

# **Reflections on policy and practices: LGBT veterans' experiences while in the military**

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# Background

- **Barriers to LGBT veteran research**
  - “Don’t ask, don’t tell” (1993)
  - Studies of veterans do not assess sexual orientation
  - Sampling difficulties
- **Gates (2004) Urban Institute Report**
  - Used 2000 Census data
    - Estimated 36,000 active duty gay men and lesbians
    - Nearly 1 million gay and lesbian Americans are veterans
      - (largest % in CA, FL, TX, NY, GA, DC metro)

# Research Questions

- How is “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy related to the experiences of LGBT veterans in the military?
- How can policy be informed by the experiences of LGBT veterans?

# Measures

- **Demographics**
- **Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), modified**
- **Military Experiences**
  - Service history, branch, etc.
  - Newly-created (26 item) measure
- **Trauma History**
  - Assessed for Criterion A traumas before, during, and after military service
- **Current Mental Health**
  - Depression (PHQ-9)
  - PTSD (PCL-C; Weathers, Huska, & Keane, 1991)
  - Alcohol use (AUDIT)
  - Suicidal behavior history
- **Current Physical Health**
- **Utilization of VA health care services**
  - What services currently used?
  - Would like to use, but don't...?

# Sampling and Procedure

- Websites, email listserv recruitment
- National and regional LGBT periodicals
- Data collected online 5/2004-1/2005
  - Inherent sampling bias
  - Over 300 questions
  - No incentive provided for respondents

# Participants

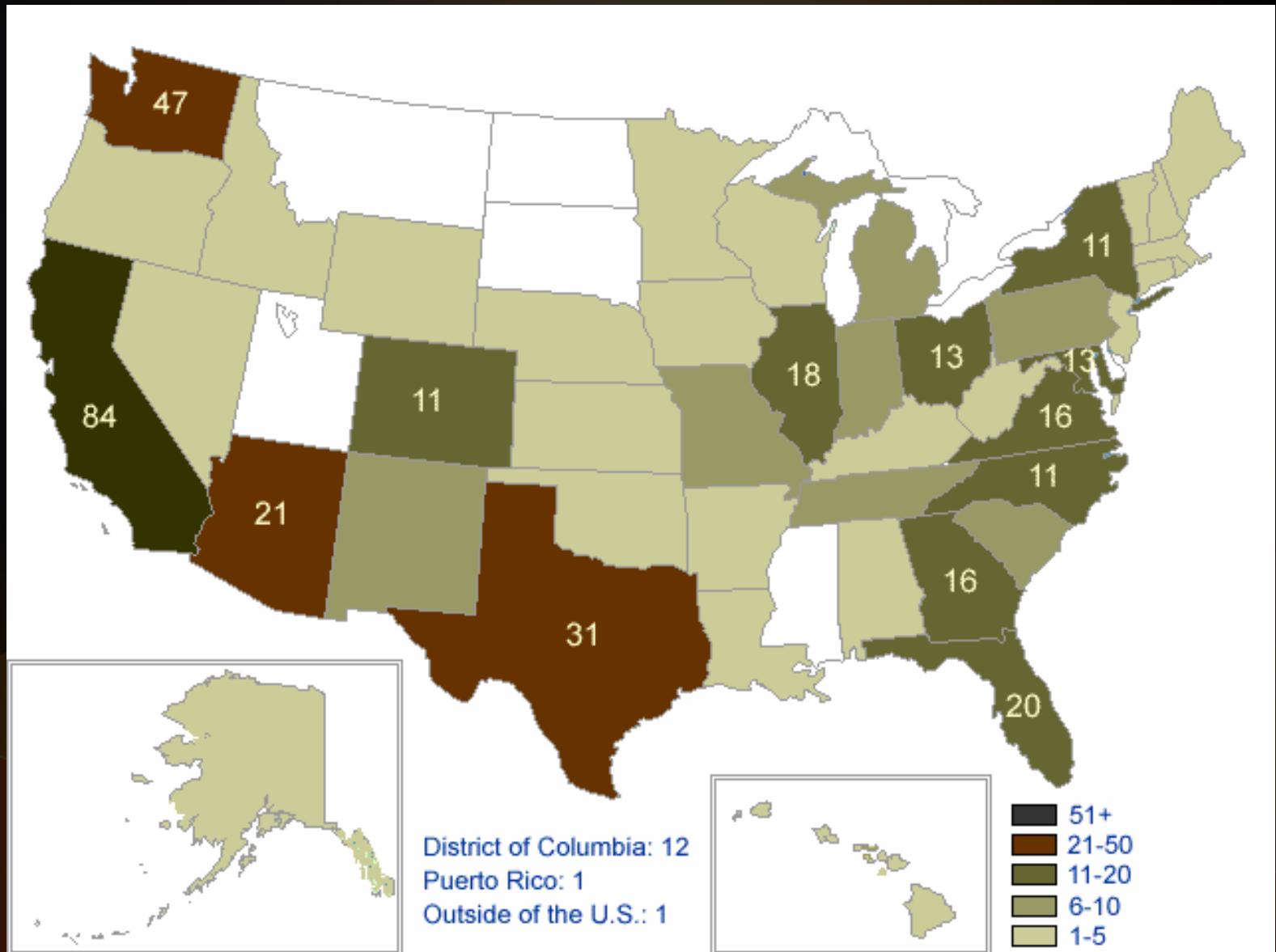
- 445 completed the survey
- **Age:** M = 45.4 (SD = 13.5)
- **Gender:**
  - 64.7% male, 27.2% female
  - 8.1% transgender or "other"

- **Ethnicity:**



- **Sexual orientation**
  - 88.7% lesbian or gay
  - 7.2% bisexual
- **Timing of Military Service**
  - 58.1% left the military before "don't ask, don't tell" policy existed
  - 41.9% left the military after "don't ask, don't tell" policy was in place

# Participants: Geographical Distribution



# Results

- Participants reported the following experiences due to their sexual orientation while in the military
  - Investigation regarding sexual orientation (36.2%, n=161)
  - Forced to leave the military (16.0%, n=71)
  - Isolation from their unit (14.8%, n=66)
    - 2.0% were incarcerated
  - Denial of promotion (12.4%, n=52)
  - Forced to undergo a psychiatric evaluation (11.7%, n=52)
- There were no differences in the frequency of these events before or after "don't ask, don't tell"



# Results

- Participants reported experiencing the following events due to sexual orientation while in the military
  - Verbal attacks (34.0%, n=141)
  - Unwanted sexual experiences (27.4%, n=113)
  - Threats of being "outed" to the military (26.1%, n=109)
  - Threats of physical violence (19.4%, n=80)
  - Property damage (8.7%, n=36)
  - Sexual assault (8.7%, n=36)
- There were no differences in the frequency of these events before or after "don't ask, don't tell"

# Results

- Some violent events due to sexual orientation occurred less frequently after “don’t ask, don’t tell”

	Before	After	$\chi^2$	$p$
Being beaten	10.8%	4.6%	5.20	.02
Being assaulted with a weapon	4.9%	0.6%	6.37	.01

- Perception of a hostile attitude toward LGBT individuals while in the military appears to have decreased for veterans after “don’t ask, don’t tell” ( $t = 2.229$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $d = .223$ )

# Conclusions

- “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy does not appear to have changed the frequency of discriminatory and traumatic events related to sexual orientation

# Conclusions

- Frequency of some acts of violence appear to have decreased
- Perception of hostile attitudes towards LGBT individuals does seem to have shifted with “don’t ask, don’t tell”
  - Cohort effect?

# Conclusions

- It appears that “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy may not be enough to protect our LGBT military personnel from discriminatory experiences
- This policy may need revision

# Limitations

- Self-report
- Retrospective bias
- Biased sample

# Acknowledgements

- The Michael D. Palm Center
- LGBT veterans of our Armed Forces