



Inclusion of LGBT persons in the context of military service in Ukraine: A psycholinguistic approach

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◆ **Abstract.** The aim of this empirical study was to identify the socio-psychological attitudes of future Ukrainian officers towards sexual diversity and to determine the latent factors that influence the potential for inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The empirical basis was provided by data from a psycholinguistic associative experiment conducted among 78 senior cadets of a military institute aged 20 to 28, with an average age of 24.6 years. Respondents provided free associations to the stimuli "a person's private life and the right to be oneself" and "traditional family norms and traditions," which were then processed using a reflective thematic analysis procedure. The results showed that ideas about privacy and family norms are key conceptual frameworks through which sexual diversity is understood in the Ukrainian military environment. The male group is dominated by an orientation towards discipline, social order and heteronormative family models, combined with an expectation of limited public visibility of LGBT people. This configuration of attitudes corresponds to a model of conditional inclusion, where the right to diversity is recognised mainly in the private sphere. In the women's group, associations related to acceptance, emotional support, respect for individual choice, and variability of family forms are more frequently recorded, indicating the psychological potential to recognise the right to independence, control, and inviolability of personal choice in the sexual sphere. The study found that the inclusion of LGBT people in the Armed Forces of Ukraine largely depends on the informal cultural perceptions of Ukrainians, and not only on official non-discrimination policies. Tolerance for sexual diversity in the minds of Ukrainian cadets is fragmented and manifests itself mainly at the level of individual rights, but is significantly narrowed in the sphere of socially significant norms. At the same time, the presence of an orientation towards respect, mutual understanding and psychological support indicates resources for the development of an inclusive climate. The practical value of the work lies in the fact that the development of a culture of respect for diversity and inclusion of LGBT people strengthens trust, cohesion and effective interaction in military units

◆ **Keywords:** sexual diversity; associative experiment; gender differences; armed forces; personal autonomy; privacy

◆ Introduction

The full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war has significantly altered not only the security situation in the state but also the socio-psychological conditions of the functioning of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In conditions of prolonged

war, the military appears not only as an instrument of defence, but also as a complex social system, the effectiveness of which depends on the level of cohesion, interpersonal trust and psychological stability of its personnel. In such

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circumstances, it is particularly important to analyse the socio-psychological processes within military collectives, in particular attitudes towards different social groups and the nature of intergroup relations. Scientific literature on military psychology repeatedly emphasises that unit cohesion is one of the key factors in combat effectiveness, stress adaptation and the preservation of mental health among military personnel. As noted by A. Naweed *et al.* (2021), it includes not only a focus on a common task, but also a sense of mutual support, fair treatment and recognition of each member of the group as important to the team. At the same time, violations of these conditions – through social exclusion, stigmatisation, or tense intergroup relations – can significantly undermine both the psychological climate in the unit and the individual resilience of military personnel. According to J. Azevedo & H. Pereira (2023), it is impossible to consider these processes without taking into account the specifics of military culture, which has historically been shaped by a rigid hierarchy, normativity and the dominance of militarised masculinity ideals. According to the Ukrainian LGBT Military Association (n.d.), such cultural frameworks define the concept of professional “normality” in the military, while at the same time labelling certain identities as deviations from it. In this sense, the military environment may unconsciously reproduce mechanisms of symbolic inclusion and exclusion that affect the position of certain social groups.

In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the analysis of the social situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, which in many societies, particularly in military institutions, has historically developed in conditions of limited social acceptance. It is these conditions that largely determine the reproduction of negative socio-psychological attitudes towards LGBT people in the military environment, leading to increased levels of social stress and deteriorating mental health among LGBT military personnel. At the same time, the formation of a supportive social climate and positive intergroup relations is associated with higher organisational commitment and psychological resilience among military personnel regardless of their sexual orientation, as emphasised in a publication by V.K. Dixon (2025). These patterns are particularly important in wartime, when intergroup boundaries can be both exacerbated and redefined under the influence of shared experiences of risk and loss. Military units in combat conditions are forced to quickly build trust and mutual support, which makes the issue of social integration and acceptance not an abstract ethical problem, but a factor of practical effectiveness (Naweed *et al.*, 2021). It is in such conditions that the extent to which socio-psychological attitudes towards “others” are consistent with the requirements of combat and special tasks and collective responsibility becomes apparent. The Ukrainian context has its own specific features, which further reinforce the relevance of this issue. The long-standing influence of traditionalist views on gender and sexuality is combined with the processes of transformation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine associated

with the European integration course and the implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination policies in the security and defence sector (Arnautova *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, full-scale war has accelerated these changes and made internal social tensions more visible, particularly regarding the acceptance of sexual diversity by military personnel. Research by D.W.B. Lomas (2025) and A.K. Osborne & G. McGill (2024) has shown that limited training of commanders on diversity issues and the lack of clear procedures for responding to discrimination significantly reduce the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives. Without systemic changes in military culture, the psychological risks for LGBT military personnel remain high. Thus, the analysis of the socio-psychological aspects of attitudes towards LGBT people in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is important and timely in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. It allows for a deeper understanding of how intergroup attitudes and identities interact with the demands of military service under extreme conditions and highlights the importance of the human dimension in ensuring the resilience and effectiveness of the state’s defence. The aim of this article was to study the attitudes of future Ukrainian officers towards sexual diversity and to investigate the factors that influence the formation of an inclusive culture in military communities.

◆ Literature Review

Scholarly research devoted to the experiences of LGBT service members in the military environment intensified significantly after the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy, which for a long time defined the limits of permissible disclosure of non-heterosexual identity within the armed forces (Aford & Lee, 2016). Most of the work in this field has been carried out in the context of social work, social and clinical psychology, and its analytical focus is on the psychological consequences of stigmatisation, characteristics of the organisational climate and features of interpersonal relationships in military communities. A review of the current literature reveals a consistent logic in the research, according to which formal institutional changes aimed at inclusion are not automatically accompanied by a transformation of everyday socio-psychological practices. As a result, the military environment for LGBT servicemembers often remains a space of social tension, limited interpersonal security, and conditional belonging. A significant portion of empirical research demonstrates the persistence of psychological risks even under conditions of declared equality. Thus, K.A. McNamara *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that perceptions of safety, acceptance, and belonging in a military unit are closely related to job satisfaction, mental health indicators, and organisational commitment. The authors argued that formal guarantees of equality, not backed up by interpersonal acceptance, are associated with psychological distress and reduced organisational engagement, including weaker identification with the unit, lower job satisfaction and less willingness to serve long-term. For LGBT military personnel, social isolation,

exclusion from informal interactions, and a lack of support from colleagues remain significant sources of psychological stress. Further empirical studies confirm these findings. I.W. Holloway *et al.* (2021) reported poorer mental health outcomes and higher prevalence of risky behaviour among LGBT military personnel compared to their heterosexual colleagues. These results are interpreted as a consequence of prolonged exposure to a socially unfavourable environment that requires constant adaptation and self-regulation. F.R. Carey *et al.* (2022), analysing large samples of active military personnel and veterans, showed that LGBT individuals are more likely to report negative perceptions of leadership effectiveness, lack of support, and reduced sense of group belonging, which in turn is associated with an increased risk of unplanned or early discharge from service. Research by J. Baumann *et al.* (2022) and M.N. Turlicuc & A.-D. Balcan (2023) focused on the persistence of heteronormative assumptions and hypermasculine norms embedded in military culture. Despite the existence of formal equality policies, these cultural patterns continue to structure interpersonal relationships and create additional barriers to the psychological well-being of LGBT military personnel. L.R. Godier-McBard *et al.* (2022) complemented this approach by showing that the consequences of social stigmatisation manifest themselves not only at the individual level, but also in group dynamics, reducing trust, unit cohesion and creating latent conflicts.

At the same time, a related line of research has emerged in the literature, focusing on the interpersonal and partnership dimensions of military service. These works go beyond the analysis of individual experiences and focus on the specific challenges faced by LGBT military personnel and their romantic partners in the context of military organisations. C. Balderrama-Durbin *et al.* (2025) found that military institutions have historically relied on heteronormative models of family and partnership, limiting the visibility and recognition of same-sex relationships. Current procedures and policies often fail to address the needs of such couples, resulting in unequal access to information, social support, and mental health services. The inability to openly acknowledge partnerships increases psychological stress, as service members are forced to balance professional responsibilities with constantly assessing the risks associated with disclosing personal information. This pressure extends to partners who are not in the military. An analysis of the impact of DADT on intimate relationships, presented in the work of B. Aford & S.J. Lee (2016), showed that the requirement to conceal sexual orientation effectively means concealing partnerships, which limits access to emotional and social support. The experience of prolonged “invisibility” has long-term consequences for the quality of relationships, contributing to emotional distance and chronic tension. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of socially conditioned psychological tensions that arise in everyday interactions in military communities. Unlike studies that focus on individual discriminatory events, these studies view tension as the result of the long-term

interaction of organisational culture, informal norms and social expectations. The results of A. LeBlanc *et al.* (2015) and C. Balderrama-Durbin *et al.* (2025) showed that the repeated exposure to stigmatising signals and practices of social exclusion, manifested in marginalisation within units, limited access to informal support networks, and reduced opportunities for full participation in collective life, creates cumulative psychological pressure that determines the nature of social participation and interpersonal behaviour of LGBT military personnel. Increased social visibility associated with same-sex partnerships or family relationships plays a key role in this process. Openness can promote a sense of authenticity, but at the same time increases vulnerability to negative social reactions within units. In this context, interpersonal conflicts and social pressure appear as structurally determined phenomena rather than individual difficulties. Strategies of selective disclosure or concealment of certain aspects of private life, while reducing the short-term risks associated with negative evaluation, are associated with emotional exhaustion, reduced trust, and limited access to informal support (LeBlanc *et al.*, 2015; Balderrama-Durbin *et al.*, 2025). Studies also record internal differentiation in the experiences of LGBT military personnel. E.E. Doan Van *et al.* (2019) and E.H. Mereish *et al.* (2017) showed that bisexual military personnel experience increased social uncertainty due to ambivalent attitudes from both heterosexual and monosexual groups. This complicates the formation of stable interpersonal relationships and exacerbates feelings of isolation. F.R. Carey *et al.* (2022) further demonstrated that sexual identity is a significant predictor of the assessment of the social climate in units, with these effects being particularly pronounced among bisexual women and men. Taken together, the results of recent studies allow to consider socially conditioned conditions of psychological vulnerability as a structurally embedded component of the military experience of LGBT individuals, formed at the intersection of organisational culture, leadership practices, and everyday interpersonal dynamics. This dimension is important not only for individual well-being, but also for unit cohesion and the stability of military organisations. However, despite significant progress in the study of mental health, organisational climate, and the effects of inclusive policies, existing empirical research on the socio-psychological aspects of LGBT military service is mainly based on data from the armed forces of North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries and do not take into account the specifics of armed forces operating in conditions of full-scale war.

◆ Materials and Methods

Given the specifics of the military environment, the study uses the psycholinguistic method of free association presented in the work of T. Khraban (2022), which has proven to be an effective tool for identifying conscious and latent components of social perceptions and psychological attitudes. In psychological research, this method allows recording spontaneous cognitive and emotional reactions

that reflect deep meanings not always accessible to direct verbalisation. The choice of an associative experiment instead of standardised questionnaires is due to a number of methodological considerations. First, attitudes towards LGBT people in a military context are socially sensitive and potentially stigmatised topics, which significantly increases the likelihood of socially desirable responses when using direct self-reporting techniques. Second, the hierarchical organisation of the military environment, normative pressure and the dominance of collectivist values may limit the psychological readiness of respondents to openly express their attitudes, even under conditions of anonymity. The free association method minimises conscious control of responses and allows for the recording of primary verbal reactions that reflect the emotional and value components of psychological attitudes.

The associative experiment was conducted in 2025 in compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics for Scientists of Ukraine (2009). Participation in the study was voluntary; all respondents were informed of the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any stage. The empirical sample consisted of fourth- and fifth-year cadets of the Zhytomyr Military Institute named after S.P. Korolyov. The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 28 years, with an average age of 24.6 years. The total sample size was 78 people, of whom 15 were women and 63 were men. Among the women, five were in their fourth year and ten were in their fifth year; among the men, there were 32 and 31, respectively. The choice of senior cadets as respondents is of fundamental methodological importance. At this stage of their training, cadets have already undergone a long period of psychological and social adaptation to the military environment and have assimilated its normative system, values and informal rules of interaction. Unlike cadets in the initial courses, their ideas and attitudes reflect civilian views to a lesser extent and the integrated experience of functioning in a military organisation to a greater extent. This allows to consider the recorded associations as reflecting the psychological orientations of future officers, which are relevant for analysing the socio-psychological climate in the military environment. During the experiment, respondents were given the following instruction: "Look at the suggested stimulus words and quickly, without thinking, write down any word that first comes to mind; the task must be completed in two minutes". In order to reduce the excessive abstractness of the stimuli, the verbal instructions additionally focused on the sphere of personal relationships and self-expression, which directed the associative process in a psychologically relevant direction. A pair of stimulus words was selected for the study: "a person's private life and the right to be oneself" and "traditional family norms and traditions". This choice has a clear psychological rationale. The first stimulus is socially and culturally neutral and does not contain a direct reference to sexual orientation, while activating ideas related to autonomy, intimacy, and personal identity. This creates conditions for the spontaneous actualisation of associations, particularly those

related to same-sex relationships, without direct stimulation and with minimal defensive reactions. The second stimulus activates a normative-social and traditionalist frame associated with ideas about socially acceptable relationship models and collective expectations.

Reflective thematic analysis based on the six-phase model by V. Braun & V. Clarke (2023) was used to process the associative data obtained. The use of an associative experiment in combination with reflective thematic analysis made it possible to explore not only declarative positions, but also latent psychological meanings that shape the attitudes of future officers towards issues of personal life, social norms and acceptance of diversity in the military environment. The first stage involved immersion in the data through repeated rereading of associations and recording of initial analytical observations. The second stage involved systematic coding of lexical units with a focus on their semantic and emotional-evaluative characteristics. At the third stage, related codes were combined into preliminary themes that reflected recurring semantic patterns. The fourth stage was aimed at reviewing and refining the themes in terms of their internal consistency and relevance to the research objective. The fifth stage involved the final definition of the semantic boundaries of the themes and giving them analytically accurate names. The sixth stage consisted of constructing a comprehensive interpretative model of social perceptions and psychological attitudes reflecting the results of the study. At the initial stage of analysis, artificial intelligence (AI) tools, in particular the ChatGPT platform, were used for preliminary systematisation of associative material and identification of recurring lexical-semantic patterns. The use of AI was auxiliary in nature and was aimed at the initial grouping of associations and the formation of preliminary thematic clusters. Further coding, refinement of topic boundaries, and interpretation were carried out through manual reflective analysis in accordance with the methodology of V. Braun & V. Clarke (2023), which ensured analytical consistency and theoretical sensitivity of the results. Thus, the use of AI was combined with expert research analysis and did not replace the interpretative role of the researcher.

The results of this study should be interpreted with a number of methodological limitations in mind. First, the sample is relatively small and consists exclusively of cadets from a single military educational institution, which limits the possibility of generalising the conclusions to a broader population of military personnel. Second, the sample did not include active military personnel with combat experience, individuals of different age groups and hierarchical levels, which narrows the range of socio-psychological perspectives. The lack of diversity in these parameters does not allow for the full consideration of the influence of the organisational context and life experience on the formation of attitudes towards the acceptance of sexual diversity. Thirdly, the use of a psycholinguistic associative experiment records spontaneous verbal reactions but does not allow for a direct assessment of

behavioural manifestations of attitudes in real interpersonal interactions. In addition, reflective thematic analysis, despite its analytical flexibility and sensitivity to context, involves the interpretive role of the researcher, which may influence the formation of thematic boundaries. These limitations outline directions for further research with broader and more diverse samples and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

◆ Results and Discussion

The results of the associative experiment on the stimulus “a person’s private life and the right to be oneself” reflect the peculiarities of cadets’ understanding of the categories of privacy and personal autonomy. Tables 1 and 2 present the generalised results of coding the associative reactions of men and women, which allows to trace latent ideas about the limits of self-expression and the acceptability of otherness.

Table 1. Results of coding men’s associations with the stimulus “a person’s private life and the right to be oneself”

Thematic group	Semantic content	Examples of associations obtained
Autonomy and personal boundaries	Privacy as protection from external interference	“Personal boundaries”; “do not interfere in my life”; “absence of interference”; “one’s own choice”
Freedom as a fundamental value	The right to live by one’s own rules	“Freedom of action”; “doing what one wants”; “the right to live in one’s own way”
Conflict with social control	Experiencing pressure, distrust of institutions	“Everything is imposed by society”; “nothing is possible”; “we do not have this here”
Legal and normative dimension	Appeal to rights and guarantees	“The right of every person”; “protection by the state”; “the right to confidentiality”
Ironisation/devaluation	Downplaying the importance of the issue through humour	“Toilet”; “eating after 22:00”; “I want...”

Source: developed by the authors

Table 2. Results of coding women’s associations with the stimulus “a person’s private life and the right to be oneself”

Thematic group	Semantic content	Examples of associations obtained
Self-identity and self-expression	Being oneself as a psychological need	“Self-expression”; “not being ashamed to be oneself”; “style”; “one’s own opinion”
Emotional security and acceptance	Privacy as a condition of psychological comfort	“Comfort”; “cosiness”; “being accepted as one is”; “mutual understanding”
Privacy in relationships	Boundaries of intimacy and personal space	“Personal space in relationships”; “time together; trust”
Social recognition	Expectation of acceptance by society	“Should not be subject to judgement”; “should be accepted by society”
Personal development	The right to be oneself as a resource for self-realisation	“Self-realisation”; “one’s own goals”; “individuality”

Source: developed by the authors

Analysis of the results of coding cadets’ associative responses to the stimulus “a person’s private life and the right to be oneself” reveals latent socio-psychological attitudes towards personal autonomy and self-expression, which are directly relevant to understanding attitudes towards sexual diversity, particularly towards LGBT people, in the military environment. Although LGBT is not directly mentioned in the formulation of the stimulus, the associative material reflects deep-seated ideas about the limits of acceptable self-expression and the willingness to accept otherness. In general, for both gender groups, the right to be oneself is conceptualised as a socially significant value, but the ways in which it is interpreted differ significantly, which is of fundamental importance for analysing potential tolerance towards LGBT people. In male associations, private life is most often seen as a space that needs to be protected from external interference. The emphasis on personal boundaries, non-interference and individual choice shapes the idea of independence and the inviolability of personal choice in the sexual sphere as a guarantee of human rights and freedoms. When projected onto the LGBT context, this concept of accepting sexual diversity

can be interpreted as conditional tolerance, whereby the right to a different identity is recognised only on condition that it remains invisible and private. In other words, sexual diversity is recognised only as long as it remains within the private sphere and does not contradict established social norms. In addition, male associations report a clear experience of normative pressure and distrust of the possibility of real personal choice in the sexual sphere. Statements about the “imposed” nature of rules and the lack of real freedom point to an internal conflict between the declared value of freedom and the acceptance of a strictly regulated social order. In the context of LGBT, this may mean that one’s own sense of limited freedom is projected onto others, reducing the willingness to recognise the right to open self-expression of groups that are already in a position of social vulnerability. The rationalised, legally oriented understanding of privacy inherent in men further reinforces this tendency. Appealing to formal rights and norms creates a framework in which tolerance for sexual privacy is determined not by empathy or the principle of equality, but by conformity to dominant notions of “normality”. Consequently, LGBT identity in such a coordinate

system is potentially perceived as acceptable only formally or abstractly, but not as a socially visible reality.

In contrast, women's associations demonstrate a different vector of understanding the right to be oneself, which is directly related to tolerance towards LGBT people. For women, private life is closely linked to self-expression, emotional authenticity and acceptance of one's own identity. The emphasis on the right to be oneself and inner comfort forms a broader understanding of autonomy that is not limited to the concept of sexual privacy. It is particularly noteworthy that women's associations often include expectations of social acceptance and non-judgment. Projected onto the LGBT context, this indicates a willingness to recognise the right to diversity not only as a formal norm, but as a social practice. Privacy in this case does not mean hiding one's identity, but rather the right to safe self-expression within social interactions. In addition, the relational nature of women's associations – a focus on mutual understanding, trust, and respect for personal boundaries – creates a psychological foundation for inclusive attitudes. The right to be oneself extends to

others and is not limited to one's own experience, which is an important indicator of potential tolerance towards LGBT people in a community. Thus, projecting the results of the associative experiment onto the LGBT context allows to conclude that latent attitudes towards sexual diversity are gender-differentiated. Men more often represent a model of conditional tolerance based on the privatisation of otherness and adherence to strict normative boundaries. Women, on the other hand, demonstrate a greater orientation towards acceptance, emotional security and social recognition, which indicates a higher inclusive potential. The results of the associative experiment on the stimulus "traditional family norms and traditions" reflect the cadets' ideas about normative family models, the limits of social acceptability, and the nature of traditions as a regulator of interpersonal relationships. Tables 3 and 4 present the summarised results of the coding of the associative responses of men and women, which allows to identify the underlying semantic structures associated with the interpretation of family norms and attitudes towards the variability of partnership forms.

Table 3. Results of coding men's associations with the stimulus "traditional family norms and traditions"

Thematic group	Semantic content	Examples of associations obtained
Heteronormative model of the family	The family as a union of a man and a woman	"Man-woman-child"; "mother and father"; "the norm of a family is a boy and a girl"
Strong rejection of alternatives	Openly negative evaluation of LGBT people	"No LGBT"; "LGBT and feminism ruin everything"
Tradition as stability	Traditions as a source of support and order	"Basic minimum"; "stability"; "generations"
Family hierarchy and roles	Clear division of functions	"Roles in the family"; "marriage"; "division of roles"
Normative pressure	Perceptions of "correctness"	"That is how it should be"; "the norm"; "a complete family"

Source: developed by the authors

Table 4. Results of coding women's associations with the stimulus "traditional family norms and traditions"

Thematic group	Semantic content	Examples of associations obtained
Family as an emotional community	Family as a space of support	"Warmth"; "care"; "love"; "cosiness"
Rituals and shared time	Traditions as a practice of unity	"Family dinner"; "holidays together"; "gathering as a family"
Flexibility of norms	Recognition of the variability of traditions	"Every family has its own traditions"; "norms should not be an obstacle"
Mutual respect and dialogue	The value of equality in relationships	"Mutual understanding"; "respect for decisions"; "the opportunity to speak"
Cultural continuity	Transmission of values between generations	"That which has been there since childhood"; "something familiar"; "family traditions"

Source: developed by the authors

Analysis of the results of coding cadets' associative responses to the stimulus "traditional family norms and traditions" reveals deep-seated ideas about family norms, acceptable models of intimate relationships, and the limits of social acceptance. In the context of the research objective, these perceptions are particularly significant, since it is through family norms in the mass consciousness that the concept of sexual diversity is most often symbolically accepted or rejected. In general, the responses of both gender groups show high semantic saturation, which indicates the central place of family norms in the cadets'

value system. At the same time, a comparative analysis demonstrates significant gender differences in the ways traditions are interpreted, their conservatism or openness to variation. Male associations are dominated by a normatively regulated image of the family, which is clearly structured around a heteronormative model. Frequent associations such as "mother-father," "man-woman-child," and "complete family" indicate the perception of traditional family norms as the only correct and socially legitimate form of family relations. In this case, tradition performs not only a cultural but also a controlling function,

defining the limits of what is acceptable. Particularly indicative is the presence of openly negative and polarised associations in which alternative family models are directly opposed to the “norm”. References to the rejection of LGBT people in the context of family traditions indicate that sexual diversity is perceived not as a private matter of identity but as a threat to the established social order. In the LGBT context, this means that the family norm acts as a key mechanism of symbolic exclusion, where the right to be oneself, declared at the level of privacy, loses its legitimacy in the sphere of family and publicly significant relationships. In addition, male associations tend to view tradition as a source of stability, order, and intergenerational continuity. This interpretation reinforces the rigidity of normative boundaries and reduces the willingness to revise them. Consequently, tolerance for sexual diversity among the male group of respondents is limited and, as a rule, does not extend to the recognition of alternative family forms.

In contrast, women’s associations demonstrate a more flexible and inclusive understanding of family traditions. Although for women the family is also associated with values of support, love and spending time together, these characteristics are not always rigidly tied to a specific structural model. A significant proportion of associations emphasise the emotional function of the family rather than its formal parameters. It is telling that women more often emphasise the variability of traditions and their ability to change. Associations such as “every family has its own traditions” or “norms should not be an obstacle” indicate that family norms are perceived as a social construct rather than an immutable prescription. When projected onto the LGBT context, this creates a basis for recognising alternative forms of family relationships, even if they do not fully correspond to the classical model. In addition, women’s associations are characterised by a clear focus on mutual respect, dialogue and support, shifting the focus from normative control to the quality of interpersonal relationships. In such a coordinate system, family tradition rejects the function of control and can be seen as a space open to sexual diversity. Thus, the projection of the results of the associative experiment on the stimulus “traditional family norms and traditions” in the LGBT context indicates a clear gender differentiation of latent attitudes. Men mostly represent a rigid heteronormative model, within which sexual diversity is excluded from ideas about the family. Women, on the other hand, demonstrate a greater willingness to rethink traditions and a higher potential for inclusiveness, focusing on the emotional and value-based aspects of family relationships rather than exclusively on their structural aspects. Thus, the data obtained confirm that it is in the sphere of family norms that the deepest normative tension regarding sexual diversity manifests itself, which is of fundamental importance for understanding the limits of tolerance in the military environment. Overall, the results show that cadets’ tolerance towards sexual diversity and LGBT

people is fragmented: it manifests itself mainly in the sphere of personal rights and individual interaction, while in the context of family and socially significant norms, its manifestations remain significantly limited.

The results of the associative experiment obtained within this study make it possible to deepen the understanding of the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying perceptions of privacy, identity and normativity within the military environment, while also conceptually resonating with a number of contemporary empirical and theoretical studies devoted to the inclusion of LGBT individuals in the armed forces. The analysis of associations in response to the stimulus “a person’s private life and the right to be oneself” indicates that, in the consciousness of male cadets, the right to autonomy, control and the inviolability of personal choice in the sexual sphere is perceived primarily as something personal that should be realised within the boundaries of norms established by the military institution. This tendency is consistent with the findings of the study by A. Blasyak (2024), which demonstrated that the sense of belonging of LGBT service members to the military community in the post-DADT period is often determined by the need to maintain a clear distinction between the professional role and sexual identity. In this context, the regulation of the visibility of sexual identity becomes a decisive factor in its perception and acceptability within the institution. This trend is consistent with the results of a study by A. Blasyak (2024), which showed that the sense of belonging of LGBT military personnel to the military community in the post-DADT period is often determined by the need for a clear distinction between professional role and sexual identity. In this context, regulating the visibility of sexual identity is a determining factor in its perception and acceptability within the institution. Similar logic can be traced in comparison with the review by P.N. Oblea & L.A. Siaki (2023), which focuses on health issues and access to care for gender- and sexually diverse military personnel. Although the authors do not directly analyse cultural attitudes, their description of the avoidance of mentioning one’s sexual orientation even in a medical context can be interpreted as a consequence of the same normative ideas that are recorded in the associative experiment: sexual orientation and sexual identity are perceived as something that must remain “outside the system” in order to avoid the risk of stigmatisation.

Associations with the stimulus “traditional family norms and traditions” revealed an even stricter normative framework, especially in the male group, where the heteronormative family model functions as a marker of social “normality” and moral order. This result is consistent with the findings of A. Blasyak (2024) and W.E. O’Connell (2021) regarding selective inclusion, which occurs through an appeal to homonormative forms of identity and conformity to militarised notions of masculinity, family and discipline. The associations indicate that acceptance of sexual diversity is conceivable only on condition of its symbolic invisibility and non-violation of

dominant social models. At the same time, gender differences in associations are of fundamental analytical importance. Women's responses more often contain elements of acceptance, emotional autonomy, and individual choice, while men's responses are oriented toward normative ideas of masculinity and social acceptability. These differences correlate with the findings of B.C. Thoma *et al.* (2021), which show that gender non-conformity is associated with higher levels of stress related to sexual identity, especially among gay and bisexual men. Thus, associative structures reflect the cultural context in which deviation from the masculine norm becomes socially visible and potentially vulnerable. The theoretical positions of D.R. Koslosky (2008) allow to understand these results in the broader perspective of citizenship and public personality. The reduction of sexual identity to the private sphere, as reflected in associations, corresponds to the logic of "permissible inclusion", where the formal expansion of rights is not accompanied by a change in perceptions of normative expectations and standards within military service. Similarly, the dominance of traditional family models supports the symbolic identification of social acceptability with conformity to heteronormative and binary notions of gender and sexuality. The associative perceptions of future officers can be seen as an indicator of the cultural level of inclusion, which is shaped by everyday perceptions and practices, rather than just formal political norms. The tendency to control the visibility of sexual diversity and to frame it within the context of discipline and efficiency has deep historical roots and continues to structure the contemporary experience of military service. Overall, the results of the associative experiment suggest that the declared inclusion of LGBT individuals in the military environment coexists with the persistence of stable normative structures. The acceptance of sexual and gender diversity appears conceivable primarily on the condition that it conforms to dominant models of family, masculinity and the privatisation of identity. This confirms the tensions and contradictions inherent in liberal projects of inclusion which, while expanding formal access, do not necessarily transform the cultural foundations of the military institution.

◆ Conclusions

The associative study revealed latent socio-psychological perceptions of Ukrainian cadets regarding independence, control, and inviolability of personal choice in the sexual sphere. The results showed that acceptance of sexual diversity is formed within a clearly defined normative framework that determines the conditions of social acceptability and symbolic "normality". An analysis of associations with the stimulus "a person's private life and the right to be oneself" showed that the right to self-expression in the context of LGBT identity is mostly perceived as personal and should be exercised within the private sphere, without affecting professional activity or public behaviour. This trend is particularly pronounced in

the male group: an emphasis on discipline, control and conformity to norms is combined with an expectation of symbolic invisibility of differences in sexual orientation and gender expression. In the female group, associations more often reflected a focus on emotional autonomy, acceptance of diversity, and individual choice in the sphere of sexual and gender identity. The results of the analysis of the stimulus "traditional family norms and traditions" showed the dominance of heteronormative and binary family models, which serve as markers of social stability and moral order. The male group demonstrates more rigid ideas about the family and is less open to alternative forms of partnership, while female associations show greater variability and potential openness to rethinking traditions, particularly in the context of accepting LGBT models of family relationships. Summarising the results of the study, it can be argued that the associative structures of cadets' consciousness reproduce a model of conditional inclusion, in which the acceptance of LGBT identity is possible mainly on condition that it is limited to the private sphere and corresponds to dominant ideas about family, masculinity and military role. This demonstrates the persistence of deep cultural barriers and highlights the need for further research and educational interventions aimed at transforming not only formal policies but also everyday social perceptions in the military and semi-military environment of Ukraine. Further research should focus on combining associative methods with qualitative interviews and experimental approaches for a deeper analysis of the mechanisms of normative perceptions of sexual diversity in the military environment. A promising avenue is to compare the pre-institutional attitudes of cadets with the experiences of active military personnel from different branches of the armed forces and levels of the hierarchy. Separate attention should be paid to analysing the intersections of sexuality, gender and ethnicity, as well as the impact of educational and inclusive programmes on the transformation of latent social perceptions.

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◆ Conflict of Interest

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Інклюзія ЛГБТ-осіб у контексті військової служби в Україні: психолінгвістичний підхід

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♦ **Анотація.** Метою цього емпіричного дослідження було виявлення соціально-психологічних установок майбутніх українських офіцерів щодо сексуальної різноманітності та визначення латентних чинників, які впливають на потенціал інклюзії лесбійок, геїв, бісексуальних та трансгендерних осіб (ЛГБТ) у Збройних силах України. Емпіричну основу становили дані психолінгвістичного асоціативного експерименту, проведеного серед 78 курсантів старших курсів військового інституту віком від 20 до 28 років, середній вік 24,6 роки. Респонденти надавали вільні асоціації на стимули «приватне життя людини та право бути собою» і «традиційні сімейні норми та традиції», а їх опрацювання здійснювалося за процедурою рефлексивного тематичного аналізу. Результати показали, що уявлення про приватність і сімейні норми є ключовими смисловими рамками, через які в українському військовому середовищі осмислюється сексуальна різноманітність. У чоловічій групі домінує орієнтація на дисципліну, соціальний порядок і гетеронормативні моделі сім'ї, що поєднується з очікуванням обмеженої публічної видимості ЛГБТ-осіб. Така конфігурація установок відповідає моделі умовної інклюзії, коли право на різноманітність визнається переважно у приватній сфері. У жіночій групі частіше фіксуються асоціації, пов'язані з прийняттям, емоційною підтримкою, повагою до індивідуального вибору та варіативністю сімейних форм, що вказує на психологічний потенціал визнавати право на самостійність, контроль і недоторканність особистого вибору у сексуальній сфері. У дослідженні встановлено, що інклюзія ЛГБТ-осіб у Збройні сили України значною мірою залежить від неформальних культурних уявлень українців, а не лише від офіційних політик недискримінації. Толерантність до сексуальної різноманітності у свідомості українських курсантів має фрагментарний характер і проявляється переважно на рівні індивідуальних прав, але суттєво звужується у сфері соціально значущих норм. Водночас наявність орієнтації на повагу, взаєморозуміння та психологічну підтримку свідчить про ресурси для розвитку інклюзивного клімату. Практична цінність роботи полягає в тому, що розвиток культури поваги до різноманітності та інклюзії ЛГБТ-осіб зміцнює довіру, згуртованість і ефективну взаємодію у військових підрозділах

♦ **Ключові слова:** сексуальна різноманітність; асоціативний експеримент; гендерні відмінності; збройні сили; особиста автономія; приватність