Discharged Under the Rainbow: Military Masculinities and Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Ariel M Martinez, Bard College

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Military Masculinities and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

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by
Ariel Martinez

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Introduction: The Projected Imaginary of Both America and Masculinity

In the United States, there exists an indisputably powerful connection between masculinity and the military (Belkin, 2012, p. 4). This can be seen through various American presidents, who, at the time, occupied the space of the most publicly powerful figure in the United States, eliciting a masculine militaristic image to convey their power to the American public at large. For example, when George Bush landed on “…the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in 2003, [he] emerged from the cockpit wearing military gear,” or when John Kerry, upon receiving his party’s nomination in the 2004 presidential election, declared, “I’m John Kerry and I’m reporting for duty” (Belkin, 2012, p. 2). Both of these examples show the projected correlation between men, power and the military. This relationship can also be observed by the military being seen as the societal vessel which socializes “boys to be men” (Barret, 2001, p. 80). The military is also unique in that it “…has socialized millions of men according to some traditional blueprint”, meaning that many men are learning how to be masculine according to a similar standard, which in turn affects the rest of society and creates a shared perception of what military members are expected to look like and how they are expected to behave (Arkin & Dobrofksy, 1978, p. 167).

Military masculinity holds a particularly valorized place within United States’ society as being the archetypal symbol and incarnation of the most extreme version of masculinity. This can be characterized both behaviorally and historically by the desire to attain the “warrior ideal”, which is upheld and perpetuated by glorifying those who embody idealized traits such as being “independent, disciplined, strong willed, physically
imposing, and above all masculine” which create the perfect soldier or warrior (Howard III & Privadera, 2006). As a way of rectifying the warrior identity, all traits typically associated with masculinity are celebrated and traits that have represented femininity such as physical weakness, the displaying of emotion, nurturing tendencies or passivity are villainized. Through this dichotomy, anything “feminine” becomes seen as antithetical to the military’s inherent masculine essence, and in turn, self. Anything that could be construed as effeminate or emasculating ends up falling under the large umbrella of being detrimental to how others perceive one’s masculinity. This includes homosexuality, which is deemed a behavior reserved for ‘faggots’, and is framed as adverse to the heterosexuality inherent within the “warrior ideal” (Howard III & Privadera, 2006). Soldiers must maintain the image of the heterosexual to reaffirm that they are able to “…attain masculine status by showing that they are not-feminine, not-weak, not-queer, not-emotional” (Belkin, 2012, p. 26). The sexual deviation away from heterosexuality in theory ends up serving as a binary, which dictates masculinity: straight equals masculine, gay equals feminine. However, while this binary seems easy enough, the reality of how we conceptualize and articulate sexuality is the result of a much more convoluted tension between behavior and identity.

The following pages contain an analysis of the relationship that exists between homosexuality and the military. Using David Campbell’s “Imagining America”, I look at how the identity of America has been projected, and argue that the identity itself is built on a process of an othering dichotomy, of who is included in the “us”, when we construct a “them” or an other in opposition. I use this us/them binary to analyze the relationship between the military and homosexuality, as the military represents the majority of the
American “us”, and homosexuals being the deviant, villainized “them”. I begin by assembling a thematic historical overview in section one that looks at the legal sanctions taken against sodomy and homosexuality. I examine the physiological traits that have been assigned to be indicative of effeminacy and homosexuality, like wide hips and sloping shoulders, to the point where these traits were looked for in potential recruits, in order to protect the heterosexuality of the military itself. This shows how the corporeal reality of the body is politicized, as “the body of the soldier has come to signify the notion and national security in particularly intensified ways” (Belkin, 2012, p. 36).

Throughout the project, I also continue to emphasize how Puritan influences have regulated our conception of morality and acceptable sexuality. To do this, I focus on the discrepancies between homo and heterosexual violators of conduct, and the fear that has been produced about homosexual soldiers by mostly Right Wing, Christian policy makers and officials. I then examine how the language used to frame the issue of incorporating homosexuals into the military has taken on a secular element, with opponents using rhetoric that detail disruption to unit cohesion, and that it would be detrimental to the collective morale of the military troop. This portion of the project ends with the Reagan era, and the construction of the homosexual as a sexual predatory threat.

The next section focuses on how the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy came into place, under the presidency of Bill Clinton, who campaigned with the promise that if he were elected President, “one if his first acts would be to overturn the military ban through executive order” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 75). I argue that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was ultimately ineffective because it simply served to institutionalize a closet that already existed, as open homosexuality had legally always been incompatible with military
service. Therefore, it did not do anything except for changing the dishonorable discharge into an “honorable” discharge, and ban recruiters from asking if a potential enlistee was a homosexual. I examine the policy itself, and look at the ways in which behavior is targeted when it is indicative of a homosexual identity, which has a more salient quality to it than behavior does. I also look at the loss of resources that the military experiences by discharging service members based on homosexuality.

The subsequent section contains an analysis of three testimonies that occurred before the Senate in relation to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” in 2010. General John Sheehan gives the first testimony that is presented. He is opposed to the integration of gay soldiers in the military because it has not been proven to explicitly improve morale. The next testimony is by Former Major Michael D. Almy, a very successful leader in the Air Force, who was discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” after a member from another troop found personal and incriminatingly homosexual emails while he was serving abroad, despite having no reason to be going through the emails in the first place. The final testimony exhibited is by Former Lieutenant Junior Jenny Kopfstein, a graduate of the Naval Academy, who openly served as a lesbian officer, because she had internalized the importance of the Naval Academy’s “Honor Concept” to such a great degree that she felt an overwhelming sense of guilt telling “half truths” to her shipmates. Kopfstein argues that her coming out actually improved the unit cohesion and morale, because by revealing her sexuality, she was able to act like a “normal human being”. I then analyze the speech that Obama gave when he repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” into effect, where the definition of what being an “American” means shifts, as homosexual soldiers have been welcomed to be a part of the “us” that constitutes the American identity. Obama
continuously praises the homosexual soldiers’ patriotism, and claims that they should be able to serve our country despite their sexuality, which he essentializes as something that cannot be helped, like eye color or race.

In the conclusion, I discuss the past importance of heterosexuality and the military in conceptualizing what we currently conceive of as America, and problematize the rigidity of these definitions. The correlation between the military and the livelihood of the state is something that often goes assumed, as does the strong relationship between masculinity and the military. By examining the delicate reality of both American identity and American military masculinity, specifically, I hope to illuminate the intentional performativity that establishes both of these concepts as ‘real’. By bringing attention to the constructed elements of both of these facets of society, and closely examining the performative elements that contribute to these very intentional results, I hope to expose the rigid paradox that is inherent within America’s pursuit of “freedom”.
Historical Contextualization

I. Campbell’s “Imagining America” ¹

In order to understand who and what America is today, it is necessary to investigate particularly notable landmarks that have informed and contributed to the version of America that exists now. The United States of America is a particularly unique nation for many reasons. A relatively young country, the U.S. has quickly risen to the top of the power hierarchy within the international arena of politics. This is illustrated by many normative symbolic aspects of success, like its robust economy, possession of nuclear weaponry and multi-million dollar military apparatus. Adding to its unique character, the United States was founded and built upon principles of democracy. Being instituted on the basis of religious freedom and the fact that democracy, not religion, has been the predominant and therefore ruling ethos of the state, also contributes to the unique identity of the United States. Because the United States technically lacks the religious vertebrae that shape other state’s anatomy in terms of shared norms and what governs morality, the United States is moved further into its own distinctive category that is unparalleled by any other existing state apparatus. The United States is also distinct in that, because all citizens have become American, by way of immigrating to the country at some point, the population is a heterogeneous mix of different ethnicities and people of all different backgrounds. The unification of the people is based on the very existence of

¹ This historical outline serves to be a thematic overview looking at major moments and events that have contributed to where homosexuality and the military is currently situated.
the cliché of the melting pot itself—that regardless of difference, the shared identity of “America” is what unites all Americans. This makes the definition of who and what an American is quite vague, as it has to be applicable to a large variety of different people. By using David Campbell’s concept of “imagining America”, this historical overview seeks to articulate different points in which America being an “imagined community”, via constructing a sense of nationalism can be observed. David Campbell argues that

“If all states are ‘imagined communities, devoid of ontological being apart from the many practices that constitute their reality, then America is the imagined community par excellence. For there never has been a country called ‘America,’ nor a people known as ‘Americans’ for whom a nationality is drawn” (Campbell, 1992, p. 91).

While all nationalism and aspects of state identity are performative, Campbell cites that America’s lack of history and tradition contributes to its rather fragile sense of identity. Campbell cites Michael Kammen, who argues, “Only in a country where it is so unclear what is American, do people worry so much about the threat of things ‘unAmerican’ (Kammen, 1980, p. 4). America articulates its own identity by a dichotomous process of othering: American/unAmerican, democratic/nondemocratic, us/them, which by defining what Americans are not, America is able to articulate what it, in fact, is. Because the criteria for being an American is mostly based on geographical proximity, i.e. if one is born in America then they have American citizenship, the identity of the state itself is made up through extending who is included in “us”. Campbell states that,

“The histories of Americans are located in places other than the one in which they live, such that the flag and the Pledge are, as it were, all we have. Defined, therefore, more by absence than presence, America is peculiarly dependent on representational practices for its being. Arguably more than any other state, the imprecise process of imagination is what constitutes American identity” (Campbell, 1992).
Through representational practices, like reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in schools and waving the flag as an expression of one’s patriotism, citizens are socialized to learn to be included in who is constituted as the “us” as opposed to the villainized “them” and are therefore able to assemble some sense of a unifying national identity. The process of extending the ‘us’ to marginalized citizens, historically implemented through legal structures, has further illustrated the fluidity of the American identity itself and the specific historical contexts, in which different versions of “America” exist.

The military, a necessary component of the state, exists to defend “us”—the loose concept of “us” being defined in terms of normative citizenship. The military can be conceptualized as an extension of the state, and more specifically, is designed to guard the state. Furthermore, according to the preamble of the United States’ Constitution, “providing a common defense” is one of the reasons that a government is even necessary, illustrating the interconnection between the state and the military (Lehring, 2003, p. 72). Because of this, the military is inherently reflective of the United States’ sense of identity, because it is a part of the state’s anatomy. It is also constructed as being accountable for defending what the United States stands for, in response to potential threats. By “othering” enemies, and constructing the other through the concept of the enemy, the sphere of who is included in “us” widens and becomes more inclusive.

Therefore, the public face of the military needs to fit neatly into the definitions that America proclaims itself to be defined by. The military, is then politicized and moralized by projected American values, given that it is not only a facet of American identity, but is the representation of “America” abroad, which is extremely important especially in times of war. Campbell cites Michel Foucault who states, “Wars are no longer waged in the
name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of slaughter in the name of life necessity” (Foucault, 1976). Campbell goes on to elaborate, “In other words, countries go to war, not for the purpose of defending their rulers, but for the purpose of defending “the nation,” ensuring the state’s security, or upholding the interests and values of the people” (Campbell, 1992). This framework for examining not only war itself, but the process of waging the war, and who exactly fights in the war, i.e. the military, shows the not only the intersection of these ideas but also the political qualities inherent to this conceptualization of the nation, the military, and what exactly is being defended. Understanding that the nation of America is “an imagined community par excellence”, shows the merge and conflict in ideas and ideals that all factor into the behavior that attempt to articulate an identity that is entirely imagined (Campbell, 1992, p. 91). By utilizing Campbell’s concept of the “imagined community”, the sometimes paradoxical notions of what it means to behave like an “American” can be revealed and observed, and the conflicts and contradictions found within American society can push the dialogue forward in terms of what “America” is or is not in practice. A parallel can be drawn between the discrepancies in the projected identity of the straight American military despite the homosexual behaviors that occur within its apparatus, and the projection of “freedom, justice, and liberty” ideals that govern the American identity juxtaposed with its past history of imperialism, racism and homophobia: neither is consistent.
II. Historical Contextualization Beginning with the Progressive Era

This historical outline traces the emergence of the “homosexual identity” as being a product of the past century. It is through the scope of the homosexual “identity” in which the relationship between homosexuality and the military will be examined. By looking at these moments of sexual deviance, the ways in which Campbell’s model of the projected imaginary can be applied to question the essence of the military’s heterosexuality. In 1916, during World War I,

“…the punishment of homosexual soldiers was codified into law. The 1916 Articles of War specified that assault with the intent to commit sodomy be identified as a felony. This law did not invent sodomy itself as a crime, but revisions of the Articles of War three years later did. Sodomy was identified as a specific felony; the crime was the sexual act itself, whether it was consensual or involved assault” (Rimmernan, 2008, p. 68).

In 1916, when this revision was made to the Articles of War, the United States military was made up entirely of male soldiers. Because of this gender homogeneity within the military, it can be assumed that the implementation of this law was aimed at soldiers who committed sexually deviant acts, falling under the rather large category of “homosexual behavior”. Prior to this historical moment, the concept of a homosexual identity did not exist; “Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the military neither officially excluded nor discharged homosexuals from its ranks, and until the late nineteenth century, neither homosexuality or the homosexual person existed as a concept” (Lehring, 2003, p.19). Laws like the 1916 Articles of War, which regulated sexuality by way of sexual practices, expose how before the homosexual “identity” gained momentum much later, sexual “perversions” like sodomy, in this instance, were not indicative of a larger implication about someone’s sense of identity. During this era,
“Men in uniform…were imagined as archetypal embodiments of manhood who had achieved the ideal of masculinity. In Post-World War I America, that ideal was understood, in part, in terms of idealized aspects of “civilized manliness such as purity, morality and cleanliness” (Belkin, 2012, p. 23). Post-World War I America held its military members to a standard that exemplified purity, morality and cleanliness, as the military was an organized facet of American identity and therefore was reflective of the purity that America wishes to represent.

The United States is a country heavily governed by concepts of morality, often deploying goliath concepts like justice, democracy, and freedom as valued and integral components that America stands for without compromise. Therefore, because America is reliant on morality as a foundational element to its identity, the military also becomes a moralized institution, as it is reflective of the United States. American morality has always been subjugated by religion, despite its technically secular backbone—most notably the Protestant ethic that the United States was founded, in part, upon. Janet Jakobsen argues that,

“The commonsensical notion as to why sexual regulation is so central to public life is that it has something to do with religion and with the specific religious heritage of the United States. ‘Puritanical’ is the name not just for the religious tradition that has historically dominated U.S. Politics; it is, at least in the popular imagination, also a synonym for sexual repression” (Jakobsen, 2005, p. 286).

As Jakobsen states, historically the United States has very much been influenced by Puritanical ideals, which have contributed to sexuality within America being very regulated. This is regardless of the fact that most of the behavior takes place within the private sphere, which should be exempt from state regulation. This version of morality is also relevant in terms of its influence on what was considered to be the “ideal”
masculinity—aspects like “purity, morality and cleanliness” (Belkin, 2012, p. 23). The idea of the sodomite, in reference to the 1916 Articles of War, is not articulated in terms of “…what might be the threat or danger to the military. It does, however, succeed in constructing the sodomite as one of questionable moral character, an offender of Christian doctrine, and a freak of nature” (Lehring, 2003, p. 76). The Puritanical undertones pervade notions of military masculinity; a structure that exists outside of domestic society, which reveals the strong influence that religion has on the United States, despite its technically secular anatomy. This is an example of exactly how engrained these religious influences are in terms of governing what is considered good. Regulating this example of masculinity shows how integral military masculinity is with the rest of societal masculinity as, “The military is a prime candidate for the study of masculinity, not only because it is an institution populated with men, but also because it plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in the larger society (Barrett, 2001, p. 71).

There is a strong correlation between masculinity and one’s success as a soldier, which can be traced to the “warrior ideal” that is upheld by personifying traits such as being “independent, disciplined, strong willed, physically imposing, and above all masculine” (Howard III & Privadera, 2006). Taking into consideration masculinity theories that assume “that definitions of masculinity depend on changing definitions of women and gay men who serve as the ‘others’ against which heterosexual men construct and project an identity”, homosexuality was seen as being incompatible with the assumed heterosexuality and hyper-masculine notion of the soldier (Kimmel, Barret, 2001, p. 82). As early as the late nineteenth century, there was a surge in inventing ways to detect and
articulate the homosexual, because “the homosexual was seen not only as a proper subject for medical study but also as a medical problem that threatened the very foundation of society” (Lehring, 2003, p. 65). This surge in medicinally studying homosexuality paved way for the societal implementation of the homosexual identity. This then made it easier to articulate what “pure” heterosexuality was, by law of opposition, which enabled and described who was the most capable of serving in the military. As early as World War I, Dr. Albert Abrams, wrote an article titled “Homosexuality—A Military Menace” in which he stated that: “in recruiting the elements that make up our invincible army, we cannot ignore what is obvious and which will militate against the combative prowess of our forces in this war…From a military viewpoint, the homosexualist is not only dangerous, but ineffective as a fighter” (Lehring, 2003, pp. 81-82). Abrams was so concerned with the idea of homosexuals surreptitiously entering the military that he invented a device that

“…Was based on electronic measurements of the naturally occurring radioactivity that emanated from men’s testicles. Abrams recorded the levels of radiation that emanated from ‘normal’ men’s testicles and the levels of radiation that emanated from women’s ovaries. Scaling these readings, Abrams claimed that he could detect homosexuals by their “ovarian reactions” on his scale” (Lehring, 2003, p. 83).

This bizarre anecdote is illustrative of multiple things. Firstly, it shows the occurrence of medically ‘othering’ homosexuals in order to keep them out of the military, on the basis that they are “dangerous” and “ineffective” as fighters. Secondly, it shows the feminization of homosexuality, and its social proximity to femininity and womanhood, and therefore vast distance from masculinity. However, the “dangerous” component used by Abrams to articulate why homosexuals should not be in the military illuminates the paradox of this situation. Because the “homosexual” is coded to be man, these men
undermine the heterosexual “essence” that seems to be tied so closely to masculinity. The discourse surrounding much medical literature at the time about homosexuality seems to be defending masculinity in its “inherent” ties to heterosexuality.

II. Gender Deviance in the Physiological Body

In 1921, the military screening standards expanded to look for “feminine characteristics” in the male body, which “...Were telltale signs of ‘degeneration’ that made a man unfit for military service. Taken almost word for word from the pages of the medical journals that first summoned the homosexual into being, these standards cautioned that men with a degenerative physique might present the general body confirmation of the opposite sex. Characteristics to watch for included sloping shoulders, broad hips, excessive pectoral and pubic adipose tissue, and lack of hirsute and muscular markings” (Lehring, 2003, p. 82).

The process of assigning physiological characteristics in order to construct the gay identity shows the “othering” that took place within the military not only on a behavioral level, but also on a corporeal basis of deviation from the prototypical soldier. Therefore, if one fell short of the physical characteristics that a “real” man possessed, their sense of masculinity and therefore heterosexuality was already being questioned. Assigning aesthetic bodily markers as symbols for potential queerness made its way into “official” policy by the start of World War II. According to the 1942 guidelines, “Persons habitually or occasionally engaged in homosexual or other perverse sexual practices are unsuitable for military service and will be excluded. Feminine bodily characteristics, effeminacy in dress or manner, or a patulous [expanded] rectum are not consistently found in such persons, but when present should lead to careful psychiatric examination” (Lehring, 2003, p. 82).
The correlation between potential homosexual behavior in military members and psychiatric examination shows how prevalent medical diagnoses had become in conceptualizing homosexuality. At this time, homosexuality was seen as “sexual psychopathy” which later became the “accepted definition of homosexuality in the United States” (Lehring, 2003). This highlights the transition that “…transform[ed] homosexuality from a crime to an illness”, eventually culminating in the idea that “…homosexuals were unfit to serve because they were mentally ill” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 69). The correlation between homosexuality, femininity and exclusion from military service are also illustrative of the deeply embedded misogyny within society in this particular historical moment. This also shows exactly how political the concept of the body is, especially in relation to the military. Bodies can be conceptualized as “symbols of social systems”, and “the body of the soldier has come to signify the nation and national security in particularly intensified ways” (Belkin, 2012, p. 36).

III. All Sodomy Becomes Illegal

Following World War II, “Article 125 of UCMJ (Uniform Code of Military Justice” was implemented in 1949, which prohibited “sodomy, defined as anal or oral penetration, whether consensual or coerced and whether same-sex or opposite-sex, and does not exempt married couples” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 70). The regulation of sexual practices among heterosexual and homosexual people, as well as married couples is indicative of the religious influences that contribute to the definitions of who is constituted as a pervert. Regulating the sexuality of all military-affiliated persons is
illustrative of the moralistic pedestal that the military resides upon, which reflects
American (and Puritan) ideals, which paradoxically govern the morality of a secular state.
Sodomy, in this case, includes most sexual behaviors not tied to procreation, which is
reflective of
“Christian proscriptions governing all sexuality that is other than procreative. There are
ways of copulating, it implies, that are less pleasing to God than others. The
pervasiveness of the Christian construction of sexuality is notable. Anal intercourse and
oral intercourse, along with bestiality, are lumped together as activities that are offensive
to God because none leads to the only legitimate end of sexual concourse: live birth”
(Lehring, 2003, p. 76).

However, in 1954, Article 125 took a turn that made it apply solely to
homosexuals, following a heterosexual violation of Article 125 by a member of the navy,
Seaman Shawn Doherty, who publicly received fellatio from a female prostitute at a
Navy charity event (Lehring, 2003, p. 102). The court “expressed doubt” on how to deal
with the “crime that was committed”, because the whole “tenor of the letter (Secretary
Navy Instruction 1620.1—the branch of the Navy that dealt with interpreting Article 125)
is to project persons with homosexual tendencies into a channel for a separation from the
military. A homosexual is a person who has morbid sexual passion for one of the same
sex and accused’s crime was committed with a person of the opposite sex” (Lehring,
2003, pp. 101-102). While both homosexuality and receiving fellatio from a female
prostitute are both constituted as “morbid sexual passion”, this discrepancy in treatment
illuminated the moral hierarchy of heterosexual sexuality, since this was seen as less
deviant than a homosexual act. This ultimately culminated in the courts declaring

“all acts of sodomy are officially homosexual acts, raising the stakes in the
politics of identification made possible by the discovery of this new kind of homosexual
person. All acts of sodomy could now be looked at anew, since sodomy, in this court’s
opinion, was a defining characteristic and symptomatic act of homosexuality” (Lehring, 2003, p. 103).

Fellatio, particularly when it happened between two members of opposite genders, took on its own category, and the word “sodomy” was used to describe only sexual acts that took place between two men.

During this time period, there were three different classes of homosexuals that were acknowledged between all branches of the military, despite the judicial separation of facets within the military. However, “separation from the military is the prescribed course of action for all three cases”, despite variance in the classes (Lehring, 2003, p. 103). In the 1940s and 1950s, “homosexuals were either dismissed with an undesirable discharge or were court-martialed and dismissed with a dishonorable or bad-conduct discharge” (Lehring, 2003, p. 107). A Class I homosexual was defined as “servicemen who have committed homosexual offenses involved force, fraud, intimidation, or the seduction of a minor” (Lehring, 2003, p. 104). A Class II homosexual was constituted as “servicemen who have willfully engaged in, or attempted to perform, homosexual acts which do not fall under the Class I category” (Lehring, 2003, p. 104). The final category, a Class III homosexual was said to be “servicemen who exhibit, profess, or admit homosexual tendencies or associate with known homosexuals” (Lehring, 2003, p. 104). This further pushed the idea that the homosexual is an identity instead of merely a behavior: the person who committed acts of sodomy became a sodomite, which eventually became a homosexual, in terms of colloquial language. The interchangeability of “sodomite” and “homosexual” reflect that they are “both viewed as symptomatic acts; both are viewed as activities that indicate a criminal character flaw or defect, a diseased
body, a disturbed personality, or a medical aberration that could endanger the mission of
the military” (Lehring, 2003, p. 80).

IV. The 1980s and the Predatory Homosexual

It was not until the Reagan era that the military established one uniform official
policy in regards to navigating homosexuality within the military. Previously, each
branch had the freedom to deal with homosexuality as they wished, resulting in a
disproportionate amount of discharges from some branches over others. On January 28,
1982, Reagan’s secretary of defense, Casper Weinberger, issued the Department of
Defensive Directive 1332.14, which stated:

“Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence of such members
adversely affects the ability of the Armed Forces to maintain discipline, good order, and
morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among the members, to ensure the integrity
of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of members
who frequently must work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit
and train members of the military services; and in certain circumstances, to prevent
breaches of security” (Department of Defense Directive, 1982).

The argument that the presence of homosexuals would disrupt the ability to “maintain
discipline, good order, and morale” is one that many opponents used in the debates
concerning the integration of gays into the military at this time, and ten years later with
Bill Clinton’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. The majority of the language used in
Reagan’s policy seems to communicate a fear of homosexuals. The idea that the presence
of homosexuals, who have always been a part of the military, despite the heterosexual
façade of the military, would “adversely affect” the ability of the military service to
“maintain discipline, good order, and morale” sheds light on the highly performative
aspect of military masculinity in relation to heterosexuality. This shows that the military’s sense of heterosexuality is not strong enough to possibly withstand an integration of open gays to join its military apparatus. In order to attempt to stabilize this instable notion of heteronormative masculinity, all gay soldiers must be banished, in order to not disrupt “discipline, good order, and morale”. By keeping the military “officially” populated by solely heterosexual soldiers, the identity of the military will not be questioned by members of the military itself, or on a societal level—it will be presumed to be straight, because by very definition, it *is* straight. This gives insight into the delicate pedestal that military masculinity is manifested upon, and the performative elements on a structural level that enable such a hegemonic and masculine status in America. David Campbell quotes Judith Butler, who states “The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (Butler, Campbell, 1994, p. 205). In reference to the implementation of the Department of Defense Directive 1332.14, the articulation of what is incompatible with the military service, i.e. homosexuals, reflexively displays what the military so desperately wants to be. The process of othering the homosexuals in order to articulate what is “incompatible” with military service, communicates that the “very terms through which identity is articulated” as political. By deconstructing the identity of the military and its intentionally inherent heterosexuality through the lens of the homosexual, the constructed binary is revealed, as is the inconsistency in its manifestation.

The portion of the policy change meant to “…ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command” also seems to highlight the susceptibility of the military as a
structure that could be influenced by deviant sexuality. Film theorist Laura Mulvey, first coined the term “the male gaze” in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, which has since been adopted by feminist literature and many scholars. Mulvey states that,

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has always been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 10).

In the instance of the military, and the privacy concerns in regards to living in close quarters, both “active” and “passive” roles are male. Therefore, both looked at and looker is male, which inverses and reflects the “male gaze” back upon itself. The potential trauma of the shower also speaks the discomfort of the flipped notion of the gaze:

“In the hypermasculine atmosphere of military culture, the hysterical cries of soldiers on the way to showers has given voice to this fear/desire: the perceived subversion of the privilege of objectification that benefits white heterosexual men at the expense of all who are different. Gays in the shower undermine “morale, good order, and discipline” by turning this process of Otherness upside down. The presence of gays threaten the straight servicemen’s position as masculine subject—the creator and consumer of objectified objects, be they women, slaves or enemies of the nation” (Lehring, 2003, p. 130).

In the patriarchal structure of the military, in which masculinity is codified by one’s ability to be in control, or in this case, be the looker, the fragile reality of military masculinity and its presumed heterosexuality is demonstrated. Homosexual men, in particular, have been constructed as having a rampant libido, and that they “lack the ability to control their sexual desire” (Lehring, 2004, p. 51). Homosexuals, in their deviation from “normal” straight soldiers, are thought to have a

“psychological defect that makes gay men and lesbians unable to control their sexual desires—[which] makes their enlistment a threat to the morale, good order, and discipline
that is demanded by the military. In reality, of course, there is no evidence that any of these characteristics, immoralities, constitutional defects, or psychological deficiencies is more frequent among gay men and lesbians than among heterosexuals men and women” (Lehring, 2004, p. 89).

Andrew Belkin aptly refers to this hysteria as “the straight soldier’s fear of a ‘Queer Eye for the Straight G.I.’ scenario” (Belkin & Bateman, 2004, p. 49). Joseph Steffan, an openly gay Navy member provides a humorous analysis of this situation, by stating, “Heterosexual men have an annoying habit of overestimating their own attractiveness” (Ducat, 2004, p. 155). The fact that the potential victims of sexual assault are straight men is also an interesting turn of the typical narrative. The military, in particular, is rampant with sexual assault violations against both women and men (D’Amico, 1996, p. 3). The incorporation of the gay soldier could inverse those “in power”—meaning that the perpetrator could turn into the victim. This codes the homosexual ‘other’ in a dangerous connotation of the word—by very nature of existing, they are already deemed a potential disruption to the military ethos as previously conceptualized.
Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: The Policy Itself

I. Introduction: Movement into the Mainstream

Many conceptualize the 1990s to be the time when the dialogue surrounding homosexuality in the military moved into the mainstream arena of American politics. This was characterized by Bill Clinton’s promise to lift the ban on gays in the military through executive order, if he were to be elected President of the United States, which he eventually accomplished (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 75). As was illustrated in the past section of this paper, The United States military and the concept of homosexuality have long been in dialogue with each other. However, the rest of America took notice when the President of the United States seemingly spearheaded the conversation surrounding the capability of gay men and lesbians to be able to perform the ‘soldier’ role, which brought the conversation into the political limelight. This conversation, while happening less blatantly throughout American history, crystallized itself into the national agenda with Clinton’s ultimately unfulfilled promise to utilize his authority to implement change through executive order. Since the 1990s, the relationship between the military and homosexuality has been more of a staple item in many facets of American society: conversations surrounding national security, the military as an entity and within the non-militarized LGBTQ \(^2\) rights platform.

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\(^2\) Acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.
II. Bill Clinton and the 1992 Election: An Ally in Office

During the fiscal years of 1980 and 1990, a total of “16,919 men and women were discharged under the separate category of “homosexuality” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 75). While that is a huge number alone, “the cost of recruiting and training replacements for these discharged service members was placed at $498 million”\(^3\) (Lehring, 2003, p. 62). This seemed to be in some ways a reaction to the success that gay rights organizations were having in the civil sphere during the previous decade:

“The 1970s were years of significant achievement. Gay liberation and women’s liberation changed the sexual landscape of the nation. Hundreds of thousands of gay women and men came out and openly affirmed same-sex eroticism. We won repeal of sodomy laws in half the states, a partial lifting of the exclusion of lesbians and gay men from federal employment, civil rights protection in a few dozen cities, the inclusion of gay rights in the platform of the Democratic Party, and the elimination of homosexuality from the psychiatric profession’s list of mental illnesses. The gay male subculture expanded and became increasingly visible in large cities, and lesbian feminists pioneered in building alternative institutions and an alternative culture that attempted to embody a liberatory vision of the future” (D’Emilio, 1993, p. 467).

Because of these notable symbolic successes in attempting to assimilate the gay identity into “normal” society, many “advocates for lesbian and gay civil rights embraced overturning the military ban as a priority in the 1980s” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 47). However, the advocates for lesbian and gay civil rights who embraced overturning the military ban as a precedence were actually “gay people inside the Democratic Party and businessmen who came out recently and positioned themselves as powerbrokers for a community they do not know and cannot represent. But as ‘Friends of Bill’ they [used to] have access to the White House and an inordinate influence on policy” (Lehring, 2003, p. 143). While these men, “called Homocrats by lesbian activist Sarah Schulman”, were still

\(^3\) This total cost has been “adjusted for inflation” as of 2003 (Lehring, 2003).
activists, the majority of other gay activist grassroots campaigns were more focused on “greater funding and awareness for AIDS; the Employment Non-discrimination Act; and a federal civil rights law for lesbians, gay men, and other sexual minorities” (Lehring, 2003, p. 143). However, as a result of the “‘Homocratic, Friends of Bill’ in the Democratic Party, and therefore [being] closer to policy changes, the overturn of the ban on gays in the military [ended up] taking more of a center stage position than it had in the past”, the military and gay rights activists merged forces in a way that they had previously not yet (Lehring, 2003, p. 144). It is the early 1990s, following the 1980s, that Bill Clinton not only announced that he would be running for President of the United States of America, but that if he were elected, “one of his first acts would be to overturn the military ban through executive order” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 74).

Bill Clinton ran for Presidential office in the 1992 election for the President of the United States of America against George H.W. Bush, following the very conservative Reagan era. Not surprisingly, Clinton overwhelmingly secured the gay vote in the election when he campaigned with the promise that to end the ban utilizing executive order. Clinton first entered the dialogue surrounding this issue in 1991 at Harvard University when he was asked if he would “…issue an executive order to rescind the ban on lesbians and gays in the military. Clinton responded ‘Yes.’ And explained further: ‘I think that people who are gay should be expected to work, and should be given the opportunity to serve the country’” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 74). In May 1992, Clinton furthered his support for this claim when he gave a speech to the Los Angeles lesbian and gay community, where he described “…a vision of America that included gay and lesbian Americans and in which discrimination, particularly the government’s own bias-induced
policy of keeping homosexuals from serving their country in uniform, would end” 
(Rimmerman, 2008, p. 74). Clinton spoke directly to the gay population in the United 
States, which marks, historically, the first president to cater the ‘gay vote’ and to address 
the gay and lesbian population in a positive light as not only members of the country, but 
politically active voting citizens. Overjoyed to be recognized by a figure so high up on 
the political ladder and by the prospect of an ‘ally’ coming into office, the LGBTQ 
activists campaigned to do what they could to ensure his election (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 
78). This proved to be a seemingly symbiotic relationship, for

“Gay men and women did make a difference in Clinton’s campaign. He received 
approximately $3 million in “gay donations” and gay men and lesbian accounted for 
about 4 percent of the vote that put him in the White House. But even as the New York 
Times described ‘gay enclaves’ in which men and women took to the streets, ‘weeping, 
dancing and hugging to celebrate the victory of Gov. Bill Clinton’ it was becoming clear 
that Clinton’s support for gay rights would become a rallying point for religious 
conservatives and a source of support for his political opponents” (Bailey, 2013, p. 96).

Once he was elected in 1992, Clinton was told by consultants not to ruin his 
“honeymoon” period in office by lifting the ban of homosexuals in the military because 
he was being met with backlash and opposition from the Right Wing (Rimmerman, 2008, 
p. 72). Stepping away from the issue, at least at first, would establish more of a neutral 
political climate while he adjusted into his new role as President. Unfortunately, 
opponents of lifting the gay military ban wasted no time in aggressively campaigning 
against the idea of incorporating the homosexual soldier into the military apparatus. The 
opposed were mostly made up men who were part of “conservative religious groups and 
other members of the right” (Lehring, 2003, p. 137).

The fact that those vehemently opposed to lifting the ban on gay members of the 
military were mostly religious groups and other members of the rights shows the
construction of homosexuality as a moral issue, and more precisely, a moral issue that is heavily governed by religion. However, those who opposed the incorporation of gay soldiers into the military seemed to avoid using moral language to debate the issue, and instead focused on aspects like the “unit cohesion” rationale to articulate their apprehension and aversion to this occurring. This created a linguistic divide between the religious opponents and the political opponents: “While outspoken members of the religious right might rail against the sin of homosexuality, and, not incidentally use the threat of gays serving openly in the U.S. military to raise funds and to mobilize the faithful against Democratic administrations, high-ranking military and political leaders— with significant stumbles—publicly avoided the language of morality” (Bailey, 2013, p. 90). However, the Pentagon itself very much had a religious component to the make up of its identity, as it

“…was rife with prayer breakfasts and Bible studies on the topics of homosexuality, and the major policy working groups on the topic took the immorality of homosexuality—along with what many participants saw as its “ick” factor—as a given. However, by publicly subordinating religious condemnations of homosexuality to discussions of military efficacy and unit cohesion, these conservative policymakers hoped to reach beyond their natural constituency, appealing to Americans who worried more about security and military strength than about religious sexual prohibitions, and so creating the possibility of political bipartisanship and legislative supermajorities” (Bailey, 2013, p. 90).

By framing the incorporation of homosexual soldiers under the idea that they would undermine military efficacy, the opponents are able to navigate the amorphous terrain of morality through language regarding national security. “I don’t think we should crucify the national defense capability on the cross of an equal opportunity slogan,” said ultraconservative Georgia representative Larry McDonald in a testimony to Congress
about the incorporation of gays into the military (Bailey, 2013, p. 104). Perhaps in an
effort to remain consistent with, or at least attempt to respect the secular structure of the
United States, “unit cohesion had become the only way to speak publicly about the issue
of homosexuality in the military. Organizations on the religious right of course, continued
to make their moral case about homosexuality, especially in media aimed at their own,
but even they increasingly employed the language of military efficacy” (Bailey, 2013, p.
107). The concept of lifting the ban on gays in the military also divided the gay
community,

“…many more moderates, gay and straight alike, who believed passionately in
equality for lesbians and gay men were uncomfortable with the idea of the military as the
organization that would determine and define notions of citizenship and equality…With a
divided gay community and a critically detached progressive straight community on one
side and a well-organized, well-financed coalition of antigay conservatives on the other
side, the battle [to lift the ban] was lost before it had even begun” (Lehring, 2003, p. 147).

On the more extreme left side, existed “lesbians and gay men…many of whom had
only recently protested against the Persian Gulf war, [who] wanted no part of an effort
that had its heart support for military efforts that they abhorred” (Lehring, 2003, p. 147).
Gary Lehring cites a letter by Barbara Smith, who

“articulated what many leftist felt: “Given the U.S. military’s role as the world’s police
force, which implements imperialist foreign policies and murders those who stand in their
way (e.g. the estimated quarter of a million people, mostly who died in Iraq as a result of
the Gulf War), a progressive lesbian and gay would at least consider the political
implications of frantically organizing to get into the mercenary wing of the military
industrial complex. A radical lesbian and gay movement would of course be working to
dismantle the military completely” (Smith, Lehring, 2003, p. 147).

With the more radical and active political advocates in complete opposition to the
military industrial complex as a whole, the adoption of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” makes
some sense given the mixture of political apathy at work. This was characterized by the
grassroots LGBTQ movements being focused elsewhere, and therefore the “Homocrats”, or more conservative members of the gay community battling with the conservative Right wing. The “compromise” of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” was officially announced in July 1993, marking a new era in the structural relationship between homosexuality and the military, most notably characterized by the benign acceptance that homosexual soldiers are in the military, and a tolerance of their presence as long as their sexuality is not something that becomes known.

II. Arguments Used Against the Integration of Homosexual Soldiers into the Military

Those who opposed the integration of homosexual soldiers in the military usually followed a common rhetoric in articulating their aversion to this idea. The most prevalent argument against the incorporation of homosexual soldiers into the military was that they would disrupt order, discipline, and individual behavior necessary to maintain cohesion and performance. Others who supported the military ban on lesbians and gays argued that if the ban were to be overturned, it would diminish the “ability of the military to ‘recruit and train members of the armed forces.’” Ban supporters worried that the United States would face the ‘specter of a depleted military force and weakened recruitment efforts if those who join or remain were forced to associate with people known to be lesbian or gay’” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 92). There was also a fear that, by allowing gays to join the military, sexual assault would be a much more common phenomenon. This traces back to the early 1980s, where “the Pentagon argued lesbians and gays must be banned in order to ‘facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording to minimal privacy’”
There was also the argument that “The impact [of lifting the ban] on the army’s public image would also endanger recruitment and retention, by causing potential service members to hesitate to enlist, making parents of potential service members reluctant to recommend or approve the enlistment of their sons and daughters in an organization in which they would be forced to live and work with homosexuals, and causing members of the army to hesitate to reenlist” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 90). The United States Navy defended their position to keep homosexuals out of the military by saying that “An individual’s daily performance of military duties could be hindered by emotional or sexual relationships with other individuals and would interfere with the proper hierarchical and command relationships that characterize the military” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 93).

Almost all of these arguments capitalize upon the idea that the homosexual soldier is a dangerous other—dangerous in terms of disrupting the order of the military unit (and therefore the efficacy of the military at large), dangerous in terms of recruiting new potential soldiers (as well as being able to retain past military members who could choose not re-enlist) and dangerous in terms of actual violence—that they would not be able to contain their sexual desires and therefore assault straight members of the military force. The military is a necessary component to “the construction of the State in the United States. Providing a common defense, according to the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, is one of the reasons that a government is necessary and desirable. Defending one’s country has always been considered a defining characteristic of citizenship” (Lehring, 2003, p. 18). Opening up this opportunity to marginalized gay “citizens” would disrupt
the heterosexuality of the State on a much broader scale. It is this perceived reality that is the real “danger”.

The adoption of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue”, announced in July 1993 was seen as a compromise between the Right Wing opponents of the policy and those who believed that the eradication of the ban was necessary (Rimmerman, 2006, p. 90). The announcement caused a bit of turmoil within the LGBTQ community invested in the ban, who anticipated the lift of homosexuals in the military being a step towards symbolic equality on a state level. This was characterized by making who could be a citizen (in terms of who could defend the nation) more egalitarian and opportunistic, through widening the doors to whom could serve in the military. Torrie Osborn, who at the time was the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian task force, argued that the plan was “simply a repackaging of discrimination” and other LGBTQ leaders like Tim McFeeley, then executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, called the Clinton proposal a “shattering disappointment” (Rimmerman, 2006, pp. 80-81).

III. The Actual Policy: An Institutional Closet

The entirety of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Repeal” policy situates homosexuality as being a burden to be carried by the homosexual within the private sphere. The homosexual therefore works to maintain the ‘public’ face of the military as being entirely heterosexual and heteronormative. Heteronormativity, a term first coined by queer theorist Michael Warner in his essay “Fear of a Queer Planet” simply implies that what we have come to conceptualize as “normative” or what is conceived as
“normal” or dominant in society is heavily reliant upon the presumption of heterosexuality, the nuclear family and monogamy, which is re-inscribed through structural and institutional practices like marriage” (Warner, 1991, p. 6).

Heteronormativity is reinforced through mandating that queer military members keep their sexualities private, and perpetuates the phenomenon of “the closet”, in order to uphold the illusory impression of the prevailing and virile notion of heterosexuality within the military. Philosopher Richard Mohr analyzes “the horrors of the closet” when he stated “The chief problem of the social institution of the closet is not that it promotes hypocrisy, requires lies, sets snares, blames the victim when snared, and causes unhappiness—though it does have all of these results. No, the chief problem with the closet is that it treats gays as less than human, less than animal, less even than vegetable—it treats gays as reeking scum, the breath of death” (Mohr, Rimmerman, 2006, p. 95). The “‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue’ policy…institutionalizes rather than eliminates the military closet. Lesbians and gay men in the military are asked to remain silent and invisible, to hide their ‘othered’ identities, so that the military can bolster its androcentric, heterocentric image” (D’Amico, 1996, p. 3). This institutionalization and reinforcement of “the closet” can be seen in many ways when closely examining what “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” entails.

The first point in the policy “bans military recruiters from asking if prospective enlistees are gay or lesbian” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). Prior to this policy change, there was a box to be checked “yes” or “no” that asked potential recruits if they identified as a homosexual or bisexual. This would be enough cause for immediate elimination in the recruiting process. The second point in “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is that “homosexual
conduct is forbidden both on-base and off-base”, making the reality of “the closet” very real (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). This also deems “homosexual conduct” unworthy of taking place anywhere, regardless of one’s proximity to “base” or their place of employment. “Homosexual conduct” is outlined in the third section of the policy. Four points are used to illustrate what “homosexual conduct” entails: “a) same-sex intercourse b) public acknowledgment of homosexuality c) attempting a same-sex marriage and d) same-sex handholding and kissing” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). This takes all aspects of “homosexual conduct”, besides the sex-act itself but also behaviors that tread into the realm of “identity”, and paint it as something that should not be happening in any circumstance. A New Republic editorial that came out after the implementation of the repeal:

“But in was a New Republic editorial that perhaps best captured the fury of those who expected the president to follow through on his original campaign promise: “And the most demeaning assumption about the new provisions is that they single out the deepest moment of emotional intimacy—the private sexual act—as that which is most repugnant. Its assumption about the dignity and humanity of gay people, in and out of the military, in public and in private, is sickening” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 81).

The fourth clause of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” discusses permissible activity for homosexual service members. The first portion states that “telling a spouse, attorney, or member of the clergy about your homosexuality” is permissible (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). This reinforces upholding a different, inauthentic image in the public sphere, in that one is allowed to tell a “spouse, attorney or member of the clergy” only, versus a more open and public announcement. Telling an attorney about one’s homosexuality suggests that one has already experienced some kind of ramification as a result of knowledge of their sexuality being brought into the realm of the public sphere. The only time where homosexuality would be relevant to an attorney is if they were being consulted for
something that related to their homosexuality, and its deviation away from the heteronormativity being demanded. Being able to tell a member of the clergy, similarly, has a connotation that one did something wrong. Members of a clergy exist only within the constructed confines of religion. The majority of anti-gay right groups base their homophobia upon an interpretation of the Bible that sanctions homosexuals. There is a strong correlation between Right wing citizens and politicians who oppose gay rights. Including “telling a clergy member” as a permissible activity communicates that it is acceptable only under the presumption that one would be seeking help or guidance about their “perversion” i.e. homosexuality. Religion has played a critical role in the sexual regulation of American life. Janet R. Jakobsen points out “The commonsensical notion as to why sexual regulation is so central to public life is that it has something to do with religion and with the specific religion of the United States. “Puritanical” is the name not just for the religious tradition that has historically dominated U.S. Politics, it is, at least in the popular image, also a synonym for sexual repression” (Jakobsen, 2005, p. 286). Jakobsen locates the extremely potent correlation between religion, sexual repression and regulation, and cites the United States’ Protestant heritage as being one of the roots that causes this regulation. Allowing one to tell the clergy men is also assuming that the majority of the people who make up the military would be Christian, as an alternative religious representation is not included in the policy itself. It should also be noted that both attorneys and clergymen are sworn to confidentiality on the basis of their meeting. Both of these instances of a “permissible” confidante maintain that homosexuality must be a private matter contained within the restrictions of the personal. The inclusion of an attorney and a clergy member also denote that the person seeking their guidance or help
did something wrong, and need aid in correcting the wrong, once again framing homosexuality as an error or sin.

Permissible activity also includes “associating with openly gay and lesbian people”, “going to a gay or lesbian bar” and “marching in a gay pride parade in civilian clothes” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). All of these activities obviously happen off of the military base itself. These activities are also not exclusive to homosexual people, in the way that “same-sex intercourse” might be. While the tolerance for these activities does seem to note more of an acceptance of “the gay lifestyle” there is very much a conscious distancing from partaking in these activities as an “ally” versus as an actual homosexual trying to participate in the community. Banning the association with an “openly gay and lesbian couple” (which probably should be or) would likely upset some familial tensions, or penalize those who actually are not queer but may have a gay brother, lesbian aunt or close friend. Going to a gay or lesbian bar is tolerated also under the presumption that there is a distancing between the reality of being homosexual versus the curiosity or accompanying someone else to one of these institutions. Going to a gay or lesbian bar is also perhaps more tolerated because one is going to a social environment that has a set time limit for how long one can stay. This communicates a temporal inhabitation of identity related to the spatial apparatus of the bar itself. Once one leaves, or the bar closes, the experience, or ‘scene’ is over (Goffman, 1959). Marching in a gay pride parade in civilian clothes, by its very wording, demands a double life. So much of our navigation of the social world is negated through aesthetic clues, often clothing. Hospital scrubs are used to symbolize a doctor, nurse or other medical professional in the same way that the military uniform symbolizes one’s participation in the military. By
mandating that one can participate in a gay pride but march in *civilian* clothes, 
perpetuates the earlier described notion of distancing of the military identity from one’s 
expression of support with the gay community.

Part five of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” relatively bluntly states “Military personnel 
found to have engaged in homosexual conduct could be discharged” (Rimmerman, 2008, 
p. 71) It is unclear what the time frame is for military personnel who have been found to 
be engaging or have been engaged in homosexual conduct. Is it before one joined the 
military? During one’s participation in the military? The past tense use of “engaged” also 
denotes that this devious behavior is not recurring. While technically all criminal 
behavior will not necessarily experience the legal consequence, the wording of this 
particular clause, and the use of the word “found” within the Repeal suggests that this 
activity will be blindly tolerated, so long as there is no reason for there to be attention 
drawn to it. The use of the word “could” also convolutes the inevitability of the discharge 
actually happening. This suggests a hierarchy of discharges, and a social element that 
contributes to determining who is discharged and why. This claim can be supported by 
the large percentage of White women who experienced discharge because they were 
lesbians. This alludes to the heterosexual and androcentric image of the military that the 
closet perpetuates, that “The U.S. Military’s lesbian/gay exclusion policy is built on 
intersecting ideas about sexuality, race, and gender. The exclusion embodies a particular 
array of race and gender relations and encourages violence against sexual minorities—
and, by extension, a group constructed as ‘Other’ or ‘undesirable’ (D’Amico, 1996, p. 3).

The sixth clause of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell states that “Military officials could not 
launch probes merely to discover if an enlistee is gay or lesbian, but if they suspect, based
on ‘articulatable facts’, that a person has engaged in prohibited activity, they may investigate to find out if their suspicion is correct” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). This clause is incredibly unclear. It seems unlikely that one would stumble upon ‘articulatable facts’ about a person who has engaged in the ‘prohibited activities’ without probing into that person’s personal life. Given the restrictions on homosexuality, it seems improbable that a homosexual service person would be conducting themself in a manner that would cause need or reason for investigation. Unless everyone was subjected to a homosexual screening prior to enlisting, which is banned by point one of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” where a recruiter may not inquire if the potential recruit is gay or a lesbian, this seems to structurally enforce a level of bullying or harassment based on the theory that someone might be a homosexual. At what point does “launching probes” turn into permission to “investigate to find out if their suspicion is correct”? This murky language is consistent in all of the portions of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. There is a very fine line in between what’s constituted as permissible activity and what is considered respecting one’s privacy. This hazy line is structurally reinforced by the very policy itself.

The seventh and last clause of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” states that “Capricious outing of suspected gays and lesbians by following personnel without evidence is forbidden, and any attempt to blackmail a suspected gay or lesbian member of the armed forces would be punishable by a dishonorable discharge, a $2,000 fine, and a one-year jail term” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). A capricious outing seems to be one that would be characterized by having acquired the (potentially) personal knowledge of another’s sexuality, and releasing it into public knowledge because of a change of heart of as a malicious act of proving one’s power. While a dishonorable discharge is notable, in that it
uniforms the punishment that all homosexual soldiers receive, the clause is still enabling the idea that one’s homosexuality remains where the military thinks it should be, which is as the skeleton in the very back of one’s metaphorical closet, tucked away from anyone else ever encountering it. The blackmailing aspect speaks to there being a political quality inherent when navigating classified or private information. This all still circles around the idea that homosexuality is not tolerated, and making someone’s homosexuality public knowledge also not tolerated by attempting to preserve the heterosexuality of the entire entity.

The entirety of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” structurally reinforces the horror of the closet for all gay and lesbian identified soldiers. While multi-faceted, the overall message is consistent: that homosexuality, at least publicly, is not and will not be tolerated. The public face of the military is very much heterosexual—even benignly tolerating the secret existence of homosexuals seemed to be enough to upset the delicate balance of military masculinity in relation to homosexuality that has been historically upheld. All ‘acts’ of homosexuality are banned on and off base, and partaking in activities that verge on more queer, like associating with a gay or lesbian couple or going to a gay bar all have a temporal quality to them that is overcompensated for by one’s allegiance and participation within the military itself. Gay bars, associating with a gay or lesbian couple and marching in a gay pride parade are all mandated to be conducted (if they must be) when one is out of uniform and in civilian clothes. This preserves the heteronormative and heterosexual signifier for the military, and reinforces the idea to the public that the military is a strictly heterosexual institution.
The Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

I. Context

President of the United States Barack Obama signed the bill that repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” on December 22 in Washington DC (White House, 2010). Effective for eighteen years, the ambiguous “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, which barred homosexual soldiers from making their sexuality public knowledge, officially became a relic of the past, marking a new opportunity for the assimilation of the homosexual identity into normative society. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, “which walked an uneven line between sexuality as *acts* and sexuality as *identity*” ultimately did not preserve the heterosexual façade of the military, nor ensure the safety of secretly homosexual soldiers (Lehring, 2003, p. 136). Technically, gay men and lesbians have always been allowed to serve in the military (and have been), as long as they remained closeted—it is only the public exposure of one’s queerness that has resulted in a discharge of the military. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” did nothing to change that as it structurally enforced the closet even further, taking on legal elements as incentives to remain within the oppressive confines of the closet. What “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” did accomplish was bringing the conversation surrounding homosexuality in the military into the mainstream media, garnering more attention among a national audience. The debates surrounding “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” seemed to repeat the conversations that occurred years prior: Would incorporating homosexual soldiers into the military undermine troop efficacy? Would straight soldiers’ privacy be violated as a result of close living quarters? Would sexual assault reports rise? These are all questions that were addressed both on a media level and within the
government. The following pages contain an analysis of testimonies between three individuals in front of Congress, nine months before Barack Obama signed the repeal into effect.

II. Case Studies

On March 18th, 2010, there was a Senate Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services relating to the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. The testimonies that were given were from General John J. Sheehan, Former Supreme Allied Commander and former Commander in Chief of the U.S. Atlantic Command, Michael D. Almy, Former Major of the United States Air Force and Jenny L. Kopfstein, Former Lieutenant of the U.S. Navy. Michael D. Almy and Jenny L. Kopfstein were both discharged as a result of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. General John J. Sheenan, who retired from his service as General represents the view that it would be in the military’s best interest to remain a publicly “heterosexual” institution. Although both Almy and Kopfstein experienced the same fate—being honorably discharged—how their careers eventually culminated into this point differed vastly. Their testimonies reveal the anxiety-provoking reality of living under the policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as a queer service member as well as what one’s life looks like after experiencing dismissal from an institution that they dedicated their lives to being a part of. These case studies are also demonstrative of the fuzzy line between behavior and identity that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” endorses. General Sheenan’s testimony provides a primary account of the more modern argument against lifting the ban on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and a rationale to keep the military structurally how it has been—stagnant in the face of potential change.
A. John J. Sheehan, Former Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, and Former Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command

General Sheehan begins by detailing his experience serving in the military:

“My point of view and convictions were formed from my experience during 35 years of service as a Marine Corps infantry officer who has served in combat, led a platoon, three companies, an infantry battalion, and an infantry regiment. My career also includes command of units from 26 different nations” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 8).

By noting his experience, he is demonstrating to Congress the authority that he has to speak out about this issue, given that he has spent the majority of his life both observing and participating within the military apparatus. Sheehan details that “…military life is fundamentally different from civilian life, and that military society is characterized by its own laws, rules, customs, and traditions, including numerous restrictions on personal behavior that would not be accepted in normal civilian life” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 8).

By distancing the military from the rest of domestic society, General Sheehan is communicating that the military should be (and is) exempt to certain norms that are more present in civilian life. This exposes the “exceptional institution” rule, or that—“the military is an exceptional institution. Its mission of national defense takes precedence over other concerns. Thus the military cannot and should not be treated as equivalent to civilian institutions, and equal rights protections cannot be accorded the same weight in the military as in civilian society” (Bailey, 2013, p. 90). He elaborates upon this idea by saying that

“Military culture is deliberately developed and structured to mold individuals from all walks of life into a coherent group that willingly sacrifices itself for the strength of the unit. In fact, the cohesion of a unit is predicated, in part, on lack of individuality of its members...we try to make marines interchangeable. This makes the military a unique
institution within the broader American society” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell", 2010, p. 9).

The interchangeability factor seems to rest on a commonality among soldiers—one that is reinforced by at least participating in the sexuality charade that is “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, and projecting a hopeful imaginary onto this “shared” trait. Sheehan then goes onto say that “The ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy, however awkward and difficult, reinforces the critical maxim that, first and foremost, you are a soldier, an airman, or marine. Your preferences and desires are not relevant. Effectiveness in training and mission accomplishment on the battlefield are the standards that you judge them by” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 9). This attempts to demand that all of the military behaves under one standard rubric, despite differences that may exist in reality between members. The use of the suffix ‘men’, in ‘airman’ also reveals the masculine notion that dominates military jargon and thought.

He then goes on to clarify what he means by saying:

“To my knowledge, nobody’s making the argument that a man or woman being attracted to the same sex debilitates them, either intellectually or physically. The question under review is whether the behavior of a person who openly declares a sexual attraction to the same sex directly or indirectly contributes to the—or detracts from—military cohesion. Make no mistake, this is not about consideration being given to someone who wants to serve in the military despite being attracted to the same sex, this particular argument has to do with the supposed right to declare oneself to be sexually attracted to a particular segment of the population, and insist on continuing to live in the most intimate proximity with them. If this committee were able to clearly demonstrate that this change would improve military effectiveness, then the change should be implemented. But, if someone were to insist on implementation because of an ulterior motive other than clear evidence and there was an uncertainty about the effect it would have on the unit cohesion, then that is a risk I would not recommend or support in today’s environment” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 9).

General Sheehan’s argument seems to be that the lift on gays in the military should only occur if one was able to prove that this change would actually improve current
military conditions. This is perhaps a new way to discuss the issue, as a 1993 Pentagon funded RAND Corporation study of the military ban (that was not released to the public until after “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” had been put in place) concluded that “the ban could be dropped without damaging the ‘order, discipline, and individual behavior necessary to maintain cohesion, and performance” after surveying countries with an integrated hetero/homo military: Britain, Israel, Australia and the Netherlands (Belkin, 2003, p.179).

According to General Sheehan, the ban on homosexuality in the military should not be lifted because, although studies have concluded that it would not damage cohesion or performance, it should only be put in place if it would explicitly improve the military. The only way to actually test this hypothesis would be to lift the ban on homosexuality, which Sheehan is obviously opposed to. However, Sheehan makes a point to say that he does not believe a homosexual man or woman is debilitated because of their attraction. Sheehan expresses concern about the close living proximities, when he discussed “the supposed right to declare oneself to be sexually attracted to a particular segment of the population, and insist on continuing to live in the most intimate proximity with them” is an example of homophobia, and the inverse of the male gaze, described earlier in the historical contextualization. Sheehan’s phrasing of “the supposed right” is also revealing of his intolerance of homosexuality, as “supposed” denotes an element of disbelief, or that his own views do not line up with that idea. Sheehan’s use of the word

4 “In the hypermasculine atmosphere of military culture, the hysterical cries of soldiers on the way to showers has given voice to this fear/desire: the perceived subversion of the privilege of objectification that benefits white heterosexual men at the expense of all who are different. Gays in the shower undermine “morale, good order, and discipline” by turning this process of Otherness upside down. The presence of gays threaten the straight servicemen’s position as masculine subject—the creator and consumer of objectified objects, be they women, slaves or enemies of the nation” (Lehring, 2003, pp. 129-130).
“insist” also frames the issue as if the gay military members are somehow overstepping their boundaries, when the entire formation and lifestyle of the military is designed in order to make people follow orders. Sheehan later frames the desire of formerly active military member’s desire to lift the ban as stemming from a selfish inclination—

“As the law says, military life is fundamentally different from a civilian life. This is a difficult reality to accept for individuals who have never served or who had such exposure to our Armed Forces…More than once, during my military career, the unacceptable behavior of one selfish marine has created a single point of failure for his unit and endangered lives. In every instance, unit polarization occurred because of this selfish behavior” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", 2010, pp. 9-10).

Framing the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” as a selfish issue, conversely, exhibits the selfishness inherent in protecting the existence of a law for one’s own maximum comfort. This projection of the ‘selfishness’ is also seen in Sheehan’s claim that the homosexuals “insist” on living in intimate living quarters. Sheehan closes his statement by saying

“To state the obvious, warfare is difficult, ugly business. Congress should not impose more uncertainty in a battlefield that is already complex enough. Each member of this committee must, in his or her mind, feel absolutely certain that the change of the current law will improve this Nation’s combat effectiveness and minimize the risks our young men and women face in today’s battlefield. The change must also reduce the current environment of a hostile workplace that exists and is increasing today” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell", 2010, p. 10).

Sheehan frames the issue of homosexuals joining the military as an occurrence that would make warfare even more “difficult” and “ugly”. By putting forward that idea in this manner, Sheehan is subtly reinforcing the idea that homosexuals would be detrimental to the military, especially during volatile times of war. This can be true, but only because “…of the hatred and bigotry of straight soldiers, which is manifested in such fears about sharing sleeping quarters and bathroom facilities” (Lehring, 2003, p. 179).
B. Michael D. Almy, Former Major, U.S. Air Force

Michael, or “Mike” Almy, a former officer in the United States Air Force who served for thirteen years in the military, eventually earning the rank of major, before being discharged under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was the next to testify in front of Congress (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010). Mike Almy begins his statement by situating himself as being entirely a product of military culture:

“I come from a family with a rich history of military service. My father is a West Point graduate, taught chemistry at the Air Force Academy, flew helicopters in Vietnam, and ultimately retired as a senior officer from the Air Force... My family’s military service inspired me to follow suit. When I was growing up, I didn’t really know what civilians were, I just knew that I would always follow in my father’s footsteps and become a military officer” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 12).

Mike Almy starts his narrative by saying that he has always been around military culture, so much so that he “didn’t really know what civilians were”. Like many other military service members, Almy came from a family of military service—he mentions his father, who was a graduate of the prestigious West Point Academy and probably a role model for Almy during his earlier years. For Almy, a life in the military was not only a choice made, but also a family legacy to continue; a path that he could not fathom not taking.

Almy then goes on to express to the Congress his aptitude and success at his position:

“During my career, I deployed to the Middle East four times in support of our efforts in Iraq. In my last position in the Air Force, I led a team of nearly 200 men and women, whose mission was to operate and maintain the systems used to control the airspace over Iraq. Of this deployment, we came under daily mortar attack, one of which struck one of my airmen and also caused significant damage to our equipment. Towards to end of this deployment, I was named one of the top officers in my career field for the entire Air Force” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 12).
Almy uses his experience in the military to communicate the difficult situations that he has been in and his ability to triumph and remain competent. Almy shows his leadership abilities, which eventually culminated in him earning the prestigious title of being named one of the top officers in his career field in the entire Air Force, an honor reserved for those who are extremely proficient and capable in the military. This is in direct opposition to Sheehan’s concern, that the potential “selfishness” of a homosexual soldier would undermine the entire unit’s capability for cohesion. Throughout the duration of his testimony, Almy remains professional, and has the credibility to warrant his perception as a highly successful member of the military. After articulating his past triumphs in the military, Almy goes on to detail the violation of privacy that he experienced, which eventually resulted in his honorable discharge from the military:

“…someone in the unit that had replaced mine was conducting a routine search and discovered my personal emails written to family and friends from the stress of a combat zone. The file was clearly labeled personal, and, as such, there was no military or work-related reason to search these emails. The commander in Iraq, during the height of the insurgency, ordered a search of my personal emails solely to determine if I had violated ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’, and to gather whatever evidence could be used against me. These emails were forwarded to my commander back in Germany. He next called me into his office and demanded that I give him an explanation for these emails. I refused to discuss the nature of these emails, because I considered them personal and private. I told my commander I would not make a statement until I had first consulted with a lawyer” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell", 2010, pp. 12-13).

Almy’s homosexuality was “outed” by a member in a different unit. Since the file was marked “personal” and was not relevant to the military or work, there was virtually no reason to go through his email, that email in particular, and much less report the contents to his commander. In this case, Almy was holding up his end of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” agreement, by explicitly not telling anything that was potentially detrimental to his image as the commanding officer. The military, on the other hand, seemed to feel no
qualms about violating their end of the policy, which is obviously, “Don’t Ask”.

Although the policy itself states that “Military officials could not launch probes merely to discover if an enlistee is gay or lesbian, but if they suspect, based on ‘articulatable facts’, that a person has engaged in prohibited activity, they may investigate to find out if their suspicion is correct” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 71). This case highlights the ambiguity that this clause in particular denotes—at what point is it probably cause to “investigate prohibited activity”?

Almy later overtly touches on the policy’s ineffectiveness, by saying “‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ failed me, despite the fact that I upheld my end of this law by never disclosing my private life. Never once in my 13-year career did I make a statement to the military that violated ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ despite pressure from my commander to do so” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, since emails do not explicitly justify “homosexual conduct”, nor are necessarily an explicitly homosexual activity, this regulates the identity of Mike Almy versus his actual behavior. Almy’s honorable discharge, even though he played according to the military’s rules, and was an extremely competent and capable Air Force officer, sheds light on the self sabotaging sacrifices that the military is willing to make, in order to continue the façade that it is solely a heterosexual institution. Almy then says:

“I was relieved of my duties leading nearly 200 airmen; my security clearance was suspended; part of my pay was terminated. Evan as my commander was relieving me of my duties, he assured me that this was in no way a reflection of performance or my abilities as an officer. After that day, I was in limbo for sixteen months. I was still in the Air Force, but I was given meaningless make-work job, while the process slowly ground forward. In my discharge proceedings, several of my former troops and one of the squadron commanders that I had served with there on the base all wrote letters on my behalf, urging that I be retained in the Air Force. They expressed the greatest respect for me as an officer, they all wanted me back on the job as their leader, and they were all horrified at how the Air Force was treating me. Ultimately, after sixteen months, I was
discharged from the Air Force. The severance pay that I had received from the Air Force was half what I would have received had I been discharged for any other reason. As a final insult, on my last day of Active Duty, I was given a police escort from the base as if I were a common criminal or a threat to national security” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, pp. 13-14).

Almy details the horror that came post military termination—from being demoted to working a “make-work job” after being a high ranking Air Force officer, to experiencing a severance pay that was half of what he would have received, had he not been discharged for accounts of homosexuality. The fact that many of his troops and one of the squadron commanders that he served with took the time out of their days to write letters on his behalf also proves the unit cohesion that had been accomplished during his time in the leadership position. This is one of many examples that disproves the rationale against lifting the ban on gays in the military under the principle that unit cohesion would be disrupted. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this case is that he was “given a police escort from the base”, something that he perceived as being comparable to treatment for “a common criminal or a threat to national security”. This shows how the body itself is extremely politicized—Almy’s queerness made him subject to a treatment that would only be used on someone who had been constructed as a dangerous and deviant “other” to “pure” society, which despite Almy’s success and accomplishments in the military, is ultimately proven to be the case.

He then concludes his testimony by elaborating once again on the betrayal that he felt from the military following his discharge:

“Being relieved of my duties as a thirteen-year career officer, enduring a 16-month administrative legal proceeding, and finally being discharged, was completely devastating to me. I felt betrayed by my country and treated as a second-class citizen, even as I had repeatedly risked my life on foreign soil. I understood the constraints of living under “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and never imagined that I would become a statistic, since I abided by its basic premise of never disclosing any aspect of my private life. My
DD-214 discharge paperwork from the military categorizes the reasons for my separation as “homosexual admission.” I refused to sign this, because I never acknowledged anything to the military. Anytime I have applied for a Federal job, potential employers now see this on my record. I am now considered unfit for military service at a time when our Nation has actively recruited convicted felons, drug abusers, and high school dropouts. As a result of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and how the Air Force discharged me, I am now forced to reveal aspects of my private life to complete strangers, or once again lie about why I left the military” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p.14).

Quite literally until his discharge, Almy refused to acknowledge the allegations made against him and his homosexuality. Almy seems to be a particularly private person, who obviously does not want his “private life” to intersect at all with his professional one. Having “homosexual admission” as a part of his official record is something that brings this very private aspect of his personality into immediate knowledge of a potential employer. While “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” institutionalizes the closet, once violated, the policy not only pushes one out of the closet, but forces one to stay there, in some ways instituting a scarlet letter—causing one to continue inhabiting the role of homosexual outside of the confines of the military and within domestic society. Furthermore, despite Almy’s extremely successful career as an Air Force general, he is discharged at a time where the military is “actively recruiting” convicted felons and drug abusers. This exposes the hierarchy of behavioral deviance—a convicted felon or drug abuser could potentially reform, however homosexuality is seen as being a non-fixable and therefore is a more permanent aspect of one’s identity. Another notable point in Almy’s testimony is his experience of betrayal by his country and that he feels treated like a second class citizen—even after willingly and repeatedly risking his life in order to protect a country that did not view him as a citizen worthy of experiencing equality. Despite feeling
betrayed by his country and that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” ultimately failed him, Almy’s dedication to the military is so strong that he closes his statement by saying that,

“My greatest desire now is to return to the Air force as an officer and a leader, protecting the freedoms of a Nation that I love, freedoms that I myself was not allowed to enjoy while I was serving in the military. This is my calling in life. I hope that you will allow this to happen” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", 2010, p. 14).

Removing Almy’s agency and ability to fulfill his calling, because he deviates from the prototypical straight male soldier, despite his accomplishments, is ultimately very unAmerican. It is unAmerican in the sense that it deprives a compliant and patriotic citizen the ability to become who they want to be—an idea that is very engrained in the traditional American narrative.

C. Jenny L. Kopfstein, Former Lieutenant Junior Grade, U.S. Navy

Jenny Kopfstein provides the only female experience and voice that is heard in the Congressional testimonies. Kopfstein joined the Navy in 1995 when she entered the Naval Academy, where she majored in physics, and was commissioned in 1999 and served openly as a lesbian officer despite “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” for two years and four months before she was ultimately discharged in 2002 under the policy. Kopfstein traces her decision to serve as an out lesbian back to the experience she had at the Naval Academy:

“The Naval Academy teaches you about honor and integrity. It places a special emphasis on these values. On the very first day, they give you uniforms, shoe polish, Brasso, and begin teaching you about the Academy’s Honor Concept. The Honor Concept starts out, ‘Midshipmen are persons of integrity. They do not lie, cheat, or steal.’ When I was a
senior midshipman, I was an investigator for the Honor Staff. I investigated midshipmen who were accused of violating the Honor Concept. This experience brought home to me the importance of integrity and just what it means not to lie…It was difficult being on the ship [USS Shiloh] and having to lie, or tell half truths to my shipmates” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, pp. 16-17).

Kopfstein somewhat brilliantly wields the Naval Academy’s ethos back upon itself, effectively calling out the inconsistency of being able to maintain true to the Honor Concept while actually serving. The Honor Concept was so engrained in Kopfstein, particularly after being an investigator for the Honor Staff, that she could not stand telling “half truths” to her shipmates. Kopfstein simultaneously shows her commitment to maintaining her allegiance to integrity, while revealing the military’s eschewing of these ideals. A product of the Naval Academy, Kopfstein experiences these concepts on such a deep level that she is ultimately willing to risk her status and employment in the military in order to uphold the standards that the military itself taught her. In this sense, she is somewhat of a backfire—ultimately, the military lost a midshipmen that adopted the military ideology to such a great degree that she willingly risked her life plan in order to live honestly, and they lost time and resources by paying for her education in exchange for her service. Kopfstein continues:

“Under ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’, answering the simplest questions can get you kicked out. If a shipmate asks what you did last weekend, you cant react like a normal human being and say, ‘Hey, I went to a neat new restaurant with my partner. You should try it.’ An answer like that would have gotten you kicked out of the Navy. But, if you don’t interact like that with your shipmates, they think you’re weird and it undermines working together as a team. So, after being on the ship for a while, and feeling deeply conflicted between the requirements of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ and the Navy’s core values, I wrote a letter to my commanding officer and told him I was a lesbian, because I felt like I was being forced to lie. I didn’t want to get out of the Navy, and I said so in my letter. I wanted to stay and serve honorably, and to maintain my integrity by not lying about who I was” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, pp. 17).
Kopfstein mentions coming out officially because of the “half truths” that she told and her inability to “react like a normal human being” due to the secrecy inherent in her militarized homosexuality, but also that her secret kept her from being able to socialize like a “normal” person. This social handicap, she found, ultimately undermined the ability to work together as a team, which is detrimental to unit cohesion and the ability to reach the maximum potential as a unit. Kopfstein also notes that simple things like answering a question about what she did last weekend that heterosexual people could answer with no penalty, ultimately become a politicized dance of sidestepping the real answer in order to preserve her secret. Her desire to be “normal”, or not have to lie about her homosexuality in order to be a member of the crew, is ultimately what drove her to come out while she was still serving:

“So, after being on the ship for a while, and feeling deeply conflicted between the requirements of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ and the Navy’s core values, I wrote a letter to my commanding officer and told him that I was a lesbian, because I felt like I was being forced to lie. I didn’t want to get out of the Navy, and I said so in my letter. I wanted to stay and serve honorably, and to maintain my integrity by not lying about who I was…During all this time, I’m proud to say I did not lie. I had come out in my letter officially, and I came out slowly over time to my shipmates. I expected negative responses. I got none. Everyone I talked to was positive, and the universal attitude was that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was dumb” (Testimonies Relating to the “Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 17).

Again, in this segment of the testimony, Kopfstein demonstrates her intense dedication to her integrity, and how she feels “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” encouraged her to compromise that within herself, by asking her to lie in order to continue to be a part of the Navy. Kopfstein also expresses her surprise about not experiencing any negative reactions in response to her coming out, which reveals a higher level of tolerance amongst the members of the crew in practice as opposed to the assumptions being made by higher-
ranking (and older) officials making the policies. This also exposes that much of the intolerance towards homosexuality does not occur on a personal level as rampantly as it does on an institutional one. Kopfstein continues to express that she was glad that she came out because of the weight taken off of her shoulders:

“My open service had a positive impact on the ship’s morale. I was able to treat my shipmates like human beings, and we could interact on a personal level. One time I was walking down the passageway on the ship and a senior chief petty officer stopped me and asked, ‘Ma’am, may I speak with you for a minute?’ My first thought was ‘Uh-oh, what is this going to be about?’ We stepped into an empty room, and he pulled out his wallet. He showed me a picture of his teenage boy, ‘This is my son, and he’s gay. I’m really proud of him.’ I was so shocked I didn’t know what to say. Finally, I said, ‘Wow. Thank you, Senior Chief.’ We could not have had that interaction if I was not out. Normal people interact and talk about their families’ (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 17).

Kopfstein continually discusses how her coming out actually normalized her to the rest of the unit, and allowed her to be able to talk about her family and relate hers to other members’ in the unit. Kopfstein equates normalcy with having a family, and trust and camaraderie being built on the basis of interacting on a personal level. Therefore, because she came out she was able to relate with fellow members of the troops on a more authentic, and therefore intimate level, which improved social relations among the troop as a whole. Because she made the decision to trust that the other members on the ship could handle the information that she was a lesbian, reciprocally, members of the ship trusted her with personal information, like the senior chief petty officer who told her that he was proud of his gay son. This fostered a sense of mutual trust, something that, in her words “could not have” happened, like the interaction with the senior chief petty officer, had she not been out.
Kopfstein closes her testimony by detailing the pain that she experienced from staying in the closet, and therefore lying, as well as her dedication to the United States and Navy, in particular:

“I should not be forced to hide who I am. When I was closeted, the pain ate away at the core of my being…I made a commitment to the Navy when I joined to serve five years after graduation from the Naval Academy. I’ve only gotten to serve three and a half so far. I want the opportunity to live up to my commitment and serve out the rest of my time with honor…There are 66,000 lesbian and gay soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who are currently serving this country in our Armed Forces. They couldn’t be here today because they are forced to be silent. I am here before you as living proof that this law is wrong and being forced to serve in silence is wrong. It’s time for a change. I love the Navy. I would still be serving but for this law. Thank you” (Testimonies Relating to the "Don't Ask, Don’t Tell”, 2010, p. 18).

Kopfstein’s closing statement is evocative of the “horrors of the closet” that Richard Mohr describes, that is mentioned in section II. Kopfstein’s desire to come back to the military is framed in a way that communicates that she, personally wants to come back because she loves the Navy, and also that she wants the “opportunity to live up to my [her] commitment and serve out the rest of my [her] time with honor”, highlighting again Kopfstein’s commitment to integrity and honor that she notes at multiple points throughout the testimony. As an accomplished and skilled shipmen during her time serving in the navy, Kopfstein not only is a graduate of the Naval Academy, showing a dedication to military life from an earlier age, but also is someone who thoroughly

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5 Philosopher Richard Mohr states that: “The chief problem of the social institution of the closet is not that it promotes hypocrisy, requires lies, sets snares, blames the victim when snared, and causes unhappiness—though it does have all these results. No, the chief problem with the closet is that it treats gays as less than human, less than animal, less even than vegetable—it treats gays as reeking scum, the breath of death” (Rimmerman, 2008, p. 95).
embodies aspects of the Honor Concept, someone that the Navy should be proud to call their own.

D. Summary

John Sheehan, Mike Almy, and Jenny Kopfstein’s testimonies were expertly curated to show the many sides of the “Don’t Ask, Don’tTell” conversations that were happening in 2010. Sheehan and Kopfstein, are in many ways opposite—he never officially “came out”, while she did almost immediately; he serves as the gay male’s voice, she provides the lesbian’s; he represents the Air Force, she represents the Navy, but there are many commonalities between them too. Both Almy and Kopfstein are extremely dedicated to the country and the military service to the point that they, at one time, had the ability to contribute to and be a part of. Both of these citizens and ex-military members had their lives aggressively revoked from them, as a result of being discharged from “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, and are standing up for other queer military members by testifying (very publicly) in front of the Senate.

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6 Kopfstein was awarded the Navy and Marine Crops achievement medal, which is an individual award. She was also chosen to represent her ship, the U.S.S. Shiloh in a ship handling competition, and won.
III. Obama’s Remarks at the Repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell

On December 22, 2010, President Barack Obama signed the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act in Washington D.C. This marked the end of an era. Now, military members would be able to openly serve in the United States Military Service, regardless of sexual orientation. While “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” offered homosexual, or otherwise not straight (queer), people to serve in the military under the condition that they keep their deviant sexuality a secret, the repeal offered a welcoming of gays and lesbians into the military. Once the myth that incorporating homosexual soldiers would dissipate unit cohesion, and overall not affect the functionality and integrity of the military itself had been debunked, there was really no basis in keeping homosexuals out of the military service. The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is illustrative of a changing landscape in United States society in relation to many aspects of the homosexual identity.

The intersectionality that exists between masculinity, the military, and power are indisputable. If, arguably the most masculine, heterosexual and elite institution is extending a rainbow flag-esque welcoming symbol, then the rest of society should soon follow. While homosexuality is becoming more tolerated, as can be seen vis-à-vis various states legalizing marriage, another state-extended gesture, the welcoming of gay military members serves as an example of the changing nature of masculinity, and military masculinities, specifically, at large.

President Barack Obama begins his speech repealing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy by saying “You know, I am just overwhelmed. This is a very good day. And I want to thank all of you, especially the people on this stage, but each and every one of you who have been working so hard on this, members of my staff who worked so hard on
this. I couldn’t be prouder” (White House, 2010). Obama uses the word “proud” to signify the struggle that has been taking place in the past twenty years since Clinton’s adoption of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. The pride that Obama expresses seems to stem from the idea that we have reached the other side of the political rainbow. This is also signified by his personal proximity to the issue, where he cites it being a “very good day”, a concept that is evoked by his own subjective experience (White House, 2010). The applause-invoking rhetoric that Obama expertly employs frames the incorporation of gay soldiers in a positive light.

Obama then describes a story where a soldier, Andy Lee, rescued his fellow soldier, Lloyd Corwin, who fell forty feet down the deep side of a ravine during Battle of the Bulge (White House, 2010). Obama dramatically conjures the image of what happened—“…dazed and trapped he [Corwin] was as good as dead. But one soldier, a friend, turned back. And with shells landing around him, amid smoke and chaos and the screams of wounded men, this soldier, this friend, scaled down the icy slope, risking his own life to bring Private Corwin to safer ground” (White House, 2010). Using this anecdote, Obama is able to paint the picture of a brave soldier, willing to risk his life to help his fellow American in need. He follows “this soldier”, with “this friend”, situating the relationship between two soldiers in the military as being more intimate than that between formal co-workers. Obama continues,

“For the rest of his years, Lloyd credited this soldier, this friend, named Andy Lee, with saving his life...It was full four decades after the war, when the two friends reunited in their golden years, that Lloyd learned that the man who saved his life, his friend Andy, was gay. He had no idea. And he didn’t much care. Lloyd knew what mattered. He knew what had kept him alive; what made it possible for him to come home and start a family and live the rest of his life. It was his friend” (White House, 2010).
Obama continues with the friend narrative, seemingly capitalizing on the idea that if you were truly friends with someone, their sexuality would not affect your perception of them, because trust had already been established. In this instance, because Andy actually saved his life, which seems to transcend potential bigotry regarding one’s sexuality, Lloyd still had “his friend Andy”. What “mattered” was the fact that this homosexual soldier had saved the other’s life, exhibiting bravery and compassion in a war context—demonstrating that gay soldiers are, and always have been, compatible with the military service. Because of Andy, Lloyd was able to participate in life outside of the military apparatus, by being able to “come home and start a family and live the rest of his life”, he is able to carry out what is expected of American citizens—procreating, and existing within the domestic sphere. The fact that Obama chose to highlight that Lloyd did come home and start a family also shows the prioritizing of this lifestyle. Through Andy’s bravery, Lloyd was able to do the “American” thing—get married and have a family and live the rest of one’s life in peace.

This story is demonstrative of many things. First, it shows how the gay soldier can be and is compatible with military effectiveness throughout history, which ultimately smites the argument that homosexuality would be disruptive of unit cohesion and would be “distracting”, as many opponents argued. This story also shows that two soldiers can be friends, even if one is gay, as demonstrated by his use of the word “friend” a total of four times in a relatively short portion of the speech. This constructs the gay soldier as an ally—someone that you can count on in times of war, who will pull through in the face of danger and ultimately save your life, despite their deviant sexuality. By applauding Andy’s bravery through the construct of Lloyd, who was someone in need, the audience
is able to relate to Lloyd’s ability to start a home post war, all because of the fact that there was a soldier present who helped him, regardless of his sexuality. Perhaps this would not have been as effective, if it had been framed in a way that directly addressed Andy’s bravery, with Lloyd being the mechanism in which we are able to view Andy, instead of vice versa. By viewing Andy through the vessel of Lloyd, a straight man that more of America is able to relate to, Obama effectively distances the military as being able to identify with Lloyd, the majority but is still welcoming potential Andys. This anecdote is also reflective of the fluidity of masculinity itself. Despite the homosocial friendship bond that led to the lifesaving behavior that took place, and Lloyd being somewhat feminized at first because he needed help, he ultimately triumphs as more masculine by knowledge of his heterosexuality, fertility, and success at procreation—via the presence of his son in the audience.

Obama continues by announcing, “And Lloyd’s son is with us today. And he knew that valor and sacrifice are no more limited by sexual orientation than they are by race or gender or by religion or by creed; that what made it possible for him to survive the battlefields of Europe is the reason that we are here today. (Applause.) That’s the reason that we are here today” (White House, 2010). Lloyd’s son’s actual physical proximity articulates the reality of the situation, and shows that this anecdote was not a well-crafted urban legend. By having Lloyd’s son there, whose very existence is a result of Andy’s bravery, Obama is able to demonstrate a personification of the ways that gays and straights can work together and be allies, eventually creating families of their own who will need to be protected by the military. It’s also notable that Andy’s family is not
present, which shows the prioritization of heterosexuality as being something that is less controversial and more welcomed.

Obama then frames sexual orientation as something that cannot be helped, by comparing it to race, gender, religion or creed. This is an essentialist rhetoric used by many LGBTQ social movements—that being gay is not something that one has chosen, but it is an engrained trait. This kind of language seems to be borrowed from the American civil rights movements of the 1960s, which was originally presented in relation to America as early as in the Declaration of Independence. This argument states that one just is gay, one does not choose it, and that it cannot be helped, much like race or being born as a gender. Obama, the most powerful man in the country, endorsing this kind of thinking, is illustrative of its effectiveness as a political tool. Discriminating on the basis of something that cannot be helped is unAmerican. Obama states that “valor” and “sacrifice” are performative qualities that would not be hindered by one’s sexuality, which frames homosexuality as a potential handicap that he needs to refute.

Obama then says

“So this morning, I am proud to sign a law that will bring an end to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” It is a law—this law I’m about to sign will strengthen our national security and uphold the ideals that our fighting men and women risk their lives to defend. No longer will our country be denied the service of thousands of patriotic Americans who were forced to leave the military—regardless of their skills, no matter their bravery or their zeal, no matter their years of exemplary performance—because they happen to be gay. No longer will tens of thousands of Americans in uniform be asked to live a lie, or look over their shoulder, in order to serve the country that they love” (White House, 2010).

When Obama states that, by repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, national security will be strengthened, he is communicating that the soldiers and soldiers’ bodies will actually make national security that much more robust, instead of potentially detracting from it.
The gay soldier’s body is then coded to be a site where bravery and zeal can still be produced, regardless of their homosexuality. The corporeal reality of bodies is that they “…are symbols of social systems” and “the body of the soldier has come to signify the nation and national security in particularly intensified ways” (Belkin, 2012, p. 36). Obama saying that national security will be strengthened with the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” shows the confidence that he has in the ability for the homosexual soldiers to not only matriculate into the soldier lifestyle but also the physical strength that they will contribute to the force. Obama then says that the signing of the repeal will “uphold the ideals that our fighting men and women risk their lives to defend”— the word “uphold” implies a preservation of the status quo, and a continuity of a past narrative, despite this incredibly pivotal moment for the incorporation of the gay identity into normative America. The gay and lesbian soldiers that have fought for the country are mostly fighting for a “freedom” that they could not have benefited from, as deviants from society. The use of the word “uphold” seems to smoothly romanticize past aberrations that have been experienced by homosexual citizens. Obama also never defines exactly what he means by “ideals”— instead it is mentioned as a vast concept, which supports the Campbell argument mentioned earlier, “…the imprecise process of imagination is what constitutes American identity” (Campbell, 1992, p. 91). This intentional ambiguity of somewhat goliath concepts like “ideals”, allow both the performer (Obama) and the observer (the American public) to define that for themselves, under the assumption that it will be similar on the basis of the word “our”— the audience/performer dynamic is assumed to be “American” and therefore have the same values and ideals. Obama also assumes, or codes, people to be serving in the military out of a “love” for their country.
The use of the word “they” also shows the construct of us/them dichotomy, which shapes so much of the discourse surrounding American identity. Because of the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, soldiers will no longer have to look over “their” shoulder—for they are now becoming us.

Obama then states that “And finally, I want to express my gratitude to the men and women in this room who have worn the uniform of the United States Armed Service. I want to thank all the patriots who are here today, all of them who were forced to hang up their uniform as a result of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”—but who never stopped fighting for this country, and who rallied and marched and fought for change. I want to thank everyone here who stood with them in that fight” (White House, 2010). This passage shows another use of the word “them”, with the “hang up their uniforms”, which showcases the previous role of the homosexual soldier as the other. Obama also makes it a point to remind us (the viewer) that regardless of sexuality, the soldiers who have served for “this country” are still patriots. He also takes the process of rallying, marching, and fighting for change, not to be in the name of gay rights or gay visibility but instead in the name of the much larger concept of “America”. Obama states that they were fighting “for this country”—the idea of changing the country to be more inclusive of their marginalized presence—they were fighting for a version of “this country” that would be more inclusive to their experiences and voices. He also thanks “…everyone who stood with them in that fight”, making it not only thank the actual gay people who have worked to enforce this change, but also the straight allies who have also been a part of the social movement.
The next noteworthy point in the speech is where he states, “Now, with any change, there’s some apprehension. That’s natural. But as Commander-in-Chief, I am certain that we can effect this transition in a way that only strengthens our military readiness; that people will look back on this moment and wonder why it was ever a source of controversy in the first place” (White House, 2010). Here, Obama asserts his authority, as not only President of the United States, but in this case, the more relevant position of Commander-in-Chief. This assertion of power puts him closer to the issue from a masculine, militaristic position. Obama’s own masculinity is heightened during this statement. Throughout the speech, he has taken on the cool, compassionate ally role—able to sympathize with the gay soldiers, but also distance himself enough to where he is constantly reiterating the collective gay experience as “theirs”. Marc E. Shaw and Elwood Watson, argue that in the public eye, particularly during the time of the 2008 election, “Obama took great pains to present himself as a congenial, admirable everyman with whom people particularly middle (white) America, would feel comfortable enough to have as a co-worker, a drinking buddy, a next-door neighbor, and maybe even a son-in-law” (Elwood & Shaw, 2011, p. 137). During the beginning of the speech, Obama does make a point to come off as the “congenial, admirable everyman” who American can relate to on this somewhat controversial issue. However, during his assertion of his Commander-in-Chief position, the audience is reminded that Obama has symbolic and literal power, as the Commander-in-Chief of one of the biggest militaries in the world. Additionally, since “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is directly related to the military, Obama’s leading position communicates that if this is something that he is adamantly in favor of, the rest of the military should follow. This also illuminates the docility and requirement
to follow orders that is very present in military culture—something not typically
associated with masculinity. Obama acknowledging that some people are apprehensive of
the change, saying that it is “natural” to feel that way, but then relinquishing it with the
fact that he is “certain” as someone who currently occupies and has earned the title of
“Commander-in-Chief” also showcases his power, masculinity, and the intertwinement of
the two concepts.

The next notable point in the speech, especially in relation to masculinity, is when
he says “As one special warfighter said during the Pentagon’s review—this was one of
my favorites—it echoes the experience of Lloyd Corwin decades earlier: ‘We have a gay
guy in the unit. He’s big, he’s mean, he kills lots of bad guys.’ (Laughter.) ‘No one cared
that he was gay.’ (Laughter.) And I think that sums up perfectly the situation.
(Applause)” (White House, 2010). This portion of the speech directly makes a spectacle
of the fetishizing of masculinity that is necessary to both the audience’s concept of the
military and the soldier as well as the continuation of this trope of masculinity, despite
the incorporation of the homosexual soldier. By focusing on traits that we have come to
associate with the ‘soldier’, i.e. “big”, “mean”, and that he “kills lots of bad guys”,
Obama perhaps over-masculinizes the gay soldier to show that regardless of his
homosexuality, a typically feminized trait, one can still possess qualities of the “warrior
ideal” which is characterized by being “independent, disciplined, strong willed,
physically imposing, and above all masculine” (Howard III & Privadera, 2006). This
somewhat classic and archaic iteration of masculinity shows continuity in the face of the
changing landscape of masculinity politics in relation to a new kind of soldiering that
incorporating the homosexual soldier theoretically compromises and complicates. The
fact that he “kills bad guys” dichotomously instates that he is a “good” guy, because the
definition of who is a “bad” guy is the same, by the commonality of being an
“American”. Furthermore, Obama highlighting this particular anecdote as being one of
his “favorites”, places his own proximity and faith in this version of masculinity, by his
authoritarian position and leader role as Commander-in-Chief. Additionally, this episode,
which “sums up perfectly the situation,” again politicizes the very body of the
homosexual soldier. This particular soldier perpetuates the myth that “Military
masculinity” as Aaron Belkin argues, “may, to most Americans, seem like an opportunity
for assimilation in which citizens come together, become soldiers and defend the nation
from threat” (Belkin, 2012, p. 137). This assimilatory model, our scope, showcases how
the military is an opportunistic vessel for the assimilation of marginalized people, in this
instance, homosexuals.
**Conclusion: In Pursuit of the Potential**

Throughout this senior project, I hope to have accomplished many things. As can be observed through the historical contextualization, the military and the concept of homosexuality have had a volatile relationship for over a century, at least. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, and arguments that led up to it, brought the conversation about military and homosexuality into more of the public eye, where it received attention from a wider assortment of people. Throughout this paper, I have brought into scrutiny the tension that exists between identity and behavior, and the difficulty in clearly articulating the moment when behavior constitutes and becomes an identity. It is by examining what an identity is composed of, whether it is homosexual, heterosexual or national, that reveals the politicized undertones that govern what it means to be a normative American citizen at various particular historical moments. Judith Butler states that “The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (Butler, 1990, p. 148). In regards to the emergence of the homosexual identity, I have sought to highlight the dichotomous process of creating the gay “other” in which to frame in opposition, the valorous, patriotic and heterosexual public façade of the American military.

The tension between behavior and identity can be observed further by looking at another letter in the LGBTQ acronym, the transgender community, who are still being marginalized and ostracized by much of society, including the military. Perhaps it is because, by very nature of coming out as transgender, one chooses to live as a gender opposite from the sex that they were born into, unless they choose to inhabit a gender
fluid identity on the gender spectrum. According to the “Medical Standards for Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction in the Military Services” that are currently in place, a “Current or history of psychosexual conditions (302), including but not limited to transsexualism, exhibitionism, transvestism, voyeurism, and other paraphilias” are found to be incompatible with military service (Department of Defense, 2010, p. 42). The term “transsexualism” was removed as a diagnosis from the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM-IV in 1994, where it was replaced with “gender identity disorder” (DSM-IV, n.d.) The blatant disregard for current politically correct monikers is perhaps reflective of what seems to be the military’s thoughts on incorporating members of the transgender community into the military apparatus. It is also problematic that the existence of transgender people is seen as a product of suffering from a “psychosexual condition” that the government seems to equate with fetishes like voyeurism. This is an example of the government equating a fetish, or behavior, as being constitutive of an (deviant) identity.

The hysteria surrounding transgender people and the military can be seen in the case of Chelsea Manning, who was convicted “for non-espionage related offences under the Espionage Act 1917” (Sharpe, 2013). Once imprisoned, Manning came out publicly about her transgender identity, saying in a press release: “As I transition into this next phase of my life, I want everyone to know the real me. I am Chelsea Manning. I am female. Given the way that I feel and have felt since childhood, I want to begin hormone therapy as soon as possible. I hope that you will support me in this transition” (Bacon,

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7 I will mostly focus on people who transition from male to female or female to male, but wish to acknowledge the validity of some people’s choice to go by “gender queer” and occupy a space in between male and female, often denoted by using “they” or “them” pronouns.
2014). The army responded that it “does not provide hormone therapy or sex-reassignment surgery for gender identity disorder”, despite covering other medical treatments (Sharpe, 2013). Manning is expected to spend at least the first seven years in a male-only facility in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where she currently is, before the possibility of parole (Sharpe, 2013). However, as of April 23, 2014, a judge in Kansas approved a name change for Manning, who will now be known as “Chelsea” instead of “Bradley” on past and current military records (Bacon, 2014). The process of legally changing a name oozes with state-controlled politics—by having her name officially recognized, Manning legally becomes “Chelsea”, abandoning her prior role as “Bradley”—something that she already did, but becomes legitimate once the state, in this case a judge in Kentucky, deems it acceptable. However, the act of keeping her in a male-only facility shows the discomfort that society has when one individual chooses to continue their life in another gender, and the emphasis on treating people as the gender that matches their genitalia.

Perhaps it is because the existence of transgender people proves the fluidity, or the lack of essence within gender itself, and the performativity that everyone partakes in when publicly conducting the self. Butler states that

“Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original, in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmic ideal of heterosexuality, one that is produced by the imitation as it effect. In this sense, the ‘reality’ of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all limitations” (Butler, 1993, p. 313).
Butler sees drag as illuminating the fact that all gender is performative, and “theatricalized” in the sense that we are all always navigating, measuring and putting on a display of our gender because the idea of an “original or primary” gender does not exist. So much of our identifying processes are based on the ability to observe and categorize, with various physiological indicators (height, hair, breasts, hips) pointing us towards “male” or “female”. Therefore, the illusory or imaginative component of our reality is revealed, once we have deconstructed gender to be merely a ritualized performance that has been taught to us. The U.S. military, so dependent on this dichotomous process of othering in order to justify and legitimize its very existence, through binaries like enemy/ally, victor/victim, safe/dangerous, and of course, male/female and gay/straight, is entirely threatened by this idea of fluidity. Judith Butler says that “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” and that the result is the imitations of a “phantasmic ideal of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1993, p. 313). The pursuit of achieving the “phantasmic ideal of heterosexuality” can be paralleled with the pursuit of achieving the phantasmic ideal of America.

If heterosexuality has historically been a symbol for America, then we can take this section and swap out “heterosexuality” with “America” and “gender” with “politics”. By doing this, we can see exactly how intertwined our concepts of America and gender really are. David Campbell states, “If all states are ‘imagined communities’, devoid of ontological being apart from the many practices that constitute their reality, then America is the imagined community par excellence” (Campbell, 1998, p. 91). Gender, concepts of hetero/homosexuality and America are all “devoid of ontological being apart from the many practices that constitute their reality”, yet there is so much of an effort on a state-
level to govern these “practices” in order to make up a reality that functions for the state to continue as it currently exists. While the behaviors may be real, in that they do occur and do happen, the identities that we attach to all of these concepts are entirely constructed, and perpetuated by our own practices and rituals. This proves true, as the catch phrase of the second wave feminist movement states, the personal is political—or rather, this brings the personal into the political. Both the military and heterosexuality are seen on a state level as symbolic strength—strength to continue to exist by way of reproducing future Americans, strength because it has been equated with what is “right” since the emergence of America as a country, and strength in that, as the hegemon, it towers above other countries, politically and morally, never quite letting go of the “city upon a hill” Protestant influence that it was founded upon.

Throughout this paper I hope that I effectively highlighted ways in which the narrative of “America” has changed, and how “America” itself is constantly changing. While it is tempting to romanticize America’s (scarce) history and past, it is necessary to thoroughly examine what this point in time is the culmination of. My own research focused more on thematic outlines to show a linear relationship between homosexuality and the military, but fell short in analyzing many other factors such as racial tensions in the military, economics and economic policies that shape the military, and various presidents’ experience or inexperience actually serving in the military apparatus itself, just to name a few. By accepting that much of our reality is navigated through performance, perhaps a new landscape of “America” can be pursued—one in which “truths” are questioned and lines are blurred.
By analyzing those who have “deviated” historically, in this case sexually, we are able to further examine what and who is being protected through “normalization”.

Perhaps being “normal” means that you are safe. As observed in the testimonies of Mike Almy and Jenny Kopfstein, in particular, who wanted to continue to be a part of the very institution that betrayed them, what they ultimately wanted was, in Almy’s case not to be treated like “a second class citizen” and Kopfstein’s desire to be able to talk about things “normal human beings” talk about, like family, without experiencing the fear of being discharged, or deemed personally incompatible with the military service. This can be seen elsewhere in the LGBTQ movement, with much media focus being on what states are working to, or already have, legalized gay marriage—another state-issued marker of normalcy and acceptance. By looking at both gender and American identity through the lens of those who have been marginalized and othered, we are able to examine the flaws in current systems that result in further marginalization and oppression via mechanisms that attempt to articulate what “identity” is, like gender or nationality. It is through processes of producing identities that we continue to set up metaphorical walls about what the limits of what we can be are perpetuated. And it is the people that fall short of being able to distinguish themselves in a world constructed of binaries, the ones who struggle checking “m” or “f” to express their gender or end up outside of the very narrow behavioral box that constitutes “straight” that we deem queer, or adopt that moniker themselves. Perhaps critically examining these structures that continue to push us into more normative structures, will further reveal the regulatory and coercive imaginarium that is “America” that we are trying to protect.

Queer theorist Jose Muñoz says,
“Queerness is not here yet. Queerness is an identity. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an identity that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness’s domain” (Muñoz, 2009, p.25).

Perhaps by refocusing our current imagined identity into more of a realm that has a “warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” we can pursue a political panorama that reflects our potential instead of our fears.
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