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Citizens at War: Reframing LGBTQ+ Military Insecurity

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Abstract

As an institution, the U.S. Military allows a certain strain of heteronormative masculinity to flourish, subsequently pushing to the margins individuals who do not fit such a standard. In this paper, I use this phenomenon as the basis for an exploration of the different forms of insecurity experienced by LGBTQ+ persons within the military, a project that necessarily includes viewing security as a holistic issue, rather than just as one which affects a person's immediate physical safety. I engage in a project of seeking out a linguistic framework through which to deconstruct LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military that is both all-encompassing of the community's needs, and is politically expedient, thereby providing channels for future activism and policy change. First, I explain and critique two common frameworks – rights and national security – pointing out both the benefits and the potential inadequacies of each. I then explore a third linguistic framework, one which focuses on citizenship, as I believe that it has the most potential both for recognizing the full scope of LGBTQ+ insecurities within the military and facilitating political progress. I explain the necessity of a fluid definition of citizenship, and use this to make brief suggestions for theorists engaging in deconstructive projects in the future.

Introduction

Despite the passage of laws prohibiting discrimination based on an individual's gender or sexuality, the LGBTQ+ community remains greatly disadvantaged on both a legal and social level. Understanding these disadvantages as insecurities, rather than just personal biases, places them within political discourse, as it makes clear the relationship between insecurities and policies that fail to prevent – or even explicitly facilitate – them. The phenomenon of LGBTQ+ insecurity is especially apparent within the military, where implicit and explicit ideas of heteronormative masculinity are evident. An individual's military experience is shaped by both interactions with other servicemembers, and by the relationship between individual soldiers and policies. It is then possible to study policy through political-philosophical frameworks, which makes clear the social ideas behind them.

In this paper, I begin by exploring security as a multifaceted issue, one which is best captured by a paradigm known as human security. I then analyze two ways of understanding LGBTQ+ insecurities within the military, both of which have merit but are incomplete on their own. I describe the potential downfalls of these two frameworks before describing what I find a more convincing one: citizenship. My paper concludes with a brief discussion of potential approaches to reframing discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ individuals within the military in terms of citizenship, as I believe that doing so will both recognize a wide range of issues and provide a feasible and politically expedient method through which to address these issues.

LGBTQ+ Insecurity

In order to understand the full scope of LGBTQ+ insecurity both in and outside of the military, it is important to grant that security is a fluid concept that is not captured fully by theories that define it in terms of physical vulnerability alone. Traditional security models center on the importance of preventing physical attacks against a specific population, but recent scholars have begun to view this approach as inadequate. Instead, insecurity is best thought of through a human security paradigm, which has grown in popularity since the 1990s because it focuses on "problems created by humankind" without limiting itself to a study of physical violence, often showing the effects of actions that target individuals.[1] Human security allows for analyses of "both direct and indirect violence," which thus renders it well-equipped to rectify a number of non-traditional security threats.[2] Throughout this paper, I will use such a definition of security, as I will assume that security threats include a variety that are predictably harmful to an individual's well-being. Viewing security in this way elucidates many of the insecurities that LGBTQ+ individuals within the military face because of their identities and making these issues visible helps facilitate discourse and political change.

Policy-based indirect violence against LGBTQ+ persons in the military contributes to their insecurity. One example of this is the G.I. Bill of Rights, a piece of legislation passed in 1944 at the conclusion of World War II with the intention of helping re-assimilate returning veterans into civilian life. The G.I. Bill gave these veterans access to education, vocational training, and financial resources to ease their transition from service. Margot Canaday writes extensively on this bill, focusing on the ways that it was unjust for gay service members, especially in the years immediately following its passage. The full extent of the G.I. Bill's benefits were "most accessible to white middle-class men" leaving the military, especially those who were not discharged for known or suspected "homosexual acts or tendencies."[3] Soldiers removed for homosexuality were issued a blue discharge, which is neither honorable nor dishonorable. Though the initial provisions of the bill were supposed to allow anyone with a non-dishonorable discharge to reap its benefits, the undesirable blue discharge was still excluded, a strategic move intended to harm men who were discharged based on sexual orientation.[4] The bill's language, then, allowed men who were discharged for homosexuality to be denied the economic and education benefits given to straight men who were not discharged dishonorably. The human security model that I am assuming allows this to be conceptualized as an instance of LGBTQ+ insecurity, as economic stability is a fundamental component of well-being.

Another policy-based threat to LGBTQ+ security affects both members of the military and civilians: healthcare access. Veterans who were discharged for homosexuality were also denied access to healthcare services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, though many of them later gained the ability to appeal their discharge statuses in order to regain access to service members' benefits.[5] Similarly to the economic stability granted under the G.I. Bill, having access

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1   Patrick Hayden, "Constraining War: Human Security and the Human Right to Peace," *Human Rights Review* 6, no. 1 (2004): 35.

2   Ibid, 39.

3   Margot Canaday, "Building a Straight State: Sexuality and Social Citizenship under the 1944 G.I. Bill," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (2003): 935.

4   Ibid, 943.

5   Aaron Glantz, "Veterans Battle to Regain 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Losses," *The New York*

to reliable and affordable healthcare is encompassed in the human security paradigm, as scholars recognize how imperative it is for a strong quality of life. This issue is not exclusive to LGBTQ+ veterans. A 2016 report explains that LGBTQ+ people in the rural United States face "decreased access to care and lower rates of screening for multiple preventable or treatable diseases" compared to cisgender and heterosexual persons, due to a number of psychological and social factors making this care more difficult to access.[6] Like the distribution of G.I. Bill benefits, a human security model allows for complications in obtaining adequate healthcare to be thought of as insecurities.

The two frameworks that I will explain and critique – along with the one that I will propose – serve as potential methods to redress a broad range of issues facing LGBTQ+ individuals in the military. They create a conceptual space within which these insecurities may be deconstructed, thereby enabling scholars to understand the conditions that create insecurity.

Traditional Frameworks for Deconstructing LGBTQ+ Insecurity

There are two dominant linguistic frameworks that are traditionally used to deconstruct and understand instances of LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military. The first is a rights discourse, which portrays insecurities as violations of individuals' rights, and the second frames them as risks to national security more broadly. As both rights and security are often linked with military service, the two frameworks offer interesting methods for deconstructing insecurity specifically within the military. Both frameworks make valuable contributions to addressing LGBTQ+ insecurity, as LGBTQ+ rights cannot and should not be fully separated from the discourse on basic human rights, and national security and conceptions of the common good ideally attempt to provide a more secure environment for a greater number of individuals. Taken alone, though, neither one is able both to (1) address a wide range of insecurities fully and (2) provide a politically expedient means of rectifying them.

Much discussion framing LGBTQ+ injustices and legal battles, especially in recent years, uses human- or civil-rights-based language. The largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization in the United States is the Human Rights Campaign, a name which suggest that human rights is the default framework for studying issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, a United Nations report regarding homophobic violence and discrimination was produced by the UN's Human Rights Council, again assuming that LGBTQ+ insecurity ought to be delegated to a human rights focus. Such an approach to security is legitimized and enabled by understanding security as a multifaceted issue. Patrick Hayden writes of a "human right to peace" as a "justifiable and necessary cornerstone" to an ideal security model.[7] Thus, though his work does not focus only on LGBTQ+ persons within the military, the language he uses allows his work to be applied to a variety of instances of LGBTQ+ insecurity.

Though the concept of human rights has facilitated much social progress for the LGBTQ+ community, it may not be the best option for influencing policy decisions. Angelia R. Wilson considers human rights framings' flaws by concentrating on what is at stake when we rely on this approach alone as an approach to LGBTQ+ issues.[8] She proposes a shift toward an approach that

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Times, April 30, 2011.

6   J. Whitehead, John Shaver, and Rob Stephenson, "Outness, Stigma, and Primary Health Care Utilization among Rural LGBT Populations," *Plos ONE* 11, no. 1 (2016): 2.

7   Ibid, 40.

8   Angelia R. Wilson, "The 'Neat Concept' of Sexual Citizenship: A Cautionary Tale for Hu-

I will explore in greater detail later, one that focuses on citizenship. Wilson believes that there is "a power relationship between the state and the individual," one which must be understood before we can examine LGBTQ+ insecurity.[9] If we study queer theory without understanding the power dynamics informed by and influencing it, we will not gain the fullest possible understanding of how LGBTQ+ insecurity operates and can be eradicated. Wilson's argument is that "a claim to human rights is not enough," as such claims tend to miss the middle ground between theoretical rights language and practical steps taken toward securing rights.[10]

Catherine Connell provides a striking example of an instance in which human rights as a framework was inadequate for addressing an LGBTQ+ insecurity: advocating for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT), a policy that for nearly two decades barred openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from military service. Connell traces DADT's evolution from the demedicalization of homosexuality in the 1960s to the more tolerant – but still not ideal – social climate in the 1990s that saw the bill's enactment.[11] She then analyzes the political climate surrounding DADT, especially while repeal was being sought, aiming to highlight activists' strategies for gaining political recognition and ultimately success. Activists initially based their position on a civil or human rights claim, arguing that all Americans have the same right to enlist in the military.[12] Though rights were a strong rallying point for activists, this approach was unsuccessful for both the DADT repeal and a number of other issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Connell points out one major flaw in the adoption of a rights-based framework for the DADT repeal: "it first requires buy-in to the idea that people deserve sexuality based protections."[13] Thus, without a major social shift that changes individuals' opinions about the LGBTQ+ community, a human rights approach to LGBTQ+ insecurity will not be successful.

Connell's work shows that relying on human rights to address LGBTQ+ insecurity within the military is not an effective approach, as it does not acknowledge the convictions of those who are fundamentally opposed to rights for marginalized sexuality groups. Though human rights may be conceptually strong, such an approach fails to facilitate the discussions that would ultimately lead to policy victories. Connell suggests a shift toward a national security framework that acknowledges traditionally conservative concerns despite working toward liberal goals. Activists working toward the DADT repeal needed to use a frame that would appeal to an audience beyond those who were LGBTQ+ rights advocates, convincing skeptics that "DADT actually threatens [military] readiness and security" by preventing individuals with valuable skills from enlisting.[14] Connell's work therefore shows the value of addressing LGBTQ+ insecurity through a bipartisan approach, as doing so allows activists to build upon a wider range of people's desires, eliminating the need to accept a liberal set of social beliefs before understanding the implications of insecurities.

In her study of political discourse through the lens of queer theory, Jasbir Puar's work offers a response to Connell's assertion that LGBTQ issues are best addressed by reference to

man Rights Discourse," *Contemporary Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 74.
9   Ibid.
10   Ibid, 82.
11   Catherine Connell, "Right to Serve or Responsibility to Protect? Civil Rights Framing and the DADT Repeal," *Boston University Law Review* 95 (2015): 1016.
12   Ibid, 1020.
13   Ibid, 1025.
14   Ibid, 1021.

national security. She argues that "proper homosexual subjects" are those easily assimilated into the larger culture, as they are not readily viewed as threats to national cohesion in a society shaped by heterosexual norms.[15] When homosexuality is not welcomed for assimilation, though, LGBTQ+ persons' identities become politicized, as homosexual language and imagery is applied to terrorists to emasculate them and portray them as 'others.' For example, she describes visual media after the September 11 attacks, like "a website where weapons are provided to sodomize Osama bin Laden to death," showing the weaponization of homosexuality.[16] Ultimately, such images say that homosexuality is a punishment, and ought not to be accepted as a natural part of individuals' lives. Coupled with the declaration of the War on Terror, then, Puar's work describes another backward step for LGBTQ+ military members, as soldiers are taught to identify potential terrorists as fundamentally unlike themselves. Therefore, images that assign homosexual characteristics to terrorists give the impression that homosexuality is essentially an antithesis to military values, opening the door for it to be marked as dangerous elsewhere.

Puar writes that "even as patriotism immediately after September 11 was inextricably tied to a reinvigoration of heterosexual norms for Americans, progressive sexuality was championed as a hallmark of U.S. modernity," drawing attention to the dual usage of queer linguistic references in terrorism discourse.[17] The U.S. will use language and images that are derogatory toward LGBTQ+ persons, but simultaneously attempts to present itself as progressive relative to the countries it fights against, in an attempt to uphold the ideal American freedom. As the link between terrorism and national security is fairly explicit, Puar's work reveals the drawbacks of the approach that Connell suggests in her work on DADT. Creating a link between LGBTQ+ identities and national security makes it possible to begin weaponizing homosexuality, which is ultimately harmful to servicemembers.

What else may prevent national security from being the best framework for deconstructing LGBTQ+ military insecurity? When policymakers focus on national security issues as opposed to human rights, they necessarily focus on the collective state rather than rectifying individuals' insecurities, or even those of communities within the state. Even though national security may be a more attractive option than human rights to a greater number of people, it does not capture the full breadth of issues faced by LGBTQ+ persons within the military because it focuses on state security. This causes issues that affect individuals, or even groups of individuals, to go unnoticed. For example, "coercive forms of military masculinity" enable rapes by and against male soldiers to be viewed as emasculating and representative of a hegemonic gendered power dynamic.[18] This effect is compounded by the shame felt by the victims of these attacks, as they often feel that their masculinity has been challenged while simultaneously knowing that their attackers will likely evade punishment.[19] Because of what sexual violence represents to its victims and its perpetrators, it is important to recognize that the military as an institution represents traditional

15   Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 140.

16   Ibid, 38.

17   Ibid, 41.

18   Aaron Belkin, "Spam Filter: Gay Rights and the Normalization of Male-Male Rape in the US Military," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 181.

19   Nathaniel Penn, "Son, Men Don't Get Raped," GQ, http://www.gq.com/long-form/male-military-rape.

masculine values, which compounds the effect of emasculation.[20] Even if these attacks represent a larger pattern of military social relations, they are still commonly thought of as attacks against individuals, and are therefore given a relatively small amount of conceptual space in discussions of individuals' military experiences and national security more broadly. Further, concern about disrupting the military's 'normal' processes may hinder prosecution of the perpetrators of these attacks. Therefore, deconstructing insecurity through national security may marginalize issues that affect individuals.

Citizenship in Analyses of LGBTQ+ Military Insecurity

Though there are merits to deconstructing LGBTQ+ insecurity in the military via rights or national security, neither of these frameworks is able to lead to a solution that is both politically expedient and captures the full extent of insecurity. Recognizing citizenship as a fluid status claim rather than purely as a legal designation means that the origins of it cannot be easily understood, as it arises through discourse rather than through policies. Foucault writes on the role of discourse in shaping political thought, writing that each state "has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth," meaning that the discourse spread by government institutions is relative to the social conditions under which it is conceived.[21] By making certain statements "function as true," states are able to give legitimate meaning to concepts that may otherwise only exist abstractly.[22] This underscores the importance of understanding the power dynamics at work within discourse, as the ideas that become dominant are often those most favored by whomever is in power. If political discourse is controlled by a hegemonically heterosexual state institution, the ideas it produces become reflective of this. Puar discusses the dis-identification of terrorists as citizens, describing it as a "process of sexualization" in which terrorists are simultaneously portrayed as anti-American and depicted as homosexuals.[23] This rhetoric is harmful as it suggests that terrorists' non-citizenship is intimately connected with these sexually charged images, therefore promoting a view that allows all LGBTQ+ persons, including those in the military, to be viewed as threats to national security. In this way, citizenship is formulated discursively in a way that designates certain individuals as non-citizens, suggesting that their non-citizenship is part of their deviance.

Linda Kerber, a historian specializing in the development over time of feminist theory, analyzes an instance of discourse being inadvertently influenced by political thought. She describes a toast given by Sarah Jay shortly after the Revolutionary War ended, in which she declares, "May all our Citizens be Soldiers, and all our Soldiers Citizens."[24] Kerber believes that Jay was doing more than just reciting a patriotic platitude; she posits that it was influenced by a political discourse that defined citizenship through military enlistment.[25] Though her work focuses on how women were excluded from discourse because they were barred from combat positions, under DADT

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20   Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014): 54.

21   Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1988 (Power),* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 131.

22   Ibid.

23   Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 38.

24   Linda Kerber, "May All Our Citizens be Soldiers and All Our Soldiers Citizens: The Ambiguities of Female Citizenship in the New Nation," in *Women, Militarism, & War: Essays in History, Politics, and Social Theory,* ed. Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), 90.

25   Ibid, 92.

the same would apply to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who wished to be open about their identities. Kerber describes the historical applicability of this discourse, tracing it back to Ancient Greek ideas, as many early political philosophers saw military service as on par with civic engagement.[26]

Present-day discussions about citizenship also liken it to a certain baseline level of civic engagement, described by Dennis F. Thompson as "the present and future capacity for influencing politics."[27] Many scholars take this literally, as they equate voting with citizenship. This misses the non-voting ways – including military service – that individuals can influence politics, and it assumes that everyone with the ability to vote is granted the same citizenship status. Instead, Thompson theorizes "degrees of citizenship" as determined by two conditions: autonomy and improvability.[28] An issue arises, then, when access to the resources allowing individuals to act upon their autonomy and improvability are not equitably distributed.

Following Thompson's model, the G.I. Bill of Rights would be a violation of individuals' citizenship because it did not fairly distribute the resources that enabled a greater level of economic autonomy and improvability to soldiers discharged for homosexuality. The aspects of the G.I. Bill denied to soldiers discharged for homosexuality were components of "social citizenship" as they would ensure recipients a greater level of social and economic stability.[29] Because these advantages were only granted to a certain group of people, they placed individuals at different levels of citizenship. Similarly, DADT challenged the notion of autonomy as "treating each citizen as the best judge of his own interest" by enabling the government to ban an entire group of persons who were otherwise qualified to serve from enlisting.[30] Deconstructing both of these issues affecting LGBTQ+ individuals in the military via citizenship, then, draws attention to their roots as insecurities.

Reframing LGBTQ+ Military Insecurity through Citizenship

T.H. Marshall describes the separate elements of citizenship as culminating in "a status bestowed upon those who are full members of a community," in that they, though different, are afforded the same "rights and duties" associated with citizenship.[31] Citizenship, therefore, is deeply rooted in equality. Marshall notes that civil rights discourse allows for economic and social inequalities to persist by treating each man as fundamentally independent and responsible for himself, rather than acknowledging the legally-sanctioned institutions like the military that enable inequality to persist.[32] Citizenship "provided the foundation of equality on which the structure of inequality could be built" in present-day capitalism, which enabled people to recognize that a society built upon identical legal status for different groups was not enough, and new forms of rights began to emerge, causing citizenship discussions to be focused on social, rather than purely

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26   Ibid.

27   Dennis F. Thompson, *The Democratic Citizen: Social Science and Democratic Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 2.

28   Ibid, 13.

29   Canaday, "Straight State," 955.

30   Ibid.

31   T.H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Inequality and Society,* ed. Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009), 149.

32   Ibid, 150.

legal, distinctions.[33]

In order to determine whether an insecurity is an instance of diminished citizenship status, theorists might combine Thompson and Marshall's theories. Thompson provides two strong yet fluid criteria that can be used to assess a given scenario: autonomy and improvability, as conditions that allow for both of these can be thought to respect individuals' citizenship. Marshall's critique of citizenship as equality may also be applied, because he acknowledges that this definition limits discourse by asking us to consider all citizens as citizens to the same extent. Instead, if we frame citizenship as Thompson suggests and then use the disparities in these qualities to show that individuals – regardless of their legal citizenship – are not granted equivalent citizenship, then we may gain a more comprehensive view of how insecurities for LGBTQ+ persons in the military are brought about by the unequal distribution of citizenship.

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33   Ibid, 151.

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