

Effects of Workplace Anti-Discrimination Policies on Families: Evidence from “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

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Abstract

The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) in 2011 marked a significant shift in U.S. military policy, allowing lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals to serve openly without risking discharge. Using a difference-in-differences approach paired with data from the 2008-2019 American Community Survey, I leverage information on active-duty military employees and their families to study the effects of the DADT repeal on same-sex partnership formation and downstream economic outcomes. I find that repealing DADT substantially increased same-sex partnership among women in the military while having no effect on same-sex partnership rates among active duty men. These effects were not limited to family structure – I also show that civilian women in same-sex partnerships with active-duty women are more likely to have military health insurance coverage following the DADT repeal. This paper provides the first evidence of the effects of repealing DADT on sexual minorities in the military, shedding new light on the relationship between workplace discrimination and family formation and contributing to the broader literature on LGBTQ+ rights and policies.

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1 Introduction

Two of the most important economic decisions that an individual will make in their lifetime are their choice of career and their choice of a life partner. Both decisions significantly impact household formation, lifetime wealth, and other important outcomes for well-being (Altonji et al., 2012, 2016, 2019; Becker, 1962, 1974; Bonnett et al., 2022; Deming et al., 2016; Topel and Ward, 1992; Zissimopoulos, 2015). Discriminatory policy regimes that interfere with either of these choices can lead to suboptimal economic outcomes in one or both domains. Understanding the family and economic ramifications of such policies is vital, as it informs policymakers about the broader societal and economic benefits of protecting minority rights. Along these lines, a large body of research has analyzed the effects of an array of anti-discrimination laws that protect workers from race-, age-, gender-, and disability-based discrimination (Acemoglu and Angrist, 2001; Adams, 2004; Bailey et al., 2023; Beegle and Stock, 2003; Bell and Heitmuller, 2009; Button, 2018; Collins, 2003; Deleire, 2000; Hotchkiss, 2004; Hyland et al., 2020; Kruse and Schur, 2003; Lahey, 2008; Leonard, 1989, 1990; Neumark and Stock, 2006). Legal protections against sexual orientation-based discrimination are more recent, and as a result, have been understudied in economics. The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” a policy that prohibited lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) and other sexual minority members of the U.S. military from serving openly, offers a unique opportunity to examine the impacts of enacting protective policies that address workplace discrimination of sexual minorities.¹

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) was the official United States federal policy on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual minority people (LGBTQ+) serving in the military. Enacted in 1994 under the administration of President Bill Clinton, DADT aimed to strike a delicate balance between the prohibition of same-sex sexual activity in the armed forces and the avoidance of intrusive investigations into the private lives of service members.² Under DADT, military personnel were prohibited from investigating, discriminating against, or harassing service members who were suspected to be LGB, but simultaneously, LGB individuals were required to keep their sexual orientation private and refrain from disclosing it publicly. If an active-duty military employee was discovered to be engaging in same-sex sexual or romantic behavior, they could be less-than-honorably discharged from the military (i.e., fired from their job) solely

¹Sexual minorities include individuals who are attracted to and/or have sex with individuals of the same sex; this includes (but is not limited to) lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals. In this paper I will use the terms “LGB” and “sexual minorities” interchangeably.

²It is not feasible to estimate the effects of the 1994 *implementation* of DADT due to the lack of comprehensive data on LGB active duty service members during the policy enforcement period. However, with the emergence of data on sexual minorities in the military in recent years, it is possible to study the impacts of the *repeal* on LGB service members and their families.

based on their sexual orientation. The U.S. Department of Defense reports that approximately 14,000 service members were discharged under the DADT policy, but this is likely an under-count (Department of Defense, 2023; Gates, 2007).³ As one might expect, this policy could create a difficult trade-off for LGB service members. If workers are concerned that their choice of a life partner may put their job at risk and expose them to adverse economic shocks under the DADT policy regime, they may feel compelled to hide their sexual orientation and forgo their preferred choice of a life partner to avoid exposure to employment discrimination. On the other hand, if LGB people who are on the margin of enlisting choose not to enlist because of the risk of losing their career if their sexual orientation is discovered, they may be forgoing their best employment opportunity.

After DADT was repealed in 2011, sexual minority service members gained the freedom to serve openly without fear of reprisal or discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Since the U.S. Department of Defense is one of the largest employers in the U.S., the repeal of DADT was effectively the first large-scale, federal anti-discrimination policy that directly addressed discrimination based on sexual orientation, even though it did not apply to all workers in the U.S. labor force.⁴ While researchers have studied the effects of repealing DADT on recruitment, military readiness, and unit cohesion, the full impact of repealing DADT on various family and economic outcomes for active duty military personnel remains unexplored due to data challenges associated with studying sexual minorities in the military (Belkin, 2012; Gates, 2004; Gates, 2010). In this paper I exploit the natural experiment provided by the 2011 repeal of DADT paired with data from the 2008-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) to identify the effects of the repeal using a difference-in-differences approach that compares active duty service members to their civilian counterparts. In doing so, I provide the first evidence of the impacts of repealing DADT on family formation and downstream economic outcomes for sexual minority active duty service members and their families. I find that the repeal of DADT caused a 2.7 percentage-point increase in same-sex partnerships for active duty women compared to the associated change for civilian women during the same time period. Given the extremely low baseline mean, this represents a substantial 300 percent increase in the prevalence of same-sex partnership for women in the military. I demonstrate that increases in same-sex partnership for women serving in the military are not driven by changes in the reporting of partnership, but rather are driven by

³Approximately 35 percent of the people discharged under the DADT policy were women.

⁴DADT was repealed before the 2020 Supreme Court ruling in *Bostock v Clayton County*, which ruled that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is a form of sex discrimination and extended federal employment protections to LGBTQ+ workers across the U.S.

increases in the formation of new partnerships. I do not find any evidence that repealing DADT impacted same-sex partnership for men in the military. This is related to the fact that women in the military are far more likely to be LGBTQ+ than men in the military. Given the substantial change in partnership for active duty women, I explore the downstream consequences of the DADT repeal on the health insurance coverage of military families. I provide evidence that repealing DADT led to an increase Tricare coverage among civilian women who partnered with active duty women.

This new evidence contributes to a number of strands of literature within economics. First, I contribute to the well-established literature on the effects of anti-discrimination laws. While many previous studies have focused on race- (Collins, 2003; Leonard, 1990; Neumark and Stock, 2006), gender- (Bailey et al., 2023; Hyland et al., 2020; Leonard, 1989), age- (Adams, 2004; Lahey, 2008) and disability-based discrimination (Acemoglu and Angrist, 2001; Beegle and Stock, 2003; Bell and Heitmuller, 2009; Button, 2018; Deleire, 2000; Hotchkiss, 2004; Kruse and Schur, 2003), this paper contributes to a growing literature that highlights the unique context of sexual orientation-based discrimination and the policies implemented to reduce it. Existing research on the impact of laws that protect sexual minorities from employment discrimination documents modest increases in the employment and wages of gay men, while noting decreases in the employment and wages of lesbians (Burn, 2018; Delhommer and Vamossy, 2020; Gates, 2009; Klawitter, 2011; Klawitter and Flatt, 1998; Martell, 2013; Tilcsik, 2011). These trends are largely attributed to differences in the division of labor and fertility decisions among male and female same-sex couples. Additionally, research has shown that anti-discrimination laws boosted support for same-sex marriage legalization and attitudes towards sexual minorities more generally, supporting the hypothesis that anti-discrimination laws can be an effective policy tool for improving sentiment towards LGB people (Delhommer, 2020; Deal, 2022). Further, research on the effects of anti-discrimination laws on the mental health of sexual minorities has shown that when such laws are enacted, mental health of sexual minorities improves. These gains are brought about by improvements in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in the workplace (Mann, 2024). One limitation of the body of work focusing on state-level anti-discrimination laws is that the enactment of these policies is endogenous to states that have higher levels of acceptance towards sexual minorities. As a military-wide policy, the repeal of DADT affected all military employees across the country, regardless of local levels of tolerance towards sexual minorities. By studying the effects of repealing DADT on LGB active duty military employees, this paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how anti-discrimination policies shape economic and social outcomes for a sizable and growing vulnerable population in the U.S.:

LGBTQ+ individuals.

Second, I contribute to the growing body of research on the impacts of LGBTQ+ policies on families. A sizeable literature has studied the effects of same-sex marriage legalization. Prior research has analyzed marriage take-up using difference-in-differences methods to show that granting same-sex couples the legal right to marry increased same-sex marriage but did not impact different-sex marriage (Carpenter, 2020; Carpenter et al., 2021; Dillender 2014, 2015). Similar research has provided evidence that marriage equality significantly reduced hours of work for women in same-sex couples, particularly for the lower earner within the household, suggesting that marriage equality increased household specialization among female same-sex couples (Hansen et al, 2019). Marriage equality has also been linked to increased investment in same-sex relationships in the form of increased monogamy, longer relationship durations, increased mortgage applications, and increased home ownership (Nikolaou, 2023; Hamermesh and Delhommer, 2020; Miller and Park, 2018; Eilam and Shahid, 2023). Further, Martin and Rodriguez (2022) found that allowing same-sex couples to adopt led to a significant rise in adoptions, thereby reducing the number of children in foster care – a testament to how LGBTQ+ policies can yield benefits for non-LGBTQ+ individuals as well. Taking all of the aforementioned evidence together, the existing literature has shown that when LGBTQ+ people are given more freedom to pursue lifecourse milestones, they take advantage of that. However, there remains a gap in understanding how policies specifically targeting sexual minorities in the military (such as DADT) influence the economic and social integration of this group. By focusing on the unique context of sexual minorities in the military and their partners, this paper sheds light on the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ identities within an institution that has historically been unwelcoming to sexual minorities. This paper provides new evidence on how inclusive policies can impact family formation and contribute to the well-being of marginalized groups in highly structured environments, offering valuable insights for future policy design aimed at promoting equity and inclusion in various sectors of society.

Third, I contribute to the limited body of research on the effects of DADT. The existing work on the impacts of DADT largely focuses on military readiness. Contrary to warnings issued by high-level generals during discussions of a possible policy change, a study on active duty military enlistees and their commanding officers found that repealing DADT did not negatively impact unit cohesion, even for units that had sexual minority members serving in the unit (Belkin, 2012). In fact, evidence suggests that morale, trust, and overall unit cohesion improved after the repeal of DADT due to the fact that service members were able to communicate more openly and honestly with each other. Officers reported that repealing DADT

made it easier to streamline their command, improving military readiness and responsiveness. There is also no evidence that repealing DADT impacted recruitment, retention, or other measures of military strength (Belkin, 2012). Prior to the repeal of DADT, research on LGB people in the military attempted to estimate the size of the LGB population. Using data from the 2000 Census, research has shown that, unsurprisingly, sexual minorities have been serving in the military for decades, even before the start of DADT. However, the prevalence of military service among LGB individuals varies greatly by sex, with sexual minority women far out-representing sexual minority men in the military (Gates, 2004). Still, the author acknowledged the challenges associated with estimating both the size of the active duty LGB population and the full impact of DADT on sexual minorities due to the policy-driven incentives to hide one's sexual orientation while serving (Gates, 2004; Gates, 2010). As a result of these data challenges, there is very limited research on the effects of DADT *on LGB populations serving in the military*. To my knowledge, the only existing quantitative research on this topic has focused on discharges of sexual minorities. A study using data from the U.S. Department of Defense showed that women and racial and ethnic minority service members are disproportionately likely to be discharged for being a sexual minority, documenting how sexual minority members of the military were impacted during the DADT policy regime, particularly those who are doubly-minoritized by their sexual orientation *and* their gender or race (Gates, 2010). I build on the existing literature on the effects of removing DADT by providing the first evidence on how the repeal impacted LGB service members and their families. By leveraging the household roster format of the ACS, I can identify LGB members of the armed forces and their same-sex partners to provide new insight into the effects of repealing DADT on the intended target group of the policy change – sexual minority people serving in the military – for the first time.

Additionally, this paper contributes to the literature on health insurance coverage among sexual minorities. Previous research has shown that legal access to same-sex marriage increased health insurance coverage and healthcare utilization for men in same-sex households (Carpenter et al., 2021). Dillender (2015) found that when states legally recognize same-sex marriage, female same-sex couples transition from arrangements where both members work to arrangements where only one member of the couple works. This shift is likely due to the ability to secure health insurance through a spouse's employer, highlighting the intersection between legal rights, family formation, and the division of labor within sexual minority women's households. Building on this literature, this paper provides new evidence on how a change in military policy, specifically the repeal of DADT, can allow sexual minority individuals to improve their access to

high-quality health insurance. This paper is the first to show that civilian women in same-sex couples with active duty women are more likely to have health insurance through Tricare, the military health insurance system, following the repeal of DADT. This finding underscores the broader, often unanticipated benefits of inclusive policies, illustrating how military policy changes can extend beyond their immediate objectives to enhance the well-being of LGBTQ+ civilian individuals.

Lastly, this paper makes a contribution to the literature on military personnel and their families by offering new insights into the evolving family structures within the military, specifically by expanding the literature to include the context of LGB service members. Previous research has explored various aspects of how military service impacts family dynamics. For instance, a study of U.S. Army enlistees found that soldiers who received relocation assignments within the last five years were more likely to marry, highlighting how military-imposed policy can influence family formation (Carter and Wozniak, 2018). Similarly, studies have examined the disruption of military families, showing that time spent in deployment significantly increases the divorce risk among enlisted military personnel (Negrusa et al., 2014; Negrusa and Negrusa, 2014; Routon, 2016). This contrasts with earlier studies on WWII- and Vietnam-era veterans that found limited evidence of family disruption for veterans relative to non-veteran peers, highlighting that cohorts of service members have evolved as societal norms have changed over time (Conley and Heerwig, 2011; Ruger et al., 2002; Routon, 2016). While the existing literature focuses on heterosexual military families, more recent data allows researchers to study sexual minority military families for the first time. The findings presented in this paper shed light on how recent military policy changes, particularly those affecting LGB active duty service members, influence family formation. This is important for a number of reasons. First, the military's structured environment might influence family formation and downstream economic outcomes among sexual minorities in active duty families differently than civilian LGB families. Researchers and policymakers should be aware of the distinct experiences of LGB members of the armed forces. Second, military personnel receive an array of tangible and intangible employee benefits, such as tuition assistance, housing stipends, food stipends, and health care. Leaving the military can mean the loss of these guaranteed benefits, leading to financial uncertainty. For the average service member, this disruption is significant, but for LGB individuals, who may additionally face rejection and stigma from their families, the loss of military-provided support may be felt even more acutely. Understanding how LGB service members form their own chosen support networks through partnership may shed light on our understanding of how military policies affect marginalized groups within the armed forces.

Overall, this paper provides the first evidence of how the repeal of DADT affected LGB people in the military and their families. In doing so, I provide new empirical evidence on the interplay among anti-discrimination policies, family formation, and downstream economic outcomes. This paper bridges gaps in the literature regarding the effects of protecting sexual minorities in the workplace and provides insight into a longstanding U.S. military policy that has been studied in a limited capacity, informing future policy decisions aimed at promoting equality and economic well being for diverse populations.

2 Institutional background and sexual minorities in the military

Sexual minorities have been serving in the U.S. military since its inception. In fact, the first reported “discharge” related to sexual orientation was in 1778, 233 years before the repeal of DADT, when Lieutenant Frederick Gotthold Enslin was drummed out of the Continental Army following his conviction on charges of sodomy.⁵ Since then, the evolution of the attitudes towards (and laws governing) sexual minorities serving in the U.S. military has followed a complex narrative of exclusion, gradual acceptance, and eventual inclusion.

During the Revolutionary War and throughout the 19th century, there was limited documentation on gay men serving in the military, though same-sex sexual activity was generally condemned. During World War I, the U.S. military began to explicitly exclude sexual minorities, and those identified as such could be court-martialed and discharged. This exclusion policy was solidified during World War II, with the military screening for and rejecting gay men during the draft. Service members suspected of homosexuality were often given “blue discharges,” which were neither honorable nor dishonorable but carried a significant social stigma. The Cold War era saw continued exclusion of sexual minorities, with the Uniform Code of Military Justice including Article 125, which criminalized sodomy among service members.⁶ Despite the historical legacy of exclusionary policies, gay and lesbian individuals have served throughout U.S. military history. In fact, Gates (2004) used 2000 Census data to document military service rates for LGB men and women across generations. Military service rates for coupled lesbians far exceeds rates for the general population

⁵“Drummed out of the military” is an old term used to describe a formal and public dismissal from military service due to misconduct or dishonorable behavior. The phrase originated from a historical practice where the soldier would be dishonorably discharged in a public ceremony, accompanied by the beating of drums as a form of purposeful humiliation. While this practice is no longer part of military discharge procedures, this highlights the historical emphasis on the public shame associated with being discharged from the military due to sexual orientation.

⁶The United Code of Military Justice is the foundational legal framework that governs the conduct of members of the U.S. Armed Forces.

of women. About one in 10 coupled lesbians between the ages of 63 and 67 reported that they had served in Korea, compared to less than one in 100 of other women in the same age group. Further, coupled lesbians age 18–27 were more than three times more likely to have served in the military relative to other women. Military service rates for gay men are lower. Men age 18–60 who are not part of a same-sex couple are over three times more likely than coupled gay men to report ever serving in the military (Gates, 2004). Although nowadays it is seen as a discriminatory policy, the introduction of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy in 1994 by President Bill Clinton marked a significant progressive shift in military policy addressing sexual minorities serving in the armed forces.

2.1 Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” emerged as a compromise to reconcile the military’s perceived need for unit cohesion and discipline with evolving societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ rights. The primary justification for DADT rested on the assertion that openly-LGB service members could disrupt unit cohesion and undermine military effectiveness. By allowing individuals to serve as long as they remained discreet about their sexual orientation, proponents of the policy argued that the military could maintain operational readiness while avoiding the potential complications associated with openly acknowledging LGB identities within its ranks. However, critics of DADT contended that the policy fostered an environment of fear and discrimination, forcing LGB service members to live in secrecy and face the constant threat of career loss if their sexual orientation became known. The policy also led to the less-than-honorable dismissal of thousands of capable service members solely on the basis of their sexual orientation, undermining both individual rights and military readiness. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, nearly 14,000 service members were discharged due to sexual orientation under the DADT policy regime between 1994 and 2011, though research suggests that the true number of separations from the military due to DADT is likely higher (Department of Defense, 2023; Gates, 2007).

In the years following its enactment, DADT became the subject of intense debate and scrutiny, with advocates for LGBTQ+ rights and civil liberties calling for its repeal. Following recommendations from the Pentagon, the repeal of DADT was finally realized on September 20, 2011, when President Barack Obama signed legislation ending the policy, marking a significant milestone in the fight for equality within the U.S. military. The repeal of DADT represented a watershed moment in LGBTQ+ rights, signaling a significant shift towards greater inclusivity and acceptance within the armed forces.

The recommendation from the Pentagon to repeal DADT was largely informed by in-depth studies that assessed the impacts of repealing DADT on recruitment, retention, and LGBT people currently serving in the military, among other issues. Repealing DADT was not predicted to impact military readiness based on surveys of current U.S. military personnel and potential recruits, and the experiences of ally military forces that went through similar policy changes before the U.S. considered changing its policy (RAND 1993, 2010). Researchers predicted that repealing DADT would likely have a small effect, if any, on recruitment. A survey fielded among 15-24 year-olds showed that when young people were directly asked about how repealing DADT would affect their decision to join the military, 75 percent of respondents said that repealing DADT would not impact their likelihood of joining the military. Among people who *did* indicate that repealing DADT would impact their decision to join the military, more respondents reported that they would be less likely to join the military rather than more likely to join. Among the small group of young people who indicated that they are “probably” or “definitely” joining the military in the next few years, 31 percent said repealing DADT would decrease the probability that they would enlist, while 21 percent said that it would increase their probability of enlisting.

However, respondents were also asked to rate a set of 33 factors that impact their decision to join the military on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 denotes that the factor that is “not at all important” for their enlistment decision, and 7 denotes a factor that was “extremely important” for their enlistment decision. In terms of average importance to survey respondents, “repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’” ranked 31st of the 33 items.⁷ So, although some individuals claim that DADT would influence their enlistment decision when asked directly, its low ranking among the most important factors influencing enlistment for young people suggests that the aversion to the policy change may not be as strong as initially perceived. Youth and young adults do not view a potential repeal as a major factor in their decision to join the military.

These predicted patterns are supported by evidence that the repeal of DADT had no overall negative impact on military readiness or its component dimensions, including cohesion, military strength, assaults, harassment, or morale (Belkin, 2012). Regarding recruitment and retention, the study found no discernible negative impact from the repeal of DADT. Despite concerns that allowing open service would deter potential recruits or prompt current service members to leave, the data did not support these fears. Belkin (2012) notes

⁷A RAND report reveals that some of the highest-ranked factors were: “having a job that makes you happy” (1st), “prefer college” (3rd), and “doing something you can be proud of” (7th). Lower ranked are “for the physical challenge” (21st), and “other family members joined” (29th). The importance of the repeal of DADT ranked ahead of only two other choices: “to get away from gangs/high-crime neighborhoods” (32nd) and “I’m not qualified to join the military” (33rd).

that recruitment targets continued to be met or exceeded in the year following the repeal. Specifically, the Army and Marine Corps both reported reaching 100 percent of their recruitment goals, while the Air Force and Navy slightly exceeded their targets. Survey data from military personnel indicates that post-repeal, 72 percent of respondents were willing to reenlist, compared to 70 percent before the repeal. Additionally, 85 percent of respondents in 2012 planned to stay in the military for at least 20 years, up from 84 percent in 2011. This suggests that the repeal did not significantly affect the willingness of service members to continue their military careers. Moreover, although 8.4 percent of service members surveyed stated that the repeal reduced their likelihood of reenlisting, actual reenlistment rates and recruitment targets continued to be met successfully. This indicates that the implementation of the repeal was a minor factor, if at all, in reenlistment decisions.

While the effects of repealing DADT on recruitment and retention have been studied, very little is known about how sexual minorities serving in the military were directly impacted. The repeal potentially marked a transformative shift in the personal lives of sexual minority service members. By allowing military personnel to openly express their sexual orientation without fear of discharge, the repeal created new opportunities for service men and women to live their lives authentically, both in and out of uniform. This could translate into significant life changes, enabling them to date openly, form and formalize relationships, and pursue major life milestones such as cohabitation, marriage, and family-building—key markers of economic and social progress throughout the lifecourse. If the repeal of DADT facilitated such changes, one of the first measurable outcomes might be an increase in same-sex coupling among military personnel, as those who were previously unwilling to disclose their sexual orientation could now openly pursue relationships without the fear of discharge. This paper is the first to empirically test whether the repeal led to these types of observable changes, specifically examining whether there was a notable rise in same-sex coupling among military personnel post-repeal. In the next section, I outline the data and methods used to investigate the effects of this policy change on sexual minority members of the armed forces.

3 Data description

The lack of research on the economic and family impacts of repealing DADT on sexual minorities in the military is primarily due to data availability. There are no large scale surveys that ask survey respondents about their current active duty status and their self-identified sexual orientation before the end of DADT.

However, there are a handful of more recent surveys that allow researchers to identify sexual minorities who have served in the military. Table 1 presents the share of men and women in the military who are LGBTQ+ using four different datasets that solicit information on both military service and sexual orientation of survey respondents in the post-DADT period. The columns of Table 1 are as follows. Column 1 uses data from the 2015 and 2018 U.S. Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS) to report the share of active duty men and women who identify as LGBT.⁸ Column 2 uses data from the Household Pulse Survey (HPS) from 2021-2023 to report the share of active duty men and women who identified as either “lesbian or gay,” “bisexual,” or “something else” not listed among the menu of available survey responses.⁹ Column 3 reports the share of active duty men and women who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual using the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) from 2015-2019.¹⁰ Column 4 uses data from the 2014-2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and reports the share of men and women who identify as “lesbian or gay,” “bisexual,” or “something else” not listed among the menu of available survey responses among those who reported that they have *ever* served in the U.S. military.¹¹ Using four new data sources identified in Columns (1)-(4), Table 1 confirms previous research that sexual minority women far out-represent sexual minority men in the military.

As mentioned previously, since sexual orientation and gender identity have only recently been introduced to national surveys, large-scale sexual orientation data for military personnel does not exist before the repeal of DADT. However, even if such data *did* exist, until 2011, military personnel had an incentive to misreport their sexual orientation on federal surveys. Despite the anonymity promised by survey administrators, LGB people in the military may not feel comfortable with truthfully reporting their sexual orientation on a government survey. Both of these features about the data landscape complicate researchers’ ability to identify sexual minorities serving in the military in large datasets. Fortunately, there is one dataset that contains information that allows for the identification of sexual minorities, *even without directly asking a respondent to report their sexual orientation*: the American Community Survey.

⁸In 2015, the Department of Defense added sexual orientation and gender identity questions to the flagship survey for understanding health and health behaviors among active duty service members for the first time.

⁹The Household Pulse Survey is a nationally representative survey that was designed to study how COVID-19 affected American households. Beginning in July 2021, the survey included questions that allow identification of sexual minority individuals.

¹⁰The National Survey on Drug Use and Health is an annual survey that collects data on the use of tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, and mental health among individuals aged 12 and older. It serves as a primary source for national statistics on substance use and mental health trends.

¹¹The BRFSS collects data on health-related risk behaviors, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services. While other datasets cover all 50 states, only 35 states in various years administered a sexual orientation and gender identity module to their core state BRFSS survey, so it is not nationally representative.

3.1 The American Community Survey

The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing repeated cross-sectional survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing information from a representative sample of households across the U.S. Launched in 2000, the ACS replaced the decennial census long form and is designed to provide more timely and accurate data on a yearly basis. The ACS covers a wide array of topics, including but not limited to, employment, income, education, military service, housing characteristics, and health insurance coverage. The ACS is the only large-scale annual nationally representative dataset that allows for the identification of both active duty service members and sexual minorities in the same survey, making the ACS an invaluable resource for studying the impacts of the repeal of DADT on military personnel and their families.¹²¹³

In this analysis, I leverage information on military employment status to identify people who were serving on active duty before and after the repeal of DADT. Combining the information on military service with information about household family structure allows me to identify single active duty service members and cohabitating couples with at least one active duty partner. Although the ACS does not directly ask respondents to report their sexual orientation, researchers studying LGBTQ+ populations have leveraged information on the sex of other household members and their relationship to the head of household to identify same-sex and different-sex couples (Black et al., 2000; Gates, 2011). Sections 3.2 and 3.3 offer detailed descriptions of the active duty sample and the methodology employed to identify LGB individuals in the ACS.

3.2 Information on active duty service members

The ACS contains information on whether an individual is an active duty service member, a reservist, a veteran, or a civilian. The sample I study in this paper includes adult active duty personnel and civilians under the age of 65. Active duty service members were legally bound by DADT during its enforcement period, while civilians were not. Excluded from the analysis are reservists and veterans. Reservists, who

¹²I use the version of the ACS that is publicly available through IPUMS-USA (Ruggles et al., 2024)

¹³The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health includes information about respondents' sexual orientation and lifetime military service, however it does not identify who was serving on active duty during the DADT policy regime. The Current Population Survey also contains information about same-sex partnerships and military service, however a major limitation of the CPS is that only military personnel living in the same household with a civilian are included in the survey – excluded are military personnel cohabitating with each other, and importantly, single military service members who live alone. Because these groups are the most likely to be impacted by the repeal of DADT, they should be included in the analysis. Therefore, I use the ACS.

serve part-time, experience the military environment differently and likely face a lower risk of discharge under DADT since they do not interact with their military peers on a daily basis.¹⁴ Veterans, who have separated from the active duty component of the military, are not at risk of discrimination and discharge under DADT. There are a number of reasons that veterans are excluded from the analysis. First and foremost, veterans were not legally bound by DADT as a group, and thus, they were not subject to its repeal. Second, in order to study how veterans were affected by the repeal of DADT, researchers should study cohorts of military personnel *who were active duty during the repeal*, rather than veterans who left the service before the policy change. Future data will allow for this kind of analysis as those treated service members will eventually become veterans. Third, the ACS does not contain information on when or why an individual separated from the military, and further, I cannot identify if a person left *because* they have been discharged due to DADT. This prevents me from determining if changes in partnership patterns for veterans are due to the symbolic impacts of the repeal of DADT or due to a change in the composition of veterans following the end of DADT discharges (Chen and van Ours, 2020). As a result, I have chosen to exclude veterans from this analysis.¹⁵ In short, to gain a clearer understanding of the impacts of the repeal, I focus on the group that was bound by the policy and most directly impacted by its repeal (active duty service members) and people who were never legally bound by DADT (civilians.)

In addition to studying active duty personnel, this paper also considers how the repeal of DADT impacted outcomes for the family members of active duty service members. In the ACS, all household members living in standard housing units (such as single family homes, apartments, townhouses, and other standard dwellings) are listed on the household roster and are identified in relation to the head of the household. I use this information to observe and link romantic partners residing in the same household to each other. This feature of the data also allows for the identification of single individuals living without a listed romantic partner. As a result, the primary sample for analysis in this paper consists of heads of household and their partners, enabling me to estimate of the effects of the repeal of DADT on partnership behaviors among active-duty service members, as the presence or absence of a partner is directly observable in the household roster. Furthermore, because I can link military personnel to their family members, I will also analyze how

¹⁴Reservists and National Guard members were only subject to DADT while serving on active duty or if activated for federal status. This meant that *when reservists were training or National Guard members were activated for federal service*, they had to comply with the policy. Since reservists only report for training once a month, it would be much easier for a reservist to hide their sexual orientation relative to someone serving on active duty who reports to work every day. Due to the unknown complexities of partial treatment of reservists and national guard members, they are excluded from the analysis.

¹⁵Future work will address veteran outcomes in the context of DADT.

the repeal influenced broader outcomes for the family members of active duty service members, shedding light on the downstream effects of this policy change on household composition and family well-being.

In addition to reservist and veteran households, also excluded from the sample are individuals living in group quarters. For studies on same-sex couples in the general population this is not usually a limitation, but for a study on LGB active duty military personnel, excluding individuals living in group quarters slightly changes the interpretation of the results. “Group quarters facilities” includes military barracks, college dormitories, and other non-institutional group quarters. Since military barracks are exclusively for active duty personnel and do not accommodate family members, it is impossible to infer partnership status (and therefore sexual minority status) of service members who reside in group quarters. Individuals listed in group quarters are coded as “households” of one, without observable linkages to any other family members or other residents of the same group quarters facility. Consequently, they are excluded from the sample. As a result of excluding individuals from group quarters, this analysis focuses on active duty members of the armed forces *who are well-established in the military* (i.e., those who are not new recruits and are no longer required to live in barracks during training or early career stages).

3.3 Identification of Same-Sex Couples

As mentioned previously, although the ACS does not directly ascertain sexual orientation, same-sex couples who live together can be identified within the data, making it possible to study partnered LGB people and their economic outcomes. The ACS designates a primary reference person as the head of the household and collects data on how each household member living at the same address is related to the head of the household. The range of possible romantic relationship categories includes husband, wife, and unmarried partner.¹⁶ Using this information, I link heads of household to their partners and use the sex of those partners to categorize romantic partnerships into same-sex and different-sex couples with high fidelity starting in 2008. In 2008, the Census Bureau implemented several new changes to address the mismeasurement of sex on the ACS. These measurement errors falsely inflated the prevalence of same-sex couples before 2008. As a result, the empirical analysis in this paper begins in 2008, when the data on same-sex couples became more accurate and reliable. Relatedly, observations with imputed sex or imputed relation to the household head have been dropped to further reduce similar measurement errors (Black et al., 2007). The final year of

¹⁶The ACS also includes separate categories that identify household members as roommates, lodgers, boarders, or other non-relatives present in the household.

data included in the empirical analysis is 2019.¹⁷

A key advantage of using this approach to identify LGB individuals in the ACS is that it is less subject to the risk of the misreporting of sexual orientation. Evidence shows that survey respondents may underreport or misreport their sexual orientation due to social desirability bias, fear of discrimination, or privacy concerns (Badgett et al., 2021). The matching algorithm employed in this study and others like it avoid this concern by using household structure to infer sexual orientation, rather than relying on self-reported identities. This is particularly important for settings like the U.S. Military, where individuals have even greater incentives to misreport their identities than the general population. On the other hand, there are two main limitations of using ACS data to identify sexual minorities. First, it is not possible to identify LGB individuals who do not have partners, or those who do not live with their partner. Second, since sexual orientation is not directly asked in the survey, it is not possible to identify bisexual people who are in different-sex couples. Despite these issues, the ACS remains one of the largest and most credible sources of data on same-sex couples in the U.S. (Badgett et al., 2024).

4 Empirical methods

4.1 Difference-in-differences framework

To estimate the causal impact of the repeal of DADT on the family outcomes of active duty service members, I employ a difference-in-differences approach. This methodology exploits the natural experiment provided by the unanticipated timing of the repeal of DADT, using the pre- and post-policy repeal periods to compare changes in family outcomes for active duty service members (the treated group) who were subject to the DADT policy regime to those for civilians (the control group) who were not legally bound by the policy. Formally, I estimate the following model:

$$Y_{ist} = \beta_1 ActiveDuty_i + \beta_2 (ActiveDuty_i \times PostDADT_t) + \gamma X_i + \lambda_{st} + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ist} is the outcome of interest for individual i in state s in year t . $ActiveDuty_i$ is a binary indicator for whether an individual is on active duty at the time of their ACS survey response. $PostDADT_t$ is a binary indicator that takes a value of one after the repeal of DADT. In my preferred specification I include a series

¹⁷The analysis ends before the COVID-19 pandemic.

of individual-level control variables for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, represented by the vector X_i . λ_{st} represents a set of 612 state-year fixed effects that control for heterogeneity specific to each state-year combination. The state-time fixed effects capture any characteristic or policy that is unique to a particular state in a particular year such as same-sex marriage legalization, Medicaid expansion, state-level economic conditions, and other factors that could impact the dependent variable. In my preferred specification, I estimate robust standard errors, however I show that the main results are robust to alternative modeling choices. The coefficient of interest, β_2 , captures the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT) of the DADT repeal on the family outcomes for active duty service members relative to civilians before and after the repeal.

The validity of the differences-in-differences approach hinges on the assumption that, in the absence of the repeal of DADT, outcomes for active duty personnel would have evolved similarly to those of civilians. To assess the credibility of this parallel trends assumption, I estimate an event study specification. Event studies allow for the visualization and estimation of the impact of the policy change at different time points relative to the repeal year. Even though ACS data quality limitations prevent me from including a longer pre-treatment period, estimating an event study specification has two main advantages. First, it allows me to check whether the pre-treatment coefficients are statistically different from zero. If they are not statistically different from zero, it supports the assumption that the treated and control groups followed similar trends before the repeal of DADT. Second, event studies allow researchers to examine how the treatment effects evolve over time. The event study will provide a more nuanced understanding of the effect of repealing DADT by showing whether the impact is immediate, delayed, or changes over time relative to the time of repeal. The event study regression equation I estimate is given by:

$$Y_{ist} = \sum_{\tau=2008}^{2019} \beta_\tau [ActiveDuty_i \times \mathbb{1}(t = \tau)] + \gamma X_i + \lambda_{st} + \varepsilon_{ist} \quad (2)$$

where β_τ is the treatment effect in year τ . Plotting each β_τ will give a visual representation of the temporal progression of the effects of the repeal.

Recent advancements in the difference-in-differences literature have demonstrated the potential dangers of biased estimates produced by two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models and their corresponding event studies when there are pre-existing differential trends in the covariates across treatment and control groups (Sant'Anna and Zhao, 2020). The results presented in this paper are robust to taking these concerns into

account.¹⁸¹⁹ I estimate equations (1) and (2) for all individuals under 65, and separately for men and women under 65. The outcomes of interest are described below.

4.2 Outcomes

I study a number of outcomes related to DADT in this paper. First, I begin by estimating the causal effect of the DADT repeal on the prevalence of same-sex partnership among active duty personnel by estimating equations (1) and (2) where the outcome of interest is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership or not. The dependent variable takes a value of one if the individual is in a same-sex partnership, or a value of zero if the individual is either in a different-sex partnership or single. I also investigate additional household composition outcomes to show that changes in partnership are not due to changes in the *reporting* of partners. To do this, I estimate the causal effect of repealing DADT on the probability of living with a same-sex roommate who is unrelated to the head of household. This accounts for the fact that active duty ACS respondents have an incentive to misreport their live-in partner on federal surveys by instead classifying them as a “roommate,” “lodger,” “boarder,” or “other non-relative household member.”

Although civilians are never legally bound by DADT, they still may be indirectly impacted by its repeal if civilians form relationships with same-sex active duty partners. To assess this question, I will analyze patterns in downstream health insurance outcomes for the civilian partners in active duty military families and the labor. Since civilians are not directly treated by DADT, there is no analogous difference-in-differences model similar to equations (1) and (2) that can estimate the causal effect of repealing DADT on civilian outcomes directly. Instead, to assess whether the repeal impacted civilians, I use a more indirect approach. To do this, I assign the insurance status of the partners to the active duty person and estimate equations (1) and (2) where the outcome is the probability of *having a partner who has insurance through Tricare*.²⁰ In addition, I investigate the labor force participation decisions of the partners of active duty sexual minority women. Similar to the analysis of Tricare coverage, the outcome is the probability of having a partner who is in the labor force.

¹⁸See Table 7.

¹⁹Additionally, new difference-in-differences advancements have demonstrated the potential dangers of biased estimates produced by two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models when there is staggered treatment timing (Goodman-Bacon, 2021). Since the repeal of DADT applied to all active duty service members at the same time, there is no concern of bias due to variation in treatment timing.

²⁰For more detail, see Section 5.3.1.

5 Results

I begin by presenting descriptive statistics of the working-age civilian and active duty adults in the ACS, followed by raw trends in same-sex partnership. I then show results from difference-in-differences models that compare changes in same-sex partnership for people in the military relative to civilians before and after the repeal of DADT. Next, I discuss a number of potential mechanisms and demonstrate the results of various robustness exercises. I conclude by exploring patterns in two relevant downstream outcomes for active duty same-sex couples: health insurance and labor force participation.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Trends

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key demographics of the treated group (active duty personnel) and the control group (civilians.) The format of Table 2 is as follows: Panel A includes men 18-64, and Panel B includes women 18-64. Column (1) reports the mean demographic characteristics for civilians and Column (2) reports the means for active duty personnel. Column (3) tests for a statistically significant difference in means between the treated and control groups.

Several patterns stand out in Table 2. Around 14 percent of the treated group are women, a figure consistent with the actual proportion of women in active duty, as reported by the Department of Defense (2018). In addition to being slightly more racially diverse than the general population, the active duty sample studied in this analysis is different from their civilian counterparts in a two key ways. First, active duty personnel are younger than civilians. The average active duty age in the sample is 33 for men and 32 for women. Demographic reports on the demographics of all active duty military personnel report that the average age among all active duty military personnel is 28, while the average age among active duty officers is 33 (Department of Defense, 2019). The second key difference between the treated and control groups is that educational attainment is higher among the active duty sample than the civilian sample. The U.S. military has rigid educational requirements for enlisting and for becoming an officer. To enlist, the minimum required education level is a high school diploma or GED. To become an officer in the military, individuals must have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree. Although military rank is not observable in the ACS, the age and education profiles of the active duty personnel in the sample suggest that they are predominantly more well-established members of the armed forces. They have progressed past the earlier stages of their military careers where group housing in barracks is mandatory, are older than the overall active duty population, and

possess the educational qualifications characteristic of higher-ranked individuals within the military.

As mentioned previously, research addressing military recruitment and retention showed that the repeal of DADT had a minimal impact on decisions to enter or exit the military (Belkin, 2012). While the ACS is not appropriate for identifying changes in recruitment or retention in the context of the DADT policy, Figure 1 offers evidence that broadly aligns with the existing literature.²¹ Specifically, Figure 1 shows that the share of men and women serving on active duty from 2008 to 2019 did not meaningfully change relative to the timing of the DADT repeal.

Since selection into the military is nonrandom, it is unsurprising that the treated group differs significantly from the control group. However, this should not be a concern for the analysis, as the key requirement is parallel pretrends in the outcome of interest. Further, the identification strategy presented in Section 4 does not rely on nonrandom assignment to treatment and control groups. Instead, the analysis presented in this paper leverages the timing of the repeal of DADT, and controls for differences in the observed characteristics of the treatment and control groups.

The key outcome of interest in this paper is same-sex partnership. Table 3 presents the raw means in same-sex partnership for active duty and civilian individuals before and after the repeal of DADT. Table 3 is formatted similarly to Table 2. For men, the prevalence of same-sex partnerships among active duty personnel remains significantly lower compared to civilians, both before and after the policy repeal. For women, differences are more pronounced. Although same-sex partnership rates among civilian and active duty women were similar before the repeal of DADT, the share of active duty women in same-sex partnerships increased by almost 3 percentage points from 0.9 percent pre-repeal to 4 percent post-repeal. The large increase in same-sex partnership among women in the military is contrasted with the relatively stable proportions of same-sex partnership among civilian men and women, who exhibited a minor increase of 0.3 percentage points during the same time period. Figure 2 shows the raw trends in same-sex partnership by treatment status and sex. In the pre-repeal period, when service members could be discharged if they are discovered to be LGB, the share of active duty military personnel reporting that they are in a same-sex partnership is, unsurprisingly, very low. For active duty men, there appears to be no change in the share of people in same-sex partnerships after the repeal of DADT. On the other hand, for active duty women,

²¹As mentioned previously, the sample used for this study is comprised of more well-established members of the armed forces, so it is not the appropriate sample for studying recruitment. The majority of research on recruitment and retention policy is conducted by policy think-tanks on behalf of the U.S. Government, and uses confidential administrative data on military personnel and applicants.

there is a clear increase in the share of women in same-sex partnerships, with up to 5 percent of active duty women being in a same-sex couple by the end of the period of study.

A natural related question is: what about other types of relationships for people in the military during the period of study? Relationship types are mutually exhaustive; an active duty service member could be in a same-sex partnership, a different-sex partnership, or they could be single. Figure 3 shows the annual raw trends in the share of active duty men in each relationship type from 2008 to 2019. Panel A shows all three trend lines on the same graph. To assist with visualization, Panel B zooms in on the trend in different-sex partnership, and Panel C zooms in on the trends in same-sex partnership and singleness. Figure 4 shows the analogous trends for active duty women. While there is no change in same-sex partnership for active duty men, it is interesting to note that the share of people in different-sex partnerships increased and the share of active duty men who are single fell following the repeal of DADT.²² For women in the military, the increase in the share of women in same-sex partnerships is paired with a concurrent decrease in the proportion of active duty women who are single. The share of active-duty women in different-sex partnerships fluctuates over time slightly, but remains around 63 percent.

While Figures 2, 3, and 4 present the unconditioned means for same-sex partnership, they do not account for other related factors such as an individual's demographic characteristics and local economic and policy conditions. In the next section, I present results from using a difference-in-differences framework to estimate the causal effect of repealing DADT on same-sex partnership among people serving in the military.

5.2 Effect of DADT repeal on same-sex partnership

To more formally explore the trends in same-sex partnership presented above, I begin by estimating equation (1) to test whether the repeal of DADT led to a higher proportion of active duty service members being in same-sex partnerships, even after accounting for relevant demographic characteristics and local factors that could influence partnership behaviors. Table 4 compares the probability that an individual is in a same-sex partnership before and after the repeal of DADT for active duty service members (the treated group) relative to civilians (the control group). In Table 4, the dependent variable takes a value of one if the individual is in a same-sex partnership, and takes a value of zero otherwise (i.e., the outcome variable takes a value of zero for the other remaining possible partnership situations: being in a different-sex partnership or being

²²Future research using data on military personnel should investigate why repealing DADT could cause an increase in different-sex coupling among men in the military.

single.) Column 1 shows that same-sex partnership increased among people in the military by a modest 0.2 percentage points. The trends in Figure 2 indicate that men and women in the military responded differently to the repeal of DADT. In Table 4 I present the causal effects separately for men and women in Columns 2 and 3, respectively. In Column 2, I find that the repeal of DADT caused a 0.2 percentage point decrease in same-sex partnerships for active duty men relative to civilian men. In Column 3, I find that the repeal of DADT caused a 2.7 percentage point increase in same-sex partnership for active duty women relative to their civilian counterparts. My preferred specification includes a set of individual-level demographic controls and a set of 612 state-time fixed effects that control for local economic conditions and policy changes, however the results presented in Table 4 are robust to alternative modeling choices.²³

The estimates presented in Table 4 are the ATT effects of the repeal of DADT. To assess the validity of the parallel pretrends assumption and to visually represent the dynamics of the effects over time, I estimate equation (2). Figure 5 shows the corresponding event studies for all individuals in Panel A, men in Panel B, and women in Panel C. In all three event study graphs, the pre-treatment β_τ coefficients are not statistically different from zero, supporting the assumption that partnership patterns among active duty service members and civilians would have evolved similarly in the absence of the repeal of DADT. In Panel A, there is a gradual increase in same-sex partnership over time among all active duty military personnel. In Panel B, the event study coefficients are not statistically different from zero, though the effect for active duty men is small and negative. Although the evidence presented in Table 4 and Figure 5 suggest that repealing DADT led to a decline in same-sex partnership among men in the military, revisiting the trends in same-sex partnership among civilian men in Table 3 and Figure 2 reveals that the negative treatment effect is mechanically due to an increase in same-sex partnership in the control group. Men serving on active duty in the military do not seem to respond to the repeal of DADT by taking up same-sex partnership. For women, Panel C shows that the effect size grows over time, up to nearly 4 percentage points higher among active duty service members relative to the difference between active duty and civilian women in the reference period.²⁴ There are a number of explanations for the delayed increase in same-sex partnership. It may take time for people to find a partner and settle down. The delay could also be due to an interim adjustment period after the change in a long-standing discriminatory policy where attitudes towards sexual minorities are improving over time as a result of the new policy environment (Delhommer, 2020; Deal, 2022). Soon after the repeal of DADT,

²³For more details, see Section 5.2.3.

²⁴Appendix A investigates different-sex partnership and singleness to show that there is a concurrent decline in active duty women being single while same-sex partnership is increasing.

sexual minorities serving in the military may have been unsure of how they would be received if they were open about their identities in the workplace, but these concerns may have waned as attitudes became more favorable.²⁵

While it may be a bit surprising that there is a large positive effect on same-sex partnership among lesbian and bisexual women in the military without a similar increase among gay men, there are a number of reasons this could be the case. First, it could be due to differences in the prevalence of sexual minorities in the military by sex. As discussed in my review of the prior literature on LGB people in the military and in Section 3, during the DADT era, there was no way to directly measure how many sexual minority people served on active duty in any given year. However, despite these limitations, research has consistently found evidence that sexual minority women eclipse sexual minority men as a share of people who have served in the military.²⁶ It could be the case that more granular data is needed to study the effects of DADT on gay and bisexual men serving in the military.²⁷

Second, the flat trend in same-sex partnership for active duty men could also be due, in part, to differences in the stigma facing men and women in the military. The military has historically been a male-dominated and masculine workplace. There may be penalties to exhibiting more traditionally feminine characteristics in historically masculine jobs, and vice versa, there may be advantages to exhibiting more traditionally masculine characteristics in historically masculine jobs, especially for sexual minorities (Blandford, 2003; Martell, 2012; Geijtenbeek and Plug, 2018; Schilt and Wiswall, 2008). If gay and bisexual men are perceived to be less masculine than their heterosexual colleagues, sexual minority men in the military may still feel that they could potentially face penalties if they reveal their sexual orientation in the workplace, even after the repeal of DADT. As a result, they may choose not to enter into same-sex partnerships or "come out" to their peers as a sexual minority at work. On the other hand, if lesbian and bisexual women in the military are perceived as more masculine than their heterosexual female counterparts, they may not face the same stigma as men. The perception of increased masculinity might mitigate some of the negative consequences traditionally faced by women working in male-dominated sectors, potentially making it easier for them to enter into same-sex partnerships without fear of professional repercussions. Future research using survey data from sexual minority service members on their experiences during and

²⁵It is also possible that it takes time for service members to "come out" as a sexual minority to their families and friends before doing so at work.

²⁶Table 3 expands the body of knowledge on the prevalence of LGBTQ+ people serving in the military.

²⁷Ideally, future work could leverage rich confidential administrative datasets on military personnel.

after the DADT policy regime should address the stigma faced by sexual minorities serving in the military and how it impacted the decision to reveal their identity to their peers. Because I find a strong causal relationship between the repeal of DADT and same-sex partnership for women serving in the military and I find no evidence that the repeal led to the formation of same-sex couples among active duty men, the remainder of the analysis focuses on active duty women and their partners.

5.2.1 Heterogeneity Analyses and Mechanisms

In Section 5.2, I demonstrated that the repeal of DADT led to an increase in same-sex partnership among women in the military. There are two possible manners in which this could be true. First, it is possible that the results discussed in Section 5.2 are due to active duty women entering into new partnerships. Alternatively, it is also possible that the first-stage effects are due to changes in the *reporting* of existing same-sex partners when ACS respondents complete the survey. While it is not possible to test these hypotheses directly (since the ACS does not include information on the length of the current relationship), below I provide evidence that suggests the increase in same-sex partnership is primarily driven by the formation of new couples, rather than a change in reporting of existing partners.

First, in Table 5, I present the results of estimating equation (1) on various subsets of the sample of active duty and civilian women: women under 35, women over 35, women without children, and women with children. Figure 6 plots the coefficients reported in Table 5 to give a clearer visual representation of the differences in magnitude. This heterogeneity analysis highlights two patterns that help clarify the nature of same-sex partnerships for active duty women. First, the results in Columns 2 and 3 show that the increase in same-sex partnership among women is largest among younger women, not older women. People who are younger have had less time to form serious partnerships to the point of cohabitation, which could suggest that the partnerships are more likely to be new couples rather than existing ones. Second, Columns 4 and 5 show that the effects are concentrated among women with no children. If, instead, the increase in same-sex partnerships was driven by women with children, that would suggest that the same-sex relationships were already well-established before the repeal of DADT and, thus, were not new partnerships.

More compelling, however, is the second empirical exercise that utilizes information on other members of the household roster to provide evidence that these partnerships were new, rather than due to changes in the reporting of an existing partners. Although the ACS guarantees confidentiality of survey responses, active duty service members may be inclined to intentionally misreport their cohabiting partner as a “room-

mate,” “lodger,” “boarder,” or other non-relative residing in the home in order to hide the true nature of their relationship. Similar to the method used to identify partners based on the relationship to the head of household described in Section 3.3, I leverage information on the presence of a roommate to estimate a version of equation (1) with two related outcomes: (i) the probability that a respondent lives with a same-sex roommate, and (ii) the probability that a respondent lives with a same-sex roommate who is within a 10-year age range. These outcomes will capture changes in the probability that a person lives with someone who could be intentionally misreported as a housemate rather than a romantic partner to assess whether active duty service members are switching from reporting roommates to reporting partners after the repeal of DADT. Table 6 presents the results of this exercise, and Figure 7 presents the corresponding event studies. I find no evidence that the probability of reporting a same-sex roommate changed differentially among active duty service women relative to civilians after the repeal of DADT. This further suggests the increase in same-sex partnerships is primarily due to the formation of new couples, rather than a reclassification of “roommates” to being identified as romantic partners on the ACS.

5.2.2 The role of local environments and stigma

Local policy environments and societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals may influence active-duty service members’ willingness to be open about their sexual orientation both at work and in their communities. To explore this hypothesis, I conduct two heterogeneity analyses. First, I examine the variation in legal same-sex marriage across states. By the time DADT was repealed in 2011, seven states had already legalized same-sex marriage.²⁸ In Figure 9, I group individuals based on when their state of residence legalized same-sex marriage. The results indicate that the increase in same-sex partnerships among military women, relative to civilian women, was most pronounced in states where same-sex marriage was already legal. Previous research suggests that marriage equality legislation can influence individuals’ decisions to come out or invest in partnerships (even for those not directly seeking marriage) as such legislation often signals broader societal acceptance and long-term security for sexual minorities (Seror and Ticku, 2023; Eilam and Shahid, 2023). The second heterogeneity analysis examines regional variation as a proxy for variation in local attitudes towards LGBTQ+ populations. In Figure 10, I find that same-sex partnership formation among military women was highest in the Northeast, a region with a history of more progressive social norms, in contrast to more conservative areas like the Midwest and the South. Both analyses suggest

²⁸See Figure 8 for a map illustrating the timeline of same-sex marriage legalization across the U.S.

that same-sex partnership formation was greater in environments that are more favorable to sexual minority service members. This finding is particularly interesting given that military personnel, unlike civilians, have limited control over their geographic location due to the nature of military assignments.

5.2.3 Robustness

The average effect for women in the military presented in Table 4 is robust to a number of alternative modeling choices. Table 7 compares the preferred specification in Column (1) to five additional models. As mentioned in Section 4.1, standard TWFE estimators can be biased if trends in the observable characteristics are not parallel across the treated and control groups. To address these concerns, I show that the main results are largely unchanged when I use the doubly-robust difference-in-difference estimator suggested by Sant'Anna and Zhao (2020) in Column (2). Column (3) shows that the results are robust to the inclusion or exclusion of demographic controls. In Column (4) I show that the main results are not sensitive to using state and time fixed effects, rather than state-time fixed effects, to increase power. Additionally, there may be concerns that when there is a small number of treated clusters, as is typically the case for canonical 2-by-2 difference-in-differences models, this may lead to biased standard errors and incorrect significance tests (Donald & Lang, 2007). To help mitigate these concerns, results presented in Table 7 demonstrate that the first stage results are robust to the use of bootstrapped standard errors (Column 5) and to permutation testing that randomly “assigns” treatment (active duty status) to observations in the dataset, and repeats the analysis 1,000 times (Column 6).

5.3 Downstream outcomes for military families

If the repeal of DADT enables sexual minority women in the military to enter into same-sex partnerships more freely, then there are a number of downstream outcomes of partnership that could be observed in the ACS. In the context of military families, one natural downstream consequence of increased family formation is increased Tricare insurance coverage among partners of active duty women. Another related outcome is the labor force participation decision of the partners of active duty women. In this section, I show that the partners of active duty service women are more likely to have insurance through Tricare following the repeal of DADT. I also document division of labor patterns for same-sex active duty-civilian couples.

5.3.1 Tricare coverage

In Section 5.2, I showed that the repeal of DADT resulted in more active duty women entering same-sex partnerships. Next, to evaluate whether this increase in same-sex partnerships led to greater Tricare insurance coverage among the partners of these women, I leverage the household roster format of the ACS that allows me to observe the type of health insurance coverage for the cohabiting female partners of active duty women. However, studying civilian outcomes in the context of DADT poses challenges for causal inference. Neither civilians nor individuals in same-sex partnerships were directly bound by DADT *as a group*, making both groups unsuitable as the treated group in a canonical difference-in-differences model. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that the prevalence of same-sex partnership changed in response to the DADT repeal, so using civilian same-sex partners as a treatment group is a violation of the assumptions underlying the difference-in-differences framework. Instead, similar to how I estimate equation (1) where the outcome for individual i is their partner's sex in Table 4, I estimate models where the outcome for individual i is their partner's insurance status. Specifically, I assign the partner's insurance status to the active-duty service member (or the civilian person, in the case of the control group) and estimate regressions where the dependent variable is the probability of having a partner who has insurance coverage through Tricare. Examining Tricare coverage in the context of DADT policy changes provides a deeper understanding of how military policies can indirectly affect the lives of service members and their civilian partners, offering valuable insights for future research on sexual minorities in the military and informing future policy decisions.

I begin by showing that partnered sexual minority women in the military were more likely to have a partner who has insurance through Tricare relative to partnered sexual minority civilian women following the repeal of DADT. The results of restricting the sample to people in same-sex partnerships and estimating equation (1) where the dependent variable takes a value of one if the individual's partner has Tricare, and zero otherwise, are presented in Table 8. Column (1) demonstrates the significant positive association between the repeal of DADT and the likelihood that an active duty woman has a partner who is covered by Tricare.²⁹³⁰

The finding that lesbian and bisexual women in the military are significantly more likely to have a partner who is covered by Tricare after the end of DADT could be consistent with two explanations. First, it could be the case that women in the military are entering partnerships with other active duty women *who*

²⁹Year-specific event study coefficients are positive but imprecise due to low power. Appendix Figure 3 shows the corresponding event study.

³⁰Column (2) of Table 8 offers null associations for men in the military as a placebo test, since there is no evidence that repealing DADT led to significant increases in same-sex partnership among this group.

are already covered by Tricare. Alternatively, it could be the case that active duty women are partnering with civilian women *who gain Tricare coverage through their active duty partner.* I argue that both of these factors contribute to this pattern. In fact, around 45 percent of partnered sexual minority service women are in dual-military partnerships.³¹ Further, Figure 12 presents the raw trend in the share of civilian women in same-sex partnerships who have insurance through Tricare, which increases over time as new female same-sex partnerships form. To demonstrate that *civilian* partners of active duty women experienced an increase Tricare coverage specifically, I estimate a regression that incorporates being in a same-sex partnership with a civilian into the outcome. Specifically, I use the original sample used to obtain main partnership results among women age 18-64, and I estimate equation (1) where the dependent variable takes a value of one if individual i in a same-sex partnership *with a civilian, and that civilian has Tricare*, and a value of zero otherwise. Table 9 reports the results of this analysis, providing evidence that the civilian partners of active duty women are significantly more likely to have Tricare coverage after the repeal of DADT. Figure 13 offers the corresponding event study.

The event study in Figure 13 shows a lagged effect, with the increase not starting until 2013. (The dynamics of Figure 13 are in contrast to the more immediate increase in same-sex partnership among active duty women shown in Figure 5, Panel C.) This slightly delayed effect can be attributed to an important legal change that impacted access to spousal benefits for same-sex couples with one member who is active duty. In 2013 after the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), active duty service members who were married to a same-sex partner were granted full access to spousal benefits, including Tricare. Prior to this change, DOMA prevented federal recognition of same-sex marriages, even in states where such marriages were legal. Consequently, same-sex married couples could not be officially recognized as spouses by the military and were not eligible for Tricare spousal benefits. The repeal of DOMA removed this secondary barrier, allowing for the official extension of active duty benefits to same-sex spouses. The event study in Figure 13 thus captures the lagged response in Tricare coverage, as same-sex couples needed time to marry and then apply for and receive these benefits. This pattern suggests that the full realization of active duty family benefits for same-sex partners required both the repeal of DADT *and* the subsequent repeal of DOMA.³²

³¹See Figure 11 for the raw trend.

³²It should be noted that it is not possible to study the effects of repealing DADT on same-sex marriage using the ACS due to data quality issues. Prior to the 2013 ACS, same-sex married couples were recoded by the Census Bureau from married to unmarried partners. Thus, I cannot separately identify same-sex married couples from same-sex unmarried couples during the DADT repeal period.

5.3.2 Labor force participation

Dillender (2015) demonstrated that when legal recognition is granted to same-sex couples, lesbian households often adjust their division of labor such that one partner secures health insurance through employment while the other exits the labor force. Although repealing DADT was not a policy that addressed legal recognition, it is a policy that similarly facilitated the formalization of partnerships among people in the military. Evidence presented thus far suggests that the repeal of DADT caused the formation of new couples and played a role in civilians gaining access to Tricare. This begs the question of how the policy repeal could have influenced the labor market decisions of military partners. While this is not a question that can be studied causally using the current data landscape on sexual minorities in the military and their families (due to the fact that I cannot observe the same couple at multiple points in time), it is still possible to gain insights from descriptive examinations of the labor force participation of civilian women partnered with active duty women to build a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of sexual minority military families in the post-DADT era.

To explore labor force participation patterns among civilian partners of active-duty women, I estimate equation (1) with two labor force participation outcomes as the dependent variable. The first outcome takes a value of one if individual i in a same-sex partnership with a civilian, *and that civilian is in the labor force*, and takes a value of zero otherwise. The second outcome takes a value of one if individual i in a same-sex partnership with a civilian, and that civilian *is not* in the labor force, and takes a value of zero otherwise. Table 10 reports the results in Columns 1 and 2, respectively. Since same-sex partnership among women in the military is increasing, and since the two outcomes studied in Table 10 are mutually exclusive and exhaustive (i.e., a woman who is the civilian partner of an active duty woman either participates in the labor force or she does not), it follows that one or both outcomes must weakly increase as a result of more same-sex partnerships. Indeed, results in Table 10 (and the corresponding event studies in Figure 14) confirm significant increases both in active duty women partnering with civilian women who are in the labor force, and in active duty women partnering with civilian women who are not in the labor force. However, comparing the magnitudes of these effect sizes reveals that active duty women who are partnering with civilian women tend to partner more with women in the workforce than with women who have exited. These results support the hypothesis that the results in this paper are driven by new couples, who have not yet been together long enough to move towards a more clear division of household labor. These findings are

also consistent with Dillender (2015). Future research should study the evolution of the division of labor over time among same-sex couples with at least one active duty partner.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

This paper is the first to study the impacts of lifting the restrictions imposed by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” on active duty service members and their families. The results presented above demonstrate that the repeal of DADT caused a 2.7 percentage point increase in same-sex partnership among women serving on active duty. I find that this effect is primarily driven by the formation of new couples, rather than changes in reporting behavior among existing couples, and that more partnership formation occurred in states with more favorable social conditions for sexual minorities. A back-of-the-envelope calculation using annual data from the U.S. Department of Defense on the total number of women serving on active duty estimates that approximately 3,200 servicewomen entered same-sex partnerships on average each year between 2011 and 2019 as a result of the DADT repeal (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). Taken together with previous research on LGB people serving in the military and the null effects on recruitment and retention, the findings in this paper suggest that DADT may have led to suboptimal partnership outcomes for female military personnel while not necessarily affecting military service choices, highlighting the complex trade-offs faced by sexual minorities in the military (Belkin, 2012; Gates, 2004; Gates, 2010; RAND, 2010). Further research is needed to fully capture the broad impacts of the repeal of DADT on LGB service members.

In addition to examining the effect of the DADT repeal on partnership formation, this paper also explores two downstream outcomes for the civilian partners of active-duty women: Tricare health coverage and labor force participation. I demonstrate that following the repeal of DADT, active duty women were more likely to have a civilian same-sex partner who has health insurance through Tricare, and that the timing of the increase in Tricare coverage aligns with an important legal change that allowed same-sex active duty family members to enroll. The ability to gain health insurance through a spouse has been linked to the labor force participation decisions of couples. I descriptively investigate the labor force participation of the civilian partners of active duty service women and find that active duty women tend to partner more with working civilian women rather than with civilian women who are not in the labor force, relative to otherwise similar civilian women. However, since these are primarily new couples whose labor force participation choices may change over time, future research should continue to study outcomes for same-sex active duty families

as they move through the lifecourse.

The results presented in this paper reveal important policy implications for sexual minority active duty families. Broadly, the results demonstrate that instituting an anti-discrimination law that protects sexual minorities in the military improves their ability to form families, and can improve economic outcomes for same-sex active duty families. By improving Tricare health insurance coverage, such policies can have a direct and positive impact on the well-being of military families. Beyond improving outcomes for the service members themselves, this analysis underscores how military policies extend to affect the economic and social outcomes of their families. These insights should inform future policy decisions aimed at supporting minority military families, ensuring a broader understanding of the ripple effects such changes can have on diverse families in the military. Future research should continue to explore the far-reaching impacts of DADT on other outcomes (such as fertility, housing and migration choices, and measures of physical health), and its impact on other groups (such as reservists and veterans). Such work would contribute valuable additions to the literature and would be helpful for understanding the lived experiences of a small but important group: sexual minority military personnel and their families. While more research is needed to properly assess the generalizability of these results to other groups and other settings, the patterns presented in this paper are in line with other related work on sexual minorities. Previous evidence that suggests that sexual minorities, especially sexual minority women in particular, take up partnership when legal recognition of their relationships is made available to them (Badgett and Mallory, 2014; Carpenter and Gates, 2008; Ramos et al., 2009).³³ The findings in this paper offer an important first-look into how military policy shapes both personal and family outcomes, with long-term implications for the well-being of sexual minority service members and their families.

³³A notable exception is Carpenter et al., (2021), which found larger increases in marriage among gay and bisexual men relative to lesbian and bisexual women.

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Tables and Figures for:
*Effects of Workplace Anti-Discrimination Policies on Families: Evidence
from “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”*

Laura Nettuno

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Table 1: The Prevalence of LGBTQ+ People in the Military is Higher Among Women Than Men

	DoD HRBS 2015-2018	Household Pulse 2021-2023	NSDUH 2015-2019	BRFSS 2014-2021
Share LGBT-identified				
Male	4.1%	4.7%	3.1%	2.6%
Female	16.6%	15.4%	14.5%	7.9%
Total	6.1%	6.9%	5.1%	3.5%

Notes: This table reports the percentage of military service members who identified as LGBT using four datasets. Data comes from the 2015 and 2018 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Surveys in Column (1), the 2021-2023 Household Pulse Survey data in Column (2), the 2015-2019 National Survey Drug Use and Health in Column (3), and the 2014-2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in Column (4).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Mean Differences Between Civilians and Active Duty Personnel

	(1) Control Group: Civilians	(2) Treated Group: Active duty personnel	(3) Difference (2)-(1)
Panel A: Men 18-64			
Age	44.70 (11.55)	33.12 (8.21)	-11.57*** (0.03)
White	0.81 (0.40)	0.81 (0.39)	0.00** (0.00)
Black	0.07 (0.26)	0.09 (0.29)	0.02*** (0.00)
Hispanic	0.13 (0.34)	0.11 (0.31)	-0.02*** (0.00)
High school degree	0.27 (0.44)	0.17 (0.37)	-0.10*** (0.00)
Some college	0.28 (0.45)	0.47 (0.50)	0.19*** (0.00)
Bachelor's degree or more	0.34 (0.47)	0.36 (0.48)	0.02*** (0.00)
N	6,402,614	64,532	6,467,146
Panel B: Women 18-64			
Age	44.31 (11.73)	32.10 (8.40)	-12.21*** (0.08)
White	0.78 (0.41)	0.68 (0.47)	-0.10*** (0.00)
Black	0.10 (0.30)	0.18 (0.39)	0.08*** (0.00)
Hispanic	0.13 (0.33)	0.13 (0.34)	0.00 (0.00)
High school degree	0.23 (0.42)	0.10 (0.29)	-0.14*** (0.00)
Some college	0.33 (0.47)	0.47 (0.50)	0.14*** (0.00)
Bachelor's degree or more	0.35 (0.48)	0.43 (0.49)	0.08*** (0.00)
N	8,075,067	10,119	8,085,186

Notes: Summary statistics for active duty and civilian men in Panel (a) and active duty and civilian women in Panel (b). The table presents means and standard deviations in parentheses for civilians in Column 1 and active duty personnel in Column 2. Column 3 tests for a difference in means between Columns 1 and 2, and displays standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance of differences denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 3: Summary Statistics: Same-Sex Partnership Before and After DADT Repeal

	(1) Control Group: Civilians	(2) Treated Group: Active duty personnel	(3) Difference (2)-(1)
Panel A: Men 18-64			
Pre-DADT repeal	0.008 (0.090)	0.002 (0.042)	-0.006*** (0.000)
Post-DADT repeal	0.011 (0.106)	0.003 (0.056)	-0.008*** (0.000)
N	6,402,614	64,532	6,467,146
Panel B: Women 18-64			
Pre-DADT repeal	0.007 (0.084)	0.009 (0.093)	0.002 (0.002)
Post-DADT repeal	0.010 (0.100)	0.040 (0.195)	0.029*** (0.002)
N	8,075,067	10,119	8,085,186

Notes: Raw means for active duty and civilian men in Panel (a) and active duty and civilian women in Panel (b). The table presents means and standard deviations in parentheses for civilians in Column 1 and active duty personnel in Column 2. Column 3 tests for a difference in means between Columns 1 and 2, and displays standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance of differences denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 4: Repealing DADT Increased Same-Sex Partnership Among Active Duty Women

	(1) All individuals	(2) Men	(3) Women
Currently Active Duty x Post-DADT	0.002** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	0.027*** (0.002)
N	14,552,332	6,467,146	8,085,186
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.003	0.002	0.009

Notes: TWFE regression coefficients. The dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership. Models include demographic controls for sex, age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Only active duty and civilian ACS respondents ages 18-64 have been considered. The sample is all working age individuals in Column 1, working age men in Column 2, and working age women in Column 3. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Source:* ACS 2008-2019.

Table 5: Heterogeneous Effects of Repealing DADT on Same-Sex Partnership Among Active Duty Women

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	All women	Under 35	Over 35	No children	Has children	Under 35, no children	Over 35, no children	Under 35 with children	Over 35 with children
Currently Active Duty x Post DADT	0.027*** (0.002)	0.031*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.004)	0.042*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.002)	0.041*** (0.005)	0.037*** (0.006)	0.017*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.004)
N	8,085,186	2,165,930	5,919,256	4,691,991	3,393,195	915,702	3,776,289	1,250,228	2,142,967

Notes: The table presents TWFE regression coefficients for various subgroups of women. The sample used in each model is given by the column heading. The dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 6: Driven By Reporting? Repealing DADT had no effect on reporting having a same-sex roommate

	(1)	(2)
	Has a same-sex roommate	Has a same-sex roommate w/ less than 10yr age difference
Currently Active Duty x Post-DADT	-0.013 (0.010)	-0.007 (0.010)
N	5,241,052	5,241,052
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.089	0.078

Notes: TWFE regression coefficients. The dependent variable in Column 1 is whether the individual resides with a same-sex roommate/lodger/boarder, and the dependent variable in Column 2 is whether the individual resides with a same-sex roommate/lodger/boarder whose age is within 10 years of the individual's age. The sample is all active duty and civilian women ages 18-64. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 7: Effect of Repealing DADT on Same-Sex Partnership for Active Duty Women: Other Sensitivity and Robustness Tests

	(1) Preferred specification	(2) Doubly Robust DiD	(3) No controls	(4) State and Time FE	(5) Bootstrapped Std. Errors	(6) Randomization Inference
Currently Active Duty x Post DADT	0.0271*** (0.0021)	0.0267*** (0.0030)	0.0273*** (0.0028)	0.0270*** (0.0027)	0.0271*** (0.0028)	0.0271*** (0.0000)
Demographic controls	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
State-Time FE	✓			✓	✓	
State & Time FE			✓			
Clustered std. err.	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bootstrapped std. err.					✓	

Notes: The table presents the TWFE regression coefficients from estimating various models to test the sensitivity of the main result to alternative modeling choices. The dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership. The sample is active duty and civilian women ages 18-64. Columns 1-5 report standard errors in parentheses. Column 6 reports the p-value associated with $\beta^* = 0.0271$ relative to the distribution of simulated values of β . Modifications from the preferred specification are presented at the bottom of each column using check-marks. Demographic controls include age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 8: Active Duty Women in Same-Sex Partnerships Were More Likely To Have a Partner with Tricare (Military Health Insurance) Following the DADT Repeal

	(1)	(2)
	Women in same-sex partnerships	Men in same-sex partnerships
Currently Active Duty x Post-DADT	0.188** (0.086)	-0.156 (0.106)
N	77,341	71,973

Notes: TWFE regression coefficients. The dependent variable is whether the individual has a partner with insurance through Tricare. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. In Column 1, the sample is all active duty and civilian women in same-sex partnerships, ages 18-64. In Column 2, the sample is all active duty and civilian men in same-sex partnerships ages, 18-64. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 9: The Civilian Same-Sex Partners of Active Duty Women Have Health Insurance Through Tricare (Military Health Insurance) after DADT Repeal

	(1)
	Pr(Individual is in a SSP with a civilian, and that civilian has Tricare)
Currently Active Duty x Post-DADT	0.012*** (0.001)
N	7,987,984
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.003

Notes: TWFE regression coefficient. The dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership with a civilian who has insurance through Tricare. The sample is all active duty and civilian women ages 18-64. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.

Table 10: Active Duty Women Tend to Partner with Civilian Women in the Labor Force

	(1) Pr(Individual is in a SSP with a civilian in the LF)	(2) Pr(Individual is in a SSP with a civilian NOT in the LF)
Currently Active Duty x Post-DADT	0.012*** (0.002)	0.002*** (0.001)
N	7,987,984	7,987,984
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.004	0.001

Notes: TWFE regression coefficients. The dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership with a civilian who is/is not in the labor force in Columns 1 and 2, respectively. The sample is all active duty and civilian women ages 18-64. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. *Source:* ACS 2008-2019.

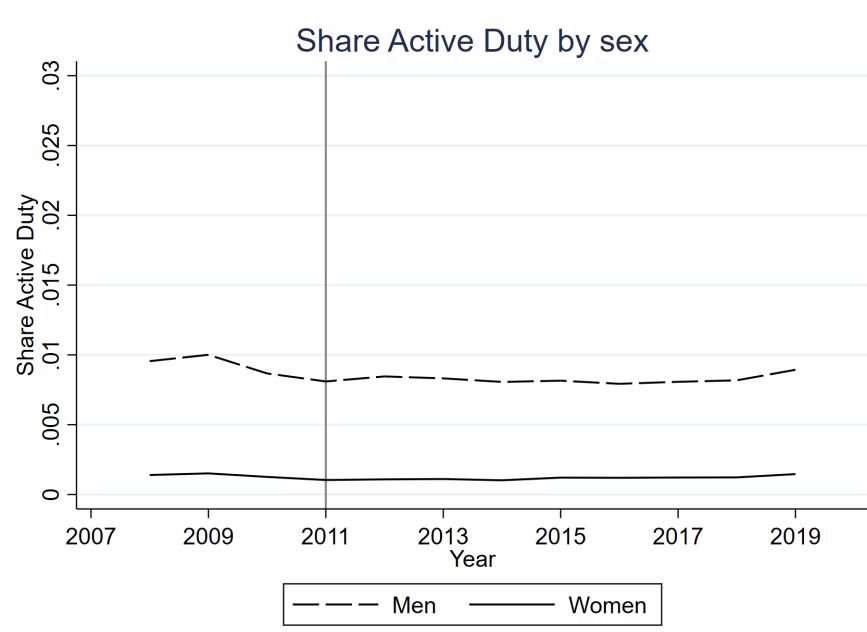


Figure 1: Trends in share active duty by sex, individuals 18-64. The figure shows that military participation remained stable during the DADT repeal. *Source:* ACS 2008-2019.

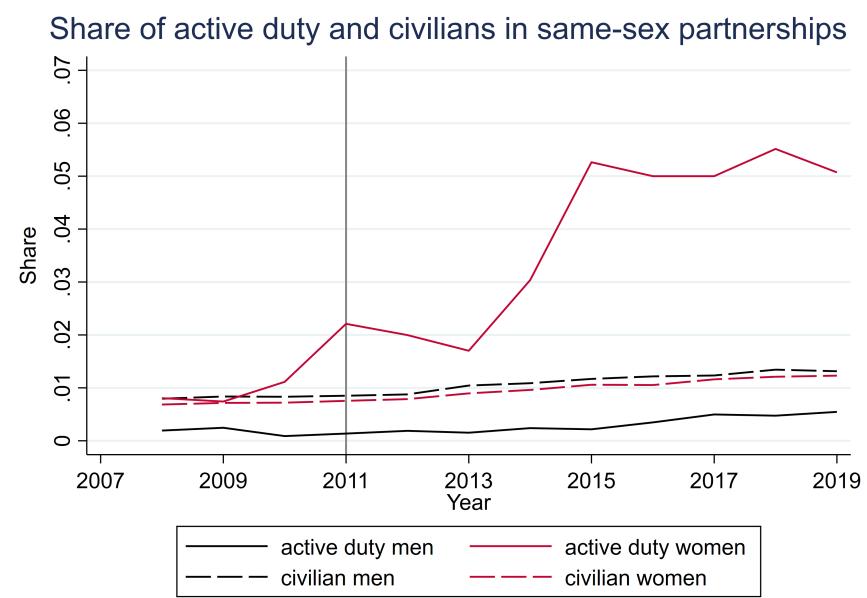
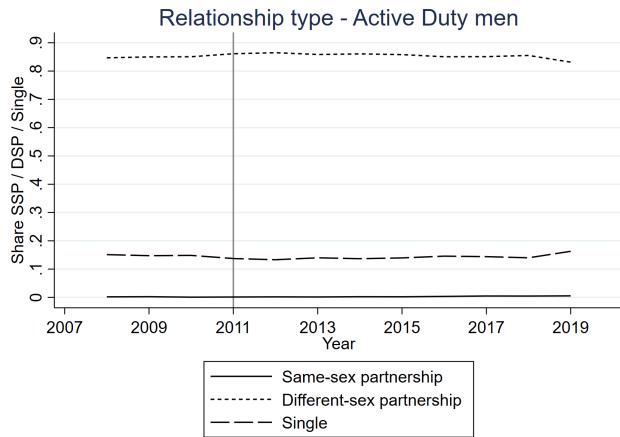
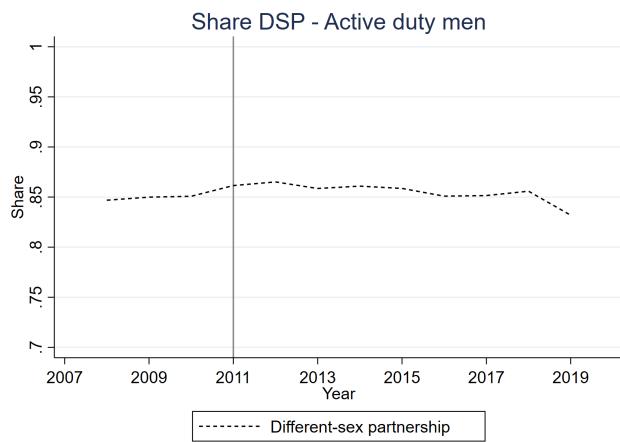


Figure 2: Trends in same-sex partnership by military affiliation for men and women age 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008-2019.



(a) All relationship types, active duty men 18-64

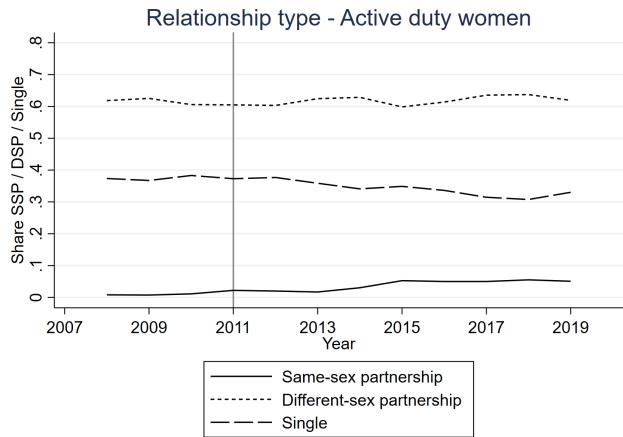


(b) Different-sex partnership, active duty men 18-64

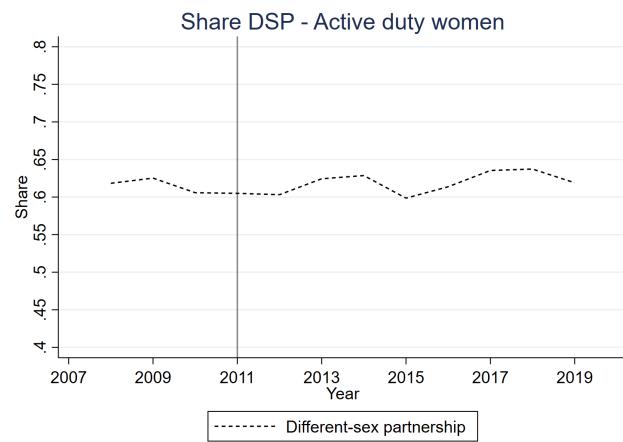


(c) Same-sex partnership and singleness, active duty men 18-64

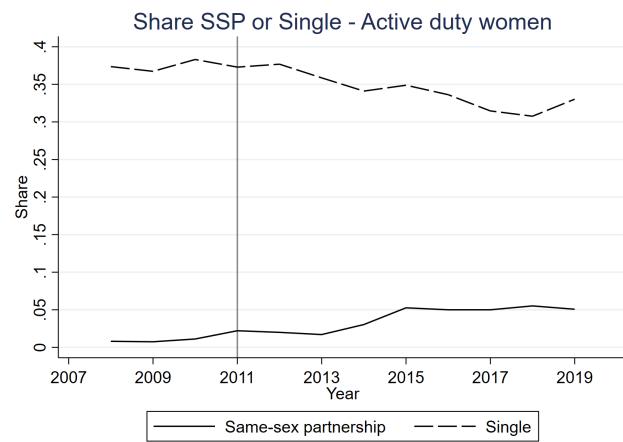
Figure 3: Trends in relationship type for active duty men age 18-64. Panel (a) shows the raw trends in all three possible relationship types on the same graph; same-sex partnerships, different-sex partnerships, and being single. To assist with visualizing the trends, Panel (b) zooms in on the trend in different-sex partnerships among men in the military and Panel (c) zooms in on same-sex partnerships and singleness in the military. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.



(a) All relationship types, active duty women 18-64

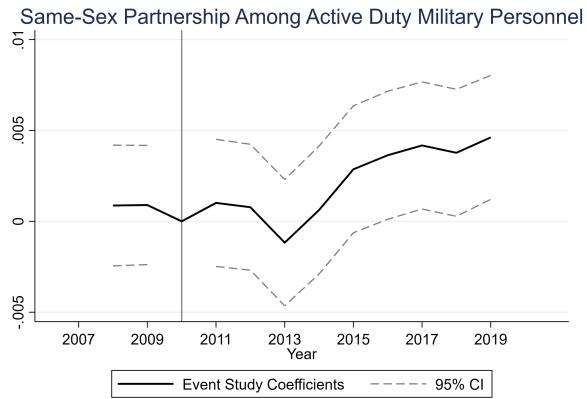


(b) Different-sex partnership, active duty women 18-64

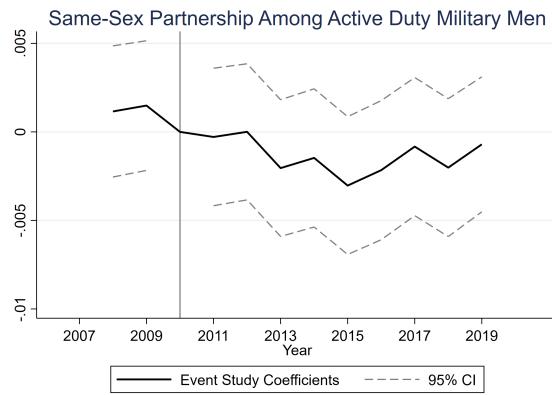


(c) Same-sex partnership and singleness, active duty women 18-64

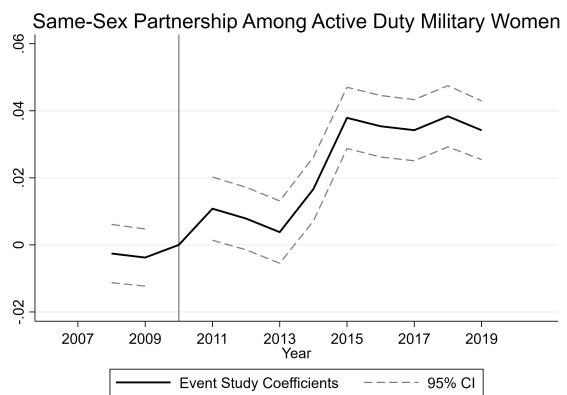
Figure 4: Trends in relationship type for active duty women age 18-64. Panel (a) shows the raw trends in all three possible relationship types on the same graph; same-sex partnerships, different-sex partnerships, and being single. To assist with visualizing the trends, Panel (b) zooms in on the trend in different-sex partnerships among women in the military and Panel (c) zooms in on same-sex partnerships and singleness in the military. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.



(a) All individuals 18-64



(b) Men 18-64



(c) Women 18-64

Figure 5: Event studies: Effect of repealing DADT on same-sex partnership. This figure analyzes whether active duty personnel were more likely to be in a same-sex couple after the repeal of DADT relative to otherwise-similar civilians. All individuals 18-64 in Panel (a), men 18-64 in Panel (b), and women 18-64 in Panel (c). The specification includes demographic controls for sex, age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

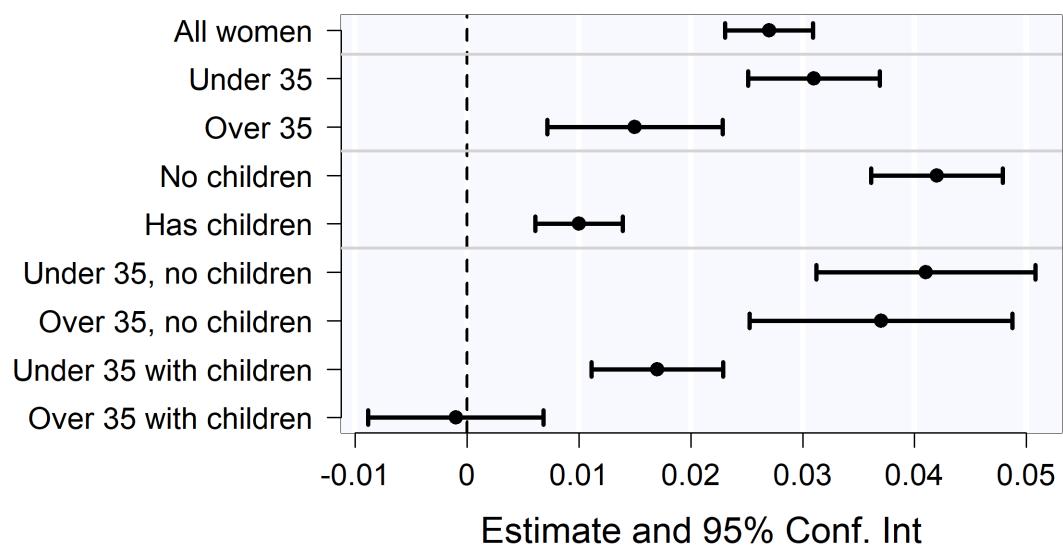
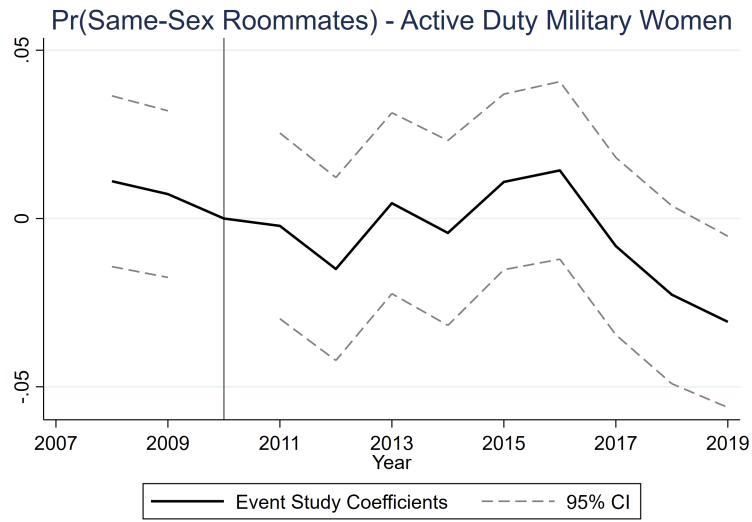
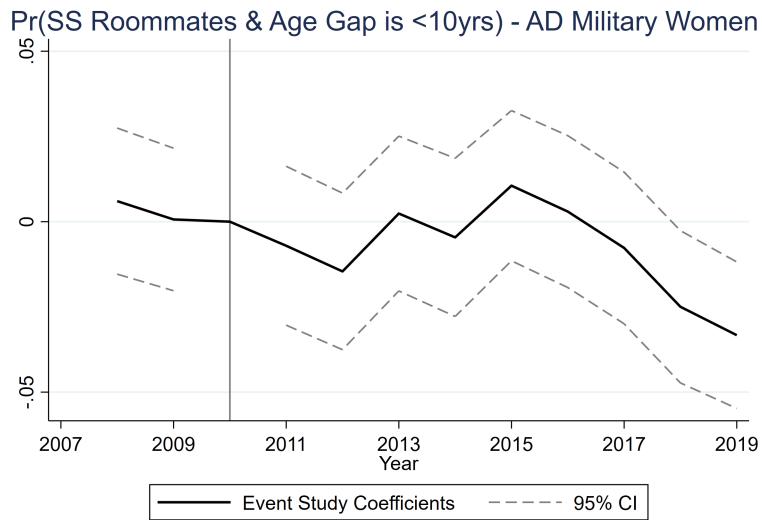


Figure 6: Regression coefficients. Heterogeneity in the effect of repealing DADT on same-sex partnership among women in the military by age and parenthood. Same-sex partnership formation was largest among young women and women with no children, groups that suggest the effect led to new relationships. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.



(a) Likelihood of living with a same-sex roommate



(b) Likelihood of living with a same-sex roommate who is within 10 years of own age

Figure 7: Event studies: Effect of repealing DADT on reporting living with a same-sex roommate among active duty women. This figure tests whether the main effects are likely to be driven by reporting. The results suggest that the increase in same-sex partnership is primarily due to new couples rather than existing couples who previously reported being “roommates” on the ACS. Panel (a) analyzes whether active duty women were more likely to be living with a same-sex roommate after the repeal of DADT relative to otherwise-similar civilians. Panel (b) analyzes whether active duty women were more likely to be living with a same-sex roommate who is within 10 years of their own age after the repeal of DADT relative to otherwise-similar civilians. The specification includes demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

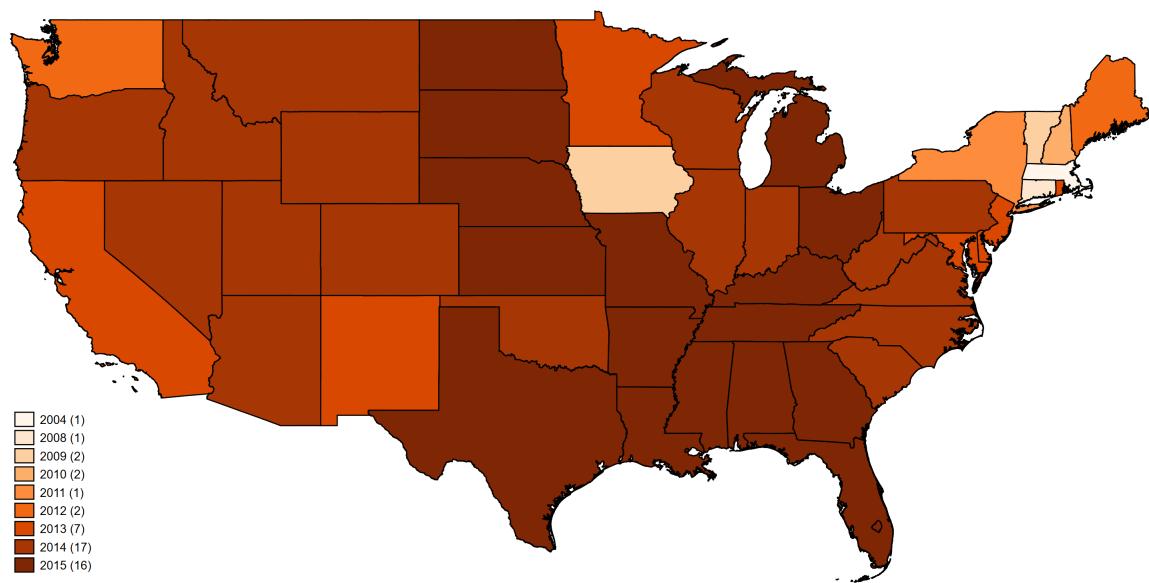


Figure 8: Same-sex marriage legalization year by state. *Source:* Human Rights Campaign.

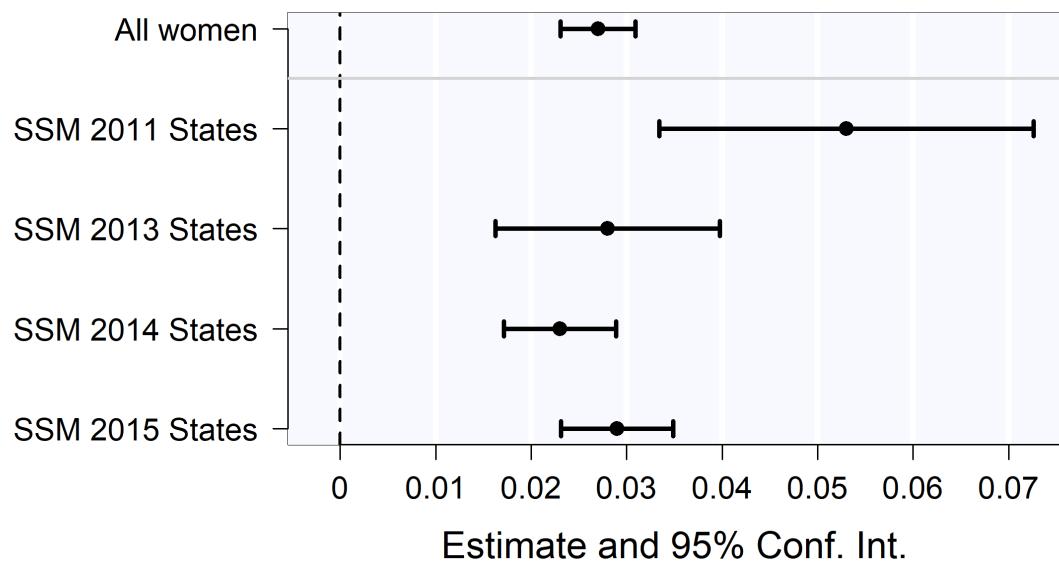


Figure 9: Regression coefficients. Heterogeneity in the effect of repealing DADT on same-sex partnership among women in the military, by same-sex marriage legalization year. Partnership formation was largest in states that had legal same-sex marriage prior to the DADT repeal. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

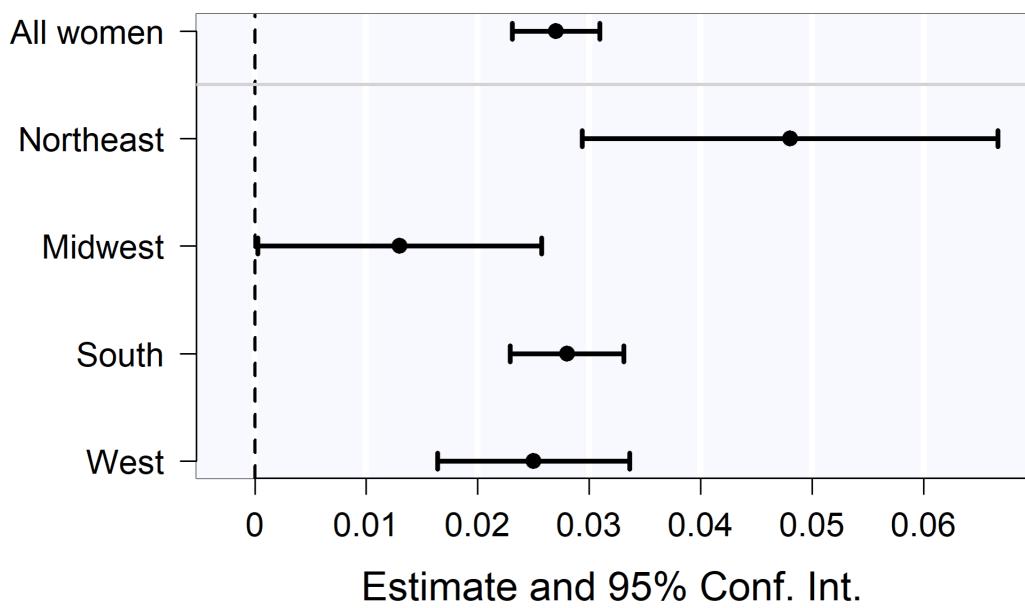


Figure 10: Regression coefficients. Heterogeneity in the effect of repealing DADT on same-sex partnership among women in the military, by region. Partnership formation was largest in the Northeast, an area with a history of favorable attitudes towards sexual minorities. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

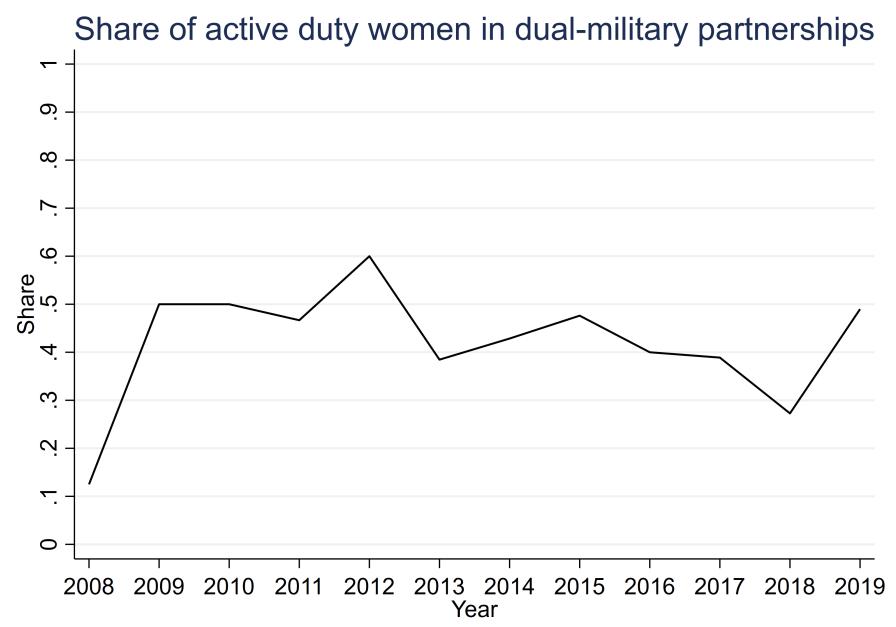


Figure 11: Trend in the share of active duty women in dual-military partnerships. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

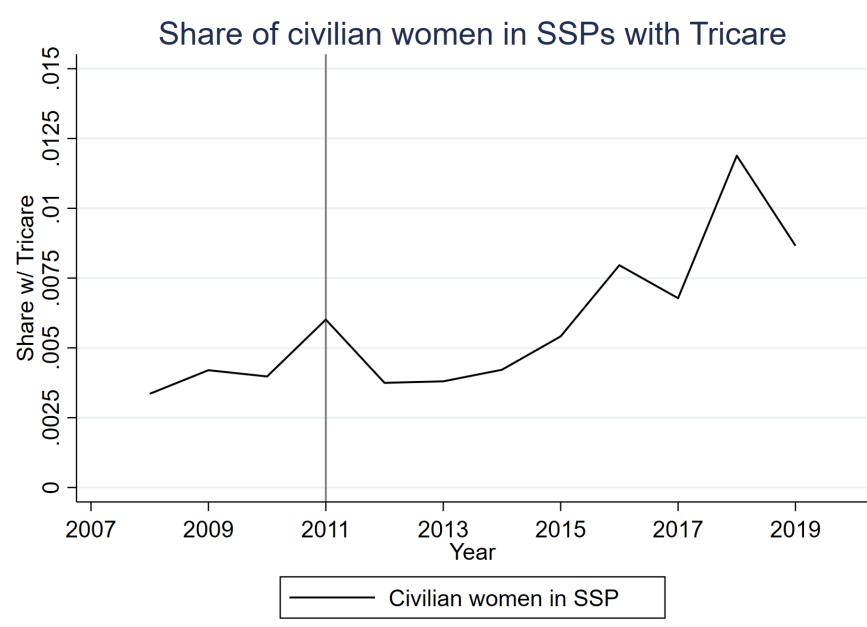


Figure 12: Trend in the share of civilian women in same-sex partnerships with insurance coverage through Tricare. Civilian women age 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

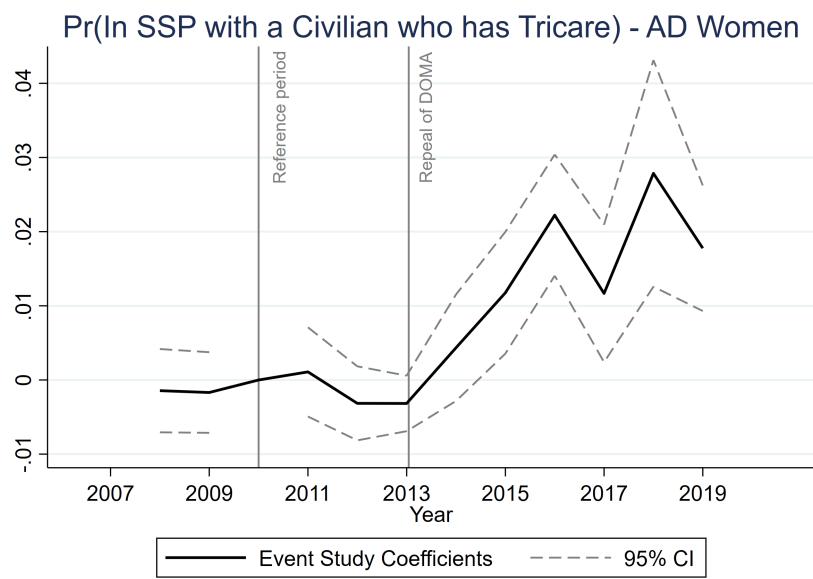
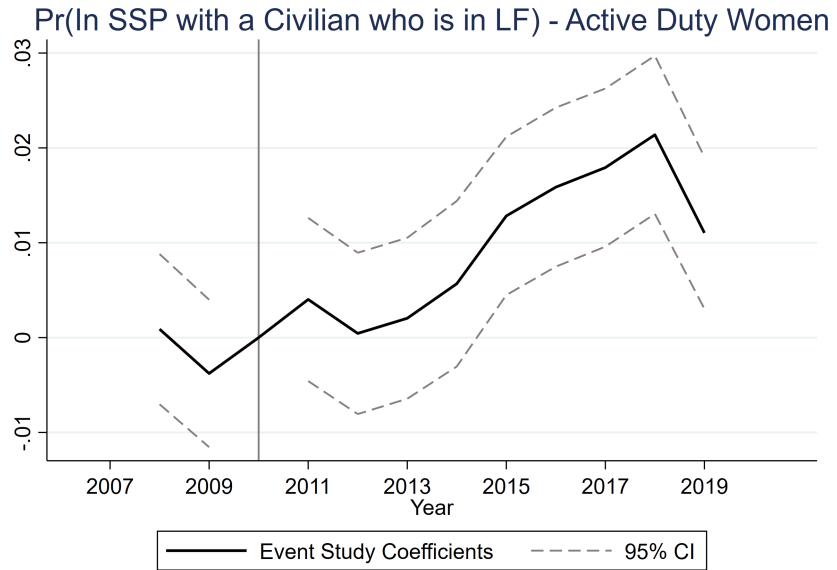
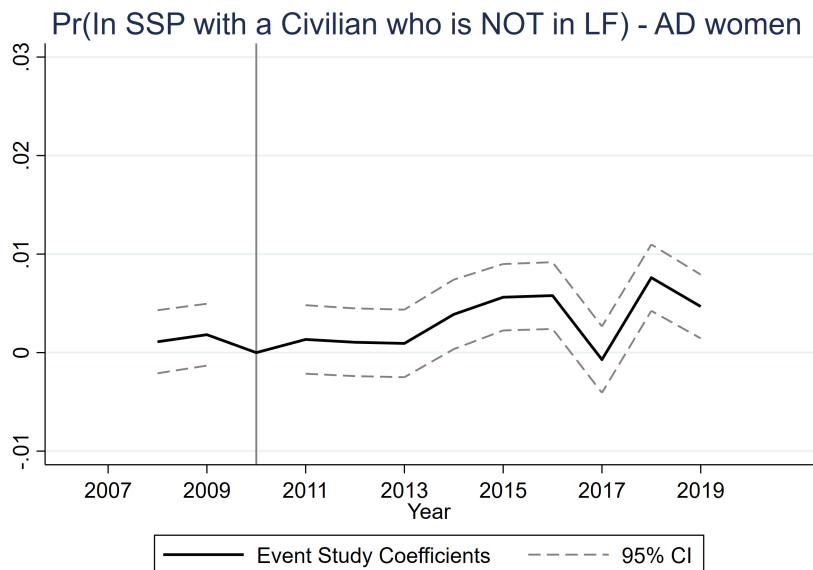


Figure 13: Event study: Effect of repealing DADT on the likelihood of having a civilian same-sex partner who has Tricare insurance for active duty women relative to civilian women. The specification includes state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.



(a) Likelihood of having a partner who is in the labor force



(b) Likelihood of having a partner who is not in the labor force

Figure 14: Event studies: Panel (a) analyzes the effect of repealing DADT on the likelihood of having a same-sex partner who is in the labor force and Panel (b) analyzes the effect of repealing DADT on the likelihood of having a same-sex partner who is not in the labor force for active duty women relative to civilian women. The specification includes state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. The sample is active duty and civilian women ages 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.

Appendices for:

Effects of Workplace Anti-Discrimination Policies on Families: Evidence from “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Laura Nettuno

October 2024

Appendix A: Other types of partnership

To further explore the differences in partnership patterns by sex, I separate the primary comparison presented in Table 4 (same-sex versus non-same-sex relationships among active duty personnel relative to civilians) into pairwise comparisons of each possible relationship type to identify the driving force behind the main result by estimating multiple versions of the model described in Section 4. Specifically, I estimate equations (1) and (2) in three additional ways: (i) I drop people in different-sex couples from the sample and compare the probability of being in a same-sex partnership (the outcome takes a value of $Y_{ist}=1$) to the probability of being single ($Y_{ist}=0$), (ii) I drop single people from the sample and compare the probability of being in a same-sex partnership ($Y_{ist}=1$) to the probability of being in a different-sex partnership ($Y_{ist}=0$), and (iii) I drop people in same-sex partnerships from the sample and compare the probability of being in a different-sex partnership (the outcome takes a value $Y_{ist}=1$) to the probability of being single ($Y_{ist}=0$). I do this separately for men and women. Deconstructing the main result presented in Table 4 in this way will allow me to separately consider each type of partnership and determine which groups (same-sex partners, different-sex partners, or singles) are changing relative to others and driving the first stage result for men and women. Appendix Table 1 presents the results for men in Panel A and women in Panel B. Both panels are formatted in the same manner: Column 1 compares $\text{Pr}(\text{SSP})$ to $\text{Pr}(\text{Single})$, Column 2 compares $\text{Pr}(\text{SSP})$ to $\text{Pr}(\text{DSP})$, and Column 3 compares $\text{Pr}(\text{DSP})$ to $\text{Pr}(\text{Single})$. Appendix Figures 1 and 2 show the corresponding event studies for men and women, respectively.

Turning first to Panel A for the results for men. In Appendix Table 1, Column 1, I find no evidence that the probability of being in a same-sex partnership increased relative to being single for active duty men after the repeal

of DADT. The corresponding event study in Panel A of Appendix Figure 1 is flat over the period of analysis. Further, in Column 2 of Appendix Table 1, I observe a decrease in the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership relative to a different-sex partnership. Although Panel B of Appendix Figure 1 shows a slight decline in same-sex partnership, the event study coefficients are not statistically significant in either the pre- or post-repeal period. Column 3 of Appendix Table 1, however, reports an increase in different-sex partnerships relative to being single, and Panel C of Appendix Figure 1 confirms that different-sex partnerships increased after the repeal. Taken together, these results indicate no significant effect of DADT repeal on same-sex partnerships among active duty men. Instead, it appears that active duty men are shifting from being single to forming different-sex partnerships. Further research is needed to explore the dynamics of different-sex partnership formation among men in the military. Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, same-sex partnerships among the control group were gradually increasing during the same period, which likely contributes to the negative regression coefficient observed in Table 4. In summary, I find no evidence that the repeal of DADT influenced the formation of same-sex partnerships among active duty men.

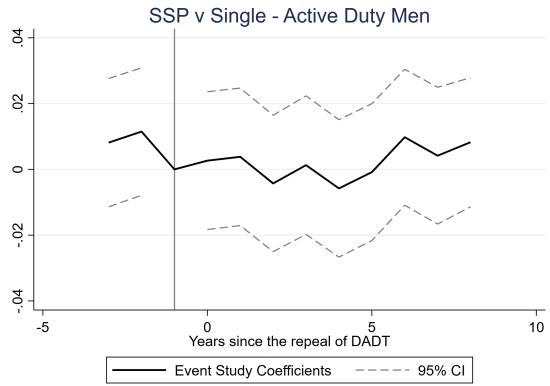
Now focusing attention to the analogous results for women in Panel B of Appendix Table 1. Columns 1 and 2 show that the probability that an active duty woman is in a same-sex partnership is increasing against both the probability of being single and the probability of being in a different-sex partnership relative to otherwise similar civilian women. The event studies shown in Panels A and B of Appendix Figure 2 confirm these patterns and show a slightly delayed effect as mentioned previously. Although the effect on the probability of being in a different-sex partnership is not significantly different from zero, the coefficient is positive and the event study graph is increasing gradually over time, which suggests that the proportion of single active duty women may have decreased after the repeal of DADT. Taking these results together, I find evidence that the repeal of DADT led to a larger proportion of women in the military being in same-sex partnerships, while reducing singleness.

Appendix Tables and Figures

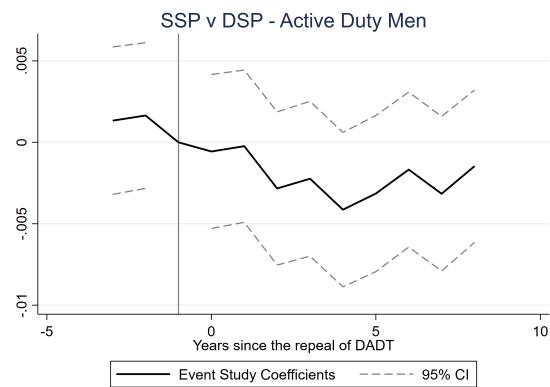
Appendix Table 1: Effect of repealing DADT on all relationship types

	(1) SSP v Single	(2) SSP v DSP	(3) DSP v Single
Panel A: Men			
Currently Active Duty x Post DADT	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.017*** (0.004)
<i>N</i>	1,460,082	5,074,642	6,399,568
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.012	0.002	0.851
Panel B: Women			
Currently Active Duty x Post DADT	0.068*** (0.006)	0.041*** (0.003)	0.013 (0.010)
<i>N</i>	2,329,863	5,830,847	8,009,662
Pre-repeal active duty mean	0.023	0.014	0.622

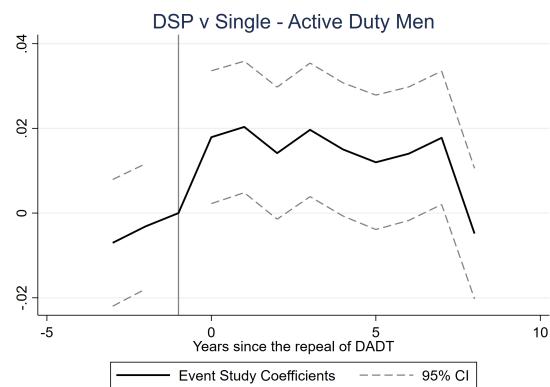
Notes: The table presents TWFE regression coefficients. Only active duty and civilian ACS respondents ages 18-64 have been considered. Panel A presents the results for men and Panel B presents the results for women. In Column 1, the sample includes people in same-sex partnerships and people who are single, and the dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership. In Column 2, the sample includes people in same-sex partnerships and people in different-sex partnerships, and the dependent variable is whether the individual is in a same-sex partnership. In Column 3, the sample includes people in different-sex partnerships and people who are single, and the dependent variable is whether the individual is in a different-sex partnership. Models include demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, and state-time fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. Statistical significance denoted using * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Source: ACS 2008-2019.



(a) Likelihood of same-sex partnership among men in same-sex partnerships and singles.

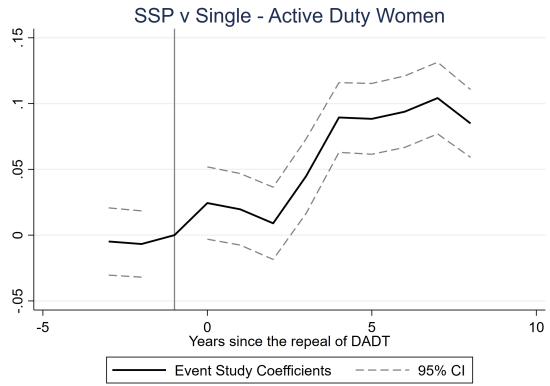


(b) Likelihood of same-sex partnership among men in same-sex partnerships and different-sex partnerships.

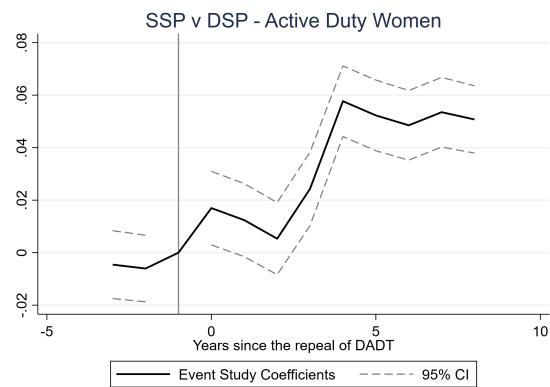


(c) Likelihood of different-sex partnership among men in different-sex partnerships and singles.

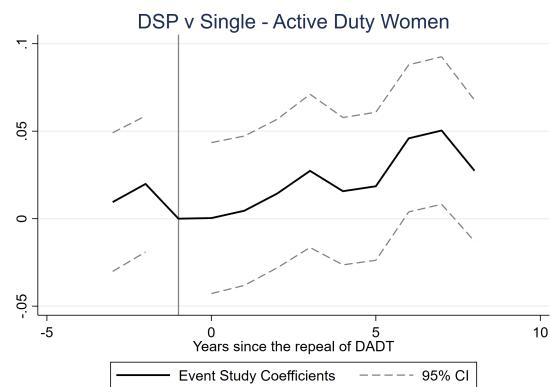
Appendix Figure 1: Event studies: Effect of repealing DADT on relationship type for active duty men relative to civilian men. Panel (a) analyzes the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership among men in same-sex partnerships and singles. Panel (b) analyzes the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership among men in same-sex partnerships and different-sex partnerships. Panel (c) analyzes the likelihood of being in a different-sex partnership among men in different-sex partnerships and singles. The specification includes demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. The sample is active duty and civilian men age 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.



(a) Likelihood of same-sex partnership among women in same-sex partnerships and singles.

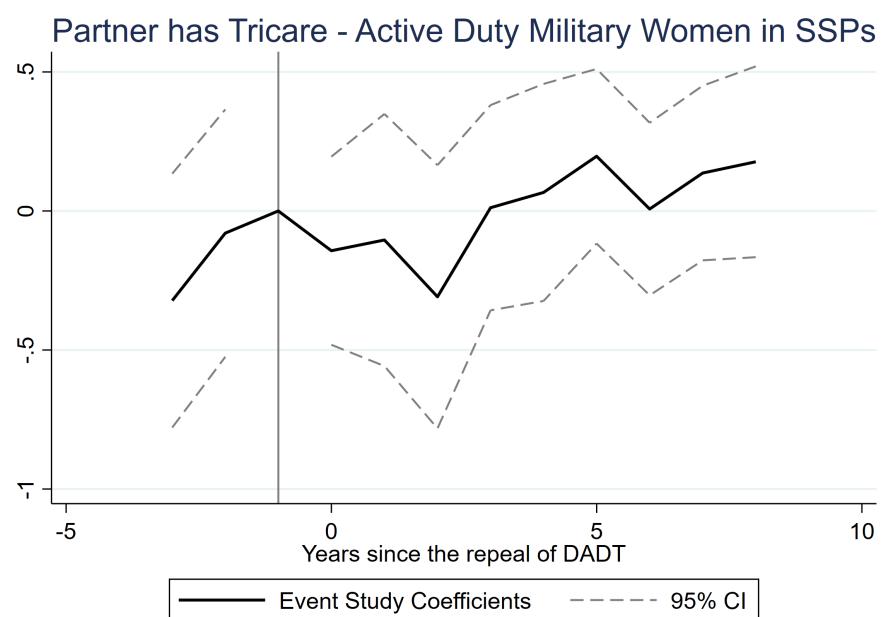


(b) Likelihood of same-sex partnership among women in same-sex partnerships and different-sex partnerships.



(c) Likelihood of different-sex partnership among women in different-sex partnerships and singles.

Appendix Figure 2: Event studies: Effect of repealing DADT on relationship type for active duty women relative to civilian women. Panel (a) analyzes the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership among women in same-sex partnerships and singles. Panel (b) analyzes the likelihood of being in a same-sex partnership among women in same-sex partnerships and different-sex partnerships. Panel (c) analyzes the likelihood of being in a different-sex partnership among women in different-sex partnerships and singles. The specification includes demographic controls for age, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. The sample is active duty and civilian women age 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019..



Appendix Figure 3: Event study: Effect of repealing DADT on the likelihood of having a partner who has Tricare among active duty women in same-sex partnerships relative to civilian women in same-sex partnerships. The specification includes state-time fixed effects, and clustered robust standard errors. The sample is active duty and civilian women age 18-64. *Source:* ACS 2008–2019.