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# How Same-Sex Spouses of Female Enlisted Soldiers Perceive Support in Military Communities Post-DADT/DOMA Repeals

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Cristina Gutman

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

How Same-Sex Spouses of Female Enlisted Soldiers Perceive Support

in Military Communities Post-DADT/DOMA Repeals

by

Cristina Gutman

MA, Bowie University, 2008

BA, University of Maryland, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

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## Abstract

The end of the Vietnam War heralded the beginning of the all-volunteer Army. In the interest of soldier retention, research focused on the military spouse, their challenges and needs. Four decades of research indicate that soldier deployments, separation from loved ones, and limited career options were among factors negatively impacting psychological and physiological well-being of this population. Support offered through military formal and informal support networks, however, provides some relief. The repeals of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and Defense of Marriage Act expanded the military family to include same-sex spouses yet a review of the literature revealed no research on this relatively new phenomenon. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored how same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers perceive support in their military communities. Presented are findings of semi structured interviews conducted with 12 spouses of active duty enlisted female soldiers recruited using purposive and snowball sampling. Spouses shared their experiences by answering 8 open-ended questions. Research credibility and validity included verbatim transcription and member checking for accuracy, reflexive journaling, audit trail maintenance, and data saturation; manual coding and NVivo11 identified emergent themes and subthemes. Data revealed spouses faced additional stressors due to their sexual minority status, and perceived rejection from support resources created feelings of alienation and isolation. This research represents the first foundational study of this minority group in this setting. Social implications include a deeper understanding of these spouses by unit commanders, chaplaincies, informal support groups, health care providers, and other military agencies in order that these may improve existing, or create additional, support networks and services.

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## Dedication

A “bolschoi spasiba” to you, Yevgen Gutman, for your endless love, patience, and support – the hours of venting between actual research and writing spanned four years, three PCS moves, and two continents . . . Я люблю тебя всем сердцем! Thank you to my research participants – you know who you are your stories, generosity, and courage will remain with me long after this dissertation is a repressed memory. A very special thanks to Christina-with-an-“h” Ridgley-Smith for encouraging and assisting me from day one.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The end of the Vietnam War ushered in the all-volunteer military. In the United States Army, soldiers began leaving the military in large numbers and taking their skills with them. Training an all-volunteer force was costly, and retention of these soldiers was of paramount importance to the military mission. Surveys focusing on soldier satisfaction with the military found a direct link to retention and spousal satisfaction (Ridge & Ziebland, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010). A hitherto ignored segment of the armed forces—military spouses—was suddenly thrown into sharp relief. Challenges and issues faced by this population were reviewed, acknowledged, and ultimately addressed as the Department of Defense (DoD) initiated programs geared towards families that would ensure greater quality of life (Ridge & Ziebland, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010). Funding for programs was prioritized at the onset of the global war on terror (GWOT) as research indicated that military families were facing a new set of stressors.

The global war on terrorism (GWOT) and its deployments that have separated so many families in the past decade may be winding down. The focus on military families, however, remains. Research indicates that deployments aside, noncombat mission requirements continue to necessitate family separations. In addition to these separations, military spouses often face additional challenges such as having to leave families, support structures, education, and employment opportunities behind in order to accompany their active duty spouse (Bitner, et.al 2010) Exacerbating these stressors are those posed by the initial introduction and integration into military life and military communities of spouses, transitions often confusing and not always easily managed. Research has found that stress has an adverse impact on the mental and physical well-being of military

spouses, citing the importance of support groups for a smooth transition into this culture and its unique challenges (Bitner, 2010; Blakely, Hennessy, Chung, Skirton, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Villagran, Canzona, & Ledford, 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). Where the literature falls silent is with regard to the same-sex military spouse.

Prior to the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT; 1993), gays and lesbians were banned from serving in the armed forces. Since the repeal of DADT and the overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA; 1996) individuals formerly banned from a conservative institution have become legitimized within a relatively short span of 18 months (Burks, 2011). Additionally, these policy changes have introduced the same-sex spouse to the military family. Although society has become more accepting of the LGBT community, hate crimes against this population have been the third most common in America over the past two decades after race and religion (Bell & Perry, 2015; Burks, 2011; Schumer, 2016). Mainstream American values are often reflected in military culture as witnessed by the integration of African Americans and women into the armed forces, transitions that proved difficult (Burks, 2011; Dong, 2013; Prividera & Howard, 2012; Segal, Smith, Segal, & Canuso, 2016; Wintermute, 2012; Witt & Wood, 2010). Although same-sex military spouses may face the same stressors and challenges faced by their heterosexual counterparts, this study indicated they also faced additional stressors due to their sexual minority status. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of this group of spouses with regard to their need for support. Support services and resources have traditionally been used by female spouses of enlisted heterosexual soldiers; therefore, this study focused on

same-sex spouses of female enlisted soldiers and how they perceived support provided within military communities.

This chapter presents a brief description of the historical foundation on which the integration of same-sex spouses rests including policy changes such as desegregating the military to African-Americans, women, and gay and lesbian soldiers. A review of the problem statement as well as the purpose for and nature of this study follows an examination of the theoretical framework selected for this research. I also discussed a definition of clarifying terms along with a review of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Finally, I explored the significance of the research with regards to fostering social change, followed by the summary.

### **Background of the Problem**

In 1948, Truman signed Executive Order 9981 desegregating the U.S. military, which called for the “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services” (Newby, 2004). This order, as well as the 1948 passage of the Women’s Armed Service Integration Act granting women official membership in the U.S. military, led the military to be regarded as the best integrated institution in the United States.

Two years after these executive orders, however, Truman also signed the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, which in part directed sexual behavior of military service members, forbidding adultery and homosexuality (Bailey, Lee, & Williams, 2013). President Ronald Reagan continued this ban on gays serving in the U.S. military by issuing a defense directive stating “homosexuality is incompatible with military service” (Department of Defense Directive 1332.14). President Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign promise to end the ban on gays in the military resulted in the compromissory

Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) which for the next 17 years would allow closeted homosexuals to serve in the military while banning openly gay and lesbian service members from doing the same (Bailey et al., 2013). President Barack Obama's signing of what would become the DADT Repeal Act of 2010 afforded equal rights to gay and lesbian soldiers, and the June 26, 2013 overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) afforded spouse of gay and lesbian soldiers the same benefits granted to all other spouses (Bailey et al., 2013; Johnson, Rosenstein, Buhrke, & Haldeman, 2015).

Running parallel to policy changes is the changing nature of the military family structure. "If the military wanted to you to have a wife, they'd have issued you one" was an adage widely accepted until the 1960s. The regular army was established over 150 years ago and until after World War II, the draft resulted in an army consisting for the most part of single, male soldiers (Hauser & Slater, 2010). President Nixon's Executive Order 11497 amended the Selective Service Act, and in the wake of its dwindling ranks, the military sought to recruit members via monetary bonuses and educational benefits (Exec. Order No. 11497, 3 C.F.R., 1969). Many began to view the military as a lucrative career option and as a result, families became a regular fixture on the military scene.

Currently, there are approximately 1.5 million service members on active duty in the United States and more than half of these are married (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2015). Though life as a military spouse has its rewards, frequent moves, the inability of spouses to develop careers, and frequent separation from family and support networks has created stressors for these spouses not always faced by their civilian counterparts (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek &



D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden, Connors, Posey, Ricciardi, & Agazio, 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea, Behnke, Huff, & Allen, 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang Nyutu, Tran, & Spears, 2015). Additionally, ten years of the GWOT has added to the strain. Between 2003 and 2012, the U.S. government sent 2.4 million soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan (USDVA, 2012).

The effects of deployments impact not only soldiers but their spouses as well. Frequent soldier deployments means spouses have to face even more loneliness and isolation coupled with the fears and uncertainty that comes with knowing their soldier is in harm’s way and may not, in fact, return home (Cozza, 2014; Saltzman, Bartoletti, Lester, & Beardslee, 2014; Villagran et al., 2013). While deployments cause psychological struggles for spouses, the period following homecoming can be just as traumatic (Cozza, 2014; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). Spouses experience double the rate of depression than their counterparts in the civilian sector which can, in turn, adversely impact marital relationships and the psychological stability within the family (Gorman et al., 2011; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). Studies across modalities have identified the need for family stability as important for over-all health and psychological well-being (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010).

Research has shown that support can act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress due to isolation and deployment (Rossetto, 2010; Bowen, Mancini, & Martin, 2013; Villagran, et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Saltzman et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015). A crucial factor aiding military spouses both in war and peace has been support

via DOD-sponsored programs or simply support from a military community of peers who accept and understand this singular lifestyle. Due to recent DADT and DOMA policy changes, however, a new spouse has emerged on the scene, the same-sex spouse. The size of this group is not known at the time of this writing because although it is estimated that approximately 71,000 active duty soldiers in the U.S. Armed Forces are gay or lesbian, the number married to same-sex partners is unknown (Ramirez et al., 2013). Attitudes towards same-sex marriage in America have shifted in the last decade. In a May 2015 Gallup poll, 60% of respondents endorsed same-sex marriages as holding the same legal validity as traditional marriages (Herek, 2015). By contrast, only 37% endorsed this sentiment in a 2005 Gallup poll (Herek, 2015). While Gallup polls suggest Americans have become more accepting of gays and lesbians in general, however, research also suggests many Americans still cling to negative stereotypes about this sexual minority (Allsep, 2013; Bailey et al., 2013; Crespi, 2015). Although same-sex military spouses might well face the same stressors and challenges faced by their heterosexual counterparts, it is conceivable they face additional stressors due to their sexual minority status. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of this group of spouses with regard to their perception of and need for support.

Previous research on military spouses has documented stressors and challenges associated with a military lifestyle in general and deployments in particular, (Rossetto, 2010; Villagran, et al, 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Saltzman et al, 2014; Wang et al, 2015). The need for spouses to establish coping strategies through social support networks has also been identified through numerous qualitative and quantitative studies (Bitner, 2010;

Lapp et al., 2010; Leroux et al., 2016; McGowan, 2008; Wadsworth, 2013). While one qualitative study (Pedersen, 2010) addressed stressors faced by military spouses who were underrepresented in the literature—husbands of female soldiers—an important gap in the literature remains regarding same-sex spouses married to gay and lesbian soldiers. As of this writing, no literature had been found addressing same-sex military spouses in general much less same-sex spouses of female enlisted soldiers.

Homosexuals and lesbians have been a stigmatized group in American society and banned from service in the U.S. armed forces before the Clinton administration's 1993 DADT policy, which was not repealed until 2011 (Burks, 2011). Spouses of gay and lesbian soldiers were not granted the same rights, recognition, and benefits until the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was overturned in June, 2013. Within a span of 18 months, a hitherto stigmatized group of citizens has become legitimized. Due to these abrupt policy changes, it is therefore not known if these spouses experience the same need for support as their heterosexual counterparts or in fact experience needs beyond those of heterosexual military spouses.

Obtaining an increased understanding behind these experiences was the focus of this study. I hoped to add to the body of literature on military spouses that linked spousal satisfaction to the overall morale of their soldiers. Soldier morale, in turn, has proven instrumental in maintaining and enhancing mission readiness (Blakely et al., 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Villagran et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). Furthermore, this study also added to the literature regarding stressors faced by military spouses and support systems used to counteract the negative impacts those stressors can have on mental and physical well-

being (Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Leroux et al., 2016; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang et al., 2015).

This study has social relevance as it adds to the literature on military spouses, specifically the hitherto unreported lives of same-sex spouses, thus leading to a greater awareness of this unique group of individuals. Social change implications of this study are far-reaching because a greater understanding of these spouses has the potential of aiding commanders, chaplains, military chains-of-command, family readiness groups, and DOD-funded family-support program directors to begin identifying the needs of and improving the quality of life for this population.

### **Problem Statement**

The repeal of DADT and the overturn of DOMA has changed the face of the military family by introducing the same-sex spouse to the military community. Not only do these spouses face all the challenges inherent in a life married to an active duty soldiers, challenges that can adversely affect mental and physical well-being, it is possible they will face additional challenges as well, given that research has shown that negative societal attitudes towards gays and lesbian are still prevalent (Cochran, Balsam, Flentje, Malte, Simpson, 2013; Crespi, 2015; Meyer, 2013; Ridge & Ziebland, 2012). This study was needed in order to obtain an increased understanding of the meaning behind the experiences of same-sex military spouses married to active duty soldiers.

Research on military spouses has documented stressors and challenges associated with a military lifestyle in general and, more recently, deployments in particular.

Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies indicated the need for spouses to establish

coping strategies through social support networks (Bitner, 2010; Eaton et al., 2008; McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010; Rossetto, 2010; Villagran, et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Saltzman et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015). The majority of research available on military spouses focuses only on the needs of female spouses married to male soldiers. Only one qualitative study (Pedersen, 2010) of ten participants was found that addressed the needs of male spouses of female soldiers. Although sample size was cited as a limitation by Pedersen (2010), findings of the study indicated these spouses faced similar stressors as those cited by female spouses: a sense of isolation and frustration due to continuous moves and anxiety during soldier absence either due to mission needs or deployment. Pedersen's (2010) study, however, did identify additional stressors that arose from participants not fitting into the mold of traditional military spouse, that is, women married to male soldiers. One important support network cited the latter group of spouses in the literature spanning several decades was the ability to interact with their peers through social networks such as family readiness groups (FRGs) or other spousal groups. Pedersen's participants indicated they had not felt comfortable using these avenues of support due to their nontraditional role.

Same-sex military spouses also do not fit the mold of the traditional military spouse. It has only been within the past three years of this writing that the Clinton administration's 1993 DADT policy has been repealed allowing homosexuals and lesbians to serve in the armed forces (Burks, 2011). Further, spouses of gay and lesbian soldiers were not granted the same rights, recognition, and benefits prior to the June 2013 overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Although U.S. society has become more accepting of the LGBT community, the FBI's list of reported hate-crimes indicated

these types of crimes against this population have remained steady over the past two decades. Within the armed forces, the status of gays and lesbians being stigmatized to legitimized spanned less than 18 months. Policy changes were relatively abrupt, and aside from a 2010 RAND corporation study that examined attitudes of service members towards gay and lesbian soldiers, no research has been conducted on the spouses these soldiers have introduced into the military family. It is therefore not known if these spouses experience the same need for support as their heterosexual counterparts or in fact experience needs beyond those of heterosexual military spouses.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experience of same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers post- DADT and the DOMA repeal and what being a same-sex military spouse means to them, particularly in terms of support. The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of same-sex spouses of enlisted female active duty Army soldiers and portray the lives of this unique group of spouses, offering readers an in-depth look at their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in a post-DADT, post-DOMA military. The study offers insight into the stressors that participants experienced and the support networks they used. Findings associated with this study provide an in-depth understanding of the complex and emerging issues faced by a segment of same-sex military spouses. I anticipate that hearing the voices of these same-sex military spouses and providing insight into the essence of their lived experience will benefit those seeking to provide support to military spouses both at the present time and in the future. This study could benefit military health care providers, pastoral services, chains of command, and family support groups in gaining a deeper understanding of this

segment of the military community in order to establish additional support systems or ensure inclusion into existing ones.

### **Research Questions**

To fill the gap in the body of research on same-sex spouses, the questions central to this study were:

RQ1: How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was drawn from the literature on stress and coping, minority stress, and stigma. The three main analytical components of this study are Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, Lazarus' (1984) theory of psychological stress and coping, and Meyer's (2003) minority stress model.

#### **Goffman's Stigma Theory**

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) viewed stigma as inherently rooted in social interactions and defined this phenomena as a discrediting social difference that yields devaluation or a spoiled social identity. Goffman is considered the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century who relied less on formal scientific method than on observation of human behavior to explain contemporary life (Ytreberg, 2016). According to Goffman (1963), three types of characteristics are stigmatized: physical deformities, character flaws, and group memberships – such as racial, national, religious, or belonging to a gender or sexual minority. Goffman (1963) held that stigmatized

individuals are devalued, ostracized, discriminated against, and as such have less opportunities in life because of the stigma these individuals are believed to have. The segment of society stigmatizing groups and individuals were described by Goffman (1963) as “normal,” individuals who did not deviate from societal expectations and norms. Per Goffman (1963), *normals* tend to view their identities as “absent” or unproblematic Goffman (1963). Stigmatized groups or individuals have deviant characteristics that are either readily apparent (race) or invisible (sexual orientation).

Goffman (1963) proposed that when discussing stigma, one should think in terms of relationships and not attributes. A stigmatized attribute derives its status from cultural values – as such, what is stigmatized in one culture is not necessarily stigmatized in another. Additionally, stigmatization can also change over time within cultures depending on what is considered normal or acceptable in particular social contexts. From a medical perspective, homosexuality is no longer pathologized, nor can it be legally persecuted as in the era’s pre and during Clinton’s Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) (Burk, 2012). Stigmatization, however, is a powerfully detrimental label, changing the way society and individuals view and value themselves (Goffman, 1963).

Homosexuals and lesbians were a stigmatized group in American society and banned from service in the US armed forces before the Clinton administration’s 1993 DADT policy which was not repealed until 2011 (Burks, 2011). Spouses of gay and lesbian soldiers were not granted the same rights, recognition, and benefits until the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was overturned in June 2013. Therefore, Goffman’s stigma theory lends itself well to the examination of the lived experiences of same-sex military spouses both pre and post DADT and DOMA.



## **Lazarus Theory of Psychological Stress and Coping**

Dr. Richard S. Lazarus's work influenced psychology in many ways. Lazarus believed stress and coping were closely related to each other and to cognitive factors. Research conducted by Lazarus pushed the role of emotion to the forefront of psychology during a time when behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner were the most influential figures, and explanations for human behavior were often reduced to base motives such as reward and punishment (Amirkhan & Marckwort, 2016). A cognitively-oriented psychologist, Richard S. Lazarus, rose to prominence in his field in the 1960's when his rational theory of cognitive-mediational within emotion contrasted with then-popular behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner. The stress and coping model Lazarus and later colleagues proposed included characteristics of both the environment and the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined psychological stress as a relationship between an individual and their environment wherein perceived threats outweigh actual threats. The threats are further seen as beyond the scope of an individual's perceived coping resources, triggering a stress response. However, personal stress is subjective and while relocations may produce distress for some spouses, they can also produce eustress – positive stress – since some spouse view military moves as a change for a military “clean slate” (Clever & Segal, 2013). Much depends on how threat is defined and how one perceives one's own strength and coping abilities per Lazarus et al's transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Greer, 2000).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theoretical framework of psychological stress views coping as a managing process for stressors identified by individuals in the person-

environment relationship. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Lazarus (1999) viewed the coping process as having three components: first, the perceived stressor is appraised; then, cognitive and behavioral efforts are drawn upon to manage the stressor; third, the efforts are changed according to their effectiveness. Internalized values and beliefs vary from person to person which may affect coping behaviors, as do environmental constraints. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of psychological stress holds that the coping process is comprised of problem-focused (PFC), and emotion-focused coping (EFC). Problem-focused coping involves appraising the situation, assessing one's abilities, and taking action to change the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping is a form of acceptance of the situation whereby the individuals attempts to control or adjust stressful emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both coping methods can be used simultaneously – a spouse preparing for his or her soldier's deployment can accept they have no influence over the deployment (EFC), but pragmatically make plans on how to best use this time apart (PFC), drawing on family and community resources.

Lazarus' Theory of stress and copy lends itself well to the examination of the lived experience of same-sex military spouses since a significant body of research indicates stressors are inherent in a military life-style both in peace-time and especially during deployments to warzones. Lazarus (1999), for example, cited relocating from familiar to unfamiliar environments as rating high on the stress scale. Since soldiers and their spouses lead a nomadic lifestyle – per a 2014 DOD survey, half of military members move every two years – stress is inherent in finding new employment - or relinquishing their careers entirely; switching schools - unless they are enrolled in an on-line university; leaving a familiar support network to establish new ones (Padden et al., 2013;

Verdeli, Baily, Vousoura, Belser, Singla, & Manos, 2011; Villagran et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). How well spouses cope with these stressors depends on a variety of factors, not the least of which is support networks from within and outside of the military community.

### **Meyer's Minority Stress Model**

Minority stress is a broad construct used to describe the excess stress placed on individuals from stigmatized groups due to their membership in that social group. Ilan H. Meyer, Ph.D., (26 Feb 1956 - ) is an American psychiatric epidemiologist, author, professor, and a senior scholar for public policy and sexual orientation law at the Williams Institute of UCLA (Van Guys, 2009). Meyer developed his model of minority stress to describing the relationship of social stressors and mental disorders within the LGBT population (Meyer, 1995; 2003). This theory, derived from multiple social and psycho-logical theories, examines the inferior status of minority group members in society, as well as prejudice, and discrimination (Meyer, 1995). Meyer (2003) explains that minority stress is additive to the usual stressors experienced by individuals, resulting from a conflict between the values of the dominant, majority culture and the values of the stigmatized group that possesses little social power (Meyer, 2003).

Meyer has conducted extensive research on minority identities related to sexual orientation, gender, race and ethnicity, which identified social stresses as adversely impacting the mental health of the LBGT population. Meyer's theory of minority stress is a logical foundation for this research on same-sex spouses since earlier research has examined stress and its impact on heterosexual soldiers, family members, and stressors faced by LBGT soldiers pre and post Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy (Burks, 2011;

Bailey et al, 2013). As of this writing, no research was found addressing sexual minorities such as same-sex spouses in any respect, much less stressors this group might face. However, in light of research that examined stressors gay and lesbian soldiers reported such as discrimination, and physical and emotional abuse pre and post-DADT, it is likely that sexual minorities such as same-sex spouses might face like stressors within such a relatively conservative social environment (Burks, 2011; RAND, 2010).

Meyers addresses such stressors in his definition of minority stress. For example, in addition to the usual stressors experienced by military spouses, sexual minorities must deal with “unique and additive adaptations” - such as being same-sex spouses and sexual minorities in a conservative social environment (Meyers, 1995). Another assumption of minority stress lies in the chronic nature of being a social minority in a given social setting (Meyer, 2003). Considering that the Department of Defense prepared its military population for the DADT-repeal with no more than a PowerPoint presentation (Allsep, 2013), this thrust a now legitimized group of people into a population that had previously discriminated against them. These federal driven policy changes align with Meyer’s (2003) third assumption – that stress and tension occurs when attempting to manage a sexual minority identity in a heteronormative environment.

According to Meyer, the processes of minority stress can include: internalized heterosexism, concealment of sexual identity, expectation of rejection, and discrimination (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Connolly (2004) described heterosexism as an oppressive force that, due to its pervasive nature, is not only endured but internalized by many LGB persons. Formerly referred to in the literature as internalized homophobia, critics noted that reasonable fear of physical and emotional abuse did not denote self-hatred and the

phenomena has now been classified as internalized heterosexism (Ridge & Ziebland, 2012; Johnson et al, 2015). In a military environment where acknowledgement of LGB culture is being ignored, LGB soldiers and their spouses risk once again being marginalized which would prove detrimental to their physiological and psycho-logical well-being (Meyer, 2013).

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to address the questions, “How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses? What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received by military communities?” A literary review that focused on military spouses indicated that heterosexual military spouses face stressors that may impact physical and mental well-being due to the challenges inherent in a military lifestyle (Bitner, 2010; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Cozza, 2014; Eaton et al., 2008; Kees et al, 2015; Leroux et al, 2016; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Rea et al, 2015; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). No literature, however, was found addressing the relatively new phenomena of a post-Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT), post-Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) military and its impact on same-sex spouse of gay and lesbian active duty soldiers in the US Army. Recent research and Gallup polls suggest that although Americans have become more accepting of the LGBT community in general, many Americans still cling to negative stereotypes about this sexual minority (Bailey et al, 2013; Burks, 2011; Johnson et al, 2015; Ridge & Ziebland, 2012). Although same-sex military spouses might well face the same stressors and challenges faced by their heterosexual counterparts, additional

stressors due to their sexual minority status suggest the voices of these military spouses need to be heard.

Because of the gap in literature concerning same-sex military spouses, a qualitative research design will be used in order to understand, explore, and describe the phenomena from the experience of those who lived it. A phenomenological approach will be used to gain an understanding of stressors faced by same-sex spouses of enlisted female active duty soldiers and support they perceive in military communities. A phenomenological approach allows the researcher the chance to gather vital data directly from the source, providing a complex, detailed understanding of same-sex military spouses of active-duty soldiers (Moustakas, 1994). The open-ended nature and focus of the research questions were key factors in identifying qualitative inquiry as the appropriate approach (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative method will also allow the researcher to use a naturalistic approach to provide descriptive written data (as opposed to numerical data) obtained from in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013; Guignon, 2012; Richards & Morse, 2012). Data will be collected via individual semi-structured interviews which will be recorded and transcribed.

### **Definition of Terms**

To fully understand this study that seeks to comprehend and realize the lived experiences of same-sex spouses, a list of operational definitions and terms is provided. Several of the terms used in this study require additional clarification. *Homosexual* was once listed in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) as a diagnosis for a mental disorder. Although the term has negative connotations for some, for the purposes of this study it will be used exclusively as a scientific term to describe sexual attraction to

members of the same sex (Eliason, 2014). *Heterosexual* is the accepted vernacular to describe people attracted to the opposite sex (Eliason, 2014).

*Adjustment*: For the purpose of this study, a period of time in which the spouse and veteran attempt to reacquaint and establish quality of life within a noncombat situation (Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008).

*Bisexual*: A term describing individuals who are attracted emotionally, romantically, and sexually to both males and females (Forbes, 2014)

*Combat veteran*: An individual who has served in the Armed Forces during a time of war exposing them to facets of war involving gunfire, attacks, and threats to life (USDVA, 2014).

*Commissioned officers*: The highest ranking officers in the military. These officers are commissioned by the President and their ranks must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate (USDOD, 2012).

*Dependent/Family Member*: The spouse of a military service member (USDOD, 2012).

*Deployment*: When a member of the U.S. Armed Forces leaves their assigned duty station to perform extended duties usually in the context of conflict or war (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994).

*Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT)*: In 1993, the law and policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) cited homosexual conduct as a bar to service in the Armed Forces. On Dec. 22, 2010, the DADT Repeal Act of 2010 became law.

*Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)*: DOMA was signed into September 21, 1996, mandating unequal treatment of legally married same-sex couples, selectively depriving

them of the 1,138 protections and responsibilities that marriage triggers at the federal level. DOMA was overturned on 26 June, 2013.

*Enlisted:* Soldiers serving in the armed forces in the ranks below those of commissioned officer or warrant officer.

*Gay:* For the purpose of this study, this term is used for males and females attracted emotionally, romantically, and sexually to same-sex individuals (Forbes, 2014).

*Heterosexual:* A term used to describe individuals emotionally, romantically, and sexually primarily attracted to members of the opposite sex (Forbes, 2014).

*Homosexual:* Although “homosexual” is a term with negative connotations for some, for the purposes of this study it will be used entirely as a scientific term to describe sexual attraction to members of the same sex (Eliason, 2014).

*Lesbian:* For the purpose of this study “lesbian” is a term used to describe women attracted romantically, erotically, and emotionally to other women (Crespi, 2015).

*Lived experience:* “A class of significant or memorable events, whose true meaning is something we come to recognize in retrospect” (Burch, 2002, p. 133).

*Military base or military post:* A facility owned and operated by a branch of the military services, used for various purposes such as training, performing operations, storing equipment or weapons, and shelter of military personnel and their families (DOD, 2009).

*Military services:* Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and the Coast Guard.

*Phenomenology:* A process by which knowledge and understanding is gained “by the habits of the natural world” (Moustakas, 1994) or via information gathered from



“everyday experience” (Moustakas, 1994) terms unique to the study was provided in the proposal and then was expanded on as they emerged through the study.

*Reintegration:* The transitional process veterans and their families experience upon return from combat in which each individual creates a different senses of meaning and narratives about the experience of deployment, combat, and the war. This process can involve different types of shared and individual adjustment (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994).

*Same-sex military couple/spouse:* Couples eligible for military spousal benefits by virtue of having legally married in a state permitting same-sex marriages. For purposes of this study, the same-sex spouse is the non-military member of this union.

(<http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2013/docs/Further-Guidance-on-Extending-Benefits-to-Same-Sex-Spouses-of-Military-M.pdf>)

*Transitional factors:* The features of everyday living that help or hinder with the reintegration and readjustment of life after war (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994). These may include daily experiences, challenges, expectations, roles, and responsibilities that directly relate to the marital dyad and family unit.

*Veteran:* An individual who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces. For the purpose of this study, the terms veterans will refer to veterans of the U.S. Army (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

A significant gap in the literature exists examining the lives of same-sex military spouses in general, and same-sex spouse of female enlisted soldiers in particular. This research is generated by the assumption that these same-sex spouses must manage the

same stressors and challenges that face their heterosexual counterparts. Due to their status as a sexual minority that had been until recently banned from being a part of the military community, it is also assumed such same-sex military spouses will face challenges unique to those faced by heterosexual military spouses. Additionally, this research operates on the assumption that this group of same-sex military spouses similarly require and will benefit from support networks as do their heterosexual spouses.

Access to same-sex spouses of female enlisted soldiers will be organized through members of LGBT support organizations such as the American Military Partner's Association (AMPA) using their Facebook forum, and it is assumed that the same-sex spouses choosing to participate in this study can be relied upon to respond honestly and with sufficient detail to interview questions which will allow for a rich understanding of their experience. Further, because experiences between heterosexual military spouses vary according to their spouse's rank (McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010), the experiences of same-sex spouse experiences may also vary slightly across the rank structure (from enlisted spouses to officer's spouses). Because active duty male soldiers outnumber active duty female soldiers, support groups have traditionally been used by female spouses. Male spouses of female soldiers do not typically use support groups offered the traditional female spouse (Pedersen, 2010), therefore this study will focus on female spouses of non-heterosexual enlisted soldiers. For this reason the results of this research – centering on the lived experience of same-sex military spouse of US Army soldiers - may not be generalizable to same-sex male enlisted couples or same-sex officer's couples within the Army or other branches of the armed forces.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this research will involve focusing on stressors and challenges faced by same-sex spouses during their spouses' deployment cycle, pre and post the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), and how they coped with these challenges. Studies abound that focus on military spouses and that have identified stressors inherent to a life under the military umbrella. These studies have also cited the need for and value of support systems in combating these stressors, yet no studies exist that address the military spouses who are in a same-sex marriage. Because previous studies on military spouses have noted that mission essential separations such as deployments cause the greatest stressors, the ten to fourteen participants to be interviewed will have been married for at least one year and will have experienced at least one separation due to deployment or other military-mission generated separation of over three months or more. Spouses chosen will have been married before or between these repeals and while their spouse was on active duty (Dec 2010 to June 2013) and were still married during the time of this research (Mar 2014 to March 2015).

Delimitating factors include number of participants selected - ten to fourteen spouses - and the branch of service in which their soldier serves: the US Army. The researcher will have access to several Army bases, and because of this, Army same-sex spouses will be chosen as participants. Because there has been no study of its kind to date, a qualitative research design was chosen - rather than a quantitative analysis of the phenomena - which, while limiting generalizability of the research, lends itself best to offer rich, thick descriptions of same-sex spouses of active duty soldiers. One further delimitating factor is that participants will be chosen via convenience sampling.

Although smaller sample size might weaken the generalizability of the research, and convenience sampling might lack validity in quantitative research, it is an approach that is best suited to the study of this phenomena. Another delimitation is the face-to-face nature of the interview technique to be used. The researcher must be vigilant about building rapport, not missing verbal or non-verbal cues, or otherwise lose trust which might jeopardize the quality of the data gained during the interview process.

Another delimitating factor is the decision to use only same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers as this group is not representative of all LGBT marriages in the armed forces across ranks. As qualitative studies have indicated (Bitner, 2012; McGowan, 2008), the lived experience of military spouses vary significantly based on the rank of their soldier spouse. A further delimitating factor set forth was the choice of theoretical frameworks. Lazarus' Theory of stress and coping lends itself well to the examination of the lived experience of same-sex military spouses since a significant body of research indicates stressors are inherent in a military life-style both in peace-time and especially during deployments to warzones. Meyer's (2003) theory of minority stress and Goffman's stigma theories were selected to illuminate the unique challenges gays and lesbians face in heteronormative societies.

### **Limitations**

The unavailability of a large sample group of same-sex spouses may be a potential limitation of this study. Another limitation might be that participants will only include same-sex spouses of female enlisted active duty Army soldiers. Because of this purposively selected, small sample, this study will focus on the transferability rather than generalizability of findings. Qualitative research uses smaller samples to attain deeper

insight and to describe a smaller number of specific experiences related to the lived meaning of same-sex military spouses in greater detail (Creswell, 2007). Many experts agree that sample sizes should be small to allow for in-depth examination of data gathered from in-depth interviews – as few as six to ten participants may suffice for data saturation to occur (Creswell, 2007, 2013; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005).

The researcher's experience as a military spouse may also have the ability of influencing the way data is interpreted since an over-rapport between researcher and participant may ensue (Creswell, 2007). Using interviews as a data collection strategy also invites the possibility of bias from some participants who may provide answers based on what the researcher wants to hear (Creswell, 2007, 2013). Additionally, participants may inaccurately recall events or supply self-serving responses to the interview questions (Patton, 2002). A further limitation is that military spouses are often reluctant to grant interviews or provide information that might potential harm their soldier's career which would also necessitate the limited number of participants used.

### **Significance of the Study**

Military spouses often face stressors unique to those of their counterparts in the civilian sector. As evidence by numerous studies, frequent moves, the difficulties spouses experience in developing careers or continuing their education, and frequent separation from family and support networks creates stressful conditions that adversely impact physical and mental well-being (Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). Studies across modalities have

identified that support via Department of Defense (DOD)-sponsored programs as well as support from a military community of peers can serve as buffers against the negative effects of stress caused by deployments and hardships caused by transient military lifestyles (Bell et al, 2014; Blakely, et al, 2013; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Faulk, Gloria, Chance, & Steinhardt, 2012; Green et al, 2013; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Wang et al., 2015). The review of the literature, however, revealed no studies published regarding military spouses married to same-sex service members in general, or female spouses married to same-sex enlisted soldiers in particular.

Although not new to military service, gay and lesbian soldiers have been permitted to serve openly since December 2011, and this policy transition, as has been the case with many others in U.S. military history, has not been seamless (Bailey & Williams, 2013). Despite the repeal and overturn of DADT and DOMA, respectively, gays and lesbians soldiers have still not been granted full acceptance and equal rights. Recent surveys indicate that of the approximately 75,000 gays and lesbians serving in the military, many still opt for a chosen-silence approach, though it was not specified if participants surveyed were married (Bailey & Williams, 2013; Burks, 2011). Regardless, chosen-silence in a perceived hostile environment creates stressors impacting not only the individual, but family systems as well (Ridge & Ziebland, 2012).

The body of literature on heterosexual and gay and lesbian couples indicates marriage to have a positive effect on emotional well-being (Crespi, 2016; Kertzner, 2009). Social support and integration to the larger community are central to the institution of marriage (Herek, 2015; Ramirez et al., 2013). Support and belonging may

also be benefits lost to same-sex couples in the military not comfortable in a society where heterosexuality is still the dominant ideology. Yet social support and community-based facilities are instrumental in helping military spouses develop a sense of coherence and control while adapting to new environment (Blakely et al., 2012). Research cites solid support systems – via formal or informal networks - as critical for military spouse well-being, helping military spouses cope with stressors inherent to a military lifestyle (Bitner, 2010; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Eaton et al., 2008; McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010; Rossetto, 2010; Villagran, et al, 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Saltzman et al, 2014; Wang et al, 2015).

This research adds to the body of literature on military spouses and may help unit commanders, chaplains, health care providers, and Family readiness Groups (FRGs) to better understand the needs of this unique and historically relevant group of spouses who emerged after the repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). This study could promote positive social change as it has the potential for improving social conditions by underscoring the worth, dignity, and contributions of this newly emerged group of spouses.

### **Summary**

Despite a lessening of deployments on the eve of the War on Global terrorist, active-duty soldier mission requirements still call for extended absences from families. Aside from managing a periods of time without their soldiers, military spouses often face additional stress-producing challenges such as having to leave families, support structures, education and employment opportunities behind in order to accompany their active duty spouse. Stress can be exacerbated as integration into military life and

communities is not often easily managed. A review of the literature has indicated stress has an adverse impact on mental and physical well-being and further indicates the importance of support groups for a smooth transition into this culture and its unique challenges.

Where the literature falls silent is with regards to the same-sex military spouse. Prior to the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), gays and lesbians were banned from serving in the armed forces. Since the repeal of DADT and the overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the same-sex military spouse has been included in the military family. However, the literature reviewed indicates that although society has become more accepting of the LGBT community, discrimination against this community is still very much in evidence. Crimes against LGBT population consistently rank third on the list of the FBI's most reported hate-crimes since the 1990's – and this since the 1990's. Policy changes such as the DADT-repeal and the overturn of DOMA have thrust a suddenly legitimized group of people into a population that had previously discriminated against them. Further, the Department of Defense (DOD) has prepared its military population and families for these policy changes with little more than a PowerPoint presentation (Allsep, 2013). As Meyer's (2003) minority stress theory suggests, stress and tension occur when attempting to manage a sexual minority identity in a heteronormative environment. Conceivably, then, same-sex military spouses might face stressors entirely unique to those of heterosexual military spouses.

This research will not only contribute to a body of literature that addresses life as a military spouse, but could contribute one of the first foundational studies in understanding same-sex military spouses, specifically those same-sex spouses married to



female enlisted active duty soldiers. Social implications may include a greater understanding of this minority within the military community and facilitate additional or improved support networks where needed for this unique group of spouses. The results of this research will further be directly applicable to unit commanders, chaplains, family readiness groups, and health practitioners in civilian communities and military communities who are within the chain of concern for military spouses.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Currently, approximately 1.5 million members of the armed forces serve on active duty in the United States, and more than half of these are married (Bitner, 2010). Although life as a military spouse has its rewards, the nature of military culture can make adjustment to it a challenge in many ways (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden et al., 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, et al., 2015;). Frequent moves, the inability of spouses to develop careers, and frequent separation from family and support networks has created stressors for these spouses not always faced by their civilian counterparts (Bell et al, 2014; Blakely, et al, 2013; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Faulk et al, 2012; Green et al, 2013; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Wang, 2015) . Additionally, ten years of GWOT has added to the strain. Between 2003 and 2012, the U.S. government sent 2.4 million soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan, and half of those soldiers deployed were married (ODASD, 2015). Approximately 71,000 active duty soldiers in the U.S. Armed Forces are assumed to be gay or lesbian although it is unknown how many of these soldiers are married to same-sex partners (Ramirez et al., 2013).

Previous research on military spouses has documented stressors and challenges associated with deployments in particular and a military lifestyle in general (Bitner, 2010;

Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees, Nerenberg, Bacharach & Sommer, 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). The need for spouses to establish coping strategies through social support networks has also been identified through numerous qualitative and quantitative studies (Bitner, 2010; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Eaton et al., 2008; Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). While one qualitative study (Pedersen, 2010) was found addressing the stressors faced by military spouses underrepresented in the literature, husbands of female soldiers, an important gap in the literature remains regarding same-sex spouses married to gay and lesbian soldiers. This gap led to the first research question: How do same-sex spouses describe their experiences as military spouses? Current literature also does not address whether these spouses experience the same need for support as their heterosexual counterparts, leading to the second research question: What are the perceptions of same-sex spouses regarding support received by military? The purpose of this study, therefore, was to use phenomenological methodology to explore the experiences of this group of spouses with regard to their need for support.

In 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 desegregating the U.S. military, which called for the “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services” (Newby, 2004). This order, as well as the 1948 passage of the Women’s Armed Service Integration Act granting women official membership in the U.S. military, led the military to be regarded as the best integrated institution in the United States.

Two years after these Executive Orders, however, Truman also signed the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, which in part directed sexual behavior of military service members, forbidding adultery and homosexuality (Bailey, Lee, & Williams, 2013; Crespi, 2015). Ronald Reagan continued this ban on gays serving in the U.S. military by issuing a defense directive stating “homosexuality is incompatible with military service” (Department of Defense Directive 1304.26). President Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign promise to end the ban on gays in the military resulted in the compromissory DADT which for the next 17 years would allow closeted homosexuals to serve in the military while banning openly gay and lesbian service members from doing the same (Bailey et al., 2013; Ramirez et al., 2013). President Obama’s signing of what would become the 2011 Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act afforded equal rights to gay and lesbian soldiers, but although recent research and Gallup polls suggest Americans have become more accepting of gays and lesbians in general, research also suggests many Americans still cling to negative stereotypes of these individuals, including gay and lesbian soldiers (Bailey et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2015).

Parallel to these policy changes is the changing nature of the military family structure. “If the military wanted to you to have a wife, they’d have issued you one” was an adage widely accepted up until the 1960s. The regular army was established over 150 years ago, and until after World War II, the draft resulted in an army consisting for the most part of single, male soldiers (Hauser & Slater, 2010). The All-Volunteer Forces Act enacted in the post-Vietnam era ended conscription, and in the wake of its dwindling ranks, the military sought to recruit members via monetary bonuses and educational benefits. Many began to view the military as a lucrative career option and as a result,

families became a regular fixture on the military scene. Currently, there are approximately 1.5 million service members on active duty in the United States and more than half of these are married (Bitner, 2010).

Though life as a military spouse has its rewards, frequent moves, the inability of spouses to develop careers, and frequent separation from family and support networks has created stressors for these spouses not always faced by their civilian counterparts (Bell et al, 2014; Blakely, et al, 2013; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Faulk et al, 2012; Green et al, 2013; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Wang, 2015). Additionally, ten years of GWOT has added to the strain. Between 2003 and 2014, the U.S. government sent 2.4 million soldiers to Iraq and Afghanistan (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). Studies on family member morale and reported behavioral health issues during and following Operation Iraqi freedom (OIF)/Operation enduring Freedom (OEF) indicate effects of deployments impacted not only soldiers but their spouses as well (Caska & Renshaw, 2011; Castaneda et al., 2008; Eaton et al., 2008; Everson & Perry, 2012; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014). Frequent soldier deployments means spouses have had to face even more loneliness and isolation coupled with the fears and uncertainty that comes with knowing their soldier is in harm’s way and may not, in fact, return home. While deployments cause psychological struggles for spouses, the period following homecoming can be just as traumatic (Faulk et al., 2012; Gorman et al., 2011; Green et al., 2013; Kees et al., 2015). Spouses experience double the rate of depression than their counterparts in the civilian sector which can, in turn, adversely impact marital relationships and the psychological stability within the family (Renshaw et al., 2008;

Lapp et al., 2010; Leroux, 2016). Studies across modalities have identified the need for family stability towards over-all health and psychological well-being (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Goff, Crow, Reisbig, & Hamilton, 2007; Green et al., 2013; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009; Kees et al., 2015; Mansfield et al., 2010; Leroux et al., 2016).

Research has shown that support can act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress due to isolation and deployment (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden et al., 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, et al., 2015). A crucial factor aiding military spouses both in war and peace has been support via DOD-sponsored programs or simply support from a military community of peers that accept and understand this singular lifestyle (Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Padden et al., 2013; Rossetto, 2010; Villagran et al., 2013).

Due to recent DADT and DOMA policy changes, a new spouse has emerged in the military lifestyle, the same-sex spouse. In today’s post-DADT and DOMA-repeal military, gay and lesbian soldiers are able to marry, and their spouses are now in the position to enjoy the same benefits afforded spouses in heterosexual marriages. However, although recent research and Gallup polls suggest Americans have become more accepting of gays and lesbians in general, research also suggests many Americans still cling to negative stereotypes of these individuals, including gay and lesbian soldiers (Allsep, 2013; Bailey et al., 2013; Crespi, 2015). How these negative stereotypes affect

the spouses of gay and lesbian soldiers is the focus of this study I wanted to know the lived experience of same-sex spouses in today's military.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand lived experience of same-sex spouses living in military communities. This chapter synthesizes the literature on the impact of military life and potential stressors such as deployments on spouses of active duty Army soldiers. The theoretical framework for this study was drawn from the literature on stress and coping, minority and sexual minority stress, and stigma. The application of this framework was directed toward understanding the lives of same-sex spouses of active duty Army soldiers from their own perspectives. The three main analytical components of this study were Goffman's (1963) stigma theory, Lazarus' (1984) theory of psychological stress and coping, and Meyer's (2003) minority stress model, which encompasses sexual minority stigma as well. The first section of this chapter examines the concept of stress and coping and minority stress and sexual minority stigma used in this study. The second section is a review in brief of integrating the U.S. Army, including the following the recent DADT and DOMA repeals, followed by a discussion of military culture. In the second section, I examine the role of the military spouse in the overall military mission. In the third section, I discuss the seven-stage model of deployment as well as negative effects of deployment and duration of deployment on spouses. In the fourth section I examine resiliency in military families and emphasize the importance of social support.

Through this research I hope to address the gap in the literature that exists about this unique group of spouses who, but for recent federal policy changes, have gone

largely unacknowledged, unsupported, and disenfranchised during their soldier's peace and wartime missions.

### **Search Strategy**

Literature for this research was located using Academic Search Premier Database, SocIndex with full text, Psych INFO, Sage Journals, and PubMed, Department of Defense (DOD) directives and websites. Broad search terms used in this search alone as well as in combinations: "same-sex spouses", "military spouse", "deployment", "social support", "Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) history and repeal", "Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)", "separation", "stress", "coping", "Women in the Armed Forces", "Integration of the US military", "social stigma", "Stigma and gays in the military" "African-Americans in the Military" "African-American families in the military". Reference lists in the articles and dissertations found via this strategy were also reviewed for further relevant articles using either Psych INFO or EBSCO host accessed through Walden University's Library system. The majority of literature found and reviewed focused on heterosexual couples in the military, and aside from a few exception, the military spouse was female. Therefore, when this review discusses the dynamics of a life under the military umbrella and the established need for support, it is based on the point of view of a military wife married to a male soldier. Dates for the literature ranged from 1969 to the present – earlier dates helped build a foundation and support theoretical constructs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was drawn from the literature on stress and coping, minority stress, and stigma. The application of this framework was directed



to the lives of same-sex spouses of active duty Army soldiers from their own perspectives. The three main analytical components of this study are Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, Lazarus' (1984) theory of psychological stress and coping, and Meyer's (2003) minority stress model.

### **Goffmann's (1963) Stigma Theory**

The term "stigma" can be traced back to early Greek civilization when citizens who had committed acts deemed offensive or immoral were branded. The branded individual was considered deviant, spoiled, undesirable, and dirty, an inferior member of society. In modern times, the term "stigma" does not necessarily refer to a physical mark but rather an attribute that results in widespread social disapproval (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Herek, 2015; Major & O'Brien, 2005). The contemporary stigma conversation can be traced to sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) who saw stigma as inherently rooted in social interactions and defined this phenomena as a discrediting social difference that yields devaluation or a 'spoiled social identity.' Sociologist Erving Goffman (11 Jun 1922 - 19 Nov 1982) is considered the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century who relied less on formal scientific method than on observation of human behavior to explain contemporary life (Ytreberg, 2016). The 73rd president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), Goffman began his teaching career at the University of California in Berkley, and became a Chair in Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania (Ytreberg, 2016). Goffman received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1977, and his publication *Forms of Talk* was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1981 (Ytreberg, 2016).

According to Goffman (1963), three types of characteristics are stigmatized: physical deformities, character flaws, and group memberships such as racial, national, religious, or belonging to a gender or sexual minority. Goffman (1963) held that stigmatized individuals are devalued, ostracized, discriminated against, and as such have less opportunities in life because of the stigma these individuals are believed to have. Those stigmatizing groups and individuals are described by Goffman (1963) as “normal” – individuals who do not deviate from societal expectations and norms. “*Normals*”, per Goffman (1963) tend to view their identities as “absent” or unproblematic Goffman (1963). Stigmatized groups or individuals have deviant characteristics that are either readily apparent (race) or invisible (sexual orientation).

Stigmatized characteristics are culturally determined and whoever possesses the stigmatized characteristic is devalued by society. The stigmatized are viewed as being morally deficient. Stigma can be experienced by an individual through either an awareness of the stigma in society or an internalization or acceptance of the stigma. Awareness means the stigmatized individual realizes that society may not accept them based on stigmatized characteristics, and acceptance means the stigmatized individual has accepted or internalized the devaluating properties of the stigma. Once a stigma has been internalized, Goffman holds that the individual’s social identity has been spoiled and as a consequence the stigmatized individual is denied full social acceptance – in some cases, self-acceptance - and that this may result in behavioral consequences.

Goffman (1963) proposed that when discussing stigma, one should think in terms of relationships and not attributes. A stigmatize attribute derives its status from cultural values – as such, what is stigmatized in one culture is not necessary stigmatized in

another. Additionally, stigmatization can also change over time within cultures depending on what is considered normal or acceptable in particular social contexts. From a medical perspective, homosexuality is no longer pathologized, nor can it be legally persecuted as in the era's pre and during Clinton's Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) (Burks, 2011). Stigmatization, however, is a powerfully detrimental label, changing the way society and individuals view and value themselves (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman (1963) described two manifestations of stigma – the discredited and the discreditable. The former case, the difference is known (i.e. a racial minority in a predominantly white culture or a female soldier assigned in a male-dominated field such as the Infantry). In the latter, the difference – or stigmatized characteristic – is not readily apparent (such as gay and lesbian soldiers, or same-sex spouses). Those with conditions not readily apparent potentially face stress and anxiety in trying to manage what they wish to reveal and what they wish to remain concealed. Jones et al (1984) state individuals with concealable stigmas face less negative interactions - prejudice, discrimination, and threats of violence, than do those with non-concealable stigmas.

Socially disordered behaviors per Goffman (1963) include: avoiding situations where the stigmatized person may feel uncomfortable or believes they are making the non-stigmatized group (“normal”) uncomfortable – in extreme cases, this might mean isolating oneself completely for fear of rejection. Another behavior is making efforts to conceal the stigmatizing condition, attempting to pass as normal, attempting to remove responsibility for the condition from oneself, avoiding confirmation of the condition (pre-Don't Ask, Don't Tell repeal, gay and lesbian soldiers may have taken opposite-sex partners to mandatory military functions). A third behavior is avoiding like-stigmatized

individuals or groups, or using the condition for “secondary gains” (as a rationale for failure in an unrelated aspect of the individual’s life – i.e. a soldier may have been passed up for promotion due to poor job performance and not sue to sexual orientation; a same-sex spouse may have problems connecting with a spouse’s organization because it is rank-based and is not discriminating because of her LBG status).

According to Crocker and Major (1989), individuals sharing the same stigmatizing condition do not necessarily share similar experiences with regards to their stigmatized status. Moderating factors include length of time since the onset of the stigmatized condition, in brief – the longer an individual has been stigmatized, the more time he or she has had to develop self-protective individual copings skills, or take advantage of the protection a group of stigmatized individuals can provide. A same-sex spouse who has lived in a gay or gay-friendly community may never experience stigmatization to an uncomfortable degree, but, within the confines of a socially conservative military community, might find that he or she represents a sexual minority. Another moderating factor is concealability of the stigma – those stigmatized characteristics not immediately or visibly evident may act as a temporary buffer to prejudice and discrimination (Jones et al., 1984).

Acceptance and internalization of the stigma is another moderating factor – some groups are more likely to accept and internalize stigmatization than others – to the degree that despite evidence to the contrary, the dominant culture’s perceptions trump reality. Responsibility is another moderating factor, per Jones et al. (1984), and stigmatization has been shown to be less detrimental for those judged not responsible for their condition (Crocker and Major, 1989). Centrality of the stigma in the self-concept also plays a

moderating role – the more central the stigma is to the individual’s self-concept, the more likely the behavioral implications.

Finally, Goffman (1963) postulated that serves the purpose of reinforcing social norms, strengthening and homogenizing groups by labelling, then expelling those perceived to have undesirable characteristics, creating a boundary between “us” and “them”. The stigmatization of “them” is an identity-producing practice, establishing moral superiority over the stigmatized groups or individual, and reinforcing the dominant culture’s claim to normalcy (Goffman, 1963).

### **Lazarus’ Theory of Psychological Stress and Coping**

Richard S. Lazarus’ (03 Mar 1922 – 24 Nov, 2002) work influenced psychology in many ways. Lazarus believed stress and coping were closely related to each other and to cognitive factors. Research conducted by Lazarus pushed the role of emotion to the forefront of psychology during a time when behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner were the most influential figures, and explanations for human behavior were often reduced to base motives such as reward and punishment (Amirkhan & Marckwort, 2016). Lazarus published his perhaps most influential book *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping* in 1984 with his student Susan Folkman. Along with Folkman and several other students, Lazarus launched the Berkeley Stress and Coping Project which greatly influenced world-wide research into the theories of measuring daily stress, emotional processes, and coping (Amirkhan & Marckwort, 2016). Lazarus won a Guggenheim Fellowship and in 1989 was awarded the Distinguished Scientific Contribution to Psychology Award from the American Psychological Association (APA, 1990). He joined the Berkeley faculty in

1957 after graduating from City College of New York and receiving his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh.

Since the 1960's, research on stress and coping has expanded and changed rapidly with no unifying theory to guide it (Appley & Trumbull, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Hans Selye's response-based theory focused on non-specific, physiological responses to stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Other researchers felt environmental factors played a greater role in understanding stress, while later research introduced relational theory which held individual perception of stressors effected the type of response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A cognitively-oriented psychologist, Richard S. Lazarus, rose to prominence in his field in the 1960's when his rational theory of cognitive-mediational within emotion contrasted with then-popular behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner. The stress and coping model Lazarus and later colleagues proposed included characteristics of both the environment and the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined psychological stress as a relationship between an individual and their environment wherein perceived threats outweigh actual threats. The threats are further seen as beyond the scope of an individual's perceived coping resources, triggering a stress response. One individual's threat, however, might be another's challenge in a positive sense – much depends on how threat is defined and how one perceives one's own strength and coping abilities per Lazarus et al.'s transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 1997; Folkman & Greer, 2000).

How individuals perceive environmental stimuli and their reaction to it involves three processes: primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An individual's initial appraisal of an experience can see it as irrelevant (of little or no consequence), benign-positive (potentially enhancing one's personal well-being), or stressful (potentially harmful). Evaluating the latter consists of appraising for harm and/or loss (the damage has already been done), potential harm and loss, but also for potential positive gain. Viewing a situation as threatening or potentially beneficial can also shift or overlap since individuals' cognitions and beliefs determine the primary appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A spouse new to the military, for example, might appraise a new situation (meeting the soldier's chain of command at a Hail and Farewell) as potentially threatening. Once there and meeting other new spouses, the individual might shift to challenge appraisal (the potential of making new friends due to shared circumstances).

The secondary appraisal examines what can and cannot be done about the perceived threat. Coping skills are assessed, strategies are considered, the odds of whether or not one can manage the threat are weighed (if the new spouse encounters indifference or unwelcoming cliques, he or she may draw on past experiences or consider whether or not to try and break through the social barriers).

Reappraisal occurs when new information – whether from environmental feedback or the result of one's own behavior and responses – upsets the balance of a previous appraisal. The spouse's concern about fitting in with a group of indifferent or hostile spouses may have seemed threatening and beyond his or her ability to manage –

until news of an impending deployment pushes the initial threat into the realm of irrelevance).

Military men and women lead a nomadic lifestyle. Per a 2002 DOD survey, half of military members move every two years (McGowan, 2008). Lazarus (1999) reports relocating from familiar to unfamiliar environments rates high on the stress scale. For the military spouse, this means finding new employment – or relinquishing their careers entirely - switching schools unless they are enrolled in an on-line university, leaving a familiar support network to establish new ones (Segal & Harris, 1993). Personal stress is subjective and while some relocations produce distress for some spouses, they can also produce eustress – military moves are sometimes viewed as a “clean slate” (Harris, 1993).

Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theoretical framework of psychological stress views coping as a managing process for stressors identified by individuals in the person-environment relationship. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Lazarus (1999) viewed the coping process as having three components: first, the perceived stressor is appraised; then, cognitive and behavioral efforts are drawn upon to manage the stressor; third, the efforts are changed according to their effectiveness. Internalized values and beliefs vary from person to person which may affect coping behaviors, as do environmental constraints. Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) theory of psychological stress holds that the coping process is comprised of problem-focused (PFC), and emotion-focused coping (EFC). Problem-focused coping involves appraising the situation, assessing one’s abilities, and taking action to change the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping is a form of acceptance of the situation whereby the individuals attempts



to control or adjust stressful emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both coping methods can be used simultaneously – a spouse preparing for his or her soldier’s deployment can accept they have no influence over the deployment (EFC), but pragmatically make plans on how to best use this time apart (PFC), drawing on family and community resources.

### **Meyer’s Minority Stress Model**

Minority stress is a broad construct used to describe the excess stress placed on individuals from stigmatized groups due to their membership in that social group. Ilan H. Meyer, Ph.D., (26 Feb 1956 - ) is an American psychiatric epidemiologist, author, professor, and a senior scholar for public policy and sexual orientation law at the Williams Institute of UCLA (Van Guys, 2009). Meyer has conducted extensive research on minority identities related to sexual orientation, gender, race and ethnicity, which identified social stresses as adversely impacting the mental health of the LGBT population. Among his most recent accomplishments, Meyer was an expert witness for the plaintiffs in *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* (2010), the federal case that overturned California Proposition 8 (Van Guys, 2009). Meyer’s theory of minority stress is a logical foundation for this research on same-sex spouses. Dr.I.H. Meyer developed his model of minority stress to describing the relationship of social stressors and mental disorders within the LGBT population (Meyer, 1995; 2003). This theory, derived from multiple social and psychological theories, examines the inferior status of minority group members in society, as well as prejudice, and discrimination (Meyer, 1995). Meyer (2003) explains that minority stress is additive to the usual stressors experienced by individuals, resulting from a conflict between the values of the dominant, majority culture and the values of the stigmatized group that possesses little social power (Meyer, 2003).

Research has examined stress and its impact on heterosexual soldiers, family members, and some research examines stressors faced by LBGT soldiers pre and post Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy (Burks, 2011; Bailey, Lee, Miller, 2013). As of this writing, no research was found addressing sexual minorities such as same-sex spouses in any respect, much less stressors this group might face. However, in light of research that examined stressors gay and lesbian soldiers reported - such as discrimination, and physical and emotional abuse pre and post-DADT - it is likely that sexual minorities such as same-sex spouses might face like stressors within such a relatively conservative social environment (Burk, 2012; RAND, 2010). Meyers addresses such stressors in his definition of minority stress. For example, in addition to the usual stressors experienced by military spouses, sexual minorities must deal with "unique and additive adaptations" - such as being same-sex spouses and sexual minorities in a conservative social environment (Meyers, 1995). Another assumption of minority stress lies in the chronic nature of being a social minority in a given social setting (Meyer, 2003). Considering that the Department of Defense prepared its military population for the DADT-repeal with little more than a PowerPoint presentation (Allsep, 2013; Crespi, 2015), this thrust a now legitimized group of people into a population that had previously discriminated against them. These federal driven policy changes align with Meyer's (2003) third assumption - that stress and tension occurs when attempting to manage a sexual minority identity in a heteronormative environment.

According to Meyer, the processes of minority stress can include: internalized heterosexism, concealment of one's sexual identity, expectation of rejection, and discrimination (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Connolly (2004) described heterosexism as an

oppressive force that, due to its pervasive nature, is not only endured but internalized by many LGB persons. Formerly referred to in the literature as internalized homophobia, critics noted that reasonable fear of physical and emotional abuse did not denote self-hatred and the phenomena has now been classified as internalized heterosexism (Herek, 2015; Szymanski et al., 2008). In a military environment where acknowledgement of LBG culture is being ignored, LGB soldiers and their spouses risk once again being marginalized which would prove detrimental to their physiological and psychological well-being (Meyer, 2003).

Research has demonstrated that internalized heterosexism as a result of anticipating and experiencing sexual minority stress, can contribute to difficulties in sexual identity formation, identity management, self-esteem, and reports of psychological distress (Allsep, 2013; Crespi, 2015; Johnson et al., 2015; Pasek, 2012; Szymanski et al., 2008). Anticipating or experiencing sexual minority stress can cause anxiety and strain or deplete coping resources (Meyer, 2003). Concealing one's identity—sexual orientation is, after, not visible—becomes an option to avoid the discrimination, prejudice, and stigma-related experiences unique to LGB persons (Allsep, 2013; Burks, 2011; Herek, 2015). Research has however shown that having to hide one's sexual identity over the long run has its own stressor (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Herek, 2015). Despite research claiming that the quality of life for LGB soldiers has improved post-DADT, research also shows that “there was no wave of mass disclosures of sexual orientation after repeal, and a minority of heterosexual service members reported . . . in an after repeal, someone in their unit disclosed being LGB or that an LGB service member joined their unit” (Allsep, 2013; Bailey et al., 2013).

## Literature Review

Stressors unique to the LBG population involve sexual stigmatization due to heteronormative ideals rooted in history, culture, and politics that confer inferior status and “relative powerlessness” on non-heterosexual behaviors, identity, or individuals (Herek, Gillis, and Cogan, 2015). Hash (2013) maintains that ecologically, sexual stigma occurs wherever heterosexism is the norm, that the environment – home, school, church, work place, etc – serves as a “...constant reminder for the potential to be stigmatized”. The potential for sexual minority stressors loom before same-sex spouse of LBG soldiers in addition to stressors already inherent in a life spent within a military environment.

Studies abound that depict the military culture as demanding, challenging and stressful for military spouses (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). These stressors include feelings of isolation resulting from transitions from civilian to military communities and being uprooted from family and friends; feelings of helplessness and isolation during their soldier’s deployment or absence due to military training; anger and anxiety due to loss of identity since careers and school are often put on hold in order to accompany one’s soldier to different places of duty, and loneliness if no support systems are accessible (Bowen et al., 2013; Rossetto, 2010; Saltzman et al., 2014; Villagran, et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Although stress is inevitable and at times even useful, chronic, severe stress has been cited as a major contributor to depression, as well as linked to mental disorders including Adjustment Disorder, Acute Stress Disorder, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Lapp et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Peebles-Kleiger, & Kleiger, 1994). Physiological disorders such as high blood pressure,

stroke, obesity, and other disease have also been linked to chronic stress (Lazarus, 1999; Brosschot, Gerin, & Thayer, 2006).

Further, after conducting a meta-analysis on social support studies, Berkman and Glass (2003) concluded that people who are socially isolated or disconnected to others – such as gays in the military have been pre-DADT and DOMA - have between two and five times the risk of dying from all causes compared to individuals with strong ties to others and their community. Berkman and Glass (2003) posit that one of the strongest ties one can have with another is the marital relationship. A 20-year longitudinal study also indicated social support – if positive – has a beneficial effect on both mental and physical health (Hakulinen, Pulkki-Råback, Jokela, Ferrie, Aalto, Virtanen & Elovainio, 2016). Research indicates that that gay and lesbian married couples report greater psychological well-being and a reduction in vulnerability to psychological disorders (Bostwick et al., 2014; Crespi, 2015; Hash & Rogers, 2013; Kertzner, 2009), a health benefit historically reserved for heterosexuals. Negative social contacts, however, would adversely affect mental and physical well-being, especially among adults (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; English & Carstensen, 2014; Rossetto, 2010). Until recently, most gays and lesbians in the military have not had the option of marriage – good or bad – made available to them. Although much research exists on the effects of marital status and heterosexual couples, no literature exists on the impact of marriage on health and happiness of gay and lesbian soldiers and their same-sex spouses. Little research exists on the effects of discrimination and stigmatization on the marital well-being on African-American soldiers and their family members, either, aside from brief research comparing the rate of divorce among African American couples in the military to their civilian

counterparts. Much research has been conducted on the concept of stress and the soldiers – particularly on the emotional reaction to stress in combat (Lazarus, 1993). More recently researchers have examined the concept of stress, resilience, and coping among spouses of activity duty soldiers – all though, to date, none have focused on same-sex spouses. And although research has focused on the effects of stigmatization on the well-being of LBG populations and African Americans in the civilian sector, few academic journals feature articles on how stigmatization impacts African American service members and their families, even less has been written on the LGB military population post-DADT and DOMA repeals, and no literature exists on how the spouses of the latter fare under the military umbrella (Burks, 2011; Estrada & Deconstanza, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2012),

### **Opening the Ranks: Integrating the U.S. Armed Forces**

Although often regarded as the one of the most diversified institutions in the United States, the US military remains fundamentally patriarchal in nature (Allsep, 2013; Johnston et al., 2015; Herek, 2015; Howard & Prividera, 2012). Military heterosexuality remains the dominant ideology, and service in the military has traditionally represented a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood for many generations, defining what it means to “be a man” (Herek, 2015; Parco & Levy, 2013). Intending to extend this right to African Americans prompted President Roosevelt’s 1941 Executive Order 8802 which prohibited racial discrimination in the military, and President Truman’s 1948 Executive order 9981 to desegregate its ranks (Keller, 1980; Lee, 2009; Wintermute, 2012). Equality was a long time coming, however, as African-Americans soldiers and their families still faced segregation on and off military bases up to twenty years later, and

today's African American soldiers are still critically underrepresented in senior leadership positions (Jefferson, 2003; Lee, 2009).

Discrimination has also characterized women's integration into the armed forces. Despite policy changes over the past fifty years, women are just now breaking through the glass ceiling into combat positions traditionally reserved for males (Allsep, 2013; Prividera & Howard, 2012). Integrating women into an institution historically defined by its absence of women can be viewed as a threat to feminize the dominant culture. While this researcher found no studies other than those of an historical nature that addressed stress, stigma, and the African American soldiers, the effects of marginalization and harassment on female soldiers have been well-documented (Allsep, 2013; Bazz & Stern, 2011; Howard & Prividera, 2012; Prividera & Howard, 2012; Burns, Grindlay, Holt, Manski, & Grossman, 2014; Parco & Levy, 2013; Segal et al., 2016). Burns et al.'s (2014) qualitative study of female soldiers cited negative feelings such as guilt, not being believed, and stigmatization as barriers to reporting sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault. Similar studies (Buchanan, Settles, Hall, & O'Connor, 2014; Foyle's, Smith, & Shipherd, 2015; Lehavot & Simpson, 2013; Prividera & Howard, 2012) also indicate that the physiological and psychological effects such as headaches, sleep-disorders, weight loss, depression and anxiety among women in the military who face discrimination and harassment exceed those of women in similar situations in the civilian sector.

If African Americans and women have challenged the notion of dominant military ideology, gay men and lesbians serving on active duty have also challenged the notion of traditional manhood (Herek, 2015; Burks, 2011). Victimization of gays and lesbians in

the military has been well-documented using peer-to-peer internet surveys generated by the RAND Corporation commissioned by the Office of the Secretary of Defense pre-Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) repeal. In 2010, the Department of Defense (DOD) commissioned the RAND study to assess how service members and their families would be impacted by a repeal of the Clinton administration's Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) policy. More than 400,000 soldiers and 150,000 military spouses and LGB veterans were interviewed and it was found that the perceived risk to military cohesion was low. In an anonymous follow-up on-line survey for the still hidden LGB service member's population, RAND reported that of 208 respondents only 3% stated they were serving openly (RAND, 2010). Asked how their view on self-disclosure might change post-repeal, three-fourths of those surveyed stated they would take a "wait and see" approach. Post-DADT, surveys indicate that LGB soldiers still opt for a chosen-silence approach, fearing that revealing their sexual identity could damage their career (Biddix, Fogel, & Black, 2013; Burks, 2011; Lehavot & Simpson, 2013; Ramirez, Rogers, Tinsley & Grant, 2013). One reason might be that although policies change, societal attitudes lag behind, and although equal rights may be the norm, anti-gay and lesbian sentiment is still prevalent because although hate-crimes have decreased in recent years, crimes against the LBGT population have risen (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, West, & McCabe, 2014; Burks, 2011). Estrada et al.'s recent review of the literature on LGB military personnel serving post-DADT includes a 15-point proposal meant to "... inform ongoing discussion and help to guide future research related to the management, participation, and inclusion of gay service personnel within the U.S. military" with no mention of LGBT family members (Estrada et al., 2013, p. 348).



Almost four years post-repeal, and two years after the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), no research exists on the spouses of LGB soldiers and how they have managed the repeals and life under the military umbrella.

**The military spouse.** Early U.S. military policy focused on soldiers, not families. In 1874, Congress enacted a law banning married men from enlisting in the Army and this trend continued until shortly before US entry into WWII (Pasek, 2013). The military provided little to its soldiers aside from basic necessities and no benefits for the soldier's spouse or children as these were viewed as "unwanted burdens on the service" (Albano, 1994). Benefits were reserved for military officers and any enlisted soldier wishing to get married needed permission from the company commander. By 1953, a mere third of active duty soldiers were married whereas today there are more family members than soldiers themselves.

Modern technology and the end of the draft paved the way for the growing ranks of family members. Soldiers were trained on new equipment, and this training was costly. In order to retain soldiers, the military was forced to increase pay and extend benefits to spouses and children (Booth et al., 2010). Still, studies conducted by both the US Air Force and US Army found a link between soldier retention and family satisfaction with support and services provided by the military (Benjamin, 2005; Burton et al., 2009; Hosek & Mantorell, 2009). During the 1970's, the military was losing many of its technically trained soldiers, and in order to retain these created the Army Community Service Program as well as similar agencies throughout the armed forces in acknowledgement of the critical role family members played – by 2010, the military budget for family support programs exceeded 7.5 billion dollars . Currently, more than

half of the military's 1.5 million active duty soldiers are married, and of these over 700,000 spouses, 54% are under the age of 30, and 93% of that group are female (Booth et al., 2010; Department of Defense, 2008).

These military spouses can face stressors and challenges uniquely different to those of their civilian counterparts. The military culture emphasizes core values, customs and traditions, is headed by a chain-of-command that is absolute and responsible for sustaining operational readiness, (Adler et al, 2006). Military families routinely experience deployments (Blakely, et al., 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014) and relocation to new duty stations – to different states and often countries - every two years (Kees et al., 2015; McGowan, 2008). Lazarus (1999) reports relocating from familiar to unfamiliar environments rates high on the stress scale - for the military spouse, stressors include finding new employment (or relinquishing their careers entirely), switching schools unless they are enrolled in an on-line university, leaving familiar support networks to establish new ones, and feeling increasingly isolated especially when the soldier's job demands long hours or frequent absences from home due to training requirements (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). Adding to these stressors, military spouses are expected to uphold certain standards or fulfill social obligations since they are considered a reflection of the soldier's ability to lead (Drummed et al., 2003; McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010). The stressors of military life have increased due to deployments yet behavioral health resources are underutilized due to a perceived stigma in seeking these services (American Psychological Association, 2007; Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, 2007).

Although frequent relocation and deployments can adversely impact family stability, it can also increase individual and family coping (Everson & Perry, 2012). Similarly, post deployment is not always stress-free. It involves adapting to new routines and relinquishing newly acquired roles and responsibilities. The wish but inability to help the returning spouse deal with post deployment adjustments can overshadow the joy of homecoming (Everson & Perry, 2012).

Numerous studies have examined the challenges military life imposes on its soldiers and families and evidenced by numerous studies, military deployments ranked high on taking a toll on service members, their spouses and their families (Blakely et al., 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Villagran et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). The negative impact of deployments on soldiers including increased mental health problems, a higher rate of suicides, a greater prevalence post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and higher divorce rates has been well-documented (Saltzman et al., 2014; Schlomer, Hawkins, Wiggs, Bosch, Casper, Card, & Borden, 2012). Although far less studies have focused on military spouses than on active duty soldiers, a review of the literature revealed several quantitative and mixed methods studies examining the impact of deployments and how all phases of the deployment cycle impacted military families (Bitner, 2010; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden, Connors, Posey, Ricciardi, & Agazio, 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, et al., 2015). Many quantitative and mixed methods studies of military spouses examined the effect of military

separations and deployments on spouses' health and well-being (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Green & Lester, Kees et al., 2015; Mansfield et al, 2010; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014). Results were consistent with findings by Dimiceli, Steinhardt, & Smith (2009), whose study of seventy-seven military spouses from the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Hood, Texas, found deployments to be most stressful life situation they had encountered.

One of the issues is that there have been few qualitative phenomenological studies on stressors and military spouses. Of the few found, McGowan (2008) examined the experiences of eight flag officer's wives who acknowledged stressors of military life and deployment, but stated that the higher their husbands' rank, the less they could avail themselves of informal and formal support systems – perceived privilege had created a form of social isolation. Another qualitative study of seven officer's wives also examined stressors of military life and deployments with similar findings (Bitner, 2010). Although both Bitner (2010) and McGowan (2008) echoed findings of previous research on the adverse effects of deployment and military separations on m (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees, Nerenberg, Bachrach, & Sommer, 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield, Kaufman, Marshall, Gaynes, Morrissey, & Engel, 2010; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015), their spouse participants were reluctant to seek help. Because of their status as officer's wives, both groups underutilized formal support networks or behavioral health services, expressing concern that their husbands rank precluded them from seeking help as this might adversely impact their husbands career (Bitner, 2010; McGowan, 2008). A third qualitative study examining the lived experience of 17 military spouses, however, stressed increased self-efficacy as positive outcomes to

spousal deployment of military. Overall, Bitner (2010) and McGowan's (2008) spouses also noted feelings of accomplishment during their spouses' deployments, yet these officer's spouses experienced what Gottman (1963) explained as social stigma because their husbands senior positions kept them from using the support systems in place. Given that the participant sample in these studies was small and limited to officers' spouses, these findings cannot be generalized; however, the participants' stories were consistent with stressors faced by military spouses in general. If, however, compared to soldiers, spouses remain largely unstudied (Demers, 2009; SteelFisher et al., 2008), as of this writing, there have been no studies conducted on same-sex spouses.

**The same-sex spouse.** Up until the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) repeal in Sep 2013, same-sex spouses of soldiers were not considered part of that soldier's family. Basic benefits such as medical and dental insurance were not available to same-sex partners. Soldiers with same-sex partners were also not eligible for basic housing allowances, pre DOMA. These spouses were also unable to access Department of Defense (DOD)funded Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) support programs such as gyms and libraries which, per DOD, "...ensure high-quality, consistent community support for service members and their families" by helping spouses build informal social networks (Pasek, 2013; <http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/l/mwr> (last visited 11 Nov 2013). Other social networks denied these spouses were unit Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) and Officer/Enlisted Spouses Clubs for spouses on base. Goffman's (1963) stigma theory discusses hiding as one of the coping mechanisms stigmatized individuals employ to protect themselves from the stressors of being stigmatized. This certainly would have been the case for soldiers and their same-sex spouses who, pre-DADT, risked

the soldier's career if their sexual orientation were to have been revealed. Since no research is available on how same-sex spouses of soldiers coped pre or even post-DADT, one can only surmise from the literature available the adverse toll hiding one's identity would have on these spouses (Foynes, et al., 2015; Ramirez et al., 2013; Ridge & Ziebland, 2012).

**Support and the military spouse—what works, what doesn't.** Research suggests that social support can be credited for having a positive influence on psychological as well as physical wellbeing, and cites its positive role in coping with stressors (Blakely et al., 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Villagran et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). Further research supports social support can reduce negative affect and promote positive affect while also promoting healthier behaviors with regards to physical and mental well-being (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). Researchers are still not sure, however, if social support is just generally helpful or can if it is uniquely helpful because it buffers stress (Rossetto, 2010; Bowen et al., 2013; Villagran, et al., 2013; Wadsworth, 2013; Saltzman et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015).

Dating from the Vietnam War to the present war in Afghanistan, studies indicate that the cycle of deployment, particularly the duration of deployments, can adversely impact the mental and physical well-being of military spouses (McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1979; Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994; Rostker, Hosek, Winkler, Asch, Baxter, & Young, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2014). Social support, however, can contribute greatly to the over-all well-being of military families and spouses during

deployments and military moves (Rossetto, 2010; Skomorovsky, 2014). McCubbin et al.'s 1979 large-scale longitudinal study of military spouses conducted after the Vietnam War indicated social networks helped spouses cope with deployments. The study identified six main coping patterns that increased adaptability to separations due to deployments: (a) seeking resolution and expression of feelings, (b) maintaining family integrity, (c) establishing autonomy while maintaining family ties, (d) reducing anxiety, (e) establishing independence through self-development, and (f) maintaining the past and dependence on religion (McCubbin et al., 1979). Milgram and Bar's 1993 survey of spouses of deployed soldiers indicated that forming family support groups enhanced emotion focused coping strategies. These findings coincide with Lazarus' (1994) theory of stress which states that the manner in which stress is managed can buffer negative effects of deployments while enhancing self-esteem and a sense of coherency.

Social support is communicative in nature and researchers have discussed various categories and functions of support such as emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support (Bitner, 2010; Smith, Vaughn, Vogt, King, & Shipherd, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Social support is shown when recipients are given the chance to vent, when they are given reassurance, and when anxiety and uncertainty is relieved or lessened during times of stress, and when companionship is offered and provided (Smith et al., 2013). Emotional or affective support offers the recipient love, affection, and support, and opens the channels for the communication of feelings and emotions; informational support provides input, feedback, or suggestions and advice on how the recipient is doing, and while instrumental support offers tangible aid or assistance, advice or suggestions in terms of decisions, rules, policies, and roles (Lapp et al., 2010).

As noted in the previously discussed studies, social support could act as a buffer to physiological and psychological pathology during deployments or other stressors unique to the military life-style (Smith et al., 2013). Although deployments are winding down, the effects of multiple deployments are still impacting and will continue to impact military families for some time (Mansfield et al., 2010; Leroux et al, 2016; Wang et al., 2015). The results of Dimiceli et al.'s 2009 quantitative study involving 77 wives from Ft Hood - an Army base that has experienced a high cycle of deployments - indicated deployment ranked as the top stressor – echoing results noted from the Gulf War deployment era by Wexler & McGrath (1991). In both studies, lack of social support featured high on the list of deployment stressors. Various studies indicate that actively relying on social support networks and creating reciprocal relationships that can act as surrogate families have helped spouses adjust to deployment separations, relocations, and other identified military stressors (Bitner, 2010; Mansfield et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2015)

Although emotional support was cited as a frequently used coping mechanism, other strategies included acceptance, planning, active coping, and religion (Dimiceli et al., 2009). McGowen's (2008) and Bitner's (2010) qualitative interviews found spouses report that actively seeking out social support networks greatly alleviated stress of deployments, as did seeking out protective mentors – spouses who had experienced multiple deployments. Ashbury and Martin's (2012) convenience survey sample of military spouses and civilian at Ft Bragg and Camp Lejeune indicated that the military spouses enjoyed a higher level of support than their civilian counterpart. The survey, however, also indicated military spouses had a significantly higher level of marital



discord – social support, it seems, did not positively impact marital discord (Asbury & Martin, 2012).

In a quantitative study surveying 1,209 military spouses examining the effects on general well-being of perceived social support and its impact on stress, perceived support from other military spouses was the only type of support found as a significant buffer against stress during routine absences of the sponsor (Rosen & Moghadam, 1990). Later research indicates that informal support systems such as families, friends, and neighbors, formal support systems including chaplains, physicians, behavioral health specialists, and military unit's support systems such as Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) and chains of command help military spouses cope with deployments (Goodman, Turner, Hillier; 2013; Parcell et al., 2014). Goodman et al (2013) found that some military spouses felt FRGs did not provide support to nontraditional spouses – working mothers or spouses who had no children. FRGs sponsored by the Army to provide social support networks for families show underutilization by enlisted spouses and were perceived to be well-organized and more helpful by officer's wives than enlisted spouses. The FRG was designed to help the families during the deployment (DOD 2012), however a survey for Army conducted by Orthner and Rose (2007) found that less than half of Army spouses took advantage of the FRGs, with more than half of those participating in the FRG finding them not helpful at all. Although not perceived as helpful, the surveyed spouses nonetheless indicated that having someone to talk to that is outside of the home who understood the military culture made the deployment cycle easier to manage post-deployment (Orthner & Rose, 2007).

Several researchers have identified integration into military communities as being vital for successful military family adaptation to stressors since these communities provide access to the aforementioned support and resources (Green & Lester, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2010; Padden et al., 2014; Rea, Huff, & Allan, 2015). Other research focusing on FRGs (Parcell & Maguire, 2014) indicates support found in civilian communities is equally important – military spouses valued someone listening to their thoughts without always offering tangible solutions. In a study of reservist families by Pennington and Lipari (2007), for example, respondents stated both military and civilian communities were important support sources, though these families are traditionally geographically distanced from military communities.

Research examining social support for spouses of reservists - typically geographically removed from military bases - indicated that these used civilian formal and informal networks if unable to access formal military support networks (Castaneda et al., 2008). These spouses often did not avail themselves of many military support services mainly due to a lack of knowledge about what services existed, or the inability to access these services (Castaneda et al., 2008). Though much used by military reservist spouses outside of the geographical proximity of military communities, civilian support networks were not always satisfactory since these communities did not fully understand the needs of military families (Parcell & Maguire, 2014). Ineffective support, in turn, caused many of the reservist spouses to use informal networks of family and friends – not always satisfactory, either, since civilian family and friends were as well not always familiar with the military, its' mission and its unique environment family and friends and lacked use of formal military or formal civilian networks (Castaneda et al., 2008; Parcell

& Maquire; 2014). Again, support sources were identified but why, precisely, these helped was not. What research has found is that support is deemed helpful by the recipient when communication is geared towards the conflicting goals and dilemmas inherent in social support interactions – in other words, support has to be relevant to the situation in order to be meaningful (Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). Researchers found, for example, that adolescents considered expressions of understanding and assurance, and support via listening and distracting to be the most helpful forms of support in the face of one or more parents deploying (Bowen et al., 2014). Still, these adolescents expressed frustration with attempts to “understand exactly what we’re going through” and “constantly having to talk about deployments” (Bowen et al., 2014). On the other hand, researchers discovered that spouses faced with their soldier’s deployment and/or stressors of a transient military life-style actually welcomed being able to “talk through” stressors and found associating with other military spouses was a comfort, although one respondent replied “perhaps it’s just that misery loves company” (Wiens, Watson, & Boss, 2006).

In a study looking at support and bereavement, 25 participants who had recently lost a loved one reported that 80% of the support-statements received ranged from unhelpful to abrasive such as minimizing a situation, forced cheerfulness, avoidance, expressing exaggerated concern, and expressing inappropriate expectations (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984). Statements least helpful to most helpful were ranked as follows: advice/evaluation, interpretation/analysis, reassuring/support, questions, clarifying/summarizing, and feeling-focused statements (Davidowitz & Myrick, 1984). Although positive social support may occur more frequently than inappropriate or

unintentionally negative support interactions, the latter causes far more emotional distress, often adding to the recipient's stressors (English & Carstensen, 2014; Rossetto, 2015). Military spouses perceive help from within their own peer group as having more value than that of civilians who are "clueless about military life" – even when those civilians are close family and friends (Bitner, 2010; Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). Yet even within military communities there is diversity – among those serving on active duty (DOD, 2014), 17.4% of personnel are female; 13.5% are African American and 11% are Hispanic, and these numbers still do not account for other ethnic minorities. Post-DADT, more than 72,000 gay and lesbian soldiers are serving the armed forces (DOD, 2014). At the time of writing, there is no information available on the percentage of gay and lesbian soldiers married whose spouses have accompanied them to their duty station. If certain awkwardness exists in extending a hand of support, it is conceivable that a traditional military community might feel challenged in how best to welcome its newest community members - the same-sex spouse. At the time of this writing, no information/policies were found that identified how unit commanders and Family Readiness Group (FRG) leaders were instructed to prepare for the DADT-repeal and the DOMA-revision.

The support strategy has to fit recipient goals or needs in order to be effective. For example, person-centered support—an expression based approach—is considered the most effective type of emotional support, showing "compassion and understanding, and encouragement of the target elaborating on his or her feelings (Burlison, 1994, p. 145)

This approach, however, may not prove successful with all cultures or with individuals not interested or comfortable with discussing feelings and emotions.

However, recipients are not the only individuals harmed in an ill-suited support transaction – those providing the ineffective support messages report feeling more anxious and depressed after failed effort, where as a well-received message boosts the providers mood and self-evaluation (English & Carstensen, 2014).

Researchers have long noted that the transition from a civilian background to a military environment can cause stressors such as feelings of alienation, isolation (Burk, 2010; Morrison & Bearden, 2007). The effects of deployments on families have been well-documented in the literature and known to lead to feelings of helplessness, loss, disruption, destruction, and negatively impact individuals physically and psychologically (Huebner et al., 2009; Marek & D'aniello, 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Wadsworth, 2013). Separation of spouses and their soldiers due to deployments or other mission-related military operations may lead to an increase of mental health issues such as anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, sleep disorders, acute stress disorders, and adjustment disorders, as well as physiological distress such as cardiac disorders, hypertension, gastro-intestinal problems, and migraines (Cozza, 2014; Saltzman et al., 2014; Villagran et al., 2013). Research has shown that that military spouses feel supported both by the natural protective structures of a military community, and the support of spouses whose soldiers serve in the same unit as well as support from family, friends, and neighbors not associated with military life (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010).

Before the very recent repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), same-sex spouses had little choice but to use support resources outside of those the military had offered to non-LGBT spouses. No research exists as of this writing that examines military support systems for same-sex spouses during stages of the deployment cycle. No literature was found that addresses how same-sex spouses fare during this time, just as little information exists on just how many gay and lesbian soldiers served on active duty and how many of these numbers are married (Parco & Levy, 2013). So how do these spouses cope? Individuals facing stressor due to social stigmatization – such as same-sex spouses could conceivably be - are not necessarily facing insurmountable challenges. Coping and resilience have been identified as factors in combating stigmatization by researchers dating from Allport (1954) to more recently (Curtis, 2014). Research has noted that group solidarity and cohesiveness are important resources that protect minorities from the negative effects of minority stressors such as stigmatization, isolation, and discrimination (Meyer, 2013). In a qualitative study of African-American participants, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) found that attributions of prejudice contributed to negative self-perception and hostility towards Whites, yet living voluntarily in a racially segregated environment contributed to increased in-group acceptance, enhanced well-being, and over-all life satisfaction. Studies on the effects social stigma in the LBG community (Meyer, 2013; Ramirez et al; 2013; Herek, 2015) suggest LBG individuals also counteract minority stress by establishing alternate values that enhance their in-group identity and self-acceptance. The power of group affiliation lies in the ability to experience social environments that accept rather than stigmatize in a climate of support (Meyer, 2013). Further, stigmatized individuals find groups offer

community cohesiveness and once involve in this community, individuals are more prone to evaluate themselves with like individuals rather than with members of the dominant culture (Meyer, 2013). Where group-level resources, are absent, however, personal-coping resources may not be enough to counter the negative effects of stigmatization – especially when employing personal coping resources such as concealing one’s sexual orientation which can lead to adverse effects on well-being (Lazarus, 1994; Meyer, 2013). Researchers such as Meyer (2013) also admonish that not all minority stress can be neatly placed in one category. LBG individuals, for example, acquire their minority identity later in life than, for example, African-Americans. Thus, LBG individuals often miss the benefit of a self-enhancing and supportive social environment early on, a social environment that promotes positive self-identity, high self-esteem – thereby promoting greater self-promoting coping skills and resilience. In the case where the opportunity for group-affiliation has been lacking – such as in a military environment – how do same-sex spouses build coping and resilience skills? The trend has shifted from viewing minorities – such as same-sex spouses – as victims, viewing them rather as “resilient actors” (Meyer, 2013). Yet Meyer (2013) believes this is a slippery slope as this ideology places the weight of responsibility for social oppression from society to the individuals - failure to cope or become resilient becomes a personal rather than societal failure. This is in stark contrast to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) definition of stress as something which is conceptualized – viewed through the lens of and determined by an individual’s coping abilities falls into the former. However, with research addressing neither the topic of individual resilience of same-sex spouses, nor the benefit of group-identify, how are we to understand the unique needs of this new brand of military spouse?

## Summary

This section shows that the phenomenon of military spouses has been addressed in the literature with regards to stressors connected to military life style and deployments (Bitner, 2010; Castaneda & Harrell, 2007; Dimiceli, 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees, Nerenberg, Bachrach, & Sommer, 2015; Leroux, Hye-Chung, Dabney, & Wells, 2016; Mansfield, Kaufman, Marshall, Gaynes, Morrissey, & Engel, 2010; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, Tran, & Speers, 2015;). As such, the literature reviewed included studies from military medical journals, journals on gay studies, nursing journals, Department of Defense policies, and dissertations examining resilience and support factors underlying the military spouse experience. In this manner, the phenomenon may be viewed through a multi-disciplinary lens which is necessary if one is to appreciate the multifaceted nature of the military spouse experience in general and therefore may begin to appreciate the pioneering aspect of same-sex military spouse experience in particular. The literature reviewed indicates that the military has been ahead of its civilian counterparts by promoting social change and integrating its ranks, but that this process has not been without its challenges (Lee, 2009; Meyer, 2013; Wintermute, 2012). Still, negative stereotypes about gays, lesbians, and same sex marriages persist in society and it would stand to reason that these stereotypes exist in the conservative mind-set of a diverse yet politically conservative military (Franklin, 2010; Johnson et al., 2015; Meyer, 2013; Pasek, 2012; RAND, 2011). The importance of self-efficacy as a personal foundation, and military support networks in helping further foster social support groups have been instrumental in helping military



spouses cope in times of war and peace (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden, Connors, Posey, Ricciardi, & Agazio, 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, et al., 2015). Yet support does not occur in a vacuum and military policies governing DADT and DOMA revisions have failed to address the importance of cultural in fostering social change (Miller & Cray, 2013). As an example, African American soldiers and their families belong to two subcultures - the military and African American community. Yet noticeably absent from the research reviewed are studies addressing the African-American military family. Research has centered primarily on domestic violence in families of deployed soldiers – broken down by demographics and examination of divorce rates between African-American couples and Caucasian couples in the civilian and military sector (Teachman and Tedrow, 2008). A paucity of academic literature concerning the gay and lesbian soldiers post-DADT and DOMA repeals exists and none exists addressing the same-sex spouses of these soldiers. This phenomenological study intends to present the lived experiences of same-sex spouses within a military community. A phenomenological study can be an empowering venue wherein same-sex spouses may give voice and meaning to their lives through intensive interviews. At the very least, this study will contribute to the existing literature on military spouses. At best, it will identify the need for research that describes the experience of same-sex military spouses, and provide a modest start. The implications of this research may have a positive effect on the same sex spouse of soldiers, their soldiers, military community, the military mission, and society at large. As more studies focus on

same-sex spouses of soldiers, it may increase awareness for the experiences of these spouses. This is important as it offers the community an opportunity to attend to the unique needs of this newly emerging part of the larger military family. It is critical, as well, to understand the same-sex spouse's sense of community within the military community and to identify support service utilization and satisfaction.

A detailed discussion of research methods will follow in Chapter 3. Because of the existing gap in the literature addressing same-sex spouse of soldiers, a qualitative phenomenological design will be used to describe the lived experience of these individuals. This approach has been identified as the most suitable for addressing new and complex phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the qualitative approach with its open-ended nature and focus of the research questions is appropriate as it provides a complex, detailed understanding of life as a same-sex spouses married to soldiers (Creswell, 2013).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to understand the phenomena of same-sex spouses married to active duty enlisted female soldiers by asking the following questions:

RQ1: How do same-sex spouses describe their experiences as military spouses?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of same-sex spouses regarding support received by military communities?

A literature review examining the lives of military spouses revealed no studies addressing this relatively new phenomenon, a clear indication that this population has gone largely unheard (Bitner, 2010; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Padden et al., 2013; Parcell & McGuire, 2014; Rea et al., 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Wang, et al., 2015). The goal of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of this group of spouses who until recent government and federal policy changes had not enjoyed the same status of legitimacy nor had access to benefits afforded their heterosexual counterparts.

A phenomenological qualitative research approach was chosen to address the gap in what is otherwise a sizeable amount of literature on military spouses married to opposite-sex partners. Research on the opposite-sex spouses identified support received within military communities to be a crucial factor in helping spouses cope with the challenges and stressors inherent in a military lifestyle (Bell et al, 2014; Blakely, et al, 2013; Cozza, 2014; Eubanks, 2013; Faulk et al, 2012; Green et al, 2013; Kilpatrick et al.,

2007; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Padden et al, 2013; Saltzman et al. 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Wang, 2015). In this study I sought to add to the already existing body of research on military spouses from a new perspective. This fresh perspective was examined through the lens of hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenology because this tradition can best describe the subjective experiences of same-sex spouses as well as the essence of their perceptions regarding support received from their military communities (Creswell, 2009).

Participants were chosen on the basis of their self-identification with the LGBT community and marriage to a same-sex female soldier in the U.S. Army and who lived with their spouse on or within a fifty-mile radius of a military community. In-depth interviews were used to collect data, which was read and reread in the hermeneutical phenomenological tradition until an exhaustive description of the experiences of same-sex spouses and their perceptions of support within a military community had been attained.

This chapter contains an overview of phenomenology as both a philosophy and a research methodology. I discuss research methods and procedures used to describe the lived experiences of same-sex military spouses and their perceptions of support within their military communities. In this chapter I also examine the tradition used within the qualitative framework, providing a rationale for its selection for this research. An examination of the role of the researcher follows, along with research questions, participant selection and recruitment procedures, and data collection, management, and analysis plans. Finally, I examine in detail issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns and procedures.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

A qualitative research design reflects the nature of the inquiry. As such, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was chosen to answer the research questions:

RQ1: How do same-sex spouses describe their experiences as military spouses?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of same-sex spouses regarding support received by military?

Using semistructured interviews, a phenomenological approach could offer insights into the lived experiences of the spouse participants that might not be gained through quantitative methodology. Per Creswell (2009), reality is personal in nature. The clear benefit of the naturalistic approach of qualitative methodology, therefore, is that it allows the research participants to define the research. The personal reports generated through semistructured interviews provided a deeper understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and challenges in the lives of same-sex spouses living in military communities that until recently had denied access to these spouses.

Qualitative research methods are considered to be the most appropriate choice to gain a detailed understanding of lived experiences, particularly when attempting to explore new and complex phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2007; Ulin et al., 2005). Same-sex military spouses fall into this category of new and complex phenomena as they have been underrepresented in the literature, although heterosexual military spouses have often been the focus of quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative approaches might explain or predict through causal laws and theoretical propositions; however, this study was conducted to recognize, understand, and give meaning to the common threads of human experience.

For this purpose, phenomenological methodology was considered appropriate as it takes a biographic approach that allowed same-sex spouses to tell their story using their own words, unprompted by standardized instruments and measures, and allowed for a complex, detailed understanding of their lived experience within their military communities (Creswell, 2009).

Although scholars agree on seven unique phenomenological perspectives—descriptive (transcendental constitutive), naturalistic constitutive, existential, generative historicist, genetic, hermeneutic (interpretive), and realistic—the majority of psychological research is guided by descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The principles of descriptive phenomenology hold that only by setting aside (“bracketing”) the researcher’s prior knowledge of the studied phenomena can meaning and an understanding of the individual lived experience emerge; the social-cultural context plays no part in this research approach (Giorgi, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology, by contrast, rejects the idea of suspending personal opinion as not only impractical but impossible, suggesting that interpretation is a result of researcher and participant’s merged understanding of the researched phenomenon (Giorgi, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks a deeper understanding of the human experience by taking into account sociocultural contextual features as well as the collective understanding of interpreter and interpreted (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Both descriptive and interpretive phenomenological approaches were useful for guiding research into the lived experiences of same-sex military spouses. Both also might have brought to light the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own

perspectives, in their own voices, therefore perhaps challenging structural or normative assumptions. Of the two approaches, however, hermeneutic phenomenology was best suited for understanding and interpreting the lived experience of same-sex spouses married to active duty soldiers on a deeper level because it allows for recognition that the participants are not inseparable from the social, cultural, and historical contexts. This is an important distinction because recent federal and military policy changes impacted the lives of same-sex military spouses dramatically, changing their status from banned to legal members of military communities within a two-year span. In examining how these spouses perceive support within their military communities, an interpretive dimension to this phenomenological research may have generated findings that have the potential to further inform, support, or challenge policy and action regarding levels of support within these communities

Max van Manen's approach to hermeneutical phenomenology served to guide this research as this approach uses individuals' reflections on their experiences to reach an understanding of the deeper meaning of the experience (van Manen, 1997; 2014). As such, I used this phenomenological orientation to likewise gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and lived experience of support within a military community as perceived by same-sex spouses of active-duty soldiers. As van Manen simply yet eloquently stated, "A phenomenological researcher cannot just have a question—he or she must live it" (van Manen, 1990, 2014, p. 43-33).

Per van Manen (1990), the lived experience is the starting and ending point of phenomenological research. Congruence is a key factor in this approach because a true phenomenological question can only stem from the interest the researcher displays in the

phenomena as lived. Collecting data via conversational interviewing, for example, is a hallmark of phenomenological inquiry. More than simply collecting data, the researcher gathers experience via research participants in order to also become more experienced as well.

Van Maren (1990, p. 43) challenges the researcher to be constantly mindful of the research question, remaining oriented to the lived experience that made it possible to ask the “What is it like?” question. By attempting to “live the question,” the researcher should be able to provide insights which might reveal something of the essential nature of life as it is lived, in this case, within a military community for same-sex spouses of soldiers (van Manen, 1990, 2014).

To summarize, the focus of this research was participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon of being same-sex spouses of active duty soldiers in a military community. Quantitative measures and statistical analysis did not meet the objective of giving voice to a group of individuals marginalized pre-DADT/DOMA repeals and therefore failed to meet the research criteria of this study. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative studies, on the other hand, allow participants to share their experiences in their own voices and reduce the power gaps that often exist between a researcher and research participants. Per Creswell (2009), a qualitative approach need not be pure, but for beginning researchers, it should stay within one methodological approach. After reviewing many articles from scholarly, peer-reviewed journals in the fields of nursing, clinical psychology, and qualitative research, I selected a hermeneutic phenomenological approach because of its established theoretical and procedural guidelines (van Manen, 1990; Laverly, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Guignon, 2012).



## **Role of the Researcher**

Simply calling oneself a researcher is not sufficient. In phenomenological research, the researcher is the instrument, and language becomes the medium of inquiry - both working towards a systematic understanding of the phenomena under investigation (van Manen, 1997; van Manen, 2014; Creswell, 2009). Data for this research was therefore collected through a semi-structured interview process, an interactive process necessary as participant responses generated further inquiries that, in turn, aided the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomena in question.

As van Manen (1990) remarked, hermeneutic phenomenology asks that the researcher lives the question - embracing subjectivity and maintaining an awareness of self at all times. To describe the essence of lived experiences of a group of individuals - and to do their stories justice - requires self-awareness of personal bias and preconceived notions that might distract from the research at hand. An evaluation process prior to conducting the interviews is therefore necessary to identify and “bracket” (van Manen, 1990) researcher bias.

This researcher considered herself an informed inquirer due to her close proximity to the phenomenon under study, although she does not belong to the LGBT community by virtue of sexual orientation. This researcher considered herself to be only an observer at all times, experiencing the phenomena as explained to her by the research participants. She had worked pro-bono for three years as a counselor for the LBGT community. Additionally, as a counselor for the US military, she had had more than six years of client contact with military spouses, LGBT soldiers and their partners/spouses many of whom had revealed their sexual orientation to her prior to the reveals. The researcher was

familiar enough with challenges of military life both inside and outside of the LBGT population enabling her to ask relevant interview questions. The researcher had been a counselor (LPC) for seven years and had worked for a major US military hospital in Germany, as well as having served military populations on several Army bases in the Continental United States (CONUS). Through her work as pro-bono counselor for a LBGT population in Germany, this study had additional significance for her. Per van Manen (1990), the researcher ‘lives the question’ and her interests extend to learning about her chosen population on a deeper level. Although DeFilice & Janesick (2015) and Creswell (2009) discourage researchers from studying interests “too close to home” due to issues of inaccuracy and bias, measures ensuring trustworthiness and ethics will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

An appropriate researcher-participant relationship was established at the onset of the actual research and all interactions were conducted in a respectful and professional manner. Although many of the spouses knew her as a counselor, the researcher reiterated that she was conducting research in the role of a doctoral student and not in the role of LPC. None of her former clients took part in this study, thus avoiding ethical breaches. To avoid conflict of interest, no spouses married to soldiers working for the researcher’s husband or in his greater Brigade were interviewed. To minimize all possible risks of perceived power on the part of the researcher, the researcher assured participants that they are the experts while she was but an observer. The researcher was confident that her extensive background in dealing with the military and LBGT population would contribute favorably to her ability in building rapport with research participants. Having established one of the first LBGT support groups on a US Army base, the researcher had

access to a broad range of same-sex military spouses who expressed an interest and willingness to take part in this study. All data collection, transcription, analysis were conducted by the researcher under the supervision of her chair and research committee.

The researcher raised awareness of - and monitored bias in - a digital research journal with the file name “Reflections/Diss” as well as a hand-written journal (Hatch, 2002). Per van Manen (1997), when conducting phenomenological research, the researcher cannot help but be a participant – the challenge is not that we “... know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much” (van Manen, 1997, p.46). The researcher brought preconceived notions to the study – notions that in fact changed during the research process. Bracketing brought these preconceived ideas to the foreground, acknowledged them, then shifted the focus back to the research participants since theirs was the only personal lived experience the researcher sought to discover.

## **Methodology**

### **Target Population and Participant Selection**

Selection of participants mandated that these should have experienced the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2009). As such, potential participants met the following inclusion criteria: they were experiencing life as a same-sex spouse of an active duty soldier in the US Army during the period of this research, resided with their soldier-spouse on or near (work-commuting distance) a military community, were 18 years and older, and were willing and able to give informed consent. The participant group included same-sex spouses from the LBGT population, and from enlisted ranks,

and from an ethnically diverse participant pool so that a somewhat representative range of military experience could be gathered given the small sample size.

Once permission to recruit participants and collect data had been granted by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the recruitment process began with the researcher employing purposeful sampling methods by advertising on-line through members of the American Military Partner's Association (AMPA), a well-established and respected organization in promoting the interests of the military LGBT community. An additional venue for recruiting participants entailed conducting outreach at support groups - located on and off-military bases - open to military LGBT populations and their allies, and to which the researcher had access. Social-media was also a viable recruitment tool as this researcher discovered through her affiliation to support groups and AMPA members: many same-sex military spouses and their service-members recruited belonged to closed military-only LGBT Facebook groups. Advertisements placed via social media (Appendix E) introduced and described the study, and provided contact information (via email/postal mail address and telephone numbers). Respondents willing to participate in either pilot or actual study were provided with an informed consent form to sign and return. Fear of public exposure on the part of LGBT populations in a military community, however, was one challenge associated with sample recruitment (Ulin et al., 2005). Researchers who had conducted qualitative research on military spouses (McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010) experienced this limitation. During pilot studies of previous studies, some participants had expressed concerns about adverse effect participation in the study could have on their spouse's career, fears about compromised anonymity, and fear of reprisal from other spouses (McGowan, 2008;

Bitner, 2010). This researcher correctly anticipated similar participant concerns as well as participant fears of reprisal by members of the military community should their sexual minority status be revealed. Given the sensitive nature of the research subject, the researcher considered following the lead of Bitner (2010) and using verbal agreement to the informed consent document instead of a written signature as approved by Walden University IRB – her participants, however, agreed to signing consent forms after they had been assured of measures in place to secure data.

### **Sampling**

A purposive sampling of research participants, same-sex spouses who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation, was used. Participants were women married to same-sex soldiers that include junior enlisted and senior enlisted officers and included an ethnically diverse mix. Creswell (2007) cited purposeful sampling as appropriate when choosing a specific population, and when seeking to explore a specific phenomenon. Many experts have agreed that sample sizes should be small to allow for in-depth examination of data gathered from in-depth interviews – as few as six to ten participants may suffice for data saturation to occur (Creswell, 2009; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Twelve spouses of US Army soldiers were interviewed in order to cover the potential for diversity of experience inherent in military enlisted ranks as research indicated experiences may vary according to the sponsor's rank (Bitner, 2010; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Eaton et al., 2008; McGowan, 2008). Saturation is achieved – and data collection ended - when no new conceptual information emerges from the data, data redundancy is noted, or a repetition of consistent themes occurs (Creswell, 2009; Marshall et al., 2013).

After the presence of data saturation had been established, a final interview was conducted to confirm saturation.

Potential participants were identified through personal connections with the military LGBT community and advertising on social media. Once IRB approval had been obtained, the nature of the research was explained at both on-base and off-base LGBT support group meetings, and the search for volunteers began. A few participants emerged from each meeting and others suggested closed LGBT Facebook groups as a participant source. Those interested in participating were then given the researcher's contact information and invited to meet with or call the researcher within 48 hours of initial interest expressed so that she could further explain purpose of research, discuss informed consent and interview questions, address any questions, and outline issues addressed in the ethics section of this chapter. An email was sent to potential participants outlining the nature of the study, and asking them to identify a time and location convenient for them to be interviewed. This email contained the informed consent form which asked participants to sign and return before interview onset as well as a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) to identify participant gender, ethnicity, length of marriage to military sponsor, and rank of sponsor. All forms were checked for completeness before the interview was scheduled.

Because not enough participants had been recruited via the purposeful sampling methods previously addressed, a snowball purposive sampling strategy was employed by virtue of the researcher's connections to military LGBT population. This strategy involved the researcher asking individuals unable or unwilling to participate if they were

willing to suggest potential participants within their circle of acquaintances which garnered additional participants (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007).

### **Instrumentation**

The focus of the research questions, “how do same-sex spouses describe their experience as military spouses” and “what are the perceptions of same-sex spouses regarding support received through the military community” were consistent with the phenomenological orientation of this study. Quantitative methods using survey questions had not been considered appropriate for this study since no instruments were found that might have covered all facets of what it means to be a same-sex military spouse. Further, surveys or questionnaires located would not have provided the in-depth information needed to understand how same-sex military spouses perceived support within their military communities. A qualitative approach was therefore used as this method is especially appropriate for exploring, discovering, and inductive logic (Patton, 2002). The researcher chose a semi-structured interviews to explore and gather experiential narrative material as such interviews are consistent with phenomenological orientation as focus is on the research questions. The researcher’s questions were chosen with an aim of narrowing the gap in the literature with regards to same-sex military spouses. The questions asked participants to describe their experiences as same-sex spouses in as much detail as possible regarding how the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) repeals impacted the support they receive from channels that traditionally give support to military spouses.

In-depth interviewing was used to explore the experience, attitudes, and perspectives of the participants in order to gain a rich description and meaning of the

essence of the researched phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These informal conversational interviews were considered to be the most effective approach to develop connection and rapport with participants, and to establish a safe, constructive interview atmosphere (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that interview guides should contain appropriately six questions but in the interest of thoroughness and pending results of a pilot study (discussed later in this section), an interview guide was created consisting of eight interview questions:

1. What does it mean to be a same-sex spouse of an active duty soldier?
2. Please tell me about your initial and subsequent exposure to the military communities as a same-sex family member.
3. Talk about your comfort-level with regards to disclosing your status as same-sex spouse where not legally necessary (i.e. enrollment for legal benefits such as an ID card) such as in social settings.
4. Talk about your experiences regarding what you perceive that military cultures/communities expects of same-sex military spouses.
5. Please talk about your experiences regarding support/acceptance towards same-sex spouses within military communities by military sponsored services such as military chaplaincy or ACS/FRGs towards you as a same-sex spouse pre and post DADT and DOMA repeals.
6. Tell me about your perception of the usefulness for same-sex military spouses of support resources available in the military community.
7. Which resources do you feel are needed but not currently available to spouses?



8. What advice would you give a same-sex spouse new to a military environment with regards to resources, receiving support?

Probing questions were used to further explore the main questions, to help clarify unclear perceptions, contradictions, gain confirmation, elaboration, prompt continuation, or to explore topics suggested at by the interviewee where necessary. Such questions generated a deeper response and aided the researcher in gaining a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena of what it is like being a same-sex spouse in a military community:

1. Could you give me an example of that?
2. What happened next?
3. Could you tell me a bit more about that?
4. What do you mean by/when you said: \_\_\_\_\_?
5. When did you become aware of that?
6. How do you know that?

In qualitative investigations, the researcher is the primary tool of data collection and processing (Creswell, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because the researcher guides the interview and interprets the data, the integrity of the researcher-as-instrument is crucial and is addressed further in the ethical considerations section that follows. The interviews were recorded face-to-face, and transcribed as soon as possible to ensure accuracy of participant responses. A pilot study was conducted using five LGBT participants fitting the study criteria in order to improve validity and reliability of the research questions, and to ensure the questions asked what they were intending to ask. Participants were asked if they comprehend the questions and intent, and if they had

recommendations for improvement – there were none. Feed-back from the pilot-study determined feasibility of the research questions and would have allowed for changes if necessary therefore improving internal validity (Cone & Foster, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Digression from the proscribed interview questions occasionally occurred when participant responses presented new themes that the researcher explored in order to solicit more data. Instrumentation for this research also included a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), but no other instruments or psychometric tools were used in this research.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Data was collected at various Army bases to include but not limited to Fort Drum, New York; Ft Bragg, North Carolina; and Fort Benning and Fort Stewart, Georgia, as these are the bases where the author resided or worked at during the period of this dissertation. Recruitment took place during support group meetings on and off bases, and using social media opportunities such as participant identified closed LGBT Facebook groups, and on-line recruitment on the American Military Partner Association's (AMPA) Facebook page. Two support groups that the researcher had been invited to provided therapy sessions as well as psycho-educational/resource presentations and it was during the latter that this researcher presented her topic and requested volunteers. Interested parties received an email explaining research (Appendix A), the informed consent, the semistructured questionnaire (Appendix B), and a form requesting demographic information (Appendix C). The email also invited interested participants to contact the author for further questions. Participants meeting criteria could select location (on or off-base) and time of interview. Should participants have gotten deployed or transferred

during the interview process, follow-up could have taken place via SKYPE or Iphone Facetime where possible, though this was not the case. Since it was conceivable that some participants might have been unable or unwilling to finish the interview and follow-up process, the researcher would have been able to recruit additional participants via social media or support groups but this proved not necessary. Once the researcher had received signed consent forms from her participants, the scheduling of interviews began. The interviews scheduled to be approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration, one interview per participant; however, participants were encouraged to contact the research with any additional questions or information. Participants were also debriefed following each interview during which participant comfort levels were throughout the interview process were discussed, and during which time any additional questions and concerns were addressed.

Upon IRB approval, a series of five pilot interviews was conducted to establish time whether 60-90 minutes of interview time was reasonable and whether or not interview questions yield the rich descriptions of the phenomenon they were designed to. Actual interviews using a high-quality digital voice recorder were conducted after evaluations of the pilot interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and participants were given numbers (P1, P2, etc) to ensure anonymity of participants. Following each interview, the researcher used a journal to note other aspects of the interview – nonverbal cues, word choice, voice inflection, notable pauses – as well as her own reactions to the interview process.

Data was obtained through in-depth interviews at times and locations convenient to the individual participants. These interviews sought to “discover a rich, deep

understanding of a particular phenomenon (and to create) a dialogue between the researcher and the participant about the meaning of the experience” (Earle, 2010, p. 290). The interviewer developed a questionnaire for this research (Appendix B) to explore the lived meaning of being a same-sex spouse of an activity duty soldier - and how these spouses perceive support – from a psycho-social perspective. The interview included open-ended, background, descriptive, structural, and contrast questions (Hatch, 2002). Background questions elicited familiar information at the onset of the interview in order to put participants at ease. Descriptive questions were asked to explore participants’ views about what they perceive life as same-sex spouse. Structural questions examined how participants view relationships in their experiences, while contrast questions elicited information on how participants make sense of their social world.

Face-to-face interviews are common approach phenomenological research methodologies (Creswell, 2007). Participants are asked to recall or recount their experiences and to describe what those experiences mean to them. Finding ways to put the participants in touch with their feelings, thoughts, and emotions requires a researcher skilled in Socratic questioning techniques, and establish rapport is a crucial factor in stimulating the participant’s memory regarding lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Van Manen (1997, p. 63) distinguished between two types of interviews - those used to “gather lived-experience material (stories, anecdotes, recollections of experiences, etc.)”, and those that reflect with the interviewee about the topic at hand, encouraging closer examination of the meaning and lived experience – the latter was used for this research. Participants were also debriefed after initial interviews and follow-up

questions to ensure all concerns were addressed and to gauge their comfort level with the process throughout.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Changes in the way questions are asked may occur at times based on responses given during initial interviews. The researcher had therefore asked permission of participants to be able to telephonically contact them in order to clarify responses stemming from the review of interview data – this is to ensure descriptive data from each participant is complete, a key process in phenomenological inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Participants were provided a copy of the interview transcript so that they could review these for accuracy. All data was stored via password-protected wav file of the original audio tape; on password-protected personal computer; and on hard-copy transcriptions without identifiable information in a locked file in the researcher's possession.

### **Data Analysis**

Acknowledging that interpretation occurs within the context of the researcher's fore structure of understanding as previously described may be the first step in analyzing hermeneutical data. Interpretation should favor the participant and not the researcher. Reflection and writing should occur simultaneously as they enhance each other, therefore van Manen's (1984, 1997) techniques of phenomenological reflection and writing were used for the study. Heidegger (1962) stated that self-interpretation is an on-going human process which takes place against a backdrop of shared culture and meaning. It is important, therefore, to ensure that interpretations remain true to the meanings and context of the research participants, and not the researcher (van Manen, 1984). The notion that human interpretation expands to include human existence as a vast

interpersonal experience while individual interpretation is a reflection on - and a making sense of – self, aids the researcher in comprehending the participant’s description of their lived experience (van Manen, 1984). Simply put, human existence – researcher and participant, using a hermeneutical philosophical approach, is interconnected - bracketing one’s bias, suspending one’s notion to obtain a pure essence of the participant’s meaning is simply not possible (van Manen, 1984).

Thematic analysis involves a rigorous back and forth process on behalf of the researcher of reflective reading of the text from description to interpretation to critique. These multiple readings and reflections uncover themes, and van Manen’s “four essentials” (1997, p. 101-109) - broad categories of lived space, lived time, lived body, and lived relation - guides the researcher in thinking about the experience of the participants. This researcher found these four essentials were useful guides for thorough and well-rounded reflection on most human experiences and they allowed her to capture the essence of the phenomena of what it means to be a same-sex military spouse in a military community (van Manen, 1997). Van Manen (1990) further distinguishes between incidental and essential themes. Incident themes emerged through data analysis that were not necessarily unique to the phenomenon in question – for example, interviews with same sex spouse revealed themes of relocation, parental status, and age of the participants (van Manen, 1990). Essential themes, on the other hand, are those themes the researcher considered to be unique to the phenomenon being researched – in this research, for example, the perception of support same-sex spouses received in a traditional military setting was germane to the study.

The writing and transcription process followed each interview. Additionally, the researcher maintained a journal of observations, feelings, and thoughts related to the interview and documented other aspects of the interview session such as participants' non-verbal cues, tonal inflections, and hesitations and pauses that occurs throughout the session. Themes or commonalities arising that expressed the meaning of the lived experience of the research participants were noted. After multiple readings of interview transcripts, data was carefully analyzed in order to get a sense of the whole interview and to identify texts relevant to the research topic (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Creswell, 2007). In-text coding – the labeling of meaningful sections of the interview transcript using category names – was then used (Van Manen, 1990; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Participant language and terms describing the information was employed in developing codes. An experienced independent researcher and member of a local LGBT support group - served as an independent data analyst so that confirmatory analysis strengthened the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2009). Transcripts and the analysis were examined to determine whether the themes, interpretations, and conclusions drawn by the researcher was supported by data (Creswell, 2009).

NVivo11© qualitative data analysis software was used to identify, document, and analyze common emergent themes in the phenomenological data collected. Further, a chart relating to each interview was maintained. This chart included the participant's assigned number, age, gender, self-identified sexual orientation, date, time, and place of interview. Other information included length of time of marriage, exposure to military community/bases, as well as community functions attended or group membership on

base; it also noted whether or not the spouse's soldier had been deployed during their marriage. Additionally, pertinent observations, consistent themes or ideas heard during the interview were documented, and as the text was read and re-read, the chart was updated accordingly. Significant insights, idea threads, and emergent themes were also entered into the margin of the interview transcription. The taped interviews were listened to and transcript re-read many times – this helped the research reach a comprehensive understanding of the text, and clarify similarities and differences. According to Earle (2010), “it is through the writing and rewriting of themes that the structure and, hence, meaning of the lived experience can be discovered” (p.290).

Themes represent a synthesis of the researcher's deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). Codes were merged which helped this researcher organize a group of repeating ideas and reoccurring themes extracted from the data (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler, 2010). Repeating items were grouped, and links between themes were sought to further form a rich, descriptive narrative of the participant's perspective of the studied (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher soon learned that data analysis included far more than just grouping data into segments, it was an ongoing process of extracting meaning from the data which led to the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research – obtaining a rich, descriptive text that explains the phenomenon.

Although, Creswell (2009) stated that while today's researchers rely more and more on computerized programs, and small sample sizes are more economically and effectively served through manual coding, NVivo11 was nevertheless employed for this study. Additionally, in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel software, colored highlighters



and colored post-it notes were used for hand-coding. Themes that had emerged from the interview transcripts were highlighted accordingly and charted, and colors had been selected to represent emotions, events (policy changes/immersion or exclusion from military communities), social interactions, perceptions (rejection/acceptance) for user-friendly identification and retrieval. Individual transcripts were read repeatedly, reviewed for additional themes that may have initially been overlooked, after which transcripts will be compared to each other for thematic similarities or discrepancies. Key elements of participant responses identified during the interview transcript analysis were grouped into categories for further interpretation. A charting system was developed to track defining statements, categories, and thematic groupings as these emerge, and general to more specific themes were condensed into individual narrative summaries which, in turn, were compiled to generate a fully explanatory narrative representing the essential features of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Green and Thorogood; 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Building from the general to the specific, the researcher condensed thematic information into narrative summaries that provided textural and structural descriptions by using pertinent quotes from the participants to describe the experience and to explore its meaning (Creswell et al., 2009; Green & Thorogood, 2014). Lastly, these summaries were integrated into a final explanatory narrative that represented the essential features of the researched phenomena.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The concepts of reliability and validity generally apply to quantitative research. These concepts become applicable to qualitative research, however, if alternative definitions and methods are employed in order to establish legitimacy and authenticity

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility becomes the alternative for demonstrating internal validity while transferability is a proxy for external validity. Dependability represents a stand-in for reliability while confirmability replaces objectivity. These criteria informed this study's trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Several techniques are needed to ensure truthfulness in a study since qualitative research is so dependent on the researcher in both the collection and interpretation of data. Without standards for validity and quality, acceptance of qualitative research as knowledge might be compromised. Qualitative studies also include interpretations involving human relationships – thus, attention should be given in addressing the issue of researcher bias (Green & Thorogood, 2014).

### **Credibility**

The researcher establish credibility by clarifying her bias in order to make her research stance transparent. Transparency included an explanation of the researcher's beliefs, predispositions, and inclinations that could potentially have affected the interpretation of the study and data (Creswell, 2009). Reflexivity is a process essential to the integrity of qualitative research, and this researcher had previously explored her philosophical views and broad assumptions in this chapter by outlining her role as a researcher, and identifying why this topic was personally relevant to her as a reflective practitioner (Hatch, 2002). Credibility (internal validity) was further strengthened through member-checking – the researcher invited participants to review transcripts for accuracy, and further invited participants to review initial findings to see if these closely represented their points of view (Creswell, 2009; Marshall et al., 2013). This corroboration between researcher and participants ensured findings validated the

participant's perceptions. Presenting thick and rich descriptions is a third way to strengthen validity. The aim of phenomenological research is not to dispute or support hypotheses, but to paint a picture with words of what it is like to experience a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Through the use of thick, rich descriptions stemming from these research transcripts and subsequent texts, the researcher strove for a faithful representation of the lived experience. When participants review transcripts and research findings recognize the descriptions and interpretations as faithful as their own, a qualitative study is said to meet criteria credibility (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985).

### **Transferability**

External validity refers to the degree results of a study can be transferred to another. This criterion was satisfied by the researcher's comprehensive, thorough, and methodical commitment to reporting phenomenon and premises central to her research. Rich, thick descriptive data allows for transferability for those interested in conveying the research results to another context (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985). Findings of this research – due to its small sample size - may not be transferable to other conditions of same-sex military spouses within the armed forces or the general public. Reliance on the thick, rich descriptions of this research, however, render the findings representative of the population studied in this research.

### **Confirmability**

The researcher recognized the need to maintain an *audit trail* to establish the rigor of a study by providing the details of data analysis and decision points that ultimately led to her research findings (Guignon, 2012; Marshall et al., 2013). Also known as a conformability audit, this process provides evidence that recorded raw data had

undergone a process of analysis, reduction, and synthesis, and could trace textual sources of the data - such as transcribed interviews and reflexive journal notes - as the researcher moved back and forth through interpretations of the data (Guignon, 2012). The audit trail was useful especially for thited budding qualitative researcher as it permits others to follow the quality of the researchers work, adding accountability to the study (Guignon, 2012). Additionally, it provides a record of the research process and evolution of codes, categories, and theories (Creswell, 2009).

### **Dependability**

Dependability was established via the researcher's audit trail consisting of a timed and dated research log which contained a chronological list of all research activities associated with the study; a reflexive journal, documenting the researchers thoughts, feelings, and on-going reflexivity; and interpretation and coding memos to record analytic ideas, activities, and coding efforts (Creswell, 2009; Berger, 2015). Maintaining a reflective journal aided this researcher in monitoring own biases and interpretations of the phenomena. Such critical self-reflection and bracketing of personal and professional knowledge also helped the researcher in arriving at a deeper understanding of the meaning and essences of each participant's experiences (Berger, 2015). Journaling also included recording other observations such body language, eye-contact, conversational flow, and tone throughout the interviewing process. Maintaining this audit not only verified rigor and conformability of this researcher's data, it also assisted the researcher in identifying and minimizing bias and assumptions as well as cueing her when no new data was emerging and saturation had occurred (Creswell, 2007; Berger, 2015; Guignon, 2012; Ulin et al., 2005). Janesick's exercise for analyzing interview data (2004, p. 85)

suggested a peer reviewer can assist in identifying categories already identified by the research – categories that emerged even after the research repeatedly reviews transcripts in order to develop a coding system. The researcher met with an independent researcher and member of a local LGBT support group with experience in inductive qualitative research and the coding process with whom she could present her steps of analysis and interpretations. The researcher compared the categories developed by the peer reviewer with her own and was open to questions as to how and she reached the conclusions in her study as a measure to check personal bias in transcription review and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues are a concern when conducting qualitative research involves human relationships and collaboration (Hatch, 2002; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Participants must be able to trust the researcher as well as the research process, though initially they may not fully realize the broader implications of the information they choose to reveal during interview sessions (Hatch, 2002). This researcher ensured this study was conducted in an ethical manner. This was accomplished through the appropriate use of an IRB, informed consent, and confidentiality safeguard of all individuals involved in this research. By virtue of their consent, the IRB protected the rights and welfare of research participants of this study by reviewing the research proposal to ensure compliance with ethical rules and regulations governing treatment of human participants in research (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Permission to conduct this survey was from each participant as well as from the IRB at Walden. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and process and about

their right to withdraw at any time. Further, participants were informed that they may cancel what they had previously stated in interviews because of their right to their own words (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Further, participants were assured verbally and in writing that strict confidentiality would be maintained by assigning identification numbers (P1 to P7) in lieu of names, and that identifiable information would be maintained secure and separated from transcripts. All names, specific locations, situations, and stories were altered to protect participant identity. Recordings were maintained in a secured safe until the end of research after which they were deleted. The transcripts are filed on a password-protected computer accessible only to this researcher. No other individuals will have access to data. All information such as transcripts and researcher journals identified participant information solely according to their identification number. All data will be destroyed five years after their collection dates, and paper copies of transcriptions, list of participants' pseudonyms, consent forms and other related documents will be shredded. The data files on the researcher's personal computer and USB will also be deleted.

Participants were invited to take part in the study after written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the initial interview. The participants were advised that no physical risk to them was anticipated, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher acknowledged, however, that participants might experience emotional distress while sharing their stories during the interview process. Should this have been the case, ethical protocol requires that the interview would have been stopped and participants given the opportunity to withdraw from the research or reschedule and continue at another time. Additionally, at the onset

of the interviews, support services available were reviewed such as non-clinical Military Family Life Counselors (MFLC) and the chaplaincy which provide anonymous counseling on-base, while behavioral health services on and off-base were also available services, albeit with documentation. Participants were debriefed after initial interviews - and after any follow-up questions sessions - to ensure all concerns had been addressed and to gauge their comfort level with the process throughout. Additionally, participants were informed that they will have access to the transcriptions from the interviews and were invited to review, edit, and withdraw the final transcript interviews. The interviewer identified potential locations at or near each base that ensured optimum privacy for the participant, but the final decision for location was at the participant's discretion.

An appropriate researcher-participant relationship was established at the onset of the actual research and all interactions were conducted in a respectful and professional manner. Although many of the spouses knew her as a licensed professional counselor (LPC), the researcher reiterated that she was conducting her research in the role of a doctoral student and not in the role of an LPC. None of the researcher's former clients took part in this study, thus avoiding ethical breaches. To avoid conflict of interest, no spouses married to soldiers working for the researcher's husband or in his greater Brigade were approached or interviewed. To minimize all possible risks of perceived power on the part of the researcher, the researcher assured participants that they are the experts while she is but an observer.

There was no known or anticipated physical risk to the research participants. Should participants have experienced any amount of emotional distress while sharing

their stories during the interview process, ethical protocol required that the interview be stopped and the participants given the opportunity to end their enrollment, or reschedule and continue at another time. The researcher also maintained a list of the behavioral health specialists mentioned earlier in this section - Military Family Life Counselor, Military one Source counselors, the chaplaincy, and off-base counseling services - and would have been able to connect participants to these services immediately upon request, as the interviews all took place during the business day.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the general aspects of the research design (qualitative) and specific methods (hermeneutic phenomenology used in this research in order to study the lived experiences of same-sex spouses married to active duty soldiers. Heidegger's philosophical position was used as the researcher feels it is the best fit for understanding the phenomenon under study, and that it best represented the researcher's world view. A purposeful sample of seventeen spouses (five were pilot study participants) was recruited through outreach using on-line forums such as the American Military Partner Association (AMPA), closed LGBT Facebook groups, an on-base and off-base support group for the military LGBT population. Data was obtained through semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews and personal journals. Interview questions were designed to elicit information regarding the experience of living as a same-sex spouse of active duty soldiers within a military community. Confidentiality was strictly maintained through the course of the research process. Van Manen's (1997, 2014) techniques of phenomenological reflection and writing were used to analyze the data. Study findings



including processes used to gather, record, and analyze data, as well as research outcomes will be presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of a phenomenological study documenting the experiences of same-sex spouses married to female enlisted soldiers in a military community. Liberating the voices of these members of the military community might win a deeper understanding of the lived experience of these spouses who, until recent government and federal policy changes, had not enjoyed the same status of legitimacy nor had access to benefits afforded their heterosexual counterparts. Research on non-LGBT spouses had identified support received within military communities to be a crucial factor in helping spouses cope with the challenges and stressors inherent in a military lifestyle (Bitner, 2010; Dimiceli et al., 2009; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; McGowan, 2008; Wood et al., 1995). This study seeks to add to the already existing body of research on military spouses, and two primary research questions were designed to guide this study:

RQ1: How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?

In this chapter I examine the pilot study and setting and provide brief demographic details of participants. The chapter continues with a review of data collected and analyzed, moves to themes emerged and coded manually using NVivo11, and closes with a discussion of research questions in light of identified themes.

The theoretical framework for this research was drawn from the literature on stress and coping, minority stress, and stigma. This study used Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, Lazarus' (1984) theory of psychological stress and coping, and Meyer's (2003) minority stress model to analyze emerging themes in a narrative form. In Chapter 5 I provide results and discuss implications of this research.

### **Pilot Study**

The semi structured in-depth interview protocol (Appendix B) was designed to gather lived experiences of same-sex spouses regarding perceived support within a military community. A pilot study of five interviews was conducted at an on-post location (library) where I had visited an individual who had helped recruit participants. Prior to the face-to-face interviews, all pilot study participants had been read the interview questions telephonically to gauge their interest in the study. Four participants were satisfied with questions and sub questions during the initial telephone pre-interviewing sessions; only one suggested that deployment locations and times not be used as these could be possible identifiers. I took this into consideration and deleted such information as it appeared in subsequent face-to-face interviews. Pilot interviews were conducted at an on-post community center of a military base in an adjoining state and because all participants knew each other well, they had agreed to meet at the same location on the same date. As several spouses worked on and off base, the interviews lasted only approximately 20 minutes each. Subsequent member checking was conducted by e-mailing interviewees a copy of their transcribed interview (Appendix B) and questions were addressed telephonically. None of the participants returned transcripts with any questions, nor did they have questions during the subsequent

telephone follow-up calls I conducted. The face-to-face interviews were digitally recorded on a SONY ICD PX333 Digital Voice Recorder with participant's prior approval. No more than two days following each interview, recorded interviews were transcribed on a Microsoft Word document that was later imported into QSR NVivo11 on the my secure laptop. Impressions gleaned during interviews were jotted into a reflective journal as soon as feasible following each interview. Participants were asked clarifying questions during the interview process but no notes were taken because I did not want to interrupt the participant's reflective flow.

### **Settings**

I had no association with facilities and/or associations aside from Walden University for the purpose of conducting this study. This study was conducted independently by me. I facilitated data collection, interview transcription, and data analysis on my own, although a peer reviewer assisted with the latter for dependability purposes. During the research period, absolutely no changes occurred in the conditions related to the research that may have influenced participants or findings.

After I received permission to recruit participants and collect data from Walden University's IRB # 08-28-15-0144686, I employed a purposeful sampling method. I used advertisement via members of on-line forums such as the American Military Partner's Association (AMPA), which is a well-established and respected organization promoting the interests of the military LBGT community. An additional venue for recruiting participants was via outreach at support groups located off the military bases that were open to military LBGT populations and their allies and to which I had access. Social-media such as Facebook was also used as a recruitment tool because I had access to many

same-sex military spouses and their service-members who belong to these closed LGBT on-line groups. Interested respondents received e-mails that described the study and provided contact information (via e-mail/postal mail address and telephone numbers). Respondents willing to participate either as pilot or main-study participants were provided with an informed consent form to sign and return.

Fear of public exposure on the part of LGBT populations in a military community was a challenge identified with sample recruitment by Ulin et al (2005). During pilot studies of the research, some participants expressed concerns about adverse effects that participation in the study could have on their spouse's career, fears about compromised anonymity, and fear of reprisal from other spouses. I rightly anticipated similar concerns being voiced as well as participant's additional fears of reprisal by members of the military community due to participants revealing their sexual minority status. I respected the participants request for utmost discretion and deferred to participants regarding choice of location.

Eight interviewees agreed to be interviewed at my large military base rather than have me travel to their homes off-post or their active duty spouse's base. The interviews were subsequently conducted at an on-post community center (4), an on-post library (3), a dog park (2), and an off-post eatery (3) between November, 2015, and February, 2016. The community center had multiple entrances, and the centers were seldom used by other members of the community during our interview times. The room chosen was away from public sections of the center and were light and airy, with windows overlooking a private wooded area. The post library room used was also away from areas of traffic and was pleasantly decorated and comfortable. The dog park used was at a quiet part of the base,

also not frequented, and the off-post eatery had a conference room that I had booked at the participant's request.

The face-to-face interviews were all conducted with my inquiring about the participants comfort level at various points during the interview. The research was respectful of participant's time constraints as eight of them had met with me during their lunch breaks. Three clients brought lunch (community center), and two members brought their dogs (dog park). Participants were reminded at the start and at the end of the interview of various behavioral health resources in the community should the interview prove traumatic in any way. The participants appreciated availability of the resources but no one stated a need for these. Although some participants expressed appropriate anger during the interview when recalling experiences, the interviewees stated they enjoyed having been a part of this research; several, in fact, remarked on having enjoyed the insights the interview process had provided. Subsequent telephone follow-up conversations took place during various parts of the day at times set by the participants.

### **Demographics**

All participants were assigned numbers (Interviewee 1-12 will read as I-1 to I-12) to ensure anonymity. Participants for this study included 12 spouses self-identifying as lesbians ranging from 22 to 51 years of age, legally married to female enlisted soldiers. All resided within 20 miles of two military bases in the Southeastern part of the United States. One participant had resided in on-post housing during the initial telephone screening although by the time the face-to-face interview was conducted, she had moved off-post. Four of the participants (I-5, I-6, I-7, I-9) had prior experience with the military community as one or both parents had been career soldiers.

Participants discovered research was being conducted via an advertisement on American Military Partner Association (AMPA) Facebook page. The ad had been placed by one of its members at my request. Interviewees I-1, I-6, I-7, and I-9 were first introduced to the military community outside of the Continental United States (CONUS); the remaining participants were introduced to the military community with their spouses on a post in NE CONUS or SE CONUS. Spouses expressed concerns about adverse effects research participation might have on their spouse's career and fears about compromised anonymity, requesting identifying information be kept to a minimum.

Table 1

*Demographics*

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Years as Couple</u>	<u>Years Married</u>
1	52	Caucasian	10	4
2	43	Caucasian	8	2
3	45	African-American	9	4
4	28	Hispanic	6	3
5	31	Caucasian	5	1
6	36	Caucasian	8	6
7	40	African American	5	4
8	26	Caucasian	6	3
9	28	Caucasian	7	5
10	46	African American	16	6
11	24	Caucasian	5	4
12	29	Hispanic	7	5

**Data Collection**

The researcher chose a topic meaningful to her and one which carried social relevance in her military community. Same-sex military spouses are the newest members to the military family yet have been underrepresented in the literature examining the lived experiences of those individuals married to service members within the armed forces. Collecting data via conversational interviewing is a hallmark of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990). More than simply collecting data, the researcher gathers experience via research participants in order to also become more experienced as well. While conducting interviews, the researcher strove to be constantly mindful of Van Manen's challenge to 'live the question' which provided her with insights that might reveal something of the essential nature of life lived within a military community and perceived support to same-sex spouses of soldiers (van Manen, 1990, p. 43). , Remaining oriented to the lived experience that made it possible to ask the, "What is it like?"



question, and a not-knowing stance was maintained to provide a space wherein interview participants would feel comfortable enough to speak openly.

Given the intimate nature of the interview questions and the participant's absolute requirement of discretion, an appropriate researcher-participant relationship was established at the onset of the actual research that ensured all interactions would be conducted in a respectful and professional manner. Ever mindful of the potentially emotionally stressful nature of the interview process, the researcher often checked in with her participants to ensure their level of comfort and strove to maintain this through active listening, validating, and honoring their contributions. The collaborative space for this interview was co-created between researcher and research participants. Per van Manen (1990), the researcher made every attempt to "live the questions: by embracing subjectivity and maintaining awareness of self, personal bias, and preconceived notions that might detract and distract from the data at all times. Although not a member of the LGBT community by virtue of sexual orientation, the researcher nonetheless is a military spouse and behavioral health provider who has extensively counseled LGBT members within the military community. Self-evaluation and self-monitoring was conducted through the interview and debriefing process to identify and "bracket" (van Manen, 1990) researcher bias. A triangulation approach which included member checking, reviewing audiotapes and transcripts numerous times to ensure accurate representation of the participant's stories. The researcher's Dissertation Chair provided support throughout the process as well.

Once the pilot studies had been completed, the actual research interviews commenced at agreed upon times. Participants were encouraged to answer to the best of

their ability and reminded that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any point. When the researcher felt small prompts or additional clarifications for answers were needed, she interjected these. All participants were reminded of behavioral health resources in the community should the interview in anyway have been traumatic.

Fear of public exposure on the part of LGBT populations in a military community, was a challenge identified with sample recruitment by Ulin et al (2005). Other researchers who conducted qualitative research on non-LGBT military spouses (McGowan, 2008; Bitner, 2010) had experienced this limitation as well. During pilot studies of the aforementioned research, some participants expressed concerns about adverse effect participation in the study could have on their spouse's career, fears about compromised anonymity, and fear of reprisal from other spouses. This researcher rightly anticipated similar concerns being voiced as well as participant's additional fears of reprisal by members of the military community due to participants revealing their sexual minority status. None of the interviewees lived in on-post housing.

Due to some of the geographical distance between selected participants and the researcher- and interview participants' requests for discretion - all pre-interviews (introducing the research and research questions, discussing confidentiality issues and/or concerns, establishing rapport) were initially conducted telephonically. Eight interviewees agreed to be interviewed at the researcher's large military base rather than have the researcher travel to their homes off-post or their active duty spouse's base. The interviews were subsequently conducted at an on-post community center (4), an on-post library (3), a dog park (2), and an off-post eatery between November 2015 and February 2016 (3). Subsequent member checking was conducted by emailing interviewees a copy

of their transcribed interview (Appendix ) and questions were addressed telephonically. Of the 12 participants, two called to say they might have to withdraw – one due to her spouse’s promotion to a sensitive military position requiring heightened security clearance, and one who thought her spouse’s impending medical discharge would render her invalid with regards to meeting participant criteria. Neither, however, withdrew and called the research to confirm their wish to remain in the study.

As with pilot interviews, the face-to-face interviews were digitally recorded on a SONY ICD PX333 Digital Voice Recorder with prior participant approval. No more than two days following each interview, recorded interviews were transcribed on a Microsoft Word document which was later imported into QSR NVivo 11 on the researcher’s secure Lenovo Thinkpad laptop. Impressions gleaned during interviews were jotted into researcher reflective journal as soon as feasible following each interview. Participants were asked clarifying questions during the interview process but no notes were taken as the researcher did not want to interrupt the participant’s reflective flow. The face-to-face interviews were between 45-75 minutes in length. Follow-up telephone interviews were designed to member check for accuracy of data transcribed, review of emergent themes, and clarifications researcher or participant may have had, a process which took no more than twenty minutes for each participant.

### **Analysis of Interview Data**

The researcher transcribed 12 interviews from the recording device onto Microsoft Word document. Copies of each transcript were emailed to each participant for member checking of accuracy. As no changes had been requested, the researcher proceeded to code all interviews manually. Van Manen’s (1984, 1997) techniques of

phenomenological reflection and writing guided the researcher. Since reflection and writing should occur simultaneously as they enhance each other (van Manen, 1997), the researcher bracketed field notes from her reflective journal into the transcripts. Confidentiality was ensured by securing all transcripts with identifying information in a locked briefcase – participants had been assigned numbers - while digital data was password protected on the researcher's laptop.

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher no more than 12 hours after the face-to-face interviews had been conducted. Directly following each interview, the researcher annotated notes in her journal recalling participants emotional shifts or own reactions to the interview process. The initial interview transcription necessitated constantly pausing recorder to transcribe sentences. A second review assessed accuracy of first transcript to see if words had been misquoted or left out. Third and fourth reviews consisted of playing the interview through in its entirety, listening for pauses and tonal inflections and, again, to verify context and data accuracy. Online folders were created for each interview as were hard-copy transcripts which were placed in individual manila folders. Two copies were made of each transcript: one for reference and highlighting of phrases, words, and emergent themes, the other to cut and paste blocks on information on a larger butcher sheet of paper. Transcripts were reviewed first individually then holistically.

Themes began to emerge during manual coding and these matched noted themes in the reflective journal. Themes emerging throughout interviewee response were identified as noteworthy by the researcher and these, in turn, generated sub-themes. As themes and subthemes emerged, transcripts were revisited for further review of key

words and phrases and units of meaning. Highlighters in different colors were used for main themes noted and subthemes that evolved from these. The second hard copy was used to cut out phrases and units of meaning that were then placed on a butcher-flow-chart – this aided the researcher in visually connecting sub-categories to themes as well as track subthemes that connected to various main themes.

NVivo11 was originally used before the researcher resorted to manually cutting and pasting the themes and sub-themes. The researcher imported interviews to NVivo11 which classified themes as nodes – the central node are parent nodes, while the child nodes contain emerging sub-themes. While NVivo 11 aides in identifying and coding phrases, words, and passages, it does not, as such, analyze information. It does, however, use technology to enhance and simplify the researcher’s manual coding, aiding the researcher in examining segments of individual interviews holistically. Since NVivo as a tool only categorizes, it could find key words and phrases while skimming over transcript segments that reflected similar themes. Analyzing was the work of the researcher and this task was more easily completed using the aforementioned flow charts. While colored highlighters were used on the intact paper interview transcripts, different color post-it notes were used to represent sub-categories.

### **Identified Themes**

The main categories explored were perceived acceptance into military community, perceived support by community, resources, and military support systems (FRGs, chaplaincy), usefulness of available resources for military spouses, and availability and usefulness of support resources for same-sex spouses. Themes that emerged from research and interview questions concerned experiences of discrimination,

feelings of stigmatization and marginalized, resultant self-editing/adaptive behavior, mistrust of policy changes positively impacting attitudes of non-LGBT population, a concern for personal safety and safety of family/children, an almost unanimous sense of isolation, and an expressed need for support resources tailored toward same-sex spouses, as well as a need for culturally-sensitive training for the non-LGBT military population (family members and soldiers alike). Noted in the reflective journal were participant emotions that arose during the interview process such as anger, indignation, sadness, expressions of hopelessness, resignation, but also pride in their identity as same-sex spouses, their ability to prevail in the face of perceived adversary, as well as recognition of their own resilience, and appreciation of their strong marriage. Six main themes and emerging sub-themes identified in the analysis of data follows:

Table 2

*Emergent Themes and Subthemes*

Identified themes	Identified subthemes
1) Perceived lack of acceptance/appreciation	<p>No LGBT specific support services</p> <p>Very little recognition of LGBT community via Pride Day celebrations/inclusive language</p> <p>Little to no inclusion into non-LGBT support organizations (FRG/Chaplaincy)</p> <p>Contribution to military service seldom acknowledged (patriotism)</p> <p>“Nothing’s changed” – from pre-to-post repeals</p>
2) Perceived hostility/avoidant attitudes of non-LGBT others	<p>Hostile comments</p> <p>Being ignored/avoided by non-LGBT spouse/unit functions</p> <p>Discriminated against via denial of services (chaplain retreats)</p>
3) Perceived aggression by non-LGBT others	<p>Conflict avoidant</p> <p>Fear for personal safety/safety of family</p>
4) Mistrust of repeals/policy changes	<p>Unit not acknowledging LGBT population</p> <p>Rejection by Support resources (Chaplain/FRG/)</p> <p>Exclusion from Spouse Groups</p>
5) Need to self-edit	<p>Conflict avoidant</p> <p>Avoiding public displays of affection/self-identifying as gay in public</p> <p>Living “out” may affect spouses career</p> <p>May offend others (safety/career)</p>
6) Lack of Understanding of LGBT issues	<p>Lack of military having prepared units for repeal</p> <p>Lack of inclusive language</p>
	<i>(table continues)</i>
Identified themes	Identified subthemes

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7) Identified needs	Support groups for LGBT families Command emphasis on including LGBT spouses in FRGs Culturally-sensitive education for non-LGBT service-members/families Recognition of LGBT community via Pride Day Culturally inclusive language throughout military re what constitutes family
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### **Responses to Research/Interview Questions and Emergent Themes**

This research examined the lived experience of same-sex spouses married to active duty enlisted female soldiers. Two research questions guided this study: “How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses?”, and “What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?” The researcher designed a semi-structured interview consisting of seven open-ended questions with prompts or sub-questions as needed to clarify or further develop the research questions. The overall essence and lived experience of being a same-sex spouse of an enlisted female soldier was revealed by these interview questions and sub-questions asked individually to each interview participant. This information was supported by descriptions of perceived support and acceptance post-Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) repeals. Descriptive statements were chosen to give voice to the lived experience of this phenomena and how these spouses perceived support within their respective military communities.



### **Discrepant Cases**

Few cases deviated from the overarching themes. The identified discrepant case (I-10) mentioned having received a warm welcome into the military community although closing statements still indicated a fair amount of adaptation to dominant culture and self-editing. I-10 stated:

I have to say . . . my base was really good, the way . . . you know when DADT ended. We're way out on the west coast so maybe that's the difference. I mean, you know how they have multicultural day—for different well, special interest groups, I guess you call them. Well, they even had one for Pride and they had gays and lesbians – well, one was a senior leader - talk to the young soldiers. It was crazy cool. It's too bad, it's too bad . . . the grapevine has it we were one of the only bases that did anything.

Towards the end of the interview, however, when asked about openly displaying affection towards her spouse on post, I-10 answered:

I'll go to my wife's job where they know we're a same sex couples but I won't necessarily kiss her because . . . I don't know, it's I don't want to offend . . . I don't think heterosexual couples should PDA all over the place either, there's a time and a place for that and it's not at work! So I'm standing in line at the commissary and I see these young couples and I'm like, get a room, we're at the commissary. As a lesbian couple I'm for sure not gonna do it because grandpa over there he's looking at me like—so I don't want to offend anyone.

Further into the interview, I-10 elaborates:

“But . . . I go to the Christmas parties and the balls, I wear all the good clothes too, but I wear the good clothes like the guys and I’m gonna go dance with my wife they—they dance with theirs . . . so I do participate there, and they know who I am. I’ll let them restrict my life but only so far...”

Regarding support, all participants but I-3 and I-7 agreed resources such as cultural sensitivity training and/or LGBT support groups would be helpful in promoting inclusiveness. I-7 stated,

‘... Honestly, I don’t think we need . . . I don’t think anything’s needed . . . no workshops, no special training. I just think it’s gonna take time. That’s all that’s needed is time. You have . . . humanity . . . well, not humanity but groups of people just . . . living inside a box . . . they think, they breathe, they breed, they live inside a box...they’re judgmental. And you can’t . . . you can’t change that. You just can’t. They don’t accept. Only they can recognize who they are and they can then change if they want to . . . *If* they want to and I don’t think any amount of training is gonna change that, until, in my opinion . . . until people who live inside the box learn – really truly learn what true love is . . . what it means and what it is . . . they’re not gonna change their ways. Because when you have love . . . real and true love for someone else . . . it doesn’t matter. If two people each other . . . it doesn’t matter how they live their lives. You love them how they are. I believe and that’s the message: love one another. I don’t believe there’s anything that will help other than . . . than recognizing that. Cultural awareness, Pride month...nothing will change those people. The way to do it . . . to make that change . . . is just to . . . by living your life. I think that the older group they .

. . . they know and understand this is how things are . . . but to not have the younger people come up that way, I'd want, you know, the older folks to just . . . put up a front. Demonstrate that this is the way...because people learn through watching other people. Because if you're a senior leader, your people, your soldiers learn by listening and watching you. So if you're showing the right things and you're doing the right things, I think that in the long run, that soldier may think you're OK and they can emulate you...it's not living real because, you know, the old guard still thinks the way they think, but if they could just outwardly show...I don't know the answer..."

I-3 expressed ambivalence regarding a need for support groups: "Support groups? But not sure how secure we'd feel in those—would they be hosted by outsiders and held off the bases or by the command groups. I don't need support groups!"

The data revealed few variations in experience and perceptions regarding the perceived level of support and acceptance they received as same-sex spouses from their respective military communities. These perceptions that support was lacking resulted in every participant - to some degree – choosing to live discreetly over living openly with their spouses. Whether ostracized by on-post chaplaincy, Family Readiness Group (FRG) spouses, and unit commanders/leaders during military events such as chaplain retreats, family days, or promotion/award ceremonies for their soldier spouses, interview participants expressed reluctance in trusting that policy changes meant changes in attitude. Although some cited positive experiences, even those individuals mentioned practicing caution and self-editing that was dictated by the uncertainty of acceptance by a transient military population when, as I-3 stated, "It's a crapshoot because one day the

command climate can be full of strokes . . . while the next change-of-command sends you right back into the closet.”

Several participants also expressed anger at the lack of respect shown towards their active duty spouses despite the latter’s having served their country (I-4, I-5). Additionally, interview participants with children all cited issues of safety as a major concern (I-4, I-8, I-7, I-9), while others feared their spouses’ career had suffered or would due to self-disclosure (I-1, I-4, I-6, I-5).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Procedures outlined in Chapter 3 were followed to ensure accuracy of data. Member checking of transcripts ensured trustworthiness of data and participants were given the opportunity to add or delete information as well as withdraw from the research entirely. The researcher’s reflective journal was used to monitor and prevent bias, to organize thoughts, and avoid enmeshment and/or over-identification with participants because although the researcher is not a same-sex spouse, she is a military spouse and has counseled many members of the LGBT-military population pre and post DADT/DOMA repeals. Whatever bias the researcher was aware of, she navigated by bracketing, allowing each interviewee to fully divulge their lived experiences as same-sex military spouses without interruption or insertion of the researchers own thoughts, judgements, or emotions. The researcher’s years as a counselor ensured she used active listening skills and Socratic questioning to the best of her ability.

### **Credibility**

In this study, participants were in the process of experiencing the studied phenomena and the researcher assumed information provided by interview participants

was given as open and honestly as possible. Subsequent debriefing and telephonic follow-up conversations did nothing to dispute this assumption. Accuracy of information was accomplished via member checking – inviting participants to review initial findings to see if these closely represented their points of view (Creswell, 2009; Marshall et al., 2013). This corroboration between researcher and participants ensured findings validated the participant's perceptions. Presenting thick and rich descriptions is a third way to strengthen validity. The aim of phenomenological research is not to dispute or support hypotheses, but to paint a picture with words of what it is like to experience a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Through the use of thick, rich descriptions stemming from these research transcripts and subsequent texts, the researcher strove for a faithful representation of the lived experience. When participants review transcripts and research findings recognize the descriptions and interpretations as faithful as their own, a qualitative study is said to meet criteria credibility (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985).

### **Transferability**

Transferability (external validity) refers to the degree results of a study can be transferred to another. This criterion was established by the researcher's comprehensive, thorough, and methodical commitment to reporting phenomenon and premises central to her research. Rich, thick descriptive data allows for transferability for those interested in conveying the research results to another context (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985). Findings of this research – due to its small sample size - may not be transferable to other conditions of same-sex military spouses within the general armed forces or for world-wide.

Reliance on the thick, rich descriptions of this research, however, will make findings representative of the twelve participants interviewed and represented for this research.

**Confirmability**

The researcher recognized the need to maintain an *audit trail* to establish the rigor of a study by providing the details of data analysis that ultimately led to findings (Wolf, 2003). Also known as a conformability audit, this process provides evidence that recorded raw data underwent a process of analysis, reduction, and synthesis, and can be used to trace textual sources of the data such as transcribed interviews, and reflexive journal notes as the researcher moves back and forth through interpretations of the data (Wolf, 2003). Additionally, it provides a record of the research process and evolution of codes, categories, and theories (Creswell, 2009).

**Dependability**

Dependability was ensured through the researcher's audit trail consisting of a timed and dated research log which will contain a chronological list of all research activities associated with the study; a reflexive journal, documenting the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and on-going reflexivity; and interpretation and coding memos to record analytic ideas, activities, and coding efforts (Creswell, 2009). Maintaining a reflective journal aided the researcher in monitoring own biases and interpretations of the phenomena. Such critical self-reflection and bracketing of personal and professional knowledge also aided the researcher in arriving at a deeper understanding of the meaning and essences of each participant's experiences (Creswell, 2009). Journaling also included the recording of other observations such body language, eye-contact, conversational flow, and tone throughout the interviewing process. In addition to journaling, thick, rich description via participant's direct quotes, and written transcripts of audio recordings were used to ensure dependability.

## Results

RQ1—How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses?—is addressed by the first emergent themes, followed by themes identified by RQ2: What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?”

When analyzing the research transcripts, seven themes emerged that aligned with Goffman’s (1963) Stress Theory, Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Theory on Stress and Coping, and Meyer’s (2003) Minority Stress Model. Socially disordered behaviors per Goffman (1963) include avoiding situations where the stigmatized person may feel uncomfortable or believes they are making the non-stigmatized group (“normal”) uncomfortable – several of the participants cited not wanting “to offend” non-LGBT members of the military community with overt displays of affection between themselves and their same-sex spouses. Per Goffman (1963), this avoidant behavior might mean isolating oneself completely for fear of rejection. Another behavior is making efforts to conceal the stigmatizing condition, attempting to pass as a member of the non-stigmatized group, and avoiding confirmation of the condition – such as interview participants that avoided the use of gender-specific pronouns and nouns, referring to their wives simply as “my spouse”. I-5 stated,

I used gender-neutral terms all the time in public, at work, if I went to any kind of function, I would say my spouse, my spouse, my spouse . . . and they’d say “oh, your husband is active duty?” . . . it would just become so cumbersome and awkward and weird constantly having to think about it instead of being natural.

Goffman (1963) also postulated that stigmatization serves the purpose of reinforcing social norms - the stigmatization of “them” is an identity-producing practice, establishing moral superiority over the stigmatized groups or individual, and reinforcing the dominant culture’s claim to normalcy (Goffman, 1963). The latter was evidenced in interviews with participants who cited disparaging remarks by non-LGBT members. I-2 quoted such a remark as “I don’t care what you do in this life . . . but you’re gonna burn in hell for what you do!” I-1 reported hearing “Well, you know, you can pretty much marry your dog now!”

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) identified primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal as the three processes by which individuals perceive environmental stimuli and their ensuing reactions. Several of the spouses interviewed expressed initial relief at the DOMA/DADT repeals. Subsequent experiences of rejection altered their appraisal causing them to mistrust the military’s policy of inclusion. Reappraisal caused spouses to alter their own behavior (self-editing) in order to minimize/avoid stigmatization. Per Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping skills are assessed, strategies are considered, and the odds of whether or not one can manage the threat are weighed (spouse interviewed that encountered hostility or rejection from non-LGBT spouses and/or support resource drew on past experiences – pre-repeal – to consider whether or not to try and break through the social barriers – the majority chose not to. I-8 mentioned,

I look at these young couples and think, what a neat thing for them, to be able to be a military family . . . we’ve been able to do this in part but the restrictions, being invisible for so long . . . you kind of get used to it, you can never really shrug that feeling off of . . . not belonging.



According to Meyer (2003), the processes of minority stress can include: internalized heterosexism, concealment of one's sexual identity, expectation of rejection, and discrimination (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Connolly (2004) described heterosexism as an oppressive force that, due to its pervasive nature, is not only endured but internalized by many LGBT persons. In a military environment where acknowledgement of LGBT culture is being ignored, as participant interviews indicated, LGBT spouses risk once again being marginalized which would prove detrimental to their physiological and psychological well-being (Meyer, 2003). Research has demonstrated that internalized heterosexism as a result of anticipating and experiencing sexual minority stress, can contribute to difficulties in sexual identity formation, identity management, self-esteem, and reports of psychological distress. A reoccurring theme of these interviews was one of self-editing – avoiding living congruently with one's same-sex spouse in order to avoid discrimination, hostility, rejection, and perceived danger to personal or family's safety. I-5 mentioned, "Yeah, I mean, definitely for our own safety there are occasions where we don't advertise that we're a same-sex couple for . . . the safety of your kids." I-7 stated, "My advice sounds like I'm pushing the movement back in the closet but if you don't want life to be a big pain in the ass . . . stick to your own kind."

**Theme 1: Perceived Lack of Acceptance of or Appreciation for Same-Sex LGBT spouses by Non-LGBT Culture**

All participants who had been in a partnership with their soldiers pre-repeals were unanimous in expressing skepticism that policy changes would "change hearts and minds" (Interview Participant 1, or - I-1). All stated having been on the receiving end of

“...quite inappropriate statements”. Interview participant 1 (I-1) remembers watching the DADT-repeal news unfolding on TV at her job on a military base:

The men were standing around . . . and they were basically—they compared same-sex marriage to, you know, bestiality. . . . Me and another woman were both standing there and two of us are gay and we were like, floored by the comments. And I ended up . . . I went to my supervisor and said, “Look, this is what happened, it’s not OK,” and I couldn’t let it go, you know? So he was counseled and . . . that’s it. That’s all that happened. He didn’t want . . . he never . . . he was counseled and he came to me and said that, I don’t remember exactly what he said, but he didn’t apologize, he managed to get around that by saying he was sorry that I took it the way I took it.

I-6 talked about her initial contacts with her spouses’ unit during the time they were married, stating,

The environment was very . . . like, hostile. Nothing was said, but . . . that’s just it: nothing was said. Like you could cut the silence with a knife. I don’t think they wanted to harm us but it was a potential setting for disaster . . . like it was just so quiet, the silence killed you inside.

I-10 was the sole participant who claimed a relatively positive introduction to the military community as a same-sex spouse, stating:

“...I have to say...my base was really good, the way...you know when DADT ended. We’re way out on the west coast so maybe that’s the difference. I mean, you know how they have multicultural day – for different well, special interest groups, I guess you call them. Well, they even had one for Pride and they had

gays and lesbians – well, one was a senior leader - talk to the young soldiers. It was crazy cool. It's too bad, it's too bad – the grapevine has it we were one of the only bases that did anything...”

Other participants, for example I-1, stated:

“...My wife had been on active duty for 12 years when DOMA hit. She was a soldier pre-repeals. It was living in a closet – she was pretty terrified, you know, about people finding out and because...because I loved her, I mean, I was terrified too. We, it was so weird because, even the gay women didn't talk about it, you know. You know, it was, it was always a witch hunt, real-life drama about people just...getting chased out of the military, especially women...so, yeah...now we were out of the closet but it sure didn't feel like it. And still doesn't. *The fear's forever...*”

I-2 recalled similar experiences:

“... we got married right after DOMA was repealed. That was...that was pretty significant...we started perusing legal rights...and when you're introduced by your wife to the FRG leader as – you know – “this is my wife!” – you get shock. Shock, no awe (laughs). Compared to my introduction to the FRG (*editor: Family Readiness Group, a support group for military spouses and families; falls under unit commander's management*) as the wife of a male soldier, my first marriage – oh, boy, oh, boy! My wife was incredibly strong. I...I was uncomfortable as hell and just wanted to get out of there. The smaller the unit, the worse people got...when I went to events with her, you just felt like – wow! – do I have, like, a second head? So it was really, really awkward...”

I-4 remembered feeling uncomfortable as well:

“...Well, there were a lot of...kids. And we don’t have two-legged (laughs) children. Well, it was...I think a lot of FRG things are based around children and even heterosexual couples that don’t have children probably struggle in that sense, too. And but yeah, it definitely wasn’t a very uncomfortable situation but we definitely didn’t relate to anyone in the room...we were also the only interracial couple in the room. And I don’t know if that even matters but we were different in more than one way...to a majority of the members. It felt kind of...*isolated*...I don’t think that they knew...what to do with... they were like (changes voice) “there’s a GAY couple here...um...what do I do”...yeah, I don’t know...”

I-5 recalled the FRG experiences as less than welcoming:

“...Then when I met my wife and became like introduced to the Army culture...I wasn’t interested in it...we were outside the base, she worked on it...I’ll be honest, I didn’t know what an FRG was for the longest time. One time the commander asked if we’d come to the FRG beach picnic. So we went, we took our two daughters to this FRG beach picnic. The FRG thing was under this gazebo-thing. And they looked at us...with...total disgust, they wouldn’t talk to us. There was one person we knew and he came up and gave us sort of a hug then went back. We were sort of standing there while they all hung out with their little groups of friends and we just...sort of stood there. So we actually just left to the beach and that was my introduction to the FRG and I haven’t been back since...”

I-9’s experience meeting the unit was also not encouraging:

“...Welcome to Army life...going into the food court. In the mall. On post. When you go into the food court and you’re walking and you ...I mean I turn to my wife and say....”do I have something on my face?” Because people are staring at us and it’s not her first relationship with a woman but it’s my first so maybe she’s used to this but I’m not! We went to some family meeting...at her unit...same thing. Me not knowing, and me not thinking about...because I’m not looking at it that way... I look at it, you know, that I’m in love, I’m happy...and everybody else should be happy for me...but that’s not the way it is. I mean I don’t...you don’t hear anything...it’s a sense of...you walk through a place and it’s all eyes on you, then there’s a silence, then not a silence...I can’t explain it, but you just know they’re talking and it’s not happy chatter!...”

I-12 recalls her introduction to the unit as her soldier’s spouse:

“...I’m a little socially shy ...there’s a roomful of people, we’re at some restaurant and they’ve reserved this space, I follow my wife to the front of the room for the mandatory introduction...and the Company Commander is like “and this is SGT \_\_\_\_\_, just in from \_\_\_\_\_.” And starts going on and on about her (spouse’s) record, deployments, how lucky the unit is to welcome her. Then says “Oh, one of the folks we’re farewelling is going into her (Jessica’s) old unit, too, let’s call him up and get the farewells going so we can eat!” Big laughs, right. So he shakes (my wife’s) hand, turns to me, shakes mine...mind you, he hasn’t said a word about me and my role in his new soldier’s life...and that’s our cue to exit stage left. So I am mortified. Jessica’s mortified but what’s she gonna say, the next dude is already up there, everyone outranks her. But there’s this weird

shifting in the room...people are looking at each other, NOT looking at us. We sit down. And the rest of the evening the only person that spoke to us at our table was someone's wife...she was cool. She's be the only one that reached out then...and pretty much now. I haven't given them a chance to snub me again..."

I-3's first experience as a same-sex spouse occurred at a family function (BBQ):

"...Well, let's say there wasn't a welcoming committee waving rainbow flags at my first family BBQ. I told my wife to introduce me as her sister, I got cold feet. We had walked into the compound – the post, whatever you call it – and...silence. Yeah, we were holding hands that first day. Looks. Weird. I come from a liberal city. This was bizarre, like going back in time...you know. I almost expected burning crosses (laughs)...well, that's extreme, but it was *like walking face-first into an invisible wall and not a friendly one...*"

## **Theme 2: Perceived Hostility or Avoidant Attitude of Non-LGBT Others**

I-4 remembered meeting family members and soldier's at her spouse's unit functions for the first time:

"...I don't think that they knew...what to do with that. They were like (changes voice) "there's a GAY couple here...um...what do I do"...yeah, I don't know...I mean, did they stare into space, move away...Not really...not really like talking to us...at all, really..."

I-6 recalled a similar reception:

"...Yeah, the environment (at the next base) was very...like hostile, like you could cut the silence with a knife. I don't think they wanted to harm us but it was

a potential setting for disaster. *Like it was just so quiet...the silence killed you inside...*”

I-8 expressed hope for same-sex couples new to the military:

“...I look at these young couples and think, what a neat thing for them, to be able to be a military family...we’ve been able to do this in part but the restrictions, being invisible for so long...you...you kind of get used to it, you can never really shrug that feeling off of...of not belonging...”

I-7 also felt age to be a factor in acceptance of the repeals:

“...The comments that...from educated, intelligent people...or so I thought...were just...rude. People are still stuck to their old views, exactly like. It’s also the age thing, these folks grew up in a different world. The old...the old guard here...that old talk is still around...that old guard mentality, keep it in the closet...”

### **Theme 3: Perceived Aggression by Non-LGBT Others Towards Same-Sex Spouses.**

I-5 introduced the aspect of physical safety:

“...Yeah, I mean, definitely for our own safety there are occasions where we don’t advertise that we’re a same-sex couple for... the safety of your kids. I mean here in ( ), there’s some people who have very, very negative opinions about gay people...in the civilian community, I mean...I don’t feel danger in the military community, I think when it comes down to life or death, I don’t think the military will let the gay thing get in the way. To be honest. There’s a higher standards among military soldiers even if they don’t like you and you’re kind of bullied but if there’s a life or death situation, they’d come clear...”

I-8 mentioned having children called for extra caution:

“...Well, it did impact us...and...we had, we have a daughter...and we were out with our daughter in all other areas of our life...there was just this one area where we couldn’t be out...it was the only area we had to tell our daughter...um..you know, to be careful. Well, to be blunt...we asked her to lie. Now...she’s out of the house. But now that I think about it, she’s still cautious or hesitant. I guess it gets to be a sort...it gets to be second nature, some of it stuck to us and it will always...stick...”

I-5 echoed the above sentiments:

“...Yeah, I mean, definitely for our own safety there are occasions where we don’t advertise that we’re a same-sex couple for... the safety of your kids. I mean here in ( ), there’s some people who have very, very negative opinions about gay people...in the civilian community, I mean...I don’t feel danger in the military community, I think when it comes down to life or death, I don’t think the military will let the gay thing get in the way. To be honest. There’s a higher standards among military soldiers even if they don’t like you and you’re kind of bullied but if there’s a life or death situation, they’d come clear...”

I-4 discussing safety, stated:

“...Being careful is...well...it’s fear, fear of not being accept or even like...physical fear...fear of being assaulted or something. Even if you’re in an open community, you still have to be careful because I mean, gay people are still getting killed, even in a big city, even in a queer-friendly city, in a gayborhood...no matter where you go you have to protect yourself...you never



know what's gonna happen...I don't think the military base is safer. You're forced to be around a lot of different people and personalities. You really don't have much of a choice to move away or anything. You hear a lot of horror stories about sexual assaults on base, in the barracks..."

I-12 felt safer on post, explaining that:

"...You know, on post I never felt a sense of danger – physical danger because of, you know, hate crimes? But I felt like I was a huge pain in the military's backside. That we were, our marriage is. Maybe if there were more queer soldiers serving – with families – it would have made all this easier. Or hey, maybe there's a bunch out there – but we don't know about them and they don't know about us..."

I-9 remembers eating out with her spouse and young daughter at the on-post foodcourt:

"...I caught my wife's hand and I wanted to whisper in her ear, and I gave her a kiss on the cheek...and all of a sudden...the table next to us was just staring us down, whispering, we could read their mouths and they were like, you know, '...it's disgusting!...'"

#### **Theme 4: Mistrust of Policy Changes, Command Attitudes, and Preparation for Repeals**

I-2 remembers an uneasy transition:

"...It was a very grudging thing for them. It was policy but basically "hey there's going to be a lot of faggots jumping out of the closet" – I heard this so many times when it was still the work – so we were like "yeah! We're...we're not coming out yet" (laughs) "nope...thanks! We'll just stay right here in this closet for now!..."

people were like “Oh, fuck, yeah, there goes the military blahblahblah!” When they (unit leadership) told people, the message wasn’t “hey, this is a good thing for the military...this is inclusive...this is who we are...this is who we should be as Americans and this is what we should defend!” Um, but that was definitely not the message that was sent and so everybody was like “Yeah, I’m gonna stay here in secret...sounds good to me!” Very, very, very few people came out. It’s a... it’s a crapshoot because one day the command climate can be full of strokes...while the next change-of-command sends you right back into the closet...”

I-1 recalled the DADT repeal as follows:

“...well, it just all of a sudden came over on the news broadcast and you know...nope, we never did get any preparation – no one did, no cultural training, no memos, just (laughs) no...co-workers now: they’re pretty nice, but you just ...you never know. New people come and go, it’s the military, people move around...it’s not a career killer any more but it’s essentially same-same. Part of me didn’t understand it or believe the repeal, per se, it ...well, other states – not everyone was on board but – by the time the repeal hit, I’d already been out for a long time. Different people, different times, same mind-set...you know? Yeah, the folks living on base are younger, they’re a little more...tolerant...but, you know, maybe it’s me – I’m too old to change that much...”

I-7 compared pre-repeal to post-repeal concerns:

“ ... (pre-repeals)Of course, it was illegal all around. But those habits are hard to break, you err...I still err, we – my wife, too – we err on the side of discretion.

Moral support's out there...as far as me going to functions, let's see – I haven't done it yet. My civilian girlfriends in previous years – sure. As far as here, being married to a soldier, at this base...at our last bases ...I honestly can't tell you how it'll turn out. Right now, I'm as always inclined to keep a low profile – why rock the boat – for what? ...in the south...you need to be more discreet about it...but up north, not so much, but they're still pretty right wing – I mean, wherever there's infantry units...the hoo-ah...the traditional army. I haven't had issues so far – but again, I don't pushy any agendas...”

I-1 recalled having to adapt to changing command climates:

“...When we came back from overseas, we came back after the repeal. It didn't make a difference to us over there when it (DADT-repeal) happened – we'd been living closeted for so long, we had a routine, it had just become...our life. Back in America – it was, like, each post we went to since then, you have to re...you have to re...I feel like, anyway, you have to reintroduce yourself to a new whole crowd and mingle and fit in, because...well you can pretty much tell that I'm gay, but...still each base was different...it depended on command...command climate is everything and can change drastically in the same unit when leadership transitions...so it's different for me than for someone who looks “straight” I guess you could say. I'm pretty much outed where ever I went...others, they...they have the option to get back in the closet if...well, if it gets too hot...”

I-8 stated that despite repeals, safety was still a concern:

“...caution. Yeah, always. Always. I'm sure the generation has something to do with it. Clearly if she's retiring, I mean, we're both older...forged in caution

(laughs). Even emails – back then – I had to keep the tone like I was a sister or friend...just in case. So we coded stuff. Well, because...because after so many years, the hiding, having to lie about...well, about love...about basic rights...you don't just trust the change. We didn't. We don't. But she...overall...we the military experience has been great for her...she's been judged primarily on the basis of her work, her contribution. But She had one boss who said to all of them on...wait...there'd be "...no he-ing and he-ing, no she-ing and she-ing"...he was talking about gay fraternization. He was bringing...giving them the riot act..."

I-1 was skeptical about attitude change due to high transitions in leadership:

"...Yeah, and we both worked with all different kinds of commands and THEY turn over every couple of years. I mean it's not a big deal because you know the older I get, the more comfortable I get with, you know, who I am, but...it's still...a process. I mean...how much really changes, you know? ..."

I-5 had experienced enough hostility to express disgust with the "system":

"...People aren't going to integrate unless you make them, and address it. My only benefit here was the job. I don't relate to being an army spouse or celebrate it whatsoever. Which is sad. I mean, I love my country, I love it, but the Army life, I hate it, I hate it. And that's...like I said...that's sad..."

Talking about showing affection (holding hands) with her wife on base post-repeals, I-6 recalled:

"...Yes, we showed affection openly... but I tell you, we were a spectacle. We would walk outside, next to each other, maybe hold hands and you know it was maybe against policy to show...affection...in uniform, but you know, we'd be

walking through the mall holding hands, and I tell you, every store we walked by or walked in, people just stopped, covered their kids eyes, it was like...when we walked by the stores, not even in them...like every person would come out of the store and stare, some people would take pictures..."

I-2 also recalled the initial post-repeal euphoria decline as follows:

"...Well, it's almost worse after the repeals because when they hit, it was, "oh, great, now we can tell people!" I'd already met my wife – then my girlfriend who was a soldier – so there's a sense of this – euphoria – but then, suddenly, you feel like – people are against you. They're against it (repeals)– they have strong – very strong feelings about it! And people would be more willing to...come out...to tell you without mincing words how they felt! I had one person tell me "I...I don't care what you do in this life...but you're gonna burn in hell for what you do!" And this was a person I worked with every day in my office! So you had, initially,... "I can tell people who I am! I can be truthful...", then – "...oh, well...within reason..." so it was...an interesting transition...in terms that it was not the big blended Army family we thought we'd be a part of! ..."

I-2 recalls several unit events post-repeals:

"...just at the FRG level – I was introduced as her wife and – oh, man – I couldn't wait to get outta that room...I just couldn't wait. I'm like, I'm ready to go. And when my wife was promoted, you know, I'm there with the other wives – who were waiting for their husbands to get promoted – we were so, so careful, I was so...and I should have just said...you know, fuck it! And kissed her like the other wives kissed their husbands! Like the heterosexual couples did. I should have

hugged her but I...I didn't...I did nothing. And you know, my wife mentioned me in her speech, she said "I couldn't have done this without my wife..."...no, she didn't say wife, she said "spouse" but still, all eyes were on me. And the Sergeant's Major mentioned to her supervisor – my wife's supervisor "...why does she have to put her business out there like that?!"...that's what he said. So that was really, you just felt like Oh, my fucking...are you serious?? I never really experienced that...this was...three years ago! It didn't get much...it got a little better...but one boss I had, he was military, he never came out against me directly but he was religious and he had bible verses all over his office and...come on...I can put two and two together...there's not too many hard-core Christians that are very receptive to gays and lesbians...the negative feedback, the negativity I received was from this boss...the other co-workers – civilians and military told me. And, and after my wife got pregnant, he asked if I knew my wife was pregnant – are you kidding me? – I complained and they immediately moved me to another section..."

I-5 addressed her perception of a "religious backlash":

"... There's nothing they need to do but treat us normal and they don't...there's nothing... we're not aliens, we're not a different breed of person. We want to be treated the exact same way. We're just normal people, and...however, I think there's a really strong religious culture in the military...a lot of them...a lot...are really, really religious. But when they made the decision not only to make gay couples acceptable in the military...now it's nation-wide...there was kind of a backlash from the religious community, so gay marriage is now legal in all fifty

states, there's been kind of a religious uprising, even in the military – you know you see the bumper stickers “one man. one woman” or “united states of gay “ with a big cross over it...I think that they need to treat us as normal but I don't know how they do that with the religious beliefs that we're like sinners, really, we're committing a crime against nature. I don't know how you're gonna combat against...against that kind of religious indoctrination...”

I-8 also seemed discouraged about leadership setting a good example as each leadership came with different attitudes and transitions were the only guaranteed constant:

“...even now...I know being in the military we're at the whim of whoever her commander is...And under the wrong person...I mean hopefully it's not gonna happen but...yeah, you don't want to do anything that sounds the alarms, I guess, brings more attention on you that you need to. Some commands are just more supportive than others...they're in charge of rating, promotions, your social situation...”

### **Theme 5: Need to Self-Edit**

Perceived lack of acceptance was cited by participants who felt the need to self-edit, adapt to the dominant, non-LGBT culture. I-12 noted

[Citing her hometown] Queer paradise [laughs]. We own that city. The military? Planet 50's. So I keep the activist well-hidden when we're out and about but it's because of my wife, I'll be honest. And that's caused more than a few headaches for us. Our marriage was in trouble for a while... (If) you can't hold your wife's hand and kiss her in public, you can't...celebrate your...who you are...your love...your identity? I mean, what is that?”

I-4 perceived a reluctant if not outright hostile response to the reveals, feeling the general sentiment within the military community was:

“...You’re queer, you’re here...now just be quiet”. And.....I wouldn’t say I don’t feel supported, but I don’t really feel like LGBT families are being acknowledged. It’s like – you’re here, you’re queer, you’re not causing any trouble, so I’m not gonna say anything to you...”

I-2 reflects on effects same-sex marriage had on her soldiers and her own career:

“...My reviews, my evaluations – hers, we’d both gotten the highest marks, always - but suddenly the evals plummeted...lots of critique, no guidance. The attitude change...dramatically...in how I was treated...and it’s been like that ever since. Just now, I’ve stopped caring. I’m gonna be who I am...and...unfortunately that means I’m not gonna be everyone’s favorite...anymore. We kept our relationship on the DL (down-low/quiet) before the reveals... yeah, the perception was... get stationed anywhere but the south – no bases down south! (laughs) and we were right in our fears...the civilian population, even now, years later – we’re legal – gay rights are protected – we don’t hold hands off base when we’re in the south. The Army didn’t honor our civil rights at the time. Bases in more liberal states – people were wonderful...wonderful if it was near a naval base: training, exposure to gays and lesbians – much more positive. Down south, though? At an Army base – I told my wife she should be collecting hazardous duty pay (laughs). I joke about it but I – down south – we don’t touch each other. We. Don’t. Touch. Each other. Not down south – our intimacy was definitely affected by living down south...”



I-10 recalled monitoring her physical affection towards her spouse in public

“...Still, I’ll go to my wife’s job where they know we’re a same sex couples but I won’t necessarily kiss her because...I don’t know, it’s I don’t want to offend...I don’t think heterosexual couples should PDA all over the place either, there’s a time and a place for that and it’s not at work! So I’m standing in line at the commissary and I see these young couples and I’m like, get a room, we’re at the commissary. As a lesbian couple I’m for sure not gonna do it because grandpa over there he’s looking at me like – so I don’t want to offend anyone...”

Responding to a sub-question about self-disclosure or public displays of affection, I-9 also answered:

“.. No. No. We don’t do that. No, that’s from...how...I can give you an example. We were out eating one night...and my daughter’s up here singing and stuff...and I just so happened to reach over, and I caught my wife’s hand and I wanted to whisper in her ear and I gave her a kiss on the cheek because you know, we were...our daughter was being...you know...being cute...and all of a sudden I look over and the table next to us was just staring us down, and you know, whispering, and you know we could read their mouths and they were like, you know, “it’s disgusting”. So my wife, being the person she is, because I’m just like “hey, what are you looking at, do you know me?” and Brandy’s like, “stop. Now. Right now. Just stop. Let’s go.” Because you, know, it woulda just stirred up a mess because you know we had our kids with us, so...”

I-5 vacillated between self-editing and trying to live as congruently as possible, the latter evident with other younger participants (I- 9, I-11, I-12), stating:

”... majority of them – realize they have to accept we’re here, but they don’t want to be confronted with our...sex life...because anytime we hold hands we’re throwing our sex in their face, or anytime my wife touches my back...you know, we’ll be standing in line and she touches the small of my back...we’re throwing our sex in their face, if I say “my wife” we’re throwing it in their face. I feel like they acknowledge that they’re here now and they don’t like it and but they think that anything, any acknowledgement we make even if it’s innocent is us purposely throwing it in their face. The smallest gesture...I used to be careful about it, I used gender-neutral terms all the time in public, at work, if I went to any kind of function, I would say my spouse, my spouse, my spouse...and they’d say “oh, your husband is active duty?” and I’d say “my spouse..” and it would just become so cumbersome and awkward and weird constantly having to think about it instead of being natural...”

Three years into her marriage, I-5 recalled that,

“...I just told my wife, you know, I’m just not doing this anymore, I’m just going to do what comes naturally to me...and to me, she’s my WIFE. You know, I’m not filling out a form for a loan or a house that says spouse A or spouse B, she’s my wife. And you know, my co-workers talk about their husbands and their wives all the time...so I decided that even in, in public situations with people I don’t know, I’m just gonna say “my wife”. I don’t care! ...”

I-7 followed the lead of her spouse (whom she referred to as “partner” in the interview:

“...Well, my partner, yeah that word’s a holdover from the dark days...she...doesn’t tell me deliberately to don’t say this, don’t say that like a

lotta people will do., She just doesn't say. She just doesn't bring it up. She changes the subject. It's habit. Save the grandstanding for the kids (laughs) – we're old". I-7 also stated "...Well, it never bothered me, her need for space in that area. It never bothered me...in the least... out of respect for her...you know... it's not that we keep anything hidden...*it's just...if people don't ask, we just leave it at that*, and...you know, so there's not like a lot of PDA going on but, you know, we're not that kind of people anyway, so..."

I-7 mentioned concerns about her spouse's career if they "over-disclosed" as a couple:

"...we keep home and work life separated...we socialize with people who are like us. I think people suspect about us but some people – some people they ask us outright... 'cause they're curious, nosy, and some of it – trying to look down their noses. Because of her high position, we have to be discreet. My advice sounds like I'm pushing the movement back in the closet but if you don't want life to be a big pain in the ass...stick to your own kind..."

I-5 recalls having to "shrink our world":

My support system is my wife and kids, or a few friends...you learn to shrink your world...our lesbian friends, for example, a couple on our street, that's it. Even my wife's work relationships – they're co-workers, it's a superficial relationship, really that's pretty much it. Most of them are married, and they never bring their spouses to our poker nights. One of my wife's coworkers – a female – came into the group...they were speculating – the others – is she gay or straight. Why is that important, why should it be addressed. So at some meeting this woman said something that would have aligned her with my wife so the

group says “oh great, now you’re going to be one of the lesbos”... a dyke and a lesbo. The woman got so upset she didn’t talk to my wife anymore, they outed her to her coworkers, they bullied my wife...so no support for her at work, we talk about it at home, that’s our support system...”

Not wanting to offend others was cited as a reason to self-edit. I-4 stated, “...Well, you know in your gut when you don’t feel comfortable around certain people. It’s just...a gut reaction. When I’m around... certain... people I just use different language so I don’t throw myself out there...even tho’ I’m out...I don’t...I guess I don’t want to make other people uncomfortable. And that’s weird...that’s weird to be concerned about that...hm...because I’ve never been concerned about that before...Some people don’t get it, or some people don’t want to know... it’s too much, it’s too much too comprehend. People ask really inappropriate questions...they always ask about genitalia. It’s like, why do you want to know that? Seems like social filters only apply to your own kind...outside of your comfort zone...everything goes. I don’t mind questions because...you know don’t know something until you find out and ask someone...but then there’s appropriate and inappropriate. Yeah, google it, first...”

Despite citing many positive experiences about her introduction to military communities, I-10 nonetheless stated, “I’ll go to my wife’s job where they know we’re a same sex couples but I won’t necessarily kiss her because . . . I don’t know, it’s I don’t want to offend.” I-8 felt that giving “folks a chance to catch up” might be helpful:

“...Well, whenever policy changes the implementation is kind of a crooked...well, it’s one step forward one step backwards but from our standpoint

it's been ...well, OK...it'll take away to normalize things. I mean, it's all evolving...there's been so much societal change happening so quickly...you've gotta give folks a chance to catch up, to grow into it and...and...but...we're moving in the right direction..."

I-5 stated location may have impacted attitudes of non-LGBT members towards her and her spouse.

"...Yeah, I feel like we're in a more conservative area, and even tho' military people come from all sorts of areas, where you're stationed at impacts the attitude...the culture where you are impacts your attitude and where you're at in life...and this community here expects – a majority of them – realize they have to accept we're here, but they don't want to be confronted with our...sex life...because anytime we hold hands we're throwing our sex in their face, or anytime my wife touches my back...you know, we'll be standing in line and she touches the small of my back...we're throwing our sex in their face, if I say "my wife" we're throwing it in their face. I feel like they acknowledge that they're here now and they don't like it and but they think that anything, any acknowledgement we make even if it's innocent is us purposely throwing it in their face..."

I-4 also remarked upon location and how this impacted her marriage:

"...Bible-belt bases...the worst. And there's nothing they need to do but treat us normal...there's nothing...there's – we're not aliens, we're not a different breed of person. We want to be treated the exact same way. We're just normal people, and...however, I think there's a really strong religious culture in the military...a

lot of them...a lot...are really, really religious. But when they made the decision not only to make gay couples acceptable in the military...now it's nationwide...there was kind of a backlash from the religious community, so gay marriage is now legal in all fifty states, there's been kind of a religious uprising, even in the military – you know you see the bumper stickers “one man. one woman” or “united states of gay “ with a big cross over it...I think that they need to treat us as normal but I don't know how they do that with the religious beliefs that we're like sinners, really, we're committing a crime against nature. I don't know how you're gonna combat against...against that kind of religious indoctrination...”

I-2 recalled feeling discouraged during her first exposure to the military community:

“...Oh, people were obvious. It would be like “– oh, hi, nice to meet you, oh...this is your spouse? Um. OK”...and they'd walk off and never look back. See you later, won't be seeing you again. Mostly dirty looks and stares. Lots of looks. A lot of dirty looks. Especially spouses, the men, the spouses could get really ugly towards us. Depending on the situation. But you got the feeling they just...they just wished you'd go and hide somewhere. Like, “...get back in the closet, would you!” Only the people my wife deployed with were supportive – incredibly supportive – she was family then, she's family now, and I'm part of it. But the daggers, you could feel them from everyone else...”

RQ2—What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?—revealed that of the 12 participants interviewed, 11 cited there were no support resources for same-sex spouses on military

bases specifically for LGBT families. Only I-4 cited an LGBT support group on post at her spouse's last duty station:

“... Yeah, so, we had a support group but it wasn't an installation group – it was created by folks that happened to be stationed there –it wasn't a military program at all, the military wasn't behind it. Soldiers went but also civilian...we all need support, at the end of the day even soldiers are civilians. The command was open to it but didn't support it officially... ..we missed people who could have benefited from it, it's not promoted by the military, we have to do it ourselves if it's going to get done. And.....I wouldn't say I don't feel supported, but I don't really feel like LGBT families are being acknowledged. It's like – you're here, you're queer, you're not causing any trouble, so I'm not gonna say anything to you...”

#### **Theme 6: Lack of Understanding and Concern for LGBT Issues**

Participants responded to questions about support resources offered within the military community such as the Chaplaincy; Unit Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); MWR/ACS) as follows:

I-4 noted,

“... I didn't realize how reserved I've become and how little resources there are...and how that's impacted me. Well... resources are available but if the language isn't inclusive...I mean, what's the point? They could have all the funding and programs in the world but if it's “steer clear, queer”...you know?”

**Chaplaincy as a resource.** Spouses had differing experiences with regards to Chaplain's Strong Bonds Marriage Retreat. These were retreats funded by the

Department of Defense and offered through the Chaplaincy at military bases. Retreats are meant to foster closeness among married couples to balance stressors of military life. The retreats are generally held outside of the post at local recreation sites and included several overnight stays, meals, and family recreational activities. I-6 stated: “We went to a retreat/seminar thing. We went to a seminar which was pretty cool with the chaplain...he was really supporting...the other couples were...well, there was no one in our age group, they were a lot older, being new to (mentions units/location), our interests were a lot different...they were just trying to keep their marriage tight while...while I was just trying to keep our marriage alive...because the military takes a lot out of a person...”

I-5's experiences were less positive: “... I can't tell you how many times we've been rejected from the chaplain's marriage retreats, marriage strengthening dinners... A weekend out of town...I've always heard how much fun it is. I've always wanted to sign up for it because I hear other spouses talk about how nice it is to get away, how it strengthens bonds and your relationship...it sounds like really fun, let's go do it. ...I get a response back “hey, we have tons of room, so glad you're interested, send us your info and we'll sign you up”...so I send back another email with our information and...never heard another thing from them. Letters, calls, nothing. When I called somebody, they said, they're not sure, they'd get back to me, then the weekend came, everyone went but us. And we never – never, ever heard back from them again. And it was really hurtful. At a family expo where I was a vendor, well, one of the chaplains was there...well, I asked when the next retreat or luncheon is and twice we've been interested and twice rejected. And he said “Rejected! Rejected...why would you be rejected, I can't believe



that!” I said I wasn’t sure, but I’d like to talk about it, and we’d really like to go, and he said “wow, rejected – that’s terribly...let me look into that...where does your spouse work?”, and I said “well, she works...” and as soon as I said “she”, he said “oh. Well, I’m not really sure about that...I’d have to check with the head chaplain on that, I don’t really know”...and I’m thinking...if you can’t service spouses equally everywhere, then you shouldn’t be servicing spouses...”

I-12 had mixed experiences: “...we went to the Chaplain – one seemed really cool. He was at that Hail and Farewell and told us her had words with the CSM about it later, so he was awesome but he PCS’d two months after our first couple of sessions. The incoming? Forget it. He told us flat out – he was polite, but no, he wasn’t going to counsel a same-sex couple. We didn’t even try for a spot on his Strong Bonds retreat.”

*FRG as a resource.* I-1 remembers her encounter with the FRG:

“...it wasn’t a huge success..... once I made an attempt to come to a meeting, I introduced myself to the FRG leader and offered to help...I mean they’d been sending out emails saying all these positions were open – volunteer positions, unit events, whatever so I thought why not. But it was smiles - all smiles - and “we’ve got this, thanks” we’ll call when we need you. No introductions to the other wives – I mean I went around and introduced myself – one woman, she was friendly, other than that...never again. I never tried it anymore after that...”

I-12 noted a need for inclusivity:

“...The resources are in place for the most part. I think if the spouses ...used FRG meetings to talk about different types of families...that would open things up to other families. Once that conversation has been opened, conversations start,

people start the dialogue. Start teaching these groups of people about different types of people... hopefully that would open their minds and in turn make other gay families feel more included and comfortable....though it's hard to imagine the military even being open to that stuff because you encounter so many people NOT into it..."

I-7 similarly felt the lack of inclusion, stating further:

"...ACS, MWR – no, we don't use their services. FRG either, nope. It's too hard...trying to figure out who's accepting and who isn't. I don't feel like there's any support at all, I feel like it's just toleration. It's just tolerated because it has to be...it has to be, it is what it is and people have to deal with it, it's glossed over and real support? No, we're under wraps. Oh, I mean, the resources are there for others but that's for them, not for us..."

I-8 also mentioned that she felt the resources were available, but not necessarily for same-sex spouses:

"...I really have no idea what those are. Like I said, she'd bring flyers home, I'd chuck them. But, what mattered then...and now of course...is how much it matters to her – the fact that resources are there but feeling...feeling they're for others. Being a service-member, serving her country...except for the time...the long period (laughs) that she was closeted...this has been a rewarding career for her...and because I love her, watching her be proud, I..I support that and what it's given to her..."

I-12 had no complaints about services used but mentioned self-editing nonetheless:

“...Well, we haven’t used those (ACS/MWR). OK, wait – a few times we have, to get information or buy tickets. It really depends. Most people are either friendly or they’re not – I’m not sure I can pinpoint any bad customer service and blame it on discrimination. On base we might commissary shop together...if we’re talking too intensely or walking too close together...too gay-ish (laughs)...we’ve gotten some looks but nothing...nothing beats our intro to that unit (editor: reference earlier in text)...at least the chaplain that turned us down was up front and open. You have to almost respect that...”

**Same-sex spouses support systems in place.** I-5 introduced a theme that many interview participants would echo - finding support only within the LGBT community or the inner circle of their family:

“...my support system is my wife and kids, or a few friends, I mean I have work, and school, we travel as a family...but I don’t think we have a support system to deal with the military issues...when we talk with friends who aren’t gay or aren’t in a same-sex relationship, well...they don’t really understand. They kind of like nod their heads and say, oh, really? Oh, hey, and then change the subject...they don’t know what to say, they don’t understand the severity of what we go through...well, nor should they, I don’t always understand what they go thru, so...it’s just not there...”

I-8 voiced a similar perception:

“...I mean we’ve socialized...but when we socialize it’s...it’s with other lesbian couples. We’re pretty open now but...well, our circle of friends include a lot of civilians that knew her when she was in the military and knew her as a gay soldier

because they were, you know, in the family so...OK, I suppose now that I think about it – our friends are all gay (laughs) ...”

I-12 was more to the point:

“...gay-friendly military environments? We haven’t found one yet...you can be yourself...I mean truly yourself...if you stick to your own kind. Are there people who aren’t gay who’ll accept you...yeah, of course. But you never know and even they can change their tune if the pressure’s on...”

### **Theme 7: Identified Need for Resources**

This theme emerged from the perceived lack of support resources. I-12 felt strongly about the need for LGBT resources:

“...Oh! Oh. (Laughs) where do I start? Not treating us like we’re a dirty secret or an embarrassment...yeah, that would be a good start. Counselors on post for our issues, TRICARE didn’t pick up the tab for our marriage counseling so...resources on post, support groups...”

I-4 commented on unit support and how lack of education might be an issue:

“...I think the military just doesn’t know what to do with “the gays” (laughs)...you know, the gay culture. That’s a lack of planning at the policy-making level. I think my unit is more supportive than other units...like the infantry units...they haven’t been very open at all. But our unit our EEO leader has always been accepting. He puts gay pride things on our bulletin board...you don’t find that everywhere...”

I-1 also alluded to the normalizing benefits of education:

“...sensitivity training? I’m not even sure how much that works. I haven’t seen any. We have, well, weeks and months for everybody – for every group...not for us, though. Not yet. EO (the military’s Equal Opportunity program – editor’s note) has just recently got on board...they generate the training. The more the topic’s broached, the more it becomes the norm...you take the mystique out of it...”

I-6 addressed the question of what she felt would have helped ease her way into the military community as a spouse:

“...train the soldiers...train their families...it’s sort of like when the elephant walks in the room...like everyone gets quiet. And that’s not what people need. Like if we would’ve been a heterosexual couple it would have like open arms...conversation and...you know, welcome to the group...versus...when we walk in thru the door, we’re the first gay couple they’ve actually met...that...that’s going through the public sector like...like any other family would, you know?...what I wanted...yeah, training...the way people are treated if they’re...uh...different...at ( ) – it’s unacceptable. It was...*it was isolating*. It just felt wrong. Conversations were short, dragged, people were just not interested if I approached them...”

I-6 addressed heteronormative assumptions in discussing her experiences with an admin office on base:

“...I think the biggest thing is that when we are...when we become military spouses, like, there’s this set mold...the man is being put into the computer, it’s assumed a woman is the spouse. If I say, I’m a military spouse, they think “well,

where or who's your husband?" and it's like, well, I don't really have a husband ...Yeah, soldiers the man, he's got the wife and two-point-five kids...but...that's not every family! ..."

I-4 voiced similar concerns:

"...I wish flyers would say...'all types of families invited!' ...more inclusive. Not that flyers now say 'straight couples only!' ...but just something to make it just a little more clear that they are friendly to all types of families, not just traditional families. Doing something that simple would make people feel more comfortable...it would make me more comfortable if I saw something like that..."

I-5 mentioned feeling conflicted between having same-sex status acknowledged versus being treated "normally":

"...there's the need here to be treated as – well, like other spouses – but also the need to stave off the isolation...It's a frustrating struggle. But my wife says all the time, "I don't want to be seen as a lesbian, I want to be seen as just (her name)." I understand that, and I agree with that, but at the same time, but there are moments I want to get together with people who have had similar experiences, to feel support, do you know what I mean? Kind of like – I want to be treated fairly as a woman in the work place but at the same time at the work place, I don't want to be reminded of the women who didn't have that option a hundred years ago, or who weren't allowed to vote, I don't want to be reminded of that on a daily basis. I want to go through my life and be treated fairly. However, there are moments when I feel pride in being a woman and on the backs of other women

who...fought the fight before me! So, on a day to day basis, I do want to be treated normally, however, I still want to have the option to come together with the people who are dealing with the struggle we're dealing with because the fact of the matter is we're not treated normally, so it's nice to have an outlet where we can express that frustration and disappointment and have ideas of how to cope with it..."

I-5 also mentioned the isolating effect of non-inclusion:

"...I think it would be great to have an LGBT support group, but that it's not just LGBT...if it could be LGBT and allies so that LGBT soldiers and families could come together but also allies so we could feel supported so we know we're all on one team. I'm sorry (starts to cry), why I'm getting so emotional, but like, when I run into gay and lesbian spouses here, I just get so...happy inside...I get, like, OK, I'm not alone, there's other people here who must be dealing with the same thing I'm dealing with. And so it'd be nice if it's not just us, but some sort of sign that there were straight people out there or heterosexual couples that are passionate about it like I am... like we are...because then it wouldn't feel like we're alone, like we have people behind us, that they have our back. Because it's the worst thing... I'm a really strong person, I'm very opinionated, I'm very vocal, but when I'm put in a situation like...where I'm in a situation where people are...people are looking at me like I'm disgusting, it's really hard when you're alone, when you're completely alone, when you're standing there by yourself, so it'd be nice to know who's behind you, so when you do come across people who are acting like that, you don't feel like you're alone..."

I-10 noted the need for inclusive language in order to inform the non-LGBT population:

“...I just want them to know I’m here. For them, not for me. If I see a flyer or a poster with people that look like me...I know the community or neighborhood is aware of me – look out: they’re here (laughs)!. Nothing wrong with a little heads up, you know? ...”

**Last words of advice to same-sex spouses new to the military community by interview participants.** I-8 expressed hope for younger couples, stating:

“...I would just say take advantage of all the opportunities out there...you can get stationed abroad, getting base housing, travel...we’ve been to Europe so when you’re there...I think the population is so much more open. I look at these young couples and think, what a neat thing for them, to be able to be a military family...we’ve been able to do this in part but the restrictions, being invisible for so long...you...you kind of get used to it, you can never really shrug that feeling off of...of not belonging...”

I-1 ended her interview with:

“...We, you know, we live normal lives – I just think that – you know, most of the stress of someone that’s gay is struggling...and this struggling is uncalled for...you live in a world where you’re ashamed of who you are because of somebody else’s expectations is not a comfortable place to be, you know? And it takes a long time to work through that stuff... (pauses/laughs)...it takes a life time! ...maybe for the younger generation. I’m impressed with how many young folks are OK with themselves, tho...who can be themselves...I see them at work, they’re more open but there’s still hesitation...you talk to people in code. Again,



this is within the “family”...I’m not sure these soldiers and the civilians and family members I know that are that way would necessarily talk to straight people about this openly. You know, people are still full of shame, there’s the trust issues, who do you trust, who don’t you – despite the media, despite what’s on TV. It wasn’t too long ago that the stars were just coming out...just...be mindful...”

I-4 expressed a need for both pride and caution:

“...I would definitely tell them not to be ashamed of who they are...always be yourself and don’t hide in the shadows. But at the same time protect yourself...because they’ll always be people that don’t get it and don’t WANT to get it. Don’t be ashamed of yourself but...be careful...”

I-6 also cautioned to “prepare to be different”:

“...I just think, to those who get into a same sex marriage, they just have to be prepared...it’s kinda like almost coming out again. For some people it’s a really easy period...and for some people it’s gonna be really bad. Discrimination...alientation. My advice would be to probably get...get someone that knows...get a counselor...get my chaplain.... Put information out there that we’re just like them, we need to be welcomed. Or inform the soldiers who could bring it all home and relay the information to their families... just be prepared to be different...you’re not such a norm yet...”

I-5 cited the need for a strong marriage:

“...become the strongest couple you can be. My wife and I...my wife and I became a team. Become a team, a strong couple. We have to be a team, we can’t

let it destroy us or hurt us, no one looks out for gay and lesbian couples, you have to do it on your own, and that's how I've felt. I hope it's changing but I haven't seen evidence of that quite yet... “

I-10 advised not limiting oneself although being mindful of the dominant culture:

“...I would say let your guard down and don't be afraid to mingle and be a part of the community. Once you do you'll find out no one cared all along. Don't be afraid to be yourself – I mean we are different, I'm not gonna go to my wife's job and kiss her...I'm not that comfortable with it but they know who I am and...they know that we're married and we...kiss...so I mean, yeah. But, she's coming off a deployment and you know, I'm gonna miss you, I'm gonna kiss you...like all the other spouses welcoming back their soldiers but...you know you'll have your conservative Christians and lets not offend anybody but let's not hide who we are, let's keep it clean, let's keep it cushioned...let's respect all families. I'd advise them to not be afraid to get into spouses programs. Look, I didn't think they'd let me in looking like the Butch that I am but hey, I want to make a deployment jar for my spouse, too, right? I want to make a blanket – go, Army! – I want to use the resources without fear...”

I-9 alluded to different generations managing accordingly:

“...The young ones aren't as gun-shy, grab whatever the military gives you, you've earned it. The ones in my generation – well, if what's worked for you still works ...I don't know, everyone has to make that call. But usually if it ain't broke, don't fix it, right...?”

## Summary

The results of the study revealed the phenomenology of same-sex spouses married to enlisted female soldiers, exploring the themes that emerged from the interview transcripts and addressing the research questions:

RQ1: How do same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers describe their experiences as military spouses?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of these same-sex spouses regarding support received within the military community?

The seven emergent themes included isolation felt by all those interviewed due to lack of acceptance and support within military communities; lack of inclusion in activities meant to support families of service-members; fear for personal and familial safety; mistrust that newly legitimized status entails ability to live life congruently, and self-editing due to perceived discrimination, intolerance, hostility towards; lack of understanding of the LGBT population in general, and the LGBT military population in particular. The latter, especially, was addressed by interview participants unanimously in a bid to provide support specifically geared towards the LGBT population and cultural-sensitivity training for non-LGBT soldiers and their families.

Chapter 5 will explore how results of this research can enhance the military community's awareness of same-sex spouses, specifically with regards to recognizing the need for understanding this community and supporting their need for inclusion. The conceptual framework underlying this research supports the aforementioned needs and will also be revisited, as will limitations to this research and recommendations for further studies that examine the lives of the newest members to the military community.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of 12 same-sex spouses of active duty enlisted soldiers and how they perceive support in military communities post-DADT/DOMA repeals. Research on non-LGBT spouses had identified support received within military communities to be a crucial factor in helping spouses cope with the challenges and stressors inherent in a military lifestyle (Bitner, 2010; Green & Lester, 2013; Kees et al, 2015; Leroux et al, 2016; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Rea et al, 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). Yet while I sought to add to the already existing body of research on military spouses, I also hoped to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing an exploration of those spouses who have experienced life within a military community as members of the LGBT community. The seven themes that emerged from the research were (a) perceived lack of acceptance/appreciation, (b) perceived hostility/avoidant attitude of non-LGBT others, (c) perceived aggression by non-LGBT others, (d) mistrust of repeals/policy changes, (e) need to self-edit, (f) lack of understanding of LGBT issues, and (g) identified needs. Interview data indicated that while same-sex military spouses faced the same stressors and challenges faced by their heterosexual counterparts, they faced additional stressors due to their sexual minority status and received little support on either front. A deeper understanding and appreciation of this segment of the military community was therefore necessary to identify and establish additional support systems as well as ensure inclusion in existing support networks.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Though life as a military spouse has its rewards, frequent moves, the inability to fully to develop academic or profession careers of their own, frequent separation from family and support networks, concern for their soldier during deployment, and traumatic adjustments upon their soldier's return have created stressors for military spouses not always faced by their civilian counterparts (Dimiceli et al., 2009; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). Literature reviewed indicated these many stressors inherent to a military lifestyle may adversely impact physical and mental well-being, and further indicated that spouses experience double the rate of divorce, depression, and suicidal ideation than their counterparts in the civilian sector which, in turn, adversely impacts marital relationships and psychological stability within the family (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2007; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010). While studies across modalities have identified the need for family stability towards over-all health and psychological well-being, research also indicated that support received through formal and informal channels such as the chaplaincy, DOD-funded programs, and spouse groups can also act as a buffer against the negative effects of the aforementioned stressors (Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015; Villagran et al., 2013).

Absent from the body of literature on military spouses are the voices of same-sex military spouses. The twelve participants interviewed for this study cited stressors similar to those of their heterosexual counterparts. All had experienced separation from their active duty spouses due either to deployments or other mission- dictated separations. Feelings of frustration, isolation, loneliness, and concern for their soldier's safety coupled

with the uncertainties and logistics of uprooting their lives and transitioning from civilian to military cultures—as well as subsequent moves to other military bases based on the Army’s needs—echoed those of their heterosexual counterparts. While non-LGBT spouses, however, were able to enjoy support services offered by DOD-funded organizations such as chaplain retreats, unit events, peer support groups, and FRGs, many same-sex spouses interviewed felt neither acknowledged nor encouraged to make use of these support services, while others had been openly excluded due to their sexual minority status.

Aside from DOD-sponsored programs, review of the literature identified support from FRGs and other spouse groups, communities of peers that accept and understand the military experience, as a crucial factor in helping military spouses traverse inherent stressors of a military lifestyle (Bitner, 2010; Kees et al, 2015; Leroux et al, 2016; Rea et al, 2015;). Same-sex spouses for the most part found no such community of peers once they left their civilian environment to marry into the military culture. For example, none of the participants chose to move onto base housing, commonly reporting they felt under continuous scrutiny or were simply ignored by the military community. Faced with forms of rejection that ran the gamut from dismissive behavior to rude remarks or outright denial of services, same-sex spouses perceived living congruently and openly in a traditionally conservative environment as too stressful to manage effectively. In a quantitative study surveying 1,209 military spouses that examined the effects on general well-being of perceived social support and its impact on stress, perceived support from other military spouses was the only type of support found as a significant buffer against stress during routine absences of the soldier whether due to deployments or other military

essential separations (Rosen & Moghadam, 1990). Later research indicated that informal support systems such as families, friends, and neighbors, and formal support systems including chaplains, physicians, behavioral health specialists, and military unit's support systems such as FRGs and chains of command, help military spouses cope with deployments and other stressors inherent to military lifestyles (Gorman et al., 2011; Kees et al., 2015; Leroux et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2010; Rea et al., 2015). FRGs sponsored by the Army to provide social support networks for families showed underutilization by enlisted spouses and were perceived to be well-organized and more helpful by officer's wives than enlisted spouses. In Parcell and Maguire's (2014) qualitative study of 50 military spouses whose husbands had deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2005, officer and enlisted spouses reported feeling "comforted yet strained . . . as well as validated yet disciplined" (p. 510) by their FRG experiences. Same-sex spouses of enlisted service-members, however, reported that FRGs ignored or outright rejected their attempts to join, thus denying them access to a valuable support resource.

The findings of this research corresponded to the frameworks of minority stress, stigma, and stress and coping outlined by Meyer (2013), Goffman (1963), and Lazarus and Folkman (1995), respectively. Despite repeats, the majority of interview participants expressed feeling little acceptance by units or support resources whether social or DOD funded. Participants felt "tolerated" (I-7) or deliberately overlooked (I-8) by informal support groups.

I-3 described the lack of acceptance as "bizarre . . . like going back in time . . . like walking face-first into an invisible wall and not a friendly one." Meyer's minority

stress model is a broad construct used to describe the excess stress placed on individuals from stigmatized groups due to their membership in that social group (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress is in addition to the usual stressors experienced by majority individuals, resulting from a conflict between the values of the dominant, culture and the values of the stigmatized group that possesses little social power (Meyer, 2003). Despite DADT/DOMA repeals, minority stress as defined by Meyer was evident in the voices of interviewed spouses who professed to feeling disillusioned and having little faith in these repeals. Perceived rejection by the dominant culture caused many of the spouses to feel that the spirit of the prerepeals “old guard” still prevailed and that “flying in the face of convention” (I-12) was often not worth the risk posed to career, family safety, and sense of well-being. Hostility—whether outright as quoted by I-1 who heard it said, “You can pretty much marry your dog now,” or more subtle rejections as described by I-6, “At unit socials, it was just so quiet . . . the silence killed you inside”—participant reactions aligned with Meyer’s proposed processes of minority stress, which include internalized heterosexism, the concealment of the individual’s sexual identity due to expectations of rejection and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Participant reports also corresponded with Meyer’s belief that hostility from non-LGBT members or exclusion from support groups would result in self-editing. Many of the participants not only monitored their behavior around the dominant non-LGBT culture but often also strove “not to offend.” As I-4 had stated when discussing her behavior at her spouse’s unit, “I don’t throw myself out there; even though I’m out . . . I guess I don’t want to make other people uncomfortable.” Interview data also corresponded with Connolly’s (2004) description of heterosexism as an oppressive force that, due to its pervasive nature, is not only endured but internalized



by many LGBT persons. “We were out of the closet but it sure didn’t feel like it. And it still doesn’t,” stated I-1. “The fear is forever.”

In addition to the usual stressors experienced by military spouses, sexual minorities deal with unique stressors such as being same-sex spouses and sexual minorities in a conservative social environment (Meyers,2003). Considering that the DOD prepared its military population for the DADT repeal with little more than a PowerPoint presentation (Allsep, 2013), this thrust a now legitimized group of people into a population that had previously discriminated against them. These federally driven policy changes align with Meyer’s (2003) assumption that stress and tension occurs when attempting to manage a sexual minority identity in a heteronormative environment. I-6 remembered her introduction to her spouse’s unit at several social functions: “It’s sort of like when the elephant walks in the room . . . like everyone gets quiet. And that’s not what people need. Like if we would’ve been a heterosexual couple it would have been, like, open arms.”

Meyer’s (2003) claim that social minorities in social settings such as the heteronormative military are vulnerable to minority stress and isolation was underscored by I-6 who conceded that while attitudes varied from assignment to assignment, feeling “pushed back into the closet” was the norm. Personal safety, mistrust of policy, and negative experiences from non-LGBT military community members invariably led participants to edit their behavior. Editing behavior stemmed either from a wish not to be confronted with hostility and discrimination or from internalized stigma that caused some participants to view themselves as the offender rather than the offended. I-6 recalled that attitudes towards their same-sex marriage when both attended functions or were openly

affectionate on base were “just...inappropriate bordering on hateful...I don’t think they wanted to harm us but it was a potential setting for disaster...people are looking at me like I’m disgusting” according to I-6. Referring to her spouse’s frequent deployments, she further stated, “... it’s really hard especially when you’re alone.”

Research has demonstrated that internalized heterosexism as a result of anticipating and experiencing sexual minority stress, can contribute to difficulties in sexual identity formation, identity management, self-esteem, and reports of psychological distress. A reoccurring theme of these interviews was one of self-editing – avoiding living congruently with one’s same-sex spouse in order to avoid discrimination, hostility, rejection, and perceived danger to personal or family’s safety. In a military environment where acknowledgement of LGBT culture is widely ignored, LGBT soldiers and their spouses risk once again being marginalized which would prove detrimental to their physiological and psychological well-being (Meyer, 2003).

Socially disordered behaviors per Goffman (1963) include avoiding situations where the stigmatized person may feel uncomfortable or believes they are making the non-stigmatized group (“normal”) uncomfortable. This avoidant behavior was evident throughout the interviews – several participants stated not wanting to “offend” non-LGBT members of the military community with overt displays of affection between themselves and their same-sex spouses.

Per Goffman (1963), this avoidant behavior might mean isolating oneself completely for fear of rejection, or concealing the stigmatizing condition by attempting to pass as a member of the non-stigmatized group – or keeping marital status ambiguous - thus avoiding confirmation of the condition. Interview participants such as I-5

deliberately avoided the use of gender-specific pronouns and nouns, referring to their wives simply as “my spouse”, explaining that:

“... I used gender-neutral terms all the time in public, at work, if I went to any kind of function, I would say my spouse, my spouse, my spouse...and they’d say “oh, your husband is active duty?” ...it would just become so cumbersome and awkward and weird constantly having to think about it instead of being natural.”

Goffman postulated that the dominating culture’s morally superior stance has a corroding effect on the stigmatized group. Despite pride in her sexual identity, I-10 sometimes felt inadvertently “pulled into shame”, as well as rage because “...(living) in a world where you’re ashamed of who you are because of somebody else’s expectations is not a comfortable place to be. In real time, the appeals changed little”

Lazarus & Folkman’s theory of stress and coping (1984) identified primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and reappraisal as the three processes by which individuals perceive environmental stimuli, adjusting their behavior accordingly. Several of the spouses interviewed expressed initial relief at the DOMA/DADT repeals yet subsequent experiences of rejection turned enthusiasm to disillusion, and causing them to mistrust the military’s policy of inclusion. Reappraisal caused spouses to alter their own behavior (self-editing) in order to minimize/avoid stigmatization. I-7’s fear that “...one mouth can destroy a person’s life...” echoed through the interview data.

With few exceptions, participants expressed feeling barely acknowledged or ignored upon meeting members of their spouse’s units or attending spouse-related functions such as Family readiness group (FRG) meetings. Participants’ feelings of being excluded from Department of Defense (DOD) funded activities specifically

developed for spouses such as Chaplain's Strong Bond marriage retreats were viewed by participants as blatantly discriminatory. Per Lazarus and Folkman (1984), when facing stressors, coping skills are assessed, strategies are considered, and the odds of whether or not one can manage the threat are weighed. Few participants interviewed felt inclined to openly address this lack of inclusion with citing they feared it would do little good or harm their spouse's career.

Participants uniformly believed the Army had not adequately prepared their soldiers and families for inclusion of LGBT-members into their greater military family. Additionally, aside from the occasional unit that had held Pride Day activities, same-sex spouses felt units, support organizations and services, did not acknowledge their existence. The interviewees overwhelmingly felt unsupported by the military community – whether by their service-member's unit, or through support resources generally available to military spouses. The initial celebratory mood which accompanied the DADT/DOMA repeals was quickly replaced with the perception that the “old guard” mentality still prevailed. A sense of alienation from the dominant military culture caused most interview participants to draw closer to their spouse for support but also underscored their general feeling of isolation once they had been forced by military moves to separate from civilian family and support networks. Not only were services often denied, same-sex spouses were at times subjected to hostilities such as overt rejection, discrimination, verbal abuse. Perceived discrimination and hostility were cited as reasons to avoid unit gatherings or many support resources. The aforementioned perceptions also resulted in self-editing behavior such as not openly showing affection towards spouses around the military and using non-gender specific pronouns when

referring to a spouse. Fear of adversely affecting their spouse's career further promoted self-editing and conflict-avoidant behavior. Another perception identified was that the dominant culture did not wish to be confronted with same-sex lifestyles, and resultant internalized heterosexism resulted in same-sex spouses not wishing to "offend anyone". Self-editing and conflict-avoidant behavior was also cited by some spouses as a means to keep their family safe from perceived physical harm.

All of the same-sex spouses interviewed had all been exposed to one or more stressors identified by military spouses in previous research and similarly sought to cope with these by initially attempting to avail themselves of support services offered within their military environment. Of those same-sex spouses interviewed, however, few found satisfaction with existing services such as Family Readiness Groups, unit sponsored events, and the Chaplaincy. In Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), the author noted that socially disordered behaviors by stigmatized individuals included avoiding situations where the individual may feel uncomfortable or believes they are making the non-stigmatized group ("normal") uncomfortable. Many of the same-sex spouses, in fact, cited not wanting to make non-LGBT members of the military community uncomfortable with overt displays of affection between themselves and their same-sex spouses. Per Goffman (1963), this avoidant behavior might mean isolating oneself completely for fear of rejection, and "stick to your own kind" was a sentiment frequently voiced throughout the interviews. Yet research spanning fifteen years clearly indicates social support to be significantly associated with lowering levels of psychological distress reported by military spouses faced with transitions, deployments, and other events unique to this population (Bitner, 2010; Burton et al.,

2009; Cook, 2014; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Kees et al, 2015; Leroux et al, 2016; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; McGowan, 2008; Merolla, 2010; Rea et al, 2015; Skomorovsky, 2014; Van Winkle & Lipari, 2015). Social support and connectivity fostered by Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), socializing with other spouses from the unit through spouses coffee groups or enjoying unit activities geared towards families also created a sense of belonging among spouses - the more social support available under the military umbrella, the greater the likelihood spouses could form social networks with other spouses that fostered a sense of belonging, understanding, and commonality. Whether deployments and the challenges of a military lifestyle represented cumulative stressors or whether spouses actually become habituated to these transitions, what remains constant throughout the reviewed literature is the identified value of resource utilization such as social support and counseling to positively enhance spouse’s psychological well-being (Cook, E., 2014). Interview participant I-1’s assessment of support, however, was dismal:

“In three military moves...I’ve heard of only one case where command openly backed a gay soldier and his spouse and life style...we’ve been to three bases in the past few years. That’s not encouraging. Support? Well, friends – that’s what you better have friends for, right?”

### **Limitations of the Study**

The researcher originally had reservations that the unavailability of a large sample group of same-sex spouses might prove to be a limitation of this study. The small sample size, however, was suitable for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007), as twelve participants allowed for deeper insight into the lived meaning of these spouses. Although generalizability was not an option because of sample size, there were enough

commonalities across the interview data to ensure transferability. Also a limitation is the subjective nature of qualitative studies raising concerns about data accuracy and reliability (Creswell, 2007). Nevertheless, precisely this subjectivity allows for a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomena explored, ensuring the participant's voices are above all heard and honored to the best of the researcher's ability and placing participant perception over questions of accuracy (Creswell, 2007). In short, restriction of the scope may have been a limitation as the researcher's primary focus was her participant's perceptions - verification of accuracy of data given was not a consideration of this study. The mixed format for these interviews – face to face and telephone follow-ups – might have their own inherent limitations. The former allows the researcher to note non-verbal cues – largely absent from telephone follow-ups and debriefs – the latter allows the participant to speak more openly, perhaps. The ideal format might have been a series of interviews covering the same questions over a longer span of time thus ensuring that those most crucial quality – trust and rapport – would have been even more strengthened thus leading perhaps to even deeper exploration of the topics at hand. Time-constraints, however, prohibited such a luxury. A further limitation is that the researcher found no research similar to her study on LGBT military spouses and so had no existing research or questionnaire to inform her own set of questions. Additionally, being an LGBT ally and not a member of the LGBT community herself may have led her to miss important points and or questions despite her pilot study.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the possibility existed that participants might withdraw from the study due to fear of disclosure or military-related issues. This, however, was not the case and all participants remained. Over-rapport on the

researcher's part and bias on the participants' part also did not occur – the researcher maintained neutrality by journaling and bracketing, and participant narratives stayed consistent throughout the interview process, debriefing, and follow-up transcript review. Still possible up to the time of final publication is that participants might contact the researcher and request their data be withdrawn. Again, this is an audience that needed constant reassurance that information would be discreetly handled and that no repercussions to their active duty spouse's career would ensue due to their participation. The interview sessions were intense and the painful experiences of these strong women will remain with the researcher for a long time – she continues to feel humbled by their willingness to trust her with their confidences and lived experiences, and has great respect and admiration for their resilience and bravery given the adverse conditions they face. As such, the researcher strives to avoid enmeshment and over-identification with her interview participants by reminding herself that these are their stories, stories that should not be clouded by researcher bias. Having kept a reflective journal throughout this journey aided the researcher in organizing the data to represent her participant's powerful voices without interruption or insertion of her own thoughts, judgment, or emotions.

### **Recommendations**

Participant interviews resonated with themes of isolation, loneliness, and not feeling supported by either unit commands or support resources generally available to non-LGBT military spouses. Some spouses cited feeling like they were “back in the closet” and that living openly with their spouse – in terms of showing affection and displaying feelings publically for one another – was too risky: some cited personal safety concerns while others feared repercussions to their spouse's career. None of the



participants felt language used in the military to define family was inclusive of all families – flyers, posters, printed media used to promote family events invariably showed a male and female parental/marital unit. Participants also overwhelmingly reported that the military had neither received nor offered education to non-LGBT service-members and families to counter misconceptions about LGBT military service-members or spouses. Further, aside from two participants, none of the spouses had heard of LGBT support groups or Pride Days commemorating LGBT populations.

Individuals facing stressor due to social stigmatization – such as the spouses in this body of research - are not necessarily facing insurmountable challenges. Coping and resilience have been identified as factors in combating stigmatization by researchers dating from Allport (1954) to more recently Meyer (2013). Research has noted that group solidarity and cohesiveness are important resources that protect minorities from the negative effects of minority stressors such as stigmatization, isolation, and discrimination (Meyer, 2013). Studies on the effects social stigma in the LBGT community (Bell & Perry, 2015; Burks, 2011; Herek, 2015; Schumer, 2016) suggest LBG individuals also counteract minority stress by establishing alternate values that enhance their in-group identity and self-acceptance. The power of group affiliation lies in the ability to experience social environments that accept rather than stigmatize in a climate of support (Meyer, 2013). Further, stigmatized individuals find groups offer community cohesiveness and once involve in this community, individuals are more prone to evaluate themselves with like individuals rather than with members of the dominant culture (Meyer, 2013). Where group-level resources, are absent, however, personal-coping resources may not be enough to counter the negative effects of stigmatization – especially

when employing personal coping resources such as concealing one's sexual orientation which can lead to adverse effects on well-being (Lazarus, 1994; ; Meyer, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2013).

Interview participants have overwhelmingly described the need for LGBT support groups in their military communities as well as language that was more inclusive when it came to addressing family issues, events. Further, the lack of preparation by the military in introducing and integrating LGBT soldiers and their families into the broader military family was perceived as a glaring shortcoming by spouses interviewed – a deliberate or accident oversight which lead directly to overt and covert acts of discrimination, rejection, and hostility towards the LGBT military population. It is recommended therefore that:

1. Equal Opportunity Offices (EEO) and unit command representatives responsible for introducing diversity training initiate programs promoting LGBT issues with dignity to its non-LGBT population
2. Brigades appoint an LGBT representative that might be responsible for establishing command-endorsed LGBT support groups and recognizing LGBT military populations on Pride Day in the same manner that other diverse groups are celebrated
3. Unit Commanders insist that their FRG leaders promote a spirit of inclusion that embraces all spouses
4. Chaplains include same-sex spouses in their DOD-funded marriage retreats or risk being replaced with Chaplains who comply with this policy
5. Installation Management Command (IMCOM) ensure all printed and verbal

media generated to promote programs for service members and their families display a policy sensitivity and inclusion towards the LGBT military population.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

This researcher hopes to not only contribute to a body of literature that addresses life as a military spouse, but could contribute one of the first foundational studies in understanding same-sex military spouses. Social implications may include a greater understanding of this minority within the military community and facilitate additional or improved support networks where needed for this unique group of spouses. The results of this research will further be directly applicable to unit commanders, chaplains, family readiness groups, and health practitioners in civilian communities and military communities who are within the chain of concern for military spouses. Examining the meaning of life as a same-sex spouse and the impact of support as heard through the voices of same-sex spouses can potentially improve life not only for these family members in particular but for the military community as a whole. Findings associated with this study on stressors spouses face and how these spouses perceive support will perhaps provide an in-depth understanding of the complex issues facing the vastly understudied population of same-sex military spouses. A deeper understanding and appreciation of this segment of the military community is needed to establish additional support systems or to ensure inclusion in existing support networks.

### **Conclusion**

Although society has become more accepting of the LGBT community, discrimination against this community is still very much in evidence. Crimes against

LGBT population consistently rank third on the list of the FBI's most reported hate-crimes since the 1990's – and this since the 1990's. Policy changes such as the DADT-repeal and the overturn of DOMA have thrust a suddenly legitimized group of people into a population that had previously discriminated against them. Further, the Department of Defense (DOD) has prepared its military population and families for these policy changes with little more than a PowerPoint presentation (Allsep, 2013). It is conceivable, therefore, same-sex military spouses might face stressors entirely unique to those of heterosexual military spouses.

Despite the repeal and overturn of DADT and DOMA, the military LGBT population have still not been granted full acceptance and equal rights. Recent surveys indicate that of the approximately 75,000 gays and lesbians serving in the military, many still opt for a chosen-silence approach which, in a perceived hostile environment creates stressors impacting not only the individual and family systems, but the military mission as well (Burks, 2011; Ridge & Ziebland, 2012). Social support and integration to the larger community are central to the institution of marriage (Herek, 2015; Blakely et al., 2012). Support and belonging, however, may be benefits lost to same-sex couples in the military not comfortable in a society where heterosexuality is still the dominant ideology. The mission, however, remains the same for LGBT or non-LGBT soldiers. Perhaps in the not too distant future, the leadership sentiment one participant said was absent post-repeals will finally become conventional wisdom: “...*hey, this is a good thing for the military...this is inclusive...this is who we are...this is who we should be as Americans and this is what we should defend!*”

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## Appendix A: Introduction E-mail

Dear Potential Research Participant,

My name is Cristina Gutman, and I am a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology Program at Walden University. I'm conducting a study to explore the lives of same-sex spouses married to female active-duty Army soldiers in their own words. Military spouses have been the focus of much research, especially with regards to the importance and effectiveness of support services within the military community. Support provided through DOD-sponsored services (ACS/MWR), the chaplaincy, chains of command (FRGs), or military housing neighborhoods have been shown to decrease stressors common to life under the military umbrella. Because of recent policy changes, however, you are a new and unique addition to the military family. This study hopes to spearhead interest and research into your stories, how you have experienced support as a same-sex spouse, and to either enhance existing services or establish new ones, because public attitudes do not necessarily keep pace with policy changes.

I am looking for 12 individuals who want to take part in this research. Additionally, I am looking for 5 participants interesting in being part of the pilot study. This means, you will be interviewed and can offer feedback about the interview, and provide suggestions for revisions or additions. As a pilot study participant, however, you will be unable to participate in the actual study. Please annotate your choice on the demographics form. If you agree to be in this study, you will receive an email from me with my contact information should you have any questions now or during the course of this study. Attached to this email you will find an informed consent letter, as well as a short



demographics form. If you are interested in participating, please fill these forms out and return them to me. If you meet the study criteria, you will be contacted.

Our interview session will last approximately 60-90 minutes at a time and location of your choosing. The transcripts of our session will be given to you so you may check it for accuracy or revisions. You may also review a summary of all the data received.

Additionally, you may choose to cancel your participation in this research at any time.

There are no known physical risks to participating in this research. Should you experience any emotion distress, free and confidential counseling services are available on or off post via the Military Family Life Counselors.

I appreciate your possible interest in taking part in this pioneering research. Please call me at 254-317-2269 if you have any questions, or reply via email.

Respectfully,

Cristina Gutman /cristina.gutman@waldenu.edu

### Appendix B: Semi structured Interview Guide

1. What does it mean to be a same-sex spouse of an active duty soldier?
2. Please tell me about your initial and subsequent exposure to the military communities as a same-sex family member.
3. Talk about your comfort-level with regards to disclosing your status as same-sex spouse where not legally necessary (i.e. enrollment for legal benefits such as an ID card) such as in social settings.
4. Talk about your experiences regarding what you perceive that military cultures/communities expects of same-sex military spouses.
5. Please talk about your experiences regarding support/acceptance towards same-sex spouses within military communities by military sponsored services such as military chaplaincy or ACS/FRGs towards you as a same-sex spouse pre and post DADT and DOMA repeals.
6. Tell me about your perception of the usefulness for same-sex military spouses of support resources available in the military community.
7. Which resources do you feel are needed but not currently available to spouses?
8. What advice would you give a same-sex spouse new to a military environment with regards to resources, receiving support?

## Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Participant number: \_\_\_\_\_

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

## Demographic Information

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male
2. Age:  
\_\_\_\_ 18-21 \_\_\_\_ 22-25 \_\_\_\_ 26-30 \_\_\_\_ 31-40 \_\_\_\_ 41 and over
3. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_ Hispanic or Latino \_\_\_\_ Black or African American \_\_\_\_ Native American or American Indian \_\_\_\_ Asian / Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_ Other
4. Years in current relationship:
5. Years married to current spouse since DADT repeal:
6. Number of months spouse has been deployed since you have been married:
7. Rank of spouse (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ E1-E5 \_\_\_\_\_ E6-E9
8. I am interested in becoming a research participant of \_\_\_\_\_ only the pilot study or \_\_\_\_\_ the final project.

#### Appendix D: Debriefing Form

On behalf of the School of Behavioral Sciences, Walden University, thank you for participating in our research study. This study explored perception of support received by same-sex spouses of female enlisted soldiers on an Army base post DADT/DOMA repeals. As participants in our study, you answered interview questions that allowed us to gather valuable information about your experiences as unique new members to the greater military family.

This research will aid all of us to understand what it is like for same-sex spouses to experience life in a military community with regards to support. We hope that this research will serve to draw attention to support in place and perhaps support still needed to serve the same-sex military spouse, and will spearhead further research into this area of interest. If you have any questions about this research study, or if you would like a copy of the results, please call Cristina Gutman, LPC, at 254-317-2269, or email: [cristina.gutman@waldenu.edu](mailto:cristina.gutman@waldenu.edu).

Confidential counseling resources available should participation in this research have caused any emotion distress are: Military Family Life Counselors (MFLC) who provide off-the-record counseling services to service members and their families, and whose number can be found under any Army military installation's Army Community Service (ACS) web-site; and confidential counseling services provided via the website [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com). Military One Source can also provide you with further off-post community counseling services that are pro-bono or covered under your TRICARE benefits.

Thank you again for your participation.

**Signature of researcher** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Online Recruitment Letter

LGBT support-group members,

My name's Cristina Gutman, and I'm a student at the Clinical Psychology program at Walden University. As part of my PhD program, I'm looking for same-sex spouses of enlisted female soldiers to take part in my doctoral dissertation. This research consists of approximately 12 open-ended questions designed to assess how you've experienced support under the military umbrella post-DADT/DOMA repeals.

Much has been written about "traditional" military spouses and their needs when facing the challenges of being married to the military: deployments, transitions from base to base, leaving family and friends, and how spouses cope...yet same-sex spouses have not been addressed through academic literature. Have you, and how have you felt supported through FRGs, the chaplaincy, spouses groups, and DOD-funded activities? Since policy changes don't always translate to changes in attitude, my study hopes to help the military community recognize and support your needs, and perhaps lay the foundation for future research.

Absolute discretion is guaranteed – no names or identifying information. If you're interested, please IM me here or contact me at [cristina.gutman@waldenu.edu](mailto:cristina.gutman@waldenu.edu), and I'll send you a detailed email describing this study and your part in greater detail. Let your voice be heard!

Thank you for your time,

Respectfully,

Cristina Gutman