

MILITARY MARRIAGES: A LOOK AT DIALECTICAL TENSIONS,
DEPLOYMENT, AND MILITARY LIFE THROUGH NAVY WIVES' EYES

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ABSTRACT

Fawcett, Erienne Lee; M.A.; Department of Communication; College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; North Dakota State University; April 2010. *Military Marriages: A Look at Dialectical Tensions, Deployment, and Military Life Through Navy Wives' Eyes*. Major Professor: Dr. Ann Burnett.

This qualitative study explored the lived military relationships of eighteen Navy wives whose husbands were stationed on the Naval Air Station Whidbey Base in Oak Harbor, Washington. The researcher performed interviews to better understand how internal dialectical tensions— autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness — were manifested throughout deployment, and what strategies were used to cope with those tensions. Results suggested that a variety of tensions characterized these marital relationships throughout the course of a deployment. The tensions that coincide with military lifestyles were often addressed by using the reframing coping strategy. A military/non-military external tension emerged from the data that influenced the internal tensions and coping strategies of Navy wives. The knowledge gained from this study may help military couples balance tensions throughout the deployment process and create more satisfactory relationships.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
FORWARD	1
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION	3
Military Marriage.....	3
Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.....	6
CHAPTER TWO. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	9
External Dialectical Tensions	10
Internal Dialectical Tensions	10
Autonomy-Connection dialectic	11
Novelty-Predictability dialectic	12
Openness-Closedness dialectic	13
Research on Internal Dialectical Tensions	14
Four Response Strategies to Cope With Dialectical Contradictions.....	16
Long Distance Romantic Relationships.....	17
Conclusion	19
Research Questions	19
CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY	21
Participants	21

Data Collection Procedures	22
Data Analysis	24
CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS	27
Autonomy-Connection	28
Coping strategies used in autonomy-connection	33
Novelty-Predictability	34
Coping strategies used in novelty-predictability	38
Openness-Closedness	39
Coping strategies used in openness-closedness	43
Military Versus Non-Military	44
Conclusion	47
CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION.....	48
Autonomy-Connection	49
Novelty-Predictability	49
Openness-Closedness	50
Military Versus Non-Military	51
Internal Dialectical Tension Coping Strategies	53
Methodological and Relational Implications	55
Limitations and Future Research	59
Conclusion	61
REFERENCES	63
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS.	70
APPENDIX B. DEMOGRAPHICS FORM	72

APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	73
APPENDIX D. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS.....	75
APPENDIX E. MILITARY VERSUS NON-MILITARY TENSION.....	76

FORWARD

“It becomes a way of looking at the world: us and them, insiders and outsiders”

(Houppert, 2005 p. XII).

My sister, Anna, “married the military” in 1997, or so she says. She was 26, and I was 14. At 14, I had no idea what being in the military was like, or the array of details that construct a military lifestyle. At the time none of my immediate family was serving in any branch of the military. Soon I found that Anna did not know much about the military herself. Although Joe and Anna had known each other for some time, she started dating and married Joe in less than nine months. During Anna and Joe’s honeymoon to Fiji, Joe got called back to the States to serve, and shortly thereafter, he was on the other side of the world. During “Anna’s first deployment”, I made the trek with her from Minnesota to Washington, where I lived with her in a small town called Oak Harbor. This was my first *real* experience with the military.

As a young teen, I was only starting to grasp the rollercoaster of emotions that surface in life and relationships. As I sat in my Oak Harbor room, I heard an escalating voice, a slam of the phone, and a burst of tears. My sister looked miserable. This was my first view of deployment: raw, gritty, and emotional. Although this moment was the first of many (both good and bad), this single moment has stuck with me. This was my first genuine view of life and love in the military.

Fast Forward to the holiday season of 2007, and my first year of graduate school. I am sitting on the bench outside the Navy commissary with my nieces, who are tired of the hustle and bustle. Joe is getting ready to deploy, but it is not just Joe --many of the people in the commissary are buzzing with the news of deployment. For those who have never

been in a military commissary, it is much like the streets of Diagon Alley in the popular Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Couples are spending last moments with their families, purchasing everything they will need for their trip and of course...arguing. Mothers are asking their daughters or daughter's friends what they will do while their husbands are gone, and children are hugging their father's legs as they walk around the store. As I sat there on the bench, watching these events unfold, I thought there must be a method to the chaos surrounding me. Questions were now infiltrating my brain. What will these families do? How do they negotiate and balance the deployment that will soon be a major part of their lives? How will these families cope? In true graduate student style, I decided that answering these questions was my mission, my responsibility to my sister. I had to find out more information about the question that has always been on her mind, "is it just us?"

For the most part, I'm an outsider to this military culture. My connection is through my sister and her experiences. I have learned a lot; however, as an outsider, I can only scratch the surface as to how deployment is navigated within a marriage. I can only see friends stepping up to help one another. I can only watch the anticipation of a husband's return. As an academic I can analyze these situations from a distance. However, I can never know the true emotions behind a six to fifteen month deployment like the thousands of military spouses in the United States.

Anna- this is for you.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is not something that most couples enter into lightly. When considering marriage, many couples have to make tough, unified decisions such as, but not limited to: where to live, how to balance work-life and home-life, and how to budget money. Despite these difficult decisions, approximately 2,197,000 couples in the United States got married in 2007 (Centers, 2009). In comparison, in 2008 there were approximately 755,000 marriages total among all the military branches (Jelinek, 2008). When entering a military marriage, couples cannot solely make traditional marital decisions, as some are dictated by the United States Department of Defense.

Military Marriage

One major decision the Department of Defense makes for every military family is where and when one or both members of the marriage will be deployed. Nine years ago American troops were sent to fight in a new war – the war on terrorism in Iraq. The war in Iraq has affected more marriages than the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), as there were only 228,000 American troops deployed throughout the entirety of that war (Black, 1993). In 2009 alone, approximately 142,000 American troops were stationed solely in Iraq (Lothian & Malveaux, 2009). In January of 2005, the Pentagon reported that 1,048,884 troops had fought since September 11th 2001. Even six years ago, the number of troops that were deployed from September 2001 – January 2005 (approximately 3.5 years), was about one-third the number of troops that were stationed in Vietnam, a battle which lasted for 15 years (Benjamin, 2005).

After the September 11th attack against the World Trade Center, military families began to prepare for active duty. American troops were unsuspecting of how long the conflict with Iraq would last or how many troops would be sent overseas. Currently, numerous troops are on their third or fourth deployments. To countless military families' dismay, in 2007 troops had their tours extended to 15-months to get more effective combat power (Kilbride, 2007). This increase in deployment broke many troops' military contract set up by the Pentagon. This contract states that troop's deployment limit is 24-months with a four-year contract (Cosgrove-Mather, 2006). The boost in deployment time increases the amount of time troops are away from their families and forces spouses to find a new way to balance tensions in their marriage.

Military divorce rates have increased since September 11, 2001. Two concerns seem to be the central blame for military divorces. The first is the low pay that enlisted and junior officers receive, and the second is the sudden need for multiple long term deployments (Gomulka, 2006). In 2005, 3,325 Army officers' marriages ended in divorce. That rate was up 78 percent since 2003 and more than 3.5 times since 2000, which was before any large military operations were occurring overseas (Burgess, 2005; Zoroya, 2005). Enlisted soldiers (anyone who has a rank lower than a commissioned officer or warrant officer) experienced approximately 7, 152 divorces in 2004, which makes their divorce rate 28 percent more than 2003 and 53 percent more than 2000 (Zoroya, 2005). The number of troops that are currently serving in the Army has not changed significantly in that period of time (Miles, 2006).

Many military families-whether they are Army, Navy, Marines, or Air Force-are going through similar deployment processes; however, divorce statistics vary among

military branches. In 2001, the divorce rate for Naval officers was 1.5 percent, and in 2004 the rate went up to 2.5 percent. In the same branch, enlisted sailors' divorce rates were 3.2 percent in 2001 and rose to 3.9 percent in 2004 (Burgess, 2005). The overall military divorce rate from October 1, 2006 – October 1, 2007 showed 25,000 failed marriages, with 730,000 marriages still intact. This divorce rate is approximately 3.3 percent and is unchanged from the previous year (Jelinek, 2008). What these statistics do not demonstrate is how many people within the military are considering divorce or are in the process of getting a divorce, and they also do not explain the tensions that military couples may experience within their marriages. Further study needs to occur to understand factors that might contribute to the failed marriages.

Soldiers are not only fighting a war in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also may be fighting to keep their families together. Noting the significant boost in the rate of divorce among troops, the military has decided to combat relationship problems by increasing programs to deal with deployment struggles and to keep marriages healthy (Miles, 2006). Currently, various programs help military families endure the hardships of military life. These support programs include: groups for spouses of deployed troops, the Deployment Cycle Support Program, and weekend retreats for military couples (Miles). Each naval spouse is given deployment packets that contain several leaflets such as: The Emotional Cycle of Deployment, USAA Deployment Guide, Long Distance Couples, Helping Your Kids Connect, and names and contact information for deployment services provided by their specific naval unit.

Naval Air Station Whidbey Island

Whidbey Island is a fair sized island at 35 miles long and sits approximately 30 miles north of Seattle, in the Puget Sound. Island County is composed of Whidbey and Camano islands and is home to an estimated 81,054 people. Oak Harbor, the islands largest city, is home to an estimated 19,795 people (U.S. Census). Naval Air Station Whidbey (NAS-Whidbey) is located near Oak Harbor and has 7,500 military personnel, 1,200 civilian employees which may include the personnel's family, and 1,200 contractors (Commander, n.d.). Approximately one out of eight people living in Island County is employed by the U.S. Navy. Much of Island County's population has some connection to the Navy. Many are Navy personnel's family such as spouses & children. Whidbey Island is known for its intense beauty; as a result, many Navy personnel retire and stay in the area (Commander).

Whidbey Island has a long military history, which started with the United States Army when Fort Casey was constructed to protect the Northern entrance to the Puget Sound (Mays). After several decommissions of Fort Casey, the Navy took over the location and built Naval Air Station Whidbey after the attack on Pearl Harbor. NAS-Whidbey served as the best location for seaplane take offs and landings, re-arming and refueling planes, rocket firing training and petty officer training (Mays). NAS-Whidbey's history is aircraft and to this day, is the home and instruction site of many Navy flyers. NAS-Whidbey is a composition of two sites; the Seaplane Base is located just outside of Oak Harbor, and Ault Field which is located northwest of the Seaplane base (Commander). A training field outside of Coupeville is also under the Navy's jurisdiction and Naval

personnel are trained to do touch-and-go maneuvers with war aircrafts such as the Prowler and the Growler (Commander, Mays).

Military training at NAS-Whidbey and all across the U.S. is on-going. Currently the U.S. is in the midst of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result military marriages and families are faced with a new set of challenges that they may not have encountered before. Very little academic research has been done regarding military marriages over the course of a deployment. Understanding dialectical theory is vital to exploring how military couples handle the tensions within their marriage. In Baxter's initial 1988 study, she pinpoints three basic contradictions (autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability and openness-closedness) that occur in relationships. This study will specifically look at these contradictions or tensions through the eyes of Navy wives and will illustrate how their lives change while their husbands are serving the United States military overseas.

The purpose of this study is to explore how Navy wives understand, deal, and cope with dialectical tensions within their marriage while their husbands are deployed. In general, military marriages are not just facing what lies ahead in the combat zone, but they also may be facing tensions in their marriages. To understand what these couples are going through, this thesis will take an in-depth look at how Navy wives manage their military lifestyles and how they handle marriage obstacles through the course of a deployment. Specifically, Navy wives were asked to discuss how relational tensions function in their lives, and how they cope with these tensions.

To complete the analysis, Chapter One has introduced facts and literature about military marriages and NAS-Whidbey. This thesis continues by reviewing literature concerning dialectical tensions, coping strategies, and long-distance romantic relationships

in Chapter Two. Next, Chapter Three will introduce the methods used to gather and analyze the interviews with the Navy wives. Chapter Four will establish the results from coding the participant data and Chapter Five will discuss the implications, limitations, and areas of future research regarding what it means to be a military wife.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Every day individuals are pulled in one direction or another on issues that seem so remotely related that there cannot be a middle ground. According to Baxter and Montgomery, "From the perspective of relational dialectics, social life exists in and through people's communicative practices, by which people give voice to multiple opposing tendencies" (1996, p.4). Dialectics are two opposing forces or needs of human behavior (Baxter, 1994). The difference between the opposing forces is like night and day, as they do not seem to go together, yet couples try to navigate the middle ground to sustain an acceptable connection in their relationship (Baxter & Simon, 1993). For couples to experience dialectical tensions in their marriage is normal (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Simon). The ways a couple approach and deal with these tensions help build their relationship (Trenholm & Jensen, 2004). In this chapter, I begin with a broad discussion of external and internal dialectical tensions, followed by a more in depth examination of the internal tensions and relevant research findings that are the subject of this investigation. I then review coping strategies couples tend to use to handle dialectical tensions.

To make sense of the assortment of tensions that couples feel in their relationships, Baxter organized common contradictions into six basic clusters or three sets of families that include both an internal (between the couple) and external (within a larger social network) set of tensions (Werner & Baxter, 1994).

The first family is the dialectic of integration-separation. This is the basic premise that individuals are pulled to assimilate or to remain detached. The external tension within this family is inclusion-seclusion, and the internal tension is autonomy-connection (Werner

& Baxter, 1994). The second family is the expression-nonexpression dialectic. This tension describes the need to be open and to disclose information and to be closed and to keep information to oneself (as an individual or as a couple). The external tension included in this family is revealment-concealment, and the internal tension is openness-closedness (Werner & Baxter). The final family is the stability-change dialectic. This tension harbors when there is a disconnect between wanting to remain static or to be variable.

Conventionality-uniqueness is the external tension that belongs to this family, whereas novelty-predictability is the internal tension (Werner & Baxter).

External Dialectical Tensions

External dialectics include: inclusion-seclusion, conventionality-uniqueness and revealment-concealment (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The inclusion-exclusion tension is when couples desire to interact with others in the outside world versus the desire to withdraw from others and just be with one another (Baxter & Montgomery). The conventionality-uniqueness tension shows the couple trying to conform, as a couple, to social norms while balancing the need to create their own unique identity as a pair (Baxter & Montgomery). The final external tension is revealment-concealment. This tension occurs when a couple decides what to reveal about their relationship to others and what to keep to themselves (Baxter & Montgomery).

Internal Dialectical Tensions

Internal dialectics include: autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability and openness-closedness (Baxter, 1988, 1990, 1993; Werner & Baxter, 1994). This portion of the chapter describes these tensions in detail, as these internal tensions are the focus of this thesis.

Autonomy – Connection dialectic.

Of the three internal dialectical tensions, autonomy-connection is the most central (Rawlins, 1983a). In the autonomy-connection dialectic, couples deal with trying to maintain their own individuality and differences while remaining linked and interdependent (Baxter 1993, 1994; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Montgomery, 1993). Realistically, the autonomy-connection dialectic is the struggle between *me* time and *us* time (Pawlowski, 1998). Goldsmith (1990) refers to autonomy as having to only be responsible for oneself. She reports that connection, on the other hand, is a desire to be relied on as well as to depend on others. To construct oneself as an “autonomous individual,” one must have connections with others (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.9). No relationship can last or exist if members of a relationship do not forsake some individual autonomy to create interdependence with one another (Baxter, 1990). If too much connection occurs within a relationship, individual uniqueness becomes lost and often ruins the relationship. On the other hand, too much autonomy can destroy an individual’s identity, as connections with others are what create and maintain personal identity (Baxter, 1990). One research participant in Baxter’s 1990 study (p. 77) said this of autonomy-connection:

I wasn’t really sure which way I wanted to go. There were a lot of things that were real attractive about being in a partnership with [partner]. But I was still trying to figure out exactly who I was, as well...I guess I was sort of worried that I would lose some of my self-identity, especially with my group that I hang out with. There were some things that I didn’t want to give up, and I was afraid I would have to.

This particular segment shows the struggle of trying to maintain autonomy as well as have connection with the romantic partner. Many marital partners seek to have time for connection and togetherness, like playing a game after supper or playing tennis together on the weekend. Couples also need to meet their own autonomous needs, such as one partner playing a game on the computer while another reads a book.

Novelty – Predictability dialectic.

The novelty-predictability dialectic is another internal tension that exists when members of a relationship want a degree of certainty or predictability, as well as a level of excitement or novelty (Baxter, 1994; Montgomery, 1993). Relationships need predictability and novelty (Altman, Vinsel & Brown, 1981). Many couples strive to create a relationship that incorporates both novelty and predictability. Couples often have a familiar rhythm to their relationship and interchange it frequently with something new and different to create a sense of fresh relational interaction (Baxter & Simon 1993; Montgomery, 1993). Baxter (1990) reports that the predictability-novelty contradiction was reported in 69 percent of the relationship stages among college students that were studied. One female in Baxter's (1990, p. 78) study said:

It was all kind of novel. In the first stage you shouldn't have to depend on somebody to be there at fixed times and places. If a first stage is predictable, the relationship dies off real fast....But it's really bad when you wait on Friday night and don't go out with your friends because you want him to come over, only he doesn't show up. In a relationship, I want someone I can depend on and that will be predictable and be there when I need him.

This quote reveals the balancing act of keeping a relationship fresh, new and fun, as well as making sure that it is predictable enough so that no one feels left behind or hurt because of decisions they make regarding the relationship. She shows that she does not want to turn her back on her friends if her significant other does not want to hang out, but she also wants to enjoy time with him as well. She is looking for a balance of both worlds.

Deciding to try something new every once and awhile can bring excitement back into a relationship. Even a random greeting card, instead of the typical card for holidays and special occasions could be considered something novel in a relationship. In general, couples want their relationships to be somewhat routine in their daily lives, and yet at the same time they want to keep an air of mystery and newness to their relationships (Pawlowski, 1998).

Openness – Closedness dialectic.

In the openness-closedness dialectic, each member of a couple deals with whether or not she or he wants to share certain secrets and thoughts with one another or create a sense of individual privacy (Baxter, 1994; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Brown, Altman & Werner, 1989). Open disclosure is necessary to create intimacy, and yet it creates vulnerabilities within the relationship (Rawlins, 1983b). Openness is an important aspect when developing a relationship (Rawlins, 1983b). Sometimes, however, revealing too much information can be detrimental (Baxter, 1993). Couples may want to disclose everything to one another, but they feel that pull toward closedness and not wanting to disclose everything, to preserve their relationship (Pawlowski, 1998). For example, a member of a couple may not tell the other that they do not like their new haircut to spare the other's feelings. Closedness can create distance in relationships, and openness gives

romantic partners a chance to share their feelings and desires with one another (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Dialectics may also be used to protect one another. For example, someone might choose to remain closed about her or his opinions about another's weight or choice of clothing.

Research on Internal Dialectical Tensions

A plethora of research since the 1980s has focused on internal dialectical tensions within relationships (Baxter, 1990; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Goldsmith, 1990; Pawlowski, 1998; Sabourin & Stamp, 1995). For example, Sabourin & Stamp (1995) used the dialogical perspective to analyze the communication patterns in both abusive and non-abusive relationships. This line of research found that abusive families are "less balanced" in their management of the dialectical tensions of novelty-predictability and autonomy-connection than non-abusive families (p. 237). This imbalance, in turn, creates an environment that is not welcoming for family development.

Baxter (1990) examined the three sets of dialectical tensions among 106 undergraduate relationships at a private university. She found that novelty-predictability, openness-closedness, and autonomy-connection dialectic tensions were present in roughly three-quarters of the identified relationship stages. Although subjects reported the openness-closedness tension in many of the initial relationship stages, they reported novelty-predictability and autonomy-connection tensions in the further developed relationship.

Pawlowski (1998) studied the importance of dialectical tensions at the beginning, middle, and present relational turning points. One discovery that Pawlowski made was that 31 percent of the identified contradictions in her study were autonomy-connection, which

made it the most frequently experienced contradiction. Participants of the study, however, reported that openness-closedness was perceived as the most important tension. In general, she concluded that both genders thought internal tensions were equally important, whereas when it came to external tensions, wives were more inclined to think they were significant.

Baxter & Simon (1993) examined the perceived partner maintenance strategies of contact, avoidance, and romance during different dialectical moments of internal contradictions. This study consisted of 162 romantic and married relationships. They discovered that perceived partner maintenance strategies varied depending on dialectical conditions of the relationship. This variation was above all noted among the male participants. They found that all of these maintenance strategies help move a relationship towards a “dialectical equilibrium” (p. 239).

In 1990, Goldsmith studied the autonomy-connection dialectic independently from the other five tensions. Ten descriptive histories of premarital couples were the focus of this study. Couples revealed five types of tensions within autonomy-connection. These tensions include: getting involved and getting to know one’s partner, dating others, trade-offs between the relationship and other activities, fairness and tolerance, and commitment. Goldsmith concluded that as relationships progressed from initial to final stages, experiences of autonomy-connection would vary.

Just like any couple, couples in military marriages work to find the middle ground between autonomy and connection, novelty and predictability, and openness and closedness. Often dialectics affect one another. For example, an open relationship is more likely to be more connected and a closed relationship to have more autonomy (Aries,

1987). Tensions can be stressful for individuals in relationships; in the next section, I review dialectical coping strategies.

Four Response Strategies to Cope With Dialectical Contradictions

Couples cannot solve all of their contradictions; however, they can find peace within the inconsistencies in their union (Turner, 2003). Originally Baxter (1988) proposed six fundamental strategies that relationship participants use to cope with dialectical tensions. However, in a later study, she proposed four basic types of strategies that people use to cope with the contradictions presented within dialectical tensions. These strategies include selection, separation, neutralization, and reframing (Baxter, 1990).

Baxter (1990) describes selection as, “The relationship parties perceive the co-existence of both elements of a given contradiction and seek to transcend the contradiction by making one condition or pole dominant to the exclusion of the other (p. 72).” In essence, the couple gives priority to one need while neglecting another. For example, when battling between autonomy and connection, a couple may choose to spend all their time together and give up their individual autonomy (Werner & Baxter, 1994).

Instead of completely removing one tension like selection, separation involves the co-existence of both sides of a tension (Baxter, 1988, 1990). Baxter says, “Parties seek to deny the interdependence of the contrasting elements by ‘uncoupling’ or separating them temporarily or topically” (1990, p. 72-73). Identifiable separation comes in two forms. The first is cyclic alternation which happens when couples shift from one end of a tension to another (Baxter, 1990). For example, a couple may shift from a time where they do not disclose a lot of information with each other, to complete openness, and then back to closedness. The second type of separation is segmentation. Segmentation allows couples to

compartmentalize aspects of their lives (Baxter, 1990). For example, couples may be autonomous about their work-life and connected about their family.

Baxter (1988, 1990) shows us that neutralization is when the couple negotiates a balance between the two poles of dialectic. Each need is met to a certain extent, but neither need is wholly satisfied. For example, when going out on their first date, a couple may engage in small talk. This meets both the need to disclose information to a potential partner, while still maintaining individual privacy and discretion.

In Baxter's original study on dialectical tensions (1988) she notes that the most complex and least utilized strategy of coping is reframing. Baxter (1988, 1990) suggests that members of a couple often use reframing to redefine contradictory needs so that they are not in opposition to one another so that the individual or couple can rise above the contradiction. For example, many couples see autonomy as something that enhances connection. By no longer seeing autonomy and connection as opposites, they have successfully reframed the situation (Baxter, 1990).

Long Distance Romantic Relationships

Long Distance Romantic Relationships entail two aspects. First, in a long distance relationship you are geographically separated from your partner, and second, although you are separated, you continue to take part in a romantic relationship (Stafford & Reske, 1990). When couples enlist in the military, they know that a long distance romantic relationship is inevitable. Though, a couple may learn to navigate in a LDRR, that does not fully determine the relationship outcome. Other factors to consider in the success or failure of a LDRR are personal characteristics of the members of the couple, as well as situational factors that may affect the relationship (Cameron & Ross, 2007).

Communication patterns change for couples in LDRRs. A relationship that has established communication patterns, now have to adapt to distance (Bejerano & Church, 2009). If a couple wants to survive, they must find new ways to communicate. For example, conversations such as, did you see the article in the morning paper, may seem trivial; however sharing small talk is just as important in romantic relationships as big discussions such as, where should the kids attend school (Spencer, 1994). People in LDDRs say that the routine of small talk and sharing day-to-day interaction is missed more than big events such as parties or family gatherings (Gerstel & Gross, 1985). In order to compensate for face-to-face small talk, couples may use: telephone, e-mail, and instant messaging (Chang, 2003, p.22) to have almost instant access to each other's thoughts on daily happenings.

Throughout a given year, a military couple may experience three or more months apart. When couples are together they may feel that all their interactions should be loving and ideal without conflict. In reality, members may have gotten used to being autonomous and being together may cause conflict between the couple at first. Sometimes one member of the couple may feel that they are more invested in the relationship than the other and that can also lead to tension and conflict (Helgeson, 1994). Members of a long-distance couple also report less certainty that their relationships will last (Van Horn et al., 1997).

LDDRs also have benefits. According to Sahlstein (2004, p. 690), "Living apart can be quite beneficial by allowing partners freedoms that they could not have if they lived in close proximity," while living together "could lead to increased feelings of stepping on each other's toes, being in each other's space and limiting individual potential." Frequent separation often causes couples to be more romantic and charismatic

about their relationship when they are together (Blake, 1996). Something that may be difficult for military couples is that they have to cycle through being together for several months and then being apart for several months. In essence they live together in a geographically close romantic relationship and then they cycle into a long distance romantic relationship. In a way, when it comes to the romantic couple being together, it is either all or nothing with no in-between alternative.

Conclusion

Researchers have studied dialectical tensions and coping strategies in a variety of ways. They produced extensive research on how dialectical tensions operate within romantic relationships and married couples. Scholars have produced little study of dialectical tensions within military marriages, and more specifically marriages where a spouse has been deployed for six or more months over the course of a year. This research is an important factor in today's society as many Americans are faced with the deployment of their loved ones every day. At this time, troops are placed in both Iraq and Afghanistan as peace seekers around the world try to resolve the war in Iraq. This study will look at dialectical tensions from an internal standpoint to determine how tensions in Navy couples' relationships function throughout the process of deployment. Exploring internal dialectical tensions within a couple's marriage will provide results that may help couples understand these tensions and may give insight on how to create a more satisfactory bond with one another. Therefore, this study advances the following:

Research Questions

RQ1: How do military wives understand the autonomy-connection dialectic in their marriage during deployment?

RQ2: How do military wives understand the novelty-predictability dialectic in their marriage during deployment?

RQ3: How do military wives understand the openness-closedness dialectic in their marriage during deployment?

RQ4: How do military wives cope with internal dialectical tensions within their marriage during deployment?

These questions will be the focus of my research of a specific population of Navy wives in Oak Harbor, Washington. The next chapter details the methods used to conduct this research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used to study how deployment impacts dialectical tensions and coping strategies in military marriages. In this study, I interviewed eighteen military wives using a series of open-ended questions that created a picture of their marriage, uncovered the tensions that operated therein, and clarified how they coped with those tensions. I conducted interviews in Whidbey Island, Washington, in December of 2007 and January of 2008. The interview questions were designed to allow wives to tell their story in an open-ended format, as well as create depth about how the wives dealt with tensions during deployment.

Participants

Eighteen heterosexual Navy wives were selected through a snowball sampling method. The researcher connected with a Navy wife whose husband was stationed on Whidbey Island, Washington, through her sister who is also a Navy wife. The first wife interviewed then connected the researcher with the president of one of the squadron's spouse groups. The president of the group agreed to an interview and also to spread the word through her group. After each wife was interviewed, they were asked if they knew of anyone else who would be interested in the study, and if they would be willing to ask them if the researcher could contact them by phone.

The researcher then called the suggested wives to further explain the study and to see if they were willing to participate. To be considered eligible for the study, the participants had to be married for over a year and their husband had to be deployed within the last year for six or more months. The investigator set these stipulations so that the

couple would be past their first year of marriage, which can often be an adjustment period, and so that the memories of their last deployment would be fresh. When screening a potential participant, the investigator asked, “how long have you been married?” and “When was your last deployment?” If the participants fit the criteria, they were asked for a convenient time and location to meet for an interview. They were also informed that most interviews lasted about 45 minutes, but they could take as much time as they needed to tell their experiences with Navy life. All except one wife chose to meet the researcher in their homes, as many were stay-at-home mothers who had young children.

All of the wives interviewed had husbands stationed at the Naval Air Station Whidbey base (NAS-Whidbey) on Whidbey Island. All of their husbands were either a commander (O-3) or a lieutenant commander (O-4). Their husbands had served in the military between 3.25 and 18.5 years, with an average of 12 years of service. Wives’ ages ranged between 25 and 41-years-old, with an average age of 34 years. They were married between 3 and 18.5 years with an average of 9.2 years. All eighteen wives earned an education after high school; the average education level was a bachelor’s degree. Only three of the eighteen wives held jobs in their educational field. All of the participants were mothers of at least one child. Most had at least two children (Table One).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher gathered data for this thesis by conducting semi-structured interviews using an interview guide (Appendix A). This allowed the researcher to have structure and also ensured that there would be room for follow up questions if needed. Interviews were conducted from December 26, 2007 - January 4, 2008. Research shows that interviews that are conducted in comfortable places are known to create a higher sense

of privacy and therefore an interview can be conversational rather than just question, answer (Keyton, 2006). Taking this into consideration, as well as wanting the participants to be able to keep their family obligations, all but one interview session took place in the homes of the Navy wives, in Oak Harbor. The other interview was conducted at a local coffeehouse.

Before collecting data from the recruited participants, the researcher conducted pilot interviews with four National Guard wives from the upper Midwest using a set of open-ended questions. From the pilot research, the researcher created a revised set of interview questions that were geared more towards finding how tensions were experienced in Navy marriages (Appendix A). Some questions were used to open communication and make the participant comfortable with the interviewer, such as, "Please tell me what your experience has been like married to someone in the military." Other questions were more specifically geared towards relational dialectics such as, "Can you tell me about any disagreements that typically happen before your husband leaves for deployment?" (openness-closedness), "What is the communication between you and your husband like when he comes home from deployment?" (autonomy-connection), and "How do your rituals and routines change before, during and after deployment?" (novelty-predictability). The interviewer asked follow-up questions if there was interesting narrative that would be helpful to the study.

When the researcher arrived for the interview, the participants were asked to fill out a brief demographic form which asked their age, how long their husband had been in the military, their husband's military rank, how long they had been married, what educational diploma/degree(s) they held, what their degree(s) were, if they held a job using said

degrees, if they had children and if so, how many (Appendix B). The researcher then explained the informed consent form and asked the participant to sign the form (Appendix C). The Navy wives were informed that if they felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview, they were not obligated to continue with the question or the remainder of the interview. Next, the researcher asked the participant for permission to audio-record the interview; after both the consent form was signed for the recording and verbal permission was given, the interview began.

At the time of the interview the wives were briefed on the researcher's educational background, and the researcher also shared that her sister was a military wife and that was how she became interested in military marriages. Frey, Botan, & Kreps (2000) suggest that how participants view an interviewer may affect what they say. The researcher felt it was important to disclose her connections with the military so the wives felt more comfortable, and the researcher wanted to build a level of trust between her and the participants. The wives' anonymity was assured by assigning pseudonyms. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour and were audio-recorded. After the interview was complete the researcher recorded observations that she thought were important to the interview. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim, and all audio recordings of the interview were erased after the transcriptions were complete.

Data Analysis

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed, verbatim. Each recording was replayed repeatedly until the researcher was sure of the transcript's precision (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). The transcripts were then analyzed for dialectical tensions and coping strategies by using Baxter's (1988, 1990) dialectic theory and coping strategies as an a

priori guide. When first approaching the data, the researcher simply familiarized herself with the transcripts by reading and listening to the audio recordings at the same time. No coding took place at this time, but notes were taken regarding the context of the message the wives were portraying. For example, one wife talked about how she gave up a career she enjoyed in order to provide stability for her children while her husband was deployed. She discussed how she knew giving up her job was the right thing to do for her family and making that decision helped her children. If someone were to only read the transcription of that interview without knowing the tone in her voice, they may think that she was content to give up her position. The tone of her voice, however, suggested an underlying longing to be able to work in the career she loved.

In the second step, the researcher coded for internal dialectical tensions and coping strategies. For this step, the researcher's data-coding procedure closely paralleled that of Baxter's (1990) study. "Two data codes were generated for each of the three contradictions: (1) presence or absence of the contradiction; and (2) the type of coping response enacted by the parties" (Baxter, 1990, p. 76). In this step the researcher was actively looking for dialogue that related to autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness, as well as coping strategies such as neutralization, selection, separation, and reframing. Each concept was color coded. For example, whenever the researcher saw dialogue that related to the openness-closedness dialectic, she would underline the transcript with orange ink, and if she recognized that one of the wives was using the reframing coping strategy, she would highlight the transcript with light blue.

In the third step, the researcher took a closer look at emerging tensions from the transcriptions; these tensions had not been noted in previous research on dialectical

tensions. In this particular research, two themes emerged, forced closedness and a military-non-military tension. Whenever the researcher discovered a section that showed forced closedness, she put a circle by the data, and if she found an example of the military-non-military tension, she put a star by the information.

A second, independent coder was used to check the validity of the researcher's coding. After the researcher trained this independent coder, they coded 10 percent of the written transcripts, a common practice when checking for interrater reliability (Burnett & Badzinski, 2000). For the autonomy-connection, openness-closedness and predictability-novelty contradictions, the emergent tension, and for the coping strategies, the reliability coefficient using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) was .78, indicating a good level of reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The researcher then took a deeper look at the color coated and marked data, and compared and contrasted Baxter's previously described tensions with the newly emerged data, to find additional meaning within the coded categories. Chapter Four will uncover what was found after analysis of the coded transcriptions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Each of the eighteen women in this study had various experiences and backgrounds as military wives. Each wife had a unique personality, interests, and life perspective. Though each was unique, the wives had many similarities regarding running the home and balancing their own life within their military lifestyle. After conducting face-to-face interviews with each wife, the researcher transcribed and analyzed the data then analyzed the autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability and openness-closedness dialectics first. Each dialectic will be described and then the related coping strategies will be revealed. In analyzing the data, one additional set of tensions was exposed: the tension between military and non-military families. Forced closedness was also found as an extension within the openness-closedness category. These emergent tensions will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

It should be noted, that wives shared some important demographic similarities. Each earned at least a bachelor's degree or an associate's degree. However, their degrees were rarely being used to advance a set career path. Each wife is also a mother, and most are the mother of at least two children. Each Navy household had a comparable family income, which can be calculated by their husbands' rank and their husbands' years of military service. The base pay for the 0-3 families in this study were between \$48,336 and \$55,224; whereas, the base pay for the 0-4 families in this study were higher and between \$55,476 and \$59,472 (Navy CyberSpace). All the wives were married to someone who is away from their family at least six months every other year and often every year (Table One).

Autonomy-Connection

The first research question asked: “How do military wives understand the autonomy-connection dialectic in their marriage during deployment?” Many of the wives revealed that there were differences between autonomy-connection when their husbands were home versus when they were overseas or getting ready for extended military training or duty. Typically when their husbands were home, couples would have face-to-face discussions and were able to continually update each other on what was happening in their daily lives. When husbands were away, there was a forced divide as they were unable to have face-to-face interactions due to the physical distance between the couple. The closest thing they could have to talking face-to-face was video conferencing which is where the officer signs up for a specific time using the squadron’s equipment or video chatting which is when an officer uses his own computer to chat whenever it is convenient for him.

Finding a balance between autonomy and connection can be difficult for military couples. Because of the physical divide and less face time, living an autonomous life can become the norm. The military wives in this study found little tension between autonomy-connection, because they were forced to be primarily autonomous in their daily lives as they could not depend on consistent connection with their husbands. Laura said: “You know, you take on everything when your husband is gone. I do it all myself.” Bell reflects: “The older I get, the more mature I get with this experience, it’s like I CAN DO THIS!” Betty had similar sentiments: “I am a one woman show.” Simone reflects on the fact that nothing changes when her husband is at home compared to when he is deployed. She maintains all the household and child-care duties whether he is home or away. She declares: “It’s really for my own sanity.”

The more autonomous wives became from their husbands, the more connected they become with their friends (typically other Navy wives who were also experiencing deployment) or with family members who were still in the States. Every wife in this study experienced this trend. Mary disclosed: “Well, if I can’t talk to him (her husband), I’ll call mom or friends who are near here. I have good friends around here and I can always rely on them.” Laura noted: “You can always rely on other wives. No matter what is happening or what you need, they are always just a phone call or even just a short walk away (pointing to her friend’s house down the street).” Carrie talked about how her husband would probably miss their child’s birth, and that she was not too worried about it because she said: “His mom is now retired; Bob’s mom, and she said she’d come up and, you know, like I said, I have good friends. I already have a (lamaze) partner if I need one.”

Exercise is a key component to many wives’ sense of autonomy. Several wives choose to focus on exercise as a release. It is a time where they can focus on themselves and their own personal goals. Carrie said: “I go to the gym a lot when he’s gone. I went almost every day.” Bell said: “I always run, but when my husband is gone I focus on running more and enter events like 5k’s and ½ marathons because I have more *me* time when he’s not home.” Margaret teaches and coaches gymnastics more when her husband is gone. She said: “Being active helps me. It makes me feel good.”

Wives are not the only member of the relationship that gear up for autonomy. Each soldier is provided a deployment preparations checklist. Categories in the checklist include: financial, legal, personal property, auto, medical, personal, emergency plans, and children and separation (USAA, 2007). Not only are soldiers preparing to emotionally leave their family, but also to leave the physical and everyday home duties. Specifically the

checklist includes: make a family video, create a family picture collage, notify the children's school of deployed family member, review auto insurance coverage, prepare roadside emergency kit, check smoke detectors, prepare a will, etc. (USAA, 2007).

Tackling this comprehensive five page checklist causes tension between the members of military couples. Wives were very explicit about their feelings about "the checklist." Virginia explained: "I know my husband has good intentions and he is doing the checklist because he cares, but I would rather just have him hang out with us." Kathleen had similar thoughts: "My husband is more attached to the deployment checklist, than he is to us. He wants to make sure everything is in place before he leaves. I appreciate it, but at the same time we could be out doing something together." Amelia said: "I'm always relieved when the checklist is done. It always makes the house twenty times more frantic. We go to the commissary a million times. Plus, when it is all said and done, everything is up to speed and then we just all get to relax together." Laura reported: "Ugh. I hate the damn checklist! The moment I see it in his hands, I cringe because our lives end up revolving around it until it is done. I would rather have a weekend in Seattle, than paint the fence or trim the trees." The wives felt a calming presence and accomplishment in having the deployment checklist done; they were relieved when it was finished.

Even though autonomy can become the default mode while husbands are deployed, military couples often get creative to stay connected. Computers have given wives a new outlet to connect with their husbands. E-mail, chatting systems like MSN instant messenger, social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, as well as Skype (an internet phone and conferencing system that works much like the telephone) are all things that wives use to keep a daily connection with their husbands. Only one of the eighteen

wives interviewed did not keep daily contact with her husband, which is a rarity in a time where high technology use is present in the squadrons.

E-mail seemed to be the most constant form of communication that kept couples connected about daily happenings. All eighteen wives use e-mail communication to stay in touch with their husbands. A practical benefit of e-mailing is the flexibility it gives the wives to send an e-mail whenever they have something to say. Instead of waiting for a telephone call, which the husbands have to initiate because the wives are unable to call them while they are deployed, the wives can take initiative to contact their husbands. Another benefit is a certain amount of privacy when a wife is e-mailing her husband. Wives are taught either through their husbands or deployment readiness classes, that even though e-mail messages can be screened at any time, the couple has some sense of pseudo personal privacy for their relationship, as their e-mails are not being screened for personal relationship content, but to make sure no classified or sensitive information is being sent that could be intercepted by foreign forces.

Technology has given wives helpful ways to stay in touch with their husbands. Audre discussed the advantage of being online at the same time as her husband: "We have been able to catch each other on e-mail and then do back to back e-mail. So you kind of get a live conversation." Technology also helps wives talk about everyday topics with their partners that many take for granted. Patricia exclaims: "E-mail is huge! You can discuss things even things like...the toilet broke down; do you want me to call this guy or this guy?" Small conversations and small talk are important to keep relationships going when couples are separated by geographical distance. E-mail gives couples the opportunity to continue to engage with one another on a frequent basis.

Another aspect of using e-mail to stay in touch is that it helps archive the couple's relationship during deployment. Susan says this about e-mail preserving the couple's history: "We have books of our e-mails that we sent to each other. They document our journey." Kathleen said: "I have folders in my e-mail inbox from each deployment. Now I can look back and see all the changes in our deployment style since we were first married." These archives can be helpful for couples to reflect and possibly change their communication habits if they are encountering problems within the relationship during deployment.

Wives saw many other benefits to written word opposed to phone calls. Audre said: "He'll e-mail a lot of his thoughts; he has more time to reflect and put it all on paper, what he wants to say. So that's been really helpful. We really enjoy e-mail!" Carrie remarked how she "loves" getting e-mails because then she can read them over and over again. Her husband shows her affection through poetry and other small writings that she can keep with her and look at them as often as she likes.

Although e-mailing can create a sense of daily connection, most of the wives discussed how e-mail messages cannot replace the connection a couple experiences face-to-face. Elizabeth said this about trying to show affection through e-mail: "You can express it [affection], but it's different. You can write it out, but to me the words don't really mean that much." Virginia had a similar comment: "There is only so many times that you can write 'I miss you, I love you' before you feel like it loses its meaning. Even though it is important, you just feel like it is a habit." Without the help of facial expression and tone, many wives feel like their messages of love are lost.

Mail is a key way that the wives could show their deepest affection for their husbands. Numerous wives talked about sending packages and physical letters/cards to their husbands. The mail could be as simple as sending a couple of drawings from the children or some homemade cookies, to packages filled with CDs, DVDs, and scrap books. The point was not what was in the package, but that when packages were delivered that their husbands received one. Amelia said this of packages: "I don't want him to be standing there while everyone else gets a package. I know that makes him feel bad or like we aren't thinking about him." Elizabeth says: "I tend to express affection through sending him things. I usually send a package a week, it might be small, but just sticking notes or color pages from the kids is important."

Although autonomy is prominent when their husbands are deployed, couples always find some way to connect. E-mail seems to be the most important when looking at daily conversations and discussions. Packages, however, seem to be somewhat of a status symbol and the go-to method for wives to express affection.

Coping strategies used in autonomy-connection.

Selection is a coping strategy that wives use within the autonomy-connection dialectic in that wives choose autonomy over connection to get through the beginning of a deployment. They often move into the reframing coping strategy. Many wives choose projects to keep themselves busy and to keep their minds off their husbands' deployment. Naomi said: "I need to have a project, I need to have something going on." Audre has a similar mentality: "The day he leaves I have fifteen projects that I need to do right away." This helps them move past the fact that their husbands have left and gives them time to adjust to their new "normal."

Couples often use separation when it comes to the deployment checklist. First, when they are actively working on the deployment checklist, they assign autonomy to their interactions. The couple is just going through the checklist motions. Then when the checklist is finished, the couple comes back together before soldiers are deployed. Laura said: "When it is all done we always do something really fun. Like a quick overnight trip, or one year we got a sprinkler and outside fun toys to just hang out with the kiddoes. So that is always something to look forward to."

Wives often redefine the substantial amount of autonomy and reduced connection they have into something that is positive and not in opposition to their need for connection. While wives are sad that their husbands are gone, they reframe by using autonomy to equal time for bettering themselves and therefore being better wives and mothers for the family and in general, just to keep their sanity. Virginia said: "You kind of get the sense of WOW ok...the night is MINE!" Even small things can be liberating. Lucy said: "I just try to think about the things I enjoy about being alone. I get the whole bed to myself. I get to choose what to watch on TV. I get to order whatever kind of pizza I want!" Patricia explains that she often thinks of what she should be doing to help her husband while he is gone, and then all of a sudden she will feel like she needs some "me" time. She said, "Buying things and doing fun things for myself. I do it because I can. Putting my daughter with a sitter a little more often, just because I might need a little alone time."

Novelty-Predictability

The second research question asked: "How do military wives understand the novelty-predictability dialectic in their marriage during deployment?" Each wife who was interviewed had gone through at least two deployments with her husband. Some had gone

through more. One thing that became predictable was that these wives would have to take on the roles that their husbands played in their marriage and family.

As husbands are getting ready to embark on their next deployment, wives undertake novel tasks to make their family life more predictable. After their husbands leave, these women take on the dual role of both mom and dad or husband and wife. Now, instead of just cleaning and caring for the home, cooking dinner and taking care of the kids during the day, they are also mowing the lawn, cleaning up after dinner, taking out the garbage and making sure the kids have their baths and are put to bed.

Many of the Navy wives considered predictability a part of their role in their family. Being the predictable partner is often not what the wives like to do or want to be, but it benefits the good of the family. Being predictable helps make their marriage and family work by relieving the stress that may come with novelty. The lives of these wives' naval husbands are often unpredictable. Their husband's day-to-day tasks while deployed may seem predictable, but as we are in a war and their job is to protect the United States, their careers have certain degree of danger. This fact is either explicitly stated or alluded to within the conversations with their wives. As a result, wives tend to try to counteract their husband's unpredictability by being highly predictable. Elizabeth noted: "You never really know what is going to happen while they are gone. You hope they are safe and try to support them, and you are also there for the kids, because you can be." Susan said: "I have all boys and when their dad is home, they always roughhouse. That is what they like to do, so when my husband is gone, I always try and roughhouse and do active things that he would do with the kids." Whether or not their husband will come home safely is out of their control, but they can be home to take care and nurture their children.

Recall that all eighteen wives interviewed had earned either an associate's or bachelor's degree after high school. Five of those women went on to graduate school and earned master's degrees or graduated with a Juris Doctorate. Out of the wives that were interviewed, only four had paid positions. The engineer and the lawyer worked for large firms in Seattle, but were able to work from home. The other two women had flexible jobs: one substitute taught so she could say 'no' if she could not teach that day and the other taught classes for the Navy that help spouses deal with their partner's deployment.

Women who did have careers had to have flexible jobs, so they could be home for their children or be able to move when their husbands got new orders. In general, all the wives talked about being the stable person for their kids and wanting their children to have that predictability of having at least one parent around if they should need them. When talking about not having a career, Bell said this about being a stay-at-home mom: "I gave up working when I started having children. Part of that is because we saw successful military families and not successful ones. I think, too, we wanted someone to be the stability for our children and for our family." She later continued: "I have struggled with not working, but I think that in some ways it's best for the family."

Simone, who is a corporate counsel for a large Seattle company, explains that she should could be making a lot more money and be higher up on the corporate ladder if she was able to work directly within the company instead of working from home. She says: "I don't have to be there from 9-5. I can work from 7-3 and then when my kids go to bed." Once again, she is making sacrifices in her career in to be the stability for her children.

To an extent, when their husbands are deployed, the wives ground themselves in predictability, except for when it comes to one thing: travel. After being in the same

predictable routine, many of these women decide to go “home,” meaning they go stay with their family, their husband’s family or both. Since fourteen out of eighteen wives do not have a job and the ones that do have flexibility; they can often travel and get out of their day-to-day rut.

Two women that were interviewed were from Spain. When their husbands left, they packed up their children and went to live in Spain for part of their deployment.

Kathleen talks extensively about traveling to Spain:

I want my son to know his roots and to speak Spanish. When Kevin is gone, it seems like the best time to go visit my family. Not only do I get a break, but my son gets to spend time getting to know my side of the family.

Betty, who is also from Spain, discusses the importance of travel during deployment: “It is good to go home and to have the freedom to get on a train and be in a whole new country. It’s something you can’t do in the U.S.”

Going home is not just something that wives from other countries do. Women who have their family based in the United States also go “home.” Amelia said: “I feel like the first question out of my military friends’ mouths are, ‘so, when are you going to see your family?’ It’s like it’s not even question of whether or not you *are* going to go, it’s *when* are you going?” Margaret’s response is similar: “We might go to Chicago in July, because that’s where I’m from. Family is there and I don’t have to work. It just seems like that is what everybody else does to break up the deployment.”

The novelty-predictability dialectic offers little middle ground. Wives must be predictable for the family. They have highly predictable lives that center on their children

and home. On the opposite end of the spectrum, they find an escape from that routine within the luxury of being able to travel. Although the predictability of home life and the novelty of travel seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum, it works for these wives. They strike a balance when incorporating both into their lives during deployment.

Coping strategies used in novelty-predictability.

Wives reframe when they talk about career aspirations to make sense out of the lives they have chosen regarding the military. Many of the wives do not have paid jobs, and those that do have strict stipulations for holding one (being able to move or work from home). Most wives said that they would like to have a career; however, they need to be home for their children. Instead of focusing their energies on not having a career that would provide novelty in their lives, they reframe the situation as being a healthy family choice and therefore they redefine contradictory needs so that they are no longer in opposition of one another. For wives, transcending the opposition between novelty and predictability by defining the contradictions they feel about working, enhances intimacy and nurturing for their family. Instead of focusing on what they could do as a career woman, they focus on being able to focus on themselves, their husbands or their roles as mothers.

With regard to travel, wives often use selection as a coping strategy. Because they are the predictable parent while their husbands are gone, wives often travel to switch up the routine. Alice said: "I know when it is time to go see the family. You just wake up one day ready to take a break from having to do everything." Bell mentioned: "It is just nice to break up the deployment and the kids really like having other, um, adults to interact with and I do too. You know, because it is just me when dad is gone."

Openness-Closedness

The third research question asked: “How do military wives understand the openness-closedness dialectic in their marriage during deployment?” The military world offers a unique openness-closedness dialectic. The wives have to balance saying enough to let their husbands know they care and yet not say too much so he needlessly worries. The length of marriage in this study is between three to eighteen years (Table One). This is important to note, because the longer the couple has been married, the more deployments the couple experiences. With each deployment the couple can look back and refine their communication techniques to better balance the tensions they are experiencing, or to find which coping strategies work best for their relationship.

When the wives were asked how truthful their disclosure is with their husbands while they are deployed, they frequently reflected on how their communication skills have changed. Bell shares: “In the beginning...nine years ago...I told him *everything*.” She goes on to say:

Through experience I’ve learned he doesn’t need to know everything, and I think too, that I’ve learned I can do this all. I don’t need to tell my husband that the girls had five meltdowns today because it doesn’t matter. Is it going to make a difference? Or is it going to possibly cause a fight or guilt? YES. I think as I get older I think I can handle it more and also that I don’t need to tell him....I don’t *want* to tell him that because those are things that are going to make him feel worse.

Lucy looked at the type of job her husband has and said:

Things you would normally tell him when he is home, you wouldn't necessarily tell him. At least for me, I kind of get stressed out. I don't want him worrying about this when he has such a dangerous job already and that's what he needs to be focused on. So I kind of leave out a lot of information and skim over things.

In both Bell and Lucy's statements, closedness is used as a form of protection.

They consciously hold back information about minor daily events in order to keep their husbands calm and their relationships safe.

Mary also holds back information. "I don't want every phone call for him to hear something is wrong. I'd rather have him hear something upbeat because it's hard for him being away." Virginia has similar feelings and also adds: "He's out there protecting us, our country. This is his JOB; this is what he needs to focus on while he is away. He doesn't need to know that there are car problems or that there is a leak in the roof."

Whether you are a Seaman, a Navy Flyer, or an Officer, all communication coming to and from the base or ship is monitored. So whether a wife is sending an e-mail, talking on the phone or sending a package, that communication could be intercepted at anytime. This regulation creates something that will be referred to as forced closedness, which means that even if a member of the couple wants to be upfront and honest about a particular event, he or she may not be able to talk to their partner about the situation. Alice says, "There is a level to their job that they don't (disclose); there's classified stuff that they don't share."

Naomi explains:

There is never really like any sense of privacy to your conversation, at least on their end. It's kind of frustrating to me because you have privacy because you are in your own home or whatever so you can be like...so what about blah blah blah and they either don't want to talk about it or can't talk about it. I mean it's more frustrating for me to talk on the phone because you are talking to him, but you're not really having a real exchange of information.

Amelia said:

The phone that my husband calls on is in the ready room, so I'll be talking to him and all of a sudden some guy will come up and start talking to him. So basically we have a one-sided conversation because *everyone* in the ready room can hear what he is saying.

Amelia's quote illustrates how she is able to share information without thinking of who may overhear or intervene. Her husband chooses not to overindulge and disclose do to the fact that there is always an audience. This is a prime example of forced closedness.

Wives continually share positive information with their husbands. Most of this information concerns the couple's children. Every wife talked about making sure they kept their husbands updated on what was happening in their children's lives. Laura said: "I always tell him what is going on with Diego. Doesn't matter if the news is big or small or if I just tell us about our daily life, Bill always wants to know." Virginia explained: "He wants to know that Paige can now do somersaults or that she now eats olives from her fingers." Amy said: "I always tell him about the kid's school programs. Usually something

funny always happens at those.” Often instead of spending time talking about negative events around the house, they discussed topics like Johnny’s new school art or that Lynn was taking her first steps. Although these events may seem minute, this is something that they can talk about regardless of what their husbands are doing or the medium with which they are using to talk. This is an acceptable form of openness because it not only keeps up the troops moral, but it also does not risk any form of national or personal security

Bad news is not something that wives readily share with their husbands. For the most part, they try to keep that information to themselves and take care of problems on their own. Typically, wives would not disclose bad information unless it transformed family structure or dynamics. Not only because it is stressful on their husbands because they are so far away, but also because of the communication channels they have to go through to reach their husbands.

When asked how truthful her disclosure is with her husband Carrie said, “It depends. If it’s something that’s going to make him jealous or insecure, probably just don’t mention it because he gets protective.” She goes on to say, “Most things stress him out too much and you don’t want to add extra stress to them.”

Naomi said her disclosures depend on the situation, she explains:

I would not, not tell him the truth about big things, factual things, like if someone died. But, I might paint a rosier picture if he’s having a really tough time at work because I know he can’t do anything about it and it would just amplify it. It would kind of make his situation worse for him without anything good coming from it.

Lucy discusses contacting her husband to let him know his grandmother passed away. “So there is a whole process, you can call Red Cross and say this is my husband’s name, this is his unit, and they can get a message to him to let him know what is going on.” For most wives, reaching their husbands to tell them bad news is not just a phone call away. Either they have to go through various channels to speak with their husbands’ personally or they have to tell them through other forms of communication such as e-mail or instant messaging.

Coping strategies used in openness-closedness.

Neutralization is often used within the openness-closedness dialectic. To an extent, the military wives want to be open with their husbands; however, they want to spare their feelings from being hurt, and they want their husbands to be able to concentrate on their service during deployment. Alice has been married the longest and is also a skipper’s wife, which means that her husband commands all the troops on a Navy ship. It also means that she deals with a lot of interpersonal issues between couples when their husbands are away. Essentially, she serves as the gatekeeper from land to ship. She revealed:

Over time I learned what I should and should not say and how to balance what I want to say with what I should say. I see this a lot with other wives as well. I can definitely tell which wives are experiencing their first deployments and which ones are seasoned veterans. It is just something that each couple needs to test and try.

Another coping strategy within openness-closedness is selection. Selection in the case of openness-closedness may be chosen or it may be forced. Wives select to tell their husbands positive information while they are deployed and choose to keep problematic

happenings to themselves. In some cases wives and husbands do not have a choice on whether they can or cannot disclose information. Because of national security, because communicative systems may be down on the base, or because there is no privacy; couples may feel forced to keep personal information to themselves.

Military Versus Non-Military

One prominent tension revealed in this study is the tension between being in a military family opposed to being in a civilian family. This external tension affects internal dialectical tensions as it impacts and is impacted by them (Figure One). Civilians' view of military families, whether positive or negative, will affect how a military family operates within a given situation. For example, if a military wife is talking about the struggles of deployment with a non-military friend, they may not understand the trials she is going through and that may come off as aloof or unsupportive to the military wife. In turn, that military wife may turn to the comfort of friends within the military who understand what she is going through which may cause a larger gap between civilian and military families and their understanding of one another. The wives often compared and contrasted their current military lives against a life where their husband would have a job and be home most of the year. A clear "us" (military families) versus "them" (civilian families) attitude existed. Even when describing friendships or non-nuclear family life, the wives tended to find comfort with friends who knew the struggles of having their spouse deployed for six or more months at a time or the struggle of having to constantly move and readjust their families to new situations.

When asked about the military lifestyle, Lucy said: "It's definitely not for everybody. You're a single parent who is married, which is always kind of a difficult

position to be in.” Many families who are not active within a military lifestyle may not understand the significance of this quote or what that means to the family that is working within these constraints. Essentially, military families have to continue to balance the life of being a family as a whole and being a family made up of two single parents, where one has more responsibility raising the children.

When talking about the importance of her husband’s job as a Navy flyer (in wartime they are sent in to scope out territory and make sure it is safe for other troops who are stationed on the ground), Bell said: “You have to realize that his job is number one, even though you want to think that it’s you and he wants to think it’s you. It’s not.”

Elizabeth said:

There isn’t anything like it [having a military lifestyle]. I have friends who call and say ‘my husband is leaving for two weeks on a business trip, how do you do it?’ And I’m like ‘I don’t know, like I said, God provides. I mean and He does. It’s where we are; it’s where we feel called to be.

Amy said: “I’ve enjoyed the military, cause I’ve enjoyed the social aspects; you’ve got travel opportunities; I think you’re just kind of exposed to a lot of things you wouldn’t have been had you not been with the military.” Again, we see a military wife pointing out the uniqueness of the military experience. At the same time, she may be justifying the hardships that are encountered in military families by constant moving and switching from single parent households to two-parent households.

One idea that was brought up in every interview was the reliance on other military wives through deployment. Although they move every other year, they know that when

they arrive at a new station, other people will be there that understand what they are going through. Bell relays:

I think it's only people or people going through deployment together that understand. You don't have to give them more detail than that [having a bad day] because you just know they know because they have been there or have had that emotion and so you just know how to comfort each other.

This tension becomes important when looking at the military lifestyle, as other spouses and the military in general are considered a family unit. Wives can count on other wives to help pull them through a tough deployment and may not feel as guilty when asking for help or favors. Amy said, "The closeness, you know, being able to count on friends, that kind of aspect (military lifestyle) is definitely beneficial."

The Spouse's Club, which is essentially a support group for spouses who have their loved one on deployment, is a place where spouses can find people who are going through similar experiences. This type of club is something that is unique to the military lifestyle. Simone said: "I try to be involved with the Spouse's Club as much as I can, just because it is someone else to talk to." She then goes on to describe Fridays in her cul-de-sac, which is primarily inhabited by military families: "Friday afternoon happy hour in the cul-de-sac is where we all get together. It's nice. We drink, have an appetizer, and sit out front on our lawn chairs while the kids would play. I can depend on a couple of cocktails to wind down, and the kids would play."

In general, the military lifestyle offers a unique experience that many civilian families do not experience. Because of the intricacies of the military lifestyle, there may be

a disconnect between military and non-military families. Both may try to understand each other, but ultimately, may be unable to do so due to their extreme differences.

Conclusion

This section covered autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness dialectics. This section also addressed coping strategies for internal dialectical tensions and the tension that emerged between military and non-military lifestyles. The following chapter offers theoretical and practical contributions of this study. In addition the chapter will provide an assessment of the limitations of this study, directions for future research, and communicative implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how internal dialectical tensions manifest in a military couple's marriage during deployment, as well as how military couples cope with these tensions. Using dialectic theory to ground these women's experiences helps give them a voice and may provide insight into the increased divorce rate in military marriages. The intent of this research in communication is to provide a useful resource, not only to the communication academic community, but also to military spouses. Military wives should understand that they are not alone in how they deal with the tensions within their marriage, especially when their husbands are deployed.

Many military families take classes through their Spouse's Clubs or through their particular military branch to learn and understand what happens during deployment. Every service member is also educated to understand typical emotions and desires that they, or their spouses, may have while preparing for, during and following deployment. The results of this study and future studies can be used within the courses that military families receive to understand the deployment process. The reported results may create a more satisfactory bond within military marriages, as well as help military spouses find solidarity with other military spouses who go through similar circumstances each year. Results show that military spouses are not alone during the deployment process and that many other spouses deal with similar tensions within the deployment process. This study seeks to expand dialectic theory and create building blocks for future communication research within the military.

Autonomy-Connection

Military couples often find it difficult to balance autonomy and connection before a deployment. Although they want to spend time and interact with one another, they also know that soon they will not be able rely on each other. Many wives try to boost the connection in their relationship before their husbands leave; however, husbands often push away and are too busy making sure that everything in their house, car, and family is secure before they leave. This “checklist”- to try and make sure everything is going to function well while they are gone- is often a source of tension. Husbands show their wives they care by making sure the house and vehicle run smoothly while they are gone. At the same time wives are disgruntled, as they would rather have their husbands spend time with their family before deployment instead of taking care of chores around the house.

Wives find autonomy dependable. While their husbands are deployed, wives work to take on the roles of husband and wife, mom and dad, and they realize that the person they can count on the most is herself. Many wives find a sense of independence within autonomy. Although wives try to stay connected with their husbands during deployment, they rely heavily on autonomy. By giving priority to autonomy, wives are able to navigate their daily lives better, as they are not always thinking about the absence of their husbands or blaming them for being away from their family. Autonomy gives wives the assurance that they can and will be able to handle the household on their own.

Novelty-Predictability

Spouses of Navy wives often have jobs that are unpredictable and dangerous, especially when they are deployed and working in a war zone. Because of this, Navy wives make themselves the predictable member of their family. Wives feel that it is their duty to

be available for their family's needs, whether it is a ride to school or being a Girl Scout leader. Many quench their craving for novelty through travel and new experiences with their children while their husband is gone. The simple act of spending time at their parent's house creates a sense of novelty and adventure. Seeing that their daily lives are so entrusted in routine, this travel time is important for military wives and often gives them a sense of excitement and adventure. Traveling helps them out of the rut of routine.

Openness-Closedness

Wives were very explicit about what they would be comfortable disclosing while their husbands were away. To protect their husbands and assure that they are able to focus on their job, they opt to tell their husbands primarily good news that would not make them worry about their family. Trivial problems, like household or car problems, were typically not disclosed to their husbands until they were fixed, because then the problem was no longer an issue as the wives had found a successful solution. However, wives would disclose if there were big problems happening within the family. If someone in their family or close-knit network was very ill or had died, the wives would tell their husbands as it would directly impact their husbands' lives and were problems that were out of the wives' realm to solve.

A big hurdle with openness-closedness is that many times wives felt they could not be open with their husbands. This concept of forced closedness came up often in the interviews. Many times wives were unable to truly disclose information as they did not want to have others overhear their conversation. Other times they or their husbands were unable to disclose information because of national security reasons. At times, husbands could not disclose any information about where they were located or what they were doing

day-to-day, as it may have been detrimental to their lives and to the lives of other members of their squadron. Outside factors such as no phone or internet access also affected whether or not a couple could communicate with one another.

Openness and connection are linked. E-mail offers women a sense of privacy. As wives feel their conversations with their husbands via e-mail are private, they are able to create a better sense of connection, and they disclose more information. Because the wives can be open about what they and their children are doing, they feel that they have created a bridge between the miles that separate their family. This feeling is important as it helps ease the discomfort of distance in the couple's relationship.

Military Versus Non-Military

A struggle occurs between "us" versus "them" between military and non-military families. In a deployment article that is distributed to each Navy family, the author Kathleen Logan (1987, p. 43), gives Navy families a perspective on the issue of military and civilian communities.

The Navy has its own culture and traditions, and it is not helpful to compare military families to the civilian community. Most Navy wives, for example, have heard from a civilian friend or relative the comment, "You're so strong, I could never do it!" It makes them sound weird, like superwomen, when they are just doing the best they can under the circumstances.

Logan's stance on military and civilian families may seem obvious; however, other perspectives should be considered. First, the Navy may be distributing this article to each

family, but it also recommends the support of other spouses within spouse's clubs.

Spouse's groups, which used to be called 'waiting wives clubs' (Houppert, 2005), are set up to help military spouses find other military spouses who are going through similar situations during deployment. Note that Spouse's Clubs are not set up for civilians, and therefore when one attends club meetings only military families are represented.

Secondly, we also see in Logan's quote that civilians are part of the military-non-military tension. Military marriages only compromise 755,000 marriages throughout the United States (Jelinek, 2008) and in the United States in 2007 alone, there were 2,197,000 marriages (Centers, 2009), which means more civilian couples are married per year than military couples. It may be in a military spouse's best interest to understand the emotional cycle of deployment; however, civilians are not going to be so inclined to understand or educate themselves on the in's and out's of deployment, military lifestyle, or the fact that it may be offensive to military spouses to think of them as "superwomen."

The military-non-military tension closely relates to external dialectics, as couples that have a military lifestyle operate in two worlds: the military world and the civilian world. Apparently military families primarily interact in their own separate sphere set inside the civilian world. Within this unique military world, internal dialectical tensions not only affect one another, but they influence and create the military lifestyle and vice versa. For example, military wives have difficulty finding full-time career options, as they often have to move every two years. This transience affects the novelty-predictability tension as wives often become the predictable member of the military couple, and mothers' being predictable is a typical part of military lifestyle. The only way to get out of this cycle would be for the military to change its moving policies so families could stay in one

location for longer periods of time. Because the external military tension affects the internal dialectical tensions and vice-versa, this unique world becomes disconnected from the civilian or non-military world (Figure One).

Internal Dialectical Tension Coping Strategies

Military wives use coping strategies to manage dialectical tensions and separations from their husbands. These strategies include selection, separation, and neutralization. In addition, I focus special attention on the reframing coping strategy, as wives frequently use this strategy to cope with their military lifestyle.

Selection is used as a coping strategy for all the internal dialectical tensions. It offers military wives a sense of protection. If the wife takes on a new project or decides to work on herself, selection offers a release in the sense that she does not always have to think about her husband and his safety. Wives also select to be closed and only tell their husbands certain information to preserve them from harm and to help them focus on their jobs. A connection exists between not disclosing information to their husband and their husbands personal and career safety. If wives disclose too much negative information, their husbands may feel guilty for not being able to be with their families, which may have a harmful effect on their working environment. If they are thinking about mishaps at home, they may not be paying attention on the job, and that may have a detrimental effect on their personal safety as they are often in life or death situations.

Separation is most commonly seen in the autonomy-connection dialect with regard to the deployment checklist. Wives use this strategy to compartmentalize opposing tensions to alleviate arguments and disagreements. Wives are often annoyed that the deployment checklist takes over their husbands' lives. If they compartmentalize their

feelings of annoyance, they can better handle the arguments that arise while finishing the checklist; and look forward to being able to spend time with their husband when the checklist is complete.

Neutralization appears the most within the openness-closedness dialectic. Wives want their husbands to know that they are open to connection; however, they have experientially learned that they cannot tell them everything without causing too much tension in the relationship. Each member of the couple knows that by giving rough outlines of their daily lives that they can keep the relationship intact without tearing each other down. They tell each other just enough to suit each other's needs for connection, and yet they can never fully satisfy that need as they are not able to be in each other's physical presence.

Reframing appears to be second nature for military wives. In general, the wives minimize hard situations and needs and reframe situations to make them positive and not contradictory. For example, when military wives' spouses leave for six months out of the year, that absence can be turned from a negative to a positive experience by reframing the experience as having that time to reconnect with their immediate family, to travel, to spend time with children, or to have time for themselves, which in turn helps them be better wives and mothers. Instead of focusing on the sadness that their spouse has left, they turn toward the positive things that they can do for themselves, but primarily for others. They find that the distance is difficult, but that absence makes their family life even more connected when they are home.

Although Baxter (1988) considers reframing a very complex coping strategy, military wives use this strategy the most frequently. Reframing is an important coping

mechanism that enhances the chance for survival of military marriages, because it allows couples to take dismal situations and make them positive. Without being able to reframe being the predictable and reliable parent, military mothers may feel as though they are missing a part of themselves. If they did not feel like they gave up careers for the purpose of being a mother to their children, they may be more frustrated with the bleak career situation in which their military lifestyle puts them. If wives were not able to reframe their husband's dangerous career choice as being a huge part of every U.S. citizen's safety, then being married to someone who is gone for six months out of the year and who holds a life-threatening job would not feel worthwhile.

Methodological and Relational Implications

Only wives were interviewed in this study because of issues with military clearance. IRB asserted that the only reason these wives could be interviewed is because they are not employed by the U.S. military. Although many of them spend countless hours volunteering for their Spouse Clubs or for other military functions, they are not technically in the military. Interviewing their husbands would have opened a whole array of further information and could show the differences in how each member of the couple manage and deal with tensions that manifest in their marriage; however, permission from the United States' Department of Defense would have been required, and the researcher determined that seeking such permission was not practical for this study

Entering the military world as a civilian and gaining trust within a military group is complex. The wives in this group rely and trust one another, because they all share similar experiences. After the researcher's recorded interview with Audre, Audre told the researcher that before she was married to her husband, the other wives just looked at her as

the girl that came to watch her boyfriend play softball. Only after she got engaged did the military wives include her in their conversations at the games. If it were not for the researcher's initial connection to Naomi, who is a good friend to the researcher's sister (also a Navy wife), finding wives who were comfortable participating in this study would have been virtually impossible.

Fortunately, word spread quickly throughout the wives' community that the researcher was a safe person to talk to and that their names would not be attached to the data. Mary's husband had just come back from deployment when she was interviewed in her home. When the interview started, her husband was not home. Midway through the interview, her husband came home and instantly her answers became brief and to the point. Clearly she was uncomfortable talking about deployment while her husband was home. By the time the researcher was ready to fly back to the Midwest, Navy wives were calling to see if they could participate in the study. One Friday night, the researcher was called and asked to babysit for the children of one of the wives she had interviewed. At that point, she knew she had assimilated into their tight-knit circle and that personal connection was critical to finding and conducting interviews within this participant demographic.

Couples rely on managing relational dialectics to create stability in their relationships. Relational dialectics may be a normal part of relational life; however, a delicate balance exists between dialectics, and when the balance is disturbed, it could be harmful to the relationship. The military believes two things are creating tumultuous relationships and the spike in military divorces: the low pay that enlisted and junior officers receive and multiple long-term deployments (Gomulka, 2006). Both low pay and length of deployment could also affect relational dialectics.

Wives in this study never explicitly discussed disagreements involving the lack of money. In fact, finances were something that was rarely talked about in the interviews. Women in this study had choices concerning money. For example, many of these women chose not to work, possibly because their families had enough money to sustain themselves without her having a salary. Several wives also talked about hiring a sitter or bringing their kids to childcare if they needed time for themselves (to be autonomous from their children). Because they had the choice to hire these services, they may have been less prone to have tension with their husbands about money or independence from children. These are not choices for many that are married to military servicepeople and may be a cause of tension for other military families.

The tensions that are more notably seen in this study are typically allied with longer or more frequent deployments. The most continuous frictions arise from the contradictions between autonomy and connection (Beck, 1988). Deployments play a part in wives' autonomy, as they are able to take care of themselves and their children while their husbands are away. They make decisions without discussing them with their husbands. Like Betty said, Navy wives become "one woman shows." Many times when husbands are coming back from deployment, wives may feel a loss of freedom or independence. Wives may resent their husbands making decisions that they made alone while their husbands were gone. Each member of the couple has to understand the new ways in which each has grown while apart and learn how to accommodate that growth. The pressure of being connected directly may be too much for either member of the couple to handle (Logan, 1987). In essence, time and patience are required to renew their relationship and find intimacy in togetherness.

While their husbands are deployed, military wives surround themselves with predictability and routine. In their daily lives they get to choose what is going to happen and when without having to consult their husbands. Even if they do something novel and refreshing, they get to decide where, when, and with whom. Couples need time to renew their roles and responsibilities, and often a whole new routine needs to be set between husbands and wives. Until that routine is set, tension often occurs between novelty and predictability dialectic. This may have an effect on the couple, as a balance between novelty and predictability are needed to sustain a satisfactory relationship.

Many people think that relationships that are completely open are ideal. This belief simply is not true as couples each need to have their own sense of privacy to have a successful relationship (Baxter, 1993). Forced Closedness is when military couples do not have the choice whether or not they can disclose certain information to one another. Forced Closedness may cause tension as one or both members of the couple may have information they would like to share with one another. This tension is not something that is experienced solely when servicepeople are deployed, as soldiers often know classified information that they cannot disclose to anyone other than authorized personnel.

Reframing is the most frequently used coping strategy used among Navy wives. In the long run, reframing may have negative effects on military wives and could eventually cause conflict within their marriages. Wives can only reframe tensions as enhancing family life for so long before they may have to reflect on what may make them the most fulfilled. Although the military families in this study may not have needed a second income, many people find a higher fulfillment in having a job outside of the home. Many of the wives discussed their desire for a career, and yet almost immediately they squelched those

thoughts by reframing and saying that they needed to be present for their children or that to have a successful (military) family, they needed to stay home. Using reframing silences many wives' innermost wants and desires even though that strategy helps them navigate their daily lives and marriages.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the limitations of this study, much new knowledge can be gained through further research of this topic. First, the military wives that were interviewed were all a part of a mid-to-upper class military community or an officer community. I did not interview wives of enlisted or junior officers. This constraint means that military wives on a limited income are encountering similar deployment struggles, but they are not included in the study. A comparison of dialectical tensions and coping strategies within officer's wives and enlisted and junior wives would create a more accurate picture of how tensions are dealt with within different socio-economic classes. For example, within this study, women had a choice of whether or not they wanted to stay home with their children as it was not a necessity to have a second income. Families with a lower socio-economic status may not have this privilege.

Another limitation of this study is that all the spouses interviewed in this study were women married to servicemen; therefore, there are no accounts of differences in relationship types or how men who are married to servicewomen cope with and see manifestations of dialectical tensions within their military marriages. On a similar note, because of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, no gay or lesbian couples were interviewed. Many Americans follow gendered roles, and being able to compare differences in how genders view situations that come up during deployment may give

insight on how roles work within the military. Men that are married to servicewomen and gay and lesbian couples are represented in the military, and are important to study.

Third, this study only examines the point-of-view of one member of the military couple. To officially study actual members of any branch of the military, extensive military clearance would need to take place to get approval from the Institutional Review Board. Being able to see the perception of both members of the couple would help researchers better understand why certain tensions may manifest within a particular marriage or what coping strategies they use to deal with those tensions.

An additional area of future research could revolve solely around the military-non-military tension. This study only scratches the surface of this tension: perceptions within the tension and why it exists. To delve deeper into this tension, members of both civilian and military families should be interviewed to create a clear picture of why this tension exists, how it impacts relationships, and how to better understand what strategies are used by both civilian and military members to cope with this tension.

Another key concept that affects military couples' lives is the fact that for part of a year they are in a long distance relationship. Many problems arise in long distance relationships that affect tensions within military lives. One very common problem is the lack of daily sharing that is possible in a close proximity relationship, as well as unrealistic expectations about time spent together (Duck, 1994). This issue could be further researched and combined with understanding dialectical tensions within military couples as well as all long distance couples. For example, when deployed, the chance for interaction is decreased, as no true face-to-face or physical interactions occur. Also, when on a ship sailors have limited access to phones and at times internet access can be faulty.

Another common problem in long distance relationships is that one partner may be carrying more of the load when it comes to staying connected. This imbalance is one of the most common reasons given when a long distance relationship fails (Helgeson, 1994). In the case of the military, the spouse that is overseas often has to make contact with his or her partner in the U.S. via telephone conversations. If scholars did more research to understand dialectical tensions and long distance relationships, they might find links that would help us understand marital dissatisfaction in the military, and we may be able to better understand why divorce in the military increases during wartime.

Finally, the sample size for this study was small and emerged using snowball sampling instead of random sampling; therefore, to generalize these patterns across a broad population of military couples is not possible. To generalize, even in the lieutenant commander and commander demographic, a researcher would need to interview more wives yielded from a random sample.

Conclusion

Studying dialectical tensions within the branches of the military is important as it affects approximately 755,000 military families in the United States (Jelinek, 2008). The more research and analysis that is done within military families, the more the United States Department of Defense will be able to help military families throughout their time in the military. The military is very interested in decreasing the divorce rate among service members. If the military and our government understand the tensions within the military couple's relationship, they can look into changing policies, such as limiting the typical length of deployment, establishing a larger area on the overseas bases for spouses to call their loved ones, or by offering more video conferencing while soldiers are deployed.

Everyday soldiers risk their lives to guard America's freedoms; however, it is vital for military spouses' voices to be heard as they also serve and sacrifice in order to protect our country.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Q1: What has been your experience being married to someone that is in the military?

Q2: What is the difference between communication with your husband when he is home and when he is deployed?

Q3: Describe what it's like for you when your husband is deployed?

Q4: What kind of communication seems to work best for you and your husband while he is away?

Q4a: How do you express affection through (said) forms of communication?

Q4b: If you openly tell him what is going on with your life while he is deployed, how do you do it?

Q5: What kinds of rituals and routines do you keep?

Q5a: How do your rituals and routines change before, during and after deployment?

Q6: Do you have a career? If so what is it?

Q6a: How does your husband's deployment affect your career?

Q6b: (If you do not work/work) is that what you want or would you choose differently if you could?

Q7: What changes occur in your household during the deployment process?

Q8: What duties do you take on when your husband is gone and how do you feel about taking on those duties?

Q9: Can you tell me about any disagreements that typically happen before your husband leaves for deployment?

Q10: What are some ways you cope with the changes in your household/family when your husband is gone?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Please answer the following questions about yourself. We are asking for this demographic information in an attempt to better understand the diversity of experiences and trends within military marriages. All information will be kept strictly confidential and identifiers will be removed from any written reports.

1. How old are you? _____ years of age

2. How long has your husband been in the military?

____ years ____ months

3. What is your husband's military rank?

4. How long have you and your husband been married?

____ years ____ months

5. What kind of educational diploma/degree(s) do you hold? Mark all that apply.

____ High school diploma

____ Associate degree

____ Bachelor's degree

____ Master's/Doctorate degree

6. What is/are your college degree(s)?

7. Do you currently hold a job using your degree(s)?

____ Yes ____ No

8. Do you have children? If so, how many children do you have and how old are they?

____ No ____ Yes

* Please specify children's sex and age:

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

NDSU**NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY** 701.231.7705

Fax 701.231.7784

*Department of Communication
P.O. Box 5075
Fargo, ND 58105-5075*

North Dakota State University Research Study
Military Marriages: A Look at Dialectical Tensions Before, During and After
Deployment

Introduction and purpose of the study:

This research study aims at learning how dialectical tensions (opposing forces or needs in human behavior) work within military marriages. You were selected as a possible participant because you are married to someone in the military. An understanding of dialectical tensions will be helpful for those interested in relational issues regarding military spouses returning from tours of duty. Information gained from this study will be offered to the Navy base from which the participants are recruited, and authors will be available if interested parties wish for additional information.

This is a thesis project, conducted by Erienne L. Fawcett, a graduate student at North Dakota State University, under the supervision of Dr. Ann Burnett, faculty member, Department of Communication. Before you agree to participate in the study, please read this form to address any questions or concerns.

Voluntary nature of the study:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring dialectical tensions (opposing forces or needs in human behavior) within military marriages. Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to be part of this research, you are free to stop your participation at any time without any consequences. You were selected to be part of this study because you are a Navy wife that has been married for over a year and where you have experienced deployment within the last year for six months or more.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, Erienne L. Fawcett will interview you based on a pre-determined set of questions. The conversation will be voice recorded and later, transcribed. The interview will take one to two hours and will be conducted at your convenience.

Confidentiality:

Any identifying information obtained in connection with this research study will be kept confidential. You will be given a pseudonym and will not be identified or identifiable in any future reports or publications ensuing from this study. You will be identified on your demographic survey only by number. Voice recordings and transcripts will be kept electronically in a password-protected computer, and only I (Erienne L. Fawcett) and my advisor will have access to the recordings while working on the project. After data analysis (March, 2008), all recordings and identifiable information will be destroyed.

Risks and benefits:

This study has minimal risks, and although there are no direct benefits to you for participating, you may learn more about your marriage and the role deployment plays in your daily life.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions or would like a copy of the results, you may contact me, Erienne L. Fawcett at 320.309.7489 or by e-mail at erienne.fawcett@ndsu.edu. You may ask questions now or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Dr. Ann Burnett (701.231.7290) will be happy to answer them. For questions about the rights of research participants, or to report a problem, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at NDSU at 701.231.8908 or at ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study and I agree to be audio-recorded.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

THANK YOU for participation in this research

Ph.D., M.S. and M.A. Degrees in Communication

B.S. and B.A. Degrees in Agricultural Communication; Health Communication; Journalism, Broadcasting, and Mass Communication Technologies; Management Communication, and Public Relations and Advertising

NDSU is an equal opportunity institution.

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Age	Years in Military	Husband's Rank	Years of Marriage	Highest Degree Held	Degree's Held	Job Using Degree	Kids
Bell	36	11	0-4	10	Bachelor's	Liberal Arts	No	2
Carrie	34	16	0-3E/ 0-4 select	16	Associate's	Liberal Arts	No	2
Margaret	36	12	0-3	5.5	Master's	Sport's Injury Mgmt	No	2
Alice	41	18.5	0-3	18.5	Bachelor's	Education	Yes	2
Lucy	26	14	0-4	6.5	Bachelor's	Psychology	No	2
Naomi	33	13	0-4	8	Bachelor's	Public Relations	No	2
Audre	33	12	0-4	10	Master's	Physician's Assistant	No	2
Mary	28	4.5	0-3	3	Bachelor's	Graphic Design and Marketing	No	1
Patricia	33	3.25	0-4	4	Bachelor's	Biology	No	1
Virginia	31	N/A	N/A	9.75	Master's	Business	No	2
Amelia	35	11.75	0-4	7.5	Bachelor's	Athletic Training	No	3
Susan	40	18	0-3	13.25	Bachelor's	Child Development	No	3
Betty	33	12.5	0-4	6.5	Bachelor's	Chemistry	No	2
Simone	40	13.75	0-4	12.5	Juris Doctorate	Law	Yes	2
Elizabeth	35	12	0-4	13	Bachelor's	Liberal Studies	No	3 & Baby Due in July
Amy	29	9.5	0-4	6.5	Master's	Engineer	Yes	2
Kathleen	33	10	0-4	6	Bachelor's	Business and Spanish	No	1 & Baby Due in '08
Laura	34	12	0-4	9	Bachelor's	Psychology	No	2

APPENDIX E

MILITARY VERSUS NON-MILITARY TENSION

