources (e.g., familial support, cohesion, coping, LGB+ community support, and inclusivity in the healthcare system). Key demographic features (e.g., relationship and parental status, employment status, income, race and ethnicity) as well as central aspects of couple and family dynamics (e.g., conflict, cohesion, communication, support) should be considered. Notably, current policies preclude researchers' ability to inquire about gender identity outside of the gender binary categories (man or woman). This is a critical area for future policy growth and of central importance from an intersectional ecological perspective.

We share an obligation as mental health professionals to advocate for progress and reform of institutional structures or barriers that constrain the opportunities or well-being of marginalized individuals. Another decade of barriers to illuminating the experiences of LGB+ military couples and families is not an option.

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Figure 1.

Bronfenbrenn's (1974) Ecological Systems Model.

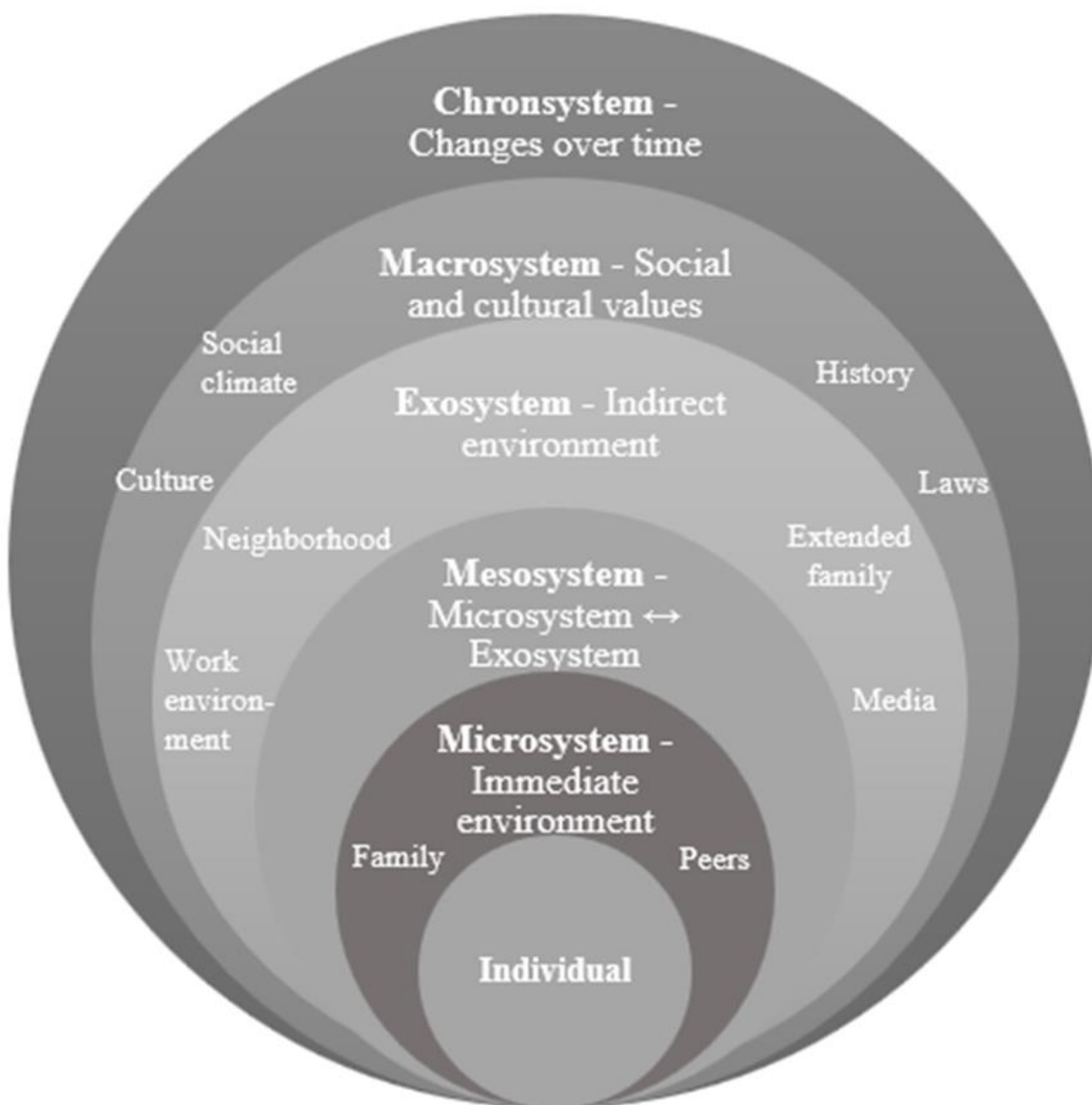
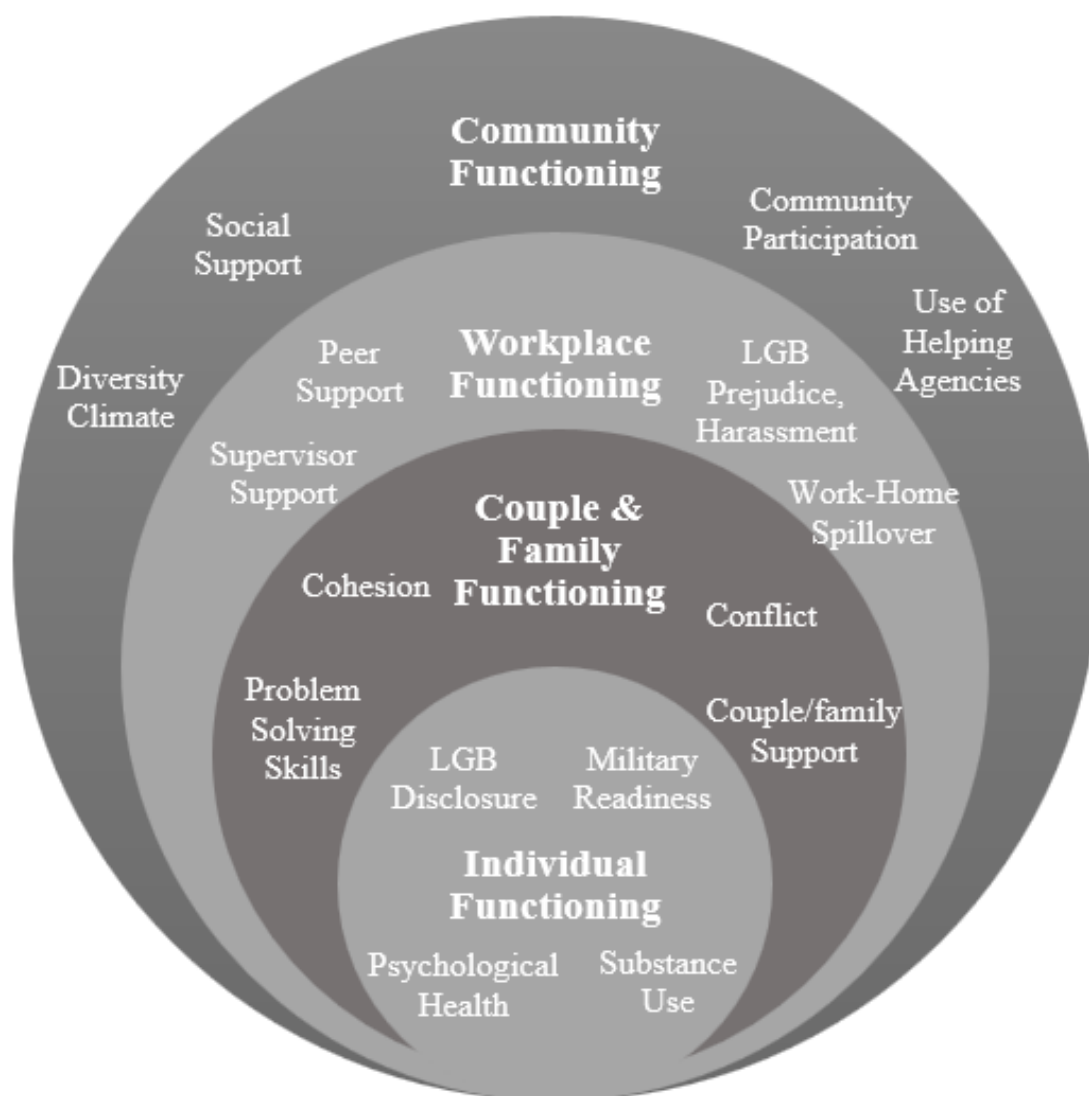


Figure 2.

Social Ecological Model of LGB+ Military Individual, Couple, Workplace, and Community Functioning



From: [JONES, SHELLBY Y GS-12 USAF AFDW AF/A1Z](#)
To: [Cigrang, Jeff](#); [BLAIR, ELIZABETH A Maj USAF HAF AF/A1Z](#)
Cc: [POUND, LEAH B Maj USAF HAF AF/A1Z](#); [SIMONSON, JORDAN L Maj USAF AMC 92 MDG/SGXW](#)
Subject: FW: SAF/PA Case Completed: Case Number 2022-0682
Date: Wednesday, October 5, 2022 11:40:36 AM

!-----|
CAUTION: This Message Is From an External Sender
Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking
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|-----!

Good morning all,
So glad to have received this news.

Have a great day!

v/r,
Shellbyu

-----Original Message-----

From: SAF.PA.Security.and.Policy.Review@us.af.mil
<SAF.PA.Security.and.Policy.Review@us.af.mil>
Sent: Wednesday, October 5, 2022 11:36 AM
To: JONES, SHELLBY Y GS-12 USAF AFDW AF/A1Z <shellby.jones@us.af.mil>;
SANDELIER, MATTHEW J Col USAF HAF AF/ST <matthew.sandelier@us.af.mil>; POUND,
LEAH B Maj USAF HAF AF/A1Z <leah.pound.1@us.af.mil>
Subject: SAF/PA Case Completed: Case Number 2022-0682

SAF/PA has completed the review process for your case on 06 Oct 2022:

Subject: Still Don't Ask More Than a Decade Later: The Impact of Research
Barriers for LGB+ Military Couples and Families (Manuscript)

Case Reviewer: Beverly Sumpter
Case Number: 2022-0682

The material was assigned a clearance of CLEARED on 06 Oct 2022. If you have
any questions concerning your case, please contact Beverly Sumpter
beverly.sumpter.1@us.af.mil.