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Lived Experiences of Sexual Orientation Discrimination of Gay Male Service Members

Dwayne A. Tyler
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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Dwayne A. Tyler

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Lived Experiences of Sexual Orientation Discrimination of Gay Male Service Members

by

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M. Phil., Walden University, 2019

Graduate Certificate, Walden University, 2016

M.Ed., Liberty University, 2013

BS, Liberty University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

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Abstract

The repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy (DADT) has been an area of study among scholars since 2011. Researchers have demonstrated that discrimination based on sexual orientation is still occurring in the armed forces. However, researchers have not studied the lived experiences of active-duty male service members in the army who self-identified as gay. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members who self-identified as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy. Using semi-structured interviews, four self-identified gay male service members from various army installations shared their lived experiences of discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The theories of Goffman's social stigma theory and Meyer's minority stress model was theoretically used to frame this study, while Moustakas's phenomenological qualitative research methods were used to analyze the interviews. The experiences of the male service members are expressed throughout four themes: the lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay, discrimination based on sexual orientation, the mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation, and army-wide educational programs on sexual orientation. The social change implications of the armed forces' leadership may benefit from this study's results by implementing sexual orientation programs in its annual mandatory training modules.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the male service members who self-identify as gay and have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation not only in the United States Army, but in all branches of the armed forces.

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Primarily, I thank God for being my guiding light and sustainer. Completing this doctoral program in human services would not have been possible without His perpetual wisdom, guidance, and love. The second person I want to acknowledge is my lead lady, my mother, the late June G. Tyler. She was a cheerleader who did all she could to ensure I completed all my collegiate endeavors while maintaining a life of health and wellness. The third person(s) I would like to acknowledge is my niece/mentee, Chereese M. Tyler-Pleasant, the Three Amigos (AC, BC, MH) and my life-long friends (siblings) who have heard many woes throughout the years. The fourth and final group is my dissertation committee, Dr. Hamilton and Dr. Lee. Dr. Hamilton's endless support, encouragement, and knowledge have caused me to prevail amid the numerous setbacks while on this doctoral journey and helped me to cross the dissertation finish line.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this qualitative study, I explored the lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation for active-duty male service members in the army who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy (DADT). Discrimination based on sexual orientation is problematic because it adversely affects individuals and lowers their military readiness (Blair et al., 2020). Asencio et al. (2017) found that discrimination was linked to higher alcohol consumption levels, substance abuse, and poor eating habits among individuals who experienced discrimination. Findings from studies have also revealed that discrimination based on sexual orientation was related to adverse psychological outcomes for victims, such as panic attacks, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Baptiste-Roberts et al., 2017; Bariola & Lenorad, 2016).

Furthermore, gay male service members tend to self-isolate due to their lack of self-esteem and integration into the ranks because of discrimination (Bonaccio et al., 2019; Bry et al., 2017). Additional research has revealed that suicide and suicidal ideations were higher among veterans who self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB; Bryan et al., 2017; Chaudoir et al., 2017). The adverse psychological outcomes associated with discrimination based on sexual orientation could further result in a service member being declared unfit for duty, thus minimizing the service member's chances of being promoted (Smith & De Angelis, 2017).

Although the research mentioned above regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation illuminates essential findings, I have found minimal research that has examined the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members in the army

who had experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation since the repeal of the DADT policy. In this chapter, I provide the background, problem statement, purpose, research question, and theoretical framework. Also, I include the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

In a qualitative study, Richard and Molloy (2020) discovered that those male service members who self-identified as gay experienced problems in being accepted into the military's rank-and-file because of their sexual orientation. Bowring (2017) further pointed out that stressed relationships between gay male and heterosexual male service members have caused male service members who self-identify as gay to conceal their sexual orientation. Research has revealed that concealing one's sexual orientation was linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes for service members who self-identified as gay (McNamara et al., 2020). Those poor health outcomes were panic attacks, depression, and PTSD (Impey et al., 2020; Scheer et al., 2020). Sweeney et al., (2025) noted that adverse psychological outcomes associated with discrimination based on sexual orientation could result in emotional distress (e.g., lack of social skills, isolation, and outbursts). As a result, some service members in the army who self-identify as gay did not experience the intended benefit of the repeal of the DADT policy (O'Connell, 2021).

Green et al. (2020) shared that even though the DADT policy was repealed, it did not end the discrimination that gay male service members experienced because of their

sexual orientation. Some male service members indicated they chose to conceal their sexual orientation based on past incidents of discrimination (Li & Samp, 2019). Gurng et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to determine the concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) service members who had experienced military sexual trauma and sexual orientation discrimination after the repeal of the DADT policy. The researchers reported that LGBT service members expressed having experienced discriminatory actions from others, such as offensive speech, derogatory names, vandalism of personal property, physical assault, and limited or denied career advancement. Also, LGBT service members expressed concerns about their safety and well-being. For example, 10% of the men interviewed expressed that they had to deal with numerous attempts from others to establish unwanted romantic relationships. Also, 9.8% of the participants interviewed revealed that others had touched them in ways that made them feel uncomfortable (Gurng, 2018).

Moreover, Shepherd et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to determine the severity of trauma that active-duty LGB service members may have experienced due to being a sexual minority. The researchers concluded that discrimination had affected some male service members by contributing to their development of PTSD. Schuyler et al. (2020) revealed that those LGB service members experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault, and stalking. Others experienced mental health challenges that included PTSD, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideations. Gurng et al. (2018) conducted a study to determine the risk of suicide among LGB individuals. They concluded that LGB service

members were at an increased risk for suicide due to the lack of social support and mental health support.

Findings from Schuyler et al.'s (2020) study are related to my research because they outlined how discrimination affects the mental and physical health of LGB service members who self-identify as being gay. Also, Gurng et al. (2018) findings are relevant to my research because they emphasized the need for more empirical research on LGB service members and their experiences after the repeal of the DADT policy. Gurng et al. also noted that the impact of sexual orientation discrimination within the armed forces has been underrepresented and not well documented.

Problem Statement

The armed forces have historically prevented LGB service members from joining the ranks (Dunlap et al., 2021). In 1996, former President Clinton implemented the DADT policy, which allowed LGB service members to serve in the armed forces if they did not publicly disclose their sexual orientation to their peers or command leadership (Connell, 2017; Worthen, 2018). In 2011, former President Obama repealed the DADT policy. The repeal of the DADT policy permitted LGB service members to openly serve in the armed forces without fear of retribution if they chose to disclose their sexual orientation publicly (VanGilder, 2017).

Three years after President Obama repealed the DADT policy, McNamara et al. (2021) conducted a study to determine the impact on LGB service members. The researchers found that of the 71,000 individuals in the United States military who openly admitted being LGB, 26,000 reported having experienced discrimination based on their

sexual orientation. Researchers have proposed that discrimination based on sexual orientation is problematic in the armed forces because it adversely affects service members and lowers morale (Hayes et al., 2020; Howe, 2018). Pachankis et al. (2020) stated that discrimination based on sexual orientation had been associated with alcohol consumption, drug use, and poor eating habits. The adverse effects of discrimination based on sexual orientation are problematic because they could result in LGB service members being declared unfit for duty, thus minimizing the service members' chances of being selected for promotion and advancement in their military career (Reilly et al., 2020; Smith & De Angelis, 2017). When service members cannot deploy or report for duty because of alcohol abuse or drug abuse, it strains the rank and file, a concern for the armed forces' leadership (Frank, 2017; Stein & Craske, 2017). Another concern for the armed forces leadership is that discrimination based on sexual orientation has a detrimental effect on positive troop morale and readiness (Alford & Lee, 2016). Positive troop morale and readiness signifies to the outside world that the armed forces are ready at any given moment to adhere to the call of duty by the commander-in-chief if the need arises (Klingaman et al., 2018). However, if troop morale is low, military readiness can become strained (Nindl et al., 2018). Researchers have also revealed that men are not likely to seek therapy services for the mental anguish caused by discrimination based on sexual orientation due to the stigma and fear of revealing their sexual orientation (Campbell et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017).

Although the previous research regarding sexual orientation discrimination illuminates essential findings regarding how discrimination adversely affects the impact

of LGB service members, I located minimal research that examined the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members in the army who experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Gurng et al. (2018) indicated that empirical research on the experiences of sexual orientation discrimination among males in the military is further warranted due to current research highlighting military sexual trauma (MST). During my literature search, I located a small number of articles that addressed sexual orientation discrimination against service members (e.g., Bowring, 2017; Campbell et al., 2017; Dunlap et al., 2021; Felix et al., 2021; Hoover et al., 2017). Given this, further research is warranted to provide information regarding the impact of sexual orientation discrimination on male active-duty service members in the army who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative study, I examined the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of active-duty male service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. Van Gilder (2017) revealed that male service members who self-identify as gay may be apprehensive about volunteering for research studies that require them to divulge their sexual orientation because they may be afraid of other service members' reactions to them divulging their sexual orientation. Goldbach and Castro (2016) also suggested that more research needs to be conducted to determine the potential healthcare needs of active-duty LGB service members who experience discrimination based on sexual orientation. Elder et al. (2017) have further indicated that the armed forces have not developed a traditional means of examining how

the DADT policy repeal has impacted service members. This research is needed to provide the male active-duty service members in the army a voice to their experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

This theoretical framework for this study consisted of principles from two theories: the social stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) and the minority stress model (MSM; Meyers, 2003). Social stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) focuses on understanding the disdain for an individual's characteristics not aligned with societal norms. Meyers (2003) MSM describes the stress faced by individuals of stigmatized minority groups.

Social Stigma Theory

Goffman (1963) developed the social stigma theory to explain the ridicule and discrimination lobbied against people who did not conform to society's expectations. The social stigma theory also describes how stigma impacts an individual's behavior. Through his research, Goffman (2005) learned that individuals develop stress due to stigma. Studies on anxiety have revealed that people who had experienced discrimination had higher stress levels than those who had not faced discrimination (Lloren & Parini, 2017; Moran & Lynch, 2017). Furthermore, when an individual anticipates discrimination, the anticipation could lead to adverse outcomes such as chronic stress, isolation, depression,

low self-esteem, and mental and physical exertion (Abdollahi et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2018; McCartan et al., 2020).

Perceived social stigmas can adversely affect an individual's behavior because they fear how others respond (Cornish et al., 2019; Schvey, 2020). For instance, the fear of rejection can adversely impact male service members who self-identify as gay by affecting their physical and psychological well-being, leading to a lack of productivity (Goffman, 2018). The premises of the social stigma theory are relevant to this study because male service members who self-identify as gay may face discrimination from some of their heterosexual comrades because of their sexual orientation (Coleman et al., 2017).

Minority Stress Model

I also used Meyer's (2003) MSM principles to guide this study. Meyer developed the MSM to explain the high-stress levels those individuals of minority groups experience. The central premise of the MSM is that minorities are subject to undue stressors, such as prejudice and discrimination, which adversely impact their mental and physical health (Meyers, 2015). For example, Moya and Moya-Garofano (2020) found that LGBT employees disclosed they faced significant amounts of work-related stress, depression, and other mental health disorders due to experiences of discrimination in the workplace because of their sexual orientation.

The premises of the social stigma theory (Nadal & Scharron-del Rio, 2021) and the MSM (Meyers, 2015) were appropriate for guiding my research because the premises from both theories explained the lived experiences of sexual discrimination of the active-

duty male service members who self-identified as gay. Furthermore, the social stigma theory (Sullivan et al., 2021) was appropriate for this study because it built on previous research dealing with discrimination based on sexual orientation. Lastly, the MSM (Meyer et al., 2021) was suitable for this study because it gave an understanding on how stress impacted active-duty male service members who self-identified as gay because of their sexual orientation (Tebbe & Moradi, 2016).

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I investigated the phenomenon of this study. The qualitative approach was best suited for this study. A qualitative approach allowed me to examine and interpret the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male active-duty service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. Hence the participant's experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation could have taken place at different intervals than their peers.

Additionally, I used purposeful sampling and snowballing strategies to recruit participants for this study. The participants were recruited through Group A. I recruited four active-duty male service members for this phenomenological qualitative study who have been in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy. I selected four participants for this study for several reasons. The first reason was to have an adequate number of participants to interview. Secondly, if something happened to a participant during the interview, I would have enough participants to continue studying. Also, I needed to interview enough participants to enhance the chance of reaching saturation of the data.

Saturation is met when participants do not share any new information based on interview questions (Hennik et al., 2017). According to Boddy (2016), 12 participants can be enough to reach saturation in a qualitative study. Also, Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that 12 participants are enough due to no new themes or data emerging from the participants.

Lastly, I used semi structured interviews to collect the data. The semi structured interview process helped me align the interview to ensure the necessary questions were asked to give insight into this study's purpose and research question. To aid in recording the interview, I used Zoom to record the participant's audible responses during the interviews. Thematic content analysis guided my data analysis (see Morgan & Nica, 2020). The intent of analyzing the data was to understand the participants' experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. One of the ways to understand the participant's experiences was to find the themes in their semi structured interviews. I used Moustaka's (1994) steps for phenomenological analysis. It allows researchers to garner general themes through the understanding of the data that is collected and being able to condense them into surfacing themes (Sibeoni et al., 2020). After the interviews had been analyzed, I had a clear picture of the experiences of male service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Long, 2021). To do so, I used an Excel workbook.

Definitions

Active Duty: Service members serve their country seven days a week (Hom et al., 2017).

Armed Forces: The combined branches of the United States military include the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard (Hom et al., 2017).

Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy: A policy that permitted LGB service members to enter the Armed Forces. Military officials could not ask them about their sexual orientation during the recruitment process. However, if anyone disclosed the LGB service member's sexual orientation during their career, they would have been discharged from the Armed forces (Moran & Lynch, 2017).

Emotional distress: Another individual's harm inflicted on another individual (Tice et al., 2018).

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Exposure to actual or threatened death, sexual violence, or severe injury events (Bryant, 2019).

Self-identified gay man: A male openly identifies as being attracted to the same sex (Dodge et al., 2016; Sewell et al., 2017).

Sexual orientation: Individuals' preferences of which gender they are naturally attracted to (Bailey et al., 2016).

Sexual orientation discrimination: Ill-treatment or harassment against someone who identifies or is perceived as LGB (Moser, 2016).

Assumptions

Certain aspects of this study are accurate but cannot be proven. For instance, I assumed the men in the army who volunteered to participate in this study would self-identify as gay and have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation since the repeal of the DADT policy. Also, I assumed the participants recruited for this

study would be forthcoming in divulging their experiences and being honest about them. I assumed that those male service members in the army who self-identify as gay would not have ulterior motives for participating in this study, such as defaming the armed forces or their leadership. Finally, I assumed that a phenomenological qualitative approach would be best suited for this study to examine the lived experiences of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay and have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I explored gay male service members' lived experiences with discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The targeted population for this study included active-duty male service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. The theoretical framework for this study was the social stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) and MSM (Meyers, 2003) because they explained how stigma and stress associated with discrimination based on sexual orientation contributed to stressors in male service members who self-identified as gay. Although I considered the theory of hopelessness and the cognitive theory, neither was chosen because they did not address specific stigma and minority stress (see Boduszek & Dhingra, 2016). This study was limited to active-duty male service members serving in the army. Both enlisted and officers were eligible to participate. Interviewing both enlisted and officers allowed recruiting individuals to vary their lived experiences.

A delimitation of this study was the time in service for the population being interviewed. The participants selected for this study had a military entrance contract date

of January 1, 1996. Interviewing participants on this contract date included service members who served in the army under the DADT policy. Also, participants were willing to disclose their lived experiences during an interview with the student researcher.

Limitations

The limitations of a study can vary in several ways. For instance, the time needed to interview the participants due to their work schedules could be improved. Service members' daily work schedules differ from 9 to 5, like many other jobs (Shattuck et al., 2018). When a service member is selected for an interview time slot, they may have to reschedule it due to their military occupational specialty (MOS) work requirements (Shattuck & Matsangas, 2016). Therefore, to minimize the participant's work schedule from impeding the interview, I scheduled it for the weekend, during their lunch break, or a military three to four holiday if permissible.

In addition to service members' availability being listed as a limitation for this study, the participants may have difficulty revealing their experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. This includes not disclosing other service members' sexual orientation or experiences that would comprise their job security. Some participants may have had selective memory or were not able to articulate their experiences clearly and concisely. To help alleviate awkward moments for the participants, I built a rapport to help them relax. After the interview, if a participant showed uneasiness, I paused and allowed them to take a break and gather their composure. The interview was concluded if the participant could not regain their composure after the break. Upon conclusion of the interview, I gave the participants a list of resources in their area that they could contact

for professional assistance to help them work through their emotional discomfort. Lastly, the amount of time needed to complete the study is limited.

Significance

In this research, I provided information regarding the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members in the army who experienced sexual orientation discrimination while fulfilling their military duties and responsibilities since the repeal of the DADT policy. The information from this study could be used by human services professionals and the Department of Defense (DOD) to understand that discrimination based on sexual orientation still exists amid reformed legislation (see Hoover et al., 2017). Human services and other professionals could use findings from my study to promote an awareness of how discrimination based on sexual orientation affects individual service members and their military readiness. The findings from this research can potentially serve as a voice for active-duty gay male service members in the army who may be hesitant to reveal their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. Additionally, information gained from this study could promote social change by providing professionals and advocacy organizations with data that supports the need to develop training programs on sexual orientation discrimination. Besides, the objective of the training programs could help with the dismantling of social stigmas and prejudices against active-duty gay male service members.

Summary

Arkles and Gehi (2016) suggested the intent behind the repeal of the DADT policy was to allow LGB active-duty service members to openly exhibit their sexual

orientation while serving in the Armed forces. However, LGB service members continue to experience prejudice and discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Sandfort et al., 2016). Also, Dover et al. (2020) suggested that discrimination is linked to higher alcohol consumption, substance abuse, and poor eating habits. In addition, findings from studies revealed that sexual orientation discrimination was related to adverse psychological outcomes such as panic attacks, depression, and PTSD (Sattler et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2020). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male active-duty service members in the army who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. The introduction, background, and problem statement gave leeway for this research study's foundation in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 included the purpose, conceptual framework, nature of the study, and its significance. A more detailed examination of the current literature on discrimination based on sexual orientation and the limited research on male service members' lived experiences of self-identifying as gay is included in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of male service members who identify as gay and have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation while serving on active duty in the United States Armed Forces. In 1996, when DADT policy was implemented, the leadership of the armed forces had not developed policies to address discrimination based on sexual orientation (Bryan et al., 2017; O'Brien & Shoemaker, 2015), primarily because the leadership of the armed forces was unsure how the DADT policy would affect service members (Mankowski, 2017; Van Gilder, 2018).

Discrimination based on sexual orientation led to unwarranted stress, physical illness, and substance abuse (Gates & Saunders, 2016; Johnson et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2016). Study findings have revealed that discrimination based on sexual orientation could be linked to structural stigma, which is defined as policies, conditions, societal norms, and a practice that denounces stigmatized individuals from receiving the same opportunities that nonstigmatized individuals receive (Schomerus & Angermeyer, 2021). Also, stigma illuminates how individuals with mental health disorders, such as anxiety disorder, depression, and PTSD, are treated and viewed by society (Johnson et al., 2015; Pelts et al., 2015; Ray-Sannerud et al., 2015). For example, a mental health diagnosis could result in a male service member being deemed unfit for duty if his mental health diagnosis impedes his ability to perform the duties and responsibilities associated with his military occupational specialty (MOS; Blosnich et al., 2019; Moring et al., 2019). When a service member is declared unfit for duty, it minimizes their chances of promotion and a successful military career (Feickert, 2014; Smith & De Angelis, 2017).

Despite research regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation, I found limited empirical data regarding the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members in the army who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation since the repeal of DADT policy. Additional research could provide information regarding the impact of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members who identify as gay in the armed forces, and researchers have indicated that scholarly research is minimal (Harwood, 2015; Van Gilder, 2018).

In this qualitative study, I examined the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy. In the first section of this chapter, I focused on the literature search strategy, including the journal databases and key search terms used and the criteria for selecting the journal articles for the literature review. The second section of this chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this study. The theoretical framework included premises from the social stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) and MSM (Meyers, 2003). In the third section, I presented the literature review. The literature review included resources that aligned with the topic of this study, and I critically analyzed, synthesized, and presented the information gathered. The last section is a summary of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

I located the literature for this review in peer-reviewed journals accessed through Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, LGBT Life with full text, Military and Government Collection, Psych INFO databases, and Google Scholar search

engine. The keywords and search terms I used in the literature search included: *lived experiences of gay males, sexual orientation discrimination, gays, military cadets, sexual attitudes, informal leadership, ethics, competence, LGB, military, homosexuality, social discrimination, social bias, victims, military personnel, framework, Don't Ask Don't Tell, military policy, military trauma, veterans, conflict-related social violence, military sexual assault, workplace discrimination, military culture, minority groups, stress, depression, suicidal ideation, prejudice, organizational behavior, gender-specific treatment, military sexual trauma, queer theory, and the Employment Nondiscrimination Act*. Publication dates of the literature reviewed ranged from 2014 to the present. Searching for and reviewing earlier peer-reviewed journal articles helped build a foundation and support for this study's theoretical framework.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in two theories: Goffman's (1963) social stigma theory and Meyer's (2003) MSM. Goffman's social stigma theory was used to explain how social stigmas are developed and how those stigmas can lead to discrimination. Meyer's MSM explained how stress related to the lived experiences of discrimination affected members of minority groups. The premises of the social stigma theory and MSM were appropriate for guiding this study because I addressed how the lived experiences of discrimination and stress based on sexual orientation have affected male service members who identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Social Stigma Theory

The etymology of the word *stigma* is traced back to the ancient Greeks and was referred to as markings on one's body (e.g., tattoos; Al-Kamel, 2017). As research on stigma theory has progressed, the word stigma has evolved into a social construct, and the conceptualization of stigma has evolved into discussions related to social stigma (Brewis & Wutich, 2020). Goffman (1963) introduced the social stigma theory to explain how and why society disapproves of people. Goffman defined stigma as an attribute that results in societal devaluation and rejection of an individual. Goffman highlighted three types of stigmas: (a) physical attributes, including physical disabilities, bodily scars, and skin conditions; (b) character blemishes, including mental illness, addictions, or homelessness; and (c) tribal membership, which relates to the stigmas that impact ethnic groups, religions, or cultures. Among the three types of stigmas, social stigma is a severe disregard for a person or group socially perceived to be inadequate (Herek, 2016). A person's inadequacy can be attributed to cultural norms, mental illnesses, physical disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, or even religion (Armstrong et al., 2018; deVries, 2015). Additionally, stigma can be expressed through verbal and nonverbal communication by shunning people who do not meet an individual personal standard or who do not conform to societal norms (Knight et al., 2016). Goffman's (1963) social stigma theory helped to illuminate the stigma of tribal membership on sexual orientation faced by male service members who identify as gay.

The social stigma theory was relevant to this study because many active-duty gay male service members have faced rejection by their heterosexual comrades due to their

sexual orientation (Bry et al., 2017; Martinez, 2017; Tatum, 2018). In addition, this theory was used to explain the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members as they coped with stigma in the armed forces due to their sexual orientation (Alford & Lee, 2016; Goldbach & Castro, 2016; Rapoliene, 2015). Finally, this theory helped to explain the lived experiences of active-duty gay male service members who were afraid to disclose their experiences for fear of exposing themselves again to stigmatization by other service members (Livingston et al., 2019; Mayo, 2017).

In this qualitative study, I explored the lived experiences of male service members who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. Exploring these experiences helped develop an understanding of how armed forces leadership handles discrimination based on sexual orientation. Discrimination based on sexual orientation included derogatory language, physical acts of harm, and unwanted gestures (Fosch-Villaronga et al., 2021; Thomas, 2021). Heterosexual male service members misconstrue the armed forces culture of sexual orientation discrimination as horseplay and derogatory language that is viewed as part of the typical male phenomenon (Bjerke & Rones, 2017; Sløk-Andersen, 2019).

Minority Stress Model

Meyer introduced medical and social science communities to MSM in 2003. Meyer's MSM revealed that prejudice and stigma cause stress and negatively impact members of marginalized communities. Meyer's intent for developing the MSM was to allow members of marginalized communities to share how their experiences of marginalization affected them. MSM has been widely used to explain how prejudice and

discrimination impact individuals in the LGBTQ community (Benjamin, 2015; Canan et al., 2019; Cramer et al., 2017). Elder et al. (2017) found that 80% of active-duty service members confirmed hearing jokes, derogatory statements, and offensive speech about gay male service members. The LGBTQ community faced stress at a higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2017; Gonzales & Henning-Smith, 2017).

Moreover, members of the LGBTQ community were twice as likely to experience mental health conditions as heterosexual adults (Sattler et al., 2017). In the United States, roughly 47 million people meet the threshold to be diagnosed with mental illness (Williams & Fish, 2020). Of the roughly 47 million people who meet the threshold to be diagnosed with mental illness, 65% are members of the LGBTQ community. Researchers have attributed mental disorders in the LGBTQ community to the stigma and the negative experiences they encounter in society (Caitlin et al., 2020; Jablonski, 2020; Sattler & Lemke, 2019).

MSM was used to explain how the stress gay male service members experience due to their sexual orientation caused strain on their coping mechanisms (Baqtayan, 2015). Johnson et al. (2015) highlighted that MSM enables researchers to understand how gay male service members function in a fragile state while serving. Overall, the MSM gave way to the theoretical framework on the lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination against male service members in the armed forces who self-identified as gay.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

In this literature review, I sought to understand how discrimination based on sexual orientation was an aggressive form of harassment experienced by active-duty service members who self-identified as gay (see Wilson, 2016). Mantas (2017) and Javaid (2016) dispelled the myth that gender discrimination only occurs between men and women; gender discrimination also occurs with heterosexual service members harassing same-sex service members. The armed forces have zero tolerance for sexual misconduct toward fellow service members (Stander & Thomsen, 2016). However, gay male service members still report experiencing discrimination and harassment because of their sexual orientation (Alford & Lee, 2016; Goldbach & Castro, 2016; Rapoliene, 2015).

Bry et al. (2017) found that LGBTQ members were confused about disclosing their sexual orientation to trusted individuals. In addition, participants expressed feeling puzzled about whether they would be judged, discriminated against or talked about negatively by others (Bry et al., 2017). Even after disclosing their sexual orientation, some participants still experienced mixed emotions about their well-being (Bry et al., 2017). In Bry et al. (2017), five of the 10 participants interviewed described decreased stress, and two experienced a higher stress level due to other people's reactions. Another participant shared increased stress due to personal safety issues; ultimately, the researchers concluded that persons who identified as gay experienced consequences (Bry et al., 2017).

Discrimination Against Gay Men in the Armed Forces

Discrimination is the unfair treatment of a group or an individual in a public or private setting due to disdain for a class or category of people (Mantas, 2017). Armed forces leadership lacked insight into addressing discrimination based on sexual orientation due to minimal policies in place to cover discrimination based on sexual orientation for male service members who self-identified as gay (McNamara et al., 2021). Armed forces leadership has implemented policies affecting gay male service members since the Revolutionary War (Burk & Moskos, 2017). Sodomy was illegal, and male service members were discharged because of their sexual orientation (Delgado et al., 2016). In 1950, President Truman instituted the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ; Rustico, 2016), which was put in place to discipline service members under the authority of the armed forces (Weber, 2017). The institution of the UCMJ led to the prevention of gay service members from serving in rank-and-file positions (Schlueter, 2017). President Regan echoed the same sentiments that the rank and file did not welcome gay service members (Nardi, 2015). The logic guiding these positions was that gay service members' presence would lower unit cohesion and morale (Weber, 2017).

Male service members who self-identified as gay have long been hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation because of the restrictions implemented by the UCMJ (Hahn et al., 2015). Morral et al. (2015) stated that 26,000 male service members have endured harassment based on their sexual identity. According to Javaid (2015), service members who self-identified as gay have been harassed predominantly by their coworkers, who are presumed to be heterosexual. Vanlandingham (2015) indicated that if

the armed forces leadership identified how to resurface their rank and file on sexual orientation discrimination, it would boost morale and lead to greater productivity in service members' understanding of the execution of their MOS. Such shifts in armed forces leadership would significantly increase military readiness, including weapon qualifications, physical training, and unit-level training (Orr, 2015). These policy changes would help alleviate the stressors of discrimination based on sexual orientation among soldiers and would alleviate costs associated with diversity training.

From the Revolutionary War until now, discrimination based on sexual orientation remains relevant in many facets (Neil et al., 2017). While it is not a new phenomenon in the social science community, federal laws limit the protection of people who have been discriminated against based on sexual orientation (Boso, 2017). Gay men have freely given themselves to serve amid the ranks to discover they are fighting an enemy amid their rank and file (Wilson, 2017). Johnson et al. (2015) stated that the direction of future research on gay male service members is topsy-turvy, as researchers are trying to understand how sexual orientation impedes the rank and file of service members without all the red tape (Hom et al., 2017).

According to Swartz (2015), same-sex individuals have been assertive in securing equality among their community members. For example, some same-sex individuals live their lives as bisexual men who pretend to have a greater desire for heterosexual women to avoid conflict with community members (Roberts et al., 2015). Male service members who self-identify as gay fall into this definition because homosexuality in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 offered limited protection (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). The

limited protection caused gay male service members to feel restricted in having their voices heard on how they encountered undue hardship because of their sexual orientation (Wong, 2015). Frequently, male service members who self-identified as gay and have experienced some forms of discrimination have reported their accounts to their superiors as restricted. A restricted report under the UCMJ allows individuals to report their experiences without a formal investigation (Testa, 2021). Gay male service members are reluctant to share experiences publicly, and they debate if they should wait until their contractual obligation is fulfilled before disclosing their experiences publicly (McNamara et al., 2021). Male service members who self-identified as gay want the same rights to be treated equally, just like other citizens of the United States, including their fellow heterosexual comrades they serve alongside in the armed forces (Alessi, 2014). However, if there is no formal investigation and no one to bring charges against, it permitted the armed forces' leadership to question how many of the reported incidents were valid, as opposed to being fictitious (O'Mochain, 2018).

Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation Against Gay Men in the Armed Forces

Sadler et al. (2018) indicated that gay male service members were discriminated against because they seemed weak. Sadler et al. conducted their qualitative study to describe male service members' awareness of those service members who had experienced sexual assault in the military. They focused on gleaning the phenomenological experience of male service members. The purpose of my study versus Sadler et al. was to understand the phenomenological experience of male service member's lived experiences while on active duty only in the army. In addition, Sadler et

al. collected data from the participants of these service members who were derived from active duty, reserve, and the National Guard.

Sadler et al. (2018) highlighted the service member's experiences related to awareness, knowledge, and attitudes, included thoughts about sexual assault and their reaction to male service members who were sexually assaulted in the military. Where Sadler et al. and I differ in our studies, mine was to understand how discrimination based on sexual orientation impacted the lives of male service members who self-identified as gay. Sadler et al. laid out the guidelines for their study participants as having to be at least 18 years old, participated in military service during Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF), and resided in the Midwest states, including Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri. Eleven male service members were chosen for the focus groups. They were divided by rank, enlisted, and officers. Researchers found that male service members faced obstacles in reporting their sexual assault experiences because it hindered career advancement and destabilized unit cohesion and unit safety during deployments (McGabe, 2016; Ramirez & Bloeser, 2018). Male service members did not want to draw attention to reporting their experiences because they feared the retribution of being labeled as gay. In their study, Sadler et al. discovered that discrimination was based on the perception of weakness.

The armed forces have an unwritten rule of hypermasculinity, and if a male service member seems not to meet the norm of heteronormativity, he is viewed by his peers as feeble (Alford & Lee, 2016). For example, Van Gilder (2019) explained in his study how femininity was viewed as a threat because of the hegemonic nature of the

armed forces. He elaborated that male service members with feminine mannerisms did not warrant discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Also, they did not impede unit cohesion, unit safety, or career advancement. VanGilder continued to learn in his study that being healthy and robust was the standard in the military. However, it caused male service members who self-identified as gay to isolate themselves in machismo because of the armed forces culture (Scheer et al., 2021).

Discrimination based on sexual orientation among men in the workplace remained a vital concern primarily due to the barriers and myths that men are not sexually assaulted or harassed (Lloren & Parini, 2017; Webster et al., 2018). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) was organized to address gays and lesbians' concerns due to the overwhelming violence and hatred they experienced worldwide (Darling, 2020; Siegfried, 2019). According to Miller et al. (2018), the Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military highlighted the statistics for the fiscal year 2016 of male service members who had experienced gender discrimination at 5.7 percent, and it increased in the fiscal year 2018 to 6.3 percent. Researchers have shown that sexual assault is perpetually rising in the Armed Forces, but the scholarly literature on males is sparse (Javaid, 2016; Sigurvinsdottir & Ullman, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2015).

Before the DADT policy's repeal, over 13,000 gay male service members had been discharged due to their sexual orientation (Alford & Lee, 2016). Many gay male service members discharged under the old DADT policy believed that their discharge was based solely on discrimination due to their sexual orientation (Moran & Lynch, 2017). LGBTQ service members felt blindsided once their sexual orientation was revealed

inadvertently to their commands, mainly since they were good at their jobs (Ormeno, 2018). Arabic linguists were another example of service members discharged from the armed forces under the DADT policy (Eleveld, 2007). At the beginning of the War on Terrorism in 2001, Arabic was the primary language of those captured as terrorists. However, the discharge of service members who were gay and fluent in Arabic left a strain on the limited number of service members who remained and were fluent in Arabic (Cainkar & Selod, 2018; Ceron et al., 2019). Members of the DOD believed the DADT repeal should have resolved any issues surrounding LGBTQ members' service because they were permitted to serve openly in the armed forces without being penalized under UCMJ (Evans et al., 2018). Tackas and Froula (2016) believed that gay male service members became prey to heterosexual service members who disdained male service members who identified as gay, ultimately leading to the loss of competent and skilled personnel.

Discrimination Against Gay Men Since the Repeal of DADT

Members of the DOD believed the DADT repeal should have resolved any issues surrounding LGBTQ members' service because they were permitted to serve openly in the armed forces without being penalized under UCMJ (Evans et al., 2018). When President Clinton was running for office, he promised the American people that he would allow LGBTQ service members to serve openly in the armed forces (Werner, 2014). Upon being elected President of the United States, this promise did not pan out as he intended (Mowlabocus, 2017). Instead, the DADT policy was instituted (Connell, 2017). The policy permitted service members who were LGBTQ to serve in their respective

branches without publicly disclosing their sexual orientation (Alford & Lee, 2016). If a service member disclosed their sexual orientation publicly, they were dishonorably discharged (Chin, 2018).

The posture of the DADT policy shifted during President Obama's tenure as President of the United States (Gates & Saunders, 2016). President Obama disagreed with LGBTQ service members serving in their respective branches having to conceal their sexual orientation due to the fear of facing discharge (Connell, 2015). As a result, President Obama initiated repealing the DADT policy that his predecessor had implemented. The repeal of the DADT policy received mixed reviews from all service members, including LGBTQ service members (Moran & Lynch, 2017). Simply because LGBTQ service members did not have a clear indication of how they would be able to serve freely without retribution (Federman & Rishel-Elias, 2017).

On the other hand, the Department of Defense (DOD) believed the repeal of the DADT policy would resolve issues since LGBTQ service members were being permitted to serve openly without receiving any UCMJ action being imposed on them (Evans et al., 2018). Unfortunately, male service members who identified as gay became prey to those who disagreed with their lifestyle (Tackas & Froula, 2016). Male service members who self-identified as gay just wanted an equal opportunity to serve their branch of service and their country without any retribution due to their sexual orientation (Burk & Moskos, 2017).

The seminal work of Burrelli (2011) gave way to how members of the 111th Congress wanted to overhaul the DADT policy with a policy of nondiscrimination based

on sexual orientation. A policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation would have covered a more comprehensive range of complications a male service member who self-identify as gay would encounter. Covering a more comprehensive range of spectrums on how heterosexual service members engage those who identified as gay could have dismantled the grievances between the two (McGabe, 2016). As a result of the legislation not fully covering gay male service members, these same service members continue to encounter sexual orientation discrimination, mental health concerns, and inequality in the ranks (Basham, 2016). These behaviors are systemic due to the repeal of the DADT policy being implemented only to allow service members who identify as gay to serve (Fulton, 2013). In addition, the data shows that more persons who self-identified as gay during the implementation of the DADT policy were discharged at higher rates than before (Laski & Albright, 2016). The spikes in these discharges were attributed to those service members who self-identified as gay by advocating for themselves (Arkles & Ghei, 2016).

During the implementation of the DADT policy, the process of reporting problems of military sexual trauma (MST) of LGBTQ service members were not clearly defined (Barth et al., 2016). MST is an aggressive form of harassment experienced by active-duty service members whose assailants are driven by sexual innuendos (Wilson, 2016). The armed forces have zero tolerance for sexual improprieties (Stander & Thomsen, 2016). When it comes to male service members who self-identify as gay, the armed forces policies are obscure in their interpretation (Romaniuk & Loue, 2017). Eckerlin et al. (2016) believed these lackluster protocols were attributed to dated military

culture and its impact on the psyche and social outcomes of those male service members who self-identify as gay.

Adverse Impacts of Discrimination Against Gay Men in the Armed Forces

Adverse Impact of Mental Illness

Mental health can be vague (Steptoe et al., 2015); however, it encompasses more when further dissected (Weare, 2015). According to Bariola et al. (2016), male service members who self-identified as gay in the armed forces experienced mental illness faster than their heterosexual counterparts. Those mental health conditions included but are not limited to suicidal ideations, bipolar disorder, antisocial personality disorder, paranoid schizophrenia, and substance abuse (Delgado et al., 2016; Mutanski et al., 2016; Robles & Edmiston, 2017). The repeated bouts of discrimination based on sexual orientation led to poor job performance, chronic fatigue, compromised immune health, and even heart disease (DeSouza et al., 2017; Hirsch et al., 2017). Gay men believe that if their sexual orientation remains hidden, it helped protect them from being ridiculed by coworkers, friends, and family members (Feinstein et al., 2020; Vander Star et al., 2019). Furthermore, these mental health issues prevented gay male service members from enjoying the healthy lives they once had before experiencing discrimination based on sexual orientation due to their lack of the proper coping skills to deal with their mental illness (Barth et al., 2016; Gates, 2015).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a severe mental health crisis. PTSD is a mental health disorder caused by a petrifying event in a person's life (Grundy et al., 2016). PTSD is often attributed to the trauma service members experienced or witnessed

after the events due to war (Karstoft et al., 2015). According to Kuester et al. (2017), the American Psychiatric Association (APA) has redefined how PTSD is now understood to include events surrounding sexual violence. Nevertheless, when male service members who self-identify as gay are experiencing PTSD due to sexual trauma, the support system is limited because the DOD and the senior leadership of the Armed Forces perpetually failed to implement concise policies and procedures for male service members who self-identify as gay (Elder et al., 2017; Ginicola et al., 2017). At the same time, all other service members began to look at those helping them indifferently to figure out if they identified as being gay (O'Brien & Shoemaker, 2015).

Male service members who self-identified as gay struggled with the reality that they live in a heterosexist society where heterosexual men deem their morals and values objective (Bishin et al., 2016; Guess & Coppock, 2020). Heterosexual men deem their morals and values as objective, which caused stressors in the lives of gay men (Ranade & Chakravarty, 2016). When gay male service members internalize their sexual orientation, it leads to depression at abnormal levels, impacting their ability to focus on their duties and responsibilities (Brown et al., 2018). Depression is considered an inflammatory illness by the APA (Mustanski et al., 2016; Slavich & Auerbach, 2018). Lastly, Cloitre et al. (2016) stated that sexual minorities are targets for maltreatment. As a result of the maltreatment, researchers have attempted to understand how mental illness impacts sexual minorities regarding discrimination (Krueger & Upchurch, 2020; Powell & Cochran, 2020). Advocacy for mental health is crucial and needed for service members who self-identify as gay due to inequality in the rank-and-file, feeling like second-class

citizens because of their sexual orientation and mental health (Checchi et al., 2017; Meyer & Wynn, 2018; Pelts & Albright, 2015).

Adverse Impact of Substance Abuse

Although substance usage is not uncommon among service members who believe in recreational drinking, it becomes a grave concern when it interferes with their daily duties and responsibilities (Bartone et al., 2017; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2017).

Substance abuse limits functioning in coping, motor skills, and cognitive abilities while the individual is trying to achieve the effects of normalcy (Vandaele & Janak, 2018). In addition, service members who indulge in substance abuse are believed to have systemic concerns (Lan, 2016). These concerns range from sexual orientation, marital issues, job performance, or even family issues (Fuehrlein et al., 2016). The warning signs of substance abuse are often masked by the daily rigmarole of work (Chaudoir et al., 2017). Also, changes in a person's behavior and physical and social makeup are the three most recognizable signs of substance abuse (Jackson et al., 2017; McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2017).

Substance abuse is the dependency on illegal drugs, prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, or alcohol to function (Kelsall et al., 2015). Americans reported they tend to distance themselves in the workplace, relationships, and even social life from persons who have substance abuse problems. Segal et al. (2017) estimated that 17.6 million Americans had experienced substance abuse. Heinz et al. (2015) indicated that 1 in 4 Americans experienced a problem with substance abuse during their life span. Researchers have concluded that family acceptance or rejection can influence an

individual's reaction, leading them to substance abuse (Birtel et al., 2017; Rohner & Lansford, 2017).

According to Boyle et al. (2017) and Kerr and Oglesby (2017), LGB people are at greater risk for substance abuse than those people who are heterosexual simply because heterosexuals do not face the same types of discrimination LGB persons face. Substance abuse was believed to help alleviate the stressors of male service members who self-identify as gay (Brown & Knopp, 2016). Some male service members who have experienced PTSD have also experienced substance abuse (Heinz et al., 2015). One or two drinks do not seem to cause any harm to service members (Greitemeyer & Nierula, 2016). However, when one or two drinks turn into several over days and lead to mental health concerns, it can impact a service member's ability to be alert and focused.

Tobin et al. (2016) described that out of 359 gay males surveyed, 18 percent were classified as poly-users, and 33 percent preferred alcohol or marijuana as the drug of choice, while 50 percent of the men had no problem with substance abuse. In addition, Semlyen et al. (2016) stated that members of the LGBTQ community experienced higher rates of suicide, self-harm, and substance abuse, which ultimately impacted their sense of normalcy. Until 2020, LGBTQ persons were not a health priority for substance abuse usage (Swan et al., 2020; Wagner & Baldwin, 2020). Discrimination lead LGBTQ persons to create hostile environments to deflect their issues of substance abuse (Mefford & Chen, 2021). As a result, gay male service members must fend for themselves in hopes that their substance abuse disorder does not become overwhelming for them in their personal lives (Elder et al., 2017; O'Brien & Shoemaker, 2015). When male service

members who self-identify as gay do not seek treatment for their substance abuse, it causes their lives to unravel in a plethora of ways (Donne et al., 2018; Monteith et al., 2019).

Adverse Impact of Physical Illness

As stated throughout this literature review, male service members who self-identify as gay are no different from their heterosexual comrades; the only difference is that they are attracted to the same sex (Chin, 2018; Dispensza et al., 2016). One of the primary areas of physical illness that sexual minorities experience is chronic stress (Flenar et al., 2017; Mereish et al., 2019). Chronic stress is activated due to sexual orientation discrimination, isolation, and interpersonal rejection at a minimum (Cohen et al., 2020; Ro & Olson, 2020). As the MSM is part of the theoretical framework for this literature review, the MSM gave leeway to how sexual minorities experience physical elements in their bodies (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016). For instance, some of the physical elements a gay male experienced were arthritis, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, weight gain/loss, and even gastrointestinal problems (Baptiste-Roberts et al., 2017; Zeeman et al., 2019).

Michaels et al. (2015) also discussed how discrimination had been linked to physical illness. The authors conducted a study to understand better how physical illness impacts the lives of gay men. The researchers surveyed 87 participants aged 18 to 45 after receiving stress tests that simulated a five-minute job interview and math test. Out of the 87 participants interviewed, eight women and 20 men identified as lesbian or gay, 13 women and five men identified as bisexual, and 20 women and 21 men identified as

heterosexual. The study results concluded that cardiovascular stress is not the same for all people but differs depending on one's sexual orientation. Male service members who self-identify as gay endure more physical stress than their heterosexual comrades. Male service members who identify as gay are skeptical about seeking medical attention from military healthcare providers.

Aside from stress, another area of physical illness in which discrimination played a significant role in gay male service members' lives is sleeping (Patterson & Potter, 2019). Sleep is vital to any service member's daily physical health regimen. However, when a gay male service member is concerned about their sexual orientation being front and center in their workplace, it causes them not to get the proper amount of sleep (Galinsky, 2018). When a service member does not get the proper amount of sleep, it leads to other physical sleep problems (Dai & Hao, 2019). The amount of sleep an individual should receive is at least seven to nine hours; anything less than that is considered short-term sleep (Caceres et al., 2019).

Finally, Dyar et al. (2019) denoted that the amount of stress a male service member goes through to conceal their sexual orientation is disheartening. Currently, researchers are conducting studies on how and if PTSD is one of the primary outcomes of MST (Steenkamp et al., 2015). Sexual orientation discrimination has caused grave concerns among male service members who identify as gay because they cannot articulate their physical illnesses (Meyer & Wynn, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

After searching through numerous journal articles, I focused on discrimination and the adverse impacts of how discrimination based on sexual orientation impacts service members who self-identified as gay in compiling this literature review. Therefore, the journal articles I located helped me identify findings related to my topic on the lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination against gay male service members. Through this research study, I illuminated the lived experiences of gay males who experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation. In Chapter 3, a more detailed description of the methodology used in this study was unfolded. Besides, the research question of this study was analyzed through the data collection of active-duty gay male service members. Lastly, interviews were conducted to collect and analyze the data needed to present the findings of this qualitative study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this phenomenological qualitative study, I examined the lived experiences of gay male service members who have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. According to Mondragon et al. (2015), the self-reported rate of sexual harassment of male service members ranges from 27% to 38%, and another 1% reported a sexual assault. O'Brien and Shoemaker (2015) further indicated that the armed forces had not developed a proven way to understand how discrimination due to sexual orientation impact gay males. The articles that I located during the literature review helped me understand the need for this research due to the lack of understanding of how the armed forces understood the lived experiences of gay male service members who have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. My research varied from the other existing phenomenological qualitative studies on lived experiences of discrimination among males who self-identify as gay. My research was specifically on the experiences of male active-duty members serving in the army. Therefore, this study was warranted because it could help the armed forces leadership to understand how discrimination due to sexual orientation impacts male service members who self-identify as gay.

In this chapter, I explain the research design and rationale of the study. Also, this chapter includes the research question that guided this study and my role as the researcher. The methodology, target population, sampling procedures, and data collection stabilized the research question's foundation. Lastly, the chapter includes the analysis

procedures, internal and external validity threats, and ethical concerns related to the participants recruited and chosen for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was as follows:

What are the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy?

I chose to use a phenomenological qualitative approach for this study. The phenomenological qualitative study approach helped me to understand the individual experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation discrimination of gay male service members. Also, the phenomenological qualitative study approach allowed the participants to share their own experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. In addition, using a phenomenological qualitative approach, I gained knowledge of the phenomena of each service member's individual experiences (see Moustakas, 1994).

To garner an understanding of individual experiences, some approaches needed to be more relevant to this study. The first approach that was irrelevant to this study was the narrative approach, which allows participants to tell the story of a given experience (see Pisarik et al., 2017). The second approach was the narrative inquiry, allowing participants to determine the narratives they wish to provide. However, the narrative approach could have sufficed for this study because it would have allowed me to analyze the narrated stories of discrimination based on sexual orientation from active-duty male service members who self-identified as gay (see Alase, 2017). The third approach was irrelevant

to this study because the grounded theory approach developed a theory from the data collected in a qualitative study (see Nelson, 2020). I was not trying to generate a theory from this research. The fourth approach that was irrelevant to this study was ethnography since it would have required me to study their social interactions and cultural norms, which was not feasible (see Simmons & Smith, 2019). Lastly, the case study approach was unsuited for this study because it would not allow me to delve deeper into the participants' lived experiences (see Basias & Pollalis, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

Compiling how a qualitative study is conducted as a scholarly researcher is vital to one's research. As a researcher for this study, I was an observer participant. An observer-participant role is to ensure that all aspects of the research remain aligned with the study's purpose and that everything being done in the study is integral and nonbiased (Hammersley, 2017; LaRossa & Bennett, 2018). To remove a researcher's biases, Johnson et al. (2017) stated that a researcher must bracket their preconceived thoughts about the phenomenon being researched. Bracketing allows the researcher to differentiate between what is known about the phenomenon and what is not (Høffding & Martiny, 2016). I bracketed myself to understand the views of the gay male service members interviewed and their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Personal and Professional Relationships of Researcher and Participants

In March 1996, I went to the military entrance processing station (MEPS) to sign up to become a soldier in the army. When I went to the MEPS, the DADT policy was not in place. As a result of it not being in place, the MEPS worker asked me if I was gay.

While serving in the army, the DADT policy was later implemented. I could recall serving alongside same-sex service members who did not divulge their sexual orientation and others who did divulge their sexual orientation to void their contractual obligation with the army. As a veteran of the army, I have no personal or professional relationships with the participants selected for this study.

Researcher Bias

According to Galadas (2017), bias is often overlooked because researchers think our concerns are under control. To assist in controlling my own biases, I journaled them. Journaling my biases allowed me to capture my thoughts and concerns on discrimination based on sexual orientation that differs from the interviewed participants (see Clark & Vealé, 2018). I primarily served in the armed forces during the DADT policy era. Another means of preventing research biases is using reflexivity. Dodgson (2019) suggested that researchers use reflexivity to identify their biases. To help control my biases aside from my journaling, I debriefed with my dissertation committee to ensure I captured the interviews of the participants accurately, including transcribing the interviews correctly.

Another means of preventing researcher bias is to avoid leading the participants in answering questions (Butler, 2016; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). To prevent leading participants, I asked the participants a question and let them respond with what they thought was the correct answer without me responding verbally or nonverbally (see Jorgensen, 2015). Again, therefore, journaling was imperative to express my concerns and to be able to decompress after interviews have been conducted. Another role as a

researcher was to understand that I have personal experiences and cannot allow them to blur the lines of the research I conducted (see Nilson, 2017). Lastly, Kornbluh (2015) stated that if researcher biases are minimal, the study will reflect a more accurate finding.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The purposeful sampling strategy for this study consisted of sending a direct message to various open and private Facebook communities on social media for permission to post my recruitment flyer (see Appendix A). The targeted participants for this study consisted of male service members who were at least 18 years old and self-identified as gay on active duty in the army. Once the participants reached out to me via email or telephone, they were screened to see if they met the criteria for the study. The participants were in the enlisted pay grades of E3 through E6. Officer pay grades of O1 through O3, and service members in the army who have been on active duty for at least 1 year and self-identified as gay. To understand the difference between enlisted service members' pay grades and officers' pay grades, enlisted service members are responsible for fulfilling military missions and carrying out orders from officers and other supervisors. Officers do not directly fulfill military missions, they act as upper-level managers because of their collegiate experience in an accredited college/university and direct onboarding by the army.

Researchers in qualitative research have debated an adequate sample size for a qualitative research study (Verman & Verman, 2020; Tran et al., 2016). Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that phenomenological studies average ten interviews before the

researcher reaches data saturation. Boddy (2016) suggested that 12 participants are enough participants in a study before saturation is reached. Out of the participants chosen for this study, I selected four participants who had experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation. Also, selecting four participants allowed me to manage the number of interviews and reach saturation (see Lin et al., 2017; Salzberger, 2017). By selecting this number of participants, the information became redundant in learning new information because I asked the right questions. Extra alternates were not needed because all the chosen participants showed up for their scheduled interviews.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation I used to collect data for this study was a researcher-developed interview protocol (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Collecting the data in semi structured interviews allowed me as a researcher to guide the interviews instead of the participant guiding the interview (see Goldberg & Allen, 2015). The interviews for this study were semi structured to understand the participants lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. According to Husband (2020), semi structured interviews allow participants to express themselves regarding their experiences. I had a list of interview questions (see Appendix C) that guided the interviews. The interview questions were open-ended on the participant's experiences of being a gay male in the armed forces who has experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Also, I asked follow-up questions, I asked the participants to elaborate and clarify the questions being asked.

To ensure content validity, I submitted my interview questions to two former army non-commissioned officers who were in the army before the DADT policy and exited the army after the repeal. Besides, noncommissioned officers are known as the army's backbone; therefore, they know the various issues impacting service members. Aside from the non-commissioned officers, I submitted my interview questions to a faculty member with Walden University who is knowledgeable in qualitative research. One of the noncommissioned officers who self-identified as gay stated that my interview questions were highly detailed and forced the interviewee to think before responding. The other noncommissioned officer believed the questions were direct. For them, it brought back memories of being in the army under the DADT policy, including the many challenges gay service members experienced. Aside from the two noncommissioned officers, I received feedback from a human service professional with extensive experience working with army service members. The human services professional highlighted how the questions were valid but not intrusive, allowing the participants to share their experiences without hesitation. The feedback from the faculty member of Walden University I received was that Questions 1-5 could have been reworded and more direct while focusing on the interviewees' experiences. Because the questions did not align with the research question, it would have taken most of the time to interview the participants without learning about their lived experiences. Therefore, I reworded the questions that focused more directly on the research question.

To capture the semi structured interviews with the participants, I used Zoom Video Communications to record only the participants' audio and transcribed them after

the interviews. Ultimately, to ensure the content validity of the instrumentation used in this study, the dissertation committee vetted it to ensure the research questions being asked were appropriately aligned with this study by receiving Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, no. 06-12-23-0439130, with an expiration date of June 11, 2024.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To recruit the participants for this study, I contacted three groups to assist in recruiting. The first group I reached out to was Group A, which hosts persons of the LGBT community. I sent a direct message (DM) to the Group A administrator explaining the purpose of my DM to request permission to recruit participants for my study once I received approval from both my dissertation committee and the IRB. Also, I sent the administrator a copy of my recruitment flyer for review to ensure it met the group's rules. Upon Walden's IRB approval of my research, I posted the flyer in group A for two weeks to attract enough participants to conduct this research study.

The second group I contacted was Group B, as a source for recruiting participants. I sent a DM to the group administrator to gain permission to recruit participants within the group based on the approval from both my dissertation committee and the IRB. When I directly messaged the appropriate representative, I introduced myself and included a statement of the purpose of the study in the DM. Also, I attached a copy of the flyer for participant recruitment for the group administrator to review to ensure it meets the criteria of being a group member. Group C was the third group I reached out to gain permission to recruit participants. I directly messaged the administrator. I followed the

same steps for Groups A and B. Ultimately, if my recruitment within these various organizations had yielded fewer participants for this study, I planned reach out to the Walden University student participant pool.

Participation

Upon the recruitment flyer being disseminated and participants contacting me to participate in the study, I prescreened to see if they met the research criteria. If the participants met the research criteria, they replied via email with the words “I consent.” Also, the participants gave me a primary email address to send the Zoom Video Communications (audio only) link and a date and time on which they would be available for the semi structured interview. If the participants could not be contacted after the two attempts, then I would email the other eligible participants to see if they were still interested in participating. If the new participants agreed to participate in the study, they would undergo the same process as the chosen participants. As a result of the initial participants being contacted and communicated accordingly, I did not have to contact other participants.

The data for this study was collected using semi structured interviews that lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. I asked the participants to find a place in their homes or cars to be free of distractions and communicate freely via Zoom Video Communications (audio only). I informed the participants that the interview was voluntary and that they could take a break or end it anytime. As part of the exiting process, I asked if they had any follow-up questions and thanked them for participating in the interview. I recapped what happened and informed them I may contact them again for a second interview. The

second interview would last 15 to 20 minutes, permitting follow-up questions from the original interview. Also, I used member checking. I emailed them a copy of the transcribed interview transcripts to double-check for the accuracy of what was discussed, known as member checking. If something was transcribed incorrectly, I had the participant highlight it in yellow on the Word document and then write in red underneath the corrections. Doing so permitted the identification of the areas of the transcript that needed to be corrected; however, the participants did not need to make any corrections

Also, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants selected for this study, I gave each of them a pseudonym when they were chosen as participants for the study, and then I created an electronic file for each of them. The electronic file included (a) the participant consent form and (b) any correspondence received from each participant. The files are stored in Google Cloud and can only be retrieved with a password. Upon conclusion of the study, all electronic files will be deleted from Google Cloud after maintaining them for 5 years, as required by the IRB. Lastly, any handwritten notes on my laptop are stored in my home file cabinet with a lock on it when not in use, and all handwritten notes and files on my laptop would be destroyed 5 years after the completion of this study.

Data Analysis Plan

Phenomenological qualitative research intends to understand the phenomenon of the participant. In which the participant's phenomenon was understood through a process known as data analysis. Data analysis allowed the researcher to gather the necessary evidence to describe the data, understand the data, and interpret the data. The data for this

research came from semi-structured interviews of the participants selected for this research study. After the interviews had been analyzed, it gave me a clear picture of the experiences of male service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy (Long, 2021). To do so, I utilized Excel Workbook.

Vaughn and Turner (2016) stated that the data could be broken down into categories: (a) narrative analysis, (b) discourse analysis, (c) framework analysis, and (d) grounded theory. The narrative analysis was not best suited for this study because a participant could get stuck telling their story, and I would need help to collect the needed data (Alase, 2017). Discourse analysis was not best suited for this study because it would allow a researcher to understand a participant's social life rather than their lived experiences (Reisigl, 2017; Silverman, 2016). The framework analysis was not suited for this study because the participants may have different experiences, and it would only permit me to summarize their transcripts (Kallio et al., 2016). Furthermore, the grounded theory was not best suited for this study because the theories had already been chosen to help answer the research question.

Moustakas (1994) phenomenological qualitative approach was used for this study. The first step of data analysis is horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization requires the researcher to look at all the data collected equally regardless of the person. As the researcher goes through the data, if some statements made by the participant are irrelevant or repetitive, the statements should be discarded. After going through the data and discarding repetitive statements, what remains known as horizons. Horizons are the textural meanings or essential parts of a participant's experience. The second step of data

analysis is the reduction of experiences to the invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994). This step allows the researcher to group the horizons into themes. Analyzing the participants' transcripts, I noted each horizon and placed the respective horizons under the heading given to each group; only having one meaning permits reduction.

The third step of data analysis is thematic clustering to create core themes (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to put the invariant constituents into clusters by themes that emerged after the reduction and elimination process. The fourth step of data analysis is a comparison of multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to examine the invariant constituents and their accompanying themes against the transcripts of each participant to see if they are a.) expressed clearly, b.) compatible even if the invariant constituents may not be apparent, c.) if the invariant constituents are not precise or compatible, they are irrelevant to the study and need to be deleted. The fifth step of data analysis is crafting individual textural descriptions of participants (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to use verbatim quotes from the participant's interview to help explain each theme in the data analysis.

The sixth step of data analysis is the construction of individual structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to view the data collected from the participant's interview by looking at the structural themes from different perspectives. I got a much clearer understanding of the participant's phenomenon. The seventh step of data analysis is the construction of composite structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). With this step, I explained how the participant's experiences occurred, which helped

structure each paragraph's end. The stronger the structural description, the better I understood the phenomena investigated.

The eighth and final step synthesizes the texture and structure into an expression (Moustakas, 1994). The synthesis of the data allows for the ordinary meaning and the participant's experiences to merge. Amid the merger, only some of the ordinary meanings and participants' experiences will be harmonious. Any discrepancies arising from the data were acknowledged and analyzed to understand how they impacted the participant's experiences. Once all the data was analyzed, I concluded and articulated the findings in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is the internal validity of a qualitative study (Eldh & Berterö, 2020). It allows a researcher to describe the appropriate strategies to ensure the study findings are correct based on the integrity of their data (Shufutinsky, 2020). A researcher could use the strategies of member checking, prolonged contact, triangulation, saturation, peer review, transcript review, and reflexivity (Nowell et al., 2017). I used a transcript review before I analyzed and summarized the data I collected. A transcript review is a method that allows the participants in a study to verify that the information that is transcribed in the interview is correct (Birt et al., 2016). After transcribing the interviews, I emailed participants a copy of the transcripts to ensure that what was discussed during the interview was captured. Upon reviewing the transcripts, I asked them to save and email the changes to me within seven days of receiving the emailed transcripts. If the

participant did not see any changes that needed to be made, I asked them to respond in the dialogue box of the email with no needed changes. I printed a copy of the email and put it into their folder with other notes.

Another method that I used to enhance the credibility of this research was peer review (Natow, 2020). Peer reviewing permits an individual not associated with the research study to review transcripts to identify any information the researcher may have overlooked. In this instance, it was my dissertation committee. Also, the peer reviewer may look at documents or any other notes that could be beneficial in helping the researcher identify any biases they may have and did not previously see (Johnson et al., 2020).

Triangulation was also used to solidify the credibility of the findings from the study. According to Renz et al. (2018), triangulation allows a researcher to use multiple methods and data sources better to understand the participant's phenomena in a qualitative study. I collected data from the participants in this study through triangulation. In simple fact, each participant shared their experiences based on what they had experienced related to the research question of this study.

Transferability

Transferability is when a qualitative study's results can be transferred into other contexts (Mohajan, 2018). Transferability is essential in qualitative research because it provides readers with evidence that the research study findings could be helpful to other studies (Levitt, 2021). To supplement transferability from the results of this study, I used thick descriptions and a reflexive journal. Transferability in this research study was

enhanced by using thick descriptions. Thick descriptions allowed the researcher to describe and observe the interactions of the participants being interviewed (Hadi & Closs, 2016). The characteristics are interpreted in context, capturing thoughts and emotions, assigning motivations and intentions, creating rich accounts of details, and describing the meaningfulness of the situation. For example, a thick description in this research study was using direct quotes from the participant's experiences.

To prevent my own biases in this study, I used reflexivity. Reflexivity allowed me to identify my own biases in the research study. I wrote down my biases daily about discrimination based on sexual orientation and other reactions I experienced with the participants interviewed for this study. Also, I disclosed any relationships I may have had with any of the participants recruited for this study to ensure I did not influence the study.

Dependability

Dependability is another element of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Dependability is the constancy of data over time, or the processes used to collect the data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I enhanced the dependability of findings from this study using an audit trail. An audit trail clearly describes the researcher's steps from the research study's beginning to the findings' end (Sahlin & Levenby, 2018; Scharp & Sanders, 2019). As the researcher of this study, I maintained a detailed log of the step-by-step elements of the research process. The log consisted of the procedures to collect and transcribe the data. For example, Moustakas's steps for transcendental phenomenology include the analysis process, audio recordings, participant recruitment information, and participant screening and interview questions. An audit trail is vital in

qualitative research because it helps establish the study's dependability and trustworthiness (Haven & VanGrootel, 2019).

Another means of ensuring dependability and trustworthiness in a qualitative study is by using discrepant cases (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). A discrepant case occurs in a study when the participant's experiences differ immensely (Fitzpatrick, 2019). Including discrepant cases is essential to qualitative study because all the data collected from the cases can help to establish themes from the data collected. According to Rose and Johnson (2020), a discrepant case in qualitative study helps present a more analytical study for the reader. Since there were no discrepancy cases, I used reflexive journaling to enhance the dependability of the findings from my research. Reflexive journaling allows researchers to document their journey in the research process (McNarry et al., 2019).

Confirmability

According to Hays et al. (2016), confirmability is the last step in the trustworthiness a researcher must establish. Confirmability helps to ensure that the study's findings genuinely reflect the participants' experiences being interviewed and not the researcher's biases (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). To enhance the credibility of this research, I used member checking. Member checking allows participants to review the transcribed transcripts of their interviews from the audio recordings recorded during the interview process (Nguyen et al., 2021). After transcribing all audio recordings, I emailed each participant their transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Ethical Procedures

Before recruiting participants or starting the data collection process, I gained Walden's University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of the approval was to ensure that the interviews I conducted would not bring reproach to the participants, the University, or myself. The IRB application described the researcher's research and how participants were made aware of the research, how they were selected, and how they were compensated for their time. Before the interview with the selected participants, I reviewed the interview protocol. For example, I reviewed the informed consent with the participants to ensure they were still willing to participate. Also, I reminded the participants that they could stop the interview at any time, which was entirely voluntary.

Moreover, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, the signed paper consent forms, demographic forms, interview transcripts, audiotapes, and any other notes from each interview were stored in my locked fireproof file cabinet. The file cabinet is tamper-free and can only be accessible by myself at my residence. In addition to collecting the data from each interview, it was transcribed and stored on a Google server called the cloud. As the researcher, I am the only one with access to the password for the Google server, and the data collected from this study will be maintained for five years. All electronic files will be erased, and all paper documentation will be shredded as outlined in Walden University research protocol.

The last area of the ethical issue I addressed was giving each participant a \$10 Wal-Mart gift card for participating in this study. The purpose of the gift card was not to persuade any participants to give an impartial interview that would lead to the data being

analyzed being skewed. In addition, the gift card was given by me and not Walden University as a token of my appreciation for taking the time to be interviewed for this study. The participants recruited for this study had no working or familial relationship with me. However, if they need assistance, they could contact Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by telephone 24/7 at 9-8-8.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a complete description of the research design and rationale. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of gay male service members who experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation while serving in the United States Armed Forces. This chapter included a description of the researcher's role, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. I discussed methodology and the participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, data collection, and data analysis plan. Additionally, this chapter included information on sample size and saturation. The study results, including demographics, data results, and data analysis of the lived experiences of gay males who have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, will be included in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of active-duty male service members in the United States Army who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. The research question aligned with the emphasis of the study and provides direction for data collection and analysis. The research question was “What are the experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy?”

Chapter 4 is organized into six sections to provide an organized presentation of the study results. The first section is an overview of the research setting. The second section includes the demographics of the participants surveyed for this study. The third section indicates the data collection methods, procedures, research instruments, recruitment process, and ethical considerations. The fourth section explains the data analysis process and includes the coding process and any thematic patterns that arose during the analysis process. The fifth section explains the evidence of trustworthiness by defining strategies and procedures to ensure the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The sixth and final sections are the results, and they are presented and supported by themes, subthemes, and direct quotations from the participants.

Setting

The research setting for this study involved a specific population of active-duty male service members who self-identified as gay and have experienced discrimination

based on their sexual orientation. These individuals have faced unique challenges that may have impacted their experiences during this study. The participants consisted of four male service members who were at least 18 years old and self-identified as gay on active duty in the army. The participants were in the enlisted pay grades of E3 through E6. Officers with grades O1 through O3 have been on active duty in the army for at least one year.

The participants were recruited through Facebook. To recruit the participants for this study, I contacted three groups to assist in recruiting. Within each group, I sent a DM to the administrator explaining that my DM was to request permission to recruit participants for my study once I received approval from both my dissertation committee and the IRB. In addition to the DM, I sent the administrator a copy of my recruitment flyer for review to ensure it met the group's rules. Upon receiving Walden's IRB approval of my research and the Facebook group administrator's permission, I posted the flyer in each group for 2 weeks to attract enough participants to conduct this research study.

After the flyer was posted in the respective Facebook groups, four participants expressed their desire to participate in the study. Yet, I planned to recruit 12 to 15 participants as previously discussed in Chapter 3. Unfortunately, the number of participants desired for this study did not pan out beyond my control as researcher. Moreover, I informed the participants of the consent process to confirm their agreement to the interview conditions. Interviews were scheduled and conducted via Zoom, with audio recordings to capture participants' experiences. Once interviews were scheduled,

the participants were reminded to be in a location free of distractions to ensure they could focus on the interview.

Once the participants were settled in the space of their choice, they were reminded of the interview protocols and that they could take a break or end the interview at any time. Upon the interview's conclusion, the participants were informed that once the transcripts were transcribed, they would be sent a copy of the interview to review and make any necessary corrections. A list of different resources was also given to them electronically in case they needed an outlet to seek guidance from their experiences.

Demographics

I collected information using the questionnaire (Appendix C) and participant interviews. The information gathered from the questionnaire was from four participants instead of the initial 12 to 15 participants proposed for this study. After numerous attempts to secure a much higher participant pool through snowball sampling, only four participants qualified for this study. To ensure each participant qualified for this study, they disclosed the year they were born. The participants consisted of all male service members who self-identified as gay, with one in the pay grade of E5, two in the pay grade E6, and one officer in the pay grade of O3, with their ages ranging from 33 to 36 years old. Also, to maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Throughout the study, the participants were identified by pseudonyms, and the demographic information comprised their ages, pay grades, and duty stations, as shown in Table 1.

Participant (P1)

Bobby is a 36-year-old male service member with a pay grade of E6 stationed at Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia.

Participant (P2)

Ricky is a 35-year-old male service member with a pay grade of E6 stationed at Fort Gregg-Adams, Virginia.

Participant (P3)

Ronnie is a 33-year-old male service member with a pay grade of E5 stationed at Fort Liberty, North Carolina.

Participant (P4)

Mike is a 33-year-old male service member with a pay grade of O3 stationed at Fort Liberty, North Carolina.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Demographics

P1 – P4	Name	Age	Pay grade	Duty station
P1	Bobby	36	E-6	Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia
P2	Ricky	35	E-6	Fort Gregg-Adams, Virginia
P3	Ronnie	33	E-5	Fort Liberty, North Carolina
P4	Mike	33	O-3	Fort Liberty, North Carolina

Data Collection

The data collection phase of the study was organized to ensure that the participants selected for this study could share their experiences without any misfortunes. The participants chosen for this study were recruited from Facebook. I obtained permission from the administrators of the Facebook pages to place my flyer for recruitment. Once the permission was obtained from Walden's IRB (06-12-23-0439130),

I contacted the administrators on December 18, 2022, informing them that since I received my school's approval, I posted my flyer. I kept the recruitment flyer posted on Facebook for 2 weeks to recruit enough participants to be screened for this study. The flyer contained the purpose, criteria, and my direct contact information, including my student's email address for Walden University and my cellphone number, which is password protected.

Once participants who expressed an interest in the study were screened to ensure they met the study's criteria, the participants who qualified for the study were sent a consent form from my Walden University student email address and instructed to reply with the words "I consent" before an interview was scheduled. Upon receipt of the consent reply, participants were scheduled for 30-60-minute interviews via Zoom (audio). I advised participants to select a private location for the interview, and I ensured privacy as well. Before the interview, participants were reminded to review the questions in the consent form for preparation. I also informed participants about the audio and transcript recording of the interview and emphasized the voluntary nature of participation with the option to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded only after addressing any participant questions. All interviews were conducted in my private office via Zoom. Also, I was the sole data collection agent, conducting interviews and ensuring data integrity.

Once the interview were concluded, the participant was informed that they would receive the transcribed interview to ensure everything was transcribed correctly, as well as a second interview if needed to clarify what was transcribed. A follow-up interview was optional with any of the participants. Each interview concluded with a debriefing

session, which included a reminder of the resource information, gratitude for their participation, and a reminder of the \$10 Wal-Mart gift card for their participation in the study. Electronic gift cards were emailed to each participant within 24 hours following their interview. The data collected through interviews were collected using password-protected instruments and stored securely, thus limiting access. No significant variations from the outlined plan in Chapter 3 were encountered throughout the data collection process, and the procedures were implemented as initially designed.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings through Zoom. I listened to the audio recordings several times to become familiar with the data and ensure the transcription's accuracy. The transcribed data was hand-coded and produced with an Excel spreadsheet.

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological qualitative approach was used for this study. The first step of data analysis is horizontalization. Horizons are the textural meanings or essential parts of a participant's experience. Therefore, horizontalization required me to look at all the data collected equally regardless of the participant. The second step of data analysis is the reduction of experiences to the invariant constituents. This step allowed me to group the horizons into themes. I analyzed the participants' transcripts, noted each horizon, and placed the respective horizons under the heading given to each group.

The third step of data analysis is thematic clustering to create core themes (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to put the invariant constituents into clusters by

themes that emerged after the reduction and elimination process. The fourth step of data analysis is a comparison of multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituents. This step allowed me to examine the invariant constituents and their accompanying themes against the transcripts of each participant to see if they were (a) expressed clearly; (b) compatible even if the invariant constituents may not be apparent; and (c) if the invariant constituents are not precise or compatible, they are irrelevant to the study and need to be deleted. The fifth step of data analysis is crafting individual textural descriptions of participants. This step allowed me to use verbatim quotes from the participant's interview to help explain each theme in the data analysis.

The sixth step of data analysis is the construction of individual structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to view the data collected from the participant's interview by looking at the structural themes from different perspectives. I got a much clearer understanding of the participant's phenomenon. The seventh step of data analysis is the construction of composite structural descriptions. With this step, I explained how the participants' experiences occurred. The stronger the structural description, the better I understood the phenomena investigated. The eighth and final step synthesized the texture and structure into an expression, and the data synthesis allowed for the ordinary meaning and the participant's experiences to merge throughout the data collection.

This study's overall coding system was comprised of four themes, 34 categories, and 430 initial codes aligned with the interview questions. The system was organized and outlined in Table 2 below. The first column represents the four themes that emerged. The

four themes are as follows: The lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay, Discrimination based on sexual orientation, The mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced Discrimination based on sexual orientation, and Army-wide educational programs on sexual orientation.

Theme 1: The Lived Experiences of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Self-Identify as Gay

There are 13 categories within Theme 1, The lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay (see Table 2). The first subtheme, “Experiences,” captured information about the participant's experiences of sexual orientation discrimination. It included initial codes such as “Perception,” “Personal Opinion,” and “Unpleasant Experiences.” The second subtheme is “Personal Expressions.” The second subtheme accounted for the expressiveness of the participants. It included initial codes such as “Afraid,” “Carefree,” and “Emotionless.” The third subtheme is “Army.” This theme accounted for the branch of service the participants selected for this study are in. It included initial codes such as “Contractual Obligation,” “Advanced Individual Training (AIT),” and “Career.” The fourth subtheme is “Leadership.” Leadership highlighted the superiors of the participants selected for this study. It included initial codes such as “Chain of Command,” “Leadership,” and “Supervisor.”

The fifth subtheme, “Identification,” captures the gender identification of the participants. It included initial codes of “Image” and “Preference.” The sixth subtheme, “Retaliation,” captured the experiences of the participants as they relate to their sexual

orientation. The seventh subtheme is “Professionalism,” the eighth subtheme is “Location,” and the ninth subtheme is “Timing.” The common factor in the above three subthemes is the participants who experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation as service members. The 10th subtheme is “Culture.” The 11th subtheme is “Jurisdiction.” The 12th subtheme is “Army Personnel,” and these subthemes captured the heartbeat of the participant's lived experiences in the United States Army. The 13th and final subtheme is “People.” This subtheme included initial codes of “Busy body's,” “Civilians,” and “Adults.”

Table 2

Code System: Theme 1 – The Lived Experiences of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Self-Identify as Gay

Subtheme	Subtheme descriptions	No. of codes	(coded references)
Experiences	This subtheme captures information about the participants lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay.	13	Experiences (4) Perception (2) Personal opinion (2) Personal values (1) Perspective (1) Point-of-view (1) Unpleasant experiences (1)
Personal Expressions	This subtheme captures the personal expressions of the participants.	36	Afraid (1) Annoyed (1) Anticipation (1) Appreciation (1) Ashamed (1) Carefree (1) Comfortable (1) Compassion (1) Confusion (1) Cordial (1) Crazy (1) Emotionless (1) Emotions (1) Empathy (1) Enthusiasm (1) Eventful (1) Fear (3) Grateful (1) Guarded (1) Happy (1) Hesitation (1) Impulse (1) Melancholy (1) Mixed emotions (1)

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixture (1) Nonchalant (1) Pain (1) Panic (1) Relaxed (1) Scared (1) Self-worth (2) Shocked (1) Stress (1)
Army	This subtheme captures information about the Army at large.	34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Individual Training (AIT) (1) Air Defense (1) Army (4) Army Specialist (SPC) (1) Artillery (1) Benefits (1) Career (1) Contractual obligation (1) Cooks (1) Deployment (1) Duty station (1) Hard chargers (1) Infantry (1) Key resources (1) Militant (1) Military (7) Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) (1) Mission (1) Report (1) Supply (1) Target (1) Threat Assessment (1) Traditional (1) Unit (1) Units (1)
Leadership	This subtheme captures the various makeup and names of army leadership.	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chain of Command (4) Leaders (1) Leadership (3) Supervisor (3) Upper-level management (1)
Identification	This subtheme captures the the participants stated during their interviews.	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender identification gender identification (3) Identification (1) Image (1) LGB (2) LGBTQ (2)
Retaliation	This subtheme captures the concerns of the participants. chosen for this study.	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retaliation (4)
Professionalism	This subtheme captures the decorum of the participants expressing their experiences prior to their experiences of sexual orientation discrimination.	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalism (5)
Location	This subtheme captures the location of the participants experiences.	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location (3) Navigation (1)

Timing	This subtheme captures the timing of the various participants of this study.	10	Conclusion (3) Three Years (1) Time (4) Timing (2)
Culture	This subtheme captures the culture of the participants experiences in the army.	3	Culture (3)
Jurisdiction	This subtheme captures the various types of authorities places for the participants' in this study.	5	Country (2) Court (1) Dependency (1) Government (1)
Army Personnel	This subtheme captures the different types of personnel and personnel structure in the army.	17	Colleagues (2) Commissioned Officers (1) Enlisted (2) Military rank (1) Non-Commissioned Officers (3) Pay grade (2) Private First Class (1) Rank (2) Service members (3)
People	This subtheme captures the various types of people included in this study.	13	Adults (2) Busybody (1) Civilian (2) Everybody (2) People (6)

Theme 2: Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

There are nine categories within the Theme 2, discrimination based on sexual orientation. The first subtheme is “Stigma.” This subtheme included the initials of the code “Stigma.” The second subtheme, “Diversity and Equity,” included initial codes of “Diversity,” “Differentiation,” and “Equity.” These respective themes captured the diversity and equity of this study. The third subtheme is “Bullying.” Bullying included the initial codes of “Bullying” and “Harassment.” The fourth subtheme, “Sexual orientation,” included initial codes of “Gay” and “Sexual orientation.” This subtheme captured the sexual orientation of the participants chosen for this study. The fifth subtheme is “Discrimination.” Discrimination included the initial codes of “Disrespect” and “Unpleasant Experiences.” The sixth subtheme, “Inflammatory,” included the initial

codes of “Derogatory language” and “Homophobic.” The seventh subtheme “Isolation/Negative.” Isolation/Negative captured the initial codes of “Negative occurrences” and “Nothing.” The eighth subtheme is “Predilections.” Predilections included the initial codes of “Bias” and “Doubt.” The ninth subtheme in this category is “Acknowledgement.” Acknowledgment included the initial codes of “Acceptance,” “Assumption,” and “Disclosure.”

Table 3

Code System: Theme 2 – Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

Subtheme	Subtheme descriptions	No. of codes	(coded references)
Stigma	This subtheme captures the stigmatic experiences of the participants in this study.	1	Stigma (4)
Diversity and equity	This subtheme captures the essence of diversity and equity of this study.	23	Differentiation (1) Diverse training (1) Diversity (6) Equality (2) Informative training (2) Leadership training (1) Military regulations (1) Opportunity (1) Race (1) Racism (1) Segregation (1) Separation (1) Statistics (1) Taboo (1) Tiers of training (1) Topics (1)
Bullying	This subtheme is coded with bullying about participants in this study.	7	Bullying (3) Harassment (2) Trolling (2)
Sexual Orientation	This subtheme is about sexual orientation of the participants chosen for this study.	22	Bisexual (1) Gay (5) Sexual orientation (16)
Discrimination	This subtheme is about discrimination of participants chosen for this study.	8	Discrimination (6) Disrespect (1) Unpleasant approach (1)
Inflammatory	This subtheme is inflammatory outlook as it pertains to the participants of this study.	4	Derogatory language (2) Homophobic (1) Pornography (1)
Isolation/Negative	This subtheme is the isolative/negative thoughts as it pertains to the participants of this study.	7	Isolation (4) Negative (1) Negative occurrences (1)

			Nothing (1)
Predilections	This subtheme is the predilections of the participants chosen for this study.	17	Basis (3) Disagreement (1) Discomfort (1) Discouraged (1) Doubt (4) Entitled (1) Favoritism (1) Intimidation (1) Opinion (1) Overreacting (1)
Acknowledgement	This subtheme captures the acknowledgment of the participants chosen for this study.	15	Acceptance (2) Announcement (1) Assumption (3) Closeted (1) Coming out (1) Disclosure (3) Discuss (1) Forthcoming (1) Observed (2)

Theme 3: The Mental Cognition of Active-Duty Male Service Members who Have Experienced Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

There were 10 categories within Theme 3, The mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced Discrimination based on sexual orientation. The first subtheme, “Mental health,” included the initial codes of “Medication,” “Treatment,” and “Coping.” These initial codes captured the mentality of the participants chosen for this study. The second subtheme, “Morals,” included initial codes of “Belief,” “Change,” and “Ethics.” The third subtheme is “Cognition.” Cognition included the initials codes of “Decision,” “Direction,” and “Logic.” The fourth subtheme, “Positive,” included the initial codes of “Norms” and “Solutions.” The fifth subtheme is “Mannerisms.” Mannerisms included the initial codes of “Machoism” and “Masculine.” The sixth subtheme is “Neutral response.” Neutral response only included the code of “Neutral response.” A neutral response gave leeway to the neutral responses of the participants as they pertained to the various questions asked during the interview. The

seventh subtheme is “Disorganization.” Disorganization included the initial codes of “Lack of knowledge, “Lack of trust,” and “Uncertainty.” The eighth subtheme, “Support,” included the initial codes of “Privacy” and “Privacy laws.” The ninth subtheme is “Family Dynamics.” Family Dynamics included the initial “Brother” and “Family “ codes. The 10th subtheme, “Friends,” included the initial codes of “Friends” and “Peers.” This last subtheme in this category captured the variation of people in the study, which the participants highlighted outside of army leadership or personnel.

Table 4

Code System: Theme 3 – The Mental Cognition of Active-Duty Male Service Members who Have Experienced Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

Subtheme	Subtheme descriptions	No. of codes	(coded references)
Mental health	This subtheme captures the mental health of the participants chosen for this study.	13	Coping (1) Medication (1) Mental health (2) Mental health (1) counselors Mental support (1) Military hospital (1) Private therapist (1) Therapy (1) Trauma (1) Treatment (3)
Morals	This subtheme captures the morals of the participants chosen for this study.	12	Beliefs (1) Change (1) Ethics (2) Integrity (1) Manners (2) Morals (1) Safety (1) Secrecy (1) Security (1) Share (1) Values (1)
Cognition	This subtheme captures the cognition of the participants chosen for this study.	15	Assimilation (1) Conscious (1) Decision (1) Direction (1) Embedded (1) Expectation (1) Focus (1) Integration (1) Logic (1) Myths (1) Relatable (1)

			Think (1) Thinking (1) Vices (1) Wisdom (1)
Positive	This subtheme captures the outlook of the participants chosen for this study.	9	Norms (2) Out of sight, out of mind (1) Outcome (1) Positive experience (1) Positive outlook (1) Priority (1) Solutions (1)
Mannerisms	This subtheme captures the mannerisms of the participants are chosen for this study.	2	Machoism (1) Masculine (1)
Neutral response	This subtheme captures the neutral responses of the participants as it pertained to various questions asked during the interview.	10	Neutral responses (10)
Disorganization	This subtheme captures the disorganization of the participants experiences.	12	Distractions (1) Lack of direction (1) Lack of knowledge (1) Lack of resources (1) Lack of support (1) Lack of trust (1) Lackluster (1) Resistance (1) Uncertainty (3) Unknown (1) Weak (2)
Support	This subtheme captures the support of the participant's chosen for this study.	18	Privacy (4) Privacy laws (1) Protection (1) Safety (1) Support (6) Support personnel (1) Support system (1) Trust (2)
Family Dynamics	This subtheme captures the different family dynamics of the participants in this study.	22	Brother (1) Childhood (4) Family (9) Family Dynamics (1) Family Values (1) Footsteps (1)
Friends	This subtheme captures the variation of people in this study other than the participants.	8	Home (1) Friend (1) Friends (4) Peers (3)

Theme 4: Army-Wide Educational Programs on Sexual Orientation

There were two categories within Theme 4, Army comprehensive educational programs on sexual orientation. The first subtheme is “Education.” Education included the initials codes of “Education” and “Training.” The second subtheme is “Advocacy.” Advocacy included the initials codes of “Awareness,” and “Concern.” These codes gave leeway to areas the participants believed the army could focus on to help other servicemembers understand discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Table 5

Code System: Theme 4 – Army-Wide Educational Programs on Sexual Orientation

Subtheme	Subtheme descriptions	No. of (coded references)
Education	This subtheme captures various areas of education the participants believe the army should focus on.	12 Activities (1) Education (6) Tasks (1) Training (4)
Advocacy	This subtheme captures the thoughts of the participants chosen for this study as it relates to advocacy.	12 Advocacy (5) Awareness (1) Concern (2) Informative (1) Informed (1)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Numerous strategies were implemented to ensure credibility for this study, as previously shared in Chapter 3. One of the vital credibility strategies used in this study was member checking. This allowed the participants of this study to check their transcribed interviews for accuracy. Also, it allowed the participants to clarify any potential misunderstanding and accuracy of the data collected. The participant's feedback was incorporated into the final analysis, strengthening this study's credibility. To prevent my own biases in this study, I used reflexivity. Reflexivity allowed me to identify my

own biases in the research study. I wrote down my biases daily about Discrimination based on sexual orientation and other reactions I experienced with the participants interviewed for this study.

Transferability

Transferability strategies, as shared in Chapter 3, were implemented to enhance the applicability of the findings beyond the study's context. Transferability in this research study was enhanced by using thick descriptions. Thick descriptions allowed me to describe and observe the interview participants' interactions (see Hadi & Closs, 2016). The characteristics are interpreted in context, capturing thoughts and emotions, assigning motivations and intentions, creating rich accounts of details, and describing the meaningfulness of the situation. For example, a thick description in this research study was direct quotes from the participant's experiences.

Dependability

Dependability is another element of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Dependability is the constancy of data over time, or the processes used to collect the data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I enhanced the dependability of findings from this study using an audit trail. An audit trail clearly describes the researcher's steps from the research study's beginning to the findings' end (Sahlin & Levenby, 2018; Scharp & Sanders, 2019). As the researcher of this study, I maintained a detailed log of the step-by-step elements of the research process. The log consisted of the procedures to collect and transcribe the data. For example, Moustakas's steps for transcendental phenomenology included the analysis process, audio recordings, participant recruitment

information, and participant screening and interview questions. In addition, since there were no discrepancies in the participant's transcribed interviews, I used reflexive journaling to enhance the dependability of the findings from my research. Reflexive journaling allowed me to document my journey in the research process (McNarry et al., 2019).

Confirmability

According to Hays et al. (2016), confirmability is the last step in the trustworthiness a researcher must establish. Confirmability helps to ensure that the study's findings genuinely reflect the participants' experiences being interviewed and not the researcher's biases (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). To enhance the credibility of this research, I used member checking. Member checking allows participants to review the transcribed transcripts of their interviews from the audio recordings recorded during the interview process (Nguyen et al., 2021). After transcribing all audio recordings, I emailed each participant their transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Results

In this section, I presented the thematic findings resulting from the interviews with male service members in the army who self-identified as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy. The results are the evidence to answer the research question: What are the experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy? Direct quotations from the interview

transcripts provided an in-depth and original representation of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Using a thematic analysis approach, Kiger and Varpio (2020) stated thematic analysis approach is often misunderstood among the research community but has valuable insight for qualitative researchers. To help align the findings of this study, they were organized into distinct themes, categories, and initial codes from the data. Along with quotations from the participants to give an understanding of each theme. Also, in this section, I evaluated whether the research question was adequately addressed and answered through the communicated themes and quotations. By methodically examining and interpreting the collected data and at length exploring the participants' narratives, personal experiences, and the transformative bearing of discrimination based on their sexual orientation, lives are illuminated.

Theme 1: The Lived Experiences of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Self-Identify as Gay

In this theme, the participant's various lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay were explored. This theme yielded 13 subthemes, and they are a.) experiences, b.) personal expressions, c.) army, d.) leadership, e.) identification, g.) retaliation, h.) professionalism, i.) location, j.) timing, k.) culture, l.) jurisdiction, m.) army personnel, and n.) people. The participant's lived experiences were outlined using quotes from their narratives. The lived experiences encompass the participants' summing up their military experience as well as describing how much of those experiences were related to their sexual orientation. Also, the study

participants unveiled the impact of their lived experiences of discrimination based on their sexual orientation on male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Subtheme 1: Experiences

During the interviews, all participants were asked how they would sum up their military experience thus far (see Table 6). Army service members have a range of experiences in the army, depending on whether they are stationed in the Continental United States (CONUS) or outside the Continental United States (OCONUS), as well as their military occupational specialty (MOS). When asked how their experiences were thus far, Participant 1 expressed, “Okay, thus far, my military experience has been nice.” Participant 2 said, “I would say thus far it has been great; I have learned a lot of different experiences from people from all different walks of life.” Participant 4 stated, “Overall, my military career has been a fair experience.” However, Participant 3 experiences differed from those of the other participants. Participant 3 stated, “My military experience is okay. There are a few hiccups and concerns about some things I have never experienced before.”

Table 6

Subtheme 1: Experiences

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Experiences	Different experiences Fair experiences Military experiences Nice Okay

Subtheme 2: Personal Expressions

In this section, participants shared their expressions of their experiences that were related to their sexual orientation (see Table 7). The experiences were mixed with the participants' feelings of fear and bravery. Participant 1 stated, "I was scared at how people would perceive me." Participant 2 shared, "I felt brave because I was able to be myself and speak to someone personally." Participant 3 stated, "I felt okay. You know it was nobody's business, but you know I felt okay." Participant 4 stated, "I had mixed feelings."

Table 7

Subtheme 2: Personal Expressions

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Personal Expressions	I felt brave/okay I was scared I had mixed feelings

Subtheme 3: Army

This subtheme captures the participants' outlook on the army at large (see Table 8). All participants were asked how they would describe their experiences as being professional according to army regulations. Participant 1 stated, "I've had the opportunity to earn my air assault wings; I've learned a lot about army topics, just like I'd hoped because of my race and gender identification." However, participant 3 stated, "Coming out of a militant household. Father was in the military. Furthermore, being the baby out of everybody I wanted, like you know, will continue in my Pop's footsteps." Participant 4 added, "The most stressful thing for me is the time we spend away from home in training or on deployments."

Table 8

Subtheme 3: Army

Codes	Keywords/Phrases
Army	I've adventured I've learned a lot I wanted to continue in my pop footsteps The amount of time we spend away from home

Subtheme 4: Leadership

This subtheme captures the makeup of army leadership (see Table 9). Army leadership consists of a wide range of age groups and ranks, to the extent some leaders are younger than their soldiers. Participant 1 stated, "I felt stigmatized because I feared my commanding officer and my sergeant knowing about my sexual orientation." Participant 2 stated, "They told me that maybe I was overreacting or imagining things." Participant 3 stated, "Well, I did not tell anybody in my chain of command, but I have told a few co-workers." Participant 4 stated, "However, there are some unpleasant experiences that I have had, and I wish the leadership would be more open to addressing or solving."

Table 9

Subtheme 4: Leadership

Codes	Keywords/Phrases
Leadership	I felt stigmatized I wish leadership would be more open

Subtheme 5: Identification

This subtheme captures the participants' identification during their interviews (see Table 10). Early on during the interview, the participants were asked if they had been treated differently than their heterosexual colleagues because of their sexual orientation. Participant 2 stated, "Not that I know of." Participant 4 concluded, "My issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions."

Table 10*Subtheme 5: Identification*

Codes	Keywords/Phrases
Identification	I am gay Assume I am gay Straight guys do not

Subtheme 6: Retaliation

When a person experiences trauma due to sexual orientation, it can cause uneasiness when faced with their accusers (see Table 11). Therefore, the question asked of the participants was, how do you feel when your sexual orientation is disclosed?

Participant 1 stated

They changed how they looked at me. They used to look at me as being a good worker. After they learned that I was gay, looks they gave me know it's like you're a sissy, and they used words in my presence that were trolling and bullying.

Participant 4 shared, “my issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions.”

Table 11*Subtheme 6: Retaliation*

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Retaliation	How they looked at me May treat me differently

Subtheme 7: Professionalism

This subtheme captures the dignity of the participants expressing their experiences prior to their experiences of sexual orientation discrimination (see Table 12). The participants' answers were standard in their response. For example, Participant 2 shared, "Well, I had been holding it in for so long. I wanted to gain the trust of my

buddies and colleagues." Participant 4: "Others may think I am weak. It is nerve-racking because I feel like they are more homophobic, and that is what's guiding their actions."

Table 12

Subtheme 7: Professionalism

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Professionalism	I've been treated differently Do not care for gay men They are more homophobic

Subtheme 8: Location

This subtheme captures the location of the participants' experiences (see Table 13). When asked about how their sexual orientation was disclosed in the army Participant 1 reported that "it's funny. Somebody caught me watching gay porn, and they concluded I'm gay." However, participant 2 stated, "It was disclosed about 3 years ago to my immediate supervisor when I first joined my unit after AIT (Advanced Individual Training)." Participant 3 had a different experience in that

It was disclosed when I allowed a friend to use my phone because his phone was not working for some reason. While my friend was using my phone, one of my friends, who is gay as well, called. When they called, their picture showed up with the name "best girlfriend." So, the million and one questions were asked: Who was this, and why did I have him saved in my phone as "best girlfriend" when the picture was of a boy?

Table 13

Subtheme 8: Location

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Location	Somebody caught me It was disclosed 3 years ago I allowed a friend

Subtheme 9: Timing

This subtheme captures the timing of the participants' lived experiences in this study (see Table 14). The participants lived experiences of discrimination based on their sexual orientation responses were mixed. The question was asked during the interview: When was your sexual orientation disclosed? Participant 2 shared, "It was disclosed about 3 years ago to my immediate supervisor when I first joined my unit after AIT (Advanced Individual Training)." Participant 4 said, "I do not have a specific timeline that I can recall; it has almost seemed natural since my first duty station."

Table 14

Subtheme 9: Timing

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Timing	Advanced Individual Training (AIT) First duty station

Subtheme 10: Culture

This subtheme captures the culture of the participant's lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination in the army (see Table 15). Some lived experiences for those people who have experienced trauma are not an easy feat to take on. This is evident by the participant's 3 statement. Participant 3 stated, "Some of the straight guys do not particularly care for gay men." Participant 1: "Apart from that, I also think that I am a bit scared of expressing myself since people learned about my sexual orientation."

Table 15

Subtheme 10: Culture

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Culture	It is nerve wrecking Guiding their actions Do not care for gay men

Subtheme 11: Jurisdiction

This subtheme captures various jurisdictions for the participants in this study (see Table 16). The various jurisdictions were the places the participants highlighted during their interviews of whom they pledged their loyalty and why. Participant 3: “Coming out of a militant household. Father was in the military. Moreover, being the baby out of everybody, I wanted, like you know, to continue in my pop's footsteps.”

Table 16

Subtheme 11: Jurisdiction

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Jurisdiction	Chain of Command

Subtheme 12: Army personnel

This subtheme captures different types of personnel and personnel structures in the army (see Table 17). In the army, different levels of management are in one unit/company. These various types of management help guide the service member's career. These managers are the people who ensure that the service members follow army regulations. One of the army regulations was the DADT policy. So, the question was asked: Did you report to anyone in your chain of command that you had experienced discrimination based on your sexual orientation? Participant 4: “For those I am comfortable with, I felt comfortable sharing my sexual orientation. My issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions.” Participant 3: “Well, I did not tell anybody in my chain of command, but I have told a few co-workers.” Participant 2: “I had been holding it in for so long. I really wanted to gain trust

from my buddies and colleagues.” Participant 1: “So, everybody knew about it, including my sergeant.”

Table 17

Subtheme 12: Army personnel

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Army Personnel	Chain of Command A few co-workers Gain trust from my buddies and colleagues My Sergeant

Subtheme 13: People

This subtheme captures various types of people included in this study (see Table 18). When a person self-identifies as gay, it can be challenging to let family members, friends, and even co-workers know about their sexual orientation. Which the question was asked during the interview: Does any of your family or friends know about your lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination in the military? Participant 2, "No." Participant 1: "Yeah, my close friends know. Like, I have a bisexual friend, he knows about this because I feel like I am open with him since he is like me." Participant 3: "I have disclosed it privately. How should I put it? They know but do not know. I tell them things without saying that it is within because of the machoism that the military is known for." Participant 4: "Yes, my friends do. However, I have not shared my experiences with my family."

Table 18

Subtheme 13: People

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
People	Bisexual friend Experiences with my family Yes, my friends do

Theme 2: Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

In this theme, the participant's various lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay were explored. This theme yielded nine subthemes, which are a.) stigma, b.) diversity and equity, c.) bullying, d.) sexual orientation, and e.) discrimination, g.) inflammatory, h.) isolation/negative, i.) predilections, and j.) acknowledgment. The participant's lived experiences were outlined using quotes from their narratives. The lived experiences encompass the participants' summing up their military experience as well as describing how much of those experiences were related to their sexual orientation. Also, the study participants unveiled the impact of their lived experiences of discrimination based on their sexual orientation on male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy. The participant's lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation were outlined using quotes from their narratives. The lived experiences encompass the participants summing up their military experience as well as describing how much of those experiences were related to discrimination based on sexual orientation, especially as male service members who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Subtheme 1: Stigma:

This subtheme captures the stigma the male service members who self-identify as gay experienced (see Table 19). The LGBT community strategies for coping are not equal in all its contexts. As it relates to the subtheme of stigma, the participants were asked during their semi-structured interviews the question: Have you ever been treated

differently than your heterosexual colleagues because of your sexual orientation?

Participant 1 stated, “Yeah, definitely. I think I've been treated differently by my colleagues. I think they look down upon me like a sissy or something and they stigmatize me.” Participant 2: “They told me that maybe I was overreacting, maybe I was imagining things.”

Table 19

Subtheme 1: Stigma

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Stigma	Stigma

Subtheme 2: Diversity & Equity

This subtheme captures the diversity and equity of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 20).

When a service member is sworn into the armed forces, no one expects a prestigious entity to discriminate against its own. The question was asked of the participants during the semi-structured interviews for this study. Did you report to anyone in your chain of command that you had experienced discrimination based on your sexual orientation?

Participant 4: "No, I have not. I did not feel like I needed to because that is what I am used to." Participant 3: "Well, I did not tell anybody in my chain of command, but I have told a few co-workers." Participant 2: "Yes, I did." 1 "I reported, but nothing has been done so far, and I cannot report again."

Table 20

Subtheme 2: Diversity & Equity

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
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 Diversity & Equity

 Differentiation
 Diversity
 Informative Training

Subtheme 3: Bullying

This subtheme captures the bullying of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 21). The leadership of the army frowns upon the bullying of its service members. The initial question was asked by the participants: How did you feel when your sexual orientation was disclosed? Participant 1: "I was scared of how people would perceive me." Participant 2: "I felt brave because I was able to be myself and speak to someone from a personal point of view." Participant 3: "I felt okay. You know it was really nobody's business, but you know I felt okay. I did not feel like my friend was a threat or anything like that." Participant 4: "For those I am comfortable with, I felt comfortable sharing my sexual orientation. My issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions."

Table 21

Subtheme 3: Bullying

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Bullying	Bullying Harassment

Subtheme 4: Sexual Orientation

This subtheme captures the lived experiences of the sexual orientation of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 22). Prior to the repeal of the DADT policy, it was punishable under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) if a male service member who self-

identified as gay would disclose his sexual orientation. The follow up question was asked by the participants how did you feel when your sexual orientation was disclosed?

Participant 1: “They changed how they looked at me. They used to look at me as being a good worker.” Participant 2: “I did not want to cause myself further pain. I feel like it would lead more to uncomfortable probing.” Participant 4: “For those I am comfortable with, I felt comfortable sharing my sexual orientation. My issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions.”

Table 22

Subtheme 4: Sexual Orientation

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Sexual Orientation	Gay Sexual Orientation

Subtheme 5: Discrimination

This subtheme captures the lived experiences of discrimination of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 23). Discrimination is often concealed through a plethora of means. Participant 3: “The old people have been saying that birds of a feather flock together. And so, within that in mind, you know I did not want them sticking together and coming against me.” Participant 4: "Others may think I am weak or that I cannot perform in more strenuous activities or assignments. It is nerve wrecking because I feel like they are more homophobic and that is what’s guiding their actions.”

Table 23

Subtheme 5: Discrimination

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
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 Discrimination

 Discrimination
 Disrespect

Subtheme 6: Inflammatory

This subtheme captures the inflammatory experiences of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 24). Many think matters are over when a service member receives military punishment under UCMJ. Yes, they are over legally, but the water cooler talk still occurs. Participant 4: "My issue is more with those that assume and may treat me differently because of their assumptions." Participant 1:

Some army boys say they do not care until someone else says something derogatory, and then they chime in. They will call you names, they will criticize you, they will stigmatize you with no affection or anything, even if you are the best of friends.

Table 24

Subtheme 6: Inflammatory

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Inflammatory	Derogatory language

Subtheme 7: Isolation/Negative

This subtheme captures participants' experiences of isolation/negativity of the male service members who self-identify as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 25). Isolation/Negativity can lead to male service-members who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy to feel ostracized. Participant 4: "I felt like people would avoid me in fear that I may try to come on to them." Participant 3:

"Some of the straight guys do not particularly care for gay men." Participant 1: "I am a bit scared of expressing myself since people learned about my sexual orientation."

Table 25

Subtheme 7: Isolation/Negative

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Isolation/Negative	Isolation Negative Occurrences

Subtheme 8: Predilections

This subtheme captures the participants' predilections of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 26). As I was conducting this study, one of the areas that was important for me to document was my own biases. Male service members who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy have experienced the predilections of other service members who do not self-identify as gay. Participant 1: "I have a bisexual friend; he knows about this because I feel like I am open with him since he is like me." Participant 4

The army has allowed me to meet new people who have become like family and my support system. However, I have had some unpleasant experiences, and I wish the leadership would be more open to addressing or solving them.

Table 26

Subtheme 8: Predilections

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Predilections	Bias Disagreement Doubt

Subtheme 9: Acknowledgement

This subtheme captures the participants' acknowledgment of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 27). Discovering one's sexual orientation is not just a matter of fact for some people. For the male service members who self-identify as gay, this was their experience. Participant 1: "Somebody caught me watching gay porn, and they concluded I am gay. And from there it was an issue, and I had to admit it." Participant 2: "Well, I had been holding it in for so long. I really wanted to gain trust from my buddies and colleagues." Participant 4: "For the most part I have volunteered my sexual orientation to those I feel like I have commonalities with."

Table 27

Subtheme 9: Acknowledgement

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Acknowledgement	Acceptance Assumption Disclosure Observed

Theme 3: The Mental Cognition of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Have Experienced Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

In this theme, the participant's various lived experiences on the mental cognition of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy that experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation were explored. This theme yielded 10 subthemes, which are a.) mental health, b.) morals, c.) cognition, d.) positive, e.) mannerisms, g.) neutral response, h.) disorganization, i.) support, j.) dynamics, and k.) friends. The participant's lived experiences were outlined using quotes

from their narratives. The lived experiences encompass the participants' summing up their military experience as well as describing how much of those experiences were related to the mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation, especially as male service members who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Subtheme 1: Mental Health:

This subtheme captures the participants' mental health of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 28). Mental Health is vital to the mission and sustainability of the service members' well-being. Participant 4: "The most stressful thing for me is the amount of time we spend away from home in training or on deployments." Participant 3: "Coming out of a militant household. Father was in the military. And being the baby out of everybody I wanted, like you know continue in my pop's footsteps."

Table 28

Subtheme 1: Mental Health

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Mental Health	Coping Mental Support Trauma Treatment

Subtheme 2: Morals

This subtheme captures the participants' morals of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 29). Morals are the premise of many Americans on how they exemplify themselves in the lives of others. Participant 1:

“It is like they are against gay and lesbianism and all the bisexual stuff. I almost think it is embedded in them.” Participant 3: "There were some very high expectations of great professionalism, and then there were some that were not professional at all." Participant 4:

I have noticed that the army has a culture within leaders and peers that they assume I am gay but will not ask or are afraid to ask. That has made me uneasy because I noticed that some people avoid me, may assume that I cannot do certain things, or may seek a particular favor to get me out of more demanding tasks because of how they perceive me.

Table 29

Subtheme 2: Morals

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Morals	Ethics Integrity Safety Values

Subtheme 3: Cognition

This subtheme captures the participants' cognition of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 30). The army holds its service members in high regard for discipline if the discipline is keeping their uniforms up to par, staying abreast of their military occupational specialty (MOS), continuing education, or simple discipline in how they present themselves daily. Participant 1:

So, sometimes, the hard-charging units seemed more masculine than some of these other units. I do not think the issue has anything to do with masculinity but

with the person's vices because some people think masculine means strong and gay means weak.

Participant 4: “The army has so many benefits that I am appreciative of because I did not have the best positive experience in my childhood and back home.

Table 30

Subtheme 3: Cognition

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Cognition	Decision Expectation Logic

Subtheme 4: Positive

This subtheme captures the participants' positive outcomes of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 31). The armed forces at large are often molded as an entity of unity. Amidst unity, male service members who self-identify as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy want to be included in the bond of unity amid the ranks. Participant 4: “The army has allowed me to meet new people who have become like family and my support system.”

Participant 1:

I have a bisexual friend; he knows about this because I feel like I am open with him since he is like me. For example, when there are LGBTQ matches, they go out there with me to support me.

Table 31

Subtheme 4: Positive

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Positive	Norms Outcome

Subtheme 5: Mannerisms

This subtheme captures the participants' mannerisms of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 32). Throughout our years in school and other public places we as people have heard and been told to use your manners. Participant 1: "I think people are more open nowadays, people are more open to supporting their friends and their buddies even though some people are still resistant." Participant 2: "I felt brave because I was able to be myself and speak to someone from a personal point of view." Participant 3: "There were some very high expectations of great professionalism, and then there were some that were not professional at all." Participant 4: "My friends have been very supportive of who I am. It is almost like they do not show me any special favors because of my sexual orientation but they make me feel included as another member of their family."

Table 32

Subtheme 5: Mannerisms

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Mannerisms	Machismo Masculine

Subtheme 6: Neutral Response

This subtheme captures the participants' neutral response to self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 33). When the participants chosen for this study were asked questions during the semi-structured interviews, their responses to some of the questions were neutral in their response. All participants asked specific questions. Participant 2: "Not that I, not that I know of." Participant: "No. Sir." Participant 4: "Yes."

Table 33*Subtheme 6: Neutral Response*

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Neutral Response	Derogatory language

Subtheme 7: Disorganization

This subtheme captures the participants' disorganization of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 34). One of the army principles are to teach its service-members discipline and organization to be squared away. If a service-member have any questions about being squared away they are told to ask their leadership. Yet, disorganization can be seen with the participants lack of being squared away when the question was asked. Did you report to anyone in your chain of command that you had experienced discrimination based on your sexual orientation? Participant 1: "I have not gone out of the chain of command, you know. I do not want to be looked down upon by the others." Participant 2: "I felt it would not do any good and would make matters worse." Participant 3: "Well, I did not tell anybody in my chain of command, but I have told a few co-workers." Participant 4: "No, I have not. I did not feel like I needed to because that is what I am used to."

Table 34*Subtheme 7: Disorganization*

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Disorganization	Lack of Direction Lack of Support Resistance Uncertainty

Subtheme 8: Support

This subtheme captures the participants' support of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 35). Support in any aspect of life is crucial to one's success or lack thereof. As the participants chosen for this study shared their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation, support was at the front and center. The question was asked: Did you seek out any treatment for your experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation? Participant 1: "Yeah, a private therapist. I do not want to use the military hospital because I think somehow my sergeant would learn about it sometime later." Participant 3: "Yes, civilian provider." Participant 4: "Yes. I preferred to work with a civilian provider because I felt they were able to relate to me and my experiences."

Table 35

Subtheme 8: Support

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Support	Privacy Protection Support

Subtheme 9: Family Dynamics

This subtheme captures the participants' family dynamics of self-identifying as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 36). Through many ups and downs, male service members who self-identify as gay must experience, due to their sexual orientation, the family dynamic is one group of people they hope will be able to offer support. Participant 1: "My brother knows, but my parents, they do not know, I have not told them shit about this." Participant 2:

No. I tried to make them aware by talking with my sister, whom I am closer with, in hopes that she would talk to my parents and break the ice, and then I would come and fill in any gaps that she may leave out.

Participant 3: “Just to keep it private, protection of myself and protection of the military.”

Participant 4:

I come from a very traditional thinking family that see cultural norms and family values a certain way and they do not agree with my sexual orientation. I believe it is because I am more open. I know some family members that identify as gay, but they are more discreet and closeted and the family treats them completely differently because they do not know about their sexual orientation.

Table 36

Subtheme 9: Family Dynamics

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Family Dynamics	Brother Childhood Family

Subtheme 10: Friends

This subtheme captures the participants' friends who self-identified as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy (see Table 37). Aside from family, friends are one of the groups of people who would look to confide in and hope their secrets are never being told. Participant 1: “Yeah, my close friends know. Like, I have a bisexual friend, he knows about this because I feel like I am open with him since he is like me.” Participant 2: “No.” Participant 4: “Yes, my friends do.”

Table 37

Subtheme 10: Friends

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Friends	Friends Peers

Theme 4: Army-Wide Educational Programs on Sexual Orientation

In this theme, the participant's various lived experiences on the army-wide educational programs on the sexual orientation of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay were explored. This theme yielded two subthemes, which are a.) education and b.) advocacy. The participants' lived experiences of Army-Wide Educational Programs on Sexual Orientation were outlined using quotes from their narratives. The lived experiences encompass the participants' summed-up military experience and described how army-wide educational programs on sexual orientation were expressed through their worldviews. Which were centered around the different educational programs they believed to be imperative as the army's leadership developed and implemented policies on discrimination based on sexual orientation, especially as male service members who self-identified as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Subtheme 1: Education

Since the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, legislative changes have been made on how LGB service members are permitted to serve in the armed forces (see Table 38). During the interviews, all participants were asked to describe from their perspective what further changes could take place in the army to help prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Participant 1:

I think that we should embrace perhaps having mental counselors who are LGBTQ personnel or gay, lesbians, you know, or bisexuals, or perhaps even a transgender being a counselor in a barracks or in an outpost. I think it would be better because they sort of understand the needs of us under the umbrella rather than other people outside, the like straight people who are trying to help us.

Participant 2:

I think there should be two training courses, one training everybody takes to learn how to treat their peers, whether their peers are other NCOs, or you know, people from a different command. And there should also be separate training for leaders to know how to handle issues of sexual orientation discrimination.

Participant 3: "But at the same time, the changes I think they need to make are classes taught on discrimination to everybody no matter where you serve."

Table 38

Subtheme 1: Education

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Education	Concern Education Training

Subtheme 2: Advocacy

In this section, participants shared their expressions of how advocacy is paramount due to discrimination based on sexual orientation (see Table 39). The expressions of the participants were fused with their experiences of what they believed should be at the forefront when it comes to bringing awareness to a topic, in this instance, discrimination based on sexual orientation. Participant 1: "Okay, I think that there is less

mental support in these issues of discrimination, especially with sexual orientation and racism.”

Participant 2:

I think for lack of better words, if you do not talk about it, it does not exist. So, the various types of training may never take place until some of the higher ups raise the issue who are not afraid to have a target on their back.

Participant 3:

In my opinion, I feel as though they do not need to know anybody's sexual orientation. We as adults should keep moving as long as we are not distractions because we are here to do what we need to do for our country.

Participant 4: “I think that training around dispelling myths about LGB persons will help. I think ethical training around integrity and equality would be a good start and I believe there is way more that can be done.”

Table 39

Subtheme 2: Advocacy

Codes	Keywords/ Phrases
Advocacy	Advocacy Awareness

Summary

In Chapter 4, I outlined the data collection process to understand the results in answering the research question on the experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identified as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the DADT policy. The four themes highlighted in this chapter were (a) The lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-

identify as gay, (b) Discrimination based on sexual orientation, (c) The mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation and (d) Army wide educational programs on sexual orientation.

Moreover, this process included detailed accounts of the research setting, the demographics relevant to the study, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and the results. The interpretation of findings, limitations of study, recommendations, implications and conclusion of this study will be included in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of active-duty male service members in the army who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. Through in-depth semi structured interviews, I was able to understand the experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy. These experiences included army leadership, identification, and professionalism. First, active-duty male service members shared how discrimination based on their sexual orientation impacted them daily. These experiences hinged on stigma, bullying, diversity, and equity. Secondly, the participants shared their experiences on the impact of their mental cognition. The participants highlighted the following areas centered on their mental cognition: (a) morals, (b) support, and (c) family dynamics. Thirdly, the participants discussed advocacy for future training on army-wide educational programs on discrimination based on sexual orientation. Finally, in this chapter, I explained the interpretation of findings, theoretical interpretation, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and recommendations for practice, and the study's conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological qualitative approach and the theories of social stigma and the MSM. There were 431 codes, six groups, and 34 subthemes that emerged into four major themes. These included the lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay, discrimination based on

sexual orientation, the mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation, and army-wide programs on sexual orientation.

Literature Interpretation

Theme 1: The Lived Experiences of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Self-Identify as Gay

Twenty-six thousand male service members have endured harassment based on their sexual identity (Morrall et al., 2015). The participants' experiences shared in this study were cross examined based on the literature in Chapter 2. Discrimination based on sexual orientation among men in the workplace remains a vital concern primarily due to the barriers and myths that men are not sexually assaulted or harassed (Lloren & Parini, 2017; Webster et al., 2018). According to Javaid (2016), Sigurvinsdottir and Ullman (2016), and O'Brien et al. (2015), sexual assault is steadily rising in the armed forces, and the scholarly literature on males is sparse.

Vanlandingham (2015) indicated that if the armed forces leadership identified how to resurface their rank and file on sexual orientation discrimination, it would increase military readiness, weapon qualifications, job training, and morale. These policy changes would help alleviate the stressors of sexual orientation experienced among soldiers and lessen diversity training costs (Orr, 2015). The responses shared by the participants in this study varied. However, the commonality among them all was their experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. After disclosing their sexual orientation, service members who self-identified as gay have been harassed

predominantly by their coworkers, who are presumed to be heterosexual (Javaid, 2015). When heterosexual male service members are discriminative towards male service members who self-identify as gay, they think it is the culture of the armed forces that horseplay and derogatory language are welcomed without any consequences (Slok-Andersen, 2019).

According to De Rond et al. (2022), the lived experiences of people who have experienced trauma have difficulty processing the occurrence of the traumatic event. Especially when a service member self-identifies as gay, it is hard for them to let their families, friends, and even coworkers know about their sexual orientation (Ghio et al., 2025). Male service members who self-identified as gay want the same rights to be treated equally, just like their fellow heterosexual comrades (Alessi, 2014). Male service members who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy still experience mixed emotions about their well-being. All due to the lack of support and resources available to them while serving on active duty.

Theme 2: Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

Van Gilder (2019) explained how femininity is viewed as a threat because of the hegemonic nature of the armed forces. The armed forces have an unwritten rule of hypermasculinity. If a male service member seems not to meet the definition of heteronormativity, then he is viewed by his peers as feeble (Alford & Lee, 2016). In this theme, participants shared how their military experiences were related to discrimination based on sexual orientation since the repeal of the DADT policy. The enactment of the DADT policy allowed service members who self-identified as gay to serve in the ranks if

they did not disclose their sexual orientation to anyone. Moreover, male service members who self-identified as gay felt restricted in having their voices heard on how they experienced undue hardship because of their sexual orientation (Wong, 2015).

The armed forces have zero tolerance for sexual misconduct (Stander & Thomsen, 2016). When President Obama implemented the repeal of the DADT, DOD personnel believed the DADT repeal should have resolved any issues surrounding discrimination based on sexual orientation (Evans et al., 2018). Tackas and Froula (2016) believed that male service members who self-identified as gay became prey to heterosexual service members. Fosch-Villaronga et al. (2021) and Thomas (2021) shared that discrimination based on sexual orientation included physical acts of harm, unwanted gestures, and derogatory language.

The Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active-Duty Members highlighted the statistics for the fiscal year 2018 that male service members who self-identified as gay experienced unwarranted acts of discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Calkins et al., 2022). In addition, they experienced stress and substance abuse (Gates & Saunders, 2016; Johnson et al., 2015; Sims et al., 2016). Amidst unity, male service members who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy wanted to be included in the bond of unity amid the ranks. Bry et al. (2017) found that male service members who self-identified as gay were hesitant about disclosing their sexual orientation to trusted individuals. Participants also expressed confusion about whether they would be judged, discriminated against, or talked about negatively by others.

Theme 3: The Mental Cognition of Active-Duty Male Service Members Who Have Experienced Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation

Many individuals join the military seeking to gain a sense of camaraderie with their fellow service members. Prior to the repeal of the DADT, over 13,000 gay male service members had been discharged due to their sexual orientation (Alford & Lee, 2016). The armed forces publicly hold its service members in high esteem for their discipline, showmanship, and knowledge of their MOS. One of the areas that is not held in high esteem is the mental cognition of its male service members who self-identify as gay and have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Mental health is vital to the mission and sustainability of the service members' well-being. In this theme, the participants shared their lived experiences on their mental cognition as active-duty male service members who self-identified as gay since the repeal of the DADT policy.

When it comes to the mental cognition of active-duty male service members who have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation, morals are the basis of foundational principles centered around truths (Li, 2025). The army prides itself on diversity and equity, and its diversity is steeped in decades of tradition (Harkness, 2024). One of the concerns of male service members who self-identified as gay was being declared unfit for duty by their chain of command. As a result, to help with their mental cognition, they sought outside mental health providers for several reasons. The first reason they sought out mental health providers out in the community as opposed to on base was that the providers could not report it to anyone in their chain of command. The

second reason was that they were able to seek out providers who had expertise in working with persons who self-identified as gay. The third reason was that they had access to care after working hours, which would not interfere with their regular duty day. In this instance, it would not raise concern with their chain of command that they had an off-post appointment.

Lastly, the mental well-being of any service member is important to the mission at hand. However, when a person must come face-to-face with their aggressor, it takes a toll on them mentally and physically. Therefore, they turn to their families with the hope that they can offer support from afar. Aside from family, friends were the other group service members who self-identified as gay looked to confide in and hope their secrets were never told. Ginieis and Brunet-Icart (2021) echoed in their writing that coping strategies for the LGBT community are not equal in all contexts. In other words, some people can ignore discrimination based on their sexual orientation, while others cannot. Nevertheless, mental anguish can evolve into more medical conditions if it goes untreated (Miller et al., 2025).

Theme 4: Army-Wide Educational Programs on Sexual Orientation

When a male service member who self-identifies as gay experiences trauma due to sexual orientation, it causes uneasiness when they are face-to-face with their accusers (Biscoe et al., 2024). Throughout this theme, participants shared their thoughts on how army-wide educational programs on discrimination based on sexual orientation are pertinent concerns that need to be addressed. The two areas the participants homed in on were education and advocacy.

Sheen and Andersen (2021) shared that when it comes to education, if it is disorganized, then it does no good. This was displayed when the participants shared their thoughts on how legislation was being introduced and implemented, but it still missed the mark. Due to heterosexual leadership making decisions on areas they do not know as it pertained to discrimination based on sexual orientation. O'Mochain (2018) shared some of the same sentiments as Sheen and Andersen (2021). However, he took it a step further. He shared how education can be front and center if the armed forces' leadership questioned how many of the reported incidents were valid, as opposed to being fictitious.

The participants shared that the armed forces leadership should have panel discussions to allow others to ask questions and gain a better understanding of what they are misinformed about. Also, having providers who work with male service members who self-identify as gay to help leadership understand the requirements, they need to be successful is no different from that of their heterosexual comrades. The participants knew their suggestions on educational awareness topics would not occur overnight, but they must advocate for themselves and others.

Lastly, advocacy was the other area where the participants raised awareness of this theme. Advocacy can be misconstrued as insubordination in the armed forces (Impellizzeri, 2024). According to Gauglitz and Schyns (2024) insubordination is viewed as the service member disagreeing with their leader on a particular topic that the leader finds offensive. Therefore, male service members who self-identify as gay must make sure that they cross their "T's" and dot their "I's" to not come across as being disrespectful. Advocacy is an area where when a service member is passionate about a

topic, their tone of voice and body language can change, which can be perceived as insubordination (Gonzalez et al., 2024). The participants of this study believe they are retreating because their concerns of discrimination based on sexual orientation has gone unaddressed.

Theoretical Interpretation

Aside from the research question and data analysis undergirding this study, the theoretical framework also provided support. According to Luft et al. (2022), a study's theoretical framework helps the researcher navigate the research without allowing one's biases to intrude on the study. The social stigma theory and the MSM were the theories I chose for this study after ruling out other theories that would not have aided in properly navigating this research.

Social Stigma Theory

According to Ahir-Knight (2024), the social stigma theory is rooted in discrimination and comprises three types of stigmas. Male service members who self-identified as gay in the army since the repeal of the DADT policy have experienced two of the three types of stigmas in the social stigma theory. Goffman (1963) laid the foundation for the social stigma theory to describe the experiences of individuals who do not adapt to societal rules, regardless of their specific characteristics or identities. The social stigma theory includes physical attributes, character blemishes, and tribal membership. The first type of stigma that the participants of this study experienced was character blemishes. Goffman described character blemishes as mental illness, addictions, or homelessness. The participants of this study did not share anything during their

interviews about addictions or homelessness; they did share how their mental health was affected. They went on to share how they endured bullying, anxiety disorder, depression, and PTSD, as well as being cold-shouldered by some of their leaders, whom they highly respected. The participants' level of anxiety was heightened during this time because they were seeking mental health support without going through the normal process of including their chain of command due to retribution. Ultimately, according to McKenzie et al. (2022), fulfilling the responsibilities of a demanding job can be tough and weigh on an individual's mental health, especially for people who self-identify as gay.

The second type of stigma that the participants of this study experienced was tribal membership. Goffman (1963) described tribal membership as ethnic groups, religions, or cultures. Even though the participants of this study did not share anything about ethnic groups or religion during their interviews, they did share how the culture of the army was pretentious towards male service members who self-identified as gay. The burden of discrimination on male service members who self-identified as gay was supposed to be relieved by the repeal of the DADT policy. Meade (2021) gave further context on how the culture of the armed forces lends itself to the country's patriotism, but the country's patriotism does not include LGB service members. The lived experiences of LGB service members are stoked by oppression and discrimination (Rostosky et al., 2022). They are not as evident at times because of how heterosexual male service members subtly approach male service members who self-identified as gay (Aldahondo & Cole, 2023). With the repeal of the DADT policy, all service members, regardless of gender and sexual orientation, were educated on how sexual orientation discrimination

would not be tolerated throughout the rank and file (McNamara et al., 2020). However, this still resulted in experiences of discrimination and harassment, which led to moments of emotional distress and social isolation because male service members who self-identified as gay did not conform to society's expectations (McGill et al., 2024).

Minority Stress Model (MSM)

According to McKenzie et al. (2022), concealing an individual's sexual orientation in the workplace can be petrifying due to the rise of both mental and physical health problems, including fatigue, insomnia, and loss of appetite. Meyer (2003) developed the MSM to address how stress affected minority groups due to prejudice, stigma, and discrimination. One of the first areas in which the participants of this study experienced stressors was during the implementation of the DADT policy and its repeal. Male service members who self-identified as gay understood that everyone they encountered would not have open arms and welcome them due to their sexual orientation, and that was okay with them (Loeb et al., 2021). However, what was not okay with them was the discriminatory experiences they underwent based on their sexual orientation, especially since their sexual orientation did not interfere with the duties and responsibilities of their military careers (Cancela et al., 2024).

In conjunction with the definition of the MSM, the participants of this study had the emotional burden of constantly navigating a hostile work environment (see Moya-Garofano, 2020). From a theoretical perspective, the MSM aligned perfectly with the purpose of this study to shed light on the participants' lived experiences of discrimination based on their sexual orientation. The environmental stressors of prejudice and

discrimination lent themselves to the early conception of the armed forces (Ison et al., 2025). The armed forces leadership considers persons of the same sex as having a mental health disorder (Balderrama-Durbin et al., 2024). It was also followed up on by the APA until the mid-1970s (Drescher, 2015). These adopted harmful beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes about an individual's sexual orientation in the armed forces have caused the experiences of prejudice in the rank-and-file to soar (Mogotsi et al., 2024). As well as the participants in this study articulated that they had to seek mental health providers who were familiar with LGB matters. Simply because of the prejudice, stigma, and discrimination they underwent, the armed forces mental health personnel did not know how to treat the above-stated areas (McGuffin et al., 2021). Besides, if heterosexual service members do not accept the army's implementation of LGB programs, male service members who self-identify as gay in the rank-and-file will continue to be marginalized, regardless of what policies or laws are implemented (see Le Menestrel & Kizer, 2019).

Limitations of the Study

By assembling the various components to conduct this research, I have provided insight into the lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination of gay male service members. Like any scholarly research, this study had its limitations. The limitations are due to the study's lack of diverse participants, which has the potential to impact its trustworthiness. Despite extensive efforts to recruit a more diverse population of male service members who self-identified as gay, the sample remained limited.

Nevertheless, the data collected for this study was done by using semi structured interviews that captured their lived experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members who self-identified as gay. When a person recalls the trauma they experienced, it can cause them not to remember all the details succinctly (Goldwasser & Springle, 2024). I asked the participants to reflect on their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and potentially, their rank and duty station could have influenced the outcome of their responses. Further, the results are limited to the perspective of discrimination based on sexual orientation since the repeal of the DADT policy. The lived experiences of the participants chosen for this study do not reflect other service members who self-identify as gay lived experiences since the repeal of the DADT policy.

Ultimately, in this phenomenological qualitative study, I examined the lived experiences of male service members in the army who self-identified as gay. Although this study has limitations, it lends itself to scholarly research on repealing the DADT policy. Future research could build upon these findings by having more participants who fit the criteria for this study, as well as allowing the DOD to examine the lived experiences of male service members who self-identify as gay in other branches of the armed forces.

Recommendations

Building upon the strengths and limitations of this current study and considering the insights from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, additional research is needed to bring awareness to the lived experiences of male service members in the army who self-

identified as gay and have experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation. First, the armed forces leadership could implement changes through community campaigns. One of the myths the literature highlighted was that men do not experience sexual trauma from other heterosexual men. Informing the public about sexual trauma statistics would allow them to be more informed, as well as advocate for those service members who may be hesitant to do so because of retaliation. Second, the armed forces leadership could implement changes by hosting informational briefings on health. Service members must attend specific courses each year on various topics. One of the courses could be on how the health of service members who self-identify as gay is gravely impacted in the areas of stress, physical illnesses, and even substance abuse. Third, the armed forces leadership could implement changes by allowing service members to seek outside community referrals if they feel uncomfortable working with military providers. By the armed forces leadership permitting community referrals, community providers could bill the armed forces for the services instead of the service member paying a copay or the bill out of pocket. Fourth, another area in which the armed forces leadership could implement changes is by allowing a diverse group of service members to conduct studies on how the impact of military readiness will be impacted by futuristic occurrences that now go against the traditional armed services' core values.

Implications

As this study was conducted, common themes arose, which are illustrated periodically throughout chapters 4 and 5. The themes were a derivative of the research question used to guide this research. The findings from this study could drive social

change across various levels, ranging from individuals and families to organizations, policy, theory, and professional practice. This section elaborates on these potential areas to drive more in-depth social changes across the varying levels.

Individual

In a previous chapter I stated that the literature on how discrimination based on sexual orientation that still impedes the rank-and-file was sparse. In the findings I implied that the experiences of these individuals in this study can continue to build on sparse literature. Another potential contribution from the participants of this study could be advocating for the armed forces leadership to publicly review and revise its policies regarding the reporting of military sexual trauma (MST). Especially since Barth et al. (2016) stated that during the implementation of the DADT policy, the process of reporting occurrences of MST about LGBTQ service members was not clearly defined.

Family

In the findings of this study, I implied that when a family member does not understand the experiences that a male service member who self-identifies as gay goes through, they would ask them how can I support you because this is new to me? According to Hoover et al. (2017), the Department of Defense (DOD) position on discrimination based on sexual orientation still exists amid reformed legislation. With current events, discrimination based on sexual orientation is still a concern for the armed forces leadership. Families can advocate locally without leaving the comfort of their homes, which can be done by starting an online petition and sharing it with other family

members and friends. The families can forward the electronic petition to their state representatives, who represent them on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Organizational Implications

According to Campbell-Sills (2023), bullying is an area that can be concealed due to the tone of voice of the individual who is doing the bullying. An example of this type of behavior is if the aggressor outranks the male service member who self-identifies as gay. The aggressor can mask the bullying by correcting the service member according to military regulations within their purview.

The human body has significant organs protected by the rib cage, and so do the armed forces. Every service member who is a non-commissioned officer or commissioned officer has taken an oath separate from the oath of enlistment. The first line in the Non-Commissioned Officer creed is, “No one is more professional than I” (Mahmoud, & Abd Fatah, 2023). The first line of the third paragraph in the Commissioned Officer’s creed is,

In justifying and fulfilling the trust placed in me, I will conduct my private life as well as my public service to be free both from impropriety and the appearance of impropriety, acting with candor and integrity to earn the unquestioning trust of my fellow soldiers, juniors, seniors, and associates (Moten, 2011).

In the findings of this study, I have implied that with these oaths being taken by various army leaders, the organizational structure of the armed forces should be of utmost importance in how they embrace one another regardless of sexual orientation.

Societal/Policy Implications

According to the seminal work of Burrelli (2010), the 111th Congress wanted to overhaul the DADT policy with a policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation. This proposed policy would have fallen under the social determinants of health (SDOH). The SDOH would have allowed for gay male service members to garner the support needed for them to win over Congress to implement their desired legislation. Also, it would have cemented any future rollercoasting policies, due to the Commander-in-Chief's personal views or campaign promises. Nevertheless, the implications of positive social change are one of the areas that are perpetually needed to undergird the findings of this study. I implied that discrimination based on sexual orientation is akin to structural stigma. Structural stigma is defined as policies, conditions, societal norms, and practices that deny stigmatized individuals the same opportunities that non-stigmatized individuals receive (Schomerus & Angermeyer, 2021). For example, in Theme No. 1, Sub-Theme 1b in the data analysis collection section under the category of personal expressions, one of the codes was the word compassion. The compassionate aspect of this proposed policy would have covered a more comprehensive range of complications a male service member who self-identifies as gay would have encountered, as opposed to the current reformed overhaul of the DADT policy.

Theoretical Implications

After carefully considering other theories, social stigma and the minority stress model (MSM) were the two best fits for this study. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is a stigma solely because it brings attention to societies' disdain for persons

whom they consider to be less than themselves. The MSM gives way to minority groups, and it is clearly shown throughout this study that male service members who self-identify as gay are the minority as opposed to their heterosexual comrades. As mentioned throughout this study, the research question was front-and-center of how this study was conducted. Therefore, the same way the research question was front-and-center of how this study was conducted, the same goes for both above-stated theories. These theories allowed for the research to be framed in such a way that the lived experiences of active-duty male service members who self-identify as gay could share their experiences with the public.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations are no more than suggestions or proposals on a particular topic for one to consider. Throughout various sections within this chapter, recommendations have been made for the armed forces leadership to consider the lived experiences of male service members who self-identify as gay. McCabe (2016) shared that covering a more comprehensive range of spectrums on how heterosexual service members engage their comrades who self-identify as gay could have brought a more realistic hope to the posture of discrimination based on sexual orientation. It is concluded that the armed forces leadership needs to continue to investigate what universal laws Congress can legislate and approve as opposed to each Commander-in-Chief deciding the welfare of the service members in the armed forces who self-identify as gay. If not, the male service members who self-identified as gay lived experiences can become a target for a President's agenda on LGBT service members serving openly in the rank-and-file.

Conclusions

I discussed this chapter's findings, limitations, recommendations, and implications to help answer this study's research question. Aside from answering this study's research question, I learned that it took risks for male service members who self-identified as gay to discuss their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation. The first observation on how these participants took risks beyond their regular call of duty was that they relived their experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation despite resisting what was considered tolerable behavior between male servicemembers. The second observation on how these participants took risks beyond their regular call of duty was enduring the open shame and rejection by persons for whom they had profound respect. Especially since the repeal of the DADT policy was put into place to allow LGB service members to serve in the rank-and-file openly as self-identified gays without any UCMJ consequences. The third observation was that other male service members who self-identified as gay could learn from the experiences of these participants in this study by continuing to advocate for their rights. The fourth observation was the need for Congress to pass a law that would prevent incoming Commanders-in-Chief from repealing the current implementation of the DADT policy. Finally, no two service members who self-identified as gay in this study experiences were the same. However, the one constant that did not change was their bravery and willpower to confront the armed forces leadership about their lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

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Interview study seeks gay active-duty male service members

There is a new study about active-duty gay men who have experienced sexual orientation discrimination in the army. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences of sexual orientation discrimination.

About the study:

- * A 30 – 60-minute Zoom Video Communications interview that will be audio-recorded only
- * Receive a \$10 Wal-Mart gift card as a thank you
- * To protect your privacy, the published study will use a fictitious name

Study requirements:

- * 18 years old or older
- * Self-Identify as a gay male service member
- * Active duty for at least one year
- * Active duty in the United States Army

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Dwayne A. Tyler, a PhD student at Walden University. Interviews for this study are scheduled to take place during June 2024.

To confidentially volunteer, contact the researcher:
Dwayne A. Tyler

Appendix B: Demographic Information

1. Participant ID: _____
2. Marital Status: _____
3. Gender: _____
4. Age: _____
5. What is your race: _____
6. How long have you been in your Branch of Service: _____
7. What is your sexual orientation (i.e., bisexual, gay, heterosexual): _____
8. What is your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS): _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Introduction:

Thank you for meeting with me and discussing your lived experiences in the armed forces. Before we begin, are you okay with me audio recording our conversation today? Audio recording our conversation will allow me to go back and transcribe the information you share with me. Upon conclusion of this study, all audio-recorded conversations will be destroyed. No one will access our audio-recorded conversation except my dissertation committee and me.

Furthermore, for me to audio record our conversation, I need you to sign the consent form. The consent form permits this interview to be audio recorded and informs you that you can stop the interview at any time and withdraw your consent. Lastly, the interview will take at least 30 minutes but no more than 60 minutes.

As you prepare to answer the various questions, the questions and sub-questions are derived from the study's research question. The study's research question is what are the experiences of discrimination based on the sexual orientation of male service members in the army who self-identify as gay while serving on active duty since the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy?

Interview Questions:

1. How would you sum up your military experience thus far?
 - A. Would you describe those experiences as being professional according to army regulations?

2. How many of those experiences from question number one were related to your sexual orientation?
3. How was your sexual orientation disclosed in the army, and when?
 - A. How did you feel when your sexual orientation was disclosed?
 - B. Was there a reason as to why your sexual orientation was disclosed at this time?
4. Have you ever been treated differently than your heterosexual colleagues because of your sexual orientation?
 - A. If yes, please explain.
5. Did you report to anyone in your chain of command that you had experienced discrimination based on your sexual orientation?
 - A. If yes, what was their response?
 - B. Did they take any actions based on what you shared with them?
 - C. If yes, do you know the outcome of their actions?
6. Did you seek out any treatment for your experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation?
 - A. If not, why?
 - B. If yes, did you seek treatment from a military or civilian service provider?
 - C. Why did you choose this provider?
 - D. Do you attend therapy groups for your experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation?

7. Does any of your family or friends know about your lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination in the military?
 - A. If not, did you try to make them aware of your lived experiences of sexual orientation discrimination?
 - B. If yes, please describe the support you have received from your family and friends.
8. The repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy began legislative change on how LGB service members are permitted to serve in the armed forces. Describe from your perspective what further changes could take place in the army to help prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation.
9. As we conclude our interview, is there anything else you would like to share that may have been omitted?

Interview Conclusion:

Again, I would like to thank you for meeting with me and discussing your lived experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation in the armed forces. A friendly reminder, the audio recording will be transcribed by me into written form and emailed to you to ensure what was discussed is what was captured. Upon reviewing the written transcript, if you find any errors, please inform me by email or by telephone. Lastly, I am emailing you with your Wal-Mart e-gift card for \$10 to thank you for participating in the interview.