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# Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Victimization in the Military

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## *An Unintended Consequence of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”?*

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Derek J. Burks  
Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Portland

*The integration of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals into the U.S. military is a long-standing and politically and socially divisive issue. Exclusionary and pseudo-inclusionary policies that restrict openly LGB individuals from military service are also of long duration. Yet LGB servicemembers have continued to serve covertly in the military for many decades. Moreover, political issues and social conventions associated with “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) have diverted focus from imperative research issues, such as LGB servicemembers and incidents of victimization in the military. Research is reviewed to evaluate such victimization, which is conceptualized as resulting from a convergence of sexual stigma, conservative gender role beliefs, and sexual prejudice. DADT, in combination with overarching difficulties intrinsic to sexual orientation research, serves to augment LGB victimization and reduce victim reports and help seeking. Consequently, there is a deficient evidence base for assisting LGB servicemembers and for advancing research, prevention efforts, and policy changes. Implications of repealing DADT are discussed, as are future directions for LGB military research.*

**Keywords:** gay, lesbian, sexual orientation, military, sexual assault

**T**he pursuit of some lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals to serve in the U.S. military is of long standing. LGB individuals have served covertly for many decades, despite a history of exclusionary policies. Unless camouflaged by a heterosexual facade, their service to the military and country has not gone unpunished. For instance, over 19,000 servicemembers (active-duty enlisted or officer members of the military service, including the National Guard and Reserve) experienced sexual-orientation-based discharges from 1980 to 1993, and 13,000 more were discharged from 1993 to 2009 following initiation of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT; Burrelli, 2010; General Accounting Office [GAO], 1992, 2005; U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2010c).

In the general population, LGB individuals are routinely subjected to discrimination, harassment, and/or victimization across the life span (Herek, 2009; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004). Moreover, LGB individuals experience disproportionately

high rates of sexual abuse in childhood and in adulthood (Gold, Marx, & Lexington, 2007; Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 1999). In a military context influenced by sexual stigma, heterosexism, and mandated secrecy about sexual orientation, LGB servicemembers may have an increased likelihood of sexual victimization, such as sexual assault and sexual harassment. Incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault, in general, are pervasive in the U.S. military (for a review, see Street, Kimerling, Bell, & Pavao, 2011). However, because of the lack of sexual orientation research in the military, it is unknown whether LGB servicemembers face similar rates of victimization. Although the military and researchers have begun to address incidents of sexual assault and harassment among servicemembers, in general, inadequate attention has been devoted to sexual orientation as a significant risk factor. Examination of what is known and what is not known about LGB servicemembers and associated issues is needed to initiate efforts for reducing incidents of LGB servicemember victimization, especially as related to sexually based crimes.

This article provides a conceptual analysis of LGB victimization in the military, which I conceptualize as resulting from a convergence of factors (e.g., sexual stigma, conservative gender role beliefs, sexual prejudice). I explain how DADT has served to increase LGB victimization, decrease victim reports and help seeking, and prevent sexual orientation military research, the last of which has led to an improper evidence base needed for informing prevention efforts and policy changes. Last, I discuss several implications of repealing DADT, as well as future

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Derek J. Burks, VISN 20 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 3710 Southwest U.S. Veterans Hospital Road, Portland, OR 97239. E-mail: derekjburks@gmail.com



**Derek  
J. Burks**

directions for LGB military research. It is also important to note that most of the data I review in this article originated from non-peer-reviewed reports, anecdotal evidence, and research on the LGB general population (which carries its own limitations and difficulties). As a result, my analysis and inferences are limited concerning what is actually happening and what has happened to LGB servicemembers in the military. Until sound, empirical research is available, readers should remain cautious before making conclusions about the true nature and extent of victimization among LGB servicemembers.

*Sexual orientation* is defined as a “specific manifestation of sexuality as expressed through sexual, affectional, and relational predispositions toward other persons on the basis of their gender” (Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009, p. 6). Furthering this concept is the notion of a *sexual orientation identity*, that is, a conscious awareness, claiming, and/or recognition of predispositions toward a given sexual orientation (Moradi et al., 2009). Because this article’s subject matter centers on sexual orientation as directly affected by military policies, the literature and related discussion solely focus on individuals who self-identify as LGB. Moreover, I focus on LGB servicemembers who are victims of military-based sexual crimes, regardless of the sexual orientation of the perpetrator. Given the unique issues and complexities associated with gender variance, this article does not include the experience of transgender individuals in the military. However, although it is perhaps easier and conceptually clearer to limit the focus of this article to sexual orientation (LGB), it is important not to lose sight of gender variant identities and transgender orientations. Thus, readers are encouraged to consult Bryant and Schilt (2008) and Witten (2007) for more information on the issues that transgender servicemembers experience in the military.

## “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Although a complete history and analysis of DADT are beyond the scope of this article, a brief description may be helpful for understanding DADT’s relevance to sexual orientation, sexual stigma, and LGB servicemembers. In the early 1990s, efforts to end the long-standing prohibition of LGB individuals from serving in the military yielded what was thought to be a compromise, unofficially coined DADT (Burrelli, 2010). DADT consists of specific regulations (10 U.S.C. § 654 and U.S. Department of Defense Instructions 1332.14, 1332.30, and 1304.26) that were promoted as more benign and liberal than previous policies with regard to LGB individuals. In such regulations, sexual orientation is considered to be personal and private, unless expressed in one or more forms of homosexual conduct, which includes behaviors that may be verbal, physical, and/or sexual (DoD, 2010b). Verbal behaviors may be purposeful or direct (e.g., “I am gay”) as well as indirect or unintentional (e.g., accidentally saying the name of a same-sex significant other). Whereas “closeted” LGB individuals or those who are silent about their sexual orientation are now permitted to enlist and serve in the military, open (verbally or nonverbally identified) or “out” LGB individuals are not. Thus, from a policy perspective, DADT regulations are written in a format that implies inclusivity of all servicemembers but that simultaneously prohibits openly LGB individuals from military service. Further, because DADT regulations specifically target same-sex behaviors, propensities for such behaviors, and verbalizations about being LGB, the regulations inherently affect servicemembers of LGB sexual orientations. In summary, early efforts to end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in determining who may serve in the U.S. military likely resulted in a more covert but nonetheless equally discriminatory policy.

In so many words, the underlying message of DADT is to “remain in the closet.” Although this approach affords entrance into the military, it is not without costs to the individual’s identity and sense of human value. DADT inherently communicates the message that a nonheterosexual orientation is wrong and that LGB people are inferior. How the message is received and interpreted may vary and be moderated by the individual’s level of self-acceptance, awareness, or avoidance of LGB identification. Moreover, although the communication may be aimed only at LGB servicemembers, it may also be received by non-military LGB individuals, many of whom may receive similarly negative messages in other contexts (e.g., LGB individuals should not have the legal right to marry, be parents or have the right to adopt).

## Sexual Stigma, Sexual Prejudice, and Antigay Aggression

Strong associations have been found among sexual stigma, sexual prejudice, and aggression toward lesbians and gay men in the general population (Parrott & Gallagher, 2008; Parrott & Zeichner, 2005). To better understand the motivation behind acts of antigay aggression and sexual vic-

timization, one must take into consideration the situation and context, as well as social and cultural norms (Parrott & Peterson, 2008). However, empirical research associating these factors has yet to include the U.S. military context and sexual orientation.

The U.S. military, in accordance with traditional societal norms, has officially situated heterosexuality as the prevailing and expected norm unless proven otherwise (Herek, 2007). Because DADT explicitly penalizes verbalized or acknowledged deviations from heterosexuality, the potential for manifestations of sexual stigma is heightened. *Sexual stigma* consist of negative attitudes and regards, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society has traditionally assigned to nonheterosexual individuals, behaviors, identities, relationships, or communities (Herek, 2004). A concept such as sexual stigma exists as a shared knowledge that homosexuality is viewed as negative and unfavorable, is devalued in comparison to heterosexuality, and consists of malevolent stereotypes (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). At the societal level, sexual stigma translates into *heterosexism*, that is, a cultural belief system reflectant of the dominant heterosexual ideology (Herek, 2008). As a result of sexual stigma, differences in power and status ultimately inform discriminatory policy and institutional practices (e.g., within the military), so nonheterosexual individuals become further devalued, marginalized, disempowered, or denigrated (Herek, 2009).

*Enacted sexual stigma* is related to harassment and victimization and consists of overt discriminatory behaviors that may be verbal or physical. Even though enacted sexual stigma may be directed toward a particular individual, the overall consequences can reach farther. For example, although an LGB servicemember may be harmed following an experience of victimization in the military, other LGB servicemembers may also be negatively affected via vicarious experience (Ciarlante & Fountain, 2010; Herek, 2009). Moreover, enacted sexual stigma in the form of antigay statements or violence toward an LGB servicemember may essentially serve as a means of intimidation and dominance of many other LGB individuals within the military and overall population (Herek et al., 1999).

*Internalized sexual stigma* may occur upon personal acceptance of sexual stigma into the individual's value system. As a consequence, the individual's self-concept is modified so as to match the dominant societal response to homosexuality (Herek, 2007). If internalized by a heterosexual individual, sexual stigma may result in *sexual prejudice*, or negative attitudes toward other individuals of differing sexual orientations (Herek, 2004). In contrast, when sexual stigma are internalized by someone who is LGB, resultant sexual prejudice may target the individual self, as well as other individuals of the same or different sexual orientation (Herek et al., 2009).

Research on sexual prejudice and antigay aggression has found that some forms of enacted sexual stigma, including physical assault and/or sexual assault, may be perpetrated so as to enforce traditional gender norms (e.g., conservative gender role beliefs) and to punish gender-nonconforming individuals (Bowling, Firestone, & Harris,

2005; Parrott, 2009; Parrott, Adams, & Zeichner, 2002). For example, men who deviate from masculine behavior and women who present with masculine behavior may be viewed negatively and subsequently targeted (Hunter, 2007). A study based in South Korea illustrates some of these principles (Kwon, Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2007), although results are not necessarily generalizable to the U.S. military. Kwon et al. conducted a cross-sectional study that examined sexual violence among male soldiers in the South Korean military. The actual sexual orientation of respondents was not specifically studied. The researchers administered surveys to 768 soldiers (671 valid samples) and conducted qualitative interviews with victims and perpetrators. Findings revealed a high frequency of sexual violence (e.g., 15.4% had been directly victimized and 24.7% had witnessed incidents of sexual violence among other soldiers). Incidents of sexual violence were often minimized, unreported, and even normalized to an extent. Moreover, the researchers found that sexual violence among the soldiers was often activated to manage a "rank-based hierarchical order" and reinforce masculinity. For instance, male victims were lower in rank than their same-sex perpetrators. Further, sexual violence among male soldiers was believed to serve the dual purpose of validating the masculinity of perpetrators and simultaneously emasculating male victims, who were already perceived as younger, weaker, submissive, or feminine. As reported in the literature, some aggressors may single out gay or bisexual men perceived as easy targets or perceived as unable to fight back (Parrott & Peterson, 2008). Further, Wooden and Parker (1982) found that male sexual aggressors who had previously engaged in situational homosexuality (engaging in homosexual behavior in the absence of women; RAND National Defense Research Institute [RAND], 1993) also typically targeted men who were perceived to be younger or gay and less able to protect themselves. As I discuss later in this article, LGB servicemembers may be less able to protect themselves. DADT serves to create a context of secrecy, perceived lack of safety, and fear of military discharge in reporting same-sex victimization, as there is no guarantee of confidentiality from other military personnel.

## **Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Victimization in the Military**

Owing to the lack of published studies and data on LGB individuals in the military, the prevalence, incident rates, and other factors associated with sexually based crimes are largely unknown. Still, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN, 2003) documented over 4,600 incidents of antigay harassment (e.g., verbal abuse, physical abuse, death threats) toward LGB servicemembers from 1994 to 2002. In 2004, several researchers (K. Balsam, B. Cochran, and T. Simpson, as cited in American Psychological Association Joint Divisional Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Military Service, 2009) obtained data from 445 LGB and transgender military veterans (64.7% male, 27.2% female, 8.1% transgender) in an anonymous, Inter-

net-based survey. Within the study, which was non-probability based, participants responded to various items that included experiences of victimization in the military. Demographics included gay or lesbian (88.7%), bisexual (7.2%), heterosexual (1.2%), or "other" (2.9%). Experiences of discrimination and victimization in the military as related to sexual orientation were reported by almost half of respondents, with 47.2% indicating at least one experience of verbal, physical, or sexual assault. Moreover, of those sampled, 8% reported experiencing sexual assault and 8% reported experiencing physical assault within the military. Female respondents also reported more experiences of sexual victimization than did male respondents.

In 2000, the DoD sponsored a large-scale study to assess the harassment of LGB servicemembers (Office of the Inspector General, 2000) via witness accounts. Surveys were administered to 71,570 respondents (84% male, 16% female) in all branches of the active-duty military. Active duty is usually suggestive of an extended period of time in which an enlisted individual or officer member actively serves in the military, on or off base (Street et al., 2011). Findings indicated that within the previous 12 months, 37% had witnessed (and/or experienced) one or more of eight events related to harassment and violence based on perceptions or suspicions that the victim was gay. Among the most severe of events, physical assault was witnessed and reported by 5.3% of respondents.

In 2010, the Office of the Secretary of Defense sponsored an update to RAND's 1993 study on sexual orientation and U.S. military personnel policy. This served to supplement the DoD's (2010d) comprehensive review of DADT (discussed later in this article). In order to examine how LGB servicemembers are currently affected by DADT and to obtain their attitudes about a DADT repeal, RAND (2010) obtained the perspectives of LGB servicemembers ( $n = 208$ ) using a peer-to-peer, Internet-based survey. Probability sampling was not possible, as the DoD does not maintain listings of active duty LGB servicemembers and because DADT constrains servicemembers from verbalizing their sexual orientation. Thus, maintaining confidentiality was critical in that LGB servicemembers are still at risk of military discharge and loss of a military career should their sexual orientation become known by participating in such research. Certificates of confidentiality were obtained from the National Institutes of Health to address this challenge and offer the strongest protection possible. Certificates such as these prevent forced disclosure of identifiable research information in civil, legislative, or other proceedings, whether at federal, state, or local levels (DoD, 2010c; Westat, 2010a).

Characteristics of the sample included a disproportionate number of men (80%) to women (20%), mostly midgrade enlisted personnel, and a disproportionate number of officers (64%) to enlisted servicemembers (36%). The majority of LGB respondents (91%) indicated that DADT puts gay servicemembers at risk for blackmail or manipulation, as well as negatively affects their personal (86%) and unit (76%) relationships. Seventy-two percent indicated experiencing stress and anxiety in their daily lives

because of DADT. Twenty-nine percent indicated having been teased or mocked and 7% indicated previous threats or injuries by other individuals in the military because of their own LGB sexual orientation. These perspectives are not statistically representative of all LGB servicemembers, but they nonetheless provide valuable information for the overall comprehensive review (RAND, 2010).

## Concealed Scientific Knowledge and Data

There is a lack of scientific knowledge pertaining to individuals who are LGB and have served in the U.S. military. The paucity of empirical research that has been conducted, mostly by independent organizations, task forces, and executive governmental entities, has typically been presented in the form of technical and executive reports rather than peer-reviewed research publications. For example, during the literature search for the present article, combinations of search terms such as *military*, *gay*, *lesbian*, and *sexual assault* produced very few results in the PsycINFO, Ovid MEDLINE, and PubMed databases. Moreover, use of a standard Internet search engine revealed valuable government and American Psychological Association technical reports not typically cataloged in the aforementioned scholarly databases. This leads to an especially challenging endeavor in identifying existing research on LGB military servicemembers and veterans. If they are not easily located or obtained by consumers of research, studies may not be utilized to inform public and military policy, clinical practice, and subsequent research.

It may be reasonable to assume that the lack of research on LGB individuals in the military is likely associated with their long-standing exclusion and more recently limited inclusion in the military. Moreover, DADT-related regulations to "not ask" may have surpassed active-duty military environments (e.g., military base, naval ship, boot camp) to become intrinsically salient among military research and within veterans health care settings. However, other factors may share some accountability for the lack of research, as well as difficulties with measurement. As I discuss next, some of these factors originate from society's overall historical discrimination against LGB individuals and from reporting difficulties intrinsic to sexual victimization research.

## Problems in Measuring Sexual Orientation

Factors unique to LGB cultures, such as sexual stigma, have led to slower progress and research disparities, especially for LGB military issues. LGB individuals often experience discomfort, embarrassment, and fear in regard to personal disclosures of their sexual orientation. Research on LGB individuals is heavily influenced by these factors and is fraught with difficulties, such as issues of definition and conceptualization, sample size, sampling error, and measurement error. Issues related to measurement error include social desirability and response bias, issues of confidentiality, and reluctance to disclose sexual orientation even under anonymous conditions (RAND, 1993,

2010). Further, although research on sexual orientation in the general population has grown significantly in the last several decades, many studies have utilized non-probability-based sampling. Consequently, use of convenience samples has led to questions about whether results are generalizable to the population (Purdam, Wilson, Afkhami, & Olsen, 2008).

In contrast to existing data in community samples, data containing the most basic, descriptive demographic information on LGB servicemembers are rare. The U.S. Census does not ascertain for sexual orientation, and research difficulties have led to deficiencies in obtaining the most basic units of statistical indicators: robust frequency counts on the sizes of the LGB populations. The result is approximations and estimations, which suggest that LGB-identifying individuals constitute at least 3% to 5% of the general population (Gates, 2004; RAND, 1993). It has also been estimated that 71,000 to 78,000 LGB individuals currently serve on active military duty, including the National Guard and Reserve, in the United States. These combined estimates, which account for 3.7% of military personnel, are within the range of the estimated rates of LGB individuals in the general population. Further examination of estimates indicates a statistically significant higher number of self-identified lesbian and bisexual women in the military (10.7%) than in the general population (4.2%). Last, the estimates for gay and bisexual men in the military (2.2%) are slightly less than those in the general population (3.2%; Gates, 2010; RAND, 2010).

### **Conceptualization Difficulties**

A methodological problem among some sexual orientation surveys is that they have not adequately differentiated the concept of sexual orientation identity from sexual orientation [same-sex] behaviors. Because there is overlap and sometimes discrepancies between sexual orientation identity and same-sex behavior, it is difficult to clearly classify individuals as LGB or heterosexual (RAND, 2010). Accordingly, obtaining quantitative data on previous sexual encounters, which could have been isolated events, does not adequately address or provide clear information about sexual orientation identity (Purdam et al., 2008). For example, Rogers and Turner (1991), who combined and analyzed five national-probability-based samples, estimated that that least 5 to 7% of male adults have engaged in same-sex behaviors. However, it cannot be known for certain whether participants identified as LGB in the respective studies because the studies focused solely on same-sex behaviors rather than same-sex identities. Moreover, an individual may identify as heterosexual but have engaged in previous same-sex experiences for multiple reasons (e.g., situational homosexuality or sexual experimentation). An additional problem found within sexual orientation survey research is response bias, such as when individuals respond to questions in a socially desirable (or self-preserving) fashion. Consequently, prevalence studies on LGB sexual orientation are affected by some degree of underreporting, which reflects the sensitive nature of this

topic and issues related to confidentiality within research (RAND, 2010).

### **Underreported Victimization**

Amid high prevalence rates of antigay violence in general, LGB individuals live in an inherently dangerous environment and may reasonably assume possibilities of being targeted and harassed (Todahl, Linville, Bustin, Wheeler, & Gau, 2009). Among samples of LGB individuals, some who experienced sexual victimization also experienced negative consequences associated with reporting the incidents, such as being "outed," as well as negative reactions by the individual's social network (Todahl et al., 2009). Such experiences not only contribute to fears of reporting their victimization to law enforcement but may also contribute to the decision to not participate in research (Otis, 2007).

Victims are likely to underreport their experiences of sexual assault and harassment (Turchik & Wilson, 2010). However, individual and group differences may also influence the decision to report or not report the incident. For example, victims who are female will likely face unique issues and considerations as compared to male victims, who will have their own unique issues to consider in deciding whether or not to report the victimization (Sivakumaran, 2005). In general, incidents of sexual assault and harassment in the military are reported by women at rates disproportionate to those for men (e.g., Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007; Street, Stafford, Mahan, & Hendricks, 2008). Demographic information from a DoD (2010b) report on military sexual assault indicates that among 1,569 investigations during the 2009 fiscal year, the majority of victims were female (89%) and the majority of perpetrators were male (87%). The majority of victims as well as perpetrators were from junior enlisted ranks (E1 to E4) in comparison with higher ranking senior enlisted servicemembers (E5 to E9) and officers (O1 to O10). Analysis of perpetrator-on-victim gender among 1,512 of the investigations indicates that 79% were male on female, 6% were male on male, and less than 2% were female on male and/or female on female. Even though these rates suggest that gender is a unique risk factor for sexually based crimes, difficulties in reporting such crimes may also be moderated by gender. For example, male victims of sexually based crimes, in general, report such crimes less often than do their female counterparts (Sivakumaran, 2005, 2007). Moreover, victims who are gay or lesbian may believe they have even fewer options for help. Some may believe they could be further harmed if the action of seeking help were to draw attention to their LGB sexual orientation (an inadvertent double disclosure) and/or served to increase the likelihood of subsequent revictimization.

Issues surrounding sexual stigma, sexual victimization, and DADT likely intertwine to increasingly prevent LGB servicemembers from feeling safe enough to report victimization and/or seek assistance and support, because there is no guarantee of confidentiality from other military personnel (Frank, 2004; Johnson & Buhrke, 2006). According to Hunter (2007),

Other than threats of death, the fear of being labeled homosexual is the most powerful psychological dynamic that prevents men who have been sexually abused from reporting it to military authorities. Since male victims of sexual assault, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are even less likely to report it than female victims, perpetrators can be confident they can get by with little fear of punishment or even investigation. (p. 139)

Encapsulated in a cycle of fear and potential extortion, LGB servicemembers may face threats ultimately leading to the experience of sexual victimization (e.g., "Sleep with me or I will report that you are gay"). Subsequent threats by the perpetrators may serve to further contain the crime and prevent it from being reported (e.g., "If you tell anyone about this, I will 'out' you or hurt you even worse"). Thus, from the victim's perspective, not reporting may seemingly be the best way to avoid increased harm, distress, and other negative consequences, such as military discharge.

### **Discrepancies in Reports and Interpretations**

Problems related to underreporting, as well as deficient resources or initiatives to properly obtain such reporting, ultimately affect both the acquisition and the interpretation of data. For instance, a recent report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP, 2010) indicated a 7% reduction in the total number (1,556 incidents) of reported U.S. hate crimes between 2008 and 2009. On the surface, this could be interpreted as good news; however, according to NCAVP, these rates are not reflective of an actual decrease in violence toward LGB or transgender individuals but rather of a decrease in reporting of such violence. NCAVP argued that significant reductions in funding and support have resulted in reduced program capacity and outreach services. Subsequently, this may have caused limitations for LGB and transgender individuals in filing reports of violence and obtaining related services provided by NCAVP.

Similarly, the DoD (2010a) reported an 11% increase in victim-reported sexual assaults (2,670 incidents) by servicemembers in 2009 compared to 2008. However, DoD officials noted that the increase may not necessarily be due to an increase in sexual assaults occurring during military service. They suggested, rather, that higher numbers of victims are reporting sexual assault incidents as servicemembers become aware of military sexual assault issues and the military's increased level of support for victims. Moreover, a newer means of reporting sexual assault incidents has led to increased anonymity of the victim (Suris & Lind, 2008). For example, sexual assault victims now have the option of filing reports as "unrestricted" or "restricted," the latter of which serves to protect the victim's anonymity and does not lead to a criminal investigation (DoD, 2010a). The obvious benefits gained from exposing sexually based crimes may serve as a reminder of the need to recognize, research, and ultimately reduce the potential for and actual occurrence of such crimes among LGB servicemembers.

### **Modern Perspectives**

Despite DADT's current, yet seemingly finite existence, increased research and data collection are needed to protect

vulnerable LGB servicemembers and to ensure that experiences of sexual victimization do not go unnoticed. Further, it is important that research be conducted carefully, sensitively, and confidentially so as to not inadvertently cause further harm. Nearly 20 years ago, the secretary of defense instructed that violence and harassment against other servicemembers for any reason would not be tolerated. Consequently, antigay harassment policies and education have been enacted within all branches of the military, although the extent to which these policies have affected incidents of sexual victimization is not known.

LGB individuals have generally held fewer constitutional protections than have those in other social and cultural groups (Johnson & Buhrke, 2006; RAND, 2010). However, during the last decade, societal messages toward LGB individuals have become more diverse (e.g., those that provide a sense of encouragement, affirmation, and acceptance). Amid an ongoing atmosphere of antigay political lobbying and legislation, several U.S. states have legalized same-sex marriage. Regardless of whether an LGB individual is even considering marriage, the sheer value of same-sex marriages being validated as "real marriages" is in and of itself meaningful and affirming. Correspondingly, the practical values (e.g., domestic insurance benefits, power of attorney, tax considerations) associated with legally recognized marriage are significant. Even more affirming is President Barack Obama's recent legislative changes, which grant LGB individuals increased rights with respect to hospital visitation of same-sex spouses ("Medicare and Medicaid Programs," 2010). This has often been problematic, as hospital visitation rules in certain situations have sometimes permitted patient access only to immediate family, whereas same-sex partners may not be considered true family members ("Respecting the Rights of Hospital Patients," 2010). Further, even though the U.S. military has been slower to consider equal rights of LGB servicemembers, other government agencies have more recently sought to maintain nondiscriminatory practices in regard to sexual orientation (SLDN, 2010). For instance, certain employment benefits (e.g., retirement, insurance) have been extended to same-sex domestic partners of federal employees ("Extension of Benefits," 2010; "Presumption of Insurable Interest," 2011).

### **Recent Attempts to Repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"**

Almost 17 years after the inception of DADT, recent legislative efforts in Congress, as well as judicial efforts, have initiated attempts to repeal the policy. Several bills introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 1283, 4180, 4902, 5136, 6520) and Senate (S. 3065, 3454, 4022, 4023) in 2010 parallel President Obama's commitment to end DADT (Feder, 2010). The president, secretary of defense, and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have indicated a preference for such repeal to occur through legislation rather than judicial action. Further, the U.S. Supreme Court has never directly considered a challenge to DADT and has consistently refused to review such policy (Feder, 2010). However, on September 9, 2010, the U.S.

District Court for the Central District of California ruled in *Log Cabin Republicans v. United States* (2010) that DADT-related policy was unconstitutional in that it violates servicemembers' right to free speech under the First Amendment and right to due process under the Fifth Amendment (Burrelli, 2010). This was followed with a nationwide ruling on October 12, 2010, that permanently restricted the DoD from further enforcing DADT against any servicemember. The government then made several appeals to both courts, and on November 1, 2010, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of the government, issuing a stay of the district court's injunction pending appeal (DoD, 2010c; Feder, 2010). As of this writing, there has not been a ruling to the appeals process.

Subsequently, a stand-alone DADT repeal bill (Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010) was passed by the House and Senate in mid-December 2010. On December 22, 2010, President Obama signed the bill; however, for repeal to be official, "certification" by Congress, the president, the secretary of defense, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must occur and be followed by an additional 60-day waiting period. As of this writing, no timeline for certification has been set. Thus, until then, DADT remains the law, and it is uncertain how long it will take for DADT to be fully repealed via legislation (Feder, 2010; SLDN, 2011).

Even still, several changes were made to upgrade DADT policy on March 25, 2010, and again on October 11, 2010 (Burrelli, 2010). For instance, recommendations were sought to (a) raise the officer rank required to instigate DADT investigations, (b) increase requirements for what constitutes "credible information" and "reliable persons" during DADT investigations, and (c) protect certain forms of communication from being used as grounds for DADT-related discharges (e.g., information provided to military psychotherapists or chaplains; DoD, 2010b). The latter modification could also hold relevance for increased research among LGB servicemembers (e.g., researcher-participant forms of communication). On the other hand, SLDN (2010) suggested that LGB servicemembers remain cautious about engaging in such research because the barring of LGB individuals from serving openly in the military is still in effect. Additionally, the current legislation and media attention could increase the targeting of LGB servicemembers in being outed and discharged (SLDN, 2010). It would seem that, unless confidentiality can be assured, circumventing some research efforts may have been necessary for self-preservation. Moreover, it seems clearer that DADT policy, by its very nature, is contraindicative to research on LGB servicemembers and related incidents of victimization.

Following President Obama's announcement in 2010 that he would work with Congress to repeal DADT, the secretary of defense established a high-level working group to conduct a comprehensive review of the issues associated with a repeal of DADT (Westat, 2010a). The working group contracted with Westat (an organization that has conducted other surveys for the military) to examine servicemembers' perceptions of how a DADT repeal might

affect factors such as military readiness and unit cohesion. A web-based survey was completed by military personnel ( $n = 115,052$ ; stratified and representative of various subgroups, enlisted and officer members, and all branches of the active duty military) and a number of their spouses ( $n = 44,266$ ; DoD, 2010c). Across the main areas of interest, the majority of servicemembers and their spouses perceived a repeal of DADT as yielding neutral effects, that is, as having no effect or as affecting their immediate service units "equally as positively as negatively" (Westat, 2010a, p. 1). The working group concluded that the risk of repeal to overall military effectiveness was low. Further, it concluded that although there could be some degree of disruption to unit cohesion, this would not be widespread or long lasting (DoD, 2010c).

### **Worries of Widespread Violence**

Questions are raised as to what immediate and long-term effects may be experienced by LGB servicemembers should DADT be repealed. As found in recent reports, there already appears to be a steady increase of hate-based crimes toward LGB and transgender individuals in the general population (Ciarlante & Fountain, 2010). Moreover, the number of crimes experienced by LGB servicemembers significantly increased during the first few years following the original launch of DADT (SLDN, 2004). Thus, it is possible that victimization toward LGB servicemembers could actually increase (in the short term) because of the increased visibility in the mainstream media. It should also be noted that prior to foreign militaries repealing their DADT-like policies, a number of military leaders and servicemembers predicted widespread violence resulting from negative reaction to serving with openly LGB servicemembers (RAND, 2010). However, this does not seem to have occurred, as there were no reported increases of harassment or violence following lifts of the bans (Frank, 2010; Gade, Segal, & Johnson, 1996). On the other hand, for reasons discussed previously in this article (e.g., underreporting as influenced by sexual victimization and sexual orientation), it is also possible that reports of violence were never made, obtained, evaluated, or disseminated. Therefore, it may be wise to remain cautious rather than overly rely on findings from the cross-national militaries.

### **Lessons From Foreign Militaries**

Though the diversity and variance of international socio-cultural norms should be taken into account, it may be helpful to consider findings from cross-national militaries as related to LGB policies and issues (Herek & Belkin, 2005; RAND, 2010). Segal, Gade, and Johnson (1993) described several overarching themes found among such examinations (e.g., GAO, 1993; RAND, 1993) of other countries, foreign military policies, and the consequences of ending such policies. First, the exclusion of LGB individuals from military service in other Western countries has generally declined. This is supplemented by a general trend of reduced discrimination in the military based on sexual orientation (Gade et al., 1996). Nonetheless, among

all of the foreign countries studied, homosexuality has yet to have been fully accepted (RAND, 1993, 2010).

A second theme indicates that military policies and their actual practices may have diverged (DoD, 2010c). For example, some countries with liberal policies on homosexuality have actually shown conservative practices toward LGB servicemembers. On the other hand, some countries with conservative policies may have practices that generally resulted in more liberal treatment of LGB servicemembers. Inconsistencies aside, an overall pattern suggests more conservative practices regardless of liberal policies (Gade et al., 1996; Segal et al., 1993). This leads to an important implication in that even if U.S. military policy is changed to integrate LGB servicemembers, the actual practices must be carefully monitored so as to prevent continued discrimination and unfair treatment toward these individuals.

A third theme relates to discreteness surrounding sexual orientation on individual and institutional levels. This theme is contextualized within the continued presence of sexual stigma and antihomosexual feelings, which remain even among countries with more liberal views and military policies inclusive of LGB individuals (Gade et al., 1996; Segal et al., 1993). In most of these militaries, the majority of LGB servicemembers preferred to keep their sexuality private and remained in the closet (presumably by choice, rather than mandated as in a DADT-like policy; DoD, 2010c; RAND, 1993). In some countries, this self-directed “chosen silence” was believed to play a key factor in the absence of problems between LGB and heterosexual servicemembers (GAO, 1993). Moreover, none of the foreign militaries provided special accommodations to individuals based on sexual orientation, and there were no separate training issues related to sexual orientation other than case examples related to antiharassment training (RAND, 2010). This minimalist approach helped keep policy changes low key, further reducing attention toward LGB servicemembers. As found in the study by RAND (2010), few LGB servicemembers are unlikely to disclose their sexual orientation widely in the event of a DADT repeal. Further, those who currently conceal their sexual orientation indicated that disclosure would be highly selective, discretionary, and dependent on overall adjustment to a DADT repeal (RAND, 2010; Westat, 2010b).

The above themes may serve as a means to assuage the fears that inform some of the arguments against LGB military integration. For example, some military servicemembers may worry about the possibility of witnessing public displays of homosexual affection or other intimate behaviors. However, the above worries have not been substantiated by findings from foreign militaries (DoD, 2010c). As suggested by foreign military research, LGB servicemembers choosing to keep their sexual orientation identity concealed has likely helped keep sexual orientation issues to a minimum. Last, ending DADT-like military policies in those countries has resulted in no effect on morale, cohesion, or enlistment (Frank, 2010; GAO, 1993; RAND, 1993, 2010).

## **Future Directions for Research**

Several recent studies may offer promising directions for future research on LGB servicemembers. For instance, sexual orientation was included as a demographic variable among returning Gulf War veterans in an unpublished study on posttraumatic stress disorder (M. Murdoch, personal communication, December 10, 2009). Preliminary study analysis indicated that 3% of participants identified as “nonheterosexual,” which parallels LGB military population estimates provided by Gates (2004, 2010). Although this may seem insignificant, inclusion of sexual orientation as a demographic variable in VA or military-based research seems in and of itself encouraging. On the other hand, researchers should continue to remain sensitive to issues of confidentiality and anonymity, especially among LGB servicemembers in active-duty military settings (see Johnson & Buhrke, 2006).

LGB research on active duty servicemembers is problematic because of policies such as DADT, but military veterans and/or postdeployment research may offer a more promising avenue. For example, DADT policy no longer officially applies once a servicemember is inactive or has been discharged from the military. Also, because VA facilities are less characteristic of traditional active-duty military environments, some LGB individuals may find it somewhat less threatening to reveal their sexual orientation and discuss related issues. On the other hand, even inactive or discharged LGB individuals may wish to pursue careers in the VA system and thus be hesitant to divulge their sexual orientation. Evidence from more liberal foreign militaries indicates that being openly LGB may result in a detriment to career opportunities subsequent to military service (Segal et al., 1993). Moreover, powerful and longstanding influences, such as stigma and discrimination, are likely to linger for some time among LGB veterans, researchers, health care providers, and society as a whole. Indeed, military and VA researchers and health care providers face great challenges in obtaining unreserved and honest communication from LGB individuals, especially considering the overall climate’s historical forbiddance of such topic. However, these researcher–participant, provider–patient, and therapist–client forums for communication are necessitated within applicable research studies and other situations; therefore, difficult questions should be asked and openly discussed when appropriate.

## **Is “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” to Blame?**

LGB individuals are a vulnerable population who experience disproportionately high reports of hate-related crimes and other victimization across the life span. Add to the formula an active-duty military environment, in which LGB individuals typically serve covertly, and harassment and violence become great sources of concern (Herek, 1993). DADT policy serves to negatively magnify an environment already characterized by conservative gender norms, heterosexism, and sexual stigma. It is known that LGB victimizations occur in the military whether or not LGB individuals are open. However, the extent of victim-

ization is unknown. Further, whether or not the unique LGB characteristics of openness and outness serve to increase the risk for victimization is also unknown. LGB individuals are first and foremost at higher risk of victimization in the military because of their sexual orientation. Regardless of DADT, the same risk is probable; however, such policy moderates the risk by further promoting a climate of sexual secrecy that becomes even more discriminatory toward LGB servicemembers.

In addition, among servicemembers who are sexually victimized, DADT's influence likely exacerbates incidents of sexual trauma. In particular, victimized LGB servicemembers may fear even worse consequences in making a report or seeking health care services, which will also add to underreported rates of sexual victimization. Thus, we can deduce that, to an extent, DADT serves to increase disparities in LGB research and efforts to prevent sexual victimization. This is evident in the lack of attention given to sexual orientation as a risk factor in the extant military-based research on sexual assault and harassment. Because of DADT, military research linking sexual orientation with these forms of trauma cannot be conducted easily, if at all. And without scientific evidence, the extent of victimization cannot adequately be monitored, treatment efforts cannot be fully implemented, and policy initiatives cannot adequately address sexually based crimes (Purdam et al., 2008). Given that LGB individuals face high rates of victimization in the general population and assumedly at least fair-to-moderate rates in the military (based on limited, non-peer-reviewed research), increased research seems more than justified. What's more, researchers and health care providers are encouraged to examine and work through their own fears and stigma related to approaching LGB issues. Although that is perhaps more easily suggested than done, it is likely that the level of fear and worry they feel is relatively less than the level felt by LGB servicemembers, especially those who have been victimized.

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