

Dialectic tensions and role negotiation: Experiences of post-deployment among married military mothers

by

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Abstract

Married military mothers are placed in a unique position where they have to navigate many tensions, including tensions between masculinity and femininity as well as tensions between the public sphere (work) and the private sphere (home). When military mothers who are married deploy and are physically separated from the home, shifts in household and family roles occur. Upon return from deployment, married military mothers have to communicate with their spouses to reestablish and renegotiate their domestic and childcare roles. Therefore, considering distinctive challenges and experiences faced by married military women with children, this qualitative analysis provides an in-depth look at married military mothers' subjective experiences using the concept of role dialectics.

The analysis of 11 in-depth interviews with married military mothers indicates that roles and responsibilities are negotiated communicatively, drawing on expectations in various interactions. Expectations are communicated nonverbally by relying on gendered roles, past experiences, and nonverbal cues. Verbally expectations are communicated to reassume, coordinate, learn, divide and resolve roles and responsibilities. Regardless of the verbal or nonverbal communication strategies, all military mothers actively resumed traditionally gendered roles and responsibilities post-deployment when negotiating gender role tensions. This study enhances understanding of communication patterns used by married military mothers to negotiate roles and responsibilities throughout the deployment cycle. Moreover, the researcher offers guidance on effective communication practices to help married military mothers navigate tensions and provide families with constructive strategies for post-deployment. Results also contribute to a larger body of work/life literature on mothers in the military, especially pertaining to deployments, while advancing the concept of role dialectics.

Keywords: married military mothers; gender role communication; division of domestic labor; role dialectics; reintegration

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to female service members who might not always have the loudest voice in historically masculine institutions and to the Kansas State University Department of Communication Studies for giving me the opportunity to give back to the military community.

Chapter 1 - Rationale

“Not only is the military context symbolically linked to traditional models of hegemonic masculinity, with almost no space for what is traditionally and symbolically dubbed feminine values and qualities, but women have repeatedly been double victims of war and conflicts” (Pawelczyk, 2016, p. 87).

Military work has a history of being a problematic occupation for women; the deep-rooted masculine values held by the military and society create a complex environment for women in the military (Pawelczyk, 2016). Nonetheless, the ideology that serving in the military is a man’s job may be a thing of the past as women take on traditionally male positions (Pellerin, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Defense (2016), women’s participation in the military has steadily increased, with 204,628 women, 15.9% of the armed forces, serving as active duty military members, compared to 11% in 1990 (Street, Vogt & Dutra, 2009). During the Gulf War in the 1990’s, women’s roles in the military began shifting away from nursing and administrative jobs (Street et al., 2009). The occupational options for women in the military also expanded as women were increasingly allowed to get closer and closer to combat, taking on key positions such as flying fighter planes and serving as military police (Mattocks et al., 2012; Street et al., 2009). Although women are participating in greater numbers and taking on more historically male roles, women still face occupational restraints.

In 2015, military women experienced one of the biggest breakthroughs yet. On December 3rd, 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter declared, “...beginning in January 2016, all military occupations and positions will be open to women, without exception” (Pellerin, 2015). Women had been banned from direct combat missions for decades which limited how society viewed women in the military. Women are now allowed to lead infantry into combat, legitimizing the

role women play in the armed forces. As Pawelczyk notes: “The role of warrior is clearly one that has historically been cast as masculine yet the role is now available to women” (Pawelczyk, 2016, p. 88). However, while these positions have become available to women, women are often unable to actually move into these positions. For example, women can now enlist in special operation forces such as the Navy SEALs, yet they are unable to advance. Since January 2016, at least 30 women have attempted Navy SEAL training; however, there are still currently no female SEALs (Steele, 2017). Increasing the amount and scope of women in the military has not come without challenges. While all service members deal with challenging experiences in the military (Kanzler, McCorkindale & Kanzler, 2011), women experience additional stressors.

Women in the military have different experiences and face distinct challenges compared to their male counterparts (Kanzler et al., 2011; Mattocks et al., 2012; Street et al., 2009). Aside from the more common combat related experiences, some women deal with separate gender-based issues such as military sexual trauma, and gender based discrimination (Nilsson et al., 2015; Street, et al., 2009). The military has a history of masculinity and male heroism which contributes to workplace stressors military women experience (Sahlstein, Maguire & Timmeran, 2009; Street, et al., 2009). For example, there is a strong association between female service members who experience sexual trauma and diagnosis of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Street, Gradus, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007). As women continue to play an increasing role in the military forces, it is important to consider female service members exclusively to understand the experiences faced by this minority group.

Not only does research indicate that women in the military have a higher risk of stress (Mattocks et al., 2012; Street et al., 2009), depression, and PTSD, but women in the military are also more likely to divorce than men in the military (Kanzler et al., 2011; Street et al., 2009).

According to the Department of Defense's 2016 demographic report, 689,058 active duty members are married and 92,888 of those service members are women. Of the 92,888 women who are married in the military, 44.9% have husbands who are also in the military (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). The U.S. military attracts the most traditional men (ascribing to highly traditional views of gender roles) and the least traditional women (ascribing to highly nontraditional views of gender roles) in our society (Karney & Crown, 2007). Unfortunately, women in the military are three times more likely to divorce than their male counterparts (Walsh, 2017) and are more likely to divorce than civilian women (Kanzler et al., 2011; Mattocks et al., 2012).

Some married women in the military face extraordinary challenges as they have to balance multiple roles, not only as wives and service members but also as mothers. "Like many who struggle with balancing multiple roles in life, military women may possess unique characteristics, which coupled with challenges in the military environment, lead to a high divorce rate" (Kanzler et al., 2011, p. 250). In 2014, the U.S. Department of Defense revealed that roughly 40% of female service members have children 18 years old or younger in the house. Military mothers must balance numerous responsibilities in their dual roles of being a mother and a service member (Walsh, 2017). While military women have to deal with the stress of military operations and gender based issues (Street et al., 2009; Walsh, 2017), they must also contend with, "...the challenges women face in balancing multiple roles as mother, 'breadwinner,' wife, as well as provider of other familial duties" (Kanzler et al., 2011, p. 252). Many of the challenges mothers in the military face stem from the dominant cultural beliefs and gender role expectations. As dominant cultural beliefs surrounding motherhood expect mothers to stay home and provide care for their children rather than work (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Gender role and military work expectations create conflicts between being a mother and being a service member as meeting both these high standards are often unattainable for military mothers (Walsh, 2017). It is important to consider women in the military as they are in a male dominated workforce and the tasks they are asked to perform are different than many other jobs. Military work hours are not consistent, sometimes requiring unusually long hours or complete separation from family due to deployment (Kanzler et al., 2011; Walsh, 2017). This separation negates motherhood expectations for the female to be the primary parent and caregiver (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Military mothers are held to the same work standards as their male counterparts, putting additional stress on the military mother to balance her family responsibilities (Walsh, 2017). When it comes to work life balance, "...women generally feel more emotional conflict concerning their work and personal lives than men do" (Kanzler et al., 2011).

In particular, married military women with children struggle through the phases of deployment (Nilsson et al., 2015; Walsh, 2017). The challenges are especially apparent in the separation and reunion stages as married military women with children have to relinquish, reassume and balance various roles and responsibilities during these phases (Walsh, 2017). Working women with children technically have two jobs, after working full-time they then perform additional labor at home (Mickelson, Claffey & Williams, 2006). This additional labor is considered the "second shift" and despite the entrance of women into the workplace, they are still accountable for the additional shift at home – cleaning, cooking and caring for the children (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). As mothers perform a majority of the childcare and household responsibilities (Mickelson et al., 2006; Walsh, 2017), it is more difficult for married mothers in

the military than fathers to let go of or divide responsibilities for deployment (Agazio et al., 2012).

Before the mother is deployed, she has to prepare her spouse or another caretaker for the increased work load of handling the home and family tasks which are frequently her responsibility prior to deployment (Sahlstein et al., 2009). Deployment leaves mothers conflicted between their roles, leading to conflicts between being a mother and being a service member (Nilsson et al., 2015). After deployment, the reunion can be even more difficult than the separation phase as mothers in the military have to reintegrate into the family routine, renegotiating and reestablishing roles, routines and relationships (Knobloch, Basinger, Wehrman, Ebata & McGlaughlin, 2016; Sahlstein et al., 2009; Walsh, 2017). Upon reintegration, responsibilities that were negotiated and relinquished prior to deployment are renegotiated by the couple (Agazio et al., 2012). Some roles and responsibilities may be revised, expectations may be modified and chores may be redistributed causing couples to struggle with the redistribution of power, control and independence (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Parcell and Maguire (2014) urge researchers to focus on post-deployment and communication regarding renegotiating parental and marital roles. “Although caregiving roles are increasingly shared between partners, military mothers continue to be far more likely to report being the primary caregivers for their children” (Walsh, 2017, p. 87). Therefore, it is important to examine role negotiation between married female service members and their spouse during the post-deployment reintegration phase as spouses become reacquainted and renegotiate domestic and childcare roles. Understanding how military families engage in communication regarding roles and responsibilities can be important for helping military families negotiate the transition from deployment effectively.

This qualitative study examines the post-deployment communication practices of women who were at one time deployed while they were married with children between the ages of 0 to 18 years old. This study aims to increase understanding of the tensions faced by married military mothers as they balance work-family issues (mothering, domestic responsibilities and work) and how they negotiate roles with their spouse upon return from deployment. Findings expand the current development of work/life literature on mothers in the military, especially surrounding deployments, while advancing the concept of role dialectics. Practical implications provide information about effective communication practices to help married military mothers navigate tensions and assist military families with constructive communication strategies.

First, a review of the relevant research pertaining to the experiences of married military mothers is provided. Next, a discussion of the theoretical frameworks of dialectical theory, relational dialectics and role theory, then the construct of role dialectics will be applied to married military mothers and their role negotiation with their spouse during the reintegration phase of deployment. Following is an explanation of the research methods, discussion of the findings, theoretical and practical implications for military families, and finally the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In order to build on research pertinent to military mothers, following is an analysis of significant research regarding gender role challenges for female service members, working mothers in general, wives and more specifically married female service members with children. Further, there is a description of the deployment cycle to provide a context for this study. Then, there is a description of the feelings and experiences of military mothers in regard to deployment. Finally, there is a broad discussion of dialectical theory, what relational dialectics adds to this theory, and what role dialectics proposes in regard to relationships.

Gender Role Challenges: Female Service Members

For centuries, the military has been an organization centered around ideas of masculinity, heroism and machoism (Sahlstein et al., 2009), leaving little room for women. In all workplaces, there are expectations for workers to perform in particular ways to be seen as ideal workers (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack & Moen, 2010). “The ‘ideal worker’ conforms to a male style of working, by engaging in full-time paid employment and being unencumbered by family demands or other commitments outside the workplace” (Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011). The standards for an ideal worker perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace (Kelly et al., 2010; Kirby, Riforgiate, Anderson, Lahman & Lietzenmayer, 2016) as these ideal worker norms disadvantage those with caregiving responsibilities which are predominantly women (Kelly et al., 2010). It becomes even more difficult for women and mothers in the military to meet the ideal worker norm, due to the increased standards for the ideal soldier.

The ideal soldier is a heightened form of the ideal worker as an ideal soldier has to be completely dedicated and committed to the cause (Howard & Prividera, 2006). A woman in the military can expect to work long hours and experience long periods of separation from family

(Kanzler et al., 2011). Due to the difference in cultural expectations of men and women as well as mothers and fathers (Hays, 1996), women, especially mothers, are less likely to meet the expectations of an ideal worker (Kelly et al., 2010) let alone the ideal soldier. Deployment creates stresses that further complicate traditional gender roles placed upon men and women (Agazio et al., 2012; Pawelczyk, 2016; Walsh, 2017). The hegemonic discourse surrounding femininity describes women as maternal, emotional, caring and other-centered, positioning women in the private sphere as mothers or caretakers (Pawelczyk, 2016; Sahlstein et al., 2009). Conversely, hegemonic discourse surrounding men portrays them as competitive, aggressive, assertive, independent and self-confident, placing men in the public sphere into professional occupations as the financially secure partner (Pawelczyk, 2016; Sahlstein et al., 2009). Specifically, military culture creates an environment where men symbolically construct masculine hierarchies expressed through emotional control, physical fitness, self-discipline, aggression and physical violence situating themselves in power positions (Hinojosa, 2010). This creates a hegemonic standard in which one identity (male/masculinity) is benefited over others (female/femininity) (Hinojosa, 2010).

Further, women in the military face opposing discourses of masculinity and femininity which promote the perception that men belong in the public sphere as workers and women are naturally adept in the private spheres as mothers and caretakers (Pawelczyk, 2016), forcing women to consider their own gender role expectations as well as the military's highly masculinized expectations for soldiers. Women are commonly viewed as victims of war rather than the warrior, whether it is women losing their loved ones to war or even issues of rape (Pawelczyk, 2016). The deep-rooted historically masculine values of the military and society

impact female service members in a distinct way (Pawelczyk, 2016). Military mothers also deal with an additional discourse of what it means to be a good mother.

Gender Roles Challenges: Working Mothers/Military Mothers

The overriding social identity often given to women revolves around mothering and domestic labor (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Mattocks et al., 2012). “Mothering ideology is based on beliefs and values about mothering that mothers must either embrace or reject, but can seldom ignore” (Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 448). Motherhood is a complex social role; Western cultural ideologies of women are centered around their role as a mother putting pressure on mothers to be a “good mother” as society sees fit (Mayer, 2012). There are cultural gender roles that women, more specifically mothers are socialized to uphold (Buzzanell et al., 2005). In the U.S., the dominant culture on motherhood declares that a good mother is one who stays at home to be the primary caretaker (Johnston & Swanson, 2006), follows the advice of experts and also participates in intensive mothering which puts the child at the center of a mother’s life (Hays, 1996; Turner & Norwood, 2013). A good mother is selfless (Johnston & Swanson, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013) as she puts everything before her child, dedicating the majority of her time, presence, money and emotional energy to her child (Hays, 1996).

These cultural expectations of mothering are so prevalent that they often go unquestioned as women unconsciously accept this female role (Buzzanell et al., 2005). Yet, some working mothers are reframing what constitutes a good working mother by accessing positions that may be viewed as inappropriate, such as managerial positions in the workplace (Buzzanell et al., 2005) or combat roles in the military (Pellerin, 2015). However, the dominant cultural ideology surrounding motherhood is still defined based on the traditional notions of a mother who does not work (Buzzanell et al., 2005). Coupled together, ideologies of a good mother and ideal

worker create tensions between mother vs. worker identities. These two ideologies are at odds with one another and as a result, women struggle to navigate satisfying the expectations for both positions (Hays, 1996). Often the mother and worker ideologies have been seen as contradictions and women are forced to decide between one or the other (Buzzanell et al., 2005). Kirby et al., (2016) found that an ideal worker takes on an unmanageable amount of work, is someone who is always available with no responsibilities to distract from their work and if a mother, and they conceal their motherhood identity while prioritizing work over family. While Hays (1996) describes a good mother as someone who practices intensive mothering, is always available to her child, and prioritizes her child over all else. Both ideal worker norms and good mother norms expect full commitment to each, creating an often impossible expectation to fulfill.

With the pressure to be what society sees as a good mother, women in the workforce face concerns about how to balance work and family. Turner and Norwood (2013) examine how mothers manage tensions between the competing identities of a good mother and an ideal worker finding that women either abandon one identity for the other, alternate between the two identities or find alternative meanings for constructing the two identities apart from the societal expectations. Women balancing work and family often feel tired and guilty when managing these competing territories of public and private life (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Nilsson et al., 2015).

“Because of these cultural expectations, mothers must modify either societal mothering expectations or worker expectations in order to construct an integrated worker–mother identity” (Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 447). Military mothers may have even more challenges navigating mother and worker expectation tensions due to the role expectations of a soldier. The relationship that exists between the military and the family can be discussed from the perspective of gender based issues as the military has historically been viewed as a male institution while the

family is considered a female institution (Vuga & Juvan, 2013). The military and the family are both categorized as greedy institutions, meaning they seek complete loyalty and dedication from members in order to survive, these needs from each institution create conflicts between the two institutions (Segal, 1986).

The military is different from many other occupations as unique demands are placed on service members and their families, from long separations from family to risk of injury or even death (Segal, 1986). Military service members are expected to work long and unusual hours. While for men this is not commonly a problem within the family dynamics, women face different struggles (Walsh, 2017). While women hold more responsibilities in the house than do men, women are held to the same, if not greater standards in the workforce (Kirby et al., 2016; Walsh, 2017). Additionally, working mothers can be stigmatized as unprofessional if they reduce work commitments to care for children, putting pressure on military mothers to have an equal balance between work and family (Kirby et al., 2016; Walsh, 2017). Working mothers in the military often experience a pull between being a being a good worker in a male dominated workforce and caring for their children and families. One mother gave a detailed description of these tensions by stating, “You’re a terrible mother because your child is in daycare 12 hours a day, but you’re also a terrible officer because you’re not there working late, you know working late hours like everybody expects you to” (Walsh, 2017, p. 96).

Gender Roles Challenges: Wife

There is also discourse surrounding married women and the gendered challenges they face as wives, this discourse influences married female service members. “Literature implies that whenever the term military spouse is used the immediate thought is military wives” (Smith, Brown, Varnado & Stewart-Spencer, 2017, p. 70). According to Jebo (2005) in the context of the

military, a military spouse has a distinct role centered around traditional gendered roles and the division of labor. The military spouse is expected to manage all domestic and childcare responsibilities while the service member focuses on the mission; these expectations are formed based on the idea that military spouses are women (Segal & Segal, 2003).

These expectations become especially problematic for female service members as they feel the pull from both the military and the family. The military is perceived as a greedy institution due to “irregular work hours, unpredictable work tasks, frequent moves, longer absences from home” and “the requirement to sacrifice one’s life for the benefit of a country” (Vuga & Juvan, 2013, p. 1060). The family as an institution is also perceived as greedy as members are expected to be “emotionally devoted, express love towards other family members, identify with the family as a whole and fulfill their roles within it” (Segal, 1986, p. 13). For these reasons, married women in the military receive conflicting messages about priorities, creating communicative challenges in navigating work and life obligations.

As Segal (1986) discusses greedy institutions, it is important to recognize that “...the family is greedier for some members than others”; this is usually more problematic for the wife as she is expected to give most of her time effort and energy to her family (p. 13). These expectations cause tensions that impact women more than men. Women are responsible for more when it comes to children, cooking, cleaning and other household tasks (Segal, 1986; Street et. al., 2009), making it challenging for women in the military to have a career and run a household. Men are able to give their undivided attention to their work without being ridiculed for not being committed to their family, but women who dedicate more time to work are scrutinized for their lack of dedication to their family (Segal, 1986). These expectations also create stress when

women deploy and relinquish their household responsibilities to their spouse, family, or friends (Street et al., 2009).

The masculine cultural ideology of the military is reinforced by the fact that a majority of the married male soldiers have dependent wives that stay home to care for children and support their spouse (Karney & Crown, 2007; Pawelczyk, 2016). However, in families where women fill the role of warrior and men fill the role of military spouse, they face challenges as they go against the traditional gendered norms (Jebo, 2005). In other words, female service members who are married to civilian males violate societal expectations of the typical military family. Newby et al. (2003) further explains that, “usually, the male partner in the marital relationship is on active duty and is married to a female civilian” (p. 289).

Gender role attitudes also impact marital satisfaction for married female service members. Overall, there is a direct negative correlation between gender role attitudes and marital satisfaction in traditional (domestic labor as the wife’s responsibility) and egalitarian (domestic labor as a shared responsibility between spouses) marriages; the more egalitarian a woman is, the less satisfied she is with her marriage (Mickelson, et al., 2006). Women who identify with traditional gender roles are less likely to divorce (Kanzler et al., 2011). Women in the military hold more egalitarian gender role beliefs which contradict the customary notions of what it means to be a woman, a wife, and a mother (Kanzler et al., 2011) and may complicate the way responsibilities are divided in the home. While women in the military still have primary responsibility to their children (Walsh, 2017), military wives are unable to perform these responsibilities during deployment. The roles and responsibilities must shift when military wives are deployed while their spouse stays behind.

Active duty military wives often face a contradiction because active duty in the military often equates to being head of household due to the plethora of benefits associated with the position such as housing, medical, dental and other services; this power and status given to the women can “alter traditional roles in the marital relationships” (Newby et al., 2003, p. 292). The experiences are different for female service members with civilian spouses verses those who are in dual-military marriages (meaning both spouses are in the military). Segal and Segal (2003) argue that male spouses with no prior military experience are at a disadvantage because they do not have a place in the military community in the same way that dual-military male spouses or male spouses with prior military experience do.

Newby et al. (2003) report that civilian male spouses are more likely than civilian female spouses to be unsatisfied with military life (e.g. housing) and have challenges managing normal tasks including finances, and childcare issues. Civilian male spouses also struggle to adjust to their new roles which are culturally defined as feminine (Segal & Segal, 2003). “Role incongruity and conflict may thus be exacerbated when female soldiers are married to civilian spouses” due to the status and power active duty women have as the breadwinner (Newby et al., 2003, p. 292).

According to demographics by the U.S. Department of Defense in 2016, 20.4 % of active duty women were in dual-military marriages compared to 4% of active duty men who were in dual-military marriages. Dual-military families also face unique everyday work life stressors specific to their dual-military career status as they are more likely to have unexpected and rigid work schedules (Huffman, Dunbar, VanPuyvelde, Klinefelter & Sullivan, 2017). Dual-military families have to learn how to coordinate and balance work life responsibilities due to their

intensive work schedules, especially in regard to who will pick up and drop off the children which can create stress within the family (Huffman, Dunbar et al., 2017).

Furthermore, dual-military families with children face even more uncertainty and stress as there is a chance both parents will be separated from the children due to work responsibilities such as deployment (Huffman, Craddock, Culbertson & Klinefelter, 2017; Lietz, Stromwall & Carlson, 2013). While female service members with civilian spouses who have children still have to have a family care plan in place, dual-military families may have to create complex parenting arrangements in the case that both parents would have to leave sporadically (Lietz et al., 2013). In these cases dual-military couples have to be adaptable and quickly modify plans if necessary (Huffman, Dunbar et al., 2017). Regardless of the marital situation, even if female service members with children are married, they generally are the primary caretakers and balance tasks of being a service member *and* a mother (Walsh, 2017).

Married military women with children encounter tensions as they simultaneously balance being a woman in a masculine workforce, being a good mother and an ideal worker, and a wife with domestic expectations. Gendered expectations may be particularly problematic when spousal roles have to be negotiated during the deployment cycle. In particular, being a service member with a child has a different impact on women than men as women have more household responsibilities (Mickelson et al., 2006). While the responsibilities typically held by women have lessened as traditional gender roles have culturally loosened, women are still accountable for more household duties (Mattocks et al., 2012). As previously discussed, the military is a male dominated workforce that has been characterized for centuries and is still strongly viewed as a culture of masculinity (Pawelczyk, 2016).

Deployment Cycle

One of the most difficult times for military families is deployment. When the family is separated for long periods of time, family members may experience “a lack of emotional devotion, a reduction of quality time spent inside the family circle... and a lack of help with everyday errands” (Vuga & Juvan, 2013, p. 1063). Military family research discusses the deployment cycle using a variety of terms. For example, the pre-deployment stage is often referred to as the separation phase and the post-deployment phase is interchanged with the reunion phase (Knobloch et al., 2016). Some military family research labels the deployment cycle in three stages: Pre-deployment, deployment and post-deployment while others define these stages as notification, deployment and reunion (Parcell & Maguire, 2014). Some scholars suggest seven stages, “from the notification of impending separation, to the actual separation of deployment, to reunion” (Yablonsky, Barbero & Richardson, 2016, p. 43). However, one of the best known process models of deployment is the emotional cycle of deployment model (Pincus et al., 2001). This model categorizes the deployment cycle into five stages with specific time frames, changes, challenges and benefits: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment and post-deployment (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Deployments differ in terms of their length but the typical deployment normally ranges from six months to 18 months (Sheppard, Malatras & Israel, 2010). According to Pincus et al., (2001), the first stage of deployment is the pre-deployment stage which varies in time frame as the exact date of departure for deployment are never certain. When a service member receives notice of a deployment, they are asked to follow strict guidelines to prepare for deployment. In this stage couples deal with tensions between seeking intimacy and accomplishing domestic tasks required for the upcoming separation (Pincus et al., 2001). While there is not a set

timeframe for pre-deployment stage, this stage starts the moment the service member is notified of an alert or warning of a deployment and ends when the service member leaves their family (Yablonsky et al., 2016).

After the service member has left their family, the deployment stage begins and this stage occurs the first month after the service member has left (Pincus et al., 2001). The family communication patterns during the deployment stage influences post deployment marital satisfaction between spouses (Hinojosa, Hinojosa & Hognas, 2012), more frequent positive interactions between spouses during deployment increases marital satisfaction after the deployment. The sustainment stage is about two to five months long, during which service members and their families begin to adjust, formulate new routines, and find new sources of support during deployment, but this is also where the strain of separation may begin to show (Pincus et al., 2001).

The last month of deployment begins the redeployment stage which brings about opposing emotions (Pincus et al., 2001). “Although individuals may be excited for reunion, they also may be nervous about how to reconnect and readjust” (Knobloch et al., 2016). The final stage of deployment is the post-deployment stage, which lasts up to six months after the soldiers’ home coming (Pincus et al., 2001). Military families may experience a honeymoon phase during the post-deployment stage as everything is good and the families have no disagreements (Louie & Cromer, 2015). However, after this phase wears off, couples deal with “awkwardness and frustration as they work to re-establish daily routines and emotional closeness” (Knobloch et al., 2016).

These stages of deployment are not always stable, as Parcell & Maguire (2014) discuss there are other events that also take place during the deployment cycle impacting military

families. These events are called turning points and can include events such as birthdays, deaths and disclosures from one spouse to another. Furthermore, the deployment cycle elicits conditions where families must face multiple uncertainties and changes. Transitions in a relationship can cause turmoil in the lives of romantic partners as transitions require newness in patterns of integration (Solomon, Weber & Stuber, 2010). These transitions have been examined using the relational turbulence model, where “relational turbulence refers to intense emotional, cognitive, and communicative response to relationship circumstances” (Theiss & Knobloch, 2013, p. 1109).

Knobloch and Theiss (2013) examined the relationship between partner responsiveness (listening, empathizing, offering verbal and nonverbal support), partner interference (invading newly set routines, ways of living), and relationship uncertainty (how certain one is on the state of the relationship) as part of the relational turbulence resulting from deployment. While deployments are a challenging period for military families, research shows that communication patterns between service members and their family members have the potential either to improve or worsen a deployment cycle (Cigrang et al., 2013). Knobloch and Theiss (2013) indicate that those marriages with communication behaviors that offer assurance, talk openly about the relationship with their spouse and manage conflict with their spouse in a constructive manner, helped lower effects of relationship uncertainty and partner interference.

Military Mothers’ Feelings towards Deployment

Although there is not a specific deployment model for female service members and their responsibilities to their children and families throughout the deployment cycle, there is literature on the way mothers feel throughout the deployment cycle. Military mothers express feeling judgement from all angles regarding deployment, if it isn’t from a co-worker or family member, it is internal (Walsh, 2017). One mother notes:

As a military mom, [whatever you're doing] you're gonna carry around that judgment for yourself all the time. "Is this really the right choice?" I've been told [by my command]... that I have to make decisions about am I going to prioritize my job or my family because I can't really do both. (Walsh, 2017, p. 96)

These contradicting tensions come about not only from personal expectations about the roles military mothers fill, but societal expectations of what it means to be a mother and an ideal worker. Further, the tensions never go away, but instead they are continuous and changing. Even after deployment, mothers characterized "...a return to the demands of home life and to the continuous struggle for work/life balance as one of the great challenges of coming home after deployment" (Walsh, 2017, p. 97). It is evident that working mothers, especially military mothers, struggle with competing role expectations. Military mothers explain that these tensions between roles are always there, but throughout deployment, role conflict is higher (Walsh, 2017).

Deployment is different from many other work environments as soldiers experience long separations from family where they are not able to fulfill normal family responsibilities, creating an additional challenge. Military mothers specifically mention experiencing competing tensions as a service member and mother right before and right after deployment (Walsh, 2017).

According to Agazio et al., (2012), in the pre-deployment stage it was difficult for women to temporarily let go of their control or role as mothers as they learned that being away, they could not control everything (Agazio et al., 2012). Military mothers experienced stress when absent from their family during deployment, and discussed their motherhood role as the primary care giver, making their absence more detrimental. In one study, a military mother states:

Most [fathers] aren't in that situation [of being primary caregiver], so when they leave they're leaving the home and the family in the extra care of the person that's already

doing it...Whereas I was a mom, right...I work full-time so I'm used to being out of the house a lot, but that sort of doesn't matter, I'm still the mom. So for me to just be gone, like how do you manage. (Walsh, 2017, p. 95)

This quote highlights how a military mother may perceive her significance as a mother and the uneasiness about leaving her family during deployment. Military mothers indicated feelings of uncertainty that their families would not survive without them (Walsh, 2017). One mother even admitted:

I tried to replicate my presence (laughs) by setting up like a helping hands website so that, you know he [my husband] would have my friends step in for me, as far as like play dates for the kids and making sure that he had meals prepared, not all of them, but some of them to help him out. (Walsh, 2017, p. 95)

As women discuss the challenges they go through balancing the roles of serving in the military and being a mother (Mattocks et al., 2012), many mothers express having an especially hard time with the separation phase of deployment finding it hard to be away from their children (Nilsson, et al., 2015). In one study, a mother expressed her conflicting feelings by stating, "I hope I don't ever deploy again. I hope that I am overlooked. I want to serve, but I want to serve in the capacity that I'm able to and I think deployment for me, my family would just be too devastated" (as cited in Nilsson et al., 2015, p. 119). In the same study, "...participants referred to their conflicting feelings as a need to compartmentalize feelings and experiences – life as a soldier vs. life as a mother" (Nilsson et al., 2015, p. 121). In a separate study, another mother echoes these feelings as she explains a push/pull relationship between work and domestic responsibilities stating, "...it was tough to leave my three kids but I felt I had a job to do and I couldn't worry too much about home" (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 540).

It is normal for the deployed mother to focus solely on work when they are gone (Walsh, 2017). While military families view it as more acceptable for a deployed mother to miss out on important events for their children due to the distance, some deployed mothers still felt painful loss when they missed special events or milestones for their children (Agazio et al., 2012; Nilsson et al., 2015). Many military mothers describe feeling helpless as they are unable to be with their families as much as normal, they feel guilty for not being able to provide more assistance at home (Nilsson et al., 2015).

While military mothers are able to see the importance in the work they are doing, these mothers still struggle with the separation (Agazio et al., 2012). While some mothers communicate a strong feeling of loss from the separation, other mothers focus more on their feelings freedom (Walsh, 2017). When women are deployed they do not have to divide their time between their domestic responsibilities and their work. When military mothers are home, none of their time belongs to them as their time is distributed between mothering, household duties and work; however, during deployment military mothers have fewer responsibilities to divide up (Walsh, 2017).

The mothers who focus on this time availability difference talk about the freedom of being able to relinquish some of their responsibilities and take a break from all of their duties (Walsh, 2017). Some mothers even felt inconvenienced by the role expectations their husbands had for them to continue to be in the caregiver role during the deployment cycle (Nilsson et al., 2015). Others describe deployment as a relieving time where they are able to get away from the constant mothering and work obligations experienced on the home front (Walsh, 2017). This freedom experienced by deployed mothers is uncommon as it, “is rare to mothers of young

children, to set and keep to their own schedules, to focus on work without interruption, and do so without guilt” (Walsh, 2017, p. 97).

While the separation phase proves to be a challenging time for military mothers, the reintegration phase can present greater challenges as military mothers who explain the struggles they face adjusting back to their normal life and fitting back into their role as a mother (Nilsson, et al., 2015). In one study on deployment reintegration, “...many participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the daily demands of life in general and motherhood in particular, such as shopping, cooking, and childcare” (Nilsson et al., 2015, p. 125). The following quote describes the tensions between mothering and being a service member after coming home from a deployment:

And I was just kind of caught up in that whirlwind, so to come back and to one day be armed and in uniform and then the next day be in civilian clothes you know, be a wife and mom. It was just hard to step out of that role, if you will. It was so hard, in fact that for several months after returning I wanted to go back. Because it was so hard to try and reintegrate. (Nilsson et al., 2015, p. 122)

One mother expressed feeling overwhelmed upon return from deployment at the thought of having to resume the role of primary caretaker and the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning and changing diapers amongst other responsibilities (Walsh, 2017). Another mother explains the complications felt during the reintegration phase stating:

It’s especially hard coming home from deployment when you feel like you want to make up for that lost time [with your children] and you’re still getting the look [from people you work with] like, why are you leaving at 1700? (Walsh, 2017, p. 96)

These quotations from previous research indicate the competing tensions and role expectations that confront military mothers. Military mothers deal with the push and pull relationship between work and domestic responsibilities as they attempt to perform both the ideal worker role in the context of a masculine military environment and the good mother role. With the expectations set for both work and private life roles, military mothers face strong tensions about what to prioritize. While deployment brings feelings of liberty it also produces feelings of helplessness as mothers are unable to perform expected motherhood roles for their children (Walsh, 2017).

Upon return from deployment, these tensions military mothers face present a good opportunity to renegotiate roles. Building on research understanding deployment and post deployment experiences, this study focuses on communication strategies military mothers use to navigate tensions upon reintegration after deployment. One way to explore these tensions faced by military mothers and how they communicatively manage these tensions is through an understanding of dialectical theory and role theory which have been combined into the construct of role dialectics.

Dialectical Theory

Dialectical theory builds off of ideas from Bakhtin (1981) who contends that life is not a soliloquy but rather a dialogue made up of contradictory ideological discourses that create tensions. Dialectical theory is used to understand relationships and how they develop based on contradictions that arise in the relationships (Baxter, 1990). Broadly, dialectical theory focuses on conceptual assumptions associated with contradiction, change, praxis, and totality (Baxter, 1990). The main focus of dialectical theory is contradiction, which will be a key assumption during this discussion (Halbesleben, Whitman, & Crawford, 2014). Briefly, contradiction deals

with the unique interplay between poles that push and pull on each other (Putnam, Fairhurst, Banghart, 2016). Contradiction has three essential characteristics: 1) the opposing poles must be connected to each other, 2) the poles must be part of a larger picture, and 3) the opposite poles must have a continuous and ever-changing relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 2000). These tensions are continuous and may present themselves at different times and at varying levels of extremes (Apker, Propp & Ford, 2005; Tracy, 2004). According to dialectical theorists, contradictions are normal and usually not harmful; in fact, contradictions are a natural part of social life (Apker et al., 2005; Halbesleben, et al., 2014).

Contradictions become more problematic as they turn into paradoxes as obeying one means disobeying the other (Tracy, 2004). In order to be a paradox, the opposing poles must have three features: 1) there must be a strong association between the two poles, 2) the message must be organized in a way that makes one contradiction defy the other and lastly, 3) the person must feel trapped inside the framing of the message (Tracy, 2004). “Maternal and work identities, as constructed in our culture, are a dialectic” (Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 449), as obeying one challenges or opposes the other. Dialectical theorists often focus on contradictions that are constructed as opposites, meaning each element of the contradiction functions solely on its own, however the elements refute each other in some aspect (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). For example, military mothers face the dialectic tension between being an ideal worker and a good mother due to the societal expectations of each role (all about the job or all about the child). In this case, “the oppositions are unified in the sense that they are interdependent and part of a greater social context” (Halbesleben, et al., 2014 p. 181).

The next assumption is change; contradiction impacts change as contradictions alter relationships and dialectics (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Tensions regarding change are visible in

the transition phase of deployment as schedules, routines and family structures are altered and roles and responsibilities are renegotiated (Knobloch et al., 2016).

The current study examines the impact that dialectics have on the spousal relationship of female service members and more specifically, how female service members manage the dialectics using communication to navigate their roles. Praxis is an extension of change as it allows people to change and manage dialectical tensions based on past experiences, giving some power over future tensions in a relationship (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Totality deals with the fact that it is impossible to interpret dialectical tensions separately without first understanding the interdependent relationship between contradictions (Apker et al., 2005; Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Revisiting the ideal worker and good mother example, if a female service member gets promoted and the job requires more time away from home, hence less time with children, the female service member may experience tension. However, this tension is only understood through the interdependence of the unique elements of ideal worker and good mother. Another aspect of totality is the probability of various contradictions that may be interrelated (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). While existing research discussed the tensions relating to the ideal worker and the good mother, there are other dialectics that could potentially exist in relationships (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Married female service members relationship with their spouse and/or private life roles within the family may complicate dialectic tensions. The four assumptions: contradiction, change, totality and praxis remain the same for dialectical theorists, but these assumptions can be applied to various contexts (Halbesleben, et al., 2014).

Dialectical theory provides a theoretical lens to better understand what married military mothers are experiencing when faced with competing tensions of masculinity vs. femininity, opposing tensions between the public vs. private spheres, and other tensions that come with

work/life balance especially within the reintegration phase of deployment when roles are negotiated with their spouse. It is through communication that people construct differing meaning systems creating dialectic tensions (Bakhtin, 1981).

As previously mentioned, all relationships have essential contradictions by nature and these tensions can be understood by studying communicative behaviors when tensions arise (Apker et al., 2005; Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Many people react to tensions with anxiety, frustration and even withdrawal, others manage these tensions without such reactions showing a more thought out decision and negotiation processes (Tracy, 2004). The reaction and management techniques used to deal with tensions depend on how the tensions are framed (Tracy, 2004).

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) provided a list of management strategies that individuals use to manage contradictions: denial, disorientation, spiraling inversion, segmentation, balance, integration, recalibration and reaffirmation. A short explanation of the management strategies presents *denial* as someone refusing to acknowledge the existence of contradictions; with denial, usually one contradiction is ignored (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Tracy (2004) also notes that one can agree completely with the message or to withdraw fully and ignore the message, with fully ignoring the message working as denial. *Disorientation* deals with the belief that the contradictions cannot be overcome (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Spiraling inversion occurs when relational partners emphasize one pole at a time, but alternate between what dialectic is emphasized temporally (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). *Segmentation* is similar to spiraling inversion, when people alternate contradicting tensions based on the situational context (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). *Balance* occurs when individuals compromise and both tensions are fulfilled, but only

partly (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). According to Tracy (2004), another way to communicatively deal with paradoxes is to find ways to make sense of the messages pertaining to the situation. The least common strategy is *integration*, which address both poles fully and at the same time (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Recalibration makes an effort to reframe the tension to be less contradictory by speaking about the paradox in a way that lowers the intensity between the two poles (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). *Reaffirmation* happens when individuals embrace contradicting tensions as a regular part of life (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In addition to Baxter and Montgomery's list of strategies, people also *reframe* the contradictions in a way that they are no longer opposites so that one tension does not have a significant impact on the other tension (Baxter, 1998). The last strategy of reframing allows the person to escape the discourse through metacommunication or by actually leaving the environment (Tracy, 2004).

Pertinent to this study, Johnston and Swanson (2006) examined how mothers adapt their construction of intensive mothering expectations to eliminate the tensions between the worker identity and the mother identity by applying dialectical theory. Hays (1996) describes a good mother as someone who practices intensive mothering as she is always available to her child and prioritizes her child over all else. Both ideal worker norms and good mother norms expect full commitment to each, creating an often impossible expectation to fulfill. Women attempt to eliminate the tensions between the worker identity and the mother identity by applying dialectical theory. Kirby et al. (2016) also noted tensions between the public and private sphere for working mothers. This dialectic tension is seen in the communication of military mothers as they talk about the challenges of being a mother in the armed forces (Nilsson et al., 2015, Mattocks et al., 2012; Walsh, 2017). Additionally, female service members face a dialectic

tension in the discourse of masculinity and femininity in a historically male dominated workforce and culture.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Adding to dialectical theory, relational dialectics theory is applied to close personal relationships, especially family relationships (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Relational dialectics theory aids in the comprehension of difficult relational communication experiences that challenge people in their everyday lives (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010). Similarly to dialectical theory, relational dialectics theory focuses on contradiction (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010; Halbesleben, et al., 2014). “Relational dialectics theory eschews the postpositivistic assumptions that support much of the empirical work in interpersonal communication, favoring instead a focus on a local and situated understanding of meanings and meaning making” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010, p. 49). The development of relational dialectics theory surrounds three major contradictions: autonomy–connection, openness–closedness, and predictability–novelty (Baxter, 1990). First, the autonomy vs. connection dialectic deals with the tension between the wanting to maintain an independent identity separate from the other and wanting to have the close bond required for a relationship (Halbesleben, et al., 2014). Secondly, the openness vs. closedness dialectic emphasizes the tension between information sharing and keeping information private (Baxter, 1990). Lastly, the predictability vs. novelty dialectic references the tensions that arises from the ease and normalcy of stability and the desire for something new (Baxter, 1990). While these are the three major contradictions found in previous research, contractions are not limited to these categories.

Role Dialectics

More specifically, role dialectics examines role contradictions within relationships and the communicative process by which role tensions are managed (Apker et al., 2005). “The concept of role dialectics marries two lines of scholarship, role theory and relational dialectics, into an alternative way of viewing the construction and negotiation of roles” (Apker, et al., 2005, p. 96). Role theory observes how individuals adjust their behaviors to fit the expectations of those around them (Biddle, 1986). Roles are defined as specific behaviors correlated to a particular position (Apker et al., 2005). Research indicates that the behaviors associated with certain roles come from societal expectations as well as individuals organization experience (Apker, et al., 2005). There is a communicative aspect to roles in that roles are learned and performed based on situation specific interactions (Apker, et al., 2005). It is through role construction and role negotiation that people learn, interpret, and accept or reject roles based on expectations through communication with others (Apker, et al., 2005).

As soon as women join the military they enter into a heightened dialectic tension. Female service members face two opposing role constructs: femininity and masculinity and in these competing constructs, these women have to construct what it means to be both a woman and a soldier in this context (Pawelczyk, 2016). While facing these competing tensions, military mothers also have to construct what it means to be a soldier and a mother.

Similarly to dialectical theory and relational dialectics theory, role dialectics views roles as an essential part of human relationships (Apker, et al., 2005). As mentioned earlier in the literature review, dialectics focus on the relationship between contradictions. Role dialectics considers the contradictions or paradoxes in roles as influential parts of role enactment and revolution (Apker, et al., 2005). “Role dialectics is the ongoing interplay of contradictions that

produce, shape, and maintain behaviors associated with a particular role” (Apker, et al., 2005, p. 97). Role tensions are created, recreated and negotiated communicatively through expectations set by the self and others in various relationships (Apker, et al., 2005). This specific approach to role dialectics draws on Apker’s (2005) application of role dialectics to the tensions and complexities of nursing roles. Role dialectics can be extended to understand female service members role negotiation with their spouse during reintegration from deployment. Extending the concept of role dialectics to the role negotiation between military mothers and their spouses after deployment can lead to a better understanding of military family communication and deployments, lowering the tensions military families face during the deployment cycle.

The post-deployment stage places a significant amount of stress on military mothers and their families (Walsh, 2017). It is important to look at role construction and role negotiation between married military mothers and their spouses in the reintegration stage of deployment as this stage is when military women reestablish roles (Agazio et al., 2012; Walsh, 2017). In the reintegration stage, the roles that the husband or grandparent had taken over while the wife was deployed are now renegotiated as the wife returns to the home (Agazio et al., 2012). Women who are married in the military have to communicate with their spouse about how roles will be renegotiated post-deployment based on the expectations they hold for one another. Roles may have inconsistent or unclear expectations and this can create role conflict (Biddle, 1986). The post-deployment reunion stage can cause spouses to feel distant from one another (Sahlstein et al., 2009), especially if partners have differing gender role attitudes (Mickelson, et al., 2006).

Communication becomes an important factor in maintaining relationships at this stage. Married female service members with children are the focus of this study due to the unique dynamics of renegotiating roles through communication with spouses upon deployment as roles

change for couples during the deployment cycle. Therefore, this study asks the following question:

RQ1: What factors impact the way married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse upon reintegration?

RQ2: How do married female service members with children negotiate roles through communication with their spouse upon reintegration?

Chapter 3 - Methods

Researcher Reflexivity

As a woman, a mother, and a worker, I am aware of the societal expectations affiliated with each of these roles and I am also aware of the competing tensions that may surface in regard to these roles. I became interested in the experience of female service members after completing a research project on military service members and how they communicate deployment to their families. All of the participants in the previous study were male. My father was also in the military and while I did not grow up as a military child, much of my experience and knowledge of military families came from a male perspective. These experiences initiated my curiosity about female soldiers and their perspective. Typically, I see or hear about men in the military who are married with children and the mothers stay at home with the children to handle the domestic responsibilities. I commonly heard the term “army wives,” but I began to wonder if there was a term for “army husbands.” I have also considered joining the military myself and wondered what that lifestyle would look like as a female and a mother.

I recognize my female perspective, previous experiences, and knowledge regarding the military; I took several steps to insure I engaged in self-reflexivity to better understand the data. For example, research questions were intentionally open-ended and did not suggest an anticipated answer. I intentionally started each interview with a clear mind, not expecting anything specifically to emerge from the data. I encouraged the participants to answer the interview questions independently and I asked clarifying questions to check for understanding of the participant’s intended meaning. The results section includes direct quotes from the participants, including specific wording as much as possible to provide support for my analysis.

Study Design

This interpretive study was designed to explore how military mothers construct their social identity in relationship to others. Eleven qualitative interviews were conducted to understand the subjective experiences of female service members who are married with children and their unique perspectives on communication used to negotiate roles and responsibilities after deployment. Interviews provided insight on roles and tensions that military mother participants experienced during the reintegration stage of deployment.

Interview methods were specifically selected because “interviews enable the researcher to stumble upon and further explore complex phenomena that may otherwise be hidden or unseen” (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). Through the flexibility of interviewing, complex experiences are given meaning as the interviewer and the interviewee exchange questions and answers (Tracy, 2013). There is also a therapeutic value in interviewing where the participants actually benefit from talking about issues that they may not otherwise discuss (Rosetto, 2014). The interview process is important for female service members because they live in the margins of the military and do not often get to voice their opinions (Pawelczyk, 2016).

Participants

To better understand the dynamics and experiences of female service members and their families in the reintegration stage of deployment, military women who had experienced at least one deployment while married with children or step-children (under 18) were recruited. Women who had been deployed and returned within the previous year were specifically recruited, however if the time back from their last deployment was longer than a year, the women were still invited to participate in the study.

Eleven military mothers were interviewed for this study. It is important to note that one participant (Gabrielle) self-identified as a married mother but was not actually married during the time of her deployment. She married her husband after the deployment and she then became a step-mother to her husband's children. Two of the participants (Lelani and Brittany) were married during their deployment, but were divorced at the time of the interview. All other participants were married with children at the time of deployment and during the interview.

Of the eleven participants, seven women were deployed while their spouse remained home with the children and four women were deployed at the same time as their spouse, leaving the children with a grandparent. All women in this study self-identified as heterosexual. Participant ages ranged from 26 to 55 years old. Five of the female service members self-identified as White, three as Black, two as mixed race and one as Hispanic. Length of years in the military ranged from four years to 22.5 years with an average range of 12 years. Length of marriage ranged from two years to 33 years with an average of 12 years. The ages of their children upon return from deployment ranged from one to 12 years old. Participant demographic information is available in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Participant Demographic Information

| Pseudonym | Race | Age | Years in Military | Military Rank | # of Deployments | Deployment Length | Years Married | Dual-Military | Children's Age at Return from Most Recent Deployment |
|------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---|
| Julie | White | 38 | 4 | CPL/E-4 | 2 | 1 year | 15 | Yes | 6 & 7 years |
| Ellen | White | 49 | 18 | MAJ/O4 | 2 | 1 year | 18 | Yes | 6 & 11 years |
| Emma | White | 39 | 16 | MAJ/O4 | 4 | 7 months | 18 | Yes | 1, 9 & 11 years |
| Dani | Hispanic/ Black | 55 | 21 | SFC/E-7 | 6 | * | 33 | Yes | 10 & 12 years |
| Gabrielle | White | 36 | 13.5 | SGT/E-5 | 3 | * | 9 | Yes | Step-children 7 & 11 years |
| Daijah | Black/ Asian | 26 | 5.5 | SGT/E-5 | 2 | 1 year | 2 | No | 2.5 & 7 years |
| Jasmin | Hispanic | 50 | 15 | SGT/E-5 | 1 | 1 year | 21 | Yes | 18 months |
| Chauncie | Black | 46 | 22.5 | SFC/E-7 | 3 | 15 months | 4 | No | 8 & 13 years |
| Brittany | Black | 26 | 6 | SGT/E-5 | 1 | 6 months | 2 | No | Twins almost 2 years |
| Lelani | Black | 29 | 8 | SGT/E-5 | 2 | 1 year | 7 | No | 1.5 & 3 years |
| Chelsea | White | 29 | 7 | CPT/O-3 | 1 | 9 months | 6 | Yes | 1 year |

* Indicates that the information is not available

Procedures

Participant recruitment

Locating married military mothers who had been on at least one deployment was challenging, as this is a very unique demographic. Therefore, participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves the researcher accessing participants through soliciting contact information provided by another person (Noy, 2008; Tracy, 2013). I began by reaching out to personal contacts that fit the study's criteria. Then I asked those personal contacts to refer someone they knew who may fit the study. I also asked interview participants if they knew anyone else who would be interested in participating. Social networks provide a unique

type of social knowledge as the power relations that may exist in a normal interview are decreased through snowball sampling (Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling participants often feel more comfortable speaking to the researcher because someone they know referred them (Noy, 2008). Participants also have a greater willingness to participate when they allow their contact information to be shared (Noy, 2008).

Data Collection

The participants engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) conducted either face-to-face or by phone. Interviews lasted between 21 to 70 minutes with an average of 38 minutes, generating 119 pages of single spaced, typed transcripts. Prior to each interview, I discussed the informed consent guidelines with each participant and was granted permission to record the interview. Participants were given a pseudonym to protect confidentiality by eliminating identifying information.

Interview guide explained

Interviews followed a flexible natural process. An interview guide with probing questions was used to stimulate the discussion (see Appendix A), but the interview guide did not control the interview process as much as the participant responses did (Tracy, 2013). Recognizing that interviews provide narratives that frame the way the participants view the world (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), I took the back seat as a listener in these interviews as much as possible (Tracy, 2013). Prior to the interview, I gave each participant a short overview of the study and asked permission to audio record the interview. Each participant was informed that the recording could cease at their request.

As the interviews began, rapport building questions were used to make the conversation as natural and open as possible (Tracy, 2013). Participants were asked to talk a little about

themselves in order to build rapport and get a sense of their story using questions such as “Why did you decide to go into the military?” The first set of questions solicited background about the participant’s identity. As the questions became increasingly specific they promoted more information about family dynamics (i.e. “Tell me a little bit about how you and your spouse met...” and “When did you and spouse decide to have children?”). From family dynamics, questions were then asked about roles within the spousal relationship (i.e. “Can you tell me a little bit about what your husband does?” and “Describe your daily routine from work-life to life at home now that you are back from deployment?”).

I then progressed to questions regarding how female service members communicatively transition into roles and responsibilities during the reintegration process. Questions were formatted to allow participants to openly express their personal experiences and narratives about being a married female service member with children. These questions centered around spousal responsibilities and participants discussed communicative aspects surrounding how roles and responsibilities came to be (i.e. “How do you and your spouse make sure everything is taken care of?” and “How do you know what responsibilities are yours?”). Some questions also reflected communication regarding roles and responsibilities throughout the deployment cycle to better understand how these dynamics change and come into existence. Probing and follow up questions were asked to tap into roles and responsibilities, centering around potential tensions and how spouses communicated about tensions to reestablish roles, this allowed for examples of the women’s personal experiences.

At the end of the interview, participants completed a demographic questionnaire with questions regarding the participants age, race, education level, years in the military, military rank, marital status, length of marriage and questions about their children. I continued recruiting

and interviewing participants until no new data was generated in the interviews with the aim of reaching theoretical saturation (Tracy, 2013). Theoretical saturation is achieved when there is no longer any new information emerging from the data and all concepts are well developed (Ando, Cousins & Young, 2014).

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, totaling 119 single-spaced, typed pages. Then, I read through the transcripts and listened repeatedly to the recordings to become more intimate with the data before identifying emergent themes (Tracy, 2013). Next, line-by-line coding was completed which involved going through each line of the transcripts and highlighted words, phrases or quotes that repeated themselves or pieces of information that related to the research question (Saldana, 2015; Tracy, 2013). The initial round of coding identified first-level codes which were the words, phrases and actual quotes from the participants without any interpretation of the data (Tracy, 2013). A few examples of first-level codes that were initially noted and later expounded upon for interpretation were “normal,” “fell into,” and “picked up where left off.”

The second round of coding focused on interpretive second-level codes which gave an explanation of the first-level codes from the participants’ actual words while searching for patterns (Tracy, 2013). For example, a second level code that provides deeper interpretation for the aforementioned first-level codes was reliance on gender roles. During this stage I participated in mapping and memo-writing by using poster sheets to draw associations and organize the data based on larger themes (Clarke, 2005).

Memo-writing allowed me to record my thoughts and reflect on the process of analysis as I continued to write and focus on the bigger picture (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008).

Memoing allowed for an inmixing of the participant data and the researcher's interpretation (Birks et al., 2008). For example, one predominant memo theme during the data analysis was "knowing responsibilities," this memo theme focused on how participants knew what they were supposed to take care of upon reintegration. This memo theme was later subdivided and refined into two other memo themes, "verbal communication about responsibilities" and "nonverbal communication about responsibilities," these themes focused on the ways in which responsibilities were communicated.

As the larger themes of verbal and nonverbal communication began to emerge, I looked more in-depth at information that did not focus specifically on communication to identify important factors influencing the negotiation of household work post deployment. Looking for patterns across participants and exploring details of their situations provided background and context to understand communication patterns. Through this analysis process, I identified a shift in the words that participants commonly used to describe deployment and words they used to describe the reunion after deployment; a shift from "self" to "family" was noted. This shift was an important aspect of the transition phase of the deployment cycle.

Three themes were identified when analyzing post deployment: easy transition, difficult transition, and role reversal. During line by line coding, the words "easy" and "difficult" were noted. While the words "role reversal" were not found during the first round of coding, during the interpretive stage of analysis, role reversal was labeled as a theme based on participant explanations to note patterns occurring in the transition phase. Further, during the interpretive analysis stage I realized there were additional factors impacting the way participants communicated in the reintegration stage of deployment and those factors also became themes.

As I read through the transcripts, I selected any quotations that aligned with the memos and copy and pasted the quotations underneath the appropriate memo. As memos developed I read the surrounding information around the key words or concepts to find quotes that explained what was occurring in each theme. Writing memos throughout the analysis process helped me retain ideas and connections between concepts as I progressed. Only responses that were related to communication to negotiate roles and responsibilities during the reintegration stage were analyzed for the current study.

As I analyzed the data I constantly reviewed the concept of role dialectics in order to accurately interpret the data in relation to the theory. This allowed me to focus on the factors that influenced communication patterns to negotiate roles and responsibilities as well as the actual communication strategies used in the reintegration stage of deployment. Lastly, I created broad themes relating to communication patterns during the reintegration stage of deployment by combining codes from the first and second levels of coding. These broad themes were then broken down into the main themes through axial coding where codes and concepts were connected to each other (Tracy, 2013).

As will be discussed in greater detail below, the analysis indicated important information pertaining to the deployment/reunion stage, a shift from self to family, and three types of communication in the transition phase. To answer the first research question, important situational factors that shaped military mother's post deployment communication included: the reason for return, deployment length, age of the children, marriage length, and dual-deployment status.

To answer the second research question about how married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse,

participants discussed changes they face during the deployment cycle and how they transitioned from deployment and routines. Specifically, there were two themes that emerged regarding the way spouses communicated about roles and responsibilities. First, the spouses had no verbal communication about responsibilities, relying on gender roles, past experiences and nonverbal cues to know what roles and responsibilities they should fill. Second, the spouses had verbal communication about responsibilities, communicating to reassume, coordinate, learn, divide and resolve roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 4 - Findings

I was very proud of the work my unit did, the work I did, and was in awe of the historic actions we helped shaped. Yet when I came home, I was frustrated by the fact that the only thing others expected me to have wanted, want now, or ever want in the future were my children. People projected onto me the idea that leaving was hard and I basically cried myself to sleep over not seeing my baby for the 8 month deployment. Others assumed I was completely broken up about it the whole time and now that I was home, wasn't I just going to bask in the glory of my baby and never want to leave again. I got that from friends, family, and army co-workers, that was very frustrating, because it wasn't true. I was focused, energized and happy on my deployment, and although I missed my baby and was excited to be home and with her again, I was also happy to return to work. Nobody talked about what I did on the deployment, or what my thoughts and feelings were about what I saw or did. My experience was only defined by my feelings about being gone from my child and that bothered me a lot. I think that was one reason I resented going to stuff like "baby rhyme time" while on leave. – Chelsea

This quote describes the role tensions faced by one study participant, Chelsea, when she returned from deployment. She was bombarded with and forced to manage messages about role expectations that were in tension regarding what it means to be a mother and a military service member. As Walsh (2017) illustrated, a woman is a bad mother if mothering expectations are not put first and a bad worker if work expectations are not put first.

This study was designed to explore contextual factors that are important to communication and the communication patterns used to negotiate roles and responsibilities by female service members and their spouses upon reintegration from deployment. To better understand this communicative process, role dialectics provided a theoretical framework for

analyzing how female service members manage role tensions to construct and negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouses.

Throughout this chapter, analysis explores how participants explained the transition stage that occurred when reunited with families and highlight important factors that participants indicated impacted the transition phase. Then, a brief discussion of how married female service members with children develop and establish routines through verbal and nonverbal communication is detailed. This information provides an important context for the analysis of the research questions regarding factors that impact the way married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse upon reintegration and the communication patterns used for this negotiation.

Deployment/Reunion

Post-deployment, the military mothers who participated in this study were in a unique position during the transition from deployment to reintegration to use communication to change gender role norms. Upon reunion, all 11 women described a similar experience of being deployed and reunited with their families, explaining that they felt a switch from mission and self-oriented behaviors to family oriented behaviors. This adjustment started the process of role construction and negotiation as the female service members managed role tensions based on their perceived expectations they had and believed others had for them.

Shifting from Self to Family

Study findings support existing research illustrating the change in roles and responsibilities throughout the deployment cycle, as well as the challenges families face reorganizing roles and responsibilities (Knobloch et al., 2016). In the post deployment stage, tensions arose for female service members as they felt a contradiction between autonomy and

connection. Of the 11 married female service members with children, seven discussed experiencing a shift in autonomy they had during deployment to reintegration. Jasmin illustrated this change stating:

When I was deployed to Korea I just had to worry about myself, get myself up and ready and go to work. I only had to worry about feeding myself so coming back the adjustment to having to take care of the family took some time for us to both get back into the groove of things.

Jasmin managed dialectic tensions between maternal and work identities by using segmentation; in the quote above, she indicates at work she “just had to worry about herself” and at home she adjusted to “take care of the family.” Segmentation allowed her to alternate the focus between one tension (the mission) during deployment and the other tension (being a mother) upon reunion (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Julie also practiced segmentation during deployment as she noted, “The focus was not on them [the children]. The focus was on the mission that we had to do...essentially, the mission came first.” However, when she was reunited with her children, Julie tried to switch her focus, explaining that, “Outside of being a soldier they [the children] got almost all of our undivided attention while they were awake.” Brittany used segmentation during deployment by keeping her main focus on work. Brittany shared, “As far as work, it was really easy because that’s all I had to do. I had time to go to the gym right after work.” However, Brittany communicates using recalibration to manage tensions during the reunion as she reframes the tensions to lower their intensity (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Brittany described feeling relieved upon the reunion as she mentioned, “I’m in control. I can do what I need to do. So I know for a fact they [her children] are okay. I know that my house is clean.”

During deployment, the participants' main focus was the mission and self. As the women returned from their deployment and were reunited with their families, reality set in and the autonomy faded away as the focus shifted from "me to them." Julie described that the responsibility for the children became "not just financial responsibility but it became a physical responsibility...they [the children] became the number one responsibility outside of being a soldier." Ellen disclosed, "my husband as a matter of fact the second time he just kind of relented like this is all yours now." Chelsea admitted, "it was really hard, at first, to be asked to be in charge of everything again...in that first week, to look around and be like, 'Shoot, I need to look at recipes again, laundry detergent, where is the laundry detergent?'" Participants confirmed existing research findings regarding female service members' experiences. In the process of being reunited with their family and the reintegration phase, these women go through a transitional period before renegotiating roles.

Interestingly, all 11 interview participants described the process of reassuming traditional gender roles pertaining to mothering upon reintegration. Upon reintegration, participants discussed a heightened expectation of desire to perform motherhood, using words such as "embraced," "begged," "welcomed" and "appreciated" to describe how they had a deep longing to resume mothering roles and responsibilities. Dani mentioned, "I begged to become the person that would pick up the kids first or if they were sick I would stay home with them." Ellen said, "I welcomed the fact that I was with my children...I got to bathe them I got to feed them... I got to do their laundry and smell them." Rather than equally negotiating roles and responsibilities with their spouse upon return from deployment, these women desired to take on responsibilities associated with maternal roles and openly sought out childcare responsibilities without question. The following section discusses the communicative aspects of this transition.

Transition Phase

To answer the research question about how married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse upon reintegration, participants were asked to discuss their experience transitioning from deployment. Specifically, there were three types of transitions that emerged: easy, difficult, and dealing with the role reversal. First, for some participants the transition was not difficult because their family was “used to it”, “not much changed”, it was the mothers “natural instinct” or the mothers had stayed involved through the deployment. Second, other participants described the transition as difficult, because everything had changed. Third, some participants explained that the couples dealt with role reversal.

After the reunion phase, these female service members entered into the post-deployment stage, for the purpose of this paper, the time period after deployment and in between reintegration to roles and responsibilities is labeled as the transition phase. In this section, events occurring in the transition phase are discussed. Then, factors that have the potential to effect the transition are examined. Lastly, routines and how they impact roles and responsibilities are analyzed. It is important to look at the transition phase because communication in the transition phase impacts how couples renegotiate roles and responsibilities.

One of the first steps that all 11 participants discussed was going through trainings, debriefings or medical screenings within the first week of being home, however the transition at home extended past a week. The focus of the first week was used to re-acclimate to the military base more than to reintegrate into the family. During this transition seven of the 11 women discussed the amount of time it took to figure out roles and responsibilities and these women explained this as the time period in which it takes to reach “normalcy.” However, what each

woman considered normal was different and the amount of time it took for each woman to experience normalcy varied from participant to participant. In the interview transcripts, there were 33 uses of variations of the word normal (e.g. normal, norm, normally, normalcy) by the women. As will be further explained in the findings below, when participants discussed getting back to normal, they were aiming to return to traditional gender role expectations and anything varying from those norms created role tensions.

Five women admitted to struggling in the transition stage and taking a lengthier amount of time to get back to what they would consider normal. Of the women who put a time period on reaching normalcy, the time frame ranged from six weeks to a year to get back to normal. Julie said it took “about a good eight months to a year to kind of get back to what normalcy kind of looked like.” Lelani explained, “it just took time, I say two months or so to be fully, fully, fully back...back physically, maybe 80% mentally.”

Chelsea discussed the frustration she faced trying to figure out how to have a relationship with her daughter who was about one and a half:

I would observe my husband and Elaine together, and Elaine is in a different disposition... more smiley... more giggly, more animated, and with me she wasn't. She had such a deep relationship with her daddy and she knew the little games to expect, and with me she didn't know anything. With me, it felt very cold, it was probably mostly in my head, but she just wasn't comfortable with me. When she cried, my husband would pick her up and she would instantly calm down, but when I picked her up, she wouldn't, and that was heartbreaking and frustrating at the same time, but the more I was around, the further into the six weeks that we went, things greatly improved. I remember telling

my husband at the end of the six weeks, I feel like it's taken every day but right now, at the end of these six weeks, before I go back to work, I feel like we're a family again.

Participants communicated about normalcy in relation to what life looked like prior to deploying, striving to get back to what they knew before they left, especially in terms of parenting and their relationship with their children. During the deployment, the women spent six months to a year away from their families and the way these women discussed normalcy was that it was a time consuming process to learn and adjust behaviors to fit their expectations. Chelsea's quote above illustrates not being able to uphold expectations she had for herself as a mother, comparing her relationship with her child to the relationship her husband and child had. She tried to manage the tension she felt between being a mother and a service member who had just spent a great deal of time away from her child.

Julie also struggled with fulfilling role expectations set for mothers as she was recovering from an injury after deployment. Julie elucidated, "I had to recover from the injury and get to a place where I could care for the girls whenever they came back, so I was released to kind of start doing the normal things right around early March." Physically caring for her children was normal for Julie and something she was waiting to get back to. Julie also explained a honeymoon phase when she and her husband were reunited with the children. She stated they were, "making sure that they understood that we loved them and that mom and dad were home." Julie shared that she felt tension because she was unable to provide for her children with her injury and she saw that as her responsibility. She constructed roles and responsibilities based on her perception and societal expectations of how a mother should perform.

Easy transition. Five of the 11 participants stated that the transition was not difficult because not much changed for the family; it was a natural instinct for the mother and the mother

stayed involved during deployment cycle. Two of those five participants explained a smooth transition because it was something their families were “used to.” There is a slight difference between what “not much changed” and “being used to it” meant, however the themes overlapped. Emma and Ellen who were both dual military couples and both married for 18 years discussed this idea of being used to the transition. Emma had experienced four deployments and Ellen had been on two. Emma discussed:

Over the years we've just gotten better at dealing stress...we just kind of adapt, and adjust, and get used to the stressors, so they're not...I mean, I think that's kind of part of it too. Just over 18 years. Thirteen years with kids in this lifestyle, we just adapted and overcame some of the stressful points.

Ellen talked about a similar experience as she illustrated how the first deployment was the rough one and by the second deployment, things were “hunky dory.” Ellen detailed the difference between the first and second time transitioning as she described, “The first time the transition was a bit longer but the second time not so much, you just kind of fit in where normal.” Since it was Ellen’s second deployment, it was something that her family had dealt with before and they knew how to handle what was coming based on previous experience. Ellen also stated, “There was really no changing because like I said we kept everything pretty much constant.”

Four of the five participants described feeling some sort of ease during the transition because “not much changed as far as responsibilities.” Lelani explained, “Not much changed as far as responsibilities...It was like, hey you’re back into the swing of thing. We picked back up.” Chauncie echoed, “I guess, as a mother and a female, I just fell back into my role...Nothing changed. I think everything just fell back into place.”

Four of the five participants said it was not difficult because it was just their natural instinct or role as a mother and a female. As Julie shared:

I was their mother before I deployed and I'm still their mother during the deployment and after that deployment and I'm going to do what I have to do as a mother to make sure that they were taken care of and provided for in every aspect...so it wasn't difficult transitioning back into that role...if anything it was probably even easier because we missed them so much.

Julie further clarified, "It wasn't hard for me because as a mother you just have that natural instinct to be a mother so it wasn't like it was a difficult transition because it became second nature." Chauncie confirmed this idea, stating, "I guess as a mother and a female, I just fell back into my role." Ellen mentioned the "natural and easy" process of inserting herself back into the family without feeling disconnected because her husband had communicated the children's schedule to her during deployment; she described, "every day I knew what the kids were going through and what their routine was."

Participants who saw the transition as easy discussed that being a mother was a "natural instinct" and they simply fell back into their roles. This finding speaks to role dialectics as these women have internalized what it means to be a mother through individual and societal expectations (Apker et al., 2005). These women were so used to the expectations of motherhood that they constructed these roles and responsibilities as part of their identity. The way the women discuss falling into particular roles and going back as though nothing changed signals role construction occurred prior to deployment and they resume these traditional gender roles upon return. Therefore, post-deployment the participants who discussed an easy transition did not experience as many challenges in negotiating roles, instead they used what they already learned

about motherhood role expectations to resume traditional gender roles (Apker et al., 2005 & Biddle, 1986).

Difficult transition. On the other hand, four participants discussed how challenging it was to reinsert themselves into the family routine because nothing was the same as before they left. Lelani explained:

I just tried to pick up from where I left off...everything kind of changed. The schedule changed, so it was like our normal routine when I was there, wasn't the same. Like the going to bed, what time dinner was done... It's like the household daily routine, things you would kind of do at the house, so I was like... What do y'all do this time of day? Or, what time do y'all get up? What time y'all eat lunch? It took me, almost a month.

In this instance, the uncertainty evoked more communication between Lelani and her husband as she asked questions about what the routine should look like. These communication exchanges indicate role construction and negotiation learn and perform roles based on interactions (Apker et al., 2005).

Chelsea used verbal communication with her husband and mother to negotiate her motherhood role. When she had a hard time dealing with the changes regarding her daughter, she struggled to figure out how to have a relationship with her daughter who was only four months old when Chelsea deployed. She depicted her frustration, explaining:

I did not know how to play with her. I did not know how to make her laugh. I didn't know how to accept that she was a baby and she wasn't going to follow my instructions. It was a complete mental switch from having soldiers that I led to having this little baby that didn't know what was going on.

Chelsea also struggled with not being the boss of everything and having control over every situation. When she was deployed, she had been in charge of her soldiers, she gave them tasks and they completed them without question. Chelsea described confrontations with her husband about role expectations:

When I came home, there were multiple times where I would look at my husband and I would say, Jonathan, you need to this and we need to do that and then, you know, XYZ, and when that is done, let me know and we will move on to step two. He'd just looked at me and he was like, I am not one of your soldiers and the baby is not one of your soldiers.

You cannot order us around and you cannot talk to us that way.

Chelsea said she ordered her family around unintentionally, as there was just “this tendency to treat each other like a soldier.” Chelsea said, “it’s really hard sometimes not just having a yes ma’am.” On top of the fact that she said, “I can’t talk to people in my everyday life like I could for eight months with my section.” These exchanges illustrate how Chelsea struggled with dialectic tensions between being a mother, wife, and soldier (worker). Of the participants in this study, Chelsea was the only female service member who had a higher ranking position and was in charge of soldiers during her deployment. She also was the only participant to discuss work expectations and processes carrying over into the home. The ideologies of mother and worker were competing ideologies for Chelsea; instead of giving up one or the other, she found ways to communicatively manage the tension between each role which Baxter and Montgomery (1996) refer to as balancing dialectics. In her communication with her spouse, Chelsea could point out interactions that allowed her to understand her roles in each context and manage role contradictions.

Role reversal. Four out of the 11 participants discussed experiencing some sort of a role reversal during the deployment cycle when they relinquished roles and responsibilities to their spouse or their parents for deployment. These women discussed this switch as something out of the ordinary or not the normal deployment situation, with the fathers taking on roles and responsibilities that are usually assigned to the mother. Interestingly, none of the participants in this category talked about childcare or household roles as a mother's "natural role." Nonetheless, even though they did not use the word "natural," they discussed role reversal by describing traditional patterns and expectations of mothers. Lelani explained:

The roles for my family was reversed. I am the mom. I was in the military, and he's the civilian. Usually, it's the other way around [where the wife is a civilian and the husband is in the military], which I think also played a part in our divorce, as well. For one, it was like I was the breadwinner in the family, and by him being a civilian, they consider him as the stay-at-home dad... he was able to pick up, or go get the girls, or cook dinner because he didn't have the job... it's great to come home from a long day of work, and you have dinner on the table... it goes to that role reversal, where usually the wife is the one that would stay home and take care of the household.

Although outside of the scope of this study, it is important to note that role tensions exist for men as well. In the interview, Lelani explained that her husband had to pick up domestic responsibilities and was not the primary earner, which created tensions surrounding male and female roles for her husband. Traditional societal expectations view men as breadwinners and women as homemakers and caretakers (Pawelczyk, 2016; Sahlstein et. al., 2009). Having an arrangement that included a role reversal from traditional expectations caused role tensions and contributed to Lelani and her husband seeing themselves as unusual. The fact that Lelani

attributed this role reversal as partially responsible for her divorce reflects research indicating that women in more egalitarian marriages are less satisfied (Mickelson et. al, 2006) and women in the military are more likely to divorce (Kanzler et al., 2011; Street et al., 2009).

Chelsea also discussed, “the normal redeployment situation” where “dad comes home and mom has taken over full roles in the family of mommy and dad, and now we are bringing dad back.” Chelsea then added that their situation was the reversed as, “I came home and daddy has been mom and dad.” Dani emphasized this role reversal as well, sharing:

We grew into the roles and they evolve a little bit because of the fact that I was in the military. With both of us being in the military, but it definitely switched hands a little bit, because typically men deploy.

After Dani resigned from the military, she said it put her and her spouse, “back into those roles where mom should probably stay home and dad should deploy.” Being the parent who normally deployed gave Dani the opportunity to relinquish traditional gender roles, but when she made the choice to get out of the military, she reverted back to traditional gender roles.

Role tensions are constantly negotiated across expectations and varying situations. However, even at a time that might be conducive to change when female soldiers are physically away from childcare and household responsibilities during deployment, roles and responsibilities are not renegotiated or altered. The dialectic of predictability/novelty (Baxter, 1990) applies to these participant experiences as they share that there is a pull between the ease of normal and trying something new or different. Normal is a return to traditional gender role norms rather than a novel change in gender role expectations. Normal is comfortable and follows a set of learned behaviors for gender roles passed down through expectations of self and others.

Situational Factors Shaping Communication

There are many factors that impacted communication in the reintegration period. As Julie stated, “There were a lot of layers of complications throughout that whole reintegration process.”

Reason for return. The reason for return from deployment impacted communication during the transition. For instance, Julie was seriously injured during deployment which slowed her transition. She explained that she was “at the mercy of everybody else” and “had to recover from the injury and get to a place where I could care for the girls.” After her injury, the only obligation Julie had to her children (6 and 7 years old), was to call them, but she was waiting to have the physical responsibility to care for them. Once Julie recovered, she was put on restrictive duty at work which allowed her to be more available and responsible for her children. She took on getting the girls ready in the morning, fed, and off to school. In Julie’s words, “I was on restrictive duty, I also ended up pregnant right after the girls came home so I was able to make sure that they were taken care of in the morning time and that was just kind of my role and my function.” As Julie’s responsibilities at work lessened, she saw herself as being more responsible for domestic roles. Communication may be shaped by an earlier return, making it easier to revert to prior roles and responsibilities with less negotiation. In Julie’s case, while she eventually returned back to the roles and responsibilities she had before deployment, her injury did make reintegration a bit more challenging.

Gabrielle came home a couple weeks early from deployment after receiving news that her father was on life support and may not live. When she returned, her focus was on her father as she traveled back and forth to the hospital to see him. She explained, “I don’t know that we even got a good transition originally...the actual transition happened a couple months after.” While Julie and Gabrielle’s situation slowed the transition process, Brittany had the opposite experience

because she was sent home early to check on her children who were allegedly being abused by her husband. Brittany was unable to talk to her husband for a short period of time upon return and was forced to reassume childcare responsibilities immediately. In Gabrielle's situation, her mind was on her father upon return from deployment, so she was unable to properly transition right away, Brittany was forced to transition very quickly and since her spouse was accused of abuse, she had to take over all responsibilities without communicating with her spouse. In all cases, the reason for return dictated what roles and responsibilities each woman took on, how they communicated as well as the speed of the transition.

Deployment length. The length of the deployment also influenced communication. For example, Brittany returned early (less than a year) and was able to quickly jump back into the roles and responsibilities she had before the deployment. Similarly, while her twins were only two years old, they were still able to remember her when she returned due to the shortened period of her deployment and they were able to bond without any challenges. However, those who had been gone for nine months to a year had a harder time adjusting in the transition phase. For example, Chelsea forgot how to cook meals and where to find everyday supplies. She had to refresh her mind about recipes and where to locate laundry detergent. Lelani also expressed challenges with cooking dinner again, sharing, "You haven't cooked in like a year, a real family meal, so it's like, what do you want you eat? I don't know what to cook?"

Age of children. The age of the children is important to communication patterns as well as well. Young children struggle to simply understand and remember the returning parent(s). While older children remember and understand, they sometimes experience resentment towards the military or the parent(s). Emma summed this up well as she explained:

When they were toddlers, it was just not understanding why we were gone so long, or not even realizing how long we were actually gone, because they don't completely understand time when they're that little. To, now, they're preteen, teenagers, and they just dislike the Army, because it takes me away for extended periods of time, they understand it now, but doesn't mean they like it though.

Ellen described, "My daughter being older (age 16) had a better understanding and the transition was pretty easy at that point she was just she was just happy to have another female back in the house." However, for Lelani, Dani, Jasmin, Emma and Cheslea who had children ranging from four months old to four years old, they had a hard time communicating with their children during the deployment cycle and much of the transition was spent building relationships with their young children again.

Emma who had a younger child and two older children (ages 3, 12 and 13) explains, "It's harder for us as adults. As parents you can't really have a conversation with a one and a half year old. You can't send an email, or a text message. When they're older you can." Dani expressed her pain in dealing with her 18 month old and three year old:

I cried, because I was hurt that my kids, the whole trip when they picked me up from our little holding area, I cried because my daughter didn't even know who I was. My son talked to me the whole time, the whole trip back, and then I asked him, do you know who I am? And he started laughing and he was like, no.

As Dani and her husband talked with each other about the tensions Dani was facing as a mother who was not being viewed as a mother by her children, her husband tried to comfort her:

We kind of like laughed it off but my husband knew it hurt... He just patted my hand and everything else and when we got home and I put my stuff up and I had put Daniel to bed and I went into the room, he was like, it's just that they were so young when you left.

Dani recollected, "I had to bribe my youngest daughter with an Elmo doll, I remember that. For her to even come to me." Daijah had a similar experience with her youngest daughter who was just turning two when she returned from her second deployment. While her older eight year old daughter was able to remember Daijah as her mother, the two year old was timid and afraid of Daijah. Daijah's older daughter actually had to explain to her younger sister that Daijah was their mother and that she was safe to be around.

Chelsea faced similar challenges with her one and a half year old as she realized she did not know how to interact with her daughter. Chelsea stated, "There was a lot of frustration in trying to figure out how to have a relationship with her." She explained:

When I got home, my mother stayed for like another three or four days and she basically did a left seat/right seat with me and tried to teach me my own child; what kind of food she liked, what kind of schedule she was on, what kind of little games they play, her favorite places, what activities they had done while I was gone, things she was learning, and all those little details.

The children's age played an important role in the communication during the transition phase. As children age, they mature in their understanding. However, mothers faced dialectic tensions when communicating with their children during the deployment as the service members could not quite explain their absence to younger children.

Length of marriage prior to deployment. The length of marriage between the spouses had an impact on their communication after deployment as well. Shorter marriages may still be

developing the foundational aspects of a relationship which may make negotiating roles and responsibilities more challenging. Julie expressed:

Very early in the relationship he wasn't quite certain of what I was saying and I wasn't quite certain why he wasn't understanding what I was saying, so instead of having that conversation because he's not a verbal communicator and I am, it was very difficult. So that barrier of our different styles of communication was challenging as we got married right before we deployed then we went to deployment and we weren't really together, we spent the first year of marriage on a deployment.

Julie and her husband returned from deployment as basically newlyweds and had to establish foundational parts of their relationship. Julie attempted to explain the complexity of the transition for her family:

There were a lot of challenges when we first got back because we didn't have those foundations and we didn't have some of that kinks worked out where most couples would have so it was barriers because of communication. Now we've got the children back too so we're dealing with that.

Dani who was also married to her husband only a short period prior to deployment faced similar issues. Dani explained, "We're growing as well. We don't know that much about ways to make the family work."

In comparison, Ellen had been married and in the military all 18 years, and, as such, had things more settled and figured out. Ellen explained that her family had figured it out along the way and they were used to the military lifestyle. Emma, who has also been married for 18 years followed a similar narrative, sharing, "We've kind of worked it after 18 years and our whole

marriage, we've been doing this Army thing. So it's not a huge transition for us. It's like we fall right back into it." Emma admitted though that one thing that always changes is the kids.

The communication during the transition phase lessened in families who have experienced multiple deployments and had been married longer. These families got so used to doing the "Army thing" that roles and responsibilities were established in the beginning of the relationship and during the deployment cycle, they were never completely reconstructed or negotiated. Rather, roles were relinquished temporarily during the deployment and reassumed upon the return of the female service member.

Dual-deployment. Whether both parents were deployed or just the mother was deployed was also an important factor in communication about roles. If both parents were deployed, upon return both parents tried to get situated in the family structure and the transition was even more complicated. Although more complicated, transitions with dual-deployments also opened up more room for role construction and negotiation as neither parent was responsible for childcare or household responsibilities during the deployment. In these instances, both spouses had an equal opportunity to assume any role or responsibility. However, Jasmin and Julie were both deployed at the same time as their spouses and upon return took over more responsibility for their children and the household. Chelsea asserted, "We have what each of us takes care of. So, if we're both gone, a lot of our stuff is just stored, on hold type of thing." However, upon return from deployment, much like Jasmin and Julie, the roles and responsibilities Chelsea discussed putting on hold were traditionally gendered.

Whether the couples were dual-military or military-civilian couples played a part in how spouses communicated about work-life tensions. Two dual-military women talked about how they were responsible for putting their children first if the situation called for it. Childcare

responsibilities fell on the military mothers over their spouses. Julie articulated, "...it would typically be me that would have to step up and say hey you know I have kids at home that are at the babysitters and I need to leave to go get them." Jasmin (dual-military) mentioned carrying childcare responsibilities when sharing, "I usually took time off from work to stay home with her [baby] but it was difficult that I always had to be the one to miss work to stay home with her." As will be further discussed, regardless of any of these factors, the transitional phase had the potential to be an opportunity to renegotiate roles and responsibilities to be more equitable between spouses, yet this was not the case.

Routine: Roles and responsibilities

During the transition phase, families began to settle into routines where roles and responsibilities were reestablished. All 11 women mentioned that routines were established based off of their schedules. Five participants discussed that for the most part, schedules remained consistent on a weekly basis. However, weekends changed childcare and household responsibilities. On weekends more time was allocated to being with the children and weekends were used to catch up on household chores and responsibilities. These military mothers talked about time as a finite resource; they did not have as much time during the week for childcare and household responsibilities, so they increased time spent on the weekend for these activities. Rather than altering expectations, they altered their weekly schedules to meet gender role expectations.

Six out of the 11 women talked about this idea of "normal life" which included gendered roles and responsibilities. Lelani illustrated that upon return from deployment, once roles and responsibilities were established they remained pretty consistent. "It was like I was right back into my normal routine of taking the baby to daycare and picking her up." Julie said, it was very

challenging getting back to what normalcy looked like; “normal life as far as mom and dad.” Ellen said, “you just kind of fit in where normal” as she explained her husband handed everything back over to her. Emma took over “laundry and stuff I normally do.” Chelsea discussed “embracing normal life again.” She explained that “after that initial shock wore off, embracing normal life again was actually cathartic” in terms of making dinner, doing laundry and taking her baby to “baby rhyme time and all these silly baby things that my mom had done with her.” She said, “My husband was patient and understanding and didn’t really expect anything. It kind of gave me time to figure that out and embrace it on my own.”

Once the military mother established a “normal routine,” that routine stayed fairly consistent with gender role expectations. Husbands did not have to explicitly state that any roles or responsibilities belonged to their wife; even the supportive husbands who had cared for children while the mother was away stepped back and let the mother ease back into traditional gender roles. For example, Chelsea discussed constructing and negotiating roles based on what she perceived others expectations were for her. Chelsea’s mother was taking her daughter to baby rhyme time. As Chelsea transitioned back post-deployment, she learned, interpreted and accepted that it was also her responsibility to participate in her child’s activities based on the actions of her own mother. Chelsea interpreted what it meant to be a mother through the standards her mother set with her child when she was gone. She also picked up cues from her husband’s supportive verbal and non-verbal communication that he was caring and supportive by giving her time to reassume traditional female gender roles.

As discussed in the literature review, military families may face challenges “reorganizing family structures for parenting, routines, roles and responsibilities” after they are reunited (Knobloch et al., 2016, p. 171). Routines can be difficult to coordinate as both spouses have their

own individual agendas (Knobloch et al., 2016). Meshing individual schedules and dividing domestic responsibilities can be difficult as spouses attempt to revise roles and responsibilities and reintegrate into the family system while re-acclimating to family routines (Knobloch et al., 2016). Dialectic role tensions arose for these military mothers (especially dual-military) in coordinating schedules, making it difficult to create routines and manage family responsibilities. Falling into a “routine” and getting back to “normal” was a strategy used to navigate tensions. When these military mothers “embraced” or accepted gender norms, it made the transition easier, while simultaneously making tensions between being an ideal mother and being an ideal worker more challenging.

Many of the women saw alignment to traditional gender norms during reintegration as the ideal. These military mothers had an intensified longing to be mothers as they “embraced” and “appreciated” gender norms and even “begged” to have traditionally maternal responsibilities. Chauncie detailed the routine of a military mother: “You go to work, then you come home, children, you deal with the kids and your family, be a wife or mother to the kids. It was back to routine.” Lelani gave her own explanation as she proposed:

Being a mother, you have to get back into the routine of being home, and being a mother, ‘cause you’ve been gone for a whole year. Then you gotta come back, and learn your child, and it was... How could I say it? I think it was more hard because she [her daughter] didn’t know me, so it was like I couldn’t be the mother I wanted to be to her when I first got back because she wouldn’t let me do a lot of things like feed her, hold her.

Lelani’s explanation communicates her perception that she needed to reach a certain level of competence as a mother. If she could not feed her daughter or hold her daughter, then she was

not a meeting her expectations of motherhood. While this was an individual expectation Lelani held for herself, the ideas were based off of societal expectations of a gendered mothering role.

All of the participants discussed having some sort of routine that depended heavily on their schedule and the schedule of their spouse, which then allowed the military mothers to care for their families. According to the analysis of the interviews, schedules and routines were a way to reduce the need for additional communication and roles went unquestioned, reducing potential tensions that could arise from actively negotiating of roles and responsibilities. Schedules gave the couples an external reason for why each person was in charge of specific tasks, rather than admitting to the participation of gender role norms. Ellen and her spouse meshed their schedules together by combining their calendars and always had everything planned out, from who would be dropping the kids off to who would be picking them up. Ellen illustrated this well as she explained:

We talk about it as a family you know who's going to do what...it was really based off of schedules...I had my calendar, he has his, we look at it and say okay I can take the kids Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday it's on the way I'll drop them off before work, but I need you to pick them up...it's something that we discuss beforehand it was never in our house left to luck or just hey let's just wing it...it's always planned.

Jasmin and her husband only had one car, so coordinating schedules became even more important to their daily routine. They had to be sure to keep track of each other's schedules so everyone was always where they "needed to be so nobody got in trouble."

Emma's schedule fluctuated and was "on the fly." Emma clarified, "We kind of have to, because of our jobs, and the hours that we work are not set in stone, and they're never known in the morning when we leave...it's just kind of unpredictable." Without talking with her husband,

she simply took over more responsibilities and explained, “when it comes to stuff at the house, I do have a schedule, like a routine. Chad does not.” Once the schedules were routine, communication about roles and responsibilities became unnecessary and gender roles became sedimented once again.

To address the research question regarding how married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse upon reintegration, two types of communication patterns were evident. There were those who did not verbally communicate about the negotiation of roles, relying largely on nonverbal cues, and responsibilities and those who verbally communicated about roles and responsibilities.

Nonverbal Communication

Those who did not communicate verbally about their roles discussed how they “fell back into” their roles, “picked up” where they left off prior to deployment or used nonverbal cues from their spouse to be aware of the roles and responsibilities they should take on ($n = 4$). All four women were adamant that there were “no conversations” and “no discussion” about roles or responsibilities, the women assumed based on perception, what they should be doing. Three of the four women who said they did not verbally communicate discussed falling into roles of motherhood and roles of a female.

Relied on gendered roles. Julie described motherhood as a “natural inclination,” a “natural role” a role that is just “second nature.” Julie then described how her and her spouse shared equal responsibility of childcare and household responsibilities as she said:

Whatever parent was there that’s what that parent provided for them so both of us were disciplinarians. Both of us were nurtures. Both of us were providers, so we both equally

shared that responsibility and there was never I guess clear boundaries as far as this is what you do and this is what I do.

However, later in the interview Julie discussed being responsible for the majority of household chores as she asserted:

The consequences were never really on him but were on me. So if I could not make sure the household chores were done he could care less because it's not his standard...I don't really care if the laundry is folded or put away or if the floors mopped or vacuumed...so the consequences were never really on him but the burden rested on me.

Similarly, while Emma had no discussion with her husband about roles and responsibilities, she believed that her and her husband split the childcare and household responsibilities evenly and that roles and responsibilities were not gendered. She explained, "we're kind of split...he doesn't expect me to do any particular things because I'm the mother or the wife...I don't really expect him to do any particular things because he's the father or the husband." However, later Emma mentioned, "When it comes to the house and running the kids and that kind of stuff, I do more than him." Emma even admitted, "There are times where I've felt like okay, I'm going to have to have a come to Jesus moment with him, because I feel like I'm doing everything."

So while Emma and her spouse "never sat down and divided it up," Emma described how she followed mostly traditional gender role norms and stated, traditional gender roles were "just norm for us" and "over time we just figured it out and fell into a routine." Emma's husband willingly passed off what he had been doing to her as soon as she got home from deployment and Emma suggested that this gesture made her feel needed when she reaffirmed gender roles. Emma

took on more childcare and household responsibilities than her husband and self-assigned herself roles and responsibilities to complete, even before going to PT in the mornings. She noted:

When it comes to stuff at the house, I do have a schedule, like, a routine. Chad does not. I know when I get up for PT I have to clean the litter box. I do that kind of stuff... it's not something that he does on a daily basis like I do. Like, I know in my head, these are things I have to do before I go to PT, after PT, before work, after work. Chad kind of will go with the flow, and is like, hey, if you need something let me know... the cat litter needs cleaned, the laundry needs switched from the washer to the dryer. I do all that stuff at 4:30am when I get up and get ready for PT. He usually gets up for PT as well, and he brushes his teeth, and gets dressed and leaves.

What Emma experienced with her husband illustrates the idea Dani discussed when she proclaimed that dads do not have to think of the things that moms do. In Dani's words:

I gotta make sure that my kids get fed good meals, I gotta make sure that the bedrooms are straight, I'm basically mom 24/7. Dad does not think of those things, because he's never had to think of those things, so I think that it's just one of those things, unless I just got fed up or I'm tired or something like that, it's just a given. We don't discuss it or anything else, it's just this is mom, this is what moms do.

Dani explained how she and her spouse “never sat down for a discussion” rather, they just “grew into roles.” Dani suggested that her and husband, “Fell into a, what do you need me to do?” Dani elaborated that, “because I had not been cooking, I kind of collected a lot of recipes. So, there were things that I wanted to try and he was more than happy to let me take over.” In Dani's case, she became in charge on traditionally feminine childcare and household responsibilities. Dani also asserted, “I just accepted that this is what moms do...this is just mom.”

Gabrielle, a step-mother said, “There was no awkward transition...I just kind of fell into the step-mom role and the girls were okay with it.” As a step-mother in the scenario, Gabrielle had less responsibility for the children who lived with their biological mother. However, she was still in charge of most traditionally feminine household responsibilities.

Relied on past experience. Brittany and her spouse also had no verbal communication about childcare and household roles; however, her husband was not a very active parent once she returned from deployment. According to Brittany, she had “no choice.” She knew that if she was present, she was responsible to pick up where she left off and she took over everything. She shared, “I knew I needed to clean, cook, feed them [her children], wash clothes.”

Relied on nonverbal cues. While Dani and her husband had no verbal conversations about roles and responsibilities, she mentioned knowing what roles and responsibilities she was supposed to enact based on the perception of nonverbal cues from her husband. Dani commented, “I noticed that on the weekends he would get up and just start cleaning. So, I would kind of take that cue as, okay, well he's got this, so let me do this.” Dani did not describe what “this” was at this point of the interview, but later she discussed her responsibilities for traditionally feminine childcare and household tasks. Dani watched her husband to figure out roles and responsibilities. Additionally, she drew on societal expectations to anticipate her husband’s expectations. As Dani put it, “I did what I felt was necessary to do,” and from that, she and her spouse grew into roles. Dani even “begged to be the parent to pick up kids or stay home with the kids if they were sick.” She described, “I called the school after a while and demanded the school call me first about any issues.” While Dani asserted there was no communication regarding the negotiation of roles and responsibilities, she sought out gendered responsibilities through active communication.

In Dani's case, while she wanted a majority of the responsibility when it came to the children, she was not ecstatic about taking over the household responsibilities. She identified barriers which came from her not wanting to enact certain responsibilities; for example, her husband expected her to cook. As part of a dual-military couple, Dani expressed, "Why are you expecting me to cook your meals every weekend? I wanna rest too, there are moments I'm overwhelmed." Dani acknowledged the expectations of mother and other gender role expectations. While she "begged" for childcare responsibilities, she complained about taking on other gendered responsibilities. Dani mentions how her mother-in-law also communicated gendered expectations for household tasks:

When we go on family vacations to his mother's house, there'll be times when she wants me to cook. I'm like "I'm on vacation." But the mother is never on vacation. She'll want me to fix their plates, and I feel obligated to wash dishes sometimes.

This again illustrates role tensions within relationships. Rather than renegotiating the gender roles Dani indicated that she accepted and performed tasks based on the expectations set by herself and others in the relationships around her. Dani commented, "mom's come home from work and put on another hat for another job."

Those who did not verbally communicate resumed typical gender roles. These military mothers discussed falling back into roles and picking up where they left off. These gendered roles were based on what the participants perceived as normal roles or a mother and a female. By having no discussion and going back to what they knew, these women accepted and affirmed traditional gender roles instead of resisting and renegotiating more equitable roles.

Verbal Communication

Those who verbally communicated about childcare and household roles were different from those who did not. These military mothers participated in active discussions regarding roles ($n = 7$); however, similar to the group that did not verbally communicate, those who did verbally communicate still relied on gender role norms to determine their responsibilities. All seven participants described having positive, effective and open communication during the negotiation process. These women used communication to reassume, coordinate, learn, divide and ultimately resolve roles and responsibilities.

Seven out of the 11 women with husbands who stayed home with their children during deployment explained that their husbands had to learn how to adapt to having all of the responsibility for the children and the household, with minimal help from family members if any. As Brittany described, “He [her husband] contributed more over deployment because he had no other choice.” Emma also stated that her husband, “learned over deployment because he had to.” Ellen, Dani and Emma all discussed how their husbands had become experts at doing their daughters hair during the deployment.

However, when the wives returned, the responsibilities were relinquished to the wife and these participants actively took back typical gender roles verbally and nonverbally, affirming their place as mother. The husbands had demonstrated that they were capable of completing childcare and household tasks because they did so for the entire deployment. Yet, during the reintegration phase these military mothers felt tension from the separation of traditional gender role expectations and their mother identity. These tensions caused these women to step in and take back over the same gendered responsibilities they had relinquished during deployment, while “allowing” the father to complete some traditionally feminine tasks.

Lelani confessed, “I guess I was so used to doing everything, I never looked for him to.” Rather than renegotiating typical gender roles, none of the women changed roles, in fact, these 11 women actually embraced archetypal gendered roles through verbal and nonverbal communication, whether they were consciously aware of it or not.

Communication to reassume roles and responsibilities. Seven of the 11 women openly admitted that upon reintegration, they were handling the majority of the household and childcare responsibilities. Through active communication, Dani admitted welcoming her responsibilities back as she was able to “bathe” “feed” and “smell” her children again. Emma discussed handling more responsibilities for the children, especially when it came to practices or appointments her children had.

Ellen mentioned that her and her spouse “talk about it as a family” and “always planned” ahead of time. When Ellen first returned she talked about being assertive as she inserted herself into the family routine, her husband even “relented responsibilities over” to her and she “welcomed back responsibilities.” Ellen practiced active communication as she took back responsibilities along gender norms. Ellen explicitly stated:

I got to do all those things I really really missed you know. I welcomed all of it back and I accepted it...there was no if ands or buts, it's like I am back. Let's do this. I'm ready. What do you need me to do? He's [her husband] like if you got to have it do whatever you think.

Ellen used active communication to embrace gender roles as mother and wife in this situation.

Gabrielle and her husband also talked about roles and responsibilities during reintegration; nonetheless, Gabrielle discussed picking back up where they left off prior to deployment. While Gabrielle had less responsibility for the children as a step-mother, she still

followed traditional gender roles as she took “basic care of the household type things, laundry and dinner.”

Four of the 11 women who communicated about gendered work described how they picked up their husbands slack and then it became an expectation that they were going to handle that role/responsibility every time. For example Julie declared:

If you’re not going to live up to my standard than I’m going to have to make sure that I am picking up your slack... I probably...made my own bed and had to lie in it because I’m sure that he’s quite capable of not being that way but because I did it became an expectation.

This higher expectation Julie set in regard to childcare and household responsibilities illustrated her buy-in to intensive mothering.

Communication to coordinate roles and responsibilities. When Ellen returned from deployment, she gave her husband her schedule so he knew what she had going on and he would communicate to Ellen the plan of action as far as who was going to drop the children off and pick them up. Ellen allowed her husband to be in charge of setting the routine in order to manage tensions between their work schedules and family responsibilities. Being able to communicate about their schedules and create a routine made roles and responsibilities more predictable and also eased potential tension. Jasmin said that “communication was key” to her and her husband figuring out what roles and responsibilities each person was supposed to fulfill. Jasmin reiterated that it was through “a lot of coordination and communication” that her and her spouse reintegrated. Jasmin noted, “we would just talk and make sure we knew each other’s schedule” and “we usually talked about it and reminded each other... it was more verbally.”

Communication to learn roles and responsibilities. Ellen had to feel out the situation upon return from deployment and she followed the routine her husband had set in place for some time before making any changes. She mentioned, “I just hopped back into the routine with everyone... I just watched like we’re doing baths usually around seven or whatever and I was like ok let’s do this.” Chelsea indicated that her, her spouse and partly her mother “overly communicated” about roles and responsibilities. Chelsea wanted her roles in the family back, but at the same time she was overwhelmed with all of the roles. Chelsea admitted, “I had to exercise some maturity and patience and humility, because I knew as much as I wanted to come barreling back in and be mommy, that I wasn’t.” This restraint caused Chelsea to further embrace getting back into the role of mother. Chelsea confessed that when she returned from deployment, she had no idea what her responsibilities were and that she had to ask. By asking what her roles and responsibilities were and performing in that manner, Chelsea actively contributed to taking traditional roles back. Chelsea illustrated:

Originally, I told my husband when I came home I just want my mom to go and I just wanted us to be a family. He told me, very patiently, I don't think that's a good idea.

When I got home and I looked at this small human, I realized I had no idea what I was doing. None at all. My tune quickly changed to asking my mother every question and my husband every question about how to parent. With that, came conversations with my husband about...re-establishing our roles.

Much like Chelsea, Daijah relied on her mother to answer questions she had regarding parenting and Daijah also watched how her mother interacted with the children before she began filling in the position of mother. Lelani also communicated about roles and responsibilities with her husband face-to-face or through text messaging, yet Lelani still ended up being responsible for

“99% of everything” after her husband taught her the routine. Lelani explained that, “When it came to our daughter, he [her husband] was on top of that until I got their schedule down and then I was able to pick up.”

Communication to divide roles and responsibilities. Chelsea mentioned that she and her spouse never had financial stressors, for them “it came down to who was doing laundry and giving the baby a bath and doing the household chores.” After coming to the conclusion that there were some responsibilities her and her husband liked better than others. Chelsea and her husband talked more in-depth about which chores each person liked and disliked and divided the chores out that way. Dinner was an issue for both parents as they usually worked late, so they compromised and simplified meals or ate take out. According to Chelsea, “As long as we picked up the baby and everyone was fed and bathed at the end of the day, we kind of said, you know, success, we did it.”

In Ellen’s family, even household chores such as laundry were planned and split between not only her and her husband, but the children as well. While Ellen perceived responsibilities to be split, she still gave her husband the okay to continue to do his daughters hair after she returned. Ellen stated, “...he continued to do it...I had no problem with that, I was like sure go ahead that is adorable, I love it.” Ellen giving her husband the okay to continue this responsibility showed that it was originally Ellen’s responsibility as a mother to do her daughters hair and she was allowing her husband to take over a responsibility commonly expected of mothers. In giving her husband permission, Ellen simultaneously reaffirmed that she was responsible for the children, in turn reinforcing mothering roles/responsibilities.

Ellen continued to present roles and responsibilities as something her family all took part in together as a team. She assured:

I can't say one does more than the other or one has a certain responsibility. Like I said before, for example, laundry, we all do it together. We bring it all down together, we separate it, we fold it...when putting it from one machine to the next sometimes whoever is up in the kitchen and we hear it ding, it's like hey while you're in there can you go do that...throw something away and it's at the top and the garbage is full...whoever throws it in they'll take it out most of the time.

Still, she added, "Now being female, being a woman,... women tend to see details more...So a man may overlook the fact that I can get another banana peel in the garbage can...when a woman may look and go that thing is full."

Jasmin said that she and her husband communicated verbally about splitting responsibilities 50/50 and "worked as a team." However, Jasmin disclosed:

I usually...would bathe her and feed her and get her ready for bed. Sometimes he would help out, but that was mainly my (with hesitation) just something I liked to do. But if I needed him to help out he would or if I had 24 hour duty then he had to do it.

By communicating childcare responsibilities as a choice, Jasmin embraced motherhood expectations. She was also the one to do most of the cooking. Despite the fact that Jasmin and her husband were a dual-military family, she handled more of the childcare and household responsibilities because she perceived her husband's job was more demanding than hers. She noted:

His job was probably a little more demanding because he was he was in charge of the clinic. Where my responsibilities weren't that much at work. I did most of the cooking dinner... My daughter had a lot of ear infections... It was easier for me to take her

because... he worked in the clinic so he had to be there so I usually took time off from work to stay home with her.

Chauncie asserted that her communication with her spouse was good as well. Chauncie and her spouse communicated roles and responsibilities by talking face to face, leaving notes for one another or texting/calling each other over the phone. Chauncie proclaimed that responsibilities were “split down the middle” as she said there was “nothing that he did more than I did.” However, when she discussed tasks that are traditionally considered masculine, such as taking out the trash, mowing the lawn or getting the car serviced, Chauncie proceeded to say, “that’s like a man thing, I’m sorry! My husband did all that.” Chauncie also stated, “we kind of just fell back into place. Everything kind of just fell back together, like it was before I even left or deployed.” This reinforces Chauncie’s gender role expectations and indicates what she sees as normal responsibilities. Chauncie mentioned, “I guess, as a mother and a female, I just fell back into my role.” Chauncie emphasized:

Mothers are different than males, or females are different than males as far as being in the military. We do more because... that’s just our jobs as mothers. We are mothers, we are spouses, we are the provider... Kids are attached more to the mother... My kids are my number one priority.

Chauncie was committed to intensive mothering as she stated her children were above all else. If it is a mother’s job to do more, putting anything before mothering or having other roles that take away from mothering can cause tensions. A “good mother” is one who puts her child at the center of her life (Hays, 1996; Turner & Norwood, 2013). With the separation from children and essentially the role as mother, these women indicated that they felt a stronger need to reaffirm the role of mother.

Explicit communication provided an opportunity to actively renegotiate roles and responsibilities to be more equitable, but instead the military mothers in this study largely used communication to integrate into traditional gender roles to reduce feelings of tensions about familial roles. As the participants discussed roles and responsibilities, it became apparent that gender role norms were at play. Interestingly, tensions arose in the discourse surrounding shared responsibilities and being a team, as the women were still doing more work or the couples were still performing traditionally gendered tasks. This unique situation reinforces research on the traditional division of labor along gender lines where even if women are working, they still take care of more childcare and household responsibilities (Riforgiate & Boren, 2015). Even those women who verbally communicated with their spouses about roles and responsibilities fell back into and actively sought out traditional gender role norms. Those who did not verbally communicate about responsibilities also continued to act on gender role expectations. Although participants had a hard time articulating how they knew what roles and responsibilities to enact, some women had a justification for why they performed the way they did. For example, several military mothers stepped up and took on responsibilities because they thought it was their natural responsibility as a mother, others picked up the responsibilities because their spouses were not doing them, and others perceived their spouse to have work responsibilities.

Communication to resolve roles and responsibilities. Ultimately, four of the 11 women left the military to stay home with their children (Julie, Chelsea, Dani, Chauncie) and Daijah, while she was not out of the military at the time of the interview, was working through the process of getting out. This is an indication that gender roles in the military are strong enough that married female service members with children face challenges to enter and stay in the military. Chelsea explained her reasoning for leaving:

It got to a point where we realized that's not the life we wanted for our daughter... We just want some stability and continuity... It just got really hard looking at our small, innocent baby and thinking how many times do we need to put her through the trauma of one or both of us being gone for extended periods. Quite frankly, my husband sold his soul to the army... It was a tough decision, but we made the decision that I would get out and go to the reserves... There were challenges that we could overcome and I was willing to overcome... Then we sat down and really looked at it... Is it worth it? Do we really, really want to put our kids through endless cycles of this? So we chose not to. To make it work, I got out and did the reserve thing, which has been wonderful, and much better family life.

While Daijah was not fully out of the military during the interview, the reason she was working to get out was because she did not like being separated from her children. She also believed her deployments were impacting the well-being of her children as their environments were often changing due to deployments or a change in duty station.

Dani decided to get out when 9/11 hit because until that point, she had been deploying more than her husband and as she expressed, "I feared that both of us were going to have to deploy and I wasn't going to leave my children without one of us." Dani said, "that kind of determined my future as far as the military, but it also kind of put us back into those roles where mom should probably stay home and dad should deploy."

Chauncie's son had some challenges during her last deployment and was having behavioral issues, so Chauncie left the deployment to take care of the situation with her son. She said, "That was rough for me. That's when I made my decision, okay this is it. That's my last deployment. I would not deploy again in my life." For these four women, tensions between

maternal roles and roles as a soldier were so strong that they chose to get out of the military and focus on maternal roles. This supports the idea that messages surrounding role tensions can be constructed as both/and or as either/or. In the case of these four women, they viewed the tensions from an either/or dynamic and they used the strategy of reaffirmation/reframing to escape the tensions through metacommunication or by actually leaving the environment (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, Baxter, 1998).

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This study explored contextual factors that influence communication and the communication patterns used by married female service members with children to negotiate roles and responsibilities upon reintegration from deployment. Results reflect varied experiences and provide useful information for those involved in or supporting military families throughout the deployment cycle, especially during the reintegration stage of deployment as families negotiate roles and responsibilities (Agazio et al., 2012). This chapter considers the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

When married military mothers deploy, they are modifying cultural expectations of mothering (Johnston & Swanson, 2007) as they leave their families for lengthy periods of time and are unable to perform traditional gender roles and responsibilities. It is for this reason that the deployment cycle provides affordance to intervene, disrupt and change gender roles/expectations. As these female service members are required to physically separate from their families and homes, they have to relinquish responsibilities. While this might be a chance to renegotiate childcare and household responsibilities, gender role norms present in participant interviews indicate deeply embedded parent and domestic roles in our society. Even with the opportunity to divide childcare and domestic labor more equitably upon return from deployment, mothering ideology among these participants was so prevalent that military mothers fell back into and even actively sought out traditional gender roles to mitigate role tensions. Some married female service members with children believed their childcare roles are separate from the title of mother and that their responsibilities were shared equally with their spouse. However, examining the ways these women communicated about role negotiation with their spouses upon reintegration, they indicated that were doing more household and childcare tasks and practicing

traditional gender role patterns. Even the women who claimed to have evenly split tasks, later in interviews indicated that they divided the tasks based on typical gender role norms.

Whether the women discussed roles through verbal communication or did not discuss roles and relied on nonverbal communication, the military mother participants perceived that their husbands (and in some cases other family members) thought the wives should take over childcare and household responsibilities upon return from deployment. Even when the participants acknowledged that their husbands were capable, they actively reassumed roles and responsibilities to affirm their motherhood identity. This phenomenon demonstrates role dialectics are at play.

When the military mothers communicated with their spouse or other family members, they adjusted their behaviors to fit the expectations of themselves and others to fit gendered roles. By simply taking over childcare and household responsibilities or having their husbands surrender childcare and household responsibilities, these women felt their identity was affirmed. Dani specifically discussed that when she went on her first deployment her husband failed at caring for the household and family, so when she returned she felt needed. By affirming and reassuming traditional roles and responsibilities, role tensions are reduced as these women re-acclimate into the family system. These responsibilities were a signifier of their membership into the family.

While these married military mothers did not talk about feeling guilty, the tension of being away from their families seemed to snap them back into these traditionally gendered positions upon return. As Julie implied by saying, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” having time, space and distance away from children makes these military mothers appreciate

them more and welcome the responsibilities back. Ultimately, the deployment reintegration phase triggers the need to compensate or make up for missed time.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Responding to a call for future research to look at role dialectics within other organizational structures (Apker et al., 2005) this study considers the concept of role dialectics in the military, especially in regard to married military mothers. Role dialectics is a fairly new theory and the results of this study move role dialectics forward in two ways. First, rather than focusing solely on organizational roles, this study provides an approach to role dialectics that examines the ongoing tensions and conflicting expectations that shape familial roles between married military mothers and their spouse during the deployment cycle. Second, as role dialectics includes strategies used to manage role contradictions, this study expounded on the different ways verbal and nonverbal communication can be used to communicatively manage role tensions. This study indicates that verbally communicating about expectations creates a clearer understanding between spouses rather than relying on nonverbal communication which leaves couples to rely only on their perception of the nonverbal cues.

Married military mothers who did not verbally communicate about responsibilities had unclear goals, boundaries and perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Non-verbal communication was less effective in renegotiating roles as the women took on more responsibilities due to their perceptions. Verbal communication about role negotiation was more effective for married military mothers as they had a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities whether or not the roles and responsibilities were equally distributed. Despite communication patterns, the women were always responsible for more than their spouse. While some women used reaffirmation to escape tensions, this strategy was ineffective as women

choose either being a mother or being a soldier, causing some mothers to leave the military institution.

The findings provide information about effective communication practices to help married military mothers navigate tensions and assist military families with constructive communication strategies. Regardless of the time and space separation from traditional gender roles during deployment, married military mothers and their families still experience challenges negotiating roles and responsibilities in the reintegration stage of deployment and take on more traditional roles and responsibilities after deployment. These findings suggest changes could be made in the military as an institution and within families. The military and the family are both considered greedy institutions (Segal, 1986) causing particular tensions for married military mothers who deal with competing messages between being a mother who gives all of their efforts to their family (Segal, 1989) and a soldier who gives their all to the military (Howard & Prividera, 2006; Kamzler et al., 2011).

First, military institutions should have more public conversations with soldiers acknowledging the history of masculinity in the military which marginalizes women (Sahlstein et al., 2009) and the impact it has on gender roles in contemporary military families in order to create more flexibility in roles and responsibilities within families. It is important to have these conversations as these cultural expectations of motherhood and the historic norms of masculinity in the military are so customary that they often go unquestioned and are not only accepted, but reproduced in the familial and military structures. Having open discussions about these unquestioned norms creates an environment for challenging cultural norms and reestablishing connotations surrounding gender and gendered roles. It is in these conversations that individuals are able to find new language to describe roles and responsibilities. For example, language could

be revisited when talking about military spouses, a term that is almost synonymously understood to mean “military wives” in military terminology due to the historically masculine environment of the military (Smith et al., 2017).

Next, while the women did not focus only on one communication strategy, all 11 women used denial, spiraling inversion/segmentation, balance or reaffirmation. The findings from this study show that the use of denial, spiraling inversion/segmentation, balance or reaffirmation as communication strategies do not work in equally renegotiating roles and responsibilities between military spouses after the female soldier returns from deployment. While these strategies may have given short term relief from tensions, these strategies allow women to eventually reintegrate back into traditional gendered roles with less communicative tension. Denial, spiraling inversion/segmentation, balance or reaffirmation are only temporary solutions to relieving tensions as relational partners are able to refuse the existence of tensions, alternate between the contradiction needing the most attention at a particular time, or compromise by partly fulfilling each tension (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The women who used reaffirmation as a strategy are actually accepting the tensions as a normal part of life.

Some participants used reframing as a strategy. One participant discussed tensions faced upon return from deployment, she used the strategy of reframing to communicatively negotiate tensions. However in the moment she dealt with the tensions using spiraling inversion and she catered to the expectations of motherhood based on what others around her thought she should do. All four of the women who used reframing as a strategy ended up leaving the military, removing themselves from the contradicting poles. Based on the findings of this study, if women want to negotiate roles and responsibilities more equally with their spouse upon reintegration

from deployment, they should avoid denial, spiraling inversion/segmentation, balance, reaffirmation, and reframing (by leaving the actual environment).

Instead women should practice other communicative strategies to deal with tensions that may produce lasting change. Focusing on integration, recalibration, and reframing (through metacommunication) may lessen tensions women face in negotiating roles and responsibilities with their spouse as these strategies address both poles, lower the intensity of the poles or frame the contradictions differently so that they no longer cause tensions (Baxter, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Military institutions should also consider implementing educational programs specifically geared toward non-traditional military families to prepare female service members and their families for the deployment cycle, but specifically the reintegration phase of deployment in order to assist families in role negotiation after deployment. The programs should be mandatory for both partners and should occur prior to deployment and during the reintegration phase of deployment. Pre-deployment programs should inform non-traditional military families of common stressors and challenges they may face throughout the deployment cycle, teaching open communication skills and specific strategies to manage tensions surrounding the negotiation roles and responsibilities. These trainings could help couples find suitable strategies specific to their family needs. In the first set of training programs the military should introduce couples to the strategies of integration, recalibration, and reframing (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) to use at home with their families. The pre-deployment trainings would focus on integration, recalibration, and reframing as a way to promote long term healthy processes for addressing tensions.

The strategy of integration would allow military couples to address competing tensions at the same time. Integration may include statements where women express to their spouse the tensions they experience from their desire to work in the military and also be a mother or upon return from deployment. Women might talk to their spouse about wanting to be a family and also wanting time alone to reintegrate at their own pace. Next, recalibration would assist the couples in communicating about the tensions in a way that makes them less contradictory in turn lessening the intensity of the competing tensions. Recalibration would allow female service members to discuss their work without having to view responsibilities for their children as an issue that interrupts work. The female service member who wants time alone after deployment would not be labeled not wanting to spend time with the family; rather, her actions could be seen as taking care of mental well-being. Lastly, reframing would go a step further allowing the couples to completely alter the way they talk about contradictions making them no longer competing tensions giving the issue new meaning (Baxter, 1998; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Reframing is the most difficult of the three strategies as individuals are asked to alter their entire perspective of the tensions. A discussion using reframing might redefine work as an enrichment to mothering or independence might be redefined as an enhancement of togetherness. Integration, recalibration, and reframing communication strategies allow couples to use verbal communication to talk about tensions they are facing while addressing the tensions head on.

Upon return from deployment, the couples should go back to the reintegration trainings. Over the first few weeks home from deployment the partners should attend a series of three reintegration trainings. During trainings, the couples will review the strategies of integration, recalibration, and reframing. It would be beneficial for the couples to work in small groups with other couples who may be experiencing similar situations. In the groups and throughout the

trainings couples can begin discussing tensions or issues they are facing within the first few weeks home. During the trainings the families will be guided through various processes to work through tensions using integration, recalibration, and reframing. These trainings should be gender neutral and discuss differing family dynamics, but ultimately the goal should be to promote open communication within families to address the needs of each partner rather than focusing on gendered norms.

As for military family practices, married couples should take the information from the trainings and work to implement similar strategies at home. Spouses who have positive communication interactions during their deployment have better spousal communication and tend to be more satisfied with their marriage after deployment, therefore couples should strive to have open communication where they can discuss tensions with their partner from the beginning of the deployment cycle. Focusing on uplifting and open spousal communication, military spouses with children should attempt to communicatively make sense of messages that create tension (Tracy, 2004). Role dialectics deals with the contradictions within relationships and how they are managed, asserting that behaviors associated with certain roles are learned from the expectations of others. At all stages of deployment, couples should be intentional about openly discussing their expectations, being willing to change and not take on permanent roles and responsibilities. Partners should consider their individual expectations and the expectations of their partner and be willing to renegotiate roles and responsibilities fluidly depending on their family needs. Focusing on integration, recalibration, and reframing will help families communicate more openly to discover what works best for them during the deployment cycle.

Limitations and Future Direction

While this study advances theory and provides many practical implications for military populations, there are suggestions to improve future studies interested in married military mothers and role negotiation. Snowball sampling was a strategic choice to reach a population that is difficult to access, but this recruitment strategy lead to a sample of all heterosexual couples. While this sample is representative of the largely heterosexual married couples in the military (Karney & Crown, 2007; Pawelczyk, 2016), other couple configurations might experience the negotiation of roles and responsibilities upon reintegration differently than the couples in this study, such as step-families, transgender individuals or same-sex couples. As seen with the one step-family in the study, reintegration may be more or less challenging depending on the relationship of the step-families as well as the amount of time and responsibility the step-mother has for her step-children. Future research with step-families may look at how roles and responsibilities are communicated with not only the husband and wife but the step-parent and the biological parent.

Future research should also focus on couple configurations that fall outside of a heterosexual binary, however finding couples outside of heterosexual relationships presents challenges in the military context. In 2016 RAND completed a study on transgender service members and estimated that there were between 1,320 and 6, 630 of the 1.3 million active service members who may be transgender. In 2010, out of the 1.2 million men and 200,000 women, 26,000 men and 21,000 women self-identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Rostker, Hosek & Vaiana, 2011). However, these numbers cannot be accurate as members of the LGBTQ community may not feel safe expressing their gender identity with the marginalization they have faced in the military context. While the 1993 Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policy banning

transgender individuals from the military was repealed on September 20th, 2011 allowing transgender service members to openly serve in the military (Dietert & Dentice, 2015), on July 26th, 2017, Trump recently announced that transgender people would not be able to serve in the military in any capacity (Gonzalez, Ramirez & Galupo, 2018).

Recognizing the importance of alternative family configurations this study is not intended to re-create gender role expectations. Future research should focus on how varying couple configurations (e.g. step-families, same-sex couples, transgender couples) experience the negotiation of roles and responsibilities upon reintegration. Conducting this research may indicate different communication patterns or strategies for negotiating role contradictions outside of heterosexual relationships. One study by Bauer (2016) found that same sex-couples have less segregation of tasks sharing housework and other tasks more equally. Studying same-sex couples in the military might provide more insight to different gender ideologies and different strategies for negotiation during the reintegration stage of deployment. Future scholars interested in this research can extend this study findings by exploring current military reintegration programs and language used in the military to understand how the military contributes to role dialectics.

Due to the challenges of accessing married female service members with children, the choice was made to consider any family of female service members who were married with children under 18 during at least one deployment. However, there were some important factors that seemed to impact communication in the reintegration stage as roles and responsibilities were negotiated. This study revealed that there were different role tensions in families with young children verses families with older children. Parents of younger children were unable to fully explain to their children what was happening during the deployment cycle due to the child's inability to comprehend or verbally communicate. Children's age contributed to different

findings pertaining to how military mothers experienced the transition of assuming responsibilities and the ability for children to remember their parents. Therefore, it would be useful for future research to look at role dialectics throughout the life cycle based on age of the children. Findings may shed light on the development of role tensions, including when role tensions begin and allowing for solutions to manage these tensions at an earlier age.

Tensions also varied between other factors outside the scope of this study such as: extended family support, reason for return from deployment, length of deployment, number of deployments, length of marriage and whether the couples were dual-military couples or military-civilian couples. Future research should hone in on these various factors to see how they may impact role dialectics during the reintegration phase of deployment.

Additionally, the women in this study talked about how they just picked right back up where they left off before deployment and how they just knew what roles and responsibilities they were supposed to fulfill, however they had a difficult time articulating the conversation they had that informed these roles and responsibilities. It might be useful for future research to observe the negotiation of roles and responsibilities of these women after deployment through case studies. Case studies would allow researchers to gain a more detailed account of role negotiation during the span of a deployment cycle.

Another way to enhance understanding of the role negotiation process would be to interview couples together to hear both perspectives, helping military mothers talk through tensions and the process they went through during reintegration. Couple interviews could provide an unbiased, more comprehensive, and impartial understanding of the role negotiation after deployment. The current study included a one-time interview with married female service members with children at some point after they had experienced a deployment. Future scholars

may consider a longitudinal study to examine if there was a difference over time for women who recently integrated after a deployment and then looking at that same group of participants over a five year span.

Many of the participants in this study embraced gender roles, this act makes it difficult for change as the tensions are masked and the narrative that mothering is a responsibility for women continues. The women in this study described equal childcare and household responsibilities and justified the imbalance of responsibilities between their husbands. Future research might explore the discourse of “equal” and how when women justify their partners’ contributions, they affirm feminine identity, but make things less equal. Researchers could also benefit by investigating the implications of justification as a communication practice.

Four women decided to get out of the military and at the time of the interview another woman was working on getting out; these five women represent almost half of the women who were interviewed. Future research should consider role dialectics and identity construction of the “good mother” and “good wife” roles, which contribute to women leaving military service. Finally, future researchers should observe how military rank makes a difference. While there was only one ranking officer in this study, her experiences differed from the rest of the participants.

Despite the limitations, this study enhances the understanding of role dialectics in familial organizations, specifically important contextual factors that shape communication and the difference between verbal and nonverbal communication patterns surrounding role negotiation and strategies for married military mothers and their spouses upon reintegration of deployment. This study also provided important theoretical implications for role dialectics, as well as practical implications for effective communication practices to assist military families during the deployment cycle.

Conclusion

Applying role dialectics to the reintegration stage of deployment, this study examined the communication patterns that emerged as the female service members with children (and one mother with step-children) constructed and negotiated roles and responsibilities with their spouse. This study observed how roles were constructed and negotiated between these women and their partners upon return from deployment based on perceived expectations, leading these female service members to actively reassume traditional gender roles and responsibilities upon return from deployment. The expectations of women, mothers and workers shape married military mothers and their perceptions of their roles. Understanding the impact of communication on role construction and role negotiation in shaping the experience military families, military reintegration programs and prospective female service members can implement changes to improve military and family institutions. While the reintegration stage of deployment is challenging, this stage of deployment can also be an opportunity for married military mothers to step away from traditional gender roles, explore new roles and renegotiate roles to be more equitable upon return from deployment.

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Appendix A - Interview Protocol

RQ1: What factors impact the way married female service members with children negotiate roles and responsibilities through communication with their spouse upon reintegration?

RQ2: How do married female service members with children negotiate roles through communication with their spouse upon reintegration?

Build Rapport

1. Tell me a little about yourself...
 - a. When did you decide to go into the military?
 - b. Why did you decide to go into the military?
 - c. What is your military occupational specialty (MOS)?
 - d. At what age did you decide to join the military?
 - e. How many deployments have you experienced in this time?
 - f. During these deployments were you married with children?
2. Please tell me a little bit about your family?
 - a. Tell me a little bit about how you and your spouse met...
 - b. How long have you been married?
 - c. You mentioned _____ about your husband, can you tell me a little bit about what your husband does?
 - d. When did you and your spouse decide to have children?
 - e. Tell me about your children...

Generative Questions

1. How long has it been since you got back from your last deployment?
2. How was the transition from being deployed to being back home been?
 - a. When did you or when do you plan to be back at work?
3. Describe your daily routine from work-life to life at home now that you are back from deployment.
 - a) How does your spouse fit into this routine?
 - b) How do you and your spouse make sure everything is taken care of?
 - c) How do you know what responsibilities are yours?
 - d) How is your routine different or the same from when you were deployed?
4. When you first returned from deployment, what was different in regard to your responsibilities?
 - a) Can you explain what it was like to come home to these responsibilities?
5. When you returned from deployment, how did you know what household responsibilities/roles you were supposed to fulfill?
 - a) In what ways does your spouse communicate to you about these household responsibilities? For example, do you leave each other notes or do you set up schedules?
6. Thinking back to your deployment to now, what is different in regard to your responsibilities with your children?
 - a) What are some of the things you know you have to do for your children daily?
 - b) How do you know what you needed to take care of in regard to the children?
 - c) How do you and your spouse communicate about childcare responsibilities?
7. If you could trade places with your spouse for one day, what care-giving and household responsibilities would he now be responsible for and what would you be responsible for?

- a) To what extent do your childcare and household responsibilities stay consistent or change from day to day?
- b) In deciding who will be responsible for what, can you discuss any possible barriers in communicating with your spouse about care-giving and household responsibilities?
- c) Can you think of a time when you were unable to fulfill one or more of these childcare or household responsibilities? What was the consequence of being unable to fulfill these responsibilities? What did your spouse do or say to you in this instance?
- d) Have you ever been frustrated by your spouse in regard to certain responsibilities and how did you express yourself to him?

Appendix B - Demographic Questionnaire

1. How old are you?

2. What is your race? (Check all that apply)

____Hispanic/Latino(a) ____American Indian ____Black/African American

____Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ____White/Caucasian ____Asian ____Other

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)

____Some high school ____High school Graduate ____Some college

____Completed an undergraduate degree ____Completed a post-graduate degree

4. How many years have you been in the military?

5. What is your military rank?

6. What is your marital status? (Check one)

____Married ____Single, never married ____Separated or divorced ____Widowed

7. If married, how many years have you been married?

8. Do you have children? (Check one)

____Yes ____No

9. If yes, how many children do you have?

10. How old were your children when you returned from the most recent deployment?

11. If you have a pseudonym (fake name) that you would like me to use for you in this study, please write it in the space below:
