

TELLING THE OPEN SECRET:  
TOWARD A NEW DISCOURSE WITH THE U.S. MILITARY'S  
DON'T ASK DON'T TELL POLICY

A Dissertation

by

ANDREW DOUGLAS REICHERT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2010

Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

Telling the Open Secret:

Toward a New Discourse with the U.S. Military's

Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy

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## ABSTRACT

Telling the Open Secret:

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Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy. (August 2010)

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This qualitative dissertation in Counseling Psychology considers the *open secret*, an under-researched phrase describing an interesting phenomenon that is experienced by some, but not all, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people when their sexual orientation is known or suspected by family members, friends, and/or coworkers, but not discussed. A review of the literature notes how the essence of the open secret appears to be about *knowledge that is not acknowledged*, while it may also create a *space of grace*, allowing people to coexist, where they might not otherwise be able to do so easily.

Participants ( $N = 11$ ) were either current or past members of the U.S. military who served before or during the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Interviews were analyzed using James Paul Gee's linguistic approach to narrative, from which three major findings emerged: (a) *sexual and homophobic harassment*, whereby historically homophobic attitudes within the military drive the need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality; (b) *acceptance and support*, whereby the open secret seems to create a *space of grace*; and

(c) *empowerment and honesty*, whereby LGBT people seem to have a new sense of honesty that empowers them toward a new sense of agency. Discussion includes examination of how the three findings may relate to the *open* versus *secret* parts of the open secret, as well as how the open secret and the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may represent a gestalt attempt at *balance* that may now be moving toward a gestalt dynamic of *completion*, suggesting the possibility of a *new Discourse* of openness and honesty for LGBT people that appears to be on a proleptic *edge of possibility*.

In Memory

Nanette Reichert

Tessie and Aggie Mom

And in Honor

William F. Reichert

Class of 1952

A&M College of Texas

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank my research participants, without whom this dissertation would not be possible – not only the final sample included here, but also those who took the online screening survey, many of whom I exchanged emails with and came to know. Although I finally focused this research on past or present members of the military, thus necessitating my final sample, I appreciate all those who contributed in any way. They not only gave of their time, some for hours, exchanging emails with me, but many also shared intimate details of their lives which have forever touched my heart. The handful of stories that I am able to actually include here hardly does justice to their astonishing lives, and yet, in telling their stories, they have helped me immeasurably, while more importantly, shedding light on an under-researched topic.

I also wish to thank my dissertation committee, especially my co-chairs who guided me every step of the way: Dr. Daniel Brossart gave lots of encouragement and wrote many recommendation letters for me, and Dr. Carolyn Clark put the wind in my sails when I was floundering through the fourth chapter, and I will never forget when she paused one day in class to magically mention the importance of doing good *scholarship*, of which I hope this dissertation might qualify. As for Dr. Michael Duffy, he is simply a saint, whose clinical wisdom and experience have guided me through the past four years, and it was Dr. Patrick Slattery who encouraged me to apply to Texas A&M University in the first place. Dr. Slattery believed I could earn a PhD when I still had doubts and was worried about the GRE, and he wrote one of my very first recommendation letters.

Additionally, I wish to thank The Rev. Dr. Brett Webb-Mitchell, a dear friend and former professor of mine from Duke University, whom I consider an honorary member of my committee. Dr. Webb-Mitchell was the first person to seriously encourage me to write, for which I will always be grateful, and he was kind enough to review the final draft, looking for theological insights. My sister, Marianne Reichert, also proofread draft after draft, finding many of my typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors, as well as offering wonderful suggestions. In the end, all the errors are mine, but there would certainly be many more without her unwavering help and support. She was also the first person I ever came out to, and she did just what a big sister should do – gave me a hug and reminded me that she loves me. Thank you.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Within the realm of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) identity development (i.e., the process by which LGBT people come to understand their sexual orientation), there is a colloquial phrase that is sometimes heard. The *open secret* refers to a peculiar time in the lives of *some* LGBT people whose sexual orientation is known – correctly deduced or ascertained by family members, friends, and/or coworkers – but not discussed. Even though the LGBT person may be aware that his or her sexuality is known or assumed by others, he or she may continue to behave as if unaware of this knowledge. Similarly, family members, friends, and/or coworkers of the LGBT person may also act as if they are unaware of the person’s sexuality, though they may know or suspect it. In short, with the open secret, people know, and people know that they know, but people also pretend not to know (i.e., the proverbial *elephant in the room*). As Kenji Yoshino (2006), a dean and law professor at Yale University, eloquently illustrates:

Many gay people have had this experience of the “open secret.” I was gay – she knew I was gay – I knew she knew I was gay. Like mirrors held up to each other, we created an infinite regress of knowledge. But as the literary critic D.A. Miller says, there is a difference between knowledge and acknowledgement of knowledge. Because I would never acknowledge our collective knowledge, she could not do so either. So we carried on – each week more strained than the last. (p. 62)

---

This dissertation follows the style of the *American Psychologist*.

Sometimes also called the *glass closet* in the popular LGBT press (Musto, 2007), little appears to have been published on the open secret outside of literary circles, suggesting a potential gap in the psychological literature, despite the possibility that many people may be living with an open secret, perhaps for years, for open secrets need not apply only to LGBT people, as there can be other open secrets in people's lives (e.g., a relative's drinking problem or a politician's mistress; Zerubavel, 2006).

### Naming

Empowering and emancipating literature, whether LGBT, feminist, or racial, to name a few genres, often has a thread running through it, especially in its early stages, of people experiencing a phenomenon, but unaware that others may also be experiencing the same thing until it is *named*, brought to light, and defined (see Lindsey [1997] for a feminist, qualitative perspective). For example, in their history of LGBT culture in and around San Francisco, Stryker and Van Buskirk (1996) note that World War II uprooted many people and brought them together in large cities: "Many people who had felt same-sex desires – but who never knew there were other people like themselves – had their first homosexual encounters as a direct result of their military service" (p. 29). Similarly, there may be many LGBT people living life with the open secret, but unaware that there may be others just like them, living similar lives with similar open secrets.

Atkins-Sayre (2005) writes that, "Although naming can be used in negative ways, it can also be used to create understanding. Labeling defines an object or phenomenon and that act of defining may bring attention to what was once unknown" (p. 9). Similarly, Worell (2000) notes how feminist psychologists have reframed and

renamed issues by asking new questions, such as, “Why do some men beat their wives and partners?” rather than “Why doesn’t she just leave him?” (p. 189). Commenting on the naming of sexual harassment, Worell (2000) writes that, “Until a problem or event is given a name or title, it remains unidentified and devoid of research. Although women have been exposed to sexual assault for centuries, feminists have shown that naming the problem exposes it to public examination” (p. 189).

In my own experience with the open secret, whether with friends or in counseling clients, there have been several occasions when I asked someone if he or she had ever heard of the open secret. Typically, the initial response was a blank look, followed by, “No.” But then, after a quick explanation (i.e., *naming* it), the person would usually say something like, “Oh yeah, I know what you mean,” followed by a story, either about their own or a friend’s or family member’s experience of an open secret.

Whatever, exactly, the open secret may be, it exists and people are experiencing it, but it appears that there is little research into *who* is experiencing it and *why* and for *how long* and *what*, if any, psychological impact it may have on people’s lives and relationships. Ironically, as seems to be its enigmatic nature, nobody seems to really know about the open secret or talk about it. It is just there, like the proverbial *elephant in the room* that everybody sees, but nobody mentions (Zerubavel, 2006).

### Questions

So, just what exactly is the open secret for LGBT people and what prevents people from talking about it? Is it merely a polite avoidance of a taboo subject or is it more, perhaps an intentional suppressing of homosexual acknowledgment, paradoxically

acquiesced by some LGBT people (Miller, 1988)? And what, if any, are the costs or psychological dimensions of the open secret, maybe in terms of denial, LGBT identity development, or other psychological variables, such as stress, self-esteem, coping, or personality to name a few possibilities? Although not specifically defined as research questions, per se, with clearly constructed and defined variables, these are the types of nondirective inquiries that this exploratory, descriptive, research project aims to answer.

### Purpose

The purpose of this research study will be to conduct an online qualitative descriptive study of the open secret to better understand how it is constructed and negotiated as LGBT and heterosexual people move in and out of it, especially within the U.S. military context before and during the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, given that this study focuses on past or present members of the U.S. military, where the open secret may be found. Frank (2009), for example, notes that it is well known that LGBT people have served and continue to serve with honor and distinction in the U.S. military, yet their presence, although a given, is kept silent by policies, such as the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Similarly, Yoshino (2006) writes that LGBT *passing* (i.e., acting as if one is heterosexual) is dependent, not only on LGBT silence, but also on “antigay insistence on such silence” (p. 66), representing a “bilateral social contract” (p. 66) that officially became policy in 1993 with the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. It seems, then, that LGBT people in the U.S. military may represent an institutional open secret, for their presence is known, yet not acknowledged (Miller, 1988) because of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.



Specifically, eleven past or current U.S. service members are interviewed to better understand (a) the costs and/or benefits of the open secret; (b) how and why the open secret develops, is maintained, and/or diminishes in people's lives, as will be seen with the major findings that emerge from the data; (c) any *open* versus *secret* aspects to the open secret, and how people may *fluidly* move in and out of any *open* versus *secret* dimensions; as well as (d) any future research that may be indicated from the study.

Additionally, this research contributes to what appears to be a gap in the psychological and multicultural literature, while also striving to be feminist in nature (i.e., emancipating and empowering) by helping to *name* a phenomenon that may be more widely experienced than realized. It is also hoped that this research might be particularly apropos in timing, given that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was recently reviewed by Congress and may be changed or repealed in the near future (Herszenhorn & Hulse, 2010).

### One Last Thing

Finally, as the late, Harvard University psychologist, Roger Brown (1989) wrote shortly before his death, "There is one last thing to be said about my research style. It has always started with some phenomenon ... I have tended to pick some mystery and poke it and prod it and turn it all around in an effort to figure it out" (p. 50). Inspired by Brown's (1989) research style, this research project also aims to poke and prod, and turn all around – all in an effort to figure out and tell the open secret.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Homosexuality is nothing new. It dates back to ancient times and the beginning of human history; the prevalence of it in ancient Greece is well known, documented, and often discussed, especially in terms of its context of older men mentoring adolescent boys. Even Jesus, himself, may have encountered a homosexual relationship, perhaps an open secret, when he healed the centurion's slave (Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13) without commenting on what some biblical scholars believe may have been a homosexual relationship between the centurion and the slave (Helminiak, 2006; Horner, 1978).

Indeed, throughout history and nearly every culture on the planet, homosexuality has enjoyed varying degrees of acceptance, while also enduring more than its share of hostility. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people have been moralized by religious communities, pathologized by the medical community, and criminalized by the legal community (Foucault, 1976/1990; Jordan, 2000), and yet, they still exist and perhaps enjoy more freedom and acceptance today than ever before, although not full equality in many countries, including the United States. In the introduction to his history of LGBT culture in New York City, Charles Kaiser (1997) writes,

No other group has ever transformed its status more rapidly or more dramatically than lesbians and gay men. When World War II began, gay people in America had no legal rights, no organizations, a handful of private thinkers, and no public advocates ... A quarter century later, gay people have completed the first stages of an incredible voyage: a journey from invisibility to ubiquity, from shame to self-respect, and, finally, from the overwhelming tragedy of AIDS to the triumph of a rugged, resourceful and caring community. (p. vii)

And yet, for some LGBT people, there still remains a strange silence around their sexuality, the "Love that dare not speak its name," as Alfred Douglas, the romantic partner of Oscar Wilde, described it in his 1896 poem, *Two Loves* (in Murray, 2000, p. 36). A search of 45 available databases for literature regarding the open secret revealed only 56 matches, slightly over half of which were LGBT-related, although often from a literary or historical account (e.g., the known but little discussed homosexuality of an artist, writer, or historical figure), rather than from a psychological perspective. Other aspects of the open secret focused on political figures, controversies, or stories of a sensational nature (e.g., a celebrity's known, but little-discussed, drug addiction).

In her review of the open secret from a literary and poetic perspective, Anne-Lise Francois (2008) defines it as, "a way of imparting knowledge such that it cannot be claimed and acted on" (p. 1). Yet, for Francois (2008), the open secret also seems to act as a sort of *grace*, creating a space for some people to coexist where they might otherwise not be able to do so – to know and love and care for each other, but *not* know (i.e., not acknowledge) what they may not wish to discuss.

Ironically, Francois (2008) also notes the way the open secret may prevent people from truly meeting their full potential and using their talents because it seems to deny them the space to do so; it seems to take away from the mundane ordinariness of life by forbidding discussion of that which would otherwise be uneventful. For example, telling parents that one is watching television with his or her boy- or girlfriend may suddenly become strangely unmentionable or, perhaps, even incomprehensible, as LGBT people self-edit simple information, despite the fact that their parents may already

know that their son or daughter is LGBT and dating someone. Thus, the information is known, and people know that it is known, and yet, it is not known because it is not acknowledged.

In this sense, Francois (2008) notes how the open secret seems to act recessively in that some piece of information is first known, but then it is indirectly taken back by never being mentioned again, as if the information that is known is actually not known by not being discussed, thus seeming to create a gap between that which is known, yet appears not to be known (Francois, 2008). Here, the open secret may not be the *presence* of something, but rather, its *absence* (Francois, 2008), as if a void is created where something could or should be. Confusing, yes – and rhetorical too. Seen but not seen. Knowledge that is *not* acknowledged seems to be the essence of the open secret (Miller, 1988), although how it then relates to people's lives, whether as grace, wasted talent, or avoidance of the ordinary is less clear.

Miller (1988) appears to be the first to discuss the open secret, as does Sedgwick (1990), the former finding it in the characters of a Charles Dickens' novel, while the latter finds it in the silence surrounding mutiny in Herman Melville's, *Billy Budd* and homosexuality in Oscar Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Both Frankham (2001) and Yoshino (2006) cite Miller (1988), the former in her study of 18 gay men in the United Kingdom, while the latter notes how the open secret can emerge within the realm of *gay passing* (i.e., when LGBT people are presumed to be heterosexual and act as such), as well as, *gay covering* (i.e., when LGBT people assimilate as heterosexual, despite their sexual orientation having been disclosed and known).

Interestingly, Yoshino (2006) traces the history of heterosexual demands on LGBT people from *gay conversion* (i.e., religious and/or therapeutic demands to change one's sexual orientation to heterosexuality) to *gay passing*, mentioned above, and now *gay covering* (as well as, *reverse covering*) where it is increasingly acceptable to be LGBT, so long as one is not too noticeably LGBT or too much of a LGBT activist, that is, not *flaunting* one's LGBT sexuality, but rather, assimilating it into the mainstream heterosexual culture. As Yoshino (2006) notes,

If conversion divides ex-gays from gays, and passing divides closeted gays from out gays, covering divides *normals* from *queers*. This last divide travels in many guises – as one between assimilationists and liberationists, or conservatives and sex radicals. Whatever we call it, it is the major fault line in the gay community today. (p. 77)

Recalling a personal story, Yoshino (2006) distinguishes between *gay passing* and *gay covering* by retelling a time he refused to hold his boyfriend's hand in public: "In saying I was gay [to his parents, employer, and others], I showed I was willing to value myself over the world's opinion. In reaching for my hand, Paul [his boyfriend] was asking me to give him the same priority" (p. 91). Yoshino (2006) regretted not taking his boyfriend's hand, an ordinary gesture for a heterosexual couple. It is interesting to note that Yoshino (2006) and his boyfriend were not trying to *pass* as heterosexual – they were both out of the closet, but some cultural force still compelled one of them, but not the other, to hide, to *cover*, to keep secret and not acknowledge with a simple gesture of love (what Francois [2008] might call an ordinary and mundane event), that which was already known, out, and open, or at the very least, could have easily been intuited by those around them.

Similarly, Sinfield (1994) notes that,

... the [open] secret keeps a topic like homosexuality in the private sphere, but under surveillance, allowing it to hover on the edge of public visibility. If it gets fully into the open, it attains public status; yet it must not disappear altogether, for then it would be beyond control ... (p. 9; see also Frankham, 2001)

While Sinfield (1994) notes the way the open secret appears to mediate between public and private spheres, Foucault (1976/1990) looks at silence, stating that, "There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of *not* saying such things ..." (p. 27; emphasis added). Similarly, Jordan (2000) looks at the use of rhetoric within the Catholic Church to create official silence and policies against LGBT people that subterfuge Catholicism's long and well-known history of having gay priests, bishops, and even popes, perhaps an open secret of its own, which Jordan (2000) traces to the ninth century.

"Like gnats," is how the open secret was described to Susan Talburt (1999) by a teaching assistant she interviewed: "It's not the greatest of problems, it doesn't prevent me from carrying out my tasks or anything, but you wish you didn't have to deal with it because it just doesn't seem that important" (p. 525). Talburt's (1999) ethnography of a lesbian faculty member recounts the way the professor's "sexuality remains unspoken, [but] it appears – despite a lack of evidence – to constitute a portion of the classroom text" (p. 535). In the words of one student,

No one talks about it, but it's ... just there, you can feel it. People are almost about to say something, and you know what they're about to say, but they sort of, it gets cut off. I know that's there. *You can just tell.* (Talburt, 1999, p. 535)

Talburt (1999) recognizes the "interplay of knowledge/ignorance and voice/visibility" (p. 536), noting that one's voice and self-representation "should be understood

as constructed within the (mis)recognitions of others ... [and] the reciprocal relation in which visibility structures ... voice as well as what others can hear" (p. 536). Talburt's (1999) understanding of the open secret echoes Francois' (2008) interpretation, who refers to Miller (2001) and Sedgwick (2003), noting how the open secret works with power, releasing those with privilege from having to know or act on what they know, but might prefer not to know or act on, as may be the case with the U.S. military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, where LGBT people are known to exist and serve with honor in the military, but their existence appears to be clouded by an open secret type of silence which prevents acknowledging knowledge of LGBT people in the military, who, in turn, are also prevented from acknowledging their presence to others (Frank, 2009). Unlike other open secret situations that may emerge through an unspoken rule or mutual understanding between people, the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may represent a societal open secret that was in place, and then was codified into law, which begs a question concerning power and privilege: Who made it law and why?

#### Don't Ask Don't Tell

The U.S. military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was created by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993 as a compromise to allow LGBT service members the right to remain in the military, provided that they do not disclose their sexual orientation because it is assumed that such disclosure would be a detriment to the military's morale, discipline, and unit cohesion (Frank, 2009). Similarly, the military is not to inquire about or pursue LGBT service members, although some have noted that, in actuality, the military may continue to do this at times (Frank, 2009).

In his excellent and exhaustive history of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, Nathaniel Frank (2009) notes that there are actually *two policies* – one is the Pentagon policy, which provides a *Don't Ask* provision; the other is the actual law, a federal statute that does not forbid the military from asking about a service member's sexuality:

The policy does nothing that is forbidden by the law, and there is nothing the policy fails to do that is mandated by the law. While the law does not force the Pentagon to stop asking recruits about their sexuality, for instance, it does not bar it from doing so ... (p. xiii)

Frank (2009) also notes an important and often misunderstood aspect of the policy: Because it is a federal law, enacted by Congress, it will require an act of Congress to repeal the policy. The President cannot overturn the policy, nor can the Secretary of Defense, nor any general or admiral. Only a majority of Congress can end the policy, which since its inception, has resulted in over 13,500 LGBT people being discharged from the military with a steady rise in discharges that peaked in 2001 and then declined as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq escalated (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2010), implying that LGBT people may be needed to serve and die for their country in wartime (presumably when unit cohesion and morale might be most important), but not in peacetime.

### *Being versus Behaving*

In her pilot study of 34 U.S. service members, Embser-Herbert (2006) found that the military's policy toward LGBT people requires that they publicly *manage* their sexuality, noting that when one identity (i.e., heterosexuality) is privileged over another (i.e., homosexuality), then power is given to the privileged at the expense of the few. Yoshino (2006) reflects that the military's policy does not exclude LGBT people for



*being* LGBT, per se, but rather, for coming out of the closet (i.e., breaking silence) and *acting* on their feelings. Indeed, the policy focuses on a person's *behavior*, rather than their *being*, in that a "homosexual" person is defined as "a person, regardless of sex, who engages in, attempts to engage in, has a propensity to engage in, or intends to engage in homosexual acts," which are further defined as, "any bodily contact, actively undertaken or passively permitted between members of the same sex for the purpose of satisfying sexual desire" (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2010).

Thus, the policy confuses *sexual identity* with *sexual behavior* by specifically defining a LGBT person as someone who *engages in* or has a *propensity to engage in* LGBT behavior when, actually, being LGBT can encompass a wide variety of thoughts and feelings that are broader than sexual behavior. Lisa Diamond (2000, 2008), for example, notes that sexuality does not only include sexual *behavior*, but also aspects of *identity* and *affection*; thus, it is not just what LGBT people *do*, but also who they *are*, and with *whom* they fall in love. Being LGBT is not just about one's *sex life*, but also one's *love life*, the former being the focus of the military's policy, while it seems to miss the latter. The policy's focus on sexual behavior also seems to miss the point that many LGBT people may identify as LGBT, but not engage in any sexual behavior, while some may identify as LGBT, but have a propensity to engage in heterosexual behavior, often due to societal pressures to be married and have children, as illustrated in the award-winning and provocative movie, *Brokeback Mountain* (Costigan & Lee, 2005).

Although the policy may represent a sign of progress as a societal shift from demands for *gay conversion* (i.e., LGBT conversion to heterosexuality) to *gay passing*,

whereby LGBT people can, ostensibly be LGBT, so long as they *pass* as heterosexual (Yoshino, 2006), it still seems to also act regressively by imposing historical demands of silence on LGBT people, which raises troubling questions regarding the power and privilege of a heterosexual majority to silence – to not acknowledge – a LGBT minority.

### *Negative Definitions of Masculinity*

Many have noted the way masculinity is culturally constructed in traditionally masculine environments, such as the military, by defining itself negatively, that is, masculinity is defined by what it is *not*, by the *absence* of something, rather than what it *is* (i.e., the *presence* of something). For many, masculinity is *not* feminine and therefore, implicitly, it is *not* gay (Britton & Williams, 1995; Serlin, 2003). The unstated, but implicit messages in negative definitions of masculinity are interesting; for example, Frank (2009) notes that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy does not state, explicitly, that being LGBT is wrong, but rather, the policy states that openly LGBT people will disrupt unit cohesion, the implicit message being that, therefore, it is wrong to be LGBT, for why else would unit cohesion be disrupted? Similarly, the open secret appears to do the same thing: Impart knowledge implicitly, perhaps with a moral quality, judgment, or assumption about it, without any explicit acknowledgement of it (Miller, 1988).

This type of negative defining is exemplified by a common military cadence that is taught to members of the Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets: “T-sip, t-sip, don't be blue/Tinker Bell was a fairy too.” The cadence can be heard at football games and it teases Texas A&M University's archrival, The University of Texas at Austin, whose students are often called “t-sips” by Texas A&M University fans, the insinuation being

that students at The University of Texas at Austin are highfaluting tea drinkers, while those at Texas A&M University keep it *real* with less highbrow ways.

Sadly, the cadence assumes that being a “fairy” is cause to be blue, and it teaches cadets at Texas A&M University to build themselves up by putting others down, while also defining themselves in the negative – not by who they are or what they represent (e.g., service to state and nation), but who they are *not*. Presumably, they are *not* “fairies,” the implicit message being that, therefore, they are *not* LGBT, though other research suggests that nearly 7% of undergraduates living on campus at Texas A&M University self-identify as LGBT (Reichert, 2008), a silent minority that is easily twice the size of Texas A&M University’s Corps of Cadets.

### *Dropping the Soap*

Oftentimes, proponents of the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy argue that military personnel must live in close quarters and share showers, the unspoken fear being that “... gay men [can] gaze licentiously at unsuspecting heterosexuals” (Britton & Williams, 1995, p. 9), one of the many assumptions being that all gay men are sexually attracted to all other men. This assumption can reach near-hysterical proportions with homophobic preoccupations of *dropping the soap* (i.e., when heterosexual men might bend over in a shower, exposing themselves to the possibility of homosexual penetration), on which Bordo (1993) paradoxically reflects, “For although it is the imagined effeminacy of homosexual men that makes them objects of heterosexual derision, here it is their imagined *masculinity*” (cited by Britton & Williams, 1995, p. 10) that causes concern.

Britton and Williams (1995) note that these arguments for maintaining the policy focus on pragmatic conditions that could easily be remedied (e.g., shower curtains), while they overlook the irony that LGBT people have, undoubtedly, already been showering with unsuspecting heterosexuals without incidents, a self-evident truth that is typically not mentioned, similar to an open secret. These arguments also seem to forget that, since the Persian Gulf War, men and women in the military have often shared tents, latrines, and shower facilities without incidents (Herek, 1993). To paraphrase two research participants in this study, “We’re too tired to worry about sex.” It should be noted, however, that these comments were from two men, and from a male position of privilege, they can likely afford not to “worry about sex” in a way that women cannot, especially with the high rates of military sexual trauma against women (Rank, 2010).

Britton and Williams (1995) also note that the military appears to be agreeable to the sexual gaze of men, so long as it is directed toward women, as observed in various *rape, pillage, and burn* combat attitudes and sexist cadences (e.g., “I don’t know, but I’ve been told/Eskimo pussy is mighty cold,” p. 12), but when the gaze turns to men, then men are suddenly objectified as sex objects, which causes concerns and complaints that women have known, named, and voiced for decades (Rich, 1980; Worell, 2000).

### *Who Cares*

It is ironic that initial formulations of the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy included concerns for America’s youth – recruits in their late teens and early twenties who might be confused or offended by openly LGBT service members (Frank, 2009). But as Kuhr (2007), Bacevich (1993), and others have noted, younger service members appear to care

less about openly LGBT people serving in the military, while older, higher ranking officers still consider it to be an issue and detriment to morale. Quoting a retired U.S. Coast Guard master chief petty officer, Kuhr (2007) notes that,

These [younger] soldiers cared only whether their fellow soldiers were willing to do the job and watch their backs ... Being gay, or Baptist, or Jewish, or whatever didn't matter to them. (p. 33)

Indeed, a recent Zogby International (2006) poll found that approximately 75% of U.S. military personnel surveyed stated that they were comfortable serving alongside gays and lesbians, while 78% indicated that they would join the military regardless of open inclusion of LGBT people.

Finally, it is interesting that the United States and Turkey are the only two remaining NATO nations which do not allow LGBT people to openly serve in their militaries (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2010). Other countries, including Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and Israel have demonstrated that allowing LGBT people to openly serve in the military has no adverse effects (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2010). Indeed, the United Kingdom even actively recruits LGBT people for the Royal Navy (Lyll, 2005).

### LGBT Identity Development

Turning now to a brief review of LGBT identity development, Magnus Hirschfeld (n.d./ 1991) was one of the first to study sexuality, especially in regard to *transvestites*, a term he coined. Much of his library, of over 20,000 books and more than 35,000 photographs, was burned in Berlin by the Nazis before World War II, the rest of which has only recently begun to resurface (Bullough, 1991 in Hirschfeld, n.d./1991).

Sigmund Freud (1930/1948, 1935), a contemporary of Hirschfeld, also studied sexuality, finding that homosexuality was not an illness and should not be illegal, but rather, it is a variation in human sexuality, perhaps due to an arrested state of sexual development.

In the United States, Alfred C. Kinsey and his colleagues shocked 1950s America with their findings that sexuality existed on a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual (i.e., the Kinsey scale), with nearly four in ten men (and one in ten women) having experienced some type of homosexual encounter (in Troiden, 1988). And in a classic experiment, Evelyn Hooker (1957) found that expert judges evaluating Rorschach test results (used at the time to *diagnose* homosexuality), could not distinguish between hetero- and homosexual clients, thus foreshadowing the eventual declassification and removal in 1973 of ego-syntonic (i.e., self-accepting) homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

### *Stage Models*

Vivienne Cass (1979), an Australian psychologist, was one of the first to study the *stages* of LGBT identity development. Her seminal, six-stage, linear model, described below, is well-known, cited, and often generalized to the larger LGBT community, although it is important to note that her initial study focused only on gay men. Cass (1979) also notes that not all LGBT people progress through all six stages, as identity foreclosure can happen at any stage, thus ending any further progression.

*Stage 1: Identity Confusion.* Cass' (1979) model starts with *Stage 1: Identity Confusion*, whereby LGBT people begin to become aware that their sexual feelings *could* be LGBT with a heightened awareness of LGBT issues (e.g., a LGBT-related

story on the news) that is not typical of heterosexual people; this creates incongruence between a previously understood heterosexual identity and a growing awareness of an LGBT possibility.

*Stage 2: Identity Comparison.* Cass' (1979) second stage begins when LGBT people start to consider that they *may be LGBT*, which can lead to a sense of alienation and feelings of being ““the only one in the world like this”” (p. 225). Cass (1979) notes that LGBT people may employ one of four common strategies to resolve incongruence at this stage, including (a) the *special case strategy*, whereby the LGBT person reasons that he or she is only LGBT in one special case involving one special person to whom he or she is attracted; (b) the *ambisexual strategy*, whereby the LGBT person believes that they are attracted to both the same and opposite sex, and as long as they can potentially be heterosexual, then their feelings of alienation about being LGBT may be alleviated; (c) the *temporary identity strategy*, whereby the LGBT person considers that their sexual feelings may only be temporary and that they can act heterosexually in the future; and (d) the *personal innocence strategy*, whereby the LGBT person may view their sexuality as being beyond their control and indicative of how they were born or brought up.

*Stage 3: Identity Tolerance.* Cass' (1979) third stage begins as the LGBT person starts to *tolerate*, but not yet *accept*, their sexuality. LGBT people at this stage may seek information about being LGBT and make initial contacts within the LGBT community. Cass (1979) notes that these initial contacts can either be *positive* or *negative*, where the former may lead to increasing acceptance of a LGBT identity and the latter may lead to

self-hatred and identity foreclosure (e.g., “‘If this [negative experience] is what being a homosexual is all about, then I do not like being a homosexual’” [pp. 230-231].)

*Stage 4: Identity Acceptance.* During Cass’ (1979) fourth stage, LGBT people have achieved a growing acceptance of their sexuality, and they may begin to selectively disclose it to trusted heterosexual people, while continuing to pass as heterosexual and limit their contact or disclosure with family members, friends, and/or coworkers who may be seen as unsupportive of LGBT people. Although Cass (1979) does not consider the open secret, it would seem that if it were to emerge within any of her stages, it might begin to reveal itself in her fourth stage, when LGBT people begin to cautiously crack the proverbial closet door open a little wider with selected heterosexual people in different settings (e.g., home, school, work).

*Stage 5: Identity Pride.* Cass’ (1979) fifth stage tends to be an angry, activist-oriented stage, whereby the LGBT person is now *out of the closet* in nearly all, if not all, aspects of their life. LGBT people in this stage may devalue heterosexual people and presume that all heterosexual people are inherently against LGBT people; however, positive interactions with LGBT-accepting heterosexual people, many of whom may be LGBT allies, can help lead LGBT people to Cass’ (1979) final stage.

*Stage 6: Identity Synthesis.* Cass’ (1979) final stage emerges as LGBT people continue to have positive encounters with supportive heterosexual people, thus challenging what may have been a previously held heterosexual versus LGBT dichotomy. Although pride in being LGBT may continue, so also will an integration of one’s LGBT identity with all other aspects of one’s life, so that sexuality, although an



important part of life, is only *one* part of life, just as many heterosexual people may integrate their own sexuality as just one of many facets in their lives.

Similar to Cass (1979), Richard Troiden (1988), a sociologist, developed a four-stage model; however, Troiden (1988), following the pragmatic and symbolic interactionist tradition of George Herbert Mead's (1934) posthumously published, *Mind, Self, and Society*, noted the way that society informs the self, along with its implications for LGBT identity development. More recently, D'Augelli (1994) considered the impact of family, peers, and cultural influences on LGBT identity development, while Fassinger (1998) looked at LGBT identity development from a Student Affairs perspective, as did Dilley (2002), although with a historical approach. Foucault (1976/1990) also took a historical approach, arguing that sexuality is a *social construction*, not an *essentialist* (i.e., genetic, inherent) way of being (see also Stein, 1990/1992; Troiden, 1988).

### *Sexual Fluidity*

Although stage models of LGBT identity development are helpful and widely used, a growing understanding of *sexual fluidity* appears to be the cutting edge of LGBT identity development research at this time, whereby people may move in and out of various sexual attractions and behaviors with the same or opposite sex throughout their lifetimes. Rich Savin-Williams (2005), for example, has taken stage theorists, such as Cass (1979), to task, noting that today's LGBT youth eschew labels such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, or *transgender*, preferring to embrace their sexuality in less categorical, binary, and gender-based ways. Savin-Williams (2005) notes that today's LGBT teenagers are coming out of the closet at earlier ages than ever before, and he argues that these LGBT

youth are much more resilient than prior LGBT generations and simply do not face the overwhelming stigma and shame of their older counterparts, thanks to more accepting parents, teachers, and peers. Although Savin-Williams' (2005) work is encouraging, it is important to remember that many LGBT people still face emotional pain, shame, and internalized homophobia (Allen & Oleson, 1999), as well as increased rates of suicide, where LGBT youth are estimated to be two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Gibson, 1994).

A protégé of Savin-Williams (2005), Lisa Diamond's (2000, 2008) longitudinal study of sexual minority women (i.e., LBT) found that women's sexual identity and behavior may be more *fluid* (i.e., changeable) over time than previously thought. Diamond (2000) questions the way LGBT people are typically understood to discover their sexual orientation with "little change [in their] sexual identity, attractions, and behavior" (p. 241) after coming out of the closet. Rather, Diamond (2008) argues that women's sexuality encompasses their sexual *identity, attractions, and behavior*, in a more fluid way, while bisexuality appears not to be a transitional or experimental stage along the way to coming out of the closet as gay or lesbian, as has often been thought to be the case.

### *Neglecting the Open Secret*

Yet, none of these theorists, nor any others to my knowledge, consider the open secret and how it may relate to LGBT identity development, suggesting a possible gap in the literature. Yoshino (2006) mentions it in his historical review of how LGBT people moved from *conversion*, to *passing*, to *covering*, and it also comes up in Frankham's

(2001) and Talburt's (1999) research, but little elsewhere within the psychological literature. Whatever and wherever, exactly, the open secret may be, it appears to lie somewhere between coming out of the closet and the interaction of acknowledgement, either with or without approval, of that knowledge between oneself and others.

To borrow from Miller (1988), the open secret seems to exist somewhere between *repression* and *expression*, between *intuition* and *information*. It not only may relate to LGBT identity development, perhaps being a stage or an arrested stage of LGBT identity development for *some*, but not all, LGBT people, but it also may relate to interpersonal relations – to perceived closeness or distance between people, as well as social control and power, whether intentional or not, and LGBT acquiescence and/or assimilation (i.e., *covering*; Yoshino [2006]) to that control and power.

#### The Down Low

Turning now to the Down Low phenomenon, another possible example of the open secret, the Down Low phrase, meaning *secret*, became popular in the 1990s by singers TLC and R. Kelly (Denizet-Lewis, 2003), and it is commonly associated with African American men who identify as heterosexual but have sex with other men (i.e., being *on* the Down Low or *DL*). Although disputed, the Down Low is thought by some to relate to the rise in new HIV cases among African Americans, the fastest growing HIV demographic in the USA (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007), especially among African American heterosexual women who, without cause for suspicion, may unknowingly contract HIV from their husbands and boyfriends who are secretly having sex with other men on the Down Low (Boykin, 2005; Lemelle, 2004).

It is interesting that the Down Low appears to relate to secrecy both on an individual level (i.e., those on the Down Low), and also on a corporate level, whereby an open secret seems to emerge as awareness of and participation in the Down Low increases over time. For example, Denizet-Lewis (2003) notes that in the 1990s,

[The Down Low] culture was completely under the radar, and DL men lived ostensibly heterosexual lives (complete with wives and girlfriends) but also engaged in secret sexual relationships with men. Today, though, an increasing number of black men who have sex only with men identify themselves as DL, further muddying an already complicated group identity. And as DL culture expands, it has become an open secret. (p. SM28)

Denizet-Lewis (2003) notes that the Down Low appears to exist between White gay culture and Black masculinity, the latter of which bell hooks (1992) suggests eschews all things feminine, including Black gay men (in Johnson, 2003), similar to the implicit and negative definitions of masculinity discussed previously. To those on the Down Low, writes Denizet-Lewis (2003), “it is the safest identity available – they don’t risk losing their ties to family, friends, and black culture” (p. SM28). In this sense, those on the Down Low may be similar to LGBT people in the military serving under the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy, in that both appear to serve as a liminal space between a desire that cannot be spoken and a negative definition of masculinity that is demanded.

To borrow from Yoshino (2006), it appears that those on the Down Low must *pass* as Black masculine to those who are not on the Down Low, while *covering* on the Down Low with those who are also on it. As with other open secrets, in the case of the Down Low, the passing and covering appear to be self-imposed, no doubt by cultural demands and constraints, while with the military’s Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy, the passing and covering are legislated by law.

### Possible Psychological Variables

Perhaps the most predictable psychological variable associated with the open secret might be *denial*, a classic psychoanalytic defense mechanism characterized by “refusing to acknowledge an aspect of reality that is evident to others” (Seligman, 2006, p. 56). Cramer (2006) notes that on an axis of maturity, denial is at the immature end, compared with other defense mechanisms, such as projection (in Szajnberg, 2008).

#### *Role of Silence*

Commenting on the *denial of denial*, Zerubavel (2006) notes that “silence is often covered up by sound”:

So-called small talk, nervous chatter, and ‘beating around the bush’ are but different forms of ‘conspiracies of noise’ specifically designed to cover up uncomfortable silences ... When there is an elephant in the room, we often find ‘some subject other than what is happening’ to talk about. (p. 52)

Similarly, Rogers et al. (1999) consider the use of silence within narratives, paying particular attention to what is *not* said or may be unsayable or even unspeakable:

What is unsayable lies just under the surface of conscious knowing, whereas what is unspeakable exists as a deep and haunting sense of something present that begs for words but is also absolutely forbidden to be spoken. (p. 86)

Rogers et al. (1999) describe four forms of the unsayable in language: (a) *language of negation*, where people specifically state what is not part of the narrative, (b) *language of revision*, where people contradict or deny themselves within a narrative, (c) *language of smokescreens and evasions*, where narratives take a vague tone or mislead listeners, either consciously or unconsciously, and (d) *language of silence*, where information could have been volunteered in a narrative, but was not, perhaps because it is unsayable or unspeakable.

Just as with the military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, much of the debate and discussion focused on concerns for unit cohesion when the policy was first formulated (Frank, 2009), a possible way of noisily distracting attention away from the unsaid, the implicit message being that being LGBT is thought by some to be a moral wrong (Frank, 2009). These silences, whether voluntary or legislated, could relate to stress, another possible psychological variable, and distances between people, as exemplified in an interview response from a lesbian teenager who participated in a social work study:

It's really difficult to be a lesbian teenager and to live at home. My Mom and I never talk about the fact that I'm a lesbian. Sometimes the silence really gets to me. (Mallon, 1999, p. 81)

Zerubavel (2006) discusses the way silences can impede honest and trusting relationships, while hindering open communication. Ironically, silences can also represent tacit forms of approval, as Zerubavel (2006) notes, "Silence, as the saying goes, is consent ... A woman who pretends not to notice that her husband is molesting her daughter thus enables the abuse by essentially conveying her tacit approval" (p. 85). Here, one might wonder if the silence that "really gets to" the teenage lesbian mentioned above also really gets to her mother in the same way, or from the mother's perspective, could the silence be a form of her tacit approval and love for her daughter and/or simply her tactful approach or inability to discuss a difficult or taboo topic?

### *Shame and Self-esteem*

Tact and taboo are two similar phenomena that relate to embarrassment and fear respectively, where shame underlies the embarrassment associated with tact (Zerubavel, 2006). Jordan (1997) notes the way shame can underlie "a broad and widespread sense

of ‘being’ wrong; that is one’s *being* is wrong” (p. 149), a common feeling with many LGBT people (Anderson, 2002; Cass 1979) that can relate to internalized homophobia and low self-esteem (Allen & Oleson, 1999), but also one that may be experienced by parents of LGBT children, who often experience profound feelings of guilt and failure after a son or daughter comes out as LGBT (Mallon, 1999; Savin-Williams, 2005), as well as regret, or even anger, for not being told sooner, the implication being that their LGBT child could not trust them (Cameron & Hargreaves, 2005).

Ironically, Zerubavel (2006) notes that the silence which can emerge around fears related to taboos is not only a *product* of the fear but also a *source* of it: “To overcome fear we therefore often need to discuss the undiscussables that help produce it in the first place” (p. 81), but this, of course, can be difficult to do, especially when constrained by cultural considerations, such as can be found with the Down Low phenomenon, or when prevented by law, as with the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy, both of which seem to prevent spaces where open secrets might be discussed and overcome.

### *Closed Secrets*

In contrast to open secrets, the psychological impact of *closed secrets* has been well researched. Jahn (1995), for example, found that family secrets in childhood regarding alcoholism related to poorer psychological wellbeing in adulthood, while Finkenauer and Rime (1998) found that secrecy negatively affected physical health, which negatively affected psychological wellbeing. Similarly, Allen and Oleson (1999) found that hiding one's homosexuality related to increased shame and internalized homophobia, which related to decreased self-esteem.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the open secret appears to be an interdisciplinary subject that can be found in various fields, such as literature, law, education, and religion, but it also appears to be an under-researched topic in terms of how it may relate to psychology and LGBT identity development. As experienced by some, but not all, LGBT people, the open secret may relate to various psychological variables, such as denial, as well as heterosexual privilege, power, and control (i.e., the privilege to not acknowledge one's knowledge; Miller, 1988). Culturally, traces of the open secret are suggested in the Down Low phenomenon that seems particularly relevant within the African American community, as well as with the U.S. military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, the latter now being the exploration of this dissertation.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The current research project is a qualitative, descriptive study of the *open secret*, a phrase sometimes heard within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community to describe situations where a person's sexuality is known or suspected, but not discussed (Yoshino, 2006). The research was conducted online in two parts: First, an online screening survey (see Appendix A) was launched on SurveyMonkey, a popular website for secure, online surveys, from which, secondly, a final sample of participants was selected for more in-depth, online interviews, as described below.

#### The Initial Screening Survey

The initial screening survey (see Appendix A) was launched as a way to easily provide prospective participants with an introduction to the research project, address frequently asked questions, obtain consent, and gather basic demographic information (e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation) about each participant, as well as gather initial information about each participant's experience of the open secret in their lives. Participants were recruited by way of an email invitation (see Appendix B) that was initially sent to a variety of LGBT religious organizations, including the Episcopal Church's Integrity, More Light Presbyterians, the Brethren Mennonite Council for LGBT Interests, Lutherans Concerned, Evangelicals Concerned, the Disciples of Christ GLAD Alliance, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Affirmation, the United Methodist Reconciling Ministries Network, and the Metropolitan Community

Church. It should be noted that many of these organizations (e.g., Affirmation, the Reconciling Ministries Network) may not be officially recognized or sanctioned by their denominational leadership; rather, many of these organizations represent political caucus groups that promote change in their denominational policies toward LGBT people.

The Episcopal Church's Integrity promoted the research study through their online newsletter, as did the *Ohana News*, an online newsletter for LGBT members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Additionally, the research study was promoted through the Texas A&M University Allies listserv, and I was invited to submit a brief online article about the research study to the *Gay Military Signal* (see Appendix C). I also promoted the research study through my own formal and informal network of contacts, many of whom either took the survey or forwarded the survey link to people they knew. Through continued snowballing techniques, the survey spread with a total of 121 people responding to it, excluding three test respondents who tested the survey when it was initially launched. Although the survey data is interesting, I have chosen not to report it because the survey was intended only to be an initial screening instrument, from which the final sample of participants would be selected.

#### The Final Sample

Originally, a final sample of eight to twelve participants was to be selected from the initial screening survey for more in-depth online interviews, based on their potential to provide *rich data* (e.g., *purposive or theoretical sampling*; Denscombe, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) regarding the open secret. However, in reading responses to the initial screening survey, I became increasingly captivated by stories from former and current

members of the military, and after being invited to publish a brief online article about the research project in the *Gay Military Signal* (see Appendix C), I was urged to consider the timing and potential relevance of the project, given that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may soon be repealed (Herszenhorn & Hulse, 2010; Obama, 2010; Shanker, 2010). Encouraged to *go where the data leads*, I decided to follow the evolving nature of the research study and focus the final sample on former and current members of the U.S. military who served before or during the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

#### *Selecting the Final Sample*

A total of 13 respondents (10.74%) to the initial online screening survey reported that they were either current or former members of the U.S. military; twelve of these 13 people were invited to participate in more in-depth online interviews regarding their experience of the open secret and the military, with one person being excluded because he is a close personal friend of mine. Eleven of the 12 people who were invited to be part of the final sample ( $N = 11$ ) agreed to participate, with one declining. A thirteenth person also contacted me, but did not take the screening survey because of military-related, security concerns; I interviewed this thirteenth person in-person (i.e., not online), but the interview was excluded from the final analysis because of overarching concerns for the person's safety, given the content of the person's interview and current military deployment. Two other people (one a retired rear admiral with the U.S. Coast Guard and the other, a U.S. Army lieutenant and Iraqi combat veteran discharged under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy) also contacted me and were consulted, but not interviewed. Email encryption was available, but no respondents used it.

### *Demographics*

Of the final 11 participants ( $N = 11$ ), seven identified as male and four identified as female, including two male-to-female transgender respondents. Four participants were retired from the U.S. Army; another Army respondent is currently serving on active duty in Iraq, and one Army respondent was discharged under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy for being gay. Four participants served in the U.S. Air Force, and one respondent served in the U.S. Navy. No respondents represented the U.S. Marine Corps or the U.S. Coast Guard, with the exception of the retired U.S. Coast Guard rear admiral who was consulted, but not interviewed.

The mean age of the sample was 48.18 ( $SD = 15.31$ ), with the two youngest respondents both being 30 years old, while the oldest respondent was an 85 year old World War II veteran who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps (the predecessor to the U.S. Air Force) as a Radio Operator on a B-17 Flying Fortress. The four highest ranking officers were lieutenant colonels (three women, one man), while the lowest ranking participant was either a sergeant or a noncommissioned officer (NCO), the latter being how one respondent identified himself. Of the eleven participants ( $N = 11$ ), nine self-identified as Caucasian, one self-identified as African American, and one self-identified as Multiracial (Caucasian and Hispanic). Six respondents self-identified as gay; three respondents self-identified as lesbian; one respondent self-identified as bisexual; and one respondent self-identified as "TransQueer."

Ideally, a more representative sample would help generalize the results to a larger population, but as Krefting (1991) notes, generalizing is "somewhat of an illusion" with

qualitative studies “because every research situation is made up of a particular researcher in a particular interaction with particular informants” (p. 216). Krefting (1991) further argues that the point of qualitative research is to describe a phenomenon, one of the goals of this research project, and therefore, *applicability* (i.e., generalization) does not carry the same relevance as it does with quantitative research. Krefting (1991) also notes that qualitative research is concerned with “a range of experience rather than the average experience”:

... atypical or nonnormative situations are important to include in the findings. In quantitative terms, the outlying data need to be identified to describe the boundaries of the experience or phenomenon. Although the person might not be completely representative of a group, his or her experience is considered important. (p. 216).

This range of experience can be found in a *purposive* or *theoretical* sample (Denscombe, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), from which depth and insight into an under-researched phenomenon, like the open secret, can be gleaned. And as Lindsey (1997) articulates, from a *postmodern* perspective, the whole idea of *truth* is troubling, for there may be no such thing as truth or reality, given a broad range of experiences in people’s lives, and even if there is, Lindsey (1997) argues that researchers may not be able to discover it, regardless of their methods. Demographic data for the final sample can be found in Table 1, presented in descending order by age, along with the pseudonyms of each participant. Although more minority and active duty participants would be nice, the final sample is still very broad, in terms of age, sex, sexuality, service branch, and rank, and it should be noted that many active duty LGBT people may not wish to participate, given legitimate fears, due to the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy.

Table 1  
*Demographic Data for the Final Sample (N=11)*

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Race	Sexuality	Service	Rank	Status
1	Trent	85	Male	Caucasian	Gay	Army	TSgt	Retired
2	Marguerite	58	Female	Caucasian	Lesbian	Air Force	LtCol	Retired
3 <sup>a</sup>	Leslie	56	MTF	Caucasian	Lesbian	Army	LTC	Retired
4	Aaron	51	Male	Caucasian	Gay	Air Force	Maj	Retired
5	Elizabeth	50	Female	Caucasian	Lesbian	Air Force	LtCol	Retired
6	David	46	Male	Caucasian	Gay	Army	LTC	Retired
7	Sterling	44	Male	Caucasian	Gay	Army	SGT	Retired
8	Duane	41	Male	African American	Gay	Navy	PO1	Retired
9	Brad	39	Male	Caucasian	Bisexual	Army	MAJ	Active Duty
10 <sup>a</sup>	Hailey	30	MTF	Caucasian	TransQueer	Air Force	SSgt	Retired
11 <sup>b</sup>	Javier	30	Male	Multiracial	Gay	Army	NCO	Discharged

*Note.* Participants are listed in descending order by age.

<sup>a</sup>Participants 3 and 10 self-identified as male-to-female transgender.

<sup>b</sup>Participant 11 was discharged under the U.S. military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

### In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews were non-standardized (Mann & Stewart, 2000), and began with approximately ten questions for each participant, based on the participant's remarks to the initial screening survey, especially where there was any indication of an open secret experience. A dialogue then developed, as I exchanged emails with each respondent, discussing their initial responses, which then led to follow-up questions. The dialogue continued until it came to a natural close, as each participant contributed all that they had to say about their experience of the open secret.

Depending on military deployment, respondents' time constraints, and other factors, I then emailed interview transcripts to respective participants with my initial interpretations for their review and comments (i.e., *member checking*; Krefting, 1991; Lindsey, 1997). Respondents generally replied with heartfelt thanks and hopes to stay in

touch. Below is a typical response from one of the participants after reviewing his transcript:

*Participant.* Alrighty, then.....how interesting and this definitely gives me a sense of exposure and soul-bearing reading what I've told to you. Some of your remarks actually reveal to me things I did not realize myself, i.e. the "lost love" comments referring back to some of my stories about being afraid of what I perceived to be sexual advances (the corporal in basic training; the "ass-grabbing incident, as you call it, lol [laughing out loud]; and so on). I never actually looked at those as lost opportunities for possible love, but that's exactly what they were. I suppose my struggle with accepting that it's ok to be gay overshadowed my ability to realize that I had the right to have a relationship and that it is ok to do so. I'll be reading and re-reading this for quite a while.

Within a feminist ethic of *care and compassion* (Lindsey, 1997), these responses were often double-checked with the participants as the dialogue continued, as shown by my reply below, to which the participant reconfirmed my initial interpretations. As can be seen, the dialogues tended to be very personal, and it appears that the research project may have achieved one of its feminist goals of being empowering and emancipating for some participants, as suggested below, where the participant seems to have an epiphany, remarking that he was “stumbling around” for the first 38 years of his life, missing the forest for the trees, but he now sees the forest, a “very peaceful and beautiful thing.”

*Author.* Well, my interpretations are all tentative, and you're the final "say" regarding how on target they may be. I hope they were not hard for you to read, and to tell you the truth, some of that could be my own "projection" (a psychological term, as you may know), as we are similar in age, and I think I've had some lost love possibilities too ... heavy sigh ...

*Participant.* I do not have a issue with what you think is projecting. I am familiar with that term and ... I don't think that's what is going on. Inferring, maybe, but not projecting. I actually think you're dead on and it's interesting to see how others may asses my story ... as it gives me a different perspective; a forest for the trees kind of thing. I've been stumbling around the trees for the first 38 years of my life I certainly did not see the forest. This has helped me see that forest I've been missing and it's a very peaceful and beautiful thing.

## Data Analysis

There are many approaches to analyzing qualitative data. Grounded Theory, developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser in the late 1960s, is one of the most widely used and has been "heralded as revolutionary in the history of the qualitative traditions" (Walker & Myrick, 2006, p. 547), in which a theory is allowed to *emerge* from the data through a process of *coding, constant comparative analysis, and categorization* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006). Similarly, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) note two main dimensions of narratives: (a) *holistic* versus *categorical* and (b) *content* versus *form*. *Categorical* approaches follow traditional content analysis (i.e., Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006), where multiple texts are dissected into categories and themes, as a theory emerges from the data, whereas the *holistic* approach considers the narrative "as a whole, and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 12). *Content* approaches consider what is actually *in* the narrative – the *who, what, where, when, and why* of a story, whereas *form* analysis looks at the structure of a narrative and sequence of events (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

Together, these two main dimensions suggest four typical approaches that can be used in narrative analysis: (a) *holistic-content* often considers one major theme of a narrative, as manifested through several sub-themes; (b) *holistic-form* also focuses on a major theme, but by considering the "progression of its plot," which Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) note typically has "Three basic patterns or graphs ... progression, regression, and a steady line, while an individual story is usually a



combination of all three" (p. 16); (c) *categorical-content* follows the traditional content analysis approach (i.e., Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006) of cutting a narrative into specific categories, from which a theory can emerge, and (d) *categorical-form* "focuses on discrete stylistic or linguistic characteristics ... [such as] metaphors ... [or] passive versus active utterances" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, pp. 13-14).

It is not that one approach is better than another, but rather each approach lends itself better to different types of narratives and research questions (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Thus, as Clark (2007) notes, the first question when choosing a qualitative analysis is to ask, What is this narrative about and what *tool* do I have (i.e., analytical approach) to best get at what it is about? In reviewing the data, James Paul Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) linguistic approach to narrative was adopted as a way to focus on the structure of each narrative, while also seeing how all the stories *illuminate* and *converge* with each other (Gee, 2005). I also found Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) approach of breaking data into strophes, stanzas, and lines, as discussed below, helped *slow the data down*, from which I was then able to better understand how the narratives fit coherently together.

#### *Lines, Stanzas, and Strophes*

Gee (1991) argues that there are five levels of structure and meaning in a narrative, beginning with *lines* and *stanzas*. Lines typically consist of one or more *idea units*, the latter representing a focus of information, which in oral narratives, can often be distinguished by voice intonation, pitch, and pauses (Gee, 1991), but with online narratives, can be interpolated from syntax, punctuation, and sentence structure. Lines

typically group into *stanzas* (i.e., larger vignettes of narrative) that, Gee (1991) notes, have “a particular ‘take’ on a character, action, event, claim, or piece of information” (p. 23) which shifts the focus in some way from the preceding stanza. Stanzas often, but not always, consist of four lines, and stanzas often group together into related pairs or *strophes*, which build the different *parts* of a narrative (Gee, 1991), although Gee’s (2005) later work appears to drop the use of strophes in favor of *stories*, *sub-stories*, and even *sub-sub-stories* within *stories*.

To illustrate, the participant response discussed previously might consist of the following lines, stanzas, and strophes:

*Strophe 1: Beginning*

Stanza 1: Introduction

1. Alrighty, then.....

Stanza 2: Soul Bearing

2. how interesting
3. and this definitely gives me a sense of exposure and soul-bearing
4. reading what I've told to you.

*Strophe 2: Middle*

Stanza 3: Lost Love Comments

5. Some of your remarks
6. actually reveal to me
7. things I did not realize myself,
8. i.e. the "lost love" comments
9. referring back to some of my stories about being afraid
10. of what I perceived to be sexual advances
11. (the corporal in basic training;
12. the "ass-grabbing incident, as you call it, lol [laughing out loud];
13. and so on).

Stanza 4: Agreement and Insight

14. I never actually looked at those as lost opportunities for possible love,  
 15. but that's exactly what they were.  
 16. I suppose my struggle with accepting that it's ok to be gay  
 17. overshadowed my ability to realize  
 18. that I had the right to have a relationship  
 19. and that it is ok to do so.

*Strophe 3: Ending*

Stanza 5: Conclusion

20. I'll be reading and re-reading this for quite a while.

*Making Meaning*

It is interesting that when I initially received the participant's comments above, my first thought was that my interpretation may have been too strong. Concerned that I may have inadvertently hurt the participant's feelings by suggesting that the participant lost opportunities for love, I immediately replied, qualifying that my interpretations were "all tentative" and that the respondent had the "final 'say,'" as well as hinting at an apology, saying how I hoped my interpretations "were not hard to read," followed by my own explanation for why they could be wrong (i.e., maybe "projection").

However, after *slowing the data down* with Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) linguistic approach, the meaning and interpretation of the text becomes clearer, and creating meaning is what Gee (1991) suggests the whole point of the exercise is about. In this case, the participant does not have hurt feelings; rather, the participant realizes an injustice has been done – he had and has a "right to have a relationship." Not only does he have this "right," but "it is ok to do so," an insight he later describes as a "peaceful and beautiful forest."

### *Levels of a Text*

Gee (1991) argues that *syntax and cohesion* (i.e., level 2 of a text) represents the way lines and stanzas (i.e., level 1) are “linked to or interrelated to each other” (p. 28) through syntactic devices (e.g., pronouns, repeated words or phrases, etc.), while level 3 of a text asks the interpreter, “‘So what?’” ... ‘What’s the point or significance of this plot?’” (p. 29). Similarly, level 4 of a text wonders about the *stance* of a text, that is, “from whose point of view the material in the stanza is viewed” (Gee, 1991, p. 31), while the fifth and final level of a text gives its interpretation or meaning by grounding the answer to the question, “‘Why is this so important?’ ... in the structure of the story, in terms of idea units, lines, stanzas, strophes, and parts” (Gee, 1991, p. 33).

Thus, after breaking a text into lines, stanzas, and strophes, Gee (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) then works his way through the levels of a text to make a bold, interpretive move that is grounded in the levels of a text; for example, Gee (1991) uses the seemingly incoherent stories of a woman with schizophrenia, to demonstrate the actual coherence of her childhood stories of horses, the sea, and being afraid of other girls:

I suggest later that the logic here is that the narrator has come by this point in the narrative, through her earlier mastery of horses, to equate herself and the horses and, indeed, to equate herself and a powerful, possibly dangerous force represented by both the sea and the horses. Thus, the other girls’ fear of horses translates quite naturally in the narrative logic into fear of the narrator. These are just some very small indications of the work syntax and cohesion are doing throughout the narrative to set up and constrain interpretive demands on the hearer. (pp. 28-29)

Using all five levels of the text, Gee (1991) arrives at, interprets, and brilliantly asserts that the woman equates herself with the horses, while also equating the fear that other girls have of horses with the fear that they have of her.

Similarly, after breaking the research participant's comments above into lines, stanzas, and strophes (i.e., level 1 of the text), it can be argued that the research participant's comments above, regarding his "right to have a relationship" (i.e., the significance or level 3 of the text) coherently connects (i.e., level 2) with his (i.e., the *stance*, level 4) later description of "seeing the forest" as a "peaceful and beautiful thing," leading me to boldly suggest one possible interpretation (i.e., level 5) of the text: To have a right – to know it, believe it, claim it, and articulate it – is to stand tall and firm like a tree. And trees are peaceful, and relationships can often be beautiful, and the world is populated with a forest of peaceful people having beautiful, loving, and kind relationships. Why not also this research participant? As a young sapling, his branches were too often pruned from love, but now empowered, he reaches for the sky, free to live and love as he might have years before.

#### *Trustworthiness*

Many qualitative researchers (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have noted the importance of establishing *trustworthiness* (i.e., addressing validity and reliability) in qualitative research, which begs the question about the validity of my interpretation of the above narrative. Is my breakdown of lines, stanzas, and strophes correct? Interestingly, Gee (1991, 2005) does not appear to be overly concerned about validity, nor the breakdown of lines, stanzas, and strophes, preferring instead, the *overall patterning* of a text. For example, while discussing the narrative of the woman diagnosed with schizophrenia, Gee (1991) asserts,

... most readers' parsing of the text would not be markedly different from the one I have given. And, of course, some differences are to be expected, because

hearers and readers hear and read differently from each other, and differently from what speakers and writers may intend. The *overall patterning* of the text, which is the framework within which the thematic echoes and thematic development take place, is what is important, and I think this is fairly clear. (p. 27)

Similarly, while discussing his analysis of Sandra, a working class teenage girl,

Gee (2005) notes that,

There are various things we could do with these motifs, in terms of worries about the validity of our analysis. For example, we could get “inter-judge reliability” in regard to the words and phrases within these themes, or in regard to similar or different themes independent judges might come up with. While there is certainly nothing wrong with this, my interest in these themes is in using them to begin to form hypotheses about some of Sandra’s situated meanings and Discourse models, hypotheses that we can check by further consultation of this and other data. (p. 154)

Although Gee (2005) allows other discourse analysts to review his data and conclusions (i.e., agreement), he seems to be more concerned with how his interpretation of data “illuminate other data (converge)” that he hopes will then lead to “similar conclusions” (convergence)” (p. 154). “Remember,” Gee (2005) reminds his readers,

... validity is never “one and for all.” Other people working on our data, or similar data, will discover things that either support, revise, or challenge our own conclusions. *Validity is social.* (p. 155, emphasis added)

Ultimately, as Gee (2005) states, it is up to each reader to decide for him- or herself if the conclusions are valid, and if not, then to offer revisions or challenges. “Undoubtedly,” Gee (1991) acknowledges, there can be “several other possible readings” of a text, but he argues “that the five levels of structure, and the interpretive questions they set, constrain what counts as a sensible (appropriate, fair) reading” (p. 33), and that was my goal – to reach reasonable interpretations with the help of Gee’s (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) linguistic approach to narrative.

Perhaps the ultimate test of validity, in the sample narrative above, came from the research participant himself, who validated my initial interpretations not once, but twice, despite my attempt to invalidate them. Such member checking can improve validity (Krefting, 1991; Lindsey, 1997), and it is in keeping with what I hope is my collaborative, constructivist, and feminist approach of sharing power and building rapport, whether in helping clients in a clinical setting, teaching students in a classroom, or working with participants in a research project.

### Discourses

Finally, a comment about Gee's (1989) understanding of Discourses, a word he capitalizes and defines as "a sort of 'identity kit'":

Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. (pp. 6-7)

Gee (1989) distinguishes between *primary Discourses* of one's early life, home, and peer group, through which one is initially socialized and able to make meaning of the world and *secondary Discourses*, which are acquired through interactions with others and institutions beyond the immediate family and peer group (e.g., schools, churches, businesses, etc.). Secondary Discourses, Gee (1989) notes, can be further divided into *dominant* and *nondominant Discourses*, the former of which can bring "social 'goods' (money, prestige, status, etc.)" when mastered, while the latter may bring "solidarity with a particular social network, but not necessarily wider status and social goods in the society at large" (p. 8). Gee (1989) argues that through the acquisition of secondary Discourses, one is able to obtain the *metaknowledge* by which one's primary Discourses

can be analyzed and critiqued, which Gee (1989) asserts can be a liberating and powerful experience. For example, in an interview with St. Clair and Phipps (2008), Gee remarked that,

... we all need to outgrow – but not necessarily disown – our favoured Discourses. Therefore, I believe that the space within which we can imagine and implement new Discourses is a crucial one for the human spirit. (p. 99)

It would seem, then, that the research participant mentioned in this chapter was raised in a primary Discourse, where sexual advances from a fellow soldier were to be feared and avoided, as he discussed in his full interview. Not to minimize concerns of sexual harassment and assault, but through the lens of a secondary Discourse, whereby these sexual advances can now be seen as maybe having been possible inquiries for love and relationships, the research participant appears able to critique his primary Discourse, as the “trees” through which he was “stumbling” for much of his life, compared to the “beautiful and peaceful forest” he now sees.

In my mind, there is something sad, unjust, and very costly about a primary Discourse that denies one the chance of possibly finding lasting love and relationship in one’s youth. Yet, there is also something hopeful and liberating in being able to finally find the “space,” as Gee might put it, to “imagine and implement” a *new Discourse* – one that can be freeing of the *human spirit* (in St Clair & Phipps, 2008, p. 99), which is what seemed to happen with this research participant, who finally saw the trees through which he was stumbling as the beautiful and peaceful forest that they are.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In his, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, James Paul Gee (2005) notes that the “first step” in analyzing a narrative is “to look across the whole interview for themes, motifs, or images that co-locate (correlate) with each other; that is themes, images, or motifs that seem to ‘go together’” (p. 153). Using the example of Sandra, a working-class teenager, Gee (2005) identified three motifs across her entire interview (i.e., disconnection, not caring, and language and laughter), from which he then selected one of her narratives for further analysis by lines and stanzas in order to better understand how “Sandra’s motifs can illuminate and get illuminated by a close look at one of her narratives” (p. 158).

Asserting that Sandra’s narrative uses “‘the principle of echo,’” Gee (2005, p. 162) then elaborates on the “most salient echoing features” (p. 162) of her narrative, noting the way it consists of several sub- and sub-sub-stories within a larger story. The goal, as Gee (2005) notes, is to gain support for the hypotheses he draws from Sandra’s motifs, while also gaining *coverage*, which he defines as “ideas inspired by one part of the data [that] extend to and illuminate other parts” (p. 164) and *convergence*, which he defines as “ideas from new parts of the database [that] continue to support ideas ... from other parts of the database” (p. 164).

In Sandra’s case, Gee’s (2005) analysis leads him to note how she “thematizes an opposition between ‘authoritative representation’ and ‘sympathetic social interaction’”

(p. 165), meaning that Sandra disavows authoritative or factual language, but she may listen to her teachers if she feels they genuinely care about her, leading Gee (2005) to conclude that Sandra's identity will and does "work against her affiliation with school, unless the school comes to know, understand, and adapt to her language and identities" (p. 165).

### Reviewing the Data

In looking at each of the research participants' interviews, various *themes, motifs, or images* can be found that, as Gee (2005) suggests, appear to *co-locate or go together*. For example, two interviews (Participants 2 and 10) are clearly about abuse and sexual harassment, while another interview (Participant 7) reveals multiple chances for sexual encounters, each a possible lost occasion for a lasting relationship, as the participant took none of them, having been *taught* that it would be *wrong* to do so; he also thought that if he *acted* on his sexual feelings, he would be *admitting* that he was gay, which he already suspected about himself, but denied, perhaps an open secret he kept with himself.

Similarly, using a Grounded Theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/2006), all the interviews could be broken into themes, and in fact, they do break nicely into various themes, including (a) *open secret experiences* (i.e., good examples of the open secret), (b) *two-plus-two situations* (i.e., when people begin to accumulate enough clues to realize that someone is LGBT), and (c) *examples of abuse and support*. By using Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) method, however, I was able to see how *all* the interviews coherently fit into one larger *big picture* as *coverage* and *convergence* illuminated and supported different aspects of the data (Gee, 2005).

### *Three Major Findings*

Three major findings emerged in the 11 participant interviews, each discussed below:

- *Sexual and homophobic harassment.* Examples of historically homophobic attitudes within the military (Bacevich, 1993; Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993) emerged and appeared to drive the need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality as a means of safety. Several participants expressed grave concerns for their military careers, should the secrecy surrounding their sexuality be disclosed, and they endured severe instances of sexual and homophobic harassment as the price they had to pay to try to maintain secrecy surrounding their sexuality.
- *Acceptance or support.* Another key finding was that of acceptance or support, whereby the open secret seemed to create Francois' (2008) space of grace, allowing heterosexual people the ability to signal their tacit acceptance or support of LGBT people. Interestingly, this space of grace (Francois, 2008) appeared to be dependent on the actions of heterosexual people opening it from their place of privilege and power, while LGBT people accepted it, rather than refusing to acquiesce to it, the latter of which was indicative of the third major finding.
- *Empowerment and honesty.* The final key finding was represented by several participants, each of whom exhibited a new sense of honesty that empowered them to come out of the closet, regardless of what others thought, for to not do so seemed increasingly dishonest to them and was understood as too costly a price to pay for living one's life. This new sense of empowerment and honesty also

fell closely along generational lines, with several of the youngest participants refusing to remain closeted, as may be indicative of younger attitudes toward sexuality (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Together, these three findings seem to interact in a fluid fashion as LGBT and heterosexual people navigate and negotiate the *open* versus *secret* parts of the open secret, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### *Interviews*

Turning now to the interviews, I have chosen selections from each interview that best exemplify these three findings. I have also chosen to give a brief introduction of each participant, including the *themes, motifs, or images* that appeared to *co-locate* or *go together* (Gee, 2005) in their respective interviews.

### Sexual and Homophobic Harassment

In formulating the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, one of the chief concerns expressed by military leaders was the fear that openly LGBT service members would be inclined to sexually harass heterosexual people, as expressed by Vice-Admiral Joseph Donnell:

Particularly for our young, often vulnerable, female sailors, subtle coercion or outright sexual advances by more senior and aggressive female sailors can be intimidating and intolerable, impacting negatively on work performance and mental state. We must recognize that women who are targets for female homosexuals experience a unique form of sexual harassment which can be even more devastating and difficult to cope with than the more traditional harassment from men ... Women must be assured that they do not have to exist in a predator-type environment. They should not have to experience improper advances from either sex. (cited by Herek, 1993, p. 541)

Although I respect the admiral's service to our country and agree with his last point, I wonder if he might miss the point that the *more traditional* form of harassment from men, presumably heterosexual men, could be more prevalent than that which may come from lesbians. Herek (1993), for example, refers to a 1988-1989 Department of Defense study of sexual harassment in the military, the first of its kind, noting that 64% of women responding to the survey ( $N = 20,249$  men and women), reported unwanted sexual attention, while 70% indicated three or more different forms of harassment. Although it is unclear if the majority of this unwanted sexual attention and harassment came from men or women, one might surmise that heterosexual men may have been frequent offenders.

Currently, 14% of women and 1% of men returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan are thought to have experienced Military Sexual Trauma, although these numbers may be underrepresented, especially among men, due to societal stigma (Rank, 2010). It is also unclear how many perpetrators may be LGBT, as the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy makes it difficult to gather data on LGBT people in the military, and it should be noted that, in addition to women, some heterosexual men have been known to sexually harass and rape other men, regardless of the victim's sexuality.

In the present study, there were several examples of sexual and homophobic harassment that participants endured, sometimes over the course of several months. These instances of sexual and homophobic harassment appeared to be perpetrated by heterosexual people as a means of exercising power and control over LGBT people, thus driving a need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality because of fears for safety and

career stability. As discussed below, Marguerite, Brad, and Javier all have harrowing stories of sexual and homophobic harassment to the point where each participant is ready to leave – Marguerite by offering to resign her officer’s commission, Brad by “escaping” to his third tour of duty in Iraq, and Javier by outing himself in order to be discharged under the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy. Aaron, we will see, also has two interesting stories of sexual and homophobic harassment; although not as severe as the situations with Marguerite, Brad, and Javier, Aaron’s stories, as well as another one by Javier, still show important examples of sexual and homophobic *microassaults* (Sue et al., 2007) which also act to police and control LGBT people, as will be discussed subsequently.

*Marguerite: Security Clearance Investigations*

Marguerite, a retired lieutenant colonel with 20 years of service in the Air Force recalled a harrowing story of sexual and homophobic harassment. A 58 year old, Caucasian, female lesbian who served before and right after the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy took effect, she described having to “completely hide” while in the service, for she said it was “not safe” to be out of the closet. Marguerite’s overall narrative appears to be a story of *fear, harassment, and hypocrisy*, the major *themes* or *motifs* that *go together* or *co-locate* her narrative (Gee, 2005), as demonstrated by her story of sexual and homophobic harassment below.

Please note that original email grammatical and typographical errors are retained in this and subsequent interview quotations, while all identifying information has been suppressed with Xxxxxx markings to safeguard each participant’s privacy and confidentiality.

## Marguerite (Story 1): Security Clearances

### *Strophe 1: Introduction*

#### Stanza 1

1. There was a lot of emotional trauma around accusations and prying
2. when it comes time for security clearance investigations.

#### Stanza 2

3. Especially when you are in a long term relationship
4. and the same person moves with you on every Permanent Change of Station the military requires of you.

### *Strophe 2: First Frightening Experience*

#### Stanza 3

5. I had two every frightening experiences with security investigations.
6. The first happened shortly after I met my life partner.

#### Stanza 4

7. My job required a higher level clearance then the Top Secret I had held since I came in the Air Force.
8. I had quite a shock when I was literally harassed for approximately 3 months during the upgrade my clearance.

### *Strophe 3: They Already Knew*

#### Stanza 5

9. Turns out that during my initial clearance investigation
10. which had been done 8 year earlier,
11. one of the informants told the investigators
12. that I was gay.

#### Stanza 6

13. For whatever reason,
14. they still granted me a Top Secret Clearance
15. and I never know about the statement
16. in my file.

*Strophe 4: Second Frightening Experience*

## Stanza 7

- 17. When my upgrade investigation started,
- 18. I was questions about specifics
- 19. from 10 or more years earlier
- 20. concerning who was coming in and out of my apartment
- 21. when I was teaching school in Xxxxxx.

## Stanza 8

- 22. It was a frightening experience
- 23. that made a total wreck of me
- 24. emotionally,
- 25. psychologically,
- 26. and caused me to fear for my career.

*Strophe 5: Purging the House*

## Stanza 9

- 27. At that time
- 28. the threat of the investigators coming into our house
- 29. to search for evidence
- 30. to substantiate their claim that I was gay
- 31. was very real.

## Stanza 10

- 32. I made my partner help me purge our house
- 33. of anything that might be construed
- 34. as damning evidence. ...

## Stanza 11

- 35. treasured pictures,
- 36. books,
- 37. etc.
- 38. all were trashed.



*Strophe 6: Lie Detector Test*

## Stanza 12

39. The investigation went so far  
 40. that they asked me  
 41. to take a lie detector test.

## Stanza 13

42. At first, I told them I'd need to give it some thought before I answered.  
 43. I then went out and took a test on my own. ....  
 44. I failed.....

## Stanza 14

45. I called the investigators.  
 46. I told them, NO,  
 47. I would not take the test  
 48. and for them to do whatever they felt necessary.

*Strophe 7: Resigning Commission*

## Stanza 15

49. I was scared to death  
 50. and didn't want to face the embarrassment and humiliation any longer.

## Stanza 16

51. After many long discussions with my partner,  
 52. I resigned my commission.

*Strophe 8: General Asks, Colonel Tells*

## Stanza 17

53. Before long,  
 54. one of the Generals I had worked for on the base found out and called me  
 in to see him.

## Stanza 18

55. When he asked why I was resigning,

56. I told him of my investigation troubles  
 57. and he said, they could catch me [i.e., the general] in bed with someone else's wife and I'd deny it!

*Strophe 9: Approved*

Stanza 19

58. Then he asked me if I would let him find me another job on base  
 59. where I wouldn't need to higher level clearance so I could pull my papers.

Stanza 20

60. I agreed  
 61. and it came to pass. Shortly thereafter,  
 62. my higher level clearance,  
 63. which I no longer needed,  
 64. was approved.

While Marguerite eventually received her higher level security clearance, it was not without costs: she endured months of fearful ups and downs, which she described as “emotionally and psychologically” frightening to the point where she was ready to submit her resignation, a strikingly ironic turn of events, given that she was not being investigated for any criminal behavior; she was being investigated for a higher level security clearance, so that she could be entrusted with more responsibilities for her country, a seeming promotion that gets twisted to the brink of her resignation.

Although Marguerite received support from her general, she is ultimately cheated from her higher level security job, taking “another job on base,” and that is one of the ways that sexual harassment often works, enforcing a *glass ceiling* on women and other minorities, possibly working in this case to keep Marguerite at a mid-level officer grade (i.e., captain through lieutenant colonel) (Evertson & Nesbitt, 2004), causing one to

wonder if she might have progressed to the rank of full colonel or general had she taken the job which required her higher level security clearance.

The general's remark that he would lie if caught in bed with another person's wife, a prosecutable offense under the Uniformed Military Code of Justice, is troubling and displays a form of dishonesty that seems to be increasingly unacceptable for some LGBT people, as we will see in later interviews. Keeping with her theme of having to "completely hide," Marguerite and her partner also had to "trash treasured pictures and books," anything of a "damning" nature, causing one to wonder what it means when the artifacts and keepsakes of a loving relationship are construed as "damning." Evidence of a murderous crime might be damning, but pictures and books? These are the ordinary things of life that Francois (2008) reminds us can be lost in the open secret.

*Brad: Escape to Iraq*

Brad also told a harrowing story of sexual and homophobic harassment, where the perpetrators were alleged to be a female coworker and fellow officer, as well as his ex-boyfriend, the latter of whom used the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy as leverage for bribing Brad to stay in their relationship, despite Brad's desire to leave the relationship. A 39 year old, Caucasian, bisexual male, currently on active duty and serving his third deployment in Iraq, Brad is a major in the Signal Corps, a branch of the U.S. Army that is responsible for military-related communications. Similar to Marguerite, Brad's overall narrative seemed to be a story of *fear, intimidation, and harassment*, the major *themes or motifs* that *go together* or *co-locate* his narrative (Gee, 2005). Brad's initial remarks on the online screening survey immediately captured my attention, and I felt

increasingly helpless as the interview progressed, able to offer Brad only emotional support, as his harassment unfolded before me in real time:

Brad: Online Screening Survey

*Strophe 1: Coworker*

Stanza 1

1. co-worker found out that I was bi-sexual last week.
2. She is telling everyone

*Interviewer Question*

Hi Xxxxxx, Thanks for your input regarding my survey on the "open secret" (link below). Sounds like your co-worker has been causing some stress for you, huh? How's that been going lately? Thanks again, Andrew

*Strophe 2: Reply*

Stanza 2

3. Andrew - I am still trying to work through it.
4. Thanks for asking.

Stanza 3

5. Do you plan to publish the results of your survey?

Brad (Story 1): Escape to Iraq

*Interviewer Question*

Yes, hopefully, I'll get something published out of it, but that will likely be a long time down the road ... This project is actually for my dissertation, and it's very slow-going ... super snail pace ... I did, however, get a little bit of publicity from The Gay Military Times (link below), which invited me to write a little blurb on some of my preliminary results, as they relate to the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy with some of my military participants.

I'm a little curious about the situation with you and your coworker and what type of story might be there ... I don't know if that's something you want to talk about, but if so, I'm curious what kind of work you're in, and how did that all come

about--how did he or she (the coworker) find out and how have others been reacting, etc?

Thanks again, Andrew

*Strophe 1: Clarification*

Stanza 1

1. Andrew - I am a officer in the US Army.
2. My co-worker is a peer.

Stanza 2

3. She lives next door to my ex-boyfriend.
4. She saw me over there and asked him how we knew each other.
5. He told her everything.
6. Our breakup was messy and he is more than happy to bring me down.

*Strophe 2: Home Movies*

Stanza 3

7. She didn't believe him at first
8. but unfortunately he was able to prove he was telling the truth.
9. During a much happier time we videotaped some of our sexual encounters.
10. He showed her our "home movies" as proof that I am gay.

Stanza 4

11. She thinks it is all a big joke.
12. At work she calls me sissy boy, girlfriend or faggot.
13. Of course I deny it.
14. I've had to submit to my ex's demands in order to avoid being outted to anyone else.

*Strophe 3: Looking Forward to Iraq*

Stanza 5

15. I am looking forward to returning to Iraq this summer
16. to escape this mess I am in.

## Brad (Story 2): Coworker

*Strophe 1: Ex-Boyfriend and Blackmail*

## Stanza 1

1. OK...I do have a couple of free minutes before PT this morning [to respond to several follow-up questions].

## Stanza 2

2. 1. Why is going back to Iraq preferable to my current situation?
3. Well at least I will be away from Xxxxxx [ex-boyfriend].
4. I tried to end the relationship
5. but he ended up blackmailing me to stay with him.

*Strophe 2: Taunts*

## Stanza 3

6. 2. "Xxxxxx" [coworker] is also a Major in the US Army.
7. We are both the same rank.

## Stanza 4

8. Her taunts are almost playful in the nature.
9. She will come into my office and say something like good morning cocksucker...
10. or at PT she will tell me that I must have gotten work over hard last night because I am running funny.

*Strophe 3: Romantically Interested*

## Stanza 5

11. I failed to tell you that she was interested in me romantically at one point.
12. I didn't do anything to dissuade her interest in me
13. because it helped maintain my cover

## Stanza 6

14. Yes, it is very weird that she has seen me without clothes and with another man.

15. Xxxxxx [ex-boyfriend] also told her that I was a bottom  
 16. and basically his bitch.  
 17. She really has fun with that information.

*Strophe 4: Coworker's Friend and Sexual Conquests*

Stanza 7

18. The only other person that I know for sure that she has told is her friend  
 Xxxxxx.  
 19. She is a Captain.  
 20. Xxxxxx [friend] doesn't make comments to me  
 21. but she does laugh whenever Xxxxxx [coworker] starts her monologues.

Stanza 8

22. Xxxxxx [coworker] also likes to share her sexual conquests  
 23. and tell me how much I would have it enjoyed xxxxx [participant's "x"  
 inserts]  
 24. because his cock is so big  
 25. or something else to that effect.

*Strophe 5: About the Ex*

Stanza 9

26. 3. My ex is no longer my ex.  
 27. He wanted to stay together  
 28. and I wanted to break it off with him.  
 29. I've agreed to stay with him to keep my secret.

*Strophe 6: About the Respondent*

Stanza 10

30. As for me, I am a Signal Corps officer.  
 31. I've done 2 tours in Iraq already.  
 32. Last time I was out xxxxxx in XXXXXXXX near the city of XXXXXXXX.  
 33. I will go back to Iraq in XXX / XXX timeframe.

*Strophe 7: Ending*

## Stanza 11

- 34. Got to go now.
- 35. Take care.
- 36. XXXXXX

## Brad (Story 3): Helpless and Humiliated

*Strophe 1: Introduction*

## Stanza 1

- 1. Andrew - I am sorry for the delay [in responding to several follow-up questions].
- 2. It has been a busy couple of weeks.
- 3. I just returned from Iraq last Thursday.
- 4. We went for 10 days to do a pre-deployment site recon prior to our actual deployment.

*Strophe 2: Doubting Obama*

## Stanza 2

- 5. 1. If I could serve openly then I would not be subject to the abuse I am dealing with now [in response to a follow-up question].

## Stanza 3

- 6. I doubt much is going to change with the Obama administration.
- 7. I doubt he will waste any political capital on this issue.
- 8. I really thought he was going to sign an executive order lifting the ban
- 9. but now it seems like he is just going to slow roll it and not do anything.

*Strophe 3: Helpless*

## Stanza 4

- 10. 2. I am not sure how to answer this question [regarding if the participant has learned anything about himself or changed in any way since the start of our email exchanges].



## Stanza 5

11. I still want to end my relationship with Xxxxxx [ex-boyfriend].
12. I am anxious to deploy to get away from him.
13. Right now I feel totally helpless.
14. I am not sure how many people Xxxxxx [coworker] has told about me.

*Strophe 4: Humiliated*

## Stanza 6

15. I am humiliated that Xxxxxx [ex-boyfriend] showed her our sex tape.

## Stanza 7

16. Xxxxxx [ex-boyfriend] is using this to totally control me.
17. If I tell him no he threatens to expose my secret.

*Strophe 5: Beach*

## Stanza 8

18. Last night he forced me to strip naked and go down on him in public.
19. We were at the beach late
20. and he told me if I didn't do it then he would tell the world about me.
21. I had to walk half a mile back to the parking lot without clothes.

## Stanza 9

22. The only thing I can be thankful for
23. is that it was overcast
24. and there was limited moonlight.

*Strophe 6: The Limit*

## Stanza 10

25. He keeps trying to push me to the limit.
26. I am afraid to call his bluff.
27. He has nothing to lose.
28. I however stand to lose everything.

## Stanza 11

29. He tells me that he is going to let Xxxxxx [coworker] watch him screw me  
 30. or other similar things are designed to embarrass and humiliate me  
 31. It is all now just a big power rush for him.

*Strophe 7: No One to Talk To*

## Stanza 12

32. I really don't have anyone to talk to.  
 33. I am not aware of any support groups for gays in the military.

## Stanza 13

34. Oh well.  
 35. Take care.  
 36. Xxxxxx

I grew increasingly concerned for Brad over the course of our interview. His feelings of helplessness and being “pushed to the limit” with no one to talk to were very disturbing to me, as it is well known that LGBT people, especially LGBT youth, as well as combat veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, are known to have higher rates of suicide than the general population (Gibson, 1994; Rank, 2010). I offered Brad empathic support, and I provided him contact information for the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network ([www.sldn.org](http://www.sldn.org)) and the Human Rights Campaign ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)), as well as suggestions on how to obtain counseling in his area. Though I often thought about him, it was nearly a year before I heard from him again.

Brad’s story illustrates the trap that LGBT service members can find themselves in, where they have no recourse against abusers of the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy, for to seek help, even from a military psychologist, could jeopardize their careers. The type

of sexual harassment Brad describes would likely not be tolerated in a typical corporate work environment, nor by many heterosexual people, and could result in severe consequences for the offenders and employers, including loss of employment and/or litigation, but none of these remedies are available to Brad, whose only way out of the situation is to escape to Iraq for his third tour of duty, a war zone where he could lose his life or limbs, yet he seems to prefer that risk to the battle he faces at home.

*Javier: Discharged under Don't Ask Don't Tell*

Javier identified himself as a 30 year old, multiracial (Hispanic and Caucasian), gay male who served as a noncommissioned officer in the Army. Javier said that he and his fellow soldiers were continuously harassed by his first sergeant, who suspected that Javier was gay. To avoid further harassment of himself and his friends, Javier said that he came out of the closet and was then discharged within 90 days under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Similar to Marguerite and Brad, the major *theme* or *motif* that appears to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Javier's narrative, is one of *harassment* and *intimidation*:

Javier (Story 1): Discharged Under Don't Ask Don't Tell

*Strophe 1: Introduction*

Stanza 1

1. I am well-acquainted with DADT.
2. It's why I was discharged from the Army.

Stanza 2

3. I came out to several of my friends in the Army,
4. all straight guys,
5. and had very positive experiences.

6. Most of them confirmed that it was commonly assumed I was gay,

*Interviewer Question*

How did they know? Do you remember what they said and/or why they didn't confront you with it before you came out to them? Also, how did you come out to them?

*Strophe 2: Response*

Stanza 3

7. I chose to out myself.  
8. Several of my friends and fellow soldiers already knew.

*Strophe 3: The First Sergeant*

Stanza 4

9. The first sergeant was looking for something,  
10. anything to give me grief about.  
11. He was the kind of person to look for trouble  
12. even when it wasn't there.

*Strophe 4: Harassment*

Stanza 5

13. I'm not sure whether he had something against gay people  
14. or whether the policy was just a convenient way to get rid of me.  
15. He started asking my friends questions  
16. and pressured them.

Stanza 6

17. He made my life miserable  
18. and kept me running in circles  
19. trying to hide from him.

*Strophe 5: Worried About Friends*

Stanza 7

20. I was worried about my friends,

21. about being able to perform my duties  
 22. and about the type of discharge he might want the commander to give me  
 23. if he discovered my sexual orientation.

*Strophe 6: Regaining Control by Outing Himself*

Stanza 8

24. Rather than allowing him to control my life,  
 25. I came out to regain control.

*Strophe 7: Everyone was Fearful*

Stanza 9

26. but everyone was fearful of discussing it  
 27. because I could be discharged.  
 28. They didn't understand the law  
 29. and didn't want to take any chances.

*Interviewer Question*

So, they were trying to protect you?

*Strophe 8: Response*

Stanza 10

30. Yes.

*Strophe 9: Return to First Sergeant*

Stanza 11

31. Later my first sergeant began to target my friends  
 32. and ask them uncomfortable questions,

Stanza 12

33. never directly about my sexual orientation,  
 34. but dancing around the subject  
 35. to see what they might say.

*Interviewer Question*

Is it kind of like they're okay with it, but then they start getting these "uncomfortable questions" from someone over them, the first sergeant, and that then does what? Create discomfort? Low morale? What?

Kind of like he already knew, and they knew he knew, but he couldn't just come right out and ask, is that it? Because then he would be violating the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy?

*Strophe 10: Response*

## Stanza 13

36. I'm sure he knew,  
 37. but tried to dance around  
 38. in order to get someone else to say it.  
 39. Why should he stick his neck out?

Like Marguerite who was pushed to the brink of resignation during her harassing security clearance investigations, as well as Brad, who escapes to Iraq in order to remove himself from his harassers, Javier also reaches a breaking point, offering his de facto resignation by coming out of the closet. Unlike Marguerite and Brad, however, we see in Javier's story the way his experience of sexual and homophobic harassment spills over onto his fellow soldiers, who are questioned by the first sergeant and scared to talk about the situation, for fear of Javier getting into trouble.

While Marguerite and Brad were coping with secrecy, trying to prevent others from knowing or spreading rumors about their sexuality, we see in Javier's story the beginning of the open secret, where it seems that everyone, including the first sergeant, is aware of Javier's sexuality, for he came out to some of his friends; but Javier's fellow soldiers are afraid to talk about it, and the best that the first sergeant can do is "dance

around” the topic. Thus, there is knowledge that is not acknowledged, a hallmark of the open secret (Miller 1988).

It is also interesting to note that one of the principle reasons for the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy is the belief that having openly LGBT people in the military will affect unit cohesion and morale (Bacevich, 1993; Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993), but this does not seem to be the case with Javier’s story. He described having very positive experiences when coming out to several of his friends in the Army, many of whom already suspected he was gay, a possible open secret. Indeed, coming out can sometimes draw people closer together (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cameron & Hargreaves, 2005), thus causing one to wonder if allowing LGBT people to openly serve might increase, not decrease unit cohesion and morale. Rather, it is the harassing and intimidating behavior of the first sergeant that seems to affect unit cohesion and morale, where Javier’s friends are fearful, and Javier is worried about his friends, as well as his own ability to perform his duties with the first sergeant making his life “miserable” and keeping him “running in circles.”

*Aaron and the “Smart Aleck” Enlisted Airman*

Turning now to Aaron, who identified himself as a 51 year old, Caucasian, gay male who retired from the Air Force with the rank of major. Aaron’s overall interview appeared to have a nesting structure to it of sub-stories within stories, similar to Gee’s (2005) later work, while the major *theme* or *motif* that seems to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Aaron’s story appears to be his use of power to support LGBT people, not only as an officer, but later in his civilian employment.

Although Aaron’s experience of sexual and homophobic harassment was not nearly as severe as that of Marguerite, Brad, and Javier, he does, nonetheless, seem to experience *microaggressions*, which Sue et al. (2007) discuss within a racial context as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 273). Aaron’s reprimand of a “smart aleck” enlisted airman is a powerful return volley to the airman’s inappropriate innuendo that Aaron is a “cocksucker”:

Aaron (Story 1): Enlisted Smart-Aleck

*Strophe 1: Introduction*

Stanza 1

1. D. The young smart-aleck enlisted person:

Stanza 2

2. I was relatively new in the field of xxxxxxxxx
3. and was spending my three years in xxxxxxx divided in the various functional areas.

Stanza 3

4. I had just finished downstairs with civilians xxxxxx, xxxxxx, and Sergeant xxxxxx on “xxxxxx” contracts.
5. Now I was on the second floor doing “xxxxxx contracting” with a good group of enlisted men and women.

*Strophe 2: Cross-training*

Stanza 4

6. I was sort of an anomaly because I was working “with” the enlisted people when, generally, they would be working for me.



7. This was a new career field and I was doing some cross-training as fast and as efficient as I could learn.
8. Oftentimes, the enlisted people would poke fun at each other, and young guys would often tell of their triumphs with the women;
9. I might chuckle at their stories, but I wouldn't participate.

Stanza 5

10. I suspect some questioned why I abstained from the banter.
11. Some knew that I was a serious church-goer and chalked-it-up to that.

*Strophe 3: White Stuff*

Stanza 6

12. One young, hot, horny and mouthy guy thought that he would poke fun at the officer (me) and try to bring me to his level by telling me in front of about three others in the office that I "had white stuff" around my mouth.
13. I had just put on some Chapstick balm and thought maybe that I had too much or had some residue;
14. so I checked around the lips and they started laughing
15. insinuating that's not what they were talking about.

Stanza 7

16. The young airman was calling me a cocksucker...

Stanza 8

17. was it because he thought that "all officers" were cocksuckers
18. or had he heard through the grapevine that I didn't date
19. (even though I had a son)
20. or maybe he had seen me in public with Xxxxxx or Xxxxxx?

*Strophe 4: Reprimand*

Stanza 9

21. Anyway,
22. whatever his intentions were –
23. prodding or distastefully kidding,
24. it earned him a Letter of Reprimand from the ranking enlisted sergeant.

## Stanza 10

25. Right, wrong or kidding aside,  
 26. this young man needed to learn that one doesn't talk to military officers  
 like that.  
 27. That was the end of that.

*Strophe 5: Getting His and Their Attention*

## Stanza 11

28. I got his attention  
 29. (along with the attention of all in the office).  
 30. That sort of kidding was uncalled for.

## Stanza 12

31. The message sent to all  
 32. was that if there was any other enlisted person out there who wanted to  
 kid me or try to allude or pry as to my sexuality,  
 33. they better have some hard evidence  
 34. or their antics or rumor-mongering would earn them a formal Letter of  
 Reprimand  
 35. which could be placed on their permanent military record.

*Strophe 6: In Hindsight*

## Stanza 13

36. Looking back some more on the incident,  
 37. I think that this enlisted kid was being a smartass toward an officer,  
 38. not alluding to my hidden sexuality;  
 39. it backfired.

## Stanza 14

40. A Letter of Reprimand for this sort of specific situation may have been  
 rare  
 41. (I've never heard of any other similar situations,  
 42. yet I'm confident they exist),  
 43. but totally called for and supported by the Chief Enlisted Officer who was  
 over all of the enlisted men and women.

Although Aaron later reflects that the airman was probably just being a “smart ass,” his reprimand makes the point that sexual harassment, whether heterosexual or LGBT, is uncalled for. And note also how Aaron described the airman as “young, hot, horny and mouthy,” which may get at the gist of many people’s concerns about allowing openly LGBT people to serve in the military, that being the fear that LGBT people will gaze sexually at heterosexual people (Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993). Yet, heterosexual people already occasionally gaze sexually at each other, do they not? And not to condone it, but both men’s and especially women’s bodies are sexually objectified throughout American culture, and as early as the Persian Gulf War, men and women shared tents, latrines, and showers (Herek, 1993), while maintaining appropriate boundaries in a work environment, despite possible sexual distractions. Aaron shows that LGBT people are capable of maintaining the same appropriate boundaries, where on the one hand, he saw the airman as “hot and horny,” but on the other hand, Aaron kept that opinion to himself and did not allow it to interfere with his duties as an officer.

Later, after serving in the Air Force, Aaron rebuked a coworker. Although less formal than his reprimand of the “smart aleck” enlisted airman, Aaron still sends a strong and coherent message that “bigotry” will not be tolerated:

Aaron (Story 2): Director of Engineering

*Strophe 1: Second Reprimand*

Stanza 1

1. Last year
2. and as a result of a discussion about the gays protesting the passing of PROP 8 in California,
3. our then new Director of Engineering

4. (“good” Catholic man, age 60)
5. told me and our Repair Technician that he thinks all the gays “ought to be lined-up and shot”...
6. or “just drowned in the ocean.”

Stanza 2

7. I told him in no uncertain terms
8. that we have no room for bigotry in our little company.

*Strophe 2: Apology, but ..*

Stanza 3

9. He subsequently apologized to me
10. twice,
11. yet I feel he still feels that way;
12. I haven’t changed him,

Stanza 4

13. but I did act to help him change his behavior at work.

*Interviewer Question*

Do you think he’s serious? Would he seriously want to see gay people lined up and shot or is that all just bravado? Where do you think those sentiments come from?

*Strophe 3: Bravado*

Stanza 5

14. It is hard to determine the root cause(s) of such a statement:
15. some bravado,
16. some cultural conditioning or mirroring of what another has said.

The Director of Engineering’s comment is similar to what Sue et al. (2007) might refer to as a *microassault*, which they define within a racial context as an explicit “verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 274). Referring to *microassaults* as

the *old fashioned* form of racism, Sue et al. (2007) note that microassaults “are most likely to be conscious and deliberate, although they are generally expressed in limited ‘private’ situations (micro) that allow the perpetrator some degree of anonymity” (p. 274). Sue et al. (2007) further elaborate:

In other words, people are likely to hold notions of minority inferiority privately and will only display them publicly when they (a) lose control or (b) feel relatively safe to engage in a microassault. (p. 274)

Initially, it would appear that the Director of Engineering thought it was safe for him to tell Aaron and the Repair Technician that he thought all LGBT people should be shot or drowned, but Aaron’s rebuke seems to send the Director of Engineering into his own closet, where Aaron suspects the Director of Engineering still holds the same views, but has at least changed his microassaultive (Sue et al., 2007) behavior at work.

The Director of Engineering’s homophobic comment in what he thought was a safe situation among likeminded coworkers suggests the possibility of a new closet for homophobic, heterosexual people who, in the future, may increasingly be able to express their homophobic microassaults only in what Sue et al. (2007) discuss as “limited ‘private’ situations” (p. 274). This new homophobic closet is also suggested by Javier, who tried to address homophobic comments from a fellow soldier, but only received a “blank stare”:

#### Javier (Story 2): Blank Stare

##### *Strophe 1: Blank Stare*

##### Stanza 1

1. I tried to say something to junior soldiers when they made [homophobic] comments,

2. but once a soldier said, “Why are you defending them?”
3. Replying with something about respect for everyone,
4. he just stared at me blankly.

Stanza 2

5. Later he made some comments to others,
6. when I was not present,
7. about me being a fag-lover
8. or something like that.

*Strophe 2: Guilt by Association*

Stanza 3

9. Unfortunately in some circumstances,
10. by defending gay people,
11. it is often assumed you are gay.

Stanza 4

12. And, of course,
13. that’s a problem in the Army under DADT.

*Strophe 3: Discharged in 90 Days*

Stanza 5

14. I outed myself
15. and was discharged in ninety days.

The “blank stare” from Javier’s fellow soldier suggests that the soldier was compelled to keep his microassaults (Sue et al., 2007) to himself; yet as was indicated by the Director of Engineering in Aaron’s story, the homophobic sentiment was still there; it merely went covert, into a new closet where it could later be expressed with concerns among likeminded friends that Javier was a “fag-lover.” Both Aaron and Javier try to use their power to address sexual and homophobic harassment, and both their stories, along with those of Marguerite and Brad are reminders that sexual and homophobic

harassment still exist in the military (Frank, 2009; Pryor, 1995), and appear to be driving the need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality, while the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy leaves no room for LGBT recourse against such sexual and homophobic harassment.

#### Movement Toward Acceptance and Support

Initially, when the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was debated and formulated, there was some concern that heterosexual service members would not accept openly LGBT people in the military and would not serve alongside them. General Norman Schwarzkopf, for example, who served as the commander of the Coalition Forces during the Persian Gulf War, was concerned that having openly LGBT service members would result in a "second-class armed force" (cited by Bacevich, 1993, p. 44). Quoting Schwarzkopf, Bacevich (1993) notes the "dire predictions" of the day:

Once avowed homosexuals are admitted into their ranks, American soldiers "will faithfully try and execute the orders of their civilian leaders, but their hearts simply won't be in it ... They will be just like many of the Iraqi troops who sat in the deserts of Kuwait, forced to execute orders they don't believe in." (p. 44)

Although I appreciate the general's service to our nation and remember well his news briefings during the Persian Gulf War, his concerns seem different than those of several research participants in this study, each of whom indicated experiencing various forms of acceptance and support for LGBT people. Javier, for example, mentioned previously, described coming out to several of his friends in the Army without incident, many of whom already suspected that he was gay. Rather, the general's remarks may be indicative of what Bacevich (1993) described at the time as a "visceral and pervasive" homophobia in the U.S. military: "To the senior officers who dominate the services – a

group that is almost entirely male and resolutely conventional in outlook – the whole gay ‘thing’ is deeply threatening and repugnant” (p. 43).

Moving the *whole gay thing* from deeply threatening and repugnant (Bacevich, 1993) toward acceptance and support is a journey along a homophobic continuum, which Dorothy Riddle (1994) described in her homophobia scale (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003), ranging from (a) *repulsion* at one extreme (i.e., seeing LGBT people as sick, sinful, or immoral, while justifying any means to change them, including prison, therapy, or violence); through (b) *pity* (i.e., viewing heterosexuality as superior, while reinforcing efforts for LGBT people to change and become heterosexual), toward (c) *tolerance* (i.e., understanding LGBT people as being developmentally delayed and in need of protection while they work through their developmental problems); and finally, (d) *acceptance* (i.e., separating the LGBT person from their behavior, as is shown by comments that support the LGBT person, but not their sexual behavior; e.g., *love the sinner, hate the sin*).

Although acceptance is often thought to be a form of support, Riddle actually considered it to be homophobic, for it implies that there is still something needing to be accepted, whereas her *positive levels of attitude* begin with (a) *support* (i.e., awareness of the homophobic culture and need to safeguard the rights of LGBT people, regardless of one’s personal comfort with LGBT people); then moving through (b) *admiration* (i.e., recognizing that being LGBT takes strength in our society); toward (c) *appreciation* (i.e., value for diversity and the unique contribution to diversity that LGBT people provide); and finally, (d) *nurturance* (i.e., recognition that LGBT people are indispensable to society, along with a willingness to become allies for LGBT people).



In the interviews that follow, we will see various forms of Riddle's *tolerance*, *acceptance* and *support* (but none of her *admiration*, *appreciation*, or *nurturance*), where the open secret emerges as spaces of grace (Francois, 2008) that are created by heterosexual people who signal their tacit acceptance or support of LGBT people in their midst; these spaces of grace (Francois, 2008) are then accepted by LGBT people who acquiesce to the tacit acceptance or support of heterosexual people, rather than pushing for more overt forms of approval, the latter no doubt being limited by military policies, such as the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

Whereas the *secret* part of the open secret prevailed in our first examples of sexual and homophobic harassment, the latter of which drove the need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality, here we begin to see more clearly how the open secret emerges as heterosexual knowledge that is not acknowledged (Miller, 1988), which creates Francois' (2008) space of grace, so long as LGBT people maintain this delicate balance by acquiescing to this arrangement. Indeed, this open secret, space of grace (Francois, 2008) seems to be the essence of what the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was intended to be – a way for heterosexual people to not acknowledge what they might prefer not to know (Miller, 1988), while requiring that LGBT people acquiesce to this arrangement by not disclosing the information that heterosexual people might prefer not to know (Miller, 1988).

#### *Trent and a Bygone Era*

Trent's story sets the stage for Riddle's moderate range of homophobic attitudes. The oldest participant, Trent is an 85 year old, Caucasian, gay male who served in the

U.S. Army Air Corps (the predecessor to the U.S. Air Force) as a radio operator on a B-17 Flying Fortress during World War II. After the war, Trent said that he left the military with the rank of technical sergeant. He worked in the aerospace industry as an engineer, where he indicated having to keep his sexuality a secret because it could jeopardize his security clearance. He was married to a woman for over 30 years before she died, and he has several children and grandchildren. Trent now lives on a U.S. territorial island, where he is out of the closet with other gay friends, but not to his children back in the States, although he suspects that they know he is gay, a possible open secret. Trent also enjoys daily swims in the nude, a throwback to his high school swim team, which he said practiced in the nude.

The major *theme* or *motif* that *goes together* or *co-locates* Trent's narrative (Gee, 2005) was one of *incomprehensibility*. Although Trent described several gay sexual experiences as a teenager, "fooling around" is how he put it, as well as during World War II, it was incomprehensible to him at the time to think of himself as gay, for he said that homosexuality was never discussed in his day. Trent knew that he was attracted to other men; but for the longest time, he did not have a name for how he felt, and he thought that he was the only one in the world who felt this way. After the war, Trent returned to the States, where he sailed racing yachts with another young man, with whom Trent said he was and still is in love. Trent described having a sexual relationship with this man; he said that they often stole away, while racing their boats, sometimes on thousand mile trips. The open secret, however, emerged when Trent's stepmother tried to catch him in bed with the man, as described below.

## Trent (Story 1): Stepmother

*Strophe 1: Getting Caught*

## Stanza 1

1. One night at my home, Xxxxxx and I were caught together by my Dad and his fairly new wife.
2. Damn embarrassing,
3. but nothing was ever said about it later.

*Interviewer Question (Interruption)*

How'd they catch you two? You said nothing was ever said about it later. What was that like? Do you remember who said what in the moment—when they did catch you?

## Stanza 2

4. My mother had died on my xxth birthday, and during WW II, my father remarried.
5. After the war, I moved back in with my father and his new bride.
6. When Xxxxxx spent the night, he would sleep in a separate bedroom.

## Stanza 3

7. On the particular night in question, I knew my father was home,
8. but they were in bed and asleep
9. I thought.

## Stanza 4

10. I entered Xxxxxx's room and climbed into bed with him.
11. (I had arranged my own bed to look like I was sleeping in it).
12. Then the hall lights went on and Xxxxxx (my fathers wife, was walking up and down the hall and saying "Where's Xxxxxx").
13. I believe that we had been 'set up'.

## Stanza 5

14. I found a break and dashed back into my bedroom and tried to act like I had been there all the time.
15. LOL [laughing out loud]
16. The next day, nothing was said between myself and my Dad or Xxxxxx.

*Strophe 2: Moving On*

## Stanza 6

17. As time went on, Xxxxxx became very successful as an xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx and I followed my career in the xxxxxxxxxxxxxx business.
18. We stayed in touch but did not see each other often.
19. By then I had married. (Xxxxxx was my best man)
20. However, on at least one occasion, Xxxxxx and I were together for an evening.

*Interviewer Question*

There is something about this that just seems so sad to me, but I wonder if you see it that way? You describe [earlier] how the two of you "loved" each other, and yet you can't really "be" with each other (except at night in your room or out on the water when nobody else is around). It strikes me as something like a love story, but without the "lived happily ever after" ending, but is that how you see it?

*Strophe 3: Lost Love*

## Stanza 7

21. I did feel like I had missed something that I would have enjoyed very much.
22. Several years after my wife died, I wrote Xxxxxx a rather lengthy letter
23. suggesting that I would really love it if he would move in with me (or me with him) and we could experience things like 'they used to be'.
24. I didn't mention sex, but it was implied!
25. Xxxxxx never replied directly to that letter.

## Stanza 8

26. I think that at that point in time, Xxxxxx was very happy with his social environment
27. (which was somewhat upscale)
28. and didn't wish to chance losing that part of his life.
29. However, we both stayed in touch with each other.

*Strophe 4: Participant Insight*

## Stanza 9

30. Today, I occasionally see Xxxxxx either on visits to our home town of  
Xxxxxxxx or on a couple of occasions he has visited me here in Xxxxxxx  
along with one or two old mutual friends.
31. Xxxxxx and I have talked and I have told Xxxxxx that I am definitely  
gay.
32. He has replied that that is not a problem with him, but he hasn't admitted  
to me that he is gay.
33. Maybe he isn't!!!!!!

## Stanza 10

34. But I think the reason is that he still sees a lot of our old friends from  
Xxxxxxxx
35. and doesn't wish for them to know that he and I were together at one time.

*Interviewer Question*

So, he's never said that he is or isn't gay, is that right?

## Stanza 11

36. Hmm, I hadn't thought of it quite that way.

## Stanza 12

37. Several years ago when I told him that I was gay
38. (I think that I said something like I still preferred sex with a guy)
39. he didn't say that he was also gay as I had hoped,
40. but also he didn't say that he was not gay!!!!!!

*Strophe 5: Putting Two and Two Together*

## Stanza 13

41. Once back in Xxxxxxxx, Xxxxxx and I were visiting friends there
42. and the wife of a mutual friend told us about her gay son.
43. Later I told Xxxxxx that I had almost told her then that I was also gay, but  
didn't.
44. Xxxxxx strongly suggested that I not do that.

## Stanza 14

45. Again I think that he was afraid  
 46. that they might look back and put two and two together.

*Interviewer Question*

I'm sorry to hear about his health [mentioned elsewhere in the interview] ... heavy sigh ... What are your feelings for him now? Would you say that you still love him?

*Strophe 6: Still Love Him, But ...*

## Stanza 15

47. Well yes, I think that I do still love him.  
 48. But I also realize that we probably would never be happy living together as a family.  
 49. Too much has changed over the years.

Above all else, this strikes me as a love story. It has a quality of Romeo and Juliet to it – two lovers destined to be apart by forces that would keep them apart – the Montagues and Capulets of our culture. And it is in Trent's very inability to articulate exactly *what* was missing (i.e., "I did feel like I had missed something that I would have enjoyed very much"), that the story displays a narrative quality of love stories, that being the *negative*, or *absence* of words, rather than the *positive* or *presence* of words (Aoki, 2004). Aoki (2004), for example, notes the way that "sincere inarticulacy authenticates a wordless emotional vocabulary" (p. 106). It is as if we know we are in love when we cannot find the words to describe it.

As for the open secret, it appears to reveal itself in classic form the morning after Trent's stepmother tried to catch him in bed with the man he loves, when "nothing was ever said about it later." Here, knowledge is known, and Trent knows that it is known,

as does his father, stepmother, and the man he loves, but it is not acknowledged (Miller, 1988) by any of them. Returning to Francois (2008), the open secret seems to act *recessively*, here, where knowledge is first put forth (i.e., the stepmother knows with whom Trent was in bed), but is then taken back (i.e., nothing is ever said about it again). The event is “damn embarrassing” for Trent, and in that sense, he is shamed, as the open secret seems to work, here, to control and police Trent by keeping him silent, for it is beyond his imagination, his comprehension, that he could somehow break this silence and assert his love for this other man, for “in those days,” Trent reminds us, “things like this just weren't allowed to occur.”

The interview also has a *constructivist* (Schunk, 2008) quality to it, as Trent and I co-create meaning when I note that the man Trent loves did not actually say if he *was* or *was not* gay. At first, Trent seems to be excited and hopeful that the man might be gay, but then he seems to regress, resolved into a realization that, whether the man is or is not gay, it is incomprehensible that they will ever be together, for alas, they both come from a time and place when “things like this just weren't allowed to occur.”

#### *Sterling and the Corrective Emotional Experiences*

Turning now to Sterling, a 44 year old, Caucasian, gay male who was a sergeant in the Army prior to the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Like Trent's incomprehensibility of being gay, the major *theme or motif* that *goes together* or *co-locates* (Gee, 2005) Sterling's narrative is also one of *incomprehensibility*, although in Sterling's case it was simply incomprehensible for him to *act* on his gay feelings, despite numerous chances to do so, for he was taught through his Baptist upbringing that it was wrong to do so, and

he further believed that if he did so, then he would turn into a stereotypically, effeminate gay man. Married to a woman and the father of two children, Sterling's wife discovered that he is gay after his time in the Army; they divorced after she *outed* him at his office (which turned out to be fairly inconsequential, as most of Sterling's coworkers already liked, and continued to like, him and his work). He now lives with his partner of several years. The open secret first emerged in Sterling's interview when his fellow soldiers gave him "what the hell looks," wondering why he kept visiting their platoon corporal's room after hours, reminiscent of the blank stare which Javier, mentioned previously, described receiving from one of his fellow soldiers.

#### Sterling (Story 1): Platoon Corporal

##### *Strophe 1: Extra Attention*

###### Stanza 1

1. Toward the end of my particular training cycle,
2. my platoon's drill corporal began to show extra attention to me personally
3. while maintaining his harsh façade to the rest of the platoon
4. (approximately 100 guys).

###### Stanza 2

5. He invited me in to his room
6. (which was located right off the bays where we all slept as a group).

##### *Strophe 2: Others Noticing*

###### Stanza 3

7. The first couple of times when I went in to his room
8. no one really said anything
9. because they assumed
10. that I was getting in trouble for something,



## Stanza 4

- 11. however
- 12. I could tell that after a week
- 13. they had a look on their face
- 14. like "what the hell are you doing
- 15. and why is he wanting to visit with just you?".

## Stanza 5

- 16. They were probably as confused as I was,
- 17. but for a different reason!

*Interviewer Question*

Can you tell me more about this part? What do you think the other guys were thinking? Whether you're right or not about it, you may never know, but what do \*\*\* you \*\*\* think they were thinking, and any idea why you thought they were thinking that? Also, any idea how their thinking and your thinking whatever you thought they were thinking may have had any impact on your relationship with these guys? Did anyone (including you) ever say or do anything (other than the "what the hell?" looks) to persuade or confirm your thinking? How did you respond to the "what the hell?" looks?

*Strophe 3: Not Sure, but Defensive*

## Stanza 6

- 18. Well,
- 19. I'm not entirely sure what they were thinking,

## Stanza 7

- 20. but when 5 or 6 guys quickly approach you
- 21. after you've been going to the corporal's room for a few nights
- 22. you get a little defensive.

*Strophe 4: Confused Looks*

## Stanza 8

- 23. They have very confused looks on their faces.....
- 24. brows furrowed,
- 25. heads tilted a bit

26. like a puppy dog

Stanza 9

27. and asked in a tone almost like you were in trouble  
28. “why are you in Corporal’s room so often  
29. and what’s going on?”

*Strophe 5: Response*

Stanza 10

30. I took a step back  
31. and stated that he was just talking to me  
32. about music and stuff,  
33. which further confused them.

Stanza 11

34. They asked me  
35. “why you”  
36. and I just shook my head  
37. and said I don’t know.

*Strophe 6: Knowing*

Stanza 12

38. My body language and tone of voice  
39. was more one of defense than confusion  
40. because I knew what was going on with the Corporal,  
41. or, rather, what I thought he wanted to go on.

Stanza 13

42. They all just turned around and walked away  
43. with a seriously confused look on their face.

*Strophe 7: Ending the Visits*

Stanza 14

44. It was shortly after that,  
45. probably even the next night

46. that I cut off out [our] little visits.

Stanza 15

47. My relationship was fine with everyone

48. and it was not spoken of again, to the best of my recollection.

Similar to Trent, it is incomprehensible to Sterling that he could be gay, even though, as a teenager, he *fooled around* with other boys in junior and senior high school. Unlike Trent, however, Sterling's incomprehensibility of being gay stems from his religious education, whereas with Trent, we are told that *nothing* about homosexuality was ever taught or discussed, a movement from Trent's *absence* of knowledge to Sterling's *presence* of knowledge (albeit misguided, I would argue).

And like Trent, Sterling's situation with the open secret also seems to act in a way which shames, controls, and polices his behavior. At first, Sterling's companions assume that he is spending time in the platoon corporal's room because he is in trouble, a heterosexist assumption one might surmise, as they do not consider until later that there could be another possibility. Their initial incomprehensibility that Sterling and/or the platoon corporal might be gay begins to wane, however, similar to Sterling's own "dawning awareness" of the platoon corporal's interests, and as Sterling's fellow soldiers begin to *put two and two together*, Sterling does find himself in trouble, as his fellow soldiers ask him, "in a tone," why he is spending so much time in the platoon corporal's room. Their "what the hell looks" control and police Sterling, causing him to "stand back" and offer a defense, which only confuses and raises their arresting suspicions more, leading Sterling to quickly end his visits with the platoon corporal,

even though he had strong feelings of desire and a “crush” on the man. Then, in classic open secret form, the situation is never discussed again.

Granted, the story has a disturbing element of sexual harassment to it (i.e., a superior seducing a subordinate, where there is an imbalance of power), but it is not of the same homophobic and sexually harassing nature we saw in Marguerite’s, Brad’s, Javier’s, and Aaron’s earlier stories. Rather, Sterling’s story seems to be more of a lost love opportunity, not only for him, but also for the platoon corporal, whose feelings, Sterling suggests, are hurt when Sterling quickly ends their visits without an explanation, indicating that the platoon corporal may have had affectionate feelings for Sterling, as well as his apparent sexual interests. Both Sterling and the platoon corporal are young adults, after all, in their late teens and early twenties, as was Trent – a time when people often meet and fall in love, and yet, sadly, this was incomprehensible for both Sterling and Trent.

The irony of Sterling’s interview is that, despite the initial “what the hell looks” from his fellow soldiers, he had numerous other opportunities for gay sexual encounters while he was in the Army, any one of which could have been a chance for lasting love, and he also appears to have had multiple encounters with presumably heterosexual men, such as the Army medics mentioned below, who may have been accepting of Sterling’s sexuality, allowing a space where he might have been able to explore his sexuality and the possibility of love, had he not been so deeply closeted because of what he had been taught was wrong.

## Sterling (Story 2): Army Medics

*Strophe 1: Army Medics*

## Stanza 1

1. My first assignment was at Ft. XXXXXX (XXXXXX), XXXXXX
2. in XXXXXX of 19xx.

## Stanza 2

3. On my flight out there I met two guys,
4. Army medics,
5. who had just completed their training
6. and were also being assigned to Ft. XXXXXX.

## Stanza 3

7. We clicked and became friends from that first day.

*Strophe 2: Gay Roommate*

## Stanza 4

8. While visiting them at their barracks one evening
9. They started talking about one of their roommates who was gay.
10. He was very effeminate and flamboyant.

## Stanza 5

11. While they laughed about him,
12. they were not mean or aggressive in their attitude against him.

*Strophe 3: Corrective Emotional Experience*

## Stanza 6

13. In fact, they related a story one night when they woke up
14. and this roommate was having sex with another guy in their room.

## Stanza 7

15. I expected to hear that they reported him or beat him up,
16. but they only laughed about it

17. and we moved on in our conversation.

Stanza 8

18. I was pleasantly surprised  
 19. and, honestly, a little confused  
 20. that these two obviously straight acting guys did not take a harsh attitude  
 toward a gay man,  
 21. ESPECIALLY one who was having sex in the same room as them!

Stanza 9

22. This incident,  
 23. along with the recent one in basic training [i.e., with the platoon  
 corporal],  
 24. planted a small seed in my mind

Stanza 10

25. that while these guys did not agree with this particular guy's actions  
 26. or the way he carried himself,  
 27. they did not dwell on it  
 28. or make a big deal about it.

Stanza 11

29. Furthermore,  
 30. the guy [i.e., platoon corporal] in basic training  
 31. who obviously liked me sexually,  
 32. was not what a "typical" gay guy was in my 18 year-old mind  
 33. which was flamboyant, loud, weak and sissy acting.

It should be noted that, although the Army medics are not aggressive toward their gay roommate, their laughter at him could be a form of *microaggression*, specifically a *microinsult*, which Sue et al. (2007) discuss in a racial context as “communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity” (p. 274). Sue et al. (2007) note that microinsults can be verbal or nonverbal *subtle snubs* that are often unknown to the perpetrator. Although the Army medics may not intend to

be insulting (a characteristic of microinsults; Sue et al., 2007), their laughter conveys a message that there is something funny about the “very effeminate and flamboyant” gay roommate.

Granted, the gay roommate is described as having sex with another man in the room which may have been humorous, but the point that seems to be missed is that, regardless of one’s sexuality, having sex in the barracks seems inappropriate. Rather, the laughter seems to send a message that there is something funny about the gay man, for would the Army medics also laugh if their roommate had been a heterosexual man having sex with a woman? We do not know, but as a friend and colleague of mine suggested, it seems reasonable, especially given the very masculine environment of the military (Bacevich, 1993; Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993), to think that the Army medics might have also laughed, in which case, the microaggression may have then been directed at the woman in an objectifying fashion (i.e., Ah, man, you should have seen him doing her last night! Ha ha ha!) (R. Sandil, personal communication, April 29, 2010), which would have then served, in a microaggressive (Sue et al., 2007) way, to empower the heterosexual, male, Army medics by disempowering the woman.

While Sterling seems to receive an empowering message from the Army medics (i.e., that they do not care if their roommate is gay), the microaggressive (Sue et al., 2007) quality of the message may actually not be empowering, although it does seem to help Sterling move from a less disempowered place (R. Sandil, personal communication, April 29, 2010), for it appears to be a surprising message of homophobic *tolerance* or homophobic *acceptance* (an interesting juxtaposition) that he was not expecting, but

certainly one that is more positive than Riddle's (1994) (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003) lower levels of homophobic *pity* or *repulsion*. Sterling later experiences two platoon sergeants, each of whom seem to be *supportive*, albeit clandestinely, of soldiers in their units who were rumored to be gay. The support of the platoon sergeants stands in contrast to the Army medics who appeared to be merely *tolerant* or *accepting* of their gay roommate with what may have been their microaggression of laughter:

### Sterling (Story 3): Platoon Sergeants

#### *Strophe 1: Rumors of Two Guys*

##### Stanza 1

1. The rumors [that two soldiers were gay] were not really vicious or mean,
2. but seemed to be just stating the fact
3. and everyone moved on
4. and nothing changed socially.

#### *Strophe 2: Sleeping Naked*

##### Stanza 2

5. I do know that one time a couple of us went in to their room
6. and they were both sleeping naked,
7. but were in separate beds.

##### Stanza 3

8. I do not know of anyone else who slept in the nude in the barracks
9. except those two.

#### *Strophe 3: Nobody Cared*

##### Stanza 4

10. Everyone still went out together
11. and drank together
12. and fell asleep in each other's room,



## Stanza 5

- 13. so again,
- 14. I think everyone knew that something had
- 15. or was
- 16. going on between the two of them,

## Stanza 6

- 17. but did not care
- 18. and still carried on as usual
- 19. without much being said
- 20. aside from the initial comment.

*Interviewer Question*

What was the "initial comment"? The rumor going around? If people had talked about it, then that would've "made it real," right? And then what would have happened? Any ideas what keeping it at a rumor level does and/or doesn't do?

*Strophe 4: Initial Comment*

## Stanza 7

- 21. The initial comment was something to the effect of
- 22. "hey, I heard that there is something going on between Xxxx and Xxxx.

## Stanza 8

- 23. They are the only ones that the platoon sergeant puts in that large sleeping bay
- 24. (it could accommodate up to 8 comfortably)
- 25. and they both sleep naked
- 26. and they've arranged it so that their beds are on one side of the room
- 27. and the lockers and couches/chairs on all on the other side."

*Strophe 5: Rumor Level*

## Stanza 9

- 28. Keeping it at the rumor level
- 29. basically protected two guys
- 30. who were good soldiers
- 31. and everyone liked very much.

*Strophe 6: Other Rumor: Two Other Guys*

## Stanza 10

32. There was one other incident of an "open secret" that involved someone else.  
 33. There was a hot and heavy rumor that a platoon sergeant from another platoon walked in to someone's room in the barracks unexpectedly right after duty hours,  
 34. probably 7:00 or so,  
 35. and caught them doing something.

## Stanza 11

36. No one knew what, exactly,  
 37. but it appeared to be something that was not what we might expect  
 38. like smoking a joint  
 39. or some other drug use.

## Stanza 12

40. I was in the area of their room at the time  
 41. and noticed the commotion.

## Stanza 13

42. Shortly after  
 43. I asked around  
 44. and there were rumors of sex.

*Strophe 7: Platoon Sergeant*

## Stanza 14

45. When a few of the guys asked the platoon sergeant what was going on  
 46. he said don't worry about it,  
 47. had a stressed look on his face  
 48. and was looking for those guys' platoon sergeant.

*Strophe 8: Official Explanation*

## Stanza 15

49. The unofficial explanation that circulated through the rumor mill

- 50. was that they were changing clothes
- 51. and started picking on each other
- 52. and it turned into a full blown wrestle.....
- 53. totally naked.

*Strophe 9: Carry-on*

Stanza 16

- 54. All the guys were a little taken back,
- 55. knew the explanation was bullshit,
- 56. but continued on with things
- 57. never to bring the incident up in a large group setting.

Stanza 17

- 58. In close knit groups, however,
- 59. the fact was discussed
- 60. that it was certain
- 61. there was some kind of sexual act going on.

*Interviewer Question*

So, you kind of have the official story (in large group settings) and the real story (in close knit groups) ... Any idea why the official and real stories couldn't be in agreement?

*Strophe 10: Platoon Sergeant Has Their Back*

Stanza 18

- 62. IF the official story was one of their being caught having sex
- 63. it would have meant immediate military justice.
- 64. I don't think the platoon sergeant wanted that for those guys.

Stanza 19

- 65. Surprisingly,
- 66. the guys were not ostracized,
- 67. threatened by anyone
- 68. and definitely not discharged.

*Strophe 11: Corrective Emotional Experience*

Stanza 20

69. This AGAIN surprised me that,  
 70. having come from the heart of redneck country (XXXXXXXXXX)  
 71. nothing happened to them  
 72. or no one was vocal about it.

Stanza 21

73. That was yet another incident that got me to thinking that the perception of gay men that had been drilled in to my brain in XXXXXXXXX just might be incorrect.

Sterling's own possible microaggression (Sue et al., 2007) about being "from the heart of redneck country" aside, the story of the two Army medics and their apparent *tolerance* or *acceptance* of their gay roommate, along with Sterling's stories of the two platoon sergeants and their apparent clandestine *support* of gay soldiers in their units, appear to represent possible *corrective emotional experiences* (Alexander, 1946/1974) for Sterling, where in a classic psychoanalytic form, he encountered others, in this case, presumably heterosexual men, who exhibited LGBT-friendly attitudes that Sterling would not have expected, which then corrected his own attitudes and beliefs.

One could argue, however, that these experiences were not *truly* corrective, for they still left Sterling with an incorrect message that there is something wrong with being LGBT (R. Sandil, personal communication, April 29, 2010). Nonetheless, the messages appear to be progressive, in that they begin to "plant seeds" in Sterling's mind which move him from a less disempowered place (R. Sandil, personal communication, April 29, 2010), as he later adopts this seemingly *cool straight guy* attitude when he is again given various opportunities for gay sex, all of which he declines because of what

he was taught; but he begins to decline these opportunities with a new *cool straight guy open-minded* approach, telling his would-be suitors that it is okay with him if *they* are gay, though he prefers not to have sex with them (although, of course, he secretly wanted to do just that, as they may have somehow known in an open secret kind of way).

*Leslie and the Doctor's Smile*

Turning now to Leslie, a 56 year old, Caucasian, male-to-female, transgender lesbian, Leslie grew-up on the East Coast and served in the Army Medical Corps, from which she retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel, prior to the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy being implemented. Now a social worker and an ordained minister in a denomination that welcomes LGBT people, Leslie said that she began her male-to-female hormone transition while she was in the Army, a bold and seemingly incomprehensible move.

The major *theme* or *motif* that *goes together* or *co-locates* (Gee, 2005) Leslie's story is one of *respect*. She feels respected, not only during her time in the service, which she said she would go back and join again if she could, but also in retirement, where she described the ease of being issued a new military identification card after her name change, as well as being saluted and called *ma'am* on base, all of which made her feel respected. She also described the support she felt from her family after coming out to them in a Christmas letter. The open secret first emerged in Leslie's narrative when a doctor noticed her developing breasts:

## Leslie (Story 1): The Doctor Noticed

*Strophe 1: The Doctor Noticed*

## Stanza 1

1. Too,
2. I worked in a medical organization,
3. and my superior,
4. a physician,
5. had unquestionably noticed

## Stanza 2

6. (for I could see his eyes stray
7. occasionally
8. to my breasts),

## Stanza 3

9. and while he almost
10. imperceptably
11. smiled,
12. he said nothing.

*Strophe 2: Others Noticed Too*

## Stanza 4

13. Others noticed that I had been losing a considerable lot of weight,
14. and that my nails were unusually long and manicured.

## Stanza 5

15. One guy asked me why my nails were so long,
16. and I said because I liked them that way;

*Strophe 3: Presumed Ill*

## Stanza 6

17. and another individual asked me
18. very directly
19. if I was really ill –

## Stanza 7

20. this was in the early 90s,
21. before antiretroviral therapy,
22. and I presume the suspicion was that I had HIV.

## Stanza 8

23. I didn't, and don't,
24. but I sure wanted to lose weight
25. to look better in feminine attire.

Similar to Sterling, whose peers asked him questions about his visits to the platoon corporal's room, Leslie also dodged questions, although in Leslie's case, there was concern for her health. We also see with Leslie the way the open secret may act as a form of tacit approval (Zerubavel, 2006), for while she and the doctor never talk about her breasts, his smile, compared to Sterling's "what the hell looks," suggest that the doctor is aware of the situation; he has knowledge, but he chooses not to acknowledge it (Miller, 1988), except with a smile, the act of which conveyed communication, as Leslie later explained that she felt that she and the doctor had an "unspoken understanding":

Leslie (Story 2): An Unspoken Understanding

*Interviewer Question*

And back to this doctor again ... So, what was it like for you to see him look at your breasts, and know and almost smile, but not say anything? Was that comforting or scary or what? Would you have wanted him to say anything, and if so, what?

*Strophe 1: Smiling Back*

## Stanza 1

1. I kind of
2. almost
3. smiled back,

4. and kept my mouth shut.

Stanza 2

5. That she said nothing [Note: The research participant later clarified in a follow-up question that the doctor was a man, not a woman.]  
 6. was entirely comforting,  
 7. and I had the sense  
 8. that we had an unspoken understanding,  
 9. that neither of us would make waves.

*Strophe 2: Safety in Ignorance*

Stanza 3

10. I'm glad he said nothing, actually,  
 11. for I didn't want to place him  
 12. in the awkward and untenable position  
 13. of knowing something  
 14. and doing nothing.

Stanza 4

15. It was safer for him  
 16. to be able to claim ignorance.

Interestingly, Leslie expresses concern for the doctor's safety and does not want to put him in an "awkward and untenable position of knowing something and doing nothing," and yet he does know something, but he also has the power and privilege to not acknowledge his knowledge, a hallmark of the open secret (Miller, 1988), but one that may be used here in a *supportive*, rather than controlling and policing fashion, similar to the platoon sergeants in Sterling's stories, as if the open secret of Leslie's developing breasts creates Francois' (2008) space of grace, allowing Leslie and the doctor to coexist without "making waves" for each other.



*David's Colliding Worlds*

Similarly, David described the way the open secret seemed to work in a supportive fashion when a female, lesbian colonel lost her “aunt,” only the “aunt” was really the colonel’s partner. And although not discussed here, David had a similar situation when his “uncle” died, only the “uncle” was really David’s former partner. A 46 year old, Caucasian, gay male who served in the Army during the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy and who retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel during the course of our interviews, the main *theme* or *motif* that seems to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) David’s stories appeared to relate to his “colliding worlds” of *compartmentalization*, whereby he was ever trying to prevent his personal life as a LGBT person from intersecting with his professional life as an Army officer.

Peter Davies (1992) notes that such compartmentalization is common among LGBT people and can be stress-inducing. The best advice, according to Davies (1992), is when either nobody knows or everybody knows about a LGBT person’s sexuality, but as we will see in David’s story, the open secret seems to create a space where everybody knows what nobody is supposed to know. What I found most interesting about David’s interview, however, was the way his outlook on the research project appeared to change over the course of our interviews. Initially, while David was still serving in the Army, I had the impression that he was a bit guarded and hesitant to talk with me:

## David (Story 1): Guarded

*Strophe 1: Hesitation*

## Stanza 1

1. Dr. Andy;
2. [Please pardon the liberty,
3. but I feel the need to keep this somewhat lighthearted
4. given the severity,
5. importance,
6. and sensitivity
7. of what we're dealing with here...]

## Stanza 2

8. I do not want to take up any more of your valuable time.
9. and I do not intend to be obtuse,
10. but it remains unclear how the 'anecdotes'
11. [ I know, my words]
12. will help clarify,
13. magnify,
14. support
15. your research.

*Interviewer Question*

Well, any anecdotes you have may or may not help ... But if you have a story of the open secret, then it will help me understand it better. And as I collect other stories from other people of the open secret in their lives, then certain themes may emerge from all these stories, which will help clarify just exactly what this open secret thing is and how it works in people's lives.

*Strophe 2: Compartmentalization*

## Stanza 3

16. I am certain that I have several instances of this,
17. but as I mentioned in my survey,
18. I had to compartmentalize my life,
19. [work vs. personal]

## Stanza 4

- 20. and live in fear
- 21. should they ever collide
- 22. through incidental junctures
- 23. of people from both 'worlds.'

*Strophe 3: Blood Running Cold*

## Stanza 5

- 24. When they have collided,
- 25. blood runs cold,
- 26. cold sweat,
- 27. and blood drains from face

## Stanza 6

- 28. as you frantically scramble
- 29. for polite niceties
- 30. to quickly disengage
- 31. both parties...

One can practically feel the stress in David's compartmentalized life under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, where "work versus personal" represents "two worlds" that occasionally "collide," as if on intercepting orbits, causing "blood and sweat to run cold." This way of life might seem incomprehensible for many heterosexual people, but it may be all too common for many LGBT people, and it gives a glimpse of the systemic lack of support that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy creates on an institutional level. It is understandable that David might be hesitant to let me into his world, and indeed, after receiving his email above, I did not hear from him again for two months. The interesting thing, though, is that David officially retired from the Army during those two months, and *after* he was no longer under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, he suddenly seemed to become much more forthcoming with me, even chatty, as we traded closing emails

about vacation plans and a city with which we were both familiar. Perhaps in retirement, he had more time for my research project, but I also wonder if he may have felt more at ease, as he gave me his full support, describing a very interesting open secret experience:

David (Story 2): The Colonel

*Strophe 1: Two Months Later*

Stanza 1

1. Hello Andrew;
2. I've kept this email
3. so that I could provide additional input
4. if I thought of any.

Stanza 2

5. As I recall,
6. the last question/issue
7. that I was wrestling with
8. concerned examples of 'the open secret.'

Stanza 3

9. I believe I may have one.

*Strophe 2: Clarification*

Stanza 4

10. I will do my best to articulate the situation/circumstances as clearly as possible
11. while maintaining appropriate confidentiality/privacy for parties involved.

Stanza 5

12. I am not a good storyteller
13. so please bear with me...

*Strophe 3: Setting*

## Stanza 6

- 14. This particular account occurred several years ago in the National Capital Region [NCR].
- 15. [I never forgot it and am still moved by it to this day
- 16. because of the immense power of compassion that it evoked in others.]

## Stanza 7

- 17. The Chief of Staff
- 18. of a Very high-profile, subordinate element
- 19. of the HQ Department of the Army Staff
- 20. sadly experienced the death of a family member.

*Strophe 4: Hallway*

## Stanza 8

- 21. My interaction with this highly-regarded
- 22. and competent
- 23. female Colonel [O-6]
- 24. was periodic and always professional,
- 25. business-like, and cordial.

## Stanza 9

- 26. One day our paths crossed in the halls of the Pentagon
- 27. and I was shocked by her extreme degraded appearance
- 28. to include unkempt uniform, messy hair, and distinct body odor.
- 29. She appeared as if she hadn't slept or bathed
- 30. in a week or more.

*Strophe 5: Greeting*

## Stanza 10

- 31. I greeted her as usual
- 32. and we exchanged "hellos."

## Stanza 11

- 33. Nothing more was said

34. as I went about my business  
 35. and attempted,  
 36. with typical Army stoicism,  
 37. not to register any indication  
 38. that I noticed her condition  
 39. or that anything was 'off.'

*Strophe 6: Colonel's Aunt*

Stanza 12

40. I later inquired with a fellow action officer  
 41. as to this Colonel's obvious and overt distress.

Stanza 13

42. I learned that the Colonel's aunt had passed away  
 43. and that she was grieving.

Stanza 14

44. I was then told that it wasn't really her aunt,  
 45. but it was her much older partner  
 46. that has passed after a long illness

Stanza 15

47. and that "...everyone knew  
 48. it wasn't really her "aunt," but her Partner  
 49. and that she was gay...  
 50. and that everyone knew,  
 51. but did not talk about it."

*Strophe 7: Flabbergasted*

Stanza 16

52. I was flabbergasted,  
 53. as I had no clue,

Stanza 17

54. but again  
 55. attempted not to register

- 56. any heightened awareness or sensitivity
- 57. one way or the other
- 58. regarding the Colonel's personal life.

*Strophe 8: Funeral*

Stanza 18

- 59. The Colonel's degraded appearance/condition lasted for weeks
- 60. after she returned to work
- 61. after the funeral.

Stanza 19

- 62. As I recall,
- 63. her attendance may have been a bit erratic for a while,

*Strophe 9: Professionalism*

Stanza 20

- 64. but her condition eventually improved significantly
- 65. where she could conduct herself
- 66. and perform
- 67. at the superior level of professionalism
- 68. that she was well-known for.

Stanza 21

- 69. As I mentioned previously,
- 70. I am still moved by this account
- 71. because of the exceptional degree
- 72. of compassion and professionalism
- 73. that was exhibited by the many people
- 74. she dealt with in the NCR and across the globe
- 75. who may or may not have been aware
- 76. of the intimate details.

*Strophe 10: Protection*

Stanza 22

- 77. Both military and civilian personnel
- 78. [senior, peers, and subordinates]

79. protected and insulated her  
80. from exposure/repercussions

Stanza 23

81. and went out of their way  
82. to ensure that 'her back was covered'  
83. to the extent possible.

*Strophe 11: Praise*

Stanza 24

84. I NEVER heard a derogatory remark against her  
85. professionally or personally  
86. at any time.

Stanza 25

87. Truly amazing  
88. for an institution that is renown for homophobia  
89. and its anti-gay stance.

*Strophe 12: Conclusion*

Stanza 26

90. I hope this was worth waiting for...  
91. while I didn't forget the incident,  
92. it took a while to make the connection.

Stanza 27

93. CHEERS!  
94. Xxxxxx (Retired)

David's story of the colonel's "aunt" appears to be a clear example of the open secret, where "everyone knew" the colonel's "aunt" was really her partner, but "did not talk about it" (i.e., knowledge that is not acknowledged; Miller, 1988), no doubt because of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Here, the open secret seems to create a space of



grace (Francois, 2008) for the colonel, where her coworkers ensured that “her back was covered,” an apparent example of Riddle’s (1994) (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003) positive attribute of *support* that suggests the possibility of an emergence of more overt individual support for LGBT people, though it must still remain covert because of an institutional lack of support, given the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy.

Interestingly, the colonel is also praised for her hard work and “superior level of professionalism,” suggesting that the support she received may be conditional, based on her being an excellent officer. Would she receive the same support in her grief, a time when one might typically receive unconditional support, if she were a poor officer, or would her being a lesbian and/or woman then be a reason for lack of support? It is unclear, but it is interesting to note the way her support may be conditional, linked to her performance, the suggestion being that LGBT people, like many other minorities, may feel the need to justify their existence by working extra hard in a way that those with privilege may not have to (Carr, Palepu, Szalacha, Caswell, & Inui, 2007).

#### Toward Empowerment and a New Sense of Honesty

In his groundbreaking book, *The New Gay Teenager*, Ritch Savin-Williams (2005), a professor in Clinical and Developmental Psychology at Cornell University, is one of the first to challenge what many may have previously seen as a bleak, suicidal, promiscuous, and drug-addictive destiny for LGBT people, arguing instead that many of today’s LGBT youth,

... live their lives in much the same way that those with heterosexual attractions do. They go to football games, try out for cheerleader, run for Student Council, argue with their parents, and wonder what to wear. (p. 69)

Quoting Thom Filicia, of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* fame, Savin-Williams (2005) captures what may be a new nonchalance about being LGBT that is indicative of Cass' (1979) final *synthesis* stage of LGBT identity development:

You know what, I *am* gay, but my sexuality has never been my defining quality. It's just a fact. My life is defined by my friends and by my interests, and I happen to be passionate about good design. (pp. 60-61).

Not to invalidate the very real concerns and hardships that many LGBT people still face (Crepeau, 1998; Walsh & Crepeau, 1998), including increased rates of suicide (Gibson, 1994), but Savin-Williams (2005) paints a much different and more resilient face on today's and tomorrow's LGBT population than has typically been understood in the past – one that may be increasingly fine with being LGBT, seeing coming out as less of a huge, dramatic, life-altering experience and more of a, *hey, by the way* type of announcement sent by text, as sexuality, whether heterosexual, LGBT, or more *fluid* forms (Diamond, 2000, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005) is increasingly understood as merely one of many facets to life – and a good facet at that, pleasurable, relational, loving, and life-affirming.

No doubt, some of these *new gay teenagers* (Savin-Williams, 2005) have and will continue to join the military, where they may find it increasingly strange to have others concerned about their sexuality with policies like the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy when they, in fact, may not be overly concerned about their sexuality. These differing levels of concern could lead to a strange and ironic situation as the LGBT *problem*, per se, may shift, becoming less of a problem for LGBT people who, presumably, should be the ones, if anyone, to have a problem with *their* sexuality. Rather, with LGBT sexuality

becoming less of a concern for today's and tomorrow's *new gay teenagers* (Savin-Williams, 2005), as well as what may be increasing numbers of heterosexual allies, LGBT concerns may increasingly be relegated to homophobic people, as an old and tired worry that may reflect more on them than LGBT people, similar to how racist people today may be the only ones still concerned about things like interracial marriage; though it should be noted that racism, as with homophobia and sexism, is still pervasive today.

This new attitude was expressed by Javier, whom we discussed earlier. One of the youngest participants, who was discharged from the Army under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, Javier recalled a story of visiting his mother with his partner, in contrast to his partner's parents:

Javier (Story 3): Petty and Weak

*Strophe 1: Dinner with Mom*

Stanza 1

1. We [Javier and his partner] travelled to Washington, DC, last year
2. and we drove.
3. We stopped in my hometown
4. and had dinner with my mother.
5. It was good.

*Strophe 2: Petty and Weak*

Stanza 2

6. Occasionally he [Javier's partner] will still bring me in
7. conversations there [at Javier's partner's parents' home],
8. but his parents simply ignore it.
9. At first I was angry.
9. I thought how petty, how weak.

*Strophe 3: Everyone Has to Come Out*

## Stanza 3

10. I came to realize that everyone has to “come out”
11. in their own way
12. and their own time.

*Strophe 4: Relationships, The New Frontier*

## Stanza 4

13. At even though everyone knows you’re gay,
14. that’s just the first step.
15. being in a relationship
16. is something else.

## Stanza 5

17. I think a lot of people aren’t bothered
18. by the knowledge that someone is gay,
19. but they aren’t sure what to think of same-sex relationships.

Javier’s characterizing of his partner’s parents as “petty and weak” for not accepting his relationship with their son suggests a new way of thinking that would have been incomprehensible to Trent, our oldest participant who served in World War II. Where it was before incomprehensible for Trent to be in a relationship with the man he loved, causing him to sneak around from bedroom to bedroom under the watchful antics of his stepmother, it now seems incomprehensible to Javier that his partner’s parents will not accept his relationship with their son. What was once Trent’s “damn embarrassing” feelings turned inward, seems to be shifting, generationally, to Javier’s feelings of anger, directed not inwardly with low self-esteem, shame, and internalized homophobia (Allen & Oleson, 1999) as may have been the case with previous LGBT generations, but rather,

directed outwardly toward those who are now viewed as “petty and weak” for their inability to accept LGBT people and their relationships.

Javier’s point that “everyone has to come out in their own time and their own way” also suggests a generational shift, for it was incomprehensible for Trent to come out, and indeed, at age 85, he still has not come out to his children, though he suspects they know he is gay. Javier, however, makes it sound like coming out is inevitable, a sentiment that was echoed by Leslie, whom we discussed earlier, when she decided to come out to her family as a transgender person in a Christmas letter, remarking to her mother that “it was time,” to which her mother agreed, albeit perhaps reluctantly:

Leslie (Story 2): Christmas Letter

*Strophe 1: Christmas Letter*

Stanza 1

1. Last Christmas
2. I sent out a "Christmas letter" with the cards
3. to family and friends ...

Stanza 2

4. a week after Christmas ...
5. very newsy,
6. mentioning all sorts of things
7. about life,
8. and work,
9. and ministry,

Stanza 3

10. and "oh, by the way,
11. I got divorced,
12. changed my sex
13. and have been in a relationship with Xxxxxx for nine years."

*Strophe 2: Almost Everybody Now Knows*

## Stanza 4

- 14. So now
- 15. almost everybody knows.

## Stanza 5

- 16. What was interesting
- 17. was that within 2 weeks
- 18. I had heard from 2 or 3 female cousins
- 19. and 2 or 3 aunts,

*Strophe 3: It's Been Fine*

## Stanza 6

- 20. all friendly,
- 21. and inviting me to come to dinner,
- 22. or continue the conversation,
- 23. or "why did you wait so long to tell us,"
- 24. or "wow, I never suspected."

## Stanza 7

- 25. Since then,
- 26. I've been to a few family events
- 27. (anniversary party, birthday party, dinner, etc),
- 28. and it's been fine.

## Stanza 8

- 29. A couple of questions have come up,
- 30. like, "are you gay?"

## Stanza 9

- 31. but overall,
- 32. it's been very much okay.

*Strophe 4: Some Confusion*

## Stanza 10

33. The trans + lesbian thing,  
 34. I think,  
 35. presents a bit of confusion.

## Stanza 11

36. Naturally,  
 37. a few have problems with pronouns and names,  
 38. but that's pretty much okay ~  
 39. it's still new to them.

*Interviewer Question*

What do you make of the, "What took you so long to tell us" theme? That theme has come up before in some of my other interviews. How's it make you feel, and what do you think they're trying to say? Do you think your Christmas letter has brought you closer to these people and them closer to you (two parts to that question :) or further apart or about the same?

*Strophe 5: Needed Time*

## Stanza 12

40. Yes,  
 41. it's very comforting, really.

## Stanza 13

42. And I explain  
 43. I needed time to get used to being me  
 44. before I was in a position to share that.

*Strophe 6: It's Time*

## Stanza 14

45. Also,  
 46. my mom didn't want me to say anything ...

## Stanza 15

47. and last year I said,  
 48. "look I think it's time,"  
 49. and she agreed.

*Strophe 7: Close Family*

## Stanza 16

50. Our family was always very close,  
 51. and this has returned some of that ...

## Stanza 17

52. very pleasant, really,  
 53. to sit and share memories,  
 54. and to hear them say  
 55. that they see  
 56. that I'm pretty much the same person  
 57. they grew up with.

## Stanza 18

58. If anything,  
 59. their acceptance leads me  
 60. to love them even more.

We see in Javier's and Leslie's narratives a new sense of timing, where coming out is inevitable, natural, and honest – something that can draw people closer together (Ben-Ari, 1995) or, in some instances, maybe drive them apart. The key, though, to this newfound sense of honesty and empowerment seems to be *openness*, where the *open* part of the open secret prevails when LGBT people refuse to acquiesce to heterosexual calls for silence. As we will now see in the last of our participant interviews, this LGBT refusal to remain silent not only effectively ends the open secret, but it can also lead LGBT people to a new sense of *agency* and *empowerment*, two terms that Richardson



(1994) refers to as a “two sided construct” (p. 40), where *agency*, closely related to individualism, relates to a person’s *internal* ability to take action in pursuit of their own goals and values, while *empowerment*, evolving from feminist understandings, relates to *external*, interpersonal relations, whereby one is empowered in relationship with others without disempowering others, when viewed from a feminist stance. (See Ibrahim and Alkire [2007] for detailed definitions of *agency* and *empowerment*.) This newfound sense of agency and empowerment allows LGBT people the ability to chart their own course, regardless of the opinions or demands of others, though the costs of doing so can still remain high for LGBT people, as with family separations, loss of church memberships, and military career ramifications, all of which we will now see.

#### *Elizabeth and the Christmas Dinner*

Elizabeth identified herself as a 50 year old, female, Caucasian lesbian. She said that she grew up on the East Coast and attended college on an athletic scholarship, noting that some of her athletic records have yet to be broken. Unhappy with her job after college, Elizabeth said that she enlisted in the Air Force because she felt “like there was a great big world out there” that she wanted to see. She said that she was accepted to Officer Training School and served for 22 years as an intelligence officer, earning numerous medals and awards, before retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

Elizabeth echoed Javier’s point that, while many people may be increasingly comfortable with LGBT people, they are not yet comfortable with LGBT relationships, as is shown in her story below. Indeed, Elizabeth suggested that the real issue behind keeping the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy in place may be less about unit cohesion and

morale (Frank, 2009), and more about trying to keep a lid on the can of worms that could be opened regarding military benefits for LGBT spouses and partners if and when the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is repealed.

The major *theme* or *motif* that seemed to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Elizabeth's stories appeared to be a sense of *liberation*; she is a lesbian, and throughout her narrative there is a theme that Elizabeth's being a lesbian is not negotiable. If other people have a problem with her being a lesbian, then that is *their* problem, not her problem. She struck me as a very sharp, no-nonsense colonel who does not have the time or patience for the *petty weaknesses*, to borrow from Javier, of others. Elizabeth volunteers at a Veterans Affairs hospital and at her church, where she helps homeless people, and after retiring from the Air Force, she was photographed in uniform for a national media campaign to raise awareness of LGBT service members. She is a woman on the go, and others can either get on board or get out of the way. Her narrative began with a story of an unfortunate Christmas dinner:

#### Elizabeth (Story 1): Christmas Dinner

##### *Strophe 1: Introduction*

##### Stanza 1

1. As far as my mom and her husband not wanting to see any signs of affection [in response to a follow-up question],
2. I have a great illustration for you on that topic.

##### Stanza 2

3. Last Christmas, my partner Xxxxxx, flew out to spend 10 days with me over the Christmas holidays.
4. She flew in late on Christmas day
5. and we went over to my folks house the next day

6. and Xxxxxx [Elizabeth's partner] went to great lengths to prepare a wonderful meal at their house...

*Strophe 2: Sitting on the Couch*

Stanza 3

7. We bought and cooked a full meal with old family recipe's of Xxxxxx's [Elizabeth's partner's] family.  
 8. The evening went well, until shortly after dinner when my Mom and sister went next door to take care of the neighbor's dogs as they were out of town.  
 9. Xxxxxx (Mom's husband) was doing dishes and Xxxxxx [Elizabeth's partner] and I were across the living room looking out the window as it was very windy and the sky looked ominous.  
 10. I had my arm around her and I leaned over and whispered something in her ear like "I'm glad you're here" or something like that.

Stanza 4

11. All of a sudden Xxxxxx [Elizabeth's stepfather] states loudly "Don't do that, I don't that".  
 12. We looked at each other and then asked him what he was talking about.  
 13. He said he saw us "smoching" and that he didn't want that in "his house".

*Strophe 3: Argument*

Stanza 5

14. I tried to tell him that he didn't see what he thought he saw,  
 15. and yet at the same time, what difference would it make if I did lean over and give my partner a kiss.

Stanza 6

16. That turned into an ugly exchange and by the time my Mom and sister came back 4 minutes later, we had packed up our things and headed out the door.  
 17. I briefly told my mom what he said, and she tried to get us to come back in the house,  
 18. but by that time Xxxxxx and I felt really unwelcome and we left.  
 19. Mind you, I was 50 and Xxxxxx was 44 at the time and here we were being scolded by this man...UGH!

*Strophe 4: Ending*

## Stanza 7

20. More stories to follow on your other questions.

*Interviewer Question*

This story about you and your partner and the Christmas visit home (pasted below) ... Geeze, I'm so sorry ... Sounds like a perfect way to ruin an otherwise really nice holiday ... So, that would've been back in 20xx? I was just curious whatever came of that? Did y'all go stay in a hotel? Have you ever been back to stay? Did he ever apologize? How did it ever get resolved or did it?

*Strophe 5: Follow-up Clarification*

## Stanza 8

21. Andrew, this story was never resolved....
22. My Mom tried to smooth things over,
23. but my "Stepdad" never apologized
24. and Xxxxxx [Elizabeth's partner] has nothing to do with him.

Unlike other participants, Elizabeth, who in retirement is no longer under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, is able to speak from a place of empowerment. Her disgust with her stepfather is practically palatable. This is a strong woman who has had it with that man. "UGH!" We do not see in her anything resembling Sterling's stereotypic "gay, effeminate, weak" worries because of what he had been taught was wrong, but rather, similar to Javier's story of his partner's parents, we see a reframing of the situation, where the LGBT person is no longer the one who, by their very nature and presence, is the one in the wrong, but rather, the homophobic person is identified as the *weak and petty* one, to again borrow from Javier.

It is not my intent to blame the LGBT victim, for participants like Marguerite, Brad, and Javier were clearly harassed in situations where they had little power. They

are not the ones in the wrong. But I do think it is interesting how Elizabeth, no longer in the military and under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, has a very empowered sense of herself, one that suggests a possible shift from a *victimic* to an *agentic* life plot, where Polkinghorne (1996), citing Frye (1957), notes that,

... the agentic plot is linked to the mythic archetypes of spring and summer. For the agentic protagonist, there is a sense that the world is starting afresh and that things will work (spring) and a sense of embarking on a perilous journey in which great obstacles are overcome and whose end is triumph (summer). In contrast, the victimic plot is linked to the archetypes of fall and winter. For the victim, there is a pessimistic sense of a time of decline and movement toward isolation and death (fall) and a sense of triumph of chaos and loss of opportunity to accomplish one's goals (winter). (p. 301)

Similar to Aaron's reprimand of the "smart aleck" enlisted airman and rebuke of the Director of Engineering, Javier and Elizabeth both seem to speak from an *agentic* (Polkinghorne, 1996) stance, maybe because they have the vantage point of being out of the closet, an open, not secret, outlook, the transparency of which may illuminate how they see homophobia as petty and weak. Thus, we begin to see in the stories of Javier's "petty and weak" partner's parents, Leslie's coming out Christmas letter, and Elizabeth's disgust with her stepfather, a sense of empowerment that, similar to Savin-Williams' (2005) *new gay teenager*, seems to shift the focus off of the LGBT person as the one with the *problem*, per se, and onto the homophobic person as the one with the problem.

#### *Hailey and the Final Straw*

This shift in focus was evident in Hailey's narrative. A 30 year old, Caucasian, male-to-female, transgender woman who is married to a woman and identified her sexual orientation as "transgender queer," Hailey served in the Air Force for six years under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. She left the Air Force with the rank of staff

sergeant, choosing not to reenlist for several reasons, including no longer wishing to serve under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

The major *theme* or *motif* that seemed to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Hailey's narrative appeared to be one of *movement toward empowerment*, as she related several stories, not only of her time in the Air Force, but also of her experience as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where she served a mission before beginning her male-to-female transition. While on her mission, Hailey tried to "confess" to her mission president that she felt like a woman, and had felt like she was a girl since she was five years old, but she was told by her mission president that it was a "perversion not to be acted upon" and that she would not want to be a woman after she (who was then a *he* and a virgin) had sex with a woman. Hailey described being very confused, as her mission leaders seemed to think her feelings were about sex:

#### Hailey (Story 1): Confused and Depressed

##### *Strophe 1: Confused*

##### Stanza 1

1. I was also honestly confused.
2. They seemed to think it was all related to sex
3. even though I told them that I felt this way since I was 5 years old
4. or earlier.

##### Stanza 2

5. I hadn't had sex yet –
6. sex seemed all very taboo
7. and mystical to me
8. still at this point.

Later, Hailey described feeling increasingly depressed on her mission, which, ironically, seemed to be the beginning of the end of her faith, an all too common experience of many LGBT people:

*Strophe 2: Depressed*

Stanza 3

9. I was very depressed  
 10. for the length of my mission.  
 11. I was at a loss for what to do.

Stanza 4

12. It was the beginning of the end for me  
 13. and my faith.  
 14. Everything I was studying and teaching  
 15. seemed to apply less and less to me.

*Interviewer Interruption*

Heavy sigh ...

*Strophe 3: Companions*

Stanza 5

16. I didn't tell any of my companions [i.e., fellow missionaries],  
 17. but my companion and roommate at the time I confessed  
 18. knew that I had sinned in some way,

Hailey depicts what appears to be the emergence of an open secret, as her companion and roommate is aware that something is wrong, and she knows that he knows this, but they cannot talk about it, perhaps because the assumption is that she has sinned, and maybe that is thought to be a private matter. More interesting, however, is the way Hailey described feeling at the time like she was the one who was “wrong,” and that seems to be the way shame works; it gets down at one’s core being and essence. To

have sinned is to be guilty for some *thing* that was done or not done, for which in the Christian and other religious traditions, there is confession and forgiveness, but Hailey does not describe feeling guilty or sinful; that is what her companion and roommate assumes. Rather, Hailey describes feeling like she was “wrong,” but for what? Not for any *thing* she did, but rather, just for *being*; her very essence as a human being seems to be “wrong,” and she is further worried that her wrongness was somehow the reason why she and her mission companions were baptizing very few converts to their faith:

Hailey (Story 2): Mission Convert

*Strophe 1: Introduction*

Stanza 1

1. One of the hardest things for me
2. on my mission
3. was giving a baptismal interview
4. near the end of my mission.

Stanza 2

5. When someone investigates the Mormon faith
6. and decides that she or he wants to join,
7. a person called a Zone Leader
8. (sort of like a regional manager over a group of 10-30 missionaries)
9. has to interview this candidate
10. to makes sure they want to be baptized, etc.

*Strophe 2: Three Things*

Stanza 3

11. I only had 1 interview during my entire mission,
12. and it was a man that I thought was probably gay.

Stanza 4

13. In the interview there were several easy questions that I had to ask



14. (Do you believe in Jesus? Joseph Smith? Book of Mormon?)  
 15. But at the end there was a list of 3 things I had to ask him if he had ever done:  
 16. 1)Murder 2)Abortion 3)"Homosexual" acts.

*Strophe 3: He Said Yes*

Stanza 5

17. I told him not to tell me which one,  
 18. but if any of the 3 applied,  
 19. he needed to say "yes".  
 20. He said "yes"

Stanza 6

21. and I tried to reassure him as best I could,  
 22. but I did what I was supposed to do –  
 23. I called the Mission President,  
 24. and scheduled an interview with this man.

*Strophe 4: Conflicted*

Stanza 7

25. I know that this experience might not make sense outside of the context,  
 26. but it hurt me.  
 27. I felt extremely conflicted.

Stanza 8

28. I knew that I was going home in 1 month,  
 29. and that I most likely wasn't going to go to church anymore.

*Strophe 5: Did Not Stop Convert from Joining*

Stanza 9

30. I also felt like I was the one that was wrong,  
 31. not the church,  
 32. so I didn't say or do anything  
 33. to keep this man from joining.

Hailey's story of her mission convert has what Ricoeur (1984-1989) might call a classic narrative form with a beginning, middle, end, and moral value (in Polkinghorne, 1996), where she seems to feel conflicted, possibly feeling on the one hand, that her mission convert should not join her church, while on the other hand, doing nothing to dissuade him from joining, for she "didn't say or do anything to keep this man from joining." It is also interesting that Hailey's church seems to put "homosexual acts," but perhaps not homosexuality, on the same plane as murder and abortion. Even if one were to think that "homosexual acts" are sinful, it does not seem to me that they would be as egregious as murder, especially if committed between consenting adults. Regardless, throughout her mission experience, Hailey continued to struggle with her feelings.

It was not until after she returned from her mission, joined the Air Force, and married a woman (as Hailey had not yet begun her male-to-female transition at that point) that she was able to start resolving her feelings by telling her wife what she tried to tell her mission president. Hailey said her wife received the news well because her wife is attracted to women; they are still together, happily married, and parents, but Hailey regretted that she never told her father about being transgender:

#### Hailey (Story 3): Praying and Father's Death

##### *Strophe 1: Praying on Mission*

##### Stanza 1

1. On my mission
2. I first realized that this [being LGBT] couldn't be prayed away.

##### Stanza 2

3. I remember being alone in a bathroom

4. in the middle of the night
5. on my mission
6. when I was 19

Stanza 3

7. praying in tears
8. to know what to do

*Strophe 2: Thinking for First Time*

Stanza 4

9. and I dared to think for really the first time
10. since I was a little kid
11. that this was who I am
12. and wondering what that meant.

Stanza 5

13. I remember wondering if I had to move to New York
14. and become an anonymous freak
15. and run away from everyone I knew.

*Strophe 3: Coming Out, But Not Okay with It*

Stanza 6

16. I should point out
17. that I came out to myself at 19,
18. and that doesn't mean I was okay with it.

Stanza 7

19. I just realized its permanence
20. and that how I was going about it was not working.

Stanza 8

21. I didn't have a better answer yet.

*Strophe 4: Telling Others*

## Stanza 9

22. I told Xxxxxx [wife] when I was 22  
 23. and we were first married.

## Stanza 10

24. I told my mom over the phone  
 25. when I was maybe 25  
 26. and stationed in Xxxxxxxx.

*Strophe 5: Not Telling Dad*

## Stanza 11

27. I never wanted my dad to know,  
 28. so I waited until then [when she told her mother]  
 29. because his Alzheimer's was advanced enough  
 30. that I didn't think he'd understand  
 31. (he died of it a couple years later).

## Stanza 12

32. I regret not telling him now,  
 33. but I was afraid of his reaction the most  
 34. because he taught Mormon seminary for over 30 years,  
 35. and I felt he would be angry.

Hailey's regret at not telling her father is indicative of how LGBT people come out as a way of hoping to draw nearer to others, especially parents, in order to bring a relationship closer, while being more open and honest with those who are important in their lives (Ben-Ari, 1995). This is a point that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy misses; in its effort to preserve unit cohesion and morale, the policy may actually promote just the opposite by encouraging LGBT people to be dishonest and secretive (Frank, 2009),

which, in turn, may cause heterosexual people to be fearful, as was the case with Javier's friends, who feared the first sergeant in Javier's story.

Although her mission may have been the "beginning of the end of her faith," Hailey did not remain in this disempowered place. After leaving the Air Force, coming out, and beginning her male-to-female transition, she became a much more empowered force, choosing to sever her ties with her church after its support of Proposition 8, the 2008 ballot initiative which overturned the right of LGBT citizens to legally marry in the state of California, a final straw for Hailey, who no longer wanted her name to be counted on the church rolls:

#### Hailey (Story 4): Leaving the Church

##### *Interviewer Follow-up Question*

You mentioned [on your online screening survey] that you

##### *Strophe 1: Online Screening Survey Response*

##### Stanza 1

1. served a mission in Xxxxxx for 2 years.

##### Stanza 2

2. I stopped going to any church
3. as soon as my mission was over at the age of 21,
4. and I officially resigned my membership
5. the day after Prop. 8 passed in California November 2008.

##### *Interviewer Follow-up Question (Continued)*

You know, it's kind of interesting ... whenever I read these surveys that people send me, I inevitably have a stop and pause and heavy sigh kind of moment ... and for me, in reading your survey, that moment happened when I read about your LDS resignation the day after Prop 8 ... Ah, yeah ... that was a heavy day for all of us ... Can you tell me more about this decision ... sounds like maybe

the Prop 8 thing was just the final straw, huh?

*Strophe 2: Response*

Stanza 3

6. Thanks for sharing that with me.

*Strophe 3: Final Straw*

Stanza 4

7. That day was awful.

8. It was very much like the final straw.

Stanza 5

9. Other than a brief stint of churchgoing

10. when Xxxxxx [Hailey's wife] was pregnant with our first child,

11. we hadn't gone to church since 20xx.

*Strophe 4: Deconstructing*

Stanza 6

12. I was still sorting it all out, though.

Stanza 7

13. I think it takes a lot of time to deconstruct what you believe and why

14. when you've been raised in a very orthodox religion

15. that encompasses every aspect of your life up to that point.

Stanza 8

16. Deep down,

17. I still felt for a long time that I was probably going to hell,

18. and God was disappointed in me.

*Strophe 5: Cease Fire*

Stanza 9

19. I felt kind of like I was in a cease fire.

20. I didn't love the church,  
21. but I didn't talk bad about it either.

Stanza 10

22. In exchange,  
23. I felt it would leave me alone.

*Strophe 6: Crossing a Line*

Stanza 11

24. I didn't marry in the temple  
25. (according to Mormon belief,  
26. only temple marriages matter after death),  
27. so I felt like my marriage didn't concern them.

Stanza 12

28. When the Mormon church campaigned so hard against our life,  
29. it crossed the line.

Stanza 13

30. Members of my extended family felt like they had to choose between  
me and God in a way,  
31. and I felt like I was fighting myself.

*Strophe 7: Feeling Relief*

Stanza 14

32. I didn't want to be part of the membership numbers that they  
announce every year,  
33. and I wanted to DO something.

Stanza 15

34. I thought I'd be very conflicted about it  
35. (resigning your membership is tantamount to choosing to not go to  
heaven),  
36. but all I felt was relief.

## Stanza 16

37. I felt like I knew who was wrong,  
 38. and it wasn't me.

Hailey's story is one of movement toward empowerment. Her narrative takes the form of several *turning points* (Walsh & Crepeau, 1998), as she moves from being a disempowered missionary who felt that she was "wrong" to being an empowered person, able to leave her church, "tantamount to not going to heaven," while now knowing in her mind who is really the one in the wrong – not her, but her church, which "crossed a line" and "campaigned so hard against her life." Similar to Javier and Elizabeth, we see a transition in Hailey from a *victimic* to an *agentive* life plot (Polkinghorne, 1996) as she gains a new sense of agency from acting on what she feels is right for her to do.

*Duane and the Chief*

Finally, we turn now to Duane who served in the Navy as a petty officer first class and self-reported to be a 41 year old, African American, gay male. Duane enjoyed his time in the Navy, referring to it as "AwEsOmE!" Although he was encouraged to reenlist, he chose not to do so, saying that he would not continue to serve under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, a reminder that the U.S. military not only loses LGBT service members who are discharged under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, but it also loses people who decide not to reenlist, or never join in the first place, because of the policy (Frank, 2009). The major *theme* or *motif* that seemed to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Duane's narrative appeared to be one of realizing that *everyone knew of his sexuality, but nobody cared*, as exemplified in his story of the open secret with one of his chiefs:



## Duane (Story 1): The Chief

*Strophe 1: Introduction*

## Stanza 1

1. There was a funny situation:
2. We had just pulled into XXXXXXXXXXXX XX
3. and I was working late on the ship.

## Stanza 2

4. After I finished
5. I went down to the local pub there.

*Strophe 2: Chief and Others Drinking*

## Stanza 3

6. My Chief
7. and a few of the other Chiefs and shipmates
8. were there drinking

*Strophe 3: Chief's Statement*

## Stanza 4

9. and my Chief comes up to me,
10. intoxicated
11. and begins to make a statement

## Stanza 5

12. but before he could finish,
13. one of the other Chiefs screams out to him
14. Shut up XXXXXX!

*Strophe 4: Next Words*

## Stanza 6

15. He did get enough out
16. that I knew what his next words would have been.

## Stanza 7

17. "XXXXXX!  
 18. Come here...  
 19. I don't care if you are..."

*Interviewer Question*

Any idea how you would have felt if he completed the sentence and/or what you might have said in response?

*Strophe 5: Response*

## Stanza 8

20. I would have hoped he would finish it.

## Stanza 9

21. Chief and I had a great working relationship.

*Strophe 6: Hard Worker*

## Stanza 10

22. I was a very hard worker  
 23. and he appreciated my efforts.

## Stanza 11

24. I gained his respect  
 25. through my performance.

*Strophe 7: Would Have Come Out*

## Stanza 12

26. I would have come out to him right then and there.  
 27. I mean he knew already. :)

## Stanza 13

28. I wouldn't have shouted to the whole bar  
 29. but ya know

30. I would have pulled him aside  
 31. and we would have had a heart to heart.

*Strophe 8: Other Chiefs*

Stanza 14

32. The other Chiefs assured me he was drunk  
 33. and not to worry about him.

*Interviewer Question*

So, what was that about? Were they coming to your defense? Correct me if I'm wrong, but it almost sounds like this is about as close as they can get to saying, "We know, and it's okay."

*Strophe 9: The Goat Locker*

Stanza 15

34. Exactly.

Stanza 16

35. The Goat Locker (Chief's Qtr's)  
 36. all respected me  
 37. due to my performance  
 38. as stated above.

*Strophe 10: Working Harder to Prove Worth*

Stanza 17

39. I worked harder  
 40. to prove my worth  
 41. everyday.

*Strophe 11: Race/Ethnicity*

Stanza 18

42. Being African American  
 43. things don't come easy

## Stanza 19

44. esp on xxxxxxxx [type of ship]  
 45. where less than xxxx% are XXXXXXXXXXXX

*Strophe 12: Deciding Not to Reenlist*

## Stanza 20

46. I was treated well by my shipmates and leadership  
 47. and was asked to re-enlist [by the chief]  
 48. but I choose not to.

*Interviewer Question*

Because you didn't want to continue serving under DADT or because you were ready to move on to other things in life (maybe other things that being more Out and open could offer you)? I'm just trying to get an idea if it was because of DADT, specifically, that you didn't re-enlist or other things or maybe a combination of all of the above? If you were straight, do you think you would've re-enlisted?

*Strophe 13: Wanting to Live Openly*

## Stanza 21

49. It was mainly because I didn't feel comfortable dating and hiding.

## Stanza 22

50. I wanted to truly live my life openly  
 51. and not hide anymore,

## Stanza 23

52. it is draining.

*Strophe 14: Not Worth It*

## Stanza 24

53. Can it be done?  
 54. yes

## Stanza 25

55. but at what cost?  
56. Not worth it.

Duane's story is similar to Javier's, where people are aware of his sexuality and do not care. Unlike Javier, however, Duane does not have a first sergeant harassing him constantly; just the opposite, as the chief's acceptance is revealed in a drunken moment. It should be noted, however, that Duane's chief appears to convey *acceptance* in the bar, not *support*, the former still being within Riddle's (1994) homophobic view (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003), for what little the chief was able to say, "I don't care if you are," seems to hint that the chief may have had a qualifier to follow (i.e., *I still ...*), suggesting a *yes-but* quality of conditional support that may be conditional upon Duane's hard work, as he notes is common among minority people, and as we saw suggested earlier in David's story of the colonel's "aunt," where the colonel's acceptance as a lesbian may have been partly based on her being an excellent officer.

Nonetheless, Duane's chief encouraged Duane to reenlist, an apparent supportive move (Riddle, 1994) (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003), but Duane declined, describing the costs of doing so as feeling dishonest and "draining." Later, I asked him specifically to discuss the costs of living life as a lie under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy:

## Duane (Story 2): Costs

*Strophe 1: Response*

## Stanza 1

1. Andrew –
2. This is easy to answer concerning the cost.

*Strophe 2: Costs*

## Stanza 2

3. When one has to constantly lie,
4. it creates stress in the mind
5. and a nervousness of always looking over your shoulder
6. wondering if you will ever be found out.

## Stanza 3

7. For me the single most important cost
8. was the opportunity to have someone significant in my life
9. and not have to hide them.

*Strophe 3: Relationships*

## Stanza 4

10. That is demoralizing and hard on the relationship.

## Stanza 5

11. You can make it work
12. but the stress and strain on the relationship is tremendous.

*Strophe 4: Deployment*

## Stanza 6

13. Knowing that I would deploy again
14. and not be able to hear from someone I love
15. was not something I was willing to do.

*Strophe 5: Heterosexual Counterpart*

## Stanza 7

16. For the heterosexual counterpart to understand this,
17. just ask them if they could go six months without talking to their wife or kids.
18. Most would think that would be unbearable.

*Strophe 6: Military Life*

## Stanza 8

19. Doing life together is what military life is about  
 20. as well as working together.

## Stanza 9

21. You truly do share life completely with each other  
 22. and that is why if most of them are sharp enough –  
 23. they already know we are hiding.

*Strophe 7: Benefit of Being Out*

## Stanza 10

24. The benefit of being out  
 25. means that I would not have to lie to my fellow shipmates face  
 26. when they asked questions about who I was seeing  
 27. and if I would get married, etc.

## Stanza 11

28. I had several people  
 29. who confided in my some of the most personal things about themselves  
 30. and I always felt like I cheated them  
 31. because I couldn't do the same with them.

*Strophe 8: Lay Reader*

## Stanza 12

32. As the layreader onboard all of my xxxxxxxx [type of ship]  
 33. I heard and advise many sailors on their personal lives.  
 34. Many times I was asked if I would get married and have kids –  
 35. I lied.

## Stanza 13

36. Why?  
 37. because I felt if I was open and honest  
 38. it would have been the end of my career.

*Strophe 9: Commentary*

## Stanza 14

39. It is unfortunate that we have to live this way,  
 40. even in society  
 41. not only in the military.

## Stanza 15

42. It's time to change  
 43. and change must come now  
 44. not later.

*Strophe 10: Closing*

## Stanza 16

45. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to express my thoughts,  
 46. XXXXXX

Duane's comments seem to capture well a shift that may be in process toward a new sense of LGBT empowerment and understanding of honesty. Although encouraged to reenlist, he chose not to do so, in part because he wanted to live "openly" and "not hide anymore," suggesting a desire to live life in a more honest and integrative fashion, Cass' (1979) final *synthesis* stage of LGBT identity development that can bring a sense of coherence to one's life story (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). The costs of having to live a lie, life in the closet, are "not worth it," Duane tells us, and although I agree with him, I am also reminded of countless LGBT people, like Marguerite and Brad, who have paid those costs.

## Conclusion

This chapter was a presentation of the research findings with interview excerpts that best exemplify the three major findings that emerged from the data, the first being



*sexual and homophobic harassment*, which drives the need for the *secret* part of the open secret, as was seen in the stories of (a) Marguerite's security clearance investigations; (b) Brad's preference for a third tour of duty in Iraq, rather than continue to face the attacks of his coworker and ex-boyfriend; (c) Javier's decision to out himself and be discharged under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, rather than continue to face his first sergeant's relentless pursuits, and (d) Aaron's *microassaultive* (Sue et al., 2007) insults from the "smart aleck" enlisted airman and the Director of Engineering.

Next, we saw how the open secret emerges as a space of grace (Francois, 2008), whereby heterosexual people signal their tacit *acceptance* or *support* of LGBT people, who, in turn, acquiesce to this tacit approval, but do not demand more overt signs of support, and likely cannot make such demands without risking their safety and/or jeopardizing their careers. We saw clear examples of the open secret in (a) Trent's story of his stepmother; (b) Sterling's platoon sergeants; (c) the "doctor's smile" in Leslie's story; and (d) the colonel's "aunt" in David's story.

Finally, we saw examples of *empowerment and honesty*, the third major finding of this study, whereby the open part of the open secret prevails, as LGBT people display a new sense of honesty because remaining in the closet feels increasingly dishonest and too costly a price to pay as a way to live one's life. This new sense of honesty seems to empower LGBT people, whereby they no longer acquiesce to heterosexual calls for silence, thus effectively ending the open secret, from which LGBT people can then be propelled into a new sense of agency, though it may come with high costs, as we saw with (a) Elizabeth, who remains estranged from her stepfather; (b) Hailey, who resigned

her church membership; and (c) Duane, who chose not to reenlist in the Navy, though he said he loved the Navy and was encouraged to reenlist.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the open secret seems to work fluidly through all three findings, as LGBT and heterosexual people navigate and negotiate the *open* versus *secret* parts of the open secret, while possibly moving toward what Gee (1989) might call a new Discourse with LGBT people – one that may be more *agentive* than *victimic* (Polkinghorne, 1996), as well as proleptic in possibility.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Returning now to Roger Brown (1989), the late Harvard University psychologist mentioned in the first chapter, whose research style was always to start with some phenomenon, then *poke it and prod it and turn it all around in an effort to figure it out*, this research also poked and prodded, turned all around, and tried to figure out the *open secret*, a phrase referring to an interesting phenomenon that is experienced by some, but not all, LGBT people whose sexuality may be known or correctly ascertained by family members, friends, and/or coworkers, but not discussed (Frankham, 2001; Yoshino, 2006). As Miller (1988) noted, the open secret seems to be about *knowledge that is not acknowledged*, perhaps as a means of power and control, or perhaps as a way of creating what Francois (2008) might call a *space of grace*, a place allowing heterosexual and LGBT people to coexist where they might not otherwise be able to easily do so.

Although noted in various disciplines, including literature, law, education, and religion (Francois, 2008), there appears to be less that is known about the open secret as it may relate to psychology or LGBT studies, suggesting a possible gap in the literature that this qualitative research aimed to address by seeing how the open secret may relate to the lives of people who served or are currently serving in the U.S. military, either before or during the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. A final sample of eleven participants ( $N = 11$ ) was selected from an online screening survey (see Appendix A), each of whom then participated in a series of in-depth, non-standardized (Mann & Stewart, 2000),

online interviews. The interviews were analyzed using the linguistic approach to narrative of James Paul Gee (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005), from which three major findings emerged, as discussed in the fourth chapter:

- *Sexual and homophobic harassment*, whereby historic homophobia within the military (Bacevich, 1993; Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993) drives the need for secrecy surrounding LGBT sexuality and represents the *secret* part of the open secret.
- *Acceptance and support*, whereby the open secret emerges and seems to create Francois' (2008) space of grace, creating a place where heterosexual and LGBT people can coexist provided that LGBT people acquiesce to this arrangement.
- *Empowerment and honesty*, whereby LGBT people do not acquiesce to the open secret, but are driven by a new sense of honesty that can empower them toward a sense of agency and openness, thus representing the *open* part of the open secret.

#### Discussion

Interestingly, the open secret appears to work *fluidly*, as its different parts, *open* versus *secret*, appear to move in and out of the three key findings mentioned above. Sexual and homophobic harassment, for example, necessitate the need for LGBT people to maintain secrecy. Two participants in particular, Marguerite and Brad, described harrowing stories of sexual and homophobic harassment in which both participants tried to maintain the secrecy of their sexuality, though their tormentors already knew of it. At the other extreme, openness prevailed, where participants, such as Elizabeth, Duane, Javier, and Hailey had reached *agentic* (Polkinghorne, 1996) points in their lives when they were no longer *playing the game* of secrecy and were open about their sexuality.

Between these two extremes of secrecy and openness is where the open secret seemed to emerge, often as a space of grace (Francois, 2008), where heterosexual people seemed to know of a LGBT person's sexuality, but generally chose not to acknowledge it overtly (Miller, 1988). For example, (a) the doctor's smile in Leslie's story; (b) the colonel's "aunt" in David's story; (c) the two platoon sergeants in Sterling's stories; and (d) the chief in Duane's story all reveal the open secret, where heterosexual people seem to be aware of LGBT people in their midst, though they do not overtly acknowledge them (Miller, 1988) and, likely, cannot acknowledge them in the military because of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. Nonetheless, in these spaces of grace (Francois, 2008), there seems to often be some form of tacit, heterosexual approval of LGBT people, although it is less clear if such tacit approval represented Riddle's (1994) understanding of homophobic *pity*, *tolerance* or *acceptance*, or if it moved more into the area of *support*; sadly, there did not seem to be any examples of Riddle's positive levels of *admiration*, *appreciation*, or *nurturance* (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003).

Each of the eleven participants and their respective stories are listed in Table 2. The participants are listed in descending order by age with brief descriptions of their respective demographic information. Table 2 also includes information regarding (a) whether each story seemed to emerge as a means of *controlling* LGBT people, (b) whether a *space of grace* (Francois, 2008) seemed to emerge in the story, (c) whether the participant *played along* with the space of grace and/or any attempts of control, and (d) whether the participant seemed to respond to the situation with a sense of the *agentic* (Polkinghorne, 1996) or *agency* (Cochran & Laub, 1994), as discussed below.

Table 2  
*Participant Responses to Stories (N = 11)*

Participant	Pseudonym and Story	Secret			
		Control	Open Secret	Grace	Open Not Playing Agentic
1	Trent (age 85, Caucasian, gay male) <i>Stepmother</i>	√		√	
2	Marguerite (age 58, Caucasian lesbian) <i>Security clearance investigations</i>	√			
3 <sup>a</sup>	Leslie (age 56, Caucasian, MTF lesbian) <i>Doctor's smile</i> <i>Christmas letter</i>			√	
4	Aaron (age 51, Caucasian, gay male) <i>Smart-aleck, enlisted airman</i> <i>Director of Engineering</i>	√			√
5	Elizabeth (age 50, Caucasian lesbian) <i>Christmas dinner</i>	√			√
6	David (age 46, Caucasian, gay male) <i>Colliding worlds/guardedness</i> <i>Colonel's "aunt"</i>	√		√	
7	Sterling (age 44, Caucasian, gay male) <i>Platoon corporal</i> <i>Army medics</i> <i>Platoon sergeants</i>	√		√	
8	Duane (age 41, African American, gay male) <i>Chiefs</i> <i>Costs</i>			√	√
9	Brad (age 39, Caucasian, bisexual male) <i>Escape to Iraq</i>	√			
10 <sup>a</sup>	Hailey (age 30, Caucasian, MTF, TransQueer) <i>Confused/depressed on mission</i> <i>Mission convert</i> <i>Proposition 8</i>	√			√
11 <sup>b</sup>	Javier (age 30, multiracial, gay male) <i>First Sergeant</i> <i>Blank stare</i> <i>Partner's parents are "petty and weak"</i>	√			√

Note. Participants are listed in descending order by age.

<sup>a</sup>Participants 3 and 10 self-identified as male-to-female transgender.

<sup>b</sup>Participant 11 was discharged under the U.S. military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

A visual inspection of Table 2 above suggests several interesting possibilities. First, with the exception of Aaron's reprimand of the smart-aleck enlisted airman and later rebuke of the Director of Engineering, along with the exception of Elizabeth's response to her stepfather during her dismal Christmas dinner, it is otherwise only the youngest participants who neither play the open secret charade nor acquiesce to heterosexual attempts to control them, representing what Savin-Williams (2005) and others have suggested could be a cultural and generational shift in LGBT understandings and acceptance. Note also that the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996), does not emerge unless participants also refuse to play along with efforts to control them, and a space of grace (Francois, 2008) does not seem possible when there are heterosexual efforts to control, for the space of grace (Francois, 2008) seems dependent on heterosexual people opening it by easing away from control, the one exception being the story of Trent's stepmother, which had both a controlling (i.e., "damn embarrassing") element to it and a possible space of grace (Francois, 2008), in that the situation was not discussed the next morning.

It seems that *fear* may keep LGBT people under control. Marguerite and Brad, for example, both fear for their careers, while Sterling fears that if he *acts* on his sexual feelings, he will be *admitting* that he is gay, causing him to fear that he would then turn into a stereotypically, effeminate, gay man. Thus, the *secret* part of the open secret may reside in the area of being controlled, held in check by fear, a reminder that, while the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy was intended to be a fair compromise (Frank, 2009), it actually has a very controlling element to it – one that allows heterosexual people to exploit LGBT people, as we saw with Marguerite, Brad, and Javier, while granting no

recourse for LGBT people who face sexual and homophobic harassment. Indeed, elements of power and control are woven throughout the open secret, where those with power have the privilege to not acknowledge their knowledge (Miller, 1988) of LGBT people, while further forcing LGBT people into silent submission with the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy as a way to block any efforts of LGBT people to voice their presence.

If *fear* drives the *secret* part of the open secret, then *anger* may propel LGBT people into *not playing the game*, from which they might then move into the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm. Elizabeth, for example, is clearly disgusted with her stepfather, while Hailey comes to the realization of what is wrong with her church, concluding that it is not her. Similar to *not playing the game*, Cochran and Laub (1994) discuss *dropping the front*, which they describe as a step toward agency by “refusing to obey orders or expectations” (p. 150). Thus, the *open* part of the open secret may reside in both the areas of not playing the game and the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm.

The space of grace (Francois, 2008) seems to be more of a neutral place, with neither the negative qualities of LGBT people being controlled, nor the more positive movement of agency, where both the *open* and *secret* parts of the open secret seem to exist. Leslie, for example, described the doctor's smile as an “unspoken understanding” that neither would “make waves,” and although Sterling seems to have multiple *corrective emotional experiences* (Alexander, 1946/1974), the most he seems able to do is adopt his own *cool straight guy* attitude when approached with LGBT opportunities. It seems, then, that in each story, the participants were faced with either (a) being under the control of others, (b) going with a space of grace (Francois, 2008) if one opened up,



or (c) refusing to play, from which the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm can emerge. Note also how nearly every participant experienced being under the control of others, suggesting that homophobia was and still is a prominent concern.

*Toward a New Discourse*

In an interesting and historic account of gestalt psychology, Rudolf Arnheim (1986) notes that gestalt psychology is most commonly known for the phrase, “The whole is more than the sum of the parts” (p. 820), and less commonly known for its other idea of movement toward that which is simplest and symmetrical, which Arnheim (1986) laments is too often confused with mere minimization. Rather, Arnheim (1986) asserts that the notion that gestalt psychologists “could never lose sight of was the dynamic striving of systems toward a balanced state” (p. 821), in which he further notes that, when confronted with disequilibrium, there is first a movement “toward tension-reducing equilibration,” followed by “tension-increasing stimuli” (p. 822) to better highlight whatever differences might have created the disequilibrium in the first place. Similarly, Cochran and Laub (1994) cite Arnheim (1986), noting how, in narratives,

... configurations of lived meaning such as a plot or a full dramatization, the law of good gestalt is that a plot will evolve toward as good a plot as possible within the circumstances ... The first tendency is tension reducing, a movement toward simplicity of form (e.g., symmetry, proportion, continuity). The second tendency is tension increasing, a movement toward articulation of distinct meaning, a fulfillment of the particular meaning of a configuration. One moves toward balance, the other toward completion. (p. 135)

I suggest that if we look at Table 2 above through a gestalt lens, we can begin to see the dynamics of disequilibrium, where heterosexual power attempts to control LGBT people; this disequilibrium between heterosexual and LGBT people was met in the

military with the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, a compromise policy (Frank, 2009) that may represent a gestalt, tension-reducing dynamic toward *balance* that is also suggested in various spaces of grace (Francois, 2008), where a neutral place of the open secret seems to exist. This balance, however, may be increasingly unacceptable for many younger LGBT people, as well as many heterosexual people, both the former and latter of whom may be increasingly moving toward the second, gestalt, tension-increasing dynamic of *completion* by not playing the open secret game, whereby a sense of the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm can be reached.

Not to dismiss criticism of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy (Bacevich, 1993; Frank, 2009; Herek, 1993), especially given abuses and increased rates of discharges since its inception (Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, 2010), but from a gestalt angle, it seems that many open secret situations, graceful as they may be, as well as the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy itself, may represent inevitable, initial, gestalt attempts at *balance*, from which we may now be moving to a second, gestalt, tension-increasing dynamic of *completion*, that being the inclusion of openly-LGBT service members in the U.S. military that President Clinton first attempted 17 years ago (Frank, 2009).

Much has changed over the past 17 years and much has also stayed the same. LGBT people are represented in the media now more than ever before, often portrayed in a positive light; more people are aware of and supportive of LGBT people than ever before, although many also remain unsupportive, while others may find themselves in religious binds, wanting to be supportive, but unable to reconcile their religious beliefs with the reality of LGBT friends, family members, and coworkers.

Returning to Gee's (1989) understanding of Discourses (uppercase *D*), as discussed at the end of the third chapter, it seems to me that the past 17 years represent a type of *discourse* (lowercase *d*), whereby LGBT and heterosexual people have been able to examine and critique the primary Discourse by which LGBT people have typically been understood to be sick or sinful, resulting in an expectation that they would remain closeted. It is only out of this type of primary Discourse that something like the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy could emerge as a compromise (i.e., an initial, gestalt movement toward balance) between this primary Discourse and a secondary Discourse that had not yet had the *discourse* to emerge, but which we now may see coming forth (i.e., coming to a gestalt dynamic of completion), as indicated in the third finding of this research project, *empowerment and honesty*, whereby it is now increasingly understood as being dishonest to conceal one's sexuality, something that would have been incomprehensible with the primary Discourse (Gee, 1989) that Trent and other older participants knew.

Gee (1989) further notes that secondary Discourses can be *dominant* and *nondominant*, the former of which can bring social status, while the latter may bring solidarity with a particular group. In not *playing the game* through which the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm is reachable, LGBT people seem to achieve Gee's (1989) *nondominant, secondary Discourse*, whereby they stand-up for themselves in solidarity with others who are doing the same thing, but they may not yet have a *dominant, secondary Discourse* of money, prestige, status, etc. Rather, just the opposite can still be the case with LGBT people, where they can lose their military careers, as happened to Javier or lose their church, as happened with Hailey.

We have yet to see what type of dominant, secondary Discourse (Gee, 1989) LGBT people may achieve, but one thought is that, if and as LGBT people gain more acceptance and support by more heterosexual people, a *new closet* might emerge for homophobic people, as was indicated in the stories of Aaron's Director of Engineering and the blank stare Javier had from his fellow soldier, where overt homophobic views and *microassaults* (Sue et al., 2007) may be increasingly unacceptable, as is often the case with overt racism and sexism today, although both certainly still exist, especially in covert forms, and it is unlikely that homophobia and heterosexism will end soon.

#### *A Proleptic Moment*

This new Discourse (Gee, 1989) for LGBT people is not yet here, but it appears to be on the horizon, suggesting that we may be in a *proleptic* moment of time for LGBT people, when past, present, and future converge and synthesize into a *progressive-regressive* (Pinar, 2004) type of present reality that has not yet arrived, but may be emerging. For example, referring to indigenous understandings of time, Patrick Slattery and Dana Rapp (2003) note that,

The proleptic experience is difficult to describe because our language is embedded with dualistic notions of time (e.g., day and night, before and after, past and present, awake and asleep, beginning and end). We may have to suspend our modern notions of clocks, bells, calendars, and schedules and enter a holistic dreamtime state like the Aboriginal peoples of Australia in order to fully comprehend the meaning of the word *proleptic*. (p. 75)

Similarly, Lily Cho (2008) reviews the theme of *proleptic loss* in Richard Fung's video, *Sea in the Blood*, where Fung copes with the loss of his sister, Nan, and his partner, Tim. Cho (2008) notes how *prolepsis* uses the future perfect tense:

The future perfect loss this video offers does not predict the future; it understands that some losses can be felt proleptically, conditioned by deaths that will have happened. It is not that she will die but that she will have died before he could return home to say good-bye, before she could meet Tim ... Feeling loss proleptically is crucially different from feeling it as a prophecy. It is precisely the unknowability of loss's prolepsis that is important here. Prophecies predict certain futures. Prolepsis is predictive but uncertain; it lies on the edges of possibility. (p. 434)

Rather than a proleptic *loss*, however, we may be in a time of proleptic *gain* for LGBT people, especially LGBT service members, as indicated by President Obama's (2010) recent State of the Union remarks that, "This year, I will work with the Congress and our military to finally repeal the law that denies gay Americans the right to serve the country they love because of who they are" (p. 10). The President's speech was soon followed by an announcement from Dr. Robert M. Gates, the Secretary of Defense and former Texas A&M University president, that only generals or admirals can now initiate investigations against LGBT service members, a new approach that seems to make good on Gates' recent commitment to Congress to enforce the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy in a *fairer, more humane* way (Shanker, 2010). The recent testimony to Congress from Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was even more striking:

No matter how I look at the issue, I cannot escape being troubled by the fact that we have in place a policy which forces young men and women to lie about who they are in order to defend their fellow citizens. (in Bumiller, 2010, p. 1)

Comments like these, from and to the highest levels of government, strongly suggest, in a proleptic way, that it is only a matter of time before the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may be repealed. Cochran and Laub (1994) remind us "that the primary way the negative loses force is by the positive gaining force" (p. 141), and in not playing the game, in becoming increasingly agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996), and with the help of more

heterosexual friends and allies, from the President on down, it is as if we are in the midst of what Cochran and Laub (1994) might consider to be a gestalt *figure ground reversal*, whereby the old Discourse (Gee, 1989) of *sick, sinful, and closeted* LGBT people becomes the new ground, from which a new Discourse of *honesty, empowerment, and agency* is emerging in a proleptic way – one that is not yet here, but can be felt, as if on the *edge of possibility* (Cho, 2008), and one which, ironically, seems to have been made possible through the discourse (Gee, 1989) of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

#### Future Research

It seems that each of the three major findings in the fourth chapter call for future research. For example, the stories of sexual and homophobic harassment, especially as we saw with Marguerite, Brad, and Javier, and to a lesser, but no less concerning, extent, with Aaron's *microassaultive* (Sue et al., 2007) insults, are a clear reminder that LGBT people have no legal recourse against sexual and homophobic harassment. This is a political problem that calls for continued research, education, and legal remedies to help name and decrease these forms of sexual and homophobic harassment.

Similarly, it was interesting that, while there were instances of Riddle's (1994) positive attitude of *support* (e.g., Sterling's platoon sergeants and the colonel's "aunt" in David's story), there were no cases of Riddle's (1994) positive attitudes of *admiration, appreciation, or nurturance* toward LGBT people (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003). While this might not be surprising, as LGBT concerns are still relatively new in many people's minds, it is a reminder that there is still a long way to go and a need for more research and educational efforts to develop ways to help people move from and through Riddle's

(1994) homophobic levels of *repulsion, pity, tolerance, and acceptance* to her positive attitudes of *support, admiration, appreciation, and nurturance* (in Peterkin & Risdon, 2003). With this, future research is also needed to better understand how LGBT people being open and honest about their sexuality can either bring people closer together (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cameron & Hargreaves, 2005) or move them further apart, thus possibly *increasing*, not decreasing unit cohesion and morale in the military in some instances.

Finally, the stories of *empowerment and honesty*, such as Elizabeth's dismal Christmas dinner, Hailey's being fed-up with her church's support of Proposition 8, and the costs associated with serving under the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy which Duane so eloquently explained, are reminders that the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm was not reached unless a participant first refused to play the open secret game, as can clearly be seen in Table 2 on page 144. Future research is needed to better understand how the agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm can be reached by not playing the game, so as to better educate and empower LGBT people toward a new sense of honesty and agency, which might also transfer into empowering discourses (Gee, 1989) for other minorities.

#### Final Thoughts

As with any research project, this study has limitations, including the challenges of online research, where it is often impossible to calculate survey response rates or verify with certainty the identity and veracity of respondents. This research also used Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) linguistic approach to narrative, and while that was a strength, other qualitative analyses (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006) may have yielded additional findings of interest.

More importantly, however, this research contributes to what seems to be a gap in the psychological, multicultural, and LGBT identity development literature; it is very timely, given that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy appears to now be under review (Herszenhorn & Hulse, 2010), and it confirms with data what many have said all along, that being that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is destined to be repealed as younger people, less fretful about LGBT people (Savin-Williams, 2005) than past generations, continue to take the reins from the older, higher-ranking, and now retiring, military officers who created the policy, many of whom may believe, to return to Bacevich (1993), that “the whole gay ‘thing’ is deeply threatening and repugnant” (p. 43).

But this “whole gay ‘thing’” need not be so “deeply threatening and repugnant” (Bacevich, 1993, p. 43), as younger generations of LGBT and heterosexual people show the way toward a more promising, more hopeful, and more honest future. We are, after all, talking about *love*, a good thing. So often, we seem to think that we are only talking about sex, and while we are talking about sex, we too easily forget that we are ultimately talking about love – the opportunity for people to meet, fall in love, and live their lives in mutually affirming ways. Indeed, as I bring this dissertation to a close, spring has come to the Rocky Mountain West, where I am completing my internship. The snows of the bleak midwinter are gone, and the emergence of a bright tomorrow is on a proleptic edge of possibility (Cho, 2008), though I know there will be hot summer days to come.

Martin Buber (1937) reminds us of the importance of the *I – thou* relationship, rather than the *I – it*. Too often, I think, LGBT Discourses (Gee, 1989) have taken an *I – it* tone, as we focus on sex, too easily forgetting that we are talking about real, live,



human beings with hopes and dreams, loves and losses. It is by entering into the *I – thou* relationship that our humanity can be deepened (Deegan, 1996) and our horizons broadened, as we encounter the *other* in the midst of our lives and they encounter us, through which we both can grow, hopefully toward a new Discourse (Gee, 1989) of life, liberty, and love for all people, for all time, my admitted and optimistically, hopeful biases, though I know it will not be so simple and there is still a long way to go.

But in doing this research, in *slowing the data down* with Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991, 2005) linguistic approach to narrative, it is my hope that we have encountered each of the research participants, not as *I – its*, but as *I – thous*: Trent ... Marguerite ... Leslie ... Aaron ... Elizabeth ... David ... Sterling ... Duane ... Brad ... Hailey ... and Javier ... They have each shared intimate details of their lives from their unique places and perspectives. They have moved us forward into an under-researched topic, where we found (a) sexual and homophobic harassment, (b) acceptance and support in various spaces of grace (Francois, 2008), and (c) a new sense of honesty and empowerment that can propel us into an agentic (Polkinghorne, 1996) realm where a new Discourse (Gee, 1989) for tomorrow has not yet arrived, but may be on a proleptic edge of possibility (Cho, 2008). The open secret, as we saw, with its distinct parts, *open* versus *secret*, moves fluidly in and out of these findings, which we could not have found without these eleven research participants. I am grateful for each of them, for together, they told the open secret.

## EPILOGUE:

## THE TWELFTH MAN

The number twelve is often considered significant in many religious and cultural contexts, including Texas A&M University, which is known for its “12th Man” athletic prowess, a phrase referring to the student body’s willingness to step into the game if called upon, just as legendary A&M football player, E. King Gill, was willing to do in 1922, when A&M beat Centre College, 22–14 (Aggie Traditions, 2010). It is fitting, then, that a dissertation from Texas A&M University would happen to have a twelfth participant, a close, personal friend of mine who requested the pseudonym, Winston.

Initially, I was planning to exclude Winston from the final analysis because he is heterosexual, and this research project focused on LGBT people, and, as mentioned, he is also a close, personal friend, and I felt that his friendship might bias my interpretations of his interview. But as Krefting (1991) suggests, while *quantitative* researchers often are objective and “scientifically distant” (p. 217), *qualitative* researchers often attempt to reduce any distance between themselves and their research participants, often through lengthy periods of contact or observation. Citing Lincoln and Guba (1985), Krefting (1991) urges that the neutrality of qualitative data is more important than the neutrality of the researcher. Thus, given that Winston was the only heterosexual person with military experience who took the initial screening survey (see Appendix A), I chose to include some of his remarks in an epilogue, for I think he offers a valuable heterosexual perspective of the open secret, especially as it relates to our friendship.

Winston is a 40 year old, Caucasian, married, heterosexual male and father of several adopted children. He served in the Navy for four years during the Persian Gulf War, retiring with the rank of lieutenant. His interview was one of the longest I had, as he and I renewed our friendship and discussed Winston's experience of the *open secret*, especially as it pertains to me. The major *theme* or *motif* that seemed to *go together* or *co-locate* (Gee, 2005) Winston's narrative appeared to be about *reconnecting*, as he and I realized that we had grown apart, partly because I was fearful of how he might react if he knew about my sexuality, yet he indicated that he already figured it out years before with things I "said, did, and didn't do" until it all "hit a critical mass" in his mind. His initial comments to the online screening survey (see Appendix A) caught my attention:

#### Winston (Story 1): Accumulating Clues

##### *Strophe 1: Online Screening Survey Comments*

##### Stanza 1

1. I've known/
2. suspected
3. of the sexuality
4. of the primary researcher
5. since I xxxxxx with him
6. in college."

##### *Interviewer Question*

Okay, I'll take the bait ... How'd you know/suspect? Was there anything in particular that stands out in your mind as when you first started to know or suspect? And any idea why you never said anything or asked about it--either back then or after all these years? Had I not sent my survey out, do you think you would have ever asked about it? And how did you feel when you got the survey and had an opportunity, I guess, to say what you've known/suspected for all this time?

*Strophe 2: Accumulating Clues*

## Stanza 2

7. I have had a very strong suspicion
8. since our spring semester
9. senior year.

## Stanza 3

10. I couldn't tell you precisely why,
11. but I suppose it was just enough clues
12. accumulating
13. til it hit a critical mass
14. in my very slow mind.

## Stanza 4

15. Things you said,
16. did
17. and didn't do.

Winston's "accumulating of clues" is reminiscent of the soldiers in Sterling's story, who knew something was amiss with Sterling's frequent visits to the platoon corporal's room, as well as the "doctor's smile" in Leslie's story and the chief in Duane's story, all of which are reminders that heterosexual people are not lacking in intelligence; if they pay attention just a little bit, then they can often tell who is and is not LGBT. As Duane reminded us, life in the military is about "sharing life completely," which is why Duane indicated that heterosexual people, most of whom he said are "sharp enough," can tell when LGBT people are "hiding" their sexuality. Javier also mentioned in his interview that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy is flawed, for he said that it relies on the idea that heterosexual soldiers are "stupid" and cannot stand the

presence of an LGBT person, a seemingly gross and even insulting underestimation of the intelligence and abilities of America's men and women in uniform:

Javier (Story 4): The Policy Flaw

*Strophe 1: The Policy Flaw*

Stanza 1

1. The policy is built on the idea
2. that straight soldiers cannot stand the presence of a gay soldier.

Stanza 2

3. That's stupid
4. and it relies on the idea that soldiers are stupid –
5. essentially that they think homosexuality is contagious
6. or that homosexuals are always prowling for straights
7. that we can magically turn gay.

These types of fears are unfounded, often driven by religious and political interest groups (Simon, 2010), and they can create unnecessary wedges between people, as happened with Winston and myself, where our friendship grew distant after college, partly because Winston felt it would be “awkward” for him to say anything, and also because I was scared to say anything, for fear of losing his friendship, which ironically had grown cold because I never said anything, which Winston described as “annoying”:

Winston (Story 2): A Bit Annoyed

*Strophe 1: Awkward*

Stanza 1

1. In looking at the whole situation,
2. the best way of phrasing it
3. was that I have known
4. or strongly suspected
5. for a long time,

## Stanza 2

6. but was reluctant to say anything
7. because I didn't want to make you feel awkward,
8. I wanted to give you the control
9. of the situation.

*Interviewer Notes (shared with participant)*

He still hasn't said it; nor have I – that I am gay (those three words!). Polite  
 XXXXXX culture acquiesces control to GLBT; DADT does not; DADT = not  
 polite? He does not want to make me feel awkward ... Does this also allow  
 him to feel comfortable (although he later says that he feels annoyed) by not  
 having to talk about an awkward subject?

*Strophe 2: Response*

## Stanza 3

10. {hmmm
11. astute point,

## Stanza 4

12. I can't deny there is an element of that
13. on a day-to-day basis,

## Stanza 5

14. if any stranger came up to me
15. and began telling me the intimate details of their life
16. it would make me feel awkward.

## Stanza 6

17. But when there is a closer relationship
18. there is a desire
19. to be "let in the door"
20. with your friend}

*Interviewer Question (Continuation)*

So, the ball was in my court? I wonder why I never hit it over to your side of  
 the net ...

*Strophe 3: Response*

## Stanza 7

- 21. I suppose you mentioned it up above ☺
- 22. I know that is how I have felt with my kids.

*Strophe 4: About Time!*

## Stanza 8

- 23. And finally,
- 24. how do I feel?

## Stanza 9

- 25. Best way of phrasing it
- 26. would be
- 27. as I said before,
- 28. its about time.

*Interviewer Question*

Yes ...

*Strophe 5: Annoyed*

## Stanza 10

- 29. I am sure
- 30. you've had to go through a lot of emotion ups and downs
- 31. to get to this point,
- 32. I can truly understand that.

## Stanza 11

- 33. But I also feel
- 34. a bit annoyed at you,

*Strophe 6: Pushed Away*

## Stanza 12

- 35. I can't help but suspect

36. that one of the reasons that a gap has grown between us over the years
37. is that you were reluctant to say anything
38. and deliberately pushed me away.

Sadly, I agree with Winston; in some sense I had deliberately pushed him away over the years, as well as others, because of my own fears that he might push me away, while he was meanwhile waiting for me to open up to him, noting that with friends, there is a desire to be “let in the door.” There is an important element of power in this story that should not be overlooked – one which Winston recognized when he mentioned that I must have had many emotional “ups and downs,” and yet, even though he is the one with the balance of power and privilege, as a heterosexual, Caucasian male, somehow, I am the one who should have faced him and come out to him years before. I am not sure that I entirely agree with that notion, for it seems to overlook the role that heterosexual people have in providing a safe space for LGBT people to come out into.

Adital Tirosh Ben-Ari (1995) notes that “information is power” (p. 162), and so, I may have exercised my own power by not sharing my information, while Winston seems to exercise his power and privilege by not acknowledging his knowledge (Miller, 1988), the end result being that two friends grew apart. I wonder now, what might have made it easier for me to have come out to Winston years before. Perhaps some sort of sign from him, a *corrective emotional experience* (Alexander, 1946/1974) similar to those that Sterling had would have helped, for we saw how they seemed to help move Sterling from a less disempowered place (R. Sandil, personal communication, April 29, 2010). Maybe that is what I could have used from Winston, and in hindsight, I see now how he actually did give me this, but apparently, I was too closeted to see it at the time.



Regardless, Winston's annoyance appears to echo that which is sometimes experienced by heterosexual parents of LGBT children, where there can be a desire to have been informed of their child's sexuality sooner, and where a LGBT child's coming out can often work in a way to bring parents and LGBT children closer together (Ben-Ari, 1995). Certainly, this is not always the case, and many LGBT youth still face severe hardships from their parents, but as Ben-Ari (1995) notes, there is a difference between *privacy* and *intimacy*, where privacy is "reflected in connotations of solitude, secrecy, and autonomy" but intimacy relates to "themes of closeness – sharing, exchanging, and knowing the innermost" (p. 156).

The Don't Ask Don't Tell policy assumes that openly LGBT people will disrupt unit cohesion and morale (Frank, 2009), but actually, it may be secrecy that could be problematic, for "secrecy," Ben-Ari (1995) reminds us, "precludes sharing" (p. 156). To paraphrase another close, personal, heterosexual, Caucasian, male friend, with whom I discussed my sexuality and research, *Whenever you share more intimate and personal things with a friend, I always believe it makes you closer.* This seems to be a point that the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may miss. With a trend toward smaller, more intimate military units, as Winston discussed with me, allowing LGBT people to come out to their fellow soldiers might actually increase, not decrease, unit cohesion and morale, an area for future research, for it can move people closer together (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cameron & Hargreaves, 2005), as it did with Winston and me. Something similar, it seems, could happen with those in the military, where camaraderie might increase, not decrease, if people were permitted to be more genuine and honest with each other.

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APPENDIX A  
INITIAL ONLINE SCREENING SURVEY

*Welcome*

Welcome to the Open Secret Project, part of a doctoral dissertation in Counseling Psychology by Andrew D. Reichert at Texas A&M University.

The open secret refers to a peculiar time in the lives of some LGBT people (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) who have come out of the closet or whose sexuality is suspected by others, but not discussed. It's when people know, and people know that they know, but everyone pretends not to know (i.e., the elephant in the room). The purpose of this project is to learn more about the open secret and how it may relate to one or more psychological variables, such as stress, denial, or coping strategies.

Here's how you can help: If you have a story or an example of the open secret in your life and you are willing to be interviewed through a series of confidential email conversations, then please complete this initial screening survey. A final sample of participants will be selected for interviews based on the initial screening results. All names and identifying information, such as email addresses, will be kept strictly confidential to the extent allowed by law. As an added safety feature, this survey site is secured with SSL encryption. To learn more about the project, click "next" below, for a review of some Frequently Asked Questions or send me an email.

Thanks for your interest in the Open Secret Project.

Andrew D. Reichert, MS

*Frequently Asked Questions*

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions about the Open Secret Project. To continue to the initial screening survey, click "next" below.

1. Do I have to use my real name? No, you may use a pseudonym, but you will need to have a valid email address to participate in the confidential email interviews. Any names and other identifying information will be kept strictly confidential and disguised or altered if used for any publication.

2. Who will have access to my real name and any other confidential information? Only the principal investigator, Andrew D. Reichert, a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Texas A&M University.

3. Are there any limits to confidentiality? Yes, generally speaking, all information will be kept strictly confidential to the extent allowed by law, but there are some legal and ethical exceptions to confidentiality, including but not limited to (a) serious threat to health or safety, (b) child abuse, (c) adult/elderly abuse, and (d) compliance with court orders. For more information about limits to confidentiality, please contact the principal investigator: Andrew D. Reichert at AReichert@tamu.edu.

4. Do I get paid to participate? No, there is no compensation for participation, but your participation is appreciated and will contribute to an under-researched topic.

5. Do I have to sign a consent form? No, submitting the screening survey will serve as your consent to participate if you are 18 years of age or older. You are also free to stop participating at any time for any reason.

6. Do I have to be 18 years of age or older? Yes, only adults age 18 or older are being recruited for this research study. Future research might be conducted to examine the open secret in the lives of adolescents.

7. Do I have to be gay or out of the closet to participate? No, all sexual and gender orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, straight, queer, questioning, etc.) may participate, as well as those who are partially or fully in or out of the closet.

8. What's the screening survey? The screening survey asks some basic demographic questions and will give you an opportunity to briefly write about your experience of the open secret. Based on the screening surveys, a final sample of participants will be selected for a series of individual confidential interviews by email.

9. Are the screening survey and online interviews secure? Yes, the screening survey is conducted through an SSL encrypted website and free encryption is available for any of the final interview participants who are concerned about email security.

10. What determines if I get picked for the email interviews? The final sample of participants will be selected based on a variety of factors, including demographic diversity (i.e., a broad range of age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location, primarily within the USA), online availability, and experience of the open secret.

11. How will I know if I get picked? You will be notified by email either way.

12. How long will it take? The initial screening survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. Those selected for the confidential email interviews may spend a total of 2–3 hours (over a 2–3 week period) exchanging a series of confidential emails with the principal investigator.

13. Who do I contact for more information? You may contact the principal investigator: Andrew D. Reichert, Doctoral Student, Counseling Psychology Program, Texas A&M University, AReichert@tamu.edu

14. Is this research approved? Yes, this research is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas A&M University. For more information about the IRB, please contact: The Office of Research Compliance, Texas A&M University at [researchcompliance.tamu.edu](http://researchcompliance.tamu.edu)

Click "next" below to proceed to the initial screening survey.

### *Demographic Questions*

To begin the Initial Screening Survey, please complete the following demographic questions.

1. Please complete the following contact information. Remember, all names and identifying information will be kept strictly confidential to the extent allowed by law and changed or altered if used for any publication.

- Name
- City/Town
- State
- Country
- Email address

2. Are you a U.S. citizen? If not, what is your nationality?

3. What is your primary language for reading and writing?

4. What is your current age? Remember, only participants age 18 or older are being recruited for this research project. Future research may include adolescents and/or children under the age of 18.

5. How do you identify your sex (e.g., male, female, other, etc.)?

6. How do you identify your race, culture, and/or ethnicity (e.g., African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, etc.)?

7. On average, approximately how many personal (i.e., not work- or school-related) hours per week do you spend online?

*Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity Questions*

1. How do you identify your sexual orientation and/or gender identity (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, MTF, FTM, queer, questioning, straight, etc.)?
2. If applicable, where would you rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 in terms of how closeted or out of the closet you currently see yourself as being, with 1 being "not out to anybody" and 10 being "out to everybody"? Please feel free to clarify your answer if needed (e.g., out to nobody at home, but everybody at work, etc.).
3. If applicable, at what age did you begin coming out to yourself and/or to others? Or, if applicable, at what age were you outed (i.e., had your sexual orientation and/or gender identity discovered and disclosed without your approval)? Please briefly describe:

*Experience of the Open Secret Questions*

1. Before learning about this research project, had you ever heard of the open secret? If yes, please briefly describe when and where, etc.
2. Please briefly describe your experience(s) of the open secret. Feel free to elaborate as much as needed (e.g., if applicable, tell a story of what happened, including how you felt, what you did, what happened next, etc.).
3. Would you say this is an isolated example or ongoing, and/or are there other occasions of the open secret in your life? Please briefly describe as needed.
4. How often, in general, do you feel that you experience the open secret in your life (e.g., daily, monthly, whenever home for the holidays, etc.)? Please briefly describe as needed.
5. Overall, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your feelings about the open secret in your life, with 1 being "perfectly okay with it" (e.g., maybe it helps you cope with awkward situations) and 10 being "perfectly not okay with it" (e.g., maybe it makes you feel frustrated or dishonest). Please briefly describe as needed.

*Childhood, Religion/Spirituality, and Relationship Questions*

1. Please briefly describe your childhood and the family in which you grew up.
2. Please briefly describe your religious/spiritual life or upbringing.

3. Are you in a long-term committed relationship? If yes, how long have you been in this relationship? Please briefly describe your relationship, including any prior long-term committed relationships you have had.

4. If applicable, do you and/or your partner/spouse/significant other ever edit, monitor, or censor yourselves, in terms of your LGBT identity among family, friends, or coworkers (e.g., "acting straight" or "not flaunting yourself," etc.). If yes, please briefly describe.

### *Final Questions*

1. Are you currently or have you ever been in the military or other type of service (e.g., police, fire department, EMS, etc.). If yes, please briefly describe, including any thoughts on how the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy may relate to your experience of the open secret.

2. Do you currently, or have you ever, played sports, either professionally, as an amateur, or just for fun? If so, please briefly describe, including any thoughts on how your athletic experience(s) may relate to the open secret in your life.

3. Are you currently, or have you ever been, in a very public role, where your name or face might be easily recognizable (e.g., acting, TV/radio news, corporate officer, etc.). If yes, please briefly describe, including any remarks on how your public role may relate to your experience of the open secret.

4. Finally, please feel free to share any other information you wish about the open secret or this research project. Thank you!

### *Concluding Remarks*

Thank you for completing this initial screening survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will help further knowledge regarding this topic. Your responses will be reviewed within the next few weeks, and you will be notified by email if you are selected for (a) an email interview, (b) as an alternate participant, or (c) if your participation is not needed at this time. Remember, by submitting this screening survey, you are giving your consent as an adult, age 18 or older, to participate in this research, and you are free to end your participation at any time for any reason. Again, thank you for completing this screening survey. Clicking "done" below should close this screen and save your responses.

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Texas A&M University  
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## APPENDIX B

## SAMPLE RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Texas A&M University, currently conducting research on the *open secret*, a phrase that describes a peculiar time in the lives of some LGBT people whose sexual orientation may be known by family members, friends, and/or coworkers, but rarely if ever discussed (i.e., elephant in the room situations).

If you believe that you have experienced the open secret in your life (regardless of whether you are LGBT or straight), then I would like to invite you to visit the link below where you can find more information about the open secret and take a brief screening survey that will ask about your experience of the open secret.

To learn more about the open secret and take the brief screening survey, please click on the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XBH6WX5>

Thank you,

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## APPENDIX C

## GAY MILITARY SIGNAL ARTICLE

Research on the Open Secret:

Possible Implications for Don't Ask Don't Tell

Andrew D. Reichert

Texas A&M University

April 21, 2009

As a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Texas A&M University, I am currently conducting research on the open secret, a phrase sometimes used to describe situations where a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) person's sexuality is known, but not discussed. For example, Kenji Yoshino, a dean and law professor at Yale University and the author of *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, notes that, "Many gay people have had this experience of the 'open secret.' I was gay – she knew I was gay – I knew she knew I was gay ... [But] because I would never acknowledge our collective knowledge, she could not do so either. So we carried on – each week more strained than the last" (p. 62).

To date, I have collected 113 responses to an online survey regarding the open secret, from which I am currently conducting follow-up interviews with many of my respondents. The participants represent a variety of demographics, including sex, race, sexual orientation, and age, ranging from 18 to 77 years. Additionally, the participants represent a variety of educational and vocational backgrounds, including those who have served in the military, both before and during the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

Although still preliminary, one theme that appears to be emerging from the qualitative data is the concept that a GLBT person's coming out of the closet may actually help bring people closer together, rather than drive them further apart. The Don't Ask Don't Tell policy assumes that the presence of openly GLBT servicemembers will undermine unit cohesion and morale, when actually, it is the secrecy and anxiety associated with the policy that may be what truly undermines unit cohesion and morale. One soldier, for example, commented that after he came out, he was able to talk more openly and honestly with others in his unit, many of whom already suspected that he was gay, but were unable to mention it, for fear of getting him in trouble. Of course, he could not mention it either, and yet, it was there – people knew, but could not talk about it.



This scenario is not unique to just one soldier, as it is a theme emerging from several of my interviews. It appears that it may be the secrecy – the knowing, but not knowing for sure preoccupation that may relate to stress and mistrust that may then lead to the undermining of unit cohesion and low morale. Indeed, in his book, *Modern Homosexualities*, Peter Davies writes that a GLBT person’s “partial disclosure is inherently unstable” (p. 79) and puts social strain on friendships. The best approach, according to Davies, is when either nobody knows or everybody knows.

The military’s policy is designed so that nobody knows, but in reality, people do know; yet, they cannot confirm their knowledge by asking or telling, and that is what seems to be problematic. If GLBT servicemembers were allowed to simply disclose their sexual orientation – get it out in the open, let everyone talk about it, and then move on – the secrecy and mistrust could dissipate. The policy suggests that people in the military cannot handle having an openly GLBT person in their midst. This would seem to seriously underestimate the intelligence and abilities of American’s men and women in uniform.

#### About the Author

Andrew D. Reichert is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Texas A&M University. An ordained minister in The United Methodist Church, he holds a Master of Science in Educational Psychology from Texas A&M University and a Master of Divinity from Duke University. He can be reached at [AREichert@tamu.edu](mailto:AREichert@tamu.edu).

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## EDUCATION

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## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Graduate Hall Director, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, 2005–2009

Volunteer Coordinator, Project Transitions, Inc., Austin, TX, 2001–2005

Senior Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Bastrop, TX 1998–2001

Pastor, First United Methodist Church, Menard, TX 1995–1998

## HONORS AND AWARDS

Graduate Student of the Year Diversity Award, Department of Multicultural Services,  
Texas A&M University, 2006

Volunteer Manager of the Year Award, Directors of Volunteers in Austin, TX, 2005

Eagle Scout with Bronze Palm, 1985