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

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

CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: Wright State University, Dayton, OH

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14. ABSTRACT The purpose of our study is to deliver a current, evidence-based understanding of the functioning of LGB couples in the Air Force community to U.S. military and civilian leadership. We anticipate that improved understanding will help focus efforts, make improvements, and ultimately contribute to a more effective armed forces. In terms of scope, we will use a two-stage, mixed methods design. Stage 1 will be a qualitative study of 50 LGB Air Force using semi-structured phone or video. Stage 2 will be a quantitative study testing hypotheses regarding risk and protective factors (at multiple ecological levels) predicting relationship and individual outcomes.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS military, couples, LGB, relationship, health, readiness					
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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

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

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

## 3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### a. What were the major goals of the project?

	Timeline	
	Months	% complete
<b>Major Task 1: Complete all preparatory work for project start.</b>		
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Complete qualitative assessment measure for LGB phone interviews	1-3	100%
Finalize strategies for reaching LGB couples with study recruitment effort	1-3	100%
Obtain necessary Air Force approvals for recruitment advertisements	1-3	50%
Develop strategy for accurately linking partner to partner responses	1-3	100%
Complete regulatory documentation for IRB/HRPO submission	1-3	100%
Develop on-line consenting and survey administration procedures	4-6	100%
Establish process for conducting participant incentive payments	4-6	100%
Complete near-final quantitative (on-line) survey for LGB couples	4-6	100%
Obtain review by Air Force Survey Office (AFSO) and judgment that project does not fall under AFSO authority, i.e., not an attitudinal/opinion survey	4-6	100%
Obtain final IRB, HRPO, and OASD/HA (if needed) approval for study implementation	6-8	80%
<i>Milestone Achieved: IRB/HRPO/OASD study approval obtained</i>	8	80%
<i>Milestone Achieved: LGB couple recruitment strategies approved by Air Force</i>	8	100%

### 1) Major Activities

- a. Finalized our readiness to conduct qualitative and quantitative assessments of sexual minority couples in the Air Force. Engaged in practice interviews with sexual minority couples with military experience (not enrolled in the study).
- b. Responded to multiple requests for revision and resubmission from USD (P&R) of our waiver request package.
- c. Requested one-year no cost extension with plus-up funds, awarded on 14 April 2021.

### 2) Specific Objectives

- a. Achieve waiver approval from USD (P&R) for asking about sexual orientation.
- b. Prepare for participant enrollment.

### 3) Significant Results

- a. A revised waiver request package had been submitted to USD (P&R) at the end of our 2020 annual report period (July 2020).
- b. On 23 Nov 2020 we received a lengthy request back from the Office of General Counsel at OSD (P&R) asking for additional information about the overall objectives of the study and to "clearly identify the gap that is going to be filled and the problem that is going to be addressed" by the proposed study.
- c. Our study team met with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs to review the OGC request and prepare a response.
- d. Preparation of our response to OGC required (1) preparation, submission, and approval of multiple amendments to our original IRB protocol, (2) meeting with and approval of study materials from USD (P&R) SAPRO, (3) meeting and approval of study materials from USD (P&R) FAP, and (4) meeting with and approval of study materials from USD (P&R) DSPO. The revision occurred in the context of U.S President transition and associated leadership transition at USD (P&R).
- e. Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs prepared and submitted a revised waiver request package to OSD (P&R) on 2 July 2021. No further communications on status of the package has been received from OSD (P&R).
- f. Though not directly in response to the above efforts, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs (Dr. Shell and his team) over the past two months has prepared and submitted 1-2 info papers for USD (P&R) on the relevance of research and surveys associated with LGBTQ, sexual identity, and sexual orientation issues.

### 4) Other Achievements

- a. We persisted.

**What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**

- The project has provided unique training experiences for investigators motivated to conduct research on the topic of sexual orientation in the military. There are only a handful of such studies funded by CDMRP and our project is the first to be conducted in the Air Force. Neither the investigators nor the military agencies involved had practical experience with the regulatory approval process. We are now subject matter experts.

**c. How were the results disseminated to communities of interest?**

- Nothing to Report.

**d. What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?**

- We have done everything possible to influence USD (P&R) to take action on and approve our waiver request. While we wait on a response, our team has begun an updated review of the literature on sexual minority couples and active military service. There have been new individual studies published in the past 2 years and an updated literature review is timely.

**4. IMPACT:**

**a. What was the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**

Nothing to Report.

**b. What was the impact on other disciplines?**

Nothing to Report.

**c. What was the impact on technology transfer?**

Nothing to Report.

**d. What was the impact on society beyond science and technology?**

Nothing to Report.

**5. CHANGES/PROBLEMS:**

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

No changes in our approach occurred in this reporting period.

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

- We are still awaiting final approval to begin recruitment and study procedures, which may cause further unplanned delay.

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

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

**6. PRODUCTS:**

**a. Publications, conference papers, and presentations**

Nothing to report

**b. Journal publications**

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

**d. Other publications, conference papers, and presentations.**

Nothing to report

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

Nothing to report

**f. Technologies or techniques**

Nothing to report

**g. Inventions, patent applications, and/or licenses**

Nothing to report

**h. Other Products**

Nothing to report

**7. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS**

**a. What individuals have worked on the project?**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Project Role</b>	<b>Nearest person month worked</b>	<b>Contribution to Project</b>
Dr. Jeffrey A. Cigrang	PI	1	Served as the Principal Investigator for the project. Led effort to prepare, submit, & obtain IRB approval for protocol. Coordinated all regulatory aspects of study with Air Force and other higher headquarters.
Maj Jordan Simonson	Co-I	1	Air Force co-PI. Our POC at the study sponsoring agency – HQ USAF/A1Z. Responsible for developing the Air Force-approved plan for study advertisement. Responsible for all communications with Air Force Survey Office and HQ A1Z. Has assisted significantly in our work with Health Affairs Office to prepare responses to USAD (P&R) OGC.
Dr. Amy Slep	Co-I	1	Senior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Assisted with all aspects of developing IRB protocol and helping prepare responses to USD (P&R).
Dr. Rick Heyman	Co-I	1	Senior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Assisted with all aspects of developing IRB protocol.
Dr. Danielle Mitnick	Co-I	1	Junior investigator at partnering University (NYU). Helped write the method and data management section for IRB protocol.
Dr. Kristin Lindahl	Co-I	1	Senior Investigator at partnering University (MU). Led selection of LGB-specific measures for quantitative survey and qualitative interviews.
Dr. Christina Balderrama-Durbin	Co-I	1	Junior investigator at partnering University (BU-SUNY). Consultant for selection of LGB-specific measures for quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Helped establish protocol and scripts for qualitative interviews and training of others in the project in conducting interviews.
Ms. Kelsey Lorko	Graduate Research Assistant	1	Served as GRA for Dr. Cigrang at WSU. Coordinated team meetings, dictated meeting minutes, helped edit portions of research questionnaires, helped establish protocol and scripts for conducting qualitative interviews and engaged in training and practicing conducting interviews.
Ms. Avantika	Graduate Research	1	Served as GRA for Dr. Cigrang at WSU. Coordinated team meetings, dictated meeting



Gupta	Assistant		minutes, created web-based versions of research questionnaires, helped establish protocol and scripts for conducting qualitative interviews and engaged in training and practicing conducting interviews.
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**b. Has there been a change in the active other support of the PD/PI(s) or senior/key personnel since the last reporting period?**

- **None**

**c. What other organizations were involved as partners?**

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

**8. SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

- **QUAD CHART attached**

**9. APPENDICES:**

- Quad chart