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"It's This Simple, You Really Have to Want to Be Together": A Qualitative Study of African American Military Couples

Emelda Curry
University of South Florida, melcurry01@gmail.com

”It’s This Simple, You Really Have to Want to be Together”:

A Qualitative Study of African American Military Couples

By

Emelda E. Curry

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Department of Applied Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: S. Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D.
Susan D. Greenbaum, Ph.D.
Heide Castañeda, Ph.D.
Kenneth Williamson, Ph.D.
Aaron Smith, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Alphonso and Pearl Curry. The love and commitment you have demonstrated in your marriage inspired me. Your endless support and encouragement sustained me during a process that included many highs and lows. In the collective spirit of our ancestors, I can triumphantly proclaim “We Did It!”

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Abstract

Recent studies have reported that African American couples in the military are less likely to divorce than their civilian counterparts. This dissertation was designed to document the experiences of African American military couples in order to understand the challenges they face while serving in the armed forces and the strategies they have used to maintain their marriages. A grounded theory approach was utilized to produce 12 main themes that categorize experiences of both the individual and the couple within the context of their respective military branch. Photo-elicitation was incorporated into semi-structured interviews with 10 couples to identify what they consider to be the important aspects of their marriage, the ways in which their relationships were impacted by the demands of duty, and their perspectives on the role that race plays in an institution that has been characterized as relatively race-neutral.

Chapter One

Introduction

This project initially began as a protest against the numerous reports that have emerged about the staggering divorce rate in the United States, particularly in the African American community. Although I have witnessed friends and family go through divorces, I also see a number of long-term marriages that are seemingly stable. The news media blitz about the decline of marriage in my community is discouraging to someone who considers herself to be an advocate of healthy marriages. I'm not exactly sure how I came to be such a strong proponent of the institution of marriage but I know it has something to do with watching my parents who after 54 years make it obvious that not only do they love each other but they actually still like each other. I may never know what it's like to be with someone every day for 54 years and still like that person but I marvel at the idea and those who do it. It takes real commitment, patience, tolerance and all the other fruits of the Spirit to spend year after year in the most intimate of relationships and not become a divorce statistic. I admit that I am a romantic, although much less than I used to be, yet I'm much more realistic about the complexities of being in marital relationship -- at least as realistic as one who has never been married can be. Through observation of the long-term marriages in my life, I understand that there must be flexibility in allowing a spouse to be the person he is and not the person you want him to be. One of my mother's classic declarations is "You know why I love your daddy? Because he allows me to be myself!"

Background of Researcher

The term “military brat” is used to describe the children of active-duty military personnel and a lifestyle that typically includes frequent relocations, living on a military base, and coping with stresses associated with the absence of one or both parents due to sometimes dangerous job-related responsibilities. Unlike my older brother and sister, I am a quasi-military brat. My father retired as a Master Sergeant from the Air Force soon after my birth so I didn’t experience many of those elements of the military brat lifestyle. However, I was familiar with many of the benefits offered to retirees and their dependents, such as grocery shopping at the base commissary and eating at the Non-Commissioned Officers Club for Sunday dinners after church. I also received much of my medical care at the base hospital. It could be said that I enjoyed the perks of being a military brat without the challenges.

It is my brother’s thirty-two year naval career and observations of his family that increased my familiarity with the military lifestyle. He married soon after graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy, had four children, and just celebrated thirty years of marriage. Over the years, I visited him and his family at the various duty stations where he was assigned including Norfolk, Virginia, Newport, Rhode Island, and San Diego, California. I witnessed some Navy traditions that celebrate career changes, such as the “hail-and-farewell” ceremony to commemorate a ship’s change in command and the retirement ceremony when a military career comes to an end. I attended military social functions hosted by my brother and his wife that were more compulsory than

voluntary if he wanted to advance up the chain of command. For my family and our friends, the fact that he is African-American underscores all of his achievements because we know there are few minorities among the officer ranks and that they are not exempt from the racial and ethnic politics that exist in civilian society.

I was amazed at how frequently they moved (which occurred every two to three years) and I particularly admired the resilience of my sister-in-law. It was obvious that she took great care to establish a sense of stability for her family, from the way she decorated their home to her active involvement in the lives of the children. She occasionally worked outside the home to supplement the household income and for personal fulfillment but her priority was always the welfare of the children and my brother's career, which meant she was unable to maintain long-term employment. When I became old enough to realize the significance of her sacrifice, I greatly admired her commitment to my brother and their family but ultimately decided I would never marry anyone in the military. However, their experiences are the catalyst for my interest in military couples and families and led me to conduct this dissertation research.

Research on Military Couples

Military members serving during this time of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan have served in unprecedented multiple and longer deployments than has been customary, thus compounding their exposure to combat and jeopardizing marriage and family stability (1994b:74; Karney and Crown 2007; Lester, et al. 2010; Merolla 2010; Ruger, et al. 2002; Spera 2009). However,

despite the perceived negative impact of military duty on marital stability, there is a paucity of literature about the prevalence of divorce in the military. In general, enlistees who marry at younger ages are 54% more likely to divorce than comparable civilians (Lundquist 2007). There also appear to be gender differences in military divorce rates. For example, two studies found that military men are less likely to get divorced than civilian men, yet military women are more likely to get divorced than their civilian counterparts (Adler-Baeder, et al. 2005; Pollard, et al. 2008). Karney and Crown (2007) found that the most stable military marriages involve a military husband and a civilian wife whereas the least stable involves a military wife and a civilian husband, with dual-military marriages falling somewhere in between. However, this pattern was not found for African Americans, among whom dual-service marriages are associated with a lower divorce rate (Lundquist 2006).

Research on African-American Military Couples

While studies have shown that African Americans have markedly higher rates of divorce than whites, this gap is not seen within the military context where black military marriages appear to be more stable than their civilian counterparts. Although one researcher found that African-Americans military couples have lower marital dissolution rates when compared to both their black and white military counterparts, possible explanations accounting for the differences are tentative (Lundquist 2006; Lundquist 2007). Lundquist speculates that black military couples experience similar marital stressors as black civilian couples and are therefore more immune to hardships than white military couples. However,

this explanation doesn't support findings that black enlisted members are also less likely to divorce than their black counterparts in the civilian world (Lundquist 2006). In addition, the data utilized for this study are dated and only include enlisted military personnel which may not provide an accurate portrayal of the experiences of black officers. Addressing these gaps in the literature, by utilizing an anthropological perspective, will contribute a more complete picture of contemporary life in the military for African Americans.

Therefore, in an effort to understand how the military may mitigate marital stressors, leading to a more stable marriage, I explored the lived experiences of black married couples in the military. My research questions include:

a. What marital challenges do military couples experience?
b. How do military couples build stable marriages?
c. Do African-American military couples face distinctive issues or challenges?

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter two focuses on the institution of marriage and outlines how anthropology has contributed to the study of marriage as well as the approaches that have commonly been applied in research on the African American community. The section continues with an examination of seminal studies on black families and a brief review of research assessing the marital success of black couples. I conclude with a discussion about how existing literature has impacted current policy that promotes marriage education and public benefits.

Chapter three discusses the culture of the military, including an overview of the service branches, and how anthropology has contributed to what is currently known about the military as an organization. The literature review

analyzes how other disciplines have addressed the issues of race and gender, particularly the experiences of African Americans and women in the military, as well as how service members cope with deployments, which are an integral part of military life. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at how military spouses are portrayed in the literature and the programs that each service branch has to support families.

Chapter four provides details about how I approached the research project, the evolution of the selection and recruitment process of study participants, and a description of the military base where most of the participants are employed. The chapter concludes with a description of how data were analyzed, couple demographics and ethical considerations in the research.

In chapter five, I introduce the 10 couples by providing information about how they came to participate in the research, length of military service, length of marriage and whether they are active-duty or retired. The vignettes also recount how the couple met and researcher impressions. The remainder of the chapter presents 12 main themes that emerged from the data collected during the interviews.

Chapter six discusses the results by revisiting the research questions. I also briefly discuss the methodology, particularly the effectiveness of using photo elicitation and a combination of individual and joint interviews. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and possibilities for future research.

Chapter Two

Research on African-American Families

Introduction

The literature about the African-American family is dominated by studies examining the association between poverty and family structure, generally leading to conclusions about the deterioration of the black family. In this chapter, I will describe the contributions of anthropology to the study of marriage, followed by the primary approaches utilized in research on the African-American community including the "culture of poverty" perspective, the deficit-focused model and the strengths-based model. I continue with a discussion of formative studies on African-American families and a review of current research about marital quality. I conclude with a discussion about the impact and implications of existing literature on policymaking.

Anthropology of Marriage

The discipline of anthropology has historically examined marriage within the context of kinship structures and alliances that are foundational to the organization of societies. Researchers have documented the variations in kinship and family arrangements, how these arrangements function in different societies, and what they mean to those who are living within these arrangements. The earliest anthropological analyses of marriage examined questions concerning the origin and development of marriage, the nature of matriarchy and patriarchy, communal marriage, the incest taboo and the role of blood ties, lineage and descent (Borneman 1996).

Two perspectives emerged in the first half of the 20th century that analyzed marriage and its function in society, alliance theory and descent theory. A major proponent of alliance theory was Claude Levi-Strauss who was instrumental in the development of kinship studies. In alliance theory, the primary focus is on the relationship among groups, mediated by "preferential marriage and the incest taboo" which determines the conditions for exchange (Borneman 1996:221). Marriage between social groups is used to ensure the perpetuation of societies and the nuclear family is the central element in social organization. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown was the most prominent supporter of descent theory, which unlike alliance theory, privileges unilineal descent groups as the primary determinant in social organization. In other words, consanguineal relationships or blood ties are most important in determining the perpetuation of generations, a central theme in subsequent research on African American families.

Since the late 19th century, anthropologists have studied marriage as a byproduct of other units of analysis such as kinship, gender, power, and political economy and declared it "as the definitive ritual and universally translatable regulative ideal of human societies" (Borneman 1996:215-216). For example, in an effort to understand the subordination of women, feminist anthropologists have focused on marriage "because it seem[s] to play a crucial role in subordinating wives to husbands by rendering alternatives to marriage untenable" (Yanagisako and Collier 1996). Anthropologists have also critiqued the heteronormative view of marriage that is prevalent not only in state and

federal policy but also in anthropological research (Boellstorff 2005; Borneman 2005).

Some contemporary work examining the language and cultural models associated with marriage has emerged from cognitive anthropology. Quinn (1982) conducted an analysis of the word "commitment" and its shared understanding among Americans. According to her research, there are three concepts with which the word 'commitment" is associated: promise, dedication, and attachment (Quinn 1982). Quinn states that "because knowledge of word use is shared, words carry culturally shared understanding; and abstract words such as 'commitment', which organize complex relations among concepts, play a large role in such understanding" (1982:794). Quinn (1996) has also written about how individuals reason about marriage and puts forth a cultural model of marriage that seems to apply to many Americans:

> Marriages are ideally lasting, shared, and mutually beneficial. Marriages that are not shared will not be mutually beneficial, and those not mutually beneficial will not last. Benefit is a matter of fulfillment. Spouses must be compatible in order for their marriages to be fulfilling and hence beneficial. Fulfillment and, especially, the compatibility it requires are difficult to realize, but this difficulty can be overcome and compatibility and fulfillment achieved with effort. Lasting marriages in which difficulty has been overcome by effort are regarded as successful ones. Achievement of a lasting, successful marriage is, of course, the point of the story (Quinn 1996:402).

This model was developed in response to a book titled *Habits of the Heart* in which the authors assert that there are two contradictory models of marriage in America. The first model portrays marriage as an institution whose function is to serve as a source of psychological and emotional gratification. Individuals who

hold this perspective view marriage primarily as an opportunity for personal growth and self-fulfillment. In contrast, the second model emphasizes the older social function of marriage that connects individuals in committed relationships to the larger society (Bellah 1985). The researchers state that these models can be looked at as extremes on a continuum in which most individuals choose to accept one perspective over the other, sacrificing either their marriage or personal fulfillment or they subconsciously compartmentalize those contradictory ideas to avoid contradiction and subsequently, internal conflict (Quinn 1996). However, Quinn argues that in actuality, many couples have found a way to deal with the internal conflict between a commitment to lasting marriage and a belief in self-fulfillment by using the model she describes to decide what to do when problems arise in their own marriages (Quinn 1996).

Approaches to Research on the African American Family

Research on African-American relationships, marriages and families has primarily focused on the link between poverty and family structure, and reflects two dominant frameworks: the deficit approach and the adaptable or strengths-based approach(Dixon 2007). The deficit approach is problem-oriented and tends to make comparisons between African-American families and the nuclear family model, leading to the determination of black families as “deviant, and in some cases ‘pathological’”(Dixon 2007:1) The underlying argument is that inadequate family structure causes most poverty, and that poverty rates would be lower if families conformed to the nuclear family structure, and remained stable (Zinn 1989).

The adaptable or strengths-based approach primarily developed as a response to assumptions about deficit and pathology regarding the black community. Proponents argue that any differences in the domestic arrangements of African-American families are attributed to their experiences of systemic marginalization and not due to a lack of morality or skewed value system (Dodson 2007; Smith, et al. 2001). Nobles (2007) defines family strength as "any process or network of interactions that aids or helps individuals in anticipating, addressing, interpreting, managing, or otherwise successfully responding to their concrete conditions or situations" (2007:74). Therefore, examining black families from a strengths-perspective helps understand why, despite hostile environments or negative social problems, some families have survived and in many cases have thrived (O'Brien, et al. 2004). While both the deficit approach and strengths-based perspective acknowledge the oppressive conditions of racism in U.S. society and the tremendous negative impact of slavery on black families, they diverge on what should be the primary focus of inquiry.

Formative Research on the African American Family

Melville Herskovits

Anthropologist Melville Herskovits was one of the first researchers to investigate similarities in cultural behavioral patterns between continental Africans and those of African descent living in the Americas: the United States, the West Indies, the Caribbean, and Brazil. Among these groups, he found evidence of commonalities in their use of language, music, art, house structure,

dance, traditional religion, and healing practices (Dodson 2007). Herskovits' research was pivotal because it was conducted at a time when the prevailing idea was that African Americans were devoid of any cultural ties to their African heritage. In his book *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits outlined some assumptions that he believed supported racial prejudice in the U.S. and rationalized discrimination in the everyday interactions between blacks and whites. Two of those assumptions clearly illustrate the conventional wisdom of the time:

> Since the Negroes were brought from all parts of the African continent, spoke divers languages, represented greatly differing bodies of custom, and, as a matter of policy, were distributed in the New World so as to lose tribal identity, no least common denominator of understanding or behavior could have possibly been worked out by them…Even granting enough Negroes of a given tribe had the opportunity to live together, and that they had the will and ability to continue their customary modes of behavior, the cultures of Africa were so savage and relatively so low in the scale of human civilization that the apparent superiority of European customs as observed in the behavior of their masters, would have caused and actually did cause them to give up such aboriginal traditions as they may otherwise have desired to preserve. (Herskovits 1958:1-2)

While Herskovits' research was mainly ignored by those who espoused a deficit-focused approach, it prompted other family researchers to study how aspects of African culture influenced features of the African-American family in the U.S. (Young 1970).

E. Franklin Frazier

The first in-depth study of the black family was conducted by sociologist E. Franklin Frazier who was interested in how race relations as a social process was demonstrated through the black family (Staples 1986). Frazier argued that

variations in marital practices grew out of the social institution of slavery; and the subsequent patterns of racism and economic marginalization begun by slavery continued to impact the family life of African Americans (Frazier 1939). The variations to which Frazier referred are: (1) the matriarchal character of the black family in which the roles of males are marginal and ineffective; (2) the instability of marital relationships resulting from the prohibition of marriage among slaves, which prevented the institution of marriage from having a strong position in the black community; and (3) the dissolution of stable family life among rural blacks caused by the process of urbanization (Frazier 1939). These issues put forth in Franklin's seminal study would be revisited by scholars searching to address the problems of black families in the U.S.

The Moynihan Report

The most notable study utilizing a deficit framework is Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (1965) report, *The Negro Family in the U.S.: The Case for National Action*. In his analysis of economic and demographic trends for 1940-1963, Moynihan argued that there was a strong association between poverty and family structure, particularly in the black community. He noted that "there is a considerable body of evidence to support the conclusion that Negro social structure, in particular the Negro family, battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting, is in the deepest trouble" and "so long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself" (Moynihan 1965:Introduction). While Moynihan acknowledged that a history of injustice created the conditions in which many black families are found, he stated

that blacks are responsible for perpetuating the “tangle of pathology” that characterizes the family structure including: (1) out-of-wedlock births, (2) divorce, (3)female-headed households, and (4) welfare dependency (Moynihan 1965:29). He pointed out that nearly a quarter of black women were divorced, nearly a quarter of black babies were born out-of-wedlock, that almost a quarter of black families were headed by females, and “the breakdown of the Negro family has led to a startling increase in welfare dependency” (Moynihan 1965:12). What isn’t mentioned, however, is that 75% of black families actually met his criteria for stability.

There was, and continues to be, considerable controversy regarding the Moynihan report. His supporters see his assessment as prophetic and point to current rates of marital dissolution and nonmarital births in the black community (Haskins 2009; McLanahan 2009). Moynihan’s critics disagree with his stance that the perpetuation of poverty in the black community is due to inherent psychological and behavioral characteristics of the poor; a condition that without intervention will keep blacks locked into poverty through the generational transfer of maladaptive behaviors. His focus on race rather than class is also disputed among social scientists who deem the report as misguided (Furstenberg 2009). Generally, political ideologies between liberal accounts and conservative views on poverty are the basis for one’s position on the controversy, with liberals emphasizing structural causes such as discrimination and conservatives focusing on the importance of group values and individual responsibility (Wilson 1985; Furstenberg 2009).

Class-Distinctions

Moynihan's report spurred numerous studies that associated family structure with poverty and subsequently influenced many of the programs and policies developed that largely impacted black families such as Head Start, Job Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Much of the research focused primarily on low-income black families who received public assistance and resided in public housing or urban ghettos but their findings are generally accepted as applicable to all blacks in the U.S. Although Moynihan acknowledged that "…many young Negroes are moving ahead to unprecedented levels of achievement" (Moynihan 1965:3), African Americans are still viewed as monolithic and linked to data regarding low-income families (Peters 2007). The black working class, middle-class, and upper class were, and continue to be largely ignored in mainstream literature about the family (Hill 2005).

Despite the focus on the low-income population, there are some studies worth noting that acknowledge the variation in socioeconomic class among African-Americans. W.E.B. DuBois identified four social classes of black Americans: (1) "the well to do, (2) the decent hard workers who were doing quite well, (3) the 'worthy poor' who were working or trying to work but barely making ends meet, and (4) the 'submerged tenth' who were beneath the surface of socioeconomic viability" (DuBois 1969). In his historical account of African American families, Frazier noted that slavery and Reconstruction created different opportunities for blacks resulting in as much of a distinct social stratification system within black communities as existed in white communities (Furstenberg 2009).

Much like the greater population, the black social class structure today generally includes the black elite or upper class, the black middle-class, the black working class and lower-income blacks. Billingsley (1968) calls attention to the social class divisions among blacks to make the point that while there may be some race-based commonalities among all African American families, the issue of class must also be recognized as an influence on black family life. Hill (1999) also acknowledges the impact of social stratification and criticizes studies that focus on racial comparisons without controlling for socioeconomic status. Such studies tend to be misleading because the analyses are actually comparing middle-class whites with low-income blacks. Hill gives a note of caution, however, regarding the reification of class distinctions by stating the "number and composition of class categories…are arbitrary abstractions of reality that vary according to the objectives of the analysts"(Hill 1999:62). For example, in Wilson's work titled *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), he depicts ghetto neighborhoods as predominantly comprising of poor and welfare families. However, census data in 1980 revealed that at least half of residents of highly concentrated impoverished areas were actually working class (Hill 1999).

Non-Marital Births

Considerable research has been devoted to "out-of-wedlock" births in the African-American community. In his report, Moynihan describes increasing rates of "illegitimacy" among both black and whites, but states it has been more dramatic in the black community (Moynihan 1965). Social scientists have followed Moynihan's lead and examined the prevalence and consequences of

out-of-wedlock births; however, their results paint a different picture (Carlson and Furstenberg 2006; McLanahan 2009; Sawhill 2006; Teachman and Polonko 1984).

Research has shown that "among all women of childbearing ages, the rate of non-marital childbearing has quadrupled, rising from about 14 per thousand in 1970 to almost 46 per thousand in 2004, despite the fact that the rate of non-marital fertility among black women has declined by a third—from 96 to 67 per thousand" (Furstenberg 2009). Furthermore, non-marital births among black teens have declined significantly since Moynihan published his report. Since 1960, black teens have actually decreased their fertility rates while the rate for white teens steadily increased until it stabilized in the middle of the past decade (Furstenberg 2009). This shift is attributed to white teenagers no longer being inclined to use marriage as a safety net when experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and black teenagers being less likely to become pregnant due to an increase in contraceptive use (Furstenberg 2009). These statistics suggest that black and white childbearing among older women and teenagers is looking more similar than it did forty years ago, making it difficult to attribute non-marital childbearing to any particular race.

Female-Headed Households and Matriarchy

Studies of black families have argued that the increase in poverty is reflective of the increase in female-headed families and the association of female-headed households to matriarchy contributes to the perception of black families as unstable (Small and Newman 2001). Matriarchy is seen as deviant in a society

that supports traditional patriarchy or male dominance in the family and households headed by females are deemed pathological (Peters and de Ford 1986). In these families, "sons are presumed to be inadequately socialized…and are expected to fall into juvenile delinquency. Daughters are presumed to perpetuate the cycle of intergenerational desertion of wives" (Peters and de Ford 1986:167). Building on the work of E. Franklin Frazier, Moynihan claimed the roles of husband and wife are reversed in African-American families, with black women assuming more power in marriages thus leaving the man feeling devalued (Moynihan 1965). While this scenario may be an accurate portrayal of some relationships, it by no means characterizes all black families. What has been called "the myth of the domineering wife" is refuted by some researchers who have found that many black families are actually more egalitarian than white families in regard to decision-making patterns (Jackson 1986; Livingston and McAdoo 2007; Staples 2007; Willie and Reddick 2003).

This egalitarian relationship has historical roots in slavery when black women worked side by side with black men as field hands, often doing the same work. As stated by Mullings, "it was not unusual that advertisements for women slaves proclaimed their ability to work like men" and that "within the household, men and women had relatively egalitarian relationships, with neither possessing the power to enforce relations of domination and subordination" (1986:14). Herskovits also discusses this relationship balance as a dynamic that had cultural roots in West Africa and was perpetuated by the slavery system:

> Slavery did not cause the 'maternal' family; but it tended to continue certain elements in the cultural endowment brought to the New World by the

> Negroes. The feeling between mother and children was reinforced when the father was sold away from the rest of the family; where he was not, he continued life in a way that tended to consolidate the obligations assumed by him in the integrated societies of Africa as these obligations were reshaped to fit the monogamic, paternalistic pattern of the white masters. That the plantation system did not differentiate between the sexes in exploiting slave labor tended, again, to reinforce the tradition of the part played by women in the tribal economics. [1958:181]

Post-slavery, blacks continued to be economically marginalized making a dual-income household necessary with women being forced to continue working in the fields or as domestics (Durr and Hill 2006). Thus when the patriarchal-breadwinner family structure emerged in which white men assumed a more authoritarian position and women worked in the home and were socialized to become more submissive, black men and women were economically unable to participate (Durr and Hill 2006). In fact, Gutman notes that African-American women who wanted to cease working and be supported by their husbands were said to be characterized by the "evil of female loaferism" (Mullings 1986:14).

Young (1970) found in her research on black families residing in a rural southern town that most families included husbands that were present and were either main or coequal providers with their wives of their families. However, in contrast to the egalitarian dynamic presented in other research, she noted that the men assumed more of an authoritarian role in the family with the wives and children taking a stance of deference. These studies demonstrate that black families exhibit varying marital social roles and we must be cautious of ascribing a particular model to all black marriages.

The increase in African-American female-headed families is typically associated with a rise in teenage pregnancies and the dearth of available black

men due to a significant increase in rates of incarceration and death from disease, poor healthcare and violent crime. Single-parent families also form because of separation, divorce, or making the decision to adopt a child. Yet despite the different paths leading to being a female-headed household, researchers tend to characterize these families as a homogenous group. In response, Sudarkasa (2007b) provides an analysis of how these households actually differ in terms of form and function:

> Households headed by widows and mature older women who are divorced or separated from their husbands or mates predictably function differently from those headed by younger mothers. Thus, age as well as maturity and the previous marital status of the household head need to be taken into consideration in any discussion of families and households headed by women. [2007b:174]

Female-headed households are not only the result of teenage pregnancies but represent one of many family patterns adopted by mature black women in response to the economic, political, and social realities of black life in the U.S. (Peters and de Ford 1986; Sudarkasa 2007b).

Response to the Deficit Perspective

The response was to reject this perspective and replace it with one that did not equate impoverishment to deficiency, extolled the strengths of the black community and acknowledged that some family patterns such as extended families were actually an adaptation to conditions of deprivation (Hill 1972; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974). In her research, Stack showed that an extended family system could provide protection and stability of family members in an environment that was conducive to transient and fluctuating available resources.

These networks were formed to care for children during times of high unemployment and welfare policies that undermined the viability of the residential nuclear family (Mullings 1986). As previously noted by Herskovits, African American families used survival strategies also found in African communities, including extended family networks and child fostering.

Deficit-focused research primarily uses a Eurocentric interpretive framework in which the nuclear family is the core relationship, a perspective which tends to distort the perception of problems in the black family (DuBois 1969; Young 1970). The underlying assumption of this framework is grounded in the assertions of Frazier who stated "As regards the Negro Family, there is no reliable evidence that African culture has had any influence on its development" (Frazier 1939:p.8). In essence, slavery destroyed the societal codes about family life which captured Africans learned while growing up. Alexis de Tocqueville had a similar view a century earlier:

> There exists, indeed, a profound and natural antipathy between the institution of marriage and that of slavery. A man does not marry when he cannot exercise marital authority, when his children must be born his equal, irrevocably destined to the wretchedness of their father; when, having no power over their fate, he can neither know the duties, the privileges, the hopes, nor the cares which belong to the paternal relation. It is easy to perceive that every motive which incites the freedman to a lawful union is lost to the slave by the simple fact of his slavery. (Gutman 1976:xxi)

In contrast, it is argued that some family organizational patterns common to different ethnic groups in West Africa did survive slavery and a less ethnocentric framework that recognizes the extended kinship ties in many African societies is more appropriate in the examination of African American families (Nobles 1985;

Sudarkasa 1980). For example, among some West Africans, divorce does not lead to the dissolution of the family because stability is not dependent on the marriage but rather the extended family centered around blood or consanguineal ties (Dixon 2007; Dodson 2007; Hill 1999; Sudarkasa 2007a). Similarly, despite some negative emotional and financial consequences, divorce among African-Americans does not necessarily mean the breakdown of the family because of the support received by the extended family as well as fictive kin (Dixon 2007; Johnson and Staples 2005). However, this should not be interpreted as a devaluation of marriage among African-Americans. On the contrary, research has indicated that marriage is highly valued and desired and until around 1980, the majority of African-American families included married couples (Dixon 2007; Johnson and Staples 2005; McAdoo 2007). While the increase in the rates of divorce and never-married individuals over the past few decades calls this assertion into question, several studies have attributed declining marriage rates primarily to social movements and cultural shifts as well as limited choices in a small pool of potential partners that can fulfill the desired family roles (Dixon 2007; Staples 1986).

Overall, debates of whether family structure and functioning is determined by culture (i.e. values and norms passed down through the generations) or class (determined by external socioeconomic forces) can be simplistic and don't capture the complexities of human existence. Poverty, crime, and adverse family conditions can be mutually reinforcing and attempts to understand the African-

American family must include the analysis of both structural restraints and the strategies created to address the circumstances (Mullings 1986).

Research on Marital Quality

During the past 15 years, there has been an increase in empirical studies examining the marital quality among African Americans and the findings have been quite discouraging. In these studies, data were taken from large-scale surveys which measured marital quality based on respondents' level of marital satisfaction or happiness, frequency of interactions, intensity of marital disagreements, perception of marital instability, and several other factors. Most studies have found that blacks tend to have lower levels of marital quality than other ethnic groups and are more likely to divorce (Adelmann, et al. 1996; Broman 2005; Bryant, et al. 2008; Bulanda and Brown 2007; Corra, et al. 2009). In his analysis of survey data from 1,414 participants, Broman (2005) reports that blacks are more likely than whites to report the negative behaviors of their spouse, including having affairs, hitting, and wasting money and are less likely than whites to say that their spouse makes them feel loved. In a comparative study of African Americans and Black Caribbeans, Bryant (2008) found that both groups have relatively high levels of marital satisfaction; however, Black Caribbean women reported a higher level of marital satisfaction than African American women. Even with the inclusion of structural (education, income, employment status) and cultural factors (religious affiliation, support from kin, gender ideology) associated with race/ethnicity, Bulanda and Brown (2007) also

found that African Americans experienced lower quality marriages than whites and Mexican Americans.

These studies raise questions about what accounts for reports of lower marital quality among African Americans? Socioeconomic status has been identified as a significant determinant of marital behaviors and perceptions of marital quality, particularly for African Americans (Clark-Nicolas and Gray-Little 1991; Lincoln and Chae 2010). Discrimination has also been examined as another factor impacting marital quality. Lincoln and Chae (2010) found that unfair treatment had a negative association with marital satisfaction, which suggests that stressors experienced outside of the home can have an effect on the interpersonal relationships of African Americans. Overall, there are no conclusive explanations that account for the differences in marital quality between African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups, thus illustrating the need for additional research.

Policy Implications

In 2005, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act which allotted funds for the promotion of marriage and fatherhood through a program called the Healthy Marriage Initiative. According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), the mission of the program is:

> To help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. (see http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/resource/the-healthy-marriage-initiative-hmi)

More recently, additional funds were allocated for marriage promotion activities as well as programs promoting responsible fatherhood through the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. Supporters of the program point to research showing that children who are raised in healthy two-married-parent households are less likely to engage in harmful and risky behaviors than those who reside in single-parent families (Amato 2005; Bachman, et al. 2009; Osborne and McLanahan 2007). While the ACF makes it clear that the initiative is not about "an immediate solution to lifting all families out of poverty", the program is still perceived as a way to promote marriage among the poor and reduce non-marital births which is associated with long-term welfare assistance. This perception is supported by the fact that although programs funded by the Initiative are not required to target only low-income couples, most programs do so (Hawkins, et al. 2009). Despite the considerable resources that have been allotted for the Initiative, research has indicated that the program has not had a significant impact on marriage quality and stability (Bir, et al. 2012).

Marriage education initiatives are not the only government administered programs that are scrutinized. As Roberts and Greenberg note (Hawkins, et al. 2009), criticism of public welfare focuses on the fact that by providing financial assistance only to single-parent families, the program unintentionally made marriage economically undesirable, resulting in an increase in non-marital births. Interestingly, since 1962, states have had the authority to provide aid to poor, two-parent families but few do so. In 1992, Congress mandated that aid be offered to two-parent households but most states make it difficult because the

combined parents' income often make them unqualified for financial assistance (Dias-Bowie, et al. 2009; Hawkins, et al. 2009). In addition, public housing policies have been criticized as being directly related to the large number of households headed by young women by discouraging and/or prohibiting multigenerational households that were once characteristic of black families (Sudarkasa 2007b). Until the implementation of such policies, young black women who had non-marital children usually lived in households with their parents, grandparents, or other senior relatives (Sudarkasa 2007b).

Studies promoting the connection between poverty and culture have influenced policies and programs known as the "War on Poverty" which sought to modify the "culture" of the poor. Again, the assumption is that by changing problematic aspects of lifestyle and culture, the poor would be able to lift themselves out of poverty (Mullings 1986). While programs such as Headstart and JobCorps have helped some individuals, they are hardly adequate to end poverty.

Chapter Three

Research Context: American Military Culture

Introduction

Substantial research about military life originates from different disciplines, particularly sociology and psychology. Early literature primarily focused on the structure and processes of the military, with a shift occurring in the last 10 years toward more ethnographic research that has highlighted the lived experience of service members and their families. In this chapter, I will discuss the contributions of anthropology to our knowledge of the defense community, followed by a description of the service branches and ranking structure. I continue with an assessment of literature from other disciplines that explores race and gender issues in the military, the impact of deployments on service members, and the recent trends in marital status. I conclude with a discussion about the role of the military spouse and the various strategies each service branch utilizes to support military families.

Anthropology of the Military

"In anthropology, the study of the people and institutions that form the 'military-industrial complex' (or the defense community) has been regarded with suspicion"(Rubenstein 2003:17). A substantial amount of literature is critical of the military, much of it focused on the actions taken by both individuals and institutions and the consequences of those actions (Lucas 2009; Price 2008). Although there appears to be little anthropological work about the experiences of

military members, a few works are worth noting. While these generally do not primarily address the issue of marriage and family life, many offer insight into the structural and social context in which military marriages are positioned.

During World War II, a group of anthropologists and sociologists surveyed the military and published a series of studies under the title *American Soldier*. The purpose was to gather information about the attitudes of American soldiers in order to help facilitate administrative and policy decisions (Stouffer 1977). One issue during the World War II period between 1940 and 1945 was the exponential growth of the Army, which grew from 16,624 officers and 249,441 enlisted men to 772,863 officers and 7,305,854 enlisted men due to the implementation of Selective Service (Stouffer 1977). This growth essentially resulted in the conflict between older professional soldiers and the new citizen-soldiers who were unaccustomed to the traditional military structure including (1) an authoritarian organization that demands rigid obedience, (2) a hierarchical social system which requires deference both on and off duty, and (3) an emphasis on maintaining traditions and discouragement of individualism (Stouffer 1977).

Although the U.S. was hardly a classless society, these new citizen-soldiers came from an environment where they had the right to go where they pleased and were not required to address higher-ups in a certain manner. However, now as enlisted men, they were not allowed to venture into places reserved strictly for officers and acts of deference had to be continuously practiced using the honorific “Sir” (Stouffer 1977). Interestingly, it has been

suggested that African American soldiers may have adjusted more easily to the military due to similarities between the oppression they experienced in the civilian world and the social privilege embedded in the Army (Stouffer 1977). The new citizen soldiers were also better educated, which further added challenges to the integration with the old Army. They tended to move up the ranks faster and get the more desirable assignments which were points of contention with the older soldiers. Furthermore, they also tended to be more critical of established traditions and the Army in general.

Later, anthropologists working as researchers at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), in collaboration with other professionals, conducted studies examining socialization within the military structure (Frese and Harrell 2003). For example, Pearl Katz examined how drill instructors used emotional metaphors to socialize new Army recruits into their appropriate roles as soldiers (Katz 1990). David Marlowe wrote a series of technical reports called the New Manning System Field Evaluation, which looked at the impact of COHORT manning which kept soldiers in their operational units for longer periods of time without rotation. This system produced greater cohesion among members of the unit as well as their spouses (Marlowe 1985).

In 2001, an ethnographic study of U.S. peacekeepers explored how "the military accommodates a variety of political understandings, and how these political representations are developed, maintained, or transformed by service in peacekeeping units" (Harrell 2003b:10). Contrary to popular belief, there is actually great cultural variation within the military organization. Military officers

who perform peacekeeping operations do so for a variety of reasons. While some actively seek to engage in some type of combat, there are also officers who are motivated by a desire to increase personal growth, to become more politically educated and/or see their participation as a political career move (Rubenstein 2003). The differences in organizational culture among the service branches and even individual units are further reflected in how officers understand their mission. Ultimately, regardless of whether or not they are engaging in peacekeeping operations, most officers see the assignment as either a political mission or a military one (Rubenstein 2003).

Jeanne Guillemin (2003) examines the conflict between individuals and institutions using the anthrax vaccination debates that surfaced following the implementation of the universal anthrax vaccination immunization program (AVIP) in 1997. In response to mass hysteria about the dangers of biological warfare, then Secretary of Defense William Cohen proposed the AVIP to vaccinate all military personnel. However, there was a small group of dissenters who refused the vaccine and revisited questions about its safety and efficacy that had been already been raised publicly. Through this study, Guillemin points out that in addition to health hazards such as battle wounds and possible death that are anticipated in military service, particularly during wartime, soldiers are also subject to bodily invasion through the form of a relatively untested vaccine that could have long-term consequences. It raises an interesting question about how much should soldiers expect the military to protect them from medical harm.

Anthropologist Anna Simons spent over a year observing and documenting the daily lives of a unit in the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF). In her ethnography, *The Company They Keep: Life in the U.S. Army Special Forces* (1997), Simons notes that while the men who serve in this unit subscribe to the military imperative of working as a team, they are not accountable to the same bureaucracy and are allowed a greater degree of autonomy than other Army units. However, similar to other military personnel, their required duties take precedence over all other aspects of their lives including their families. This prioritization is understood, although not always liked, by their spouses. Consequently, many men in SF have been or are currently going through a divorce. Serving in SF, where they may be called to deploy at a moment's notice, provokes anxiety and annoyance for wives; their husbands tend to exhibit a calm enthusiasm at the thought of leaving, which only increases the wives' frustration. As one spouse states, "no matter how many times a husband demonstrates his affection; he always seems to be demonstrating it more to the army. Nor is it enjoyable being reminded that essentially the army is his life and you are just a wife—and conceivably not even a first, or a last" (Simons 1997). The soldiers of SF also abide by a code of silence about activities that take place away from home including extramarital affairs which further stresses marital relationships. Much like that Vegas slogan, what happens in the field, stays in the field.

In summary, there is little anthropological research that examines the military from the viewpoint of those that comprise the organization, or that

focuses on marriage and family. However, existing ethnographic studies document the heterogeneity within the defense community, stressing that the military is not a one-dimensional entity. These studies also highlight a human dimension that demonstrates value of anthropological approaches in providing a more informed and reality-based perspective of military life, which may potentially help to decrease the distrust between the discipline and the military community and influence more effective policymaking.

Military Structure

The four branches of the U.S. military can be distinguished in terms of their differing views on strategic operations that reflect their history and the environments in which they operate. The Army considers itself the branch most representative of the people, the grassroots group of the military organization (Builder 1989). Since it is the oldest of the branches, the Army takes pride in its long history of service to the nation and complete devotion to the country. "Of all the military services, the Army is the most loyal servant and progeny of this nation, of its institutions and people" (Builder 1989:20). The Air Force is the youngest of the branches and sees itself as a technologically oriented organization and therefore progressive (Meilinger 2007; Murray 1999).

The Navy possesses a sense of independence due to its virtual autonomy while out to sea and away from the Washington powerbase. While this promotes initiative, it also elicits a resistance to politicians who "meddle" in their affairs (Meilinger 2007). The Navy also takes a more economic approach to war by controlling sealanes and disrupting the enemy's trade (Meilinger 2007). The

Marine Corps falls within the Department of the Navy which means that unlike the other service branches, it doesn't contribute to defense planning as an independent entity. However, the Marines Corps still sees itself as unique from other branches in its willingness and ability to be innovative in terms of defense strategy demonstrated by its "conceptualization, development and adoption of amphibious warfare… and weapons platforms to enhance its capacity to conduct amphibious operation" (Terriff 2006:481). Overall, each military branch has its own culture that shapes the way Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines view their purpose, their strategies, their tactics and each other.

The command structure of each military branch is similar and can be divided into two categories of personnel: enlisted and commissioned officers. Enlisted members are further divided between junior enlisted and non-commissioned officers (NCO). Junior enlisted personnel are new members who hold a rank ranging from E-1 to E-4, while NCOs hold a rank of E-5 to E-9. Officers are also divided into warrant officers and commissioned officers, which are the highest ranks in the military. Warrant officers hold a rank of W-1 to W-5 and commissioned officers hold ranks of O-1 to O-10. Across service branches, enlisted members comprise the majority of service personnel ranging from 80% to 89% (see Table 1).

Commissioned officers have completed college, which puts them on a different career trajectory than NCOs, moving toward administration and positions of command. As stated in an Army publication about NCO/Officer relationships:

Table 1: Number and Percentage of Active Duty Officers and Enlisted Members by Service Branch

Service Branch										
	Army		**Navy**		**Marines**		**Air Force**		**Total DoD**	
Rank	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**	#	**%**
Officers	81,698	14.6	51,592	16.1	19,784	9.8	65,478	19.9	218,552	15.5
Warrant Officers	15,583	2.8	1,617	0.5	2,081	1.0	N/A	N/A	19,551	1.4
Enlisted	463,886	82.6	266,932	83.4	179,161	89.1	263,343	80.1	1,173,322	83.1
Total	561,437	100.0	320,141	100.0	201,026	100.0	328,821	100.0	1,411,425	100.0

SOURCE: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy): 2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community 2012:15

> The officer commands, establishes policy, plans and programs the work of the Army; concentrates on collective training which will enable the unit to accomplish its mission; is primarily involved with unit operations, training, and related activities; concentrates on unit effectiveness and unit readiness; pays particular attention to the standards of performance, training, and professional development of NCOs; creates conditions makes the time and other resources available- so the NCO can do his job… The NCO conducts the daily business of the Army within established orders, directives, and policies; concentrates on individual and team training which develops the capability to accomplish the mission; is primarily involved with training individual soldiers and teams; concentrates on each subordinate NCO and soldier and on the small teams of the unit- to ensure that each is well trained, highly motivated, ready, and functioning; concentrates on standards of performance, training, and professional development of NCOs and enlisted personnel; gets the job done. (United States. Dept. of the Army. Information Management Support 1997:23)

In some instances, individuals who initially have enlisted status go on to earn a college degree and are promoted to the status of officer. Interestingly, there are also occasions in which those that could qualify to be officers choose to remain an NCO because it is perceived to be a more authentic position that holds greater status among the other soldiers (Simons 1997).

Race in the Military

It is interesting to note that many studies in the literature control for the influence of race with the presupposition that the military is a colorblind institution (Lundquist 2004; Teachman and Tedrow 2008). In his report on the status of the black family, Moynihan touted the perceived disregard for race in the military organization by stating:

> Service in the United States Armed Forces is the only experience open to the Negro American in which he is truly treated as an equal: not as a Negro equal to a white, but as one man equal to any man in a world where the category ‘Negro’ and ‘white’ do not exist. If this is a statement of the

> ideal rather than reality, it is an ideal that is close to realization. In food, dress, housing, pay, work, - the Negro in the Armed Forces is equal and is treated that way. (Moynihan 1965:42)

According to Lundquist (2004), pay is standardized according to rank and rank is more important than race in terms of stratification within the military. The military's highly bureaucratic and hierarchical structure offers blacks a well-defined career trajectory that fully integrates them into leadership positions, thereby reducing stress associated with discrimination and promoting stable marriages (Lundquist 2004).

However, the history of African-Americans in the military paints a different picture, beginning with the end of the draft in 1973. When the military became an all-volunteer institution, one of the primary concerns was whether it "could maintain adequate social representation, especially with regard to race" (Armor and Gilroy 2010). In other words, critics of the all-voluntary service worried that blacks from the lower socioeconomic class would be overrepresented because they were unable to find comparable opportunities in the civilian world and that this would decrease the caliber and status of the military (Binkin and Eitelberg 1982). Aside from the concerns about status reduction based on race, reports in 1981 did show an increased proportion of African-American enlisted personnel and officers in all the service branches (Binkin and Eitelberg 1982). Today, African-Americans make up 18.4% and 9.5% of active duty enlisted members and officers, respectively (Defense 2012).

Despite the attempts of some scholars to portray the military as a colorblind institution, there are others who have reported evidence to the contrary. Some

Table 2: Percentage of African American Active Duty Officers and Enlisted Members by Service Branch

Service Branch										
	Army		Navy		Marines		Air Force		Total DoD	
Rank	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Officers	10,331	12.6	3,951	7.7	968	4.9	3,734	5.7	18,984	8.7
Warrant Officers	2,960	18.7	373	23.1	252	12.1	N/A	N/A	3,585	18.3
Enlisted	101,176	21.8	51,770	19.4	19,517	10.9	43,330	16.5	215,793	18.4
Total	114,467	20.4	56,094	17.5	20,737	10.3	47,064	14.3	238,362	

studies have shown that there are race and ethnic differences in the perception of equal opportunity in the military with whites reporting a more positive climate than other racial/ethnic groups (Rosenfeld, et al. 1998; Truhon 2008). There are also some noteworthy trends in the participation of blacks in the military. Blacks tend to be overrepresented in administrative and clerical jobs and in the unskilled service and supply handler categories and are less likely than white men to reach higher officer ranks (Binkin and Eitelberg 1982; Hosek 2001). In interviews with black officers, three issues were raised that they believed hindered their ability to be promoted:

1. White officers expect black officers to have weaker skills and abilities; to overcome this expectation, the "performance bar" gets increased for black officers.

2. Cultural barriers make it harder for black officers to develop the strong peer and mentor relationships that provide access to information and resources necessary for career success.

3. Black officers are less likely to get career-enhancing assignments or be selected for participation in important missions. (Hosek 2001:56)

With regard to the second issue about developing peer and mentor relationships, many black officers perceived that any outward display of socializing with other blacks was perceived as a way to isolate themselves. "One officer commented, 'People will look at you because there are four of us sitting there talking and it's a problem!..But it's okay if 50 white guys are talking together'" (Hosek 2001). As a result, black officers sometimes avoid socializing in order to avoid misperceptions or allegations of bias toward other blacks.

African Americans are the largest minority group in the U.S. military but their unique experiences are often obscured by the prevailing view that race is

inconsequential in the defense community. As the number of minorities increase in the U.S., this perspective may have deleterious effects on the military organization with fewer minorities willing to join the service if it doesn't acknowledge that it is indeed a microcosm of society, including all of its racial and ethnic biases.

Women in the Military

In contrast to the portrayal of racial neutrality, the literature does not present the military as a gender neutral environment. Women account for only 14.5% of the total Active Duty force, illustrating that the military is a male-dominated organization (Defense 2012).

The history of women in the military is one of restriction with women being excluded from certain occupations and assignments that were viewed as male domains, particularly direct combat (Hosek 2001). Since policy changes beginning in 1992, women are now only restricted from serving in occupations or assignments that engage in direct ground combat, defined by then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin as

> …engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect (Harrell 2002:3-4).

Although changes in policy have opened up new occupations and skills for women, the regulations restricting engagement in ground combat are still seen as a contributing factor for limiting a woman's military career:

> If you don't put fire and iron on a target, you're a second-class officer (or lower)…as they rise higher in the organization, women don't command the same confidence that they can lead at the highest ranks as men, because they don't come from the combat arms branch. (Hosek 2001:84)

In the Navy and Air Force, women perform several key jobs, including flying combat aircraft and serving on larger combat ships (Harrell 2002). Despite the increased opportunities for women in the armed forces, most women still work in gendered occupations such as personnel and administration (Hosek 2001).

In terms of career progression, women believe that they do not receive as many career-enhancing opportunities because of the perception that they are less capable. Hosek also identifies additional reasons for challenges in the career development of women in the military:

- Sexual harassment creates an uncomfortable working environment for women who are harassed.
- Male officers' fears of being charged with sexual harassment have placed a pall on the interactions between men and women.
- The demands of assignments often come into conflict with family responsibilities, sometimes unnecessarily.
- There continues to be no clear consensus among military personnel on the appropriate role for women. (2001:77)

As a result of these difficulties that women regularly face many women decide to leave the military before promotion to the next grade (Hosek 2001).

Similar to many women in the civilian work force, women in the military report conflicts between their professional responsibilities and caring for their families. Hosek (2001) reports that there are two particularly problematic areas for women: child-care arrangements and their relationships with their spouse.

Table 3: Number of Active Duty Officers and Enlisted Members by Service Branch and Gender

	Service Branch									
	Army		Navy		Marines		Air Force		Total DoD	
Rank	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
O1-O10	67,411	14,287	43,155	8,437	18,562	1,222	53,187	12,291	182,315	36,237
W1-W5	14,380	1,473	1,534	83	1,975	106	N/A	N/A	17,889	1,662
E1-E9	403,631	60,255	223,036	43,896	166,798	12,363	213,042	50,301	1,006,507	166,815
Total	485,422	76,015	267,725	52,416	187,335	13,691	266,229	62,592	1,206,711	204,714

SOURCE: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy): 2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community 2012: 19

Women service members with children are considerably more likely than men to be unmarried or in a dual-working couple. They are also more likely than their male peers to utilize daycare services. However, military officers are expected to work long and irregular hours, which military and civilian daycare establishments are often unable to accommodate.

Officers who seek career advancement are expected to accept frequent reassignments that vary both in duration and location. As a result, officers or their spouses must either sacrifice their career development or cope with long separations, and typically this burden falls on women. Based on a 1992 Survey of Officer and Enlisted Personnel, Hosek (2001) reports that one-quarter of all women officers reported that their spouse's job interferes with their military job. In dual-service couples, the likelihood of separation from one's spouse is increased unless both spouses agree to be assigned to the same location. However, finding co-locating opportunities can be difficult and one partner must usually accept a lesser assignment, which may make them significantly less competitive for promotions. Not surprisingly, more married women than married men consider their careers as subordinate to their partner's careers and feel as if they have to choose between family and career.

Military Deployments

A common aspect of military life is succession or the frequent reassignment of personnel from one position to another. Grusky (1964) examines how members respond to rapid succession which can have the effect of being socially disruptive because it disinclines an individual or family from

establishing roots in a community (Grusky 1964). However, if succession is routinized within an organization where frequent moves are anticipated, then it can have the opposite effect, in that it generates a desire to become socially involved. At the Air Force Base where he conducted his research, Grusky found that knowing their time in a community would be brief, service members tended to take steps to quickly become integrated into that community by joining in local activities such as church groups, neighborhood clubs and fraternal organizations.

Several studies focus on the impact of deployments and combat, which have generally been shown to be detrimental to marriage and family stability (Gimbel and Booth 1994a; Ruger, et al. 2002). This news is particularly significant considering soldiers serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan have served in unprecedented multiple and longer deployments, thus compounding their exposure to combat (Karney and Crown 2007; Lester, et al. 2010; Merolla 2010; Spera 2009). Furthermore, the exposure to combat results in considerable risk for mental health problems including major depression, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which have been identified as threats to the positive communication and connection necessary for marital stability (Allen, et al. 2010; Dekel and Monson 2010; Galovski and Lyons 2004).

A few studies are noteworthy for their discussion of the characteristics of a deployment which can be conceptualized in different ways and may vary in several circumstances. For instance, there are different purposes for deployment (peacekeeping, combat, training) as well as various levels of danger or risk to the

service member. Deployments also vary in terms of how much advance notice is provided and duration with current deployments in the current conflicts lasting from 6 to 18 months (Sheppard, et al. 2010). Deployment has also been described not as a single event but as a process that can start before the service member leaves and end sometime after he or she returns home. Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler (2001) describe five stages of the military deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and post-deployment. Each stage has its own time frame and unique emotional challenges that must be dealt with by the family.

Deployments require the spouse left behind to cope with responsibilities that were once shared including child care, financial management, and household duties which contributes to increased stress that accumulates with each tour of duty (Lester, et al. 2010; Spera 2009). Spouses whose husbands are required to travel and be separated from family for longer periods of time exhibit more negative psychological symptoms than those whose spouses are home more often (Orthner and Rose 2009). One study showed that junior enlisted spouses, particularly those that have been married for less than three years, are at an increased risk of using maladaptive coping mechanisms to deal with deployment (Spera 2009). Studies have also examined the impact of deployment on children showing a correlation between increased emotional and psychological difficulties with the cumulative length of parental deployments (Chandra, et al. 2010; Flake, et al. 2009; Lester, et al. 2010).

Military wives tend to form a team of their own to foster support, particularly during times of deployment. However, there are many factors that determine to what extent this occurs. In families without children, the wives usually are working outside the home and have established friendships outside the military community. They may attend large events with their spouses where they interact with the other wives but generally aren't in frequent contact with other military wives. In contrast, the wives who have children often tend to not work outside the home and therefore seek out other spouses for help with childcare and social support. It is these wives who form more of a team that parallels the team structure that is required of their military spouses. Researchers also found that problems coping with deployment were mitigated as levels of support from leadership, other spouses, and base services increased (Orthner and Rose 2009; Pittman, et al. 2004; Spera 2009).

Based on an interpersonal perspective, the physical separation from deployment can interfere with the intimacy and communication of a couple (Allen, et al. 2010) but there are couples who are able to maintain a stable and satisfying marriage despite the challenges of deployment (Karney and Crown 2007). Merolla (2010) identifies three broad categories that encompass the ways spouses maintain their relationship during deployments: (1) intrapersonal (positive thinking, imagined interaction, prayer), (2) mediated partner communication (positivity, reassuring safety, faith talk), and (3) social-network support (talking about deployed spouse with family and friends, military support groups).

Overall, there is little question that deployments have a profound impact on service members and their families. The far-reaching effects of these job-related separations can directly and indirectly determine career advancement, family structure, and even mental health status. While less studied, the more common occurrence of job reassignment is also an important characteristic of military life that affects the ability of families to establish roots in their communities. Research is critical to developing methods of mitigating the negative impact of both events on service personnel and their families.

Marital Status

The military institution was initially designed for single men. In fact, in 1847, the Army prohibited the enlistment of married men and men with children although they could re-enlist during wartime (Schumm, et al. 1996). It wasn't until 1942 that the Army allowed peacetime enlistment of men with wives and/or children (Schumm, et al. 1996). Since then, the number of military personnel with families has significantly increased, with 69.6% of officers and 54% of enlisted members being married and 43.9% of all members having children (Defense 2012).

Rates of divorce in the military have increased since 2000 in all service branches with the greatest increase occurring among enlisted members (see Table 5). Research about the dissolution of military marriages consists primarily of comparative studies examining the probability of divorce between military personnel and civilians. In general, enlistees who marry at younger ages are 54% more likely to divorce than comparable civilians (Lundquist 2007). There

also appear to be gender differences in military divorce rates. For example, two studies found that military men are less likely to get divorced than civilian men, but military women are more likely to get divorced than their civilian counterparts (Adler-Baeder, et al. 2005; Pollard, et al. 2008). Karney and Crown (2007) found that the most stable military marriages involve a military husband and a civilian wife, whereas the least stable involves a military wife and a civilian husband, with dual-military marriages falling somewhere in between. However, this pattern was not found for African Americans, among whom dual-service marriages are associated with a lower divorce rate (Lundquist 2006).

Veterans have higher rates of divorce than civilians, which has led researchers to hypothesize that the military may provide incentives to marry among couples who might not have typically married in the civilian context (Hogan and Seifert 2009). Incentives include but are not limited to: higher pay for married personnel, free or subsidized housing, pay supplements when deployed without family, child care and spouse employment assistance. Therefore, when those incentives are discontinued upon leaving the military, the relationship becomes fragile and the marriage becomes more susceptible to dissolution (Pollard, et al. 2008). However, this incentives hypothesis has been challenged by some who did not find a difference in divorce rates when comparing couples that were married before entering military service and those who married after enlistment (Lundquist 2007; Ruger, et al. 2002).

While the increase in divorce rates has raised concerns in the defense community about the impact of extended and multiple deployments, some

researchers challenge the notion that the unique stresses of military life lead to divorce, a concept also known as the stress hypothesis. Their criticism of existing literature supporting the stress hypothesis is that it is mostly based on interviews and surveys of military spouses rather than empirical data (Karney and Crown 2007). Furthermore, the empirical studies have methodological limitations, such as a limited sample size, that may have prevented adequate analyses (Karney and Crown 2007). Two separate analyses of data on Vietnam veterans found that the divorce rate of those who served during that war were not different from those who did not serve or served in other wars (Call and Teachman 1991; Cohen and Segal 2009; Ruger, et al. 2002). A longitudinal study of military members who were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan between 1996 and 2006 reports some surprising results (Karney and Crown 2007). They found that when controlling for demographic variables typically associated with divorce (e.g. gender, race, age of marriage), the more deployment days that were served by enlisted military members, the lower risk of divorce. This was true for enlisted members in the Army, Navy and Marines, and for officers in the Navy and Marines. Interestingly, the Air Force was the only branch that demonstrated the stress hypothesis, which suggests that the longer service members (enlisted and officer) were deployed while married, the greater risk of marital dissolution.

There doesn't appear to be a systematic study comparing military members and civilians regarding race differences in family patterns. Therefore, it is unclear from the sparse empirical literature on black marriages in the military whether

Table 4: Estimated Percentage of Divorces among Active Duty Officers and Enlisted Members by Service Branch Trends

Service Branch	2000		2005		2010		2011	
	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted	Officers	Enlisted
Army	1.7%	2.3%	2.3%	3.6%	2.2%	3.9%	2.5%	4.0%
Navy	1.1%	2.6%	2.1%	3.2%	1.7%	3.8%	2.0%	4.0%
Marines	1.6%	3.3%	1.6%	3.2%	1.7%	4.2%	1.8%	3.9%
Air Force	1.3%	3.6%	1.5%	3.7%	1.6%	4.5%	1.7%	4.6%
Total DoD	**1.4%**	**2.9%**	**1.9%**	**3.5%**	**1.9%**	**4.1%**	**2.1%**	**4.1%**

SOURCE: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy): 2011 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community 2012: 50

Note: These figures include widowed cases. However, the number of people who were widowed last year is expected to be small and should not affect the percentages.

African-Americans have stable relationships. One exception is Lundquist's (2007) study that found that African-Americans have low marital dissolution rates when compared to their white military counterparts. When compared to white civilians, white enlisted personnel are 49% more likely to divorce while black enlisted personnel are 12% less likely to divorce than white civilians. Lundquist speculates that African-American couples are:

> …willing to endure greater levels of marital stress in exchange for the benefits they receive relative to the civilian world. It may also be that the stresses of military marriage are not so different from those in civilian society by blacks; as a result, African American military marriages may be more immune to hardship than white military marriages. (2006:435)

However, this explanation doesn't support findings that black enlisted members are also less likely to divorce than their black counterparts in the civilian world (Lundquist 2006). Exploring the factors that contribute to these differences would be useful in understanding how the military may mitigate those marital stressors that contribute to the higher rate of dissolution of black civilian marriages.

The Military Spouse

There are few ethnographic studies about being a military spouse and all are from the perspective of a wife. Anthropologist Pamela Frese (2003) uses oral histories to explore the concepts of family and home for retired officer's wives who are members of the "Golden Age" of the U.S. military. All of the women interviewed were white and either from elite families or were raised in military families. The perspectives presented from these women distinctly reflect the culture and beliefs of the elite Anglo American which frequently overlapped with those of high-ranking culture. Because many of the women who became

officer's wives came from upper-class families, a form of "aristocracy" within the military was reproduced. The activities of officer's wives mimicked those of the elite, including significant volunteer service within religious and philanthropic institutions. They were expected to participate in the Officers' Wives Clubs, which served as a support network and provided them an opportunity to interact with women of similar social status. The Club hosted various social activities and provided educational and cultural programs for the community which established a link to the civilian social elite in the civilian world. Officers' wives also had the responsibility to mentor the women married to the men under her husband's command regarding what it meant to be a military wife. They educated these lower-ranking wives in proper military etiquette and appropriate gender roles traditionally associated with the Anglo American upper class (Frese 2003). In a sense, a fictive kin relationship was established that positioned the higher-ranking wife as "mother" to the wives of the men in her husband's command. Most importantly, an officer's wife was always "required to be successful in the reproduction of home, children and the larger military family wherever her husband was stationed" (Frese 2003).

The role of military spouse is culturally gendered in that male spouses are not expected to perform the duties associated with the role, although there is no biological reason why men cannot perform these duties (Harrell 2003a). This comes as no surprise considering the history of the military spouse. For example, a guide was published in 1941 by Nancy Shea titled *The Army Wife,*

which outlined the important aspects of the role of military wife, highlighting loyalty to family, the Army and the United States:

> So you are with the Army now!! As a wife you have a most important role in your husband's Army career…His work will reflect his life at home, your attitude toward the Army, your interest in his duty, and your adaptability. In this respect, you also have an important part in our national security, and a duty to your country…Although no serviceman's career was ever *made* by his wife, many have been hindered or helped by the social skills of their wives, their flexibility, and their loyalty toward the Army and its customs. It is your responsibility to create the right background for your husband and your ability to do so can make a subtle but important contribution to his advancement. (Frese 2003:51-52)

Harrell (2003a) also reports that men are sometimes excluded from spouse gatherings or find it difficult to participate in activities due to concern about the appearance of impropriety if they should be found alone with a female spouse. What is most interesting about Harrell's research is her insight into the class distinction between officers and enlisted military personnel and how it is reflected among military spouses. In the Army, there is a fraternization policy that prohibits social relationships between soldiers of different ranks, particularly if it would compromise the authority of the commander or result in preferential treatment:

> While many spouses of noncommissioned officers (NCO) have friends who are officers' wives, they typically spoke of their friendships as either exceptional or as relatively limited. Either they were exceptional in that their friend was untypical (i.e., all officers' wives are snotty-except for my friend) or they acknowledged that they could not freely associate with their friend and include their soldier spouses. In these cases, the spouses enjoyed one another's company, but their friendship was limited to one another, exclusive of their soldier spouses. If they did socialize as couples, then they were limited to out-of-the-way locations or to their private homes. (Harrell 2003a:81)

Some officers' wives use the fraternization policy as a reason to maintain a social distance from enlisted wives. However, others see class differences as the main

barrier contributing to the perception of officers' wives as "snotty" by some of their enlisted counterparts.

Since the officer's wife continues to be seen as an extension of the officer, the expectations of an officer's wife remain similar to those of the past, although they are not as rigid. At a minimum, all military spouses are compelled to represent their husband, obey military laws and rules, and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner at all times. Volunteerism, particularly in a formal organization such as the Red Cross, continues to be part of the role of an officer's wife but is not considered compulsory. The social responsibilities of the officer's wife are more extensive and include appearances at formal ceremonies such as a change of command where the incoming commander's spouse is presented with a bouquet of roses (Frese and Harrell 2003). Entertaining and socializing also remain a large part of the duties of officer spouses. They often serve as hosts of unit-related functions (hail and farewells and balls) as well as peer functions such as monthly dinners attended by all the commanders and monthly meetings for all the spouses of the senior commanders (Frese and Harrell 2003). These hosting duties can be very expensive and time-consuming, placing a strain on family resources, but there really is no option not to participate.

The expected roles of the junior enlisted wives are vastly different than those for officers' spouses and are also based on class-based stereotypes (Harrell 2000; Harrell 2003b). These spouses are perceived to be immature, unintelligent, and uneducated and have a tendency to be a nuisance and speak

out of turn to leadership. Thus, "the ideal junior enlisted spouse is one who does not present difficulties, either for the soldier or for the soldier's unit" (Harrell 2003a:85). Unlike the spouses of officers, junior enlisted spouses are not considered to be assets to their husbands' career advancement and are often intentionally excluded by their husbands from unit-related events and functions. Harrell claims they are not expected to be active in the military community and are geographically isolated from the military community due to junior enlisted personnel being less likely to receive base housing. This is an aspect of military policy that has been criticized, as noted by journalist Karen Houppert in her book *Home Fires Burning: Married to the Military- for Better or Worse* (2005). In one of several interviews Houppert conducted with military spouses, one Army wife stated,

> The thing that I would change would be the housing regulations because the people who need to live on base the most are the ones least eligible for base housing...Here are your youngest wives and those newest to the military, those most probably in need of support and most financially stressed and whatnot, and they're the farthest from the PX and commissary, from the hospital, from the support of military neighbors who will notice if you haven't put your lights on for a day and ask, 'Are you depressed?' (2005:50)

Military wives often find it difficult to secure employment outside the home. According to Hosek (2002), employers are reluctant to hire military spouses because of the transient nature of the military. Military families must move much more frequently than the average civilian family and thus employers aren't willing to train individuals that won't be around long. Also, particularly for those wives who married young and/or didn't obtain a degree beyond high school, they are only able to secure low-wage employment that doesn't even cover the cost of

childcare (Hosek 2002). Therefore, it is often more cost-effective to stay at home with the children.

Military Strategies to Support Families

Demographic changes have placed a great demand on the military to provide support services for families and increase their "readiness," which is defined as the "level of preparedness for performing one's combat mission" (Schumm, et al. 1996). Thus, Department of Defense (DoD) offers services through all military branches to help families prepare and cope with the unique challenges of military life. Military OneSource is a free information and referral service offered to active duty, National Guard and Reserve personnel that is designed to supplement existing installation services (see http://www.militaryonesource.com/default.aspx for more information). The service provides access to three kinds of short-term, non-medical counseling options: face-to-face counseling, telephone consultations, and online consultations. The counseling services are designed to provide assistance with short-term issues such as adjustment to situational stressors, stress management, decision making, communication, grief, blended-family issues, and parenting-skills issues. It is not designed, however, to address long-term issues such as child or spouse abuse, suicidal ideation, and mental health issues. People in need of long- term care are referred to a military treatment facility and/or the healthcare insurance program, TRICARE, for services. Military OneSource also assists military members with locating information about coping with deployment and reunion issues, child care and parenting issues, spouse

training, education, and career, relocation and other issues pertinent to family life.

Department of Defense (DoD) family centers located on military installations have served as the focal point for military families since their inception over 25 years ago. The term "family centers" is used generically to identify Army Community Service Centers, Navy and Marine Corps Family Service Centers, and Air Force Family Support Centers. The DoD family centers typically include a variety of services that assist military members and families deal with the unique demands of the military lifestyle. The focus of family support programs is to keep family members informed, to support them when necessary, and to encourage self-sufficiency.

Army

The Army established the Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), which offers a variety of programs dedicated to maintaining the readiness of Soldiers, families and communities (see http://www.myarmyonesource.com/default.aspx for more information). Army Family Team Building (AFTB) is a volunteer-based organization that provides training and knowledge to spouses and family members to support the total Army effort. It offers a series of training modules through the local Army Community Service or Family Program's office that cover topics such as basic information about the Army, personal growth skills and leadership skills. AFTB also offers an Enlisted Spouse Training Series that prepares enlisted spouses to deal with the additional responsibilities they will assume as their Soldiers advance in their

careers. The Army also offers resources about mobilization and deployment through the Operation READY (Resources for Educating About Deployment and You) series. One of the materials offered through Operation READY is the *Deployment Cycle Readiness: Soldier's and Family Members Handbook*. Among other issues, the handbook discusses the preparation and mobilization stages for the Soldier as they prepare to deploy, and provides tips and information for the family as they prepare for the Soldier's deployment.

Navy

The Navy's Fleet and Family Readiness (FFR) Program provides support for Sailors and their families including programs and services offered through Fleet and Family Support Centers, such as relocation assistance, information and referral, financial management counseling, spouse employment services, family advocacy and the transition assistance program. Family Readiness also consists of child and youth programs such as Child Development Centers, the Child Development Home Program and Youth and Teen Centers (see http://www.cnic.navy.mil/CNIC_HQ_Site/index.htm for more information). The Fleet and Family Support Programs (FFSP) is the division of FFR that supports individual and family readiness and adaptation to life in the Navy. Programs include: deployment support for Sailors and their families, personal and family wellness education and counseling, emergency preparedness and response, crisis intervention and response, military and personal career development, financial education and counseling, and spouse employment. Programs and services are currently delivered from 81 sites worldwide, with 58 of

those sites delivering a full portfolio of programs and services. Navy FFSP is organized into three sub-functional areas: Deployment Readiness, Career Support and Retention, and Crisis Response. Across all three sub-functions, services include information and referral, individual clinical and non-clinical consultation and educational classes and workshops.

Marines

The Marine Corps has the Personal and Family Readiness Division which offers a wide range of services through the Marine Corp Community Services (MCCS) Program (Marine Corps 2005). One of the programs targeting families is the Marine and Family Services programs which delivers transition and relocation assistance; substance abuse counseling; family advocacy; new parent support; family member employment assistance; suicide prevention counseling; personal financial management; and educational opportunities. The Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) Program coordinates five family readiness programs: Key Volunteer Network (KVN); Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge, and Skills (L.I.N.K.S.); Spouses' Learning Series (SLS); Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP); and Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO).

Programs of particular interest are LINKS, SLS, and PREP. The L.I.N.K.S. program offers an orientation to the Marine Corps lifestyle for spouses. L.I.N.K.S. was developed and is implemented by a volunteer team of Marine Corps spouses in partnership with the Chaplain Corps (U.S. Marine Corps 2005). The program includes spouse-to-spouse mentoring and small group discussions.

The climate is informal with a nurturing and supportive format. Participants receive real life tips, information on Marine Corps culture, and resources to help manage the demands of Marine Corps life. The SLS is a three-tiered program providing Marine Corps spouses the opportunity to further their personal and professional growth through a series of workshops and online courseware in the following areas: relationship building, personal and professional empowerment, goal-setting, self-care, stress reduction and life/work balance. PREP is a research-based approach to teaching couples (premarital and married) how to increase communication and enhance attitudes toward marital success delivered by Chaplains.

Air Force

Airman and Family Readiness Centers offer programs and services in eight categories: (1) information and referral to family support programs, (2) spouse employment training and education, (3) family development education, (4) services for family members with special needs, (5) financial management education, (6) crisis intervention and referrals, (7) relocation assistance, and (8) deployment and reintegration support. The types and number of program offered in each category are determined at the base level.

Conclusion

The primary focus of anthropology regarding the military has been the examination and critique of the military organization and its policies which has highlighted the power dynamic between the military and the populations with whom it comes in contact. Anthropology has also contributed rich ethnographic

data about the lived experiences of military personnel and spouses thus providing insight into the complexities of family life within the military structure. Literature from other disciplines addresses important aspects that are useful to the understanding of military life, but there are significant gaps concerning the experiences of African American military marriages and families. Although empirical research findings suggest that African American military marriages are more stable than both white military marriages and black civilian marriages, these results are limited to a single study and based on data that is dated (1979). Furthermore, existing studies tend to rely on more broad, quantitative approaches. Therefore, anthropology is faced with a well-timed opportunity to build upon current knowledge, both by addressing those gaps in the literature and using ethnographic methods to develop more nuanced picture of contemporary life in the military for African Americans.

Chapter Four

Methodological Considerations

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the planning for and methodology used for my dissertation research. Before addressing specific methodological considerations, I first discuss issues about the research that derive from its military context, and which needed to be addressed before the project could begin. I continue with a discussion about how I approach the study, how couples were selected and recruited, and a description of the military installation associated with most of the military members. I then describe how data were collected and analyzed, and provide a description of the couples, before concluding with a discussion of the ethical considerations related to this research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore possible explanations for the stability of black military marriages with the hope that such insight can be used to address the apparent instability of black civilian marriages. Research has shown that black military couples have a lower divorce rate than their black civilian counterparts but researchers have been unable to account for the differences between the two groups (Lundquist 2006). From a structural perspective, it is speculated that the military offers African Americans greater socioeconomic gains than civilians which has a stabilizing effect on marriages (Lundquist 2006). In other words, despite a challenging lifestyle, African Americans have a more

positive perspective about military life, which perhaps results in greater marital stability. On a micro level, studies report that African Americans have more conflict, less effective communication, and tend to evaluate their relationships more negatively than other groups, thus translating to a relatively high divorce rate (Amato 2012; Bulanda and Brown 2007). This study seeks to identify what military couples perceive as the important aspects of their marriage and how they address challenges that serve as threats to the stability of their relationships.

Finally, this study also expands the current scope of military anthropology beyond the Human Terrain System and ethical concerns about the collaboration between anthropologists and the defense community. The individuals that comprise the military organization can provide valuable insight into military culture and governance but have been relatively ignored in the discipline.

Key Issues Prior to Research

Research that is conducted on military bases is typically sponsored by the military, or has been authorized by a high-ranking official on the base installation. This approval can be particularly helpful with recruitment for military studies since it allows access to a centralized community of personnel. Some service members may also be more comfortable speaking with researchers who have been approved by base officials. However, a military-supported project may also be a deterrent for some people, particularly those from communities who are already leery of participating in research because of cultural beliefs and/or a history of unethical research. Unlike the civilian sector, career advancement for military members can be jeopardized by the revelation of issues that imply a lack

of stability such as marital discord or the use of counseling services, subjects that are integral to couples research. Therefore after much consideration, I ultimately decided against seeking military approval for my study, to allay any concerns of active duty participants that the information they provided would be accessible by their command. This rationale seemed to be appreciated by participants when discussed during the informed consent process.

Another concern was the potential for rank to be used to coerce members into participating in the study. Rank is an ever-present reality that explicitly or implicitly influences all interactions among service members. Directives or commands can be issued during seemingly informal conversations between higher- and lower-ranking members. It was important that participation in the study remained as voluntary as possible; thus I decided to conduct the research independent of any actual or perceived influence from the military structure.

Grounded Theory Approach

The study draws on a grounded theory approach, in which the information collected from couples will produce conceptual categories to explain and understand those experiences and identify patterns. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of grounded theory methods include (1) simultaneous data collection and data analysis, (2) the creation of analytic codes and categories based on the data and not preconceived hypotheses, (3) the development of mid-range theories to explain behavior and processes, (4) writing analytic notes that explain and enhance categories emerging from the data, and (5) theoretical sampling to check and refine emerging conceptual categories (Charmaz 2004).

The literature supports the use of grounded theory methods for studying the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes, making it an appropriate approach to studying the intersection of African American couples and the military organization (Charmaz 2004; LaRossa 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Evolution of Study Criteria and Recruitment Strategies

Initially, the scope of the study focused on the experiences of African American active duty couples in the Air Force. Although the military is a closed community, I presumed my status as an African American with family ties to the military would increase my credibility and increase the likelihood of participation. My personal connection to communities in the vicinity of four air force bases located in Tampa, Florida, Montgomery, Alabama, Washington, DC, and Prince George's County, Maryland would allow me to spend ample time in those areas for the purpose of recruitment. In addition to recruiting strategies such as advertising in military newspapers, conducting outreach at locations with close proximity to military bases and utilizing personal and professional associates, I anticipated my position as a "native anthropologist" would easily produce a sufficient number of couples who would agree to participate in the study in a relatively short period of time However, it became clear after my initial efforts to solicit participants that I needed to modify my approach despite my supposed "inner circle" status.

After spending several hours of distributing flyers (see Appendix A) at an air show on an air force base in Maryland, I managed to leave with the contact

information of 10 people who expressed an interest in participating in the study or could refer me to other potential participants. Attempts to follow-up with most of the contacts were unsuccessful, with my phone calls and email going unanswered. The exception was one woman who was retired from the Air Force and mistakenly referred me to someone who was involved in an interracial marriage, which was outside the scope of my study. The study also didn't include retired military personnel at the time. An attempt to post an advertisement in newspapers at two Air Force bases was also blocked because it required prior approval by the base command.

Following these and a few other recruiting setbacks, I (supported by my committee), decided to open the study to personnel in all military branches and people who retired during the last 10 years, a time frame which coincides with the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recruitment was more successful after making these changes in eligibility criteria and I was able to focus the study solely on those who were stationed at MacDill AFB and lived in the Tampa Bay area. This had the advantage of producing a somewhat more homogeneous sample, with participants sharing some experience of locale.

I have several family members who have a history of service in the military, including one who was critical to this study. My first cousin, who is retired from the Navy, works at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, where I reside. As my primary contact on base, he was instrumental at spreading the word about my research and is responsible for recruiting the majority of

participants. In addition, my brother is now a civilian employee at MacDill and served as a secondary contact.

Description of MacDill Air Force Base

MacDill Air Force Base is located seven miles south of Tampa, Florida on the southwestern tip of the interbay peninsula in Hillsborough County. It is situated on 5,767 acres of land including 906 acres of wetlands. MacDill is home to the active-duty 6th Air Mobility Wing (AMW) and the reserve 927th Air Refueling Wing which have a primary mission of aerial refueling, airlift and contingency response missions for the U.S. and allied forces worldwide. There are approximately 15,485 military personnel assigned to MacDill and 2,798 civilian employees on base. Figure 2.1 is a map of Florida which shows the location of MacDill AFB.

MacDill AFB (formerly known as MacDill Field) has played a pivotal role in the training of Airmen since it was activated in 1941. The first primary mission of the base involved training Airmen to fly and operate heavy bomber aircraft during World War II. After the war in 1951, MacDill became an operational base for Strategic Air Command and focused training activities on new bomber and tanker aircraft with a mission of strategic bombardment and air refueling. Plans to close most of MacDill emerged in 1960 due to the advent of missile technology and decreasing usage of the heavy bombers used in previous wars. However the Cuban Missile Crisis highlighted the strategic location of the base and led to the cancellation of the planned cutbacks. In 1963, MacDill became a Tactical Air Command base and began training crews in fighter aircraft that eventually

Figure 1: MacDill AFB on a Map of Florida

deployed to Vietnam and later to Iraq during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Due to military downsizing, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (DBCRC) mandated MacDill to cease all flying operations by 1993 and allowed the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to utilize the runway. However, in 1994, MacDill once again demonstrated its significance when it played a pivotal role in U.S. operations to restore Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his government after an attempted military coup. The 1995 DBCRC recommended that the Air Force retain control of the airfield which eventually led to MacDill's new mission in refueling.

In addition to aerial refueling, the 6th Wing also supports two of 10 Unified Combatant Commands (UCC) in the U.S. military, U.S. Central Command

(USCENTCOM) and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). USCENTCOM, along with six other UCCs, have an area of responsibility (AOR) which is a region in the world where the combatant commanders plan and conduct military operations. The AOR of USCENTCOM comprises 20 countries in what is deemed the central area of the globe, including Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Thus, USCENTCOM is the department that has coordinated operations for the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. USCENTCOM is considered a joint command because most of the military branches are represented in its organization. This structure provides exposure, albeit limited, to the unique culture of each service branch. Figure 2.2 is a map of MacDill AFB on which USCENTCOM is denoted as building 570 in the north-central area of the base.

Data Collection – Interviews

I decided to utilize a semi-structured interview format for this study based on a review of the literature as well as my experiences while conducting a "pilot" study to fulfill requirements for 2 doctoral courses. I conducted joint and individual in-depth interviews with ten active duty and retired military couples over the course of a year. Collecting data through in-depth interviews provides an opportunity to examine relationships and the narrative accounts of social

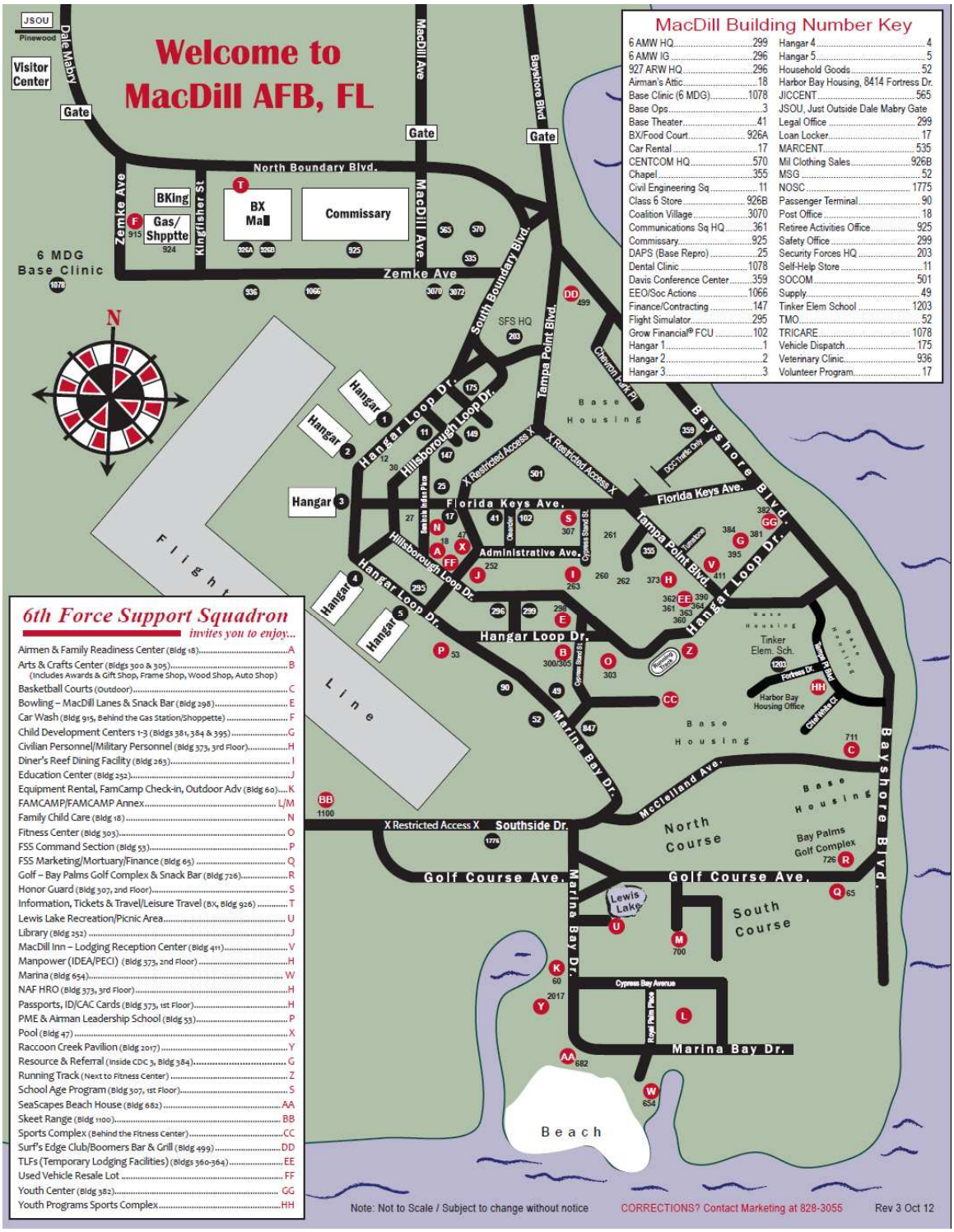

Figure 2: Map of MacDill AFB

worlds (Miller and Blassner 2004). While the joint interview format is the most common qualitative research method utilized for obtaining information from couples, a research design often incorporates both joint and individual interviews (Arksey 1996), as did my research.

The literature does present several advantages of conducting joint interviews in which both members of the couple are present. One advantage is that couples can co-create meaning through the narratives as well as elicit information that may not have emerged during interviews with individuals (Allan 1980; Marks, et al. 2008). Couples engage in a negotiation process that produces a shared reality which is often different than the reality experienced by the individual participants (Valentine 1999). As Allan states:

> Not only is it possible that this joint account will be fuller and more valid than either spouse's individual statements, but…the discussion involved in its creation provides much useful information for the researcher and allows him to explore themes he might never have uncovered in individual interviews. (1980:206)

Couples can corroborate each other's stories, fill in memory gaps or add details to the other person's account which may then bring other themes to the surface for discussion (Allan 1980; Valentine 1999). Participants can also challenge and/or contradict each other's accounts and correct any unintentional distortions to help create a more valid version (Valentine 1999). For example, one spouse may feel the need to present a certain situation in a more favorable light rather than one that reflects the reality. This leads the other spouse to contradict the idealized statements and deny the reality the other spouse is attempting to present. Researchers can also gain insight into the relationship by observing the

interactions and power dynamic between the couple which includes their use of both verbal and non-verbal communication (Arksey 1996). In other words,

> …this form of interviewing affords an opportunity to witness how the couple perform together, how they attempt to support and influence one another and how they cope with disagreement. What matters from this perspective is not so much the final account negotiated by the spouses but the very processes involved in their negotiation (Allan 1980:p.208).

The negotiation process in which the couples engage during the joint interview may also illustrate how the household functions in relation to other issues (Miller and Blassner 2004; Valentine 1999). This type of information cannot be readily obtained through other methods such as questionnaires or even highly structured interviews because it requires interaction between the couple.

Another advantage of the joint interview is that it "widens the range of relationships that can be compared with one another" (Allan 1980:p.207). We all function within a system of various kinds of relationships, but the extent and quality of those relationships differ for each person, even for members of a couple that interact with the same people. Comparing those relationships during an interview can generate a fuller discussion and bring an awareness to the underlying principles of different relationships (Allan 1980).

However, a combination of joint and individual interviews may provide a sense of equity, which is important when one participant tends to dominate the conversation. Researchers have expressed particular concern for women who are sometimes inhibited during joint discussions and men who are more likely to be more domineering, to interrupt or speak on behalf of the other (Arksey 1996). However, Seale et al. (2008) found in their study that women actually spoke

more and more often than men during interviews about health-related issues. Finally, when the joint interview occurs after individual ones, any inconsistencies between the separate accounts can be addressed and clarified (Arksey 1996; Valentine 1999).

However, there are also some disadvantages to joint interviewing that should be noted. Although identified as an advantage, the co-creation of meaning or consensual data can also be considered a liability, since a couple may collude to present more socially acceptable behavior rather than behavior that is reflective of reality (Arksey 1996; Valentine 1999). There is the risk that one or both individuals will not feel as capable of being candid or honest when in each other's presence, particularly about sensitive issues, thereby decreasing the validity of the data collected (Allan 1980; Seale, et al. 2008). Furthermore, some couples may speak more freely and openly than others which also will influence the amount of data generated for each couple and impact data analysis.

The joint interview presents more logistical challenges since the researcher must accommodate the schedules of two or more people, including children, rather than just one (Valentine 1999). Arksey (1996) also notes that the joint interview method is associated with a low response rate. In a study that examined the sensitive topic of money, a high number of couples declined to participate or only one partner, often the wife, would agree to be interviewed (Pahl 1989). The joint interview has the potential to inadvertently expose tension in the relationship that may lead to a full-blown conflict or argument in which the

researcher is called upon to mediate or take sides (Arksey 1996; Valentine 1999). The researcher's response in such a situation is critical and requires the interviewer to disentangle herself from the discussion without taking sides or leaving either or both participants in a vulnerable position (Valentine 1999).

I incorporated photo elicitation, the method of using photographs in the interview process, during the initial joint interview. I chose this method for several reasons. First, the process allows some of the attention, which is sometimes uncomfortable, to be taken off the subject and placed onto another object (the photograph) thus allowing the person to be less self-conscious when reflecting thoughts, perceptions and memories (Clark-IbáÑez 2004). Second, it has been argued that using images and words in an interview can reach a deeper level of consciousness than words alone (Harper 2002), with photos acting as triggers to memory. Finally, photographs also provide the opportunity to narrate and explain, rather than answer direct questions, thus giving participants more control over the process (Oliffe and Bottorff 2007).

There is sparse literature about using preexisting photographs in interviews (as opposed to having participants take photos especially for the project). While pre-existing photographs can be enlightening, they can also "lack important contextual information such as the relationship between the photographer and the subject, why a photograph survived when others did not, and the photographer's intention in making the image" (Prosser and Schwartz 2004:p342). In the "pilot" study, there were some cases in which the photograph merely reflected a fond memory and didn't necessarily address the research

questions. In order to limit researcher influence on the data, I may not have provided sufficient guidance in the selection of photographs, an error I corrected for the current study.

Each couple was asked to select five to eight photographs from their personal collection that represented various aspects of their marriage. In most cases, the wife selected the photos and asked her husband if he agreed with the collection or they chose the photos together. This process including the selection of alternate photos sometimes took place during the formal interview rather than prior to the interview as hoped. There was one couple in which the husband took responsibility for choosing the photos and sought approval from his wife. The couple was asked to describe what is seen in the picture and what the image represents. This combined approach provided the flexibility to allow them to identify those issues that are most important as well as the option to follow up with questions that may not have been elicited by the photos in subsequent interviews.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions during a three-phase the process. For the initial "pilot" study, I only conducted one joint interview with each couple and found that the two hours allotted for the interview was not sufficient to adequately explore the issues they presented. I usually left the interview wanting to follow-up with individuals about contradictory statements or non-verbal reactions that implied more needed to be shared about an issue. There were also some topics unique to the individual such as being a military

wife that could be better examined in-depth during an individual interview. Therefore, for this study the initial interview was held jointly, followed by individual interviews with each spouse, and ending with a joint interview for a total of 40 interviews.

Thirty-eight sessions took place in the couples' homes, while the remaining two were held at alternative locations that were more convenient to the participants at the time. Initial joint interviews lasted between one and two hours and individual interviews were between 30 minutes and one-and-a-half hours. The final joint interview was the shortest in duration due to fewer questions lasting 20 minutes to one hour. The time between each interview varied according to the availability of the individuals and the phase of the research. Initially, the interviews were scheduled in 3 month intervals. However, as the time allotted for data collection grew short, interviews were held within 1 to 4 weeks of each other. Since I personally conducted all of the interviews, I am confident that the questions were similarly asked for each interview. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection – Observation

The most traditional anthropological method of research is fieldwork or participant observation and is a critical component to understanding the population of study. Through the influential work of pioneers like Bronislaw Malinowski, Edward Evans-Pritchard and Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston, field observations became a legitimate approach to investigating and revealing the complexities and sometimes contradictory nature of humanity.

However, as one researcher notes, the selection of a research site does not necessarily guarantee access (Tierney 2007).

I partially achieved my goal of integrating within the family structure as much as possible so that I could observe couple interactions in various settings. I had the opportunity to attend a variety of formal and informal military-related functions that provided insight into lives of one couple. Events included a farewell party for the wife who was relocating to another state for a job, a retirement party for her husband, as well as his retirement ceremony held at MacDill AFB. I used these occasions to talk with military personnel and collect additional information about Air Force military rituals, social behaviors, and perceptions about being married in the military. My primary contact at MacDill also arranged for me to attend a cookout hosted by a potential study participant. She ultimately decided not to participate but discussions at the event still provided valuable information about military life. These families served as my informal entrée into military society; without their assistance this would have proved to be a challenging bureaucratic and time-consuming process.

Data Analysis

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. However, the audiotape files were coded prior to submission and only I had the list of names associated with the codes. I listened to every recorded interview and compared them to the typed transcripts to check for errors and military jargon or colloquialisms that might have been misunderstood.

The transcripts and field notes were reviewed for themes that emerged during the interviews and other events, and which addressed the research questions.

Description of Couples

Ten couples agreed to be interviewed for the study. Five couples represent the Air Force, while the Navy and Marines are represented by two couples each, with a final couple in the Army. Five couples are dual-military marriages meaning both spouses were in the military at the time they married. In all of those cases, it was the wife who separated from the military. The participants who have a history in the military are shown in Table 2.1 and are grouped according to rank.

The sample consists entirely of senior NCOs (E-6 through E-8), junior officers (O-3), and senior officers (O-4 and O-5).

Table 5
Number of Interviews based on Grade and Status

Grade	Active-Duty	Retired	Discharged	Total
E-6	2	1	1	4
E-7	-	3	-	3
E-8	-	1	-	1
W-4	1	-	-	1
O-3	-	-	2	2
O-4	3*	-	-	3
O-5	-	1	-	1
Total	6	6	3	15

All the active-duty couples interviewed live off-base, which is not surprising since base housing is limited and tends to be reserved primarily for junior military personnel. In most cases participants lived at least 45 minutes away from the base. Figure 2.2 is a map of the Tampa Bay area showing the location of MacDill AFB and its proximity to the areas where each of the 10 couples live.

Figure 3: Map of Tampa with Location of Residences

The overall sample was highly educated, with most participants having a bachelors or graduate degree. Household incomes were similar, with all the couples reporting a joint annual income of $75,000 and above. Six couples live solely on the husband's income while the wives are engaged in other pursuits, such as going to school for an advanced degree, taking care of the home and childrearing -- in some cases simultaneously. In the situation of two couples in

which the wives are retired from the military, the household income consists of the husband's employment income and the wife's retirement pay.

The age range for participants range between 29 and 59 years old and each couple has between two and four children. The length of marriage also varied widely from 3 years to 37 years. Two couples are involved in their second marriages while for one couple this is the husband's second marriage and the wife's first marriage. The sample overwhelmingly identified as Christian with the exception of one couple in which the husband practices Islam and the wife, although raised as a Christian, does not currently claim any religious affiliation. She stated she would like to learn more about her husband's faith and is particularly interested in getting their two young children involved in more religious activities.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research with families can present some unique challenges in terms of the interpersonal dynamics and issues that may emerge during the course of research. This can be particularly true when the researcher is both an anthropologist and a social worker, as in my case. This dual role raises questions about how to reconcile the two positions and whether one should take precedence when faced with an ethical dilemma. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) Code of Ethics (2009) states that "…anthropological researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities, or might reasonably be thought to be affected by their research"

(Research section, para. A2). However, as a social worker who maintains a license in the state of Florida, I am mandated to report any suspicions of child abuse and/or neglect. While this issue did not arise during data collection, I was fully prepared to respond according to the legal statute designating all licensed social workers as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect (Proceedings Relating to Children, 39 FL. Ann. Statute. § 39.201).

An additional concern with working with such a small population is the researcher's ability to balance her position as both an outsider and insider. I developed an affinity for the study participants and would often describe them as "my couples." There were several couples that I genuinely liked and with whom I could potentially interact on a social basis. In fact, it would have been quite easy for me to develop a friendship with some of the wives who are similar in age and background and have comparable views on life. There were occasions when I would visit one couple who had just had a baby to see if they needed any assistance or just to chat. However, there was always some concern about what to do with information that was gained during these informal visits. Would it be a violation of trust to include such data or would I simply be fulfilling my role as researcher? Eventually I realized that these couples understood my responsibility as a researcher to report on any pertinent information I collected and they trusted that I would do so in a manner that would maintain their anonymity. The rapport that we established was critical to conducting this research and I am grateful for their willingness to share their lives.

Chapter Five

Results

Introduction

In this study, interviews were conducted with ten couples, resulting in data regarding their experiences of military life, especially with regard to marriage. This section first briefly introduces the couples with information derived from a demographic form completed by each individual and their interviews. Pseudonyms are created for each participant and specific identifying characteristics are either omitted or generalized to protect the confidentiality of the participants. This is especially important since half of the couples were still active-duty members and information about family life is subject to inquiry by their command. The chapter continues with a discussion of 12 key themes that emerged from the interviews.

Introduction to the Couples

Howard and Connie

Howard and Connie were referred to me by my primary contact at CENTCOM and agreed to participate in the study after an initial conversation. They are both retired as NCOs from the Air Force after 20 years of service and had been married for 23 years at the time of their interviews. They have three children, one whom is currently serving in the Air Force. According to Howard, he and Connie dated for a little over a year while they were both stationed in Japan, but Connie claims that they only dated officially for two months. She says "Yes, we were both just friends. That was it. He wasn't my boyfriend, I wasn't

his girlfriend, we were just friends going out and having a good time together." Apparently, Howard had a different perspective so that when he was later posted to Holland he proposed to Connie and mailed her an engagement ring.

As they look at their wedding photograph together, Howard and Connie recall the obstacles they overcame to be united. Connie, along with her mother, planned the ceremony while she was still in Japan and Howard contributed however he could from Holland. Far from the lavish weddings we're accustomed to seeing in the media, theirs took place at Connie's aunt's house in her home state of Florida and cost $500 including the reception. The food was provided by her uncle who is a chef and their cake was given to them as a wedding gift. Connie didn't even find her dress until she arrived for the wedding. Soon after the excitement of the wedding, however, the reality of their situations resumed as Connie and Howard returned to their bases, where they started married life separated from each other. It would be almost a year before Connie received her permanent change of station (PCS) to Holland to be with Howard. They have spent 5 years of their marriage separated due to deployments or remote assignments, a point that Howard feels is significant because "a lot of couples could not deal with that." He considers himself to be "blessed and then lucky" to have a wife that understood the nature of his job and has been able to maintain their household.

When I first met Howard and Connie, I immediately felt at ease in their presence. Although Howard is only a few years older than me, he has the demeanor of someone more senior and reminded me of an uncle who wants to

see his niece succeed in school. He offered words of encouragement following each of our interviews and appreciated my efforts to highlight the experiences of black military families. If Howard was like an uncle, then Connie was definitely like an aunt who was no-nonsense but had a nurturing spirit, evidenced by her full-time role as caretaker for her mother who has dementia. Though she was less vocal during our joint interviews, Connie insured that her voice was heard.

Bernard and Sheila

I was introduced to Bernard at the retirement ceremony of another study participant. Bernard retired as a senior NCO from the Air Force after 25 years of service and is currently a civilian employee at CENTCOM. Sheila works full-time in the county school system. They had been married for 14 years at the time of their interviews and have three adult children from previous marriages, two of whom still reside at home. A photo they selected for our interview prompted an interesting story of how they met. It shows them at their first Christmas party as a couple, dressed in red shirts and wide smiles, which took place at Bernard's best friend's house. Bernard and Sheila were first introduced by the sister of Sheila's ex-boyfriend. The sister, Ruth, went to meet with Bernard to get advice about how to reconcile with her ex-boyfriend who was also Bernard's best friend. Sheila accompanied the sister to the meeting and became acquainted with Bernard. It was not a love-connection initially since Bernard was still recovering from a divorce and had no interest in getting remarried. However, after a few phone calls, a friendship was established and a year later they were married.

Bernard and Sheila's relationship is interesting because of their experiences with blending two families. Unlike some couples, they seem to have agreed from the beginning of their relationship about how to parent their stepchildren and supported each other's efforts to do so. Bernard and Sheila presented as a united front when coping with the challenges of rearing stepchildren, particularly Sheila's oldest child who had difficulties adjusting to her mother's new husband and Bernard's son who is in recovery from substance abuse issues. The other remarkable aspect about their life is Bernard's 10 year tenure at one military base, an occurrence that is highly unlikely at this time during these periods of conflict.

Matthew and Felicia

Matthew retired from the Navy as a Chief Petty Officer following 22 years of service, and currently works as a contractor for DOD. He was referred by a secondary contact at CENTCOM whom Matthew considers to be a mentor. Felicia is a stay-at-home mother who is also working toward earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. They had been married for 15 years at the time of their interviews and have two young children. Felicia first met Matthew at the hair salon where his sister worked. They dated for two years and during that time Felicia moved to Tampa where Matthew was assigned so they could be together. After only two months of marriage, Matthew and Felicia relocated to Turkey for two years where he was assigned to a naval station.

When we first met, my initial impression of Felicia and Matthew was that they were very serious and I predicted they would be guarded in their interactions

with me. I could not have been more mistaken in my assessment. The joint interviews with this couple were filled with the playful banter and laughter indicative of a sincere friendship. I often found myself having to regain my composure and bring the conversation back to the topic of discussion. However, it became clear that there was also tension related to Matthew's self-professed authoritarian personality and the military's negative impact on Felicia's career path. In fact, many of the photographs they selected were attached to memories of Felicia being unhappy with the each job she had at the time. Interestingly, the images portray seemingly happy moments of the couple and their family but a deeper discussion of the pictures typically included Felicia's feelings of discontent. In her words, "I hated every job I had…" which speaks to her ongoing search for a meaningful career of her own. Although the interview process revealed interpersonal conflicts, it reportedly served as a catalyst for Matthew and Felicia to further discuss their relationship.

Mark and Jeanine

Mark is an active-duty officer who has been in the Navy for 26 years and was referred by my primary contact at CENTCOM. His wife, Jeanine, is a retired chief petty officer from the Navy after 24 years of service. They had been married for nine years at the time of their interviews and have four children from previous marriages. Since retiring, Jeanine has been employed with the Federal government and recently earned her bachelor's degree. Mark and Jeanine initially met as coworkers when they were stationed in Italy. At the time they were both married and their relationship was strictly platonic. Six years and two

divorces later, they found themselves working together again. This time Mark and Jeanine began dating and eventually married.

Jeanine and Mark's marriage seems to have benefited greatly from the lessons they have learned from their previous marriages. There was a cooperative spirit between them during the interviews that was also evident in the narratives about their relationship, particularly those that emerged during the photo elicitation phase of the first interview. When we finished reviewing their pictures, Kevin summed up the collection by saying "You can see in about almost all the pictures is the compromise. Every one of the pictures I think about the reflection of our relationship is just a lot of compromise, a lot of understanding to get through different things" such as blending their two families, coordinating two military careers, and coping with Jeanine's transition from military to civilian service. The importance of effective communication was also a common theme in our discussions as well as the advantages and disadvantages of being a dual-military couple.

John and Staci

John is an active-duty staff NCO in the Marines and has served for 13 years, two of which were in the Reserve. His wife, Staci, is a stay-at-home mother of their four children and they have been married for 11 years. They met when Staci was working at a nursing home where John delivered mail for a package delivery company. She didn't like John initially because she thought he was "rude" but as time went on, they began to flirt with each other during his deliveries. According to Staci, John began to "stalk" her, found out that she lived

with her grandmother and eventually ingratiated himself with her grandmother and aunt to the point of eating lunch with them on a daily basis. They eventually started dating officially after much encouragement from Staci's family members.

The phrase that comes to mind when I think of this couple is "best friends". John and Staci selected two photographs of them at two different Marine Corps Balls which they enjoy attending mainly because of the fun they have together. In addition to being husband and wife, the picture "reminds us of how we could be friends too", according to Staci, "and how we can at least go out and leave the kids home and just have fun." In fact, they routinely schedule time to be together whether it is going on a cruise or Staci accompanying John to a conference where they can go out in the evenings. Making accommodations for quality time also applies to their children such as John arranging to attend school in the summer so his family can go with him.

In addition to the challenges of military life, they have also endured periods of homelessness and survived serious illness during their 11 year marriage. In many ways John and Staci remind me of the stereotypical military couple with the career-focused husband and his devoted wife whose primary focus is the stability of her family and supporting her husband's career. However, it is also apparent that military life is taking its toll on Staci who is looking forward to the day when John retires from the Marines.

Chris and Shelley

Chris and Shelley was the first couple to agree to participate in my study so I've been able to witness a few important events in their lives. When we first

met, Chris had been in the Air Force for 21 years and was planning his retirement. Shelley, who had also served in the Air Force, was in the process of completing an advanced degree and seeking employment. Chris eventually retired as an officer and Shelley finished school and relocated to another state to take a position at a managed healthcare company. They had been married for three years at the time of our interviews and still have the air of newlyweds. They also have two teenage children from Chris' previous marriage who spend the summers with them. This is a first marriage for Shelley who lovingly refers to her stepchildren as her "bonus" children.

I have a special fondness for Shelley and Chris since I've known them longer than the other couples and have attended a few of their special events. They are a dynamic couple who have built a life outside of the military through membership in several black fraternal organizations which is illustrated in the photographs they selected. One picture shows the couple "repping" or displaying hand signs representing their respective fraternity and sorority and another shows them in formal attire with Chris wearing the traditional fez associated with membership in the Masons. It symbolizes their success and affluence and as Torrez says "all those things that African Americans should strive for and that we continually strive to do." The manner in which Torrez and Michelle present themselves to the world is important to the couple because they believe that they are representing their organizations, the military and by extension the African American community at all times.

Jerry and Gwen

I met Jerry while I was having lunch at a local eatery. He and another uniformed service member were waiting in line to order their food when I approached him to introduce myself and tell him about my study. Jerry was understandably guarded initially but listened to my pitch and agreed to speak with me further about what would be required if he and his wife decided to participate, which they did. Jerry and Gwen had been married for seven years and had one child at the time of our interviews. He has been an active-duty officer in the Air Force for 11 years and Gwen is a stay-at-home mother. They have since welcomed another child into their family and are now adjusting to caring for two young children.

Chronologically, Jerry and Gwen are the youngest couple among the participants but in their seven years together they have experienced more challenges of being married in the military than many of the other couples. They were candid about their marriage and shared some particularly difficult moments they have endured which made it difficult to maintain an impartial stance. Their vulnerabilities and amiability evoked a desire to support their marriage by providing reassurance and encouragement whenever needed. I even offered to provide childcare so they could spend time together alone but have yet to take me up on my offer.

Lawrence and Marcia

Marcia is the relative of a friend so we have been acquainted for the past several years. However, I met her husband Lawrence for the first time at our

initial meeting. They had been married for 37 years at the time of our interviews and have two adult children. Lawrence retired from the Air Force as an officer after 21 years of service and currently works at an accounting firm. Marcia is a housewife who is active in her church and continues to manage the household. They met while in college and dated for a year before getting married; Lawrence didn't enter the military until after he and Marcia were married. A picture of Lawrence's commissioning ceremony made Marcia recall when he first told her he was going to join the Air Force:

> I was like, 'You got to be kidding,' because when I married Lawrence, he was an accounting major. So I thought he was going to be an accountant, a CPA. He had said that he was going to law school and he was going to join the Air Force. I was like, 'Yes, right. How was that going to happen being an accountant?' He ended up going to law school and joining ROTC. I was like, 'Why? Why are you doing that? I mean for the stipend you get, I'll give it to you.' I was working. He said he wanted to join the Air Force. So that's what he did because by signing up with ROTC, he obligated himself to joining the Air Force after he finished law school.

As Marcia stated "I married an accountant who became a military man. Fooled me!"

Marcia and Lawrence have the longest marriage of all the participants in the study. Marcia is lively and talkative while Lawrence is far more reserved and soft-spoken which initially caused me some concern until I remembered that I included individual interviews in the methodology to address this type of issue. I quickly learned that Lawrence is simply a man not given to verbosity and responds just enough to get his point across. Their marriage is solidly based in their faith and the belief that their union is divinely orchestrated as reflected in

Marcia's statement about Lawrence, "That was what God gave to me. He was definitely a gift from God."

David and Sarah

David is an active-duty officer and has been in the Army for 13 years. Sarah is a former Army officer who served for almost 12 years and is currently a stay-at-home mother. They have been married for 11 years and have two young children. They met while posted in Korea and dated for over a year before getting married upon their return to the U.S. Sarah outranked David when they met since she had been in the Army for two years prior to David's entry into the military, but both were still a part of the officer corps.

Based on my interactions with David, I initially thought that David and Sarah would be serious and reserved people. Once again, my assessment was inaccurate because they were much more talkative than I expected and quite playful with each other during the joint interviews. There were occasions when they would get involved in repartee and I felt almost invisible. I also marveled at how their house was immaculate with everything in its proper place each time we met, and I don't think it was because they were expecting a visitor. In fact, this is a common characteristic among all of the couples with the exception of one who had just moved into their home and were still getting settled.

Michael and Rachel

I was introduced to Michael at a gathering hosted by Chris and Shelley and he expressed an interest in hearing about my study. After consulting with his wife Rachel, I met with them for our first interview about a month later. Michael is

an active-duty staff NCO who had been in the Marine Corps for almost 11 years at the time of our interviews. Rachel is a former staff NCO who had also served in the Marines for almost 11 years and is currently working and seeking an advanced degree. They have been married for 8 years and have 2 young children. Their friendship began while they were both stationed in Japan. Their wedding picture revealed that not long before they married, Rachel had ended a previous relationship and was pregnant with her first child while Michael provided her emotional support. They eventually started dating and after two months they got married.

Michael and Rachel have the most volatile marriage of all of the couples I interviewed. A picture of Michael and Rachel's daughter naturally elicited fond memories of interacting with her and the way she would strike a pose whenever she saw a camera. But they also recalled a troubled relationship that prompted Michael to pack his belongings and move out multiple times before they had even reached their one-year anniversary. Michael admits to being immature at the time and unprepared to be a husband. Rachel says she was coping with depression and feeling overwhelmed by all the changes that occurred in her life including the break-up with her ex-boyfriend, having a child and getting married shortly thereafter. She had come to a point when focusing on her child was all she could emotionally handle:

> I kind of blocked him out because of the depression and all the stuff that was going on with us. I just totally just said, 'Forget this' and I concentrated on her. He felt like I was neglecting him for her when to me, we were going through too much at one time and I had just already – just not a year before, I already went through a lot of crap. I didn't want to go

> through that again. So I just said, 'Forget it. If he leaves, he leaves. If he don't, he don't' type of thing.

Considering their history, I was initially uncertain if they could contribute to a study about the strengths of military marriage. However, their story is important because it gives voice to those military couples whose relationships began under not-so-ideal circumstances and yet they continue to persevere. I'm still unsure about the survivability of their marriage due to their history but l do not doubt that Michael and Rachel have a strong connection that has been forged by the many trials they have endured during their 8 year marriage.

Theme 1: Duty-Related Separations

All of the couples have experienced multiple duty-related separations due to deployments, field exercises in preparation for deployment or the pursuit of educational opportunities. Periods of separation ranged from 1 month to 2 years in which the military members travelled to locations such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Africa. Mark spoke about being aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt during a particularly difficult tour that established a Navy record for the most consecutive days at sea without pulling into a port which still remains:

> So we left that cruise which was the – it's 9/11. So 9/11 – September 11th, we were about to deploy anyway within the month. Well, 9/11 happened, of course, we didn't see that coming. We ended up getting underway about a week-and-a-half, two weeks earlier than we expected and, of course, the mission changed, which was a routine deployment, six-month deployment. When 9/11 happened, we had to get underway a lot quicker. So we left Norfolk September 18th of 2011. The first time that ship pulled into a port was February – I want to say February 22nd, February 23rd when we hit our first port. So 160th day when we hit our first port. So, of course, September, like I said - so we saw Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, all that go by, we're at sea. So it was pretty tough.

In all, we only pulled in twice that whole seven months.

The experience of a duty-related separation for each spouse varies according to the duration of the absence, the location of the military member and whether or not the couple has children. As Jerry explains, getting deployed to a warzone as opposed to a more stable location comes with additional challenges:

> Iraq was different because you're obviously the – I guess the fear factor that goes along with it to start with – "Oh, my gosh. I'm going into this type of environment," don't know what to expect. You know, you hear the horror stories, so that part was stressful, leading up to it. Then you got your family here that's going through the same thing. That part was stressful at first. The actual deployment and getting over there – rough too. It takes you a few days to get over there and a lot of – just a lot of waiting around and anxiousness, waiting to get there, what it's going to be like, all that kind of stuff.

However, once in theater, he focuses on getting acclimated and tries to use the time as an opportunity for personal growth:

> I get there and the first week or so is about learning the routine. You're working pretty long hours. The environment's rough, especially when we got there, summertime, 130 almost…I'm wearing all the stuff, getting acclimated to the environment, and everything that's going on, it's rough. So, after about the first couple of weeks, about two weeks or so, you start getting into a groove and routine. It's all about routine. The faster you can get into a routine, the faster the time seems to go…So, you start finding your routine. For me, it was you get up and you do some work in the morning. You go to – get some breakfast, do some more work, go to lunch, work out, and then try and find something fun to do in the end of the day, and then knock out your – in your free time, if you got a master's - working on your master's or something like that …So that I would work on that also just to pass the time and do that. A lot of those things I would tend to do, just find a routine, and doing something I enjoyed like working out and all that kind of stuff…So, that aspect of it was good and you – it sucks that you're away from everybody but you realize that, "Okay, I'm bettering myself this way," or "I'm working out and I'm going to lose some weight," "I'm doing this," and "I'm getting three free meals a day, that's good, and I'm not spending any money because everything's paid for and -" so that aspect – it was pretty good and for me it was – looking back, it wasn't a bad time. There weren't a lot of those stresses that you have here, per se.

Sarah's experience of being deployed in Iraq for a year illustrates how people form a bond in a warzone:

> When you're deployed, it's like a big family. Everyone is together, you all live in a big tent together. You work together. You go with all your workmates to eat every day. So while you're gone - I mean we all just have a - not a good time cause you're away from home. But you have a group of people that's like your little mini-family.

While Jerry and Sarah have a more positive view of their deployments Matthew describes a time filled with concern about his family back home:

> I was always worried about her because she was by herself and she was going to school. I was lonely. I mean I was always lonely. I was worried about her and stuff, and I couldn't do anything about the separation. It's just the way the Navy is.

For the spouse that is left behind, a deployment can be a time when days are filled with activities such as work, school and children's activities and the evenings are reminders that their spouse is gone. Rachel describes her feelings of isolation when Michael is away:

> …it's lonely because when I lay down after all this rushing and getting them ready for bed and I lie down, then like I'm trying to talk to somebody like, "Oh, Let me tell you what they had me do at work today," and there's no one there. Then I really can't sleep because sometimes when I can't sleep, I toss and turn and I roll over and I find him and then – right. Then I'm able to relax and go to sleep. Then when he's gone, I really can't sleep because it's too much room.

Understandably, the presence of children plays a significant role in how a wife or husband experiences the absence of their military spouse. When Gwen looks at a picture of Jerry and their newborn son, she sees her husband who is about to leave for a six-month tour to Iraq and the last time Jerry would really get to interact with their son at that stage of his development.

> So when I look at that picture, I think it's very sweet because, you know, he's getting to hold [our son] but, really, there wasn't gonna be much more of that until he was like walking. You know what I mean? So, well, when he left for that [field training], Jonathan was nine weeks old. So six weeks went by, then he came home for two weeks, and then he left again… [Our son] was nine weeks old and when [Jerry] came back, [he] was walking. So he missed a whole lotta stuff.

Figure 2: Jerry Holding Son During a Brief Visit at Field Training.

At the time of the photograph (Figure 1), however, they didn't know he would be deployed to Iraq. Jerry wasn't notified until he completed field training and was given two weeks to prepare for his departure which included one week of pre-deployment training in Virginia. Since she wasn't working outside the home, Gwen and their son accompanied Jerry to Virginia because they wanted to spend as much time together as possible. For Jerry, the picture illustrates the challenge of being in the military and a parent and for Gwen, it foretells the periods of single-parenthood she would soon experience. When asked how deployment without a child was different than with a child, Gwen responded:

> Well, deployment with a child obviously there's so much work involved. Without a child, I have my friends, I have my job, I have church. I was always gone. The hardest part would probably be for every deployment, every time he leaves is that night for me because during the day I'm so busy. It doesn't bother me during the day but at night when it's time to go to bed…

Connie agreed and stated:

> So yes, it was real hard trying to – I had a teenager and then I had two: one was a toddler and then other one was – how old was he? Five? I think he was either four or five. I think he was five. So I had a bunch of different little stages going on but it was rough and I would have my moments where I just was like, “I can’t do this no more. I’m tired of this. I’m just tired. It’s time for him to get home from wherever,”

In contrast, the absence of Marcia’s husband, Lawrence, seemed to have little impact on the daily life of the family unit:

> The good thing about that was the fact that I was my kids’ mom. So it didn’t matter if he went or if he didn’t go because our lives were pretty much the same. Except for him being gone which was sad but we had the continuity. Because I was there for them like 24/7, helicopter mom, what everyone called it. It was easier for us. We became very close as a unit because we had each other. That’s what we had that was consistent. It didn’t matter so much.

When military spouses are deployed to an area of conflict, there is constant concern that he or she will be wounded or killed. Sarah spoke about how she processes her husband’s presence in a warzone:

> It usually takes about a month to get over that “He's gone” phase and then because he's a field grade officer now – I know he's not out running patrols so the fear does not exist either. I know there's a possibility that he could come home in a bag. He knew that about me when I was deployed. You never know how your spouse is going to return. You just pray that they'll come back walking on two feet and the same shape as they left and not injured. But now, it's like you're in the safety zone once you make it past captain because you don’t have to patrol. So that fear factor is not present anymore either.

David also described his experience of his wife’s deployment and how it gave him a greater appreciation for military spouses:

> I didn’t realize - I didn't really appreciate - I appreciate the spouses when my wife first deployed for a year in Iraq because I realized how helpless you are. As a husband, you always protect your family. I couldn’t do jack. The only thing I could do is pray and talk to her, and so, you just realize what's it like being the one left behind.

These couples illustrate a range of reactions to duty-related separations. For the spouse that is deployed, it is an opportunity for growth because he can devote more time to accomplishing personal and educational goals that may get displaced by daily activities of family life. Deployment is also a time when one family is exchanged for another consisting of coworkers who live, eat and sleep in the same facilities and must endure the same hardships of being in theater.

The wives in the study, particularly those with children, continue with life as usual and are preoccupied with maintaining a stable household for their children who must still be transported to school, attend extracurricular activities, get assistance with homework and be disciplined when necessary. They take on the role of a single-parent which is a preferable scenario for some wives and is frustrating for others. The frequency of housecleaning and meal preparation may diminish slightly while a spouse is deployed but not completely. The evenings seem particularly difficult for wives after their busy day comes to an end and they are reminded of their husband's absence. This is the time when being able to communicate with a spouse becomes very important in order to assuage feelings of loneliness and maintain a sense of connection.

Theme 2: Communication During Separations

The ability of family members to communicate during a deployment has changed drastically since the time some participants first entered the military. Retired couples remember when writing letters and the occasional phone call were the only ways to communicate with their spouses. Today, letter writing has given way to emailing and Skype, the popular VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)

service. When asked how they handle relationship issues or problems when they arise during deployment, Chris said:

> …we try to talk it through. With today's technology, you pretty much – I mean like the last time that I left we Skype'd nearly every day. So the lines of communication were there. If we don't – if we didn't have that capability we had other electronic means. I could – being in the communications element, I could always call at any time I wanted to, or there's email but email's probably not the best way to handle a disagreement, but it is a way. So I would say that primarily we would have handled those types of situations telephonically or through other through other electronic means like Skype or something like that.

In terms of subject matter, Gwen and Jerry choose to limit their topics of discussions in order not to distract or burden each other:

> Household stuff, I just took care of it. I would give him, give details after the fact or during the fact. This is what's going on, this is what I'm doing and I just handled it. Interpersonal things, I want to say they barely came up because you're so happy to talk to the person. The little time that you get, I won't say they weren't there or if they were there and maybe neither of us would mention it because you don't want to spoil the time or you don't want to make anybody feel… He wouldn't want to probably burden me with whatever it was and I wouldn't want to burden him because of where he is.

Jerry goes on to say:

> …when we did talk, it was like, "Hey, what's going on? Give me the basics. Everything good? Are you okay?" No major, thought-provoking conversations or anything like that. So it was a fairly surface, and when it wasn't, you're just missing them, so everything is real good at that point.

Based on her own military experience, Sarah is also cautious when talking with her husband during his deployments:

> I've seen both sides. It's stressful over there. I mean you're working sometimes 12 hours. When I first got there, I was working 15, but we went down to 12. It was a lot of stress. So you need to be careful. The spouse that's at home needs to be careful not to burden the person that's deployed. So I understand that. So I don't burden [my husband] with anything while he's deployed. He needs to focus on their mission there because what he's doing is very important. I can handle a lot of things.

Technological advances have given couples the means to communicate on a daily basis during duty-related separations which is a far cry from the days when loved ones had to wait days and in some cases weeks for a letter to arrive in the mail. While there is greater access to a spouse, that access doesn't necessarily translate into more conversations about problems or issues that arise. In fact, the spouses are aware that each person is in a demanding situation whether it is a military mission or running a household and make the conscious decision to primarily talk about subjects that won't cause additional stress.

Theme 3: Reintegration

The process of reintegrating into the family following a prolonged absence can be difficult for the entire family. Initially, a few couples reported they didn't experience any problems, but with some probing most spouses identified some challenges following the return of their military member. Gwen spoke about developing a "rhythm" while her husband was away and her not-so-positive reaction to his attempts at reassuming his position:

> We are like – it's almost like it turns you into a control freak because you have to run your entire house by yourself and you've been doing it for six months and then here comes somebody who wants to mess up your little thing you got going on so it really makes you angry.

She went on to recall feeling ambivalent about her husband's return from his periodic absences:

> It's almost like, you know, "When are you going TDY again?" (laughs) And that's bad, because you can't wait for him to get home, you know, when he gets home. But then he gets home, it's like, oh, he's home. (laughs)…And I feel like he's an intrusion. (laughs)

Jeanine describes the process of readjusting when Mark returns from a deployment:

> It's a little prickly. It's a little difficult like rearranging the routine that I've been in especially with everybody fending for themselves. There's not a lot of the cooking going on and things like that because when he comes back it's like okay, I have to set time to cook or take something out. Just like we hadn't been doing it, me and the kids it's like everybody fending for themselves and stuff. When he's back, you start back getting into that routine. It's a little friction changing back over and start setting aside time to be at home more. Also a way of doing things since I had been handling everything from finances and everything down on paper and things like that, I have to like shuffle some over to start showing, okay, this is just here and this is how I was doing that. He might start taking back over some things and was like saying, well, I already got that but wait till after this month then we're going to have you start back taking care of like handling some of the items or things like that.

In dual-military families, spouses will occasionally deploy simultaneously or in the case of the Army couple, in succession. Sarah describes her experience with reintegrating into her family without her husband who left a year-long deployment 20 days after her return from a year in Iraq:

> When I came home, it was like I was hit by a brick wall because David left. So I quickly learned I would much rather be deployed than the one back home. I mean when you're deployed, somebody fixes your food, you turn in your laundry. I mean I remember coming home from Iraq when David was gone. I'm just standing in the kitchen wondering when my dinner was going to appear. I got to eat and I haven't prepared a thing because I was so used to just going to the dining facility and standing in line. I just stood in the kitchen one day and I think I cried]. I was like, "What's next?" Because there was nobody to go eat with. There was nobody in the tent when I went home. It was just empty. So it's much easier to be the one gone.

When her husband, David, finally returned home, she states "we were so used to talking to each other on the phone, we were sitting there looking at each other like, 'What are we supposed to do?' Her husband jokingly said, "Well go upstairs

and I'll call you" because the phone was how they had communicated for two years.

Interestingly, Matthew and Felicia presented conflicting views about their experiences with reintegration. Felicia states that there were no issues with her husband returning:

> I didn't have any problem. I mean, we just carried on like normal. I'm trying to think was there any readjustment. No, because I mean, I still went to work and I still continued like I did before. Yes, I'm trying to think. There was no readjustment. I didn't have to…I just kept doing my thing. I'm like, "Hey. Okay. You're here. Good." [Laughter]

Matthew, however, had a different perspective:

> Oh my God! It was hard. I always had to come in and observe a little while. I come in there and observe for three or four days and change everything around. I didn't think it was working, a bunch of [clown class] going on.
>
> If I give an example, my boys, if they do something – they'd be acting up, she'd try to make them cooperate and they're like, they aren't listening, oh no, I'm going to tighten this up real quick we don't have time for this, there's too many conversations going on or something's going on where it's like 'what the heck is this mess here', 'well we thought..' 'nope wrong answer let's change it real quick. Okay. Move on. Sometimes she doesn't like it, but I'm in the military, I'm used to it. "We've been doing this, following this plan, or have these procedures in place…" "Oh, these procedures, well they didn't work." Check, on the spot. You adjust quickly, no attitude, no - sometimes there's no conversation. These procedures are obsolete, so this is the new corrective action right here.
>
> Interviewer: So you bring that into the home?
>
> Oh, sometimes I have to.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Well, I say I have to because that's what I know, but I try to be nice and vocal with it. "Hey, this ain't going to work." "What do you mean?" "Blah, blah, blah." Nothing so vulgar or profanity and that kind of stuff. I'll just say, "Hey, this ain't going to work." Sometimes she doesn't like it. I can see it. Sometimes I don't care sometimes, but this is where we're going

> because if I know that if this is going to work out better for her, then I'll change it.

The reason for the discrepancy between Felicia and Matthew's experiences when he returned home from deployment is unclear. It could be indicative of some underlying interpersonal issue or reflect a difference in their coping skills, possibilities which are beyond the scope of this study. However, it does demonstrate that the return of a military spouse can significantly impact how the family system operates.

Most husbands, like Michael, choose a more cooperative approach by taking on more household responsibilities and removing some of the burdens from their wives even if it means tolerating some complaints:

> I have to come back to the house and I know that I hadn't been there, so I've got to help out. I've got to chip in, I've got to find something to do. I can't make up for what I've not done, and I'm not ever going to make up because as long as I'm there, I'm going to hear it, that I haven't been there. I had to do this, I had to do that. In my head, I'm, "Suck it up!" this is the harden part of me because I'm more of the hard – I try to show emotion but I'm more of the suck-it-up type thing.

Before service members return from a deployment, they go through a mandatory reintegration briefing that provides information about what to expect when they go home. While the focus tends to be on identifying signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), these sessions also offer suggestions about how make a smooth transition back into family life. However, according to Sheila, these briefings aren't always effective:

> When we had our briefing before he left, the main thing they told him, "Don't come back and try to take over." What did he do? He came back and tried to take over. After I had been dealing with everything for four months, and that's the first time, he was just - take it and just doing things. I'm like, "What did they tell you at the briefing? Didn't they tell you not to

> take over and stuff?" I had been doing things a certain way, and now you want to come over and change everything.

There are also services available to assist members with the challenges of reintegration after they return however most of the couples I interviewed had not utilized those services. In fact, only Sarah reported going to classes specifically designed for spouses where, again, they learn about signs of PTSD but also how to slowly integrate their military spouses back into the family. There weren't any specific reasons given as to why most chose not to get assistance except feeling like it was unnecessary. Matthew simply stated "I was beyond that stuff, I thought".

The wives were most vocal when asked about their experiences with reintegration. Although they miss their husbands, they become quite comfortable with establishing the daily household routine and find it difficult to have that routine disrupted when their husbands return. In most cases, responsibilities must be renegotiated or sometimes completely relinquished in order for balance to be restored to the family system and the manner in which this occurs depends on the personality of the individuals involved. Some husbands are sensitive to the fact that their wives have been running the household and take on more responsibilities, including parenting, according to the comfort level of their wives. Others are more authoritarian in their approach and immediately try to reestablish their place in the family by implementing changes despite being cautioned against such an approach in the mandatory reintegration briefings.

Theme 4: Delineation of Roles

There were many similarities in how spouses viewed their roles in the relationship. It was not uncommon to hear the phrase "head of the household" when I asked each person to describe the involvement of the other spouse in managing the household, a perspective derived from their interpretation of Biblical scripture. Connie reluctantly stated:

> Well, I know probably a lot of women don't like to hear it but I see him as the head of the household and that he's supposed to take care of me and protect me and do like the Word said. That's how I feel about it. At certain points in our careers, I was making more money than him but that's just the nature of the military, how you get promoted. Plus, I was in before him so stuff, and I know sometimes women or even men get all jacked up in the head about, "She's making more money than me," or women talking about, "I make more money so he can't tell me what to do and I could take care of myself," and all this stuff but for me, that's how I've always seen it. I don't care if he was an Airman Basic and I was a Master Sergeant. He married me and he said he will love and cherish, respect, whatever. That's what he needs to do. He needs to take care of me. So, Bible-wise, I'll hold him to that. See that's what he's supposed to do because I feel that's what God made man and – God, man, and then women and he's supposed to be – like I said, I know he's supposed to be taking care of me, protecting me, and what have you.

Howard concurs with Connie by saying "We got our roles, we both have our roles and stuff and sometimes like she said I got to put my foot down. She is one of those Saint Pete girls, but most of the time I don't, but we pretty much strive to work as one and because we have done that, we have a beautiful family." Jeanine agrees and attributes the harmonious relationship with her spouse to following the prescribed roles in the Bible:

> …we complement each other but still we play a role as husband and wife as prescribed in the Bible. The reason why we don't have a great conflict or a disagreement, I think, is because I still let him play his role or he lets me complement and play my role in things, everyday experiences and stuff.

The responsibilities that each spouse adopts is associated with "domains" that follow traditionally ascribed gender roles such as women doing housework and cooking and men being responsible for household and yard maintenance as illustrated in this exchange with John:

> Well, of course, she recognizes me as being the head. With the heading of the household, there are certain decisions I'll make or certain elements in the house that I say, "This is how it should be and that's how it should be." She respects that. At the same time, with her being the lady of the house, I respect how she wants certain things done as well. For instance, like organizing the house. I leave that to her. I don't come in and…
>
> Interviewer: Like decorating and organizing?
>
> Respondent: Yes, decorating – that's all her. Even with the cabinets in my house, she has all her dishes and - let me tell you, but I do come in and swap stuff out and she blows up, but I've learned not to…it's her domain and just like she knows with me, it's certain things like – say, the garage or with the cars or with my grill and stuff like that…

While their delineation in roles appears patriarchal on the surface, he goes on to reveal the more egalitarian aspects of their relationship:

> We talk about the bills together, but I normally let her handle them for us, like make sure everything is good to go and stuff. With the finances, we're on equal terms. We have joint accounts. We don't separate anything because I feel since we're married, my money is her money. Her money is mine. There's no need to, "I have this pot of money for this. She has this pot of money for that."

Finally, as if to counteract any perceptions of himself as dictatorial, John continues to say:

> I've never been like that, dominating spouse like, "This is what you're going to do. This is how you're going to do it. This is…" I don't treat anybody like that, even my kids, I don't – because I feel if you treat people like that, then a certain amount of disrespect may form or animosity. You need to let people – you tell them what you want them to do or suggest things, but I don't like forcing it – we're not in the 40s or the 50s.

For Chris, the process of deciding who takes on which tasks is more pragmatic and based on preference:

> Well, I think it's based on what we like to do. I think that's how we've done it. For example, I like to cook. I don't really like washing dishes, but I like cooking. So whoever cooks, the other washes the dishes. So that's kind of like a standing SOP for us, Standard Operating Procedure for us. [Laughter] So I know I don't care for washing the dishes so I'll rush in there to cook.

Sarah describes a collaborative approach to domestic tasks but also sees her involvement as a reasonable contribution to household maintenance:

> We both will do whatever it needs to be done, if it needs to be done either one of us will do it. I think since we've been here, I do most of it because if he'll go to work every day to provide for us, the least I can do is keep the house clean.

Most of the couples report having clearly established roles in the family which tend to be gender- and Biblically- based. Husbands are acknowledged as the heads-of-the household and have final decision-making authority. The wives, however, do have input into family decisions and control certain domains including food preparation, home decoration and financial management while their husbands take care of home repairs and maintenance. This arrangement appears to be mutually agreed upon and satisfactory to both spouses.

Theme 5: Dual-Military Marriages

Since half of the couples I interviewed have at one time been in dual-military marriages, the issues involved in this type of relationship emerged prominently in the interviews. All of the dual-military couples, except one, selected at least one photograph that portrayed both spouses in uniform. There

Figure 5: Chris and Shelley in Uniform.

is a sense of pride that emanates from each person as they describe these particular photographs. Chris is particularly effusive when he looks at a picture of he and Shelley in uniform on their wedding day (Figure 2):

> Also, what else I see is two strong African-American military leaders. And that's what makes me proud when that picture is displayed. And as you can see, it's prominently displayed in our home now. It gives me a sense of pride when people see that. To know that we have strong African-American leadership in the military as well. And it's not just, you know, our people in the military who are African-American and not just enlisted. We have officers and leaders. And that's what that represents to me as well as, the moment that that was captured was probably the happiest moment in our lives.

When I asked about the advantages to being in a dual-military marriage, most couples could only identify one benefit, an increased level of understanding about military job responsibilities. As Mark notes,

> I think we have an advantage being dual military. We have an advantage over the traditional one person in and whatnot. We understand the demands of the other. So when they called me like this and say, "Hey, you got to go to deployment and you got to go do this," being her in the military, she understands where I think it's probably tough for someone who doesn't have any military experience of why a person gets jumped around like that a lot. So understanding how tough it is to advance and promote, we both know exactly what it takes. So there's some support that comes along with that because we both understand that. So dual military and being married, that's a lot of the advantages, just understanding each other's obstacles and roadblocks.

However, understanding the extent of a spouse's job responsibilities does not necessarily exempt the other spouse from feelings commonly associated with duty-related separations. Since Shelley left the military, she empathizes more with civilian spouses and describes her thoughts when Chris is sent on assignment:

> Now that I'm a spouse and I'm at home all the time since I'm not working, I didn't have anything else occupying me besides school, it was tough because I'm like, "Oh gosh, you got to go again?" In the back of my mind, I'm like, I understand this is what he has to do, but those same feelings are still there. Like, "Oh man, how many times are you going to have to be deployed? Like isn't there anybody else who could go?" So I think on the spouse side, it's still tough.

The more common perception among couples is that dual-military families are more challenging than those in which there is only one service member and certainly more difficult than civilian marriages. As Michael says, "It's more difficult to the fact that someone may deploy, both of them can deploy, and the kid has to go to the guardian or someone that's selected to take them". This view usually emerged when couples discussed photographs depicting promotion ceremonies which were commonly selected by participants. A picture of Mark's ceremony when he was promoted to W-04 elicited this comment: "I think in a lot of ways, it's even harder than just one of the spouses being in the military. I got two careers going, two military careers. A lot of folks have both spouses in careers, but two military careers, it's specifically – some things inherent to that, it just makes it tough". The "inherent" characteristics to which Mark refers includes arrangements for children during short- or long-term deployments and balancing career advancement with the needs of the family. In addition to being happy for

her husband, Jeanine also recalled feeling stressed because she had to take off a few days from work and school so she could attend the ceremony. Her life was a "juggling" act as she tried to balance work, school, and her husband's military responsibilities.

Dual-military marriages require the negotiation of duty orders because while the military attempts to keep spouses together, joint placements are not guaranteed. It is also more difficult to arrange joint assignments at higher ranks. However, these couples shared some poignant stories of how they were able to negotiate their assignments in order to be together. As Mark and Jeanine look at two pictures of them wearing uniforms, they remember being strategic as they planned their future together. Mark was scheduled to transition from being enlisted personnel to a commissioned officer so he and Jeanine married two months prior to his commission to avoid any possible issues with fraternization policies. Shortly after getting married, Mark received orders to go to California and requested that Jeanine accompany him on the tour. However Jeanine had only been in her assignment for eight months and her superiors did not want to reassign her to another post. Mark considered not accepting the commission in order to stay with Jeanine which would have been detrimental to his career. As the time drew near for Mark to leave, Jeanine's command agreed to her transfer despite being told by the Navy that he would not get a replacement for her position. Mark said the commander's response was "'Hey, for the Navy family, we'll take a loss. Let her go out there with her husband,' and that was the only

reason they let her go is because her command accepted the loss of a body, so that she could come out to San Diego with me."

Howard and Connie had a similar experience with getting assigned to the same base which is captured in a photograph of Connie and her son sitting in an airport in Holland. Howard was stationed in Holland and Connie was posted in Japan when they got married. Connie requested a transfer to Holland a year into her two-year assignment but was told that she would only be able to get orders if she obtained a general's endorsement which was not easily attainable. She first approached her colonel, who worked for a general, about requesting the endorsement and was met with significant resistance. Connie recalls "…I was able to go down there and talk to him and I mean he tried to put me through, the colonel tried to put me through a whole bunch of mess but I had a clean record, so..." The colonel eventually agreed to the transfer, completed the paperwork and acquired the approval of the general. Connie was given the news right before Christmas that she was allowed to join her husband in Holland. Howard calls the event a "miracle" because she was able to leave her assignment a year early which is quite unusual. Also, it was typically very difficult to get an assignment to the base in Holland because there were limited available slots. In the photograph, Connie had successfully received a permanent change of station (PCS) to Holland and was waiting with her son for Howard to pick them up. It was the beginning of their marriage and life together as a dual-military couple.

Dual-military marriages cope with the added stressors of trying to be posted together at a military installation which is not guaranteed and negotiating

orders so that both parents are not deployed simultaneously which is not always possible. Since both spouses understand the demands of the military, there is an increased level of empathy when one spouse must deploy or leave for some other assignment and fewer questions like 'why do you have to deploy again?' and 'why do you have to be away so long?' There is also more compassion for spouses in single-military marriages who are unable to draw from personal military experience to help cope with the separation.

Theme 6: Choosing Relationship Over Career

David and Sarah have a different story that prompted a life-changing decision. Initially, a photograph of David's promotion ceremony began a discussion about being proud of his accomplishment but then evolved into a narrative of how Sarah made the decision to leave the military. Shortly after they were posted to a base in Colorado, David was sent with his unit to a post in Texas where he spent the week and travelled to see his family on the weekends. This left Sarah to handle the day-to-day activities of the family, including frequent doctor's appointments for their child. David and Sarah's son had open heart surgery due to a heart defect shortly after he was born and was required to follow-up with a pediatric cardiologist every six months. Three days before the next appointment, Sarah's colonel informed her that she would be leaving on assignment for two months. According to Sarah, her colonel had sent her on assignments twice before with very little notice and she was forced to make arrangements for emergency childcare. David offered to fly to Colorado to take

him to the doctor and then keep him for a month in Texas but Sarah said she responded:

> 'Why are we doing this?' We deserve more than three days notice… I had talked to my colonel and said my son is sick, my husband is gone and I need to get my son well. He was, 'I understand.' Two times he did this to me. He called me with no notice so that time I told him you'll have my resignation in the morning.

Sarah decided to leave the Army and spoke about how she came to that decision:

> I was going to have to cancel a cardiology appointment for a - he was a year old, almost a year old. You want me to cancel a heart appointment for a boy who's on high blood pressure medicine and diuretics to go to the field for two months? I was torn up about that and I just told him I'm resigning. I'm done. I can't play this game anymore. So I'll sacrifice my career for my child. One, you can give up and it's okay to give up. The other if I kill my son and then what the heck do I do? I just said to hell with you all.

I asked Sarah if there was any discussion about her husband leaving the military instead since she had been in the Army a year longer than David and she responded:

> Yes. He actually said he would leave [prior to me] but I know David. By his design, he wouldn't be happy following me around…He says he could do it, I just don't believe it. I mean you could tell his sense of pride to take care of his family. Him finding a job every three years, he'd deal with it worse than I do. I don't know, I thought it was natural by God's design. I mean I should be the one to get out.

In military marriages, generally one spouse's career tends to supersede the career of the other spouse and it is the husband's career that often takes precedence with the wife eventually leaving the military to provide stability to the family unit. Sarah wasn't the only female spouse in a dual-military marriage who opted to relinquish her military career for the sake of her family. Shelley and

Figure 6: Chris and Shelley at Their Wedding.

Chris' wedding photograph (Figure 3) reflects a critical time in their relationship when Shelley had to decide whether to deploy to Afghanistan or separate from the military. She ultimately chose to leave the Air Force in order to be with her husband Chris when, prior to her decision, Shelley consulted several female mentors in the military who gave her the same advice:

> 'You're going to have to choose career or family. That's just the way it is.' But I chose the relationship than the career opportunity. Because I felt… family is important to me. And I felt that I can get out. I have a degree in Engineering. So I can get out and work on the outside as an Engineer, but my husband at the time had 20 years in. So this is his career. It's easy for me to get out and follow him. Because I feel like I'm going to be okay. I can go…engineering is pretty much everywhere.

Shelley had been in the Air Force for five years when she made the decision to separate from the military so I was curious if she would have made the same decision if she had been in longer, say 15 years, and she responded "Fifteen years? You only have five more years left to go [until retirement]. So at 15 years, I would have had to really think about it, and maybe we could've just been separated for that last five years or figured out how to be joined."

Shelley's husband, Chris, confided that his decision to retire was also determined by his commitment to his relationship with Shelley:

> Currently – right now, my decision to retire. I chose family over career when I made that decision because prior to getting here to this assignment, I was very career oriented. I was doing the things to make my career very prosperous and to move to those upper echelons of leadership. I was – what we call tracking for the next level; 405, squadron command, and future full bird colonel. That's what I was tracking for. But then when I got here and I saw the impact that it was having on me and Shelley, and because previously I had chosen career over family, I didn't want to go through that again. So, I chose family.

The needs of the military supersede the needs of the family which has led some wives in dual-military marriages to separate from the military. In situations where there didn't appear to be room to negotiate with their command, couples decided that it would be the wife to sacrifice her career for the sake of the relationship or family. Although length of service and job prospects factored into the decision-making process, the perceived inability of the husband to give up his career also weighed heavily in the outcome.

Theme 7: Impact of Being Dual-Military on Parenting

Howard spoke about the differences in educational achievement between his oldest child who grew up with active-duty parents and his younger siblings who had a stay-at-home mother when Connie retired:

> Like our last two kids, they are on AB honor roll. My oldest kid, he was never. He was a latchkey kid. He's at the childcare center all of the time or at the babysitter. So they had him more than we had him, so he might have been on a video game instead of reading a book and then when we're at home, we've got a good four to five hours before it's time to tuck him in to get in some reading or whatever, feed him, bathe him up.

While not necessarily referring to his own children, Mark expressed some ambivalence about how children adjust to both parents being in the military based on observations of his peers:

> The kids I think in dual military too can be – the kids are suffering sometimes too because of the dual military careers as well. I guess you can look at it both ways. I think kids grow up faster or have to grow up faster with both parents being in the military because what happens is they have to start doing things on their own a lot faster. If you're a traditional family where the mom's at home, that's not the case. If I think about dual military, both you're getting up at 5:00, 4:00 in the morning rolling out. The kids have to grow up faster and start doing things on their own. So that can be good or bad I guess, a disadvantage or an advantage depending on the kids I think…

Once Sarah made the decision to leave the military, she had an encounter that reinforced her decision. While waiting to get a copy of her medical records, another female service member expressed disbelief that Sarah would separate from the Army after nearly 12 years of service. Sarah briefly explained she had a child and that she and her husband received orders to deploy at the same time. The other member proudly replied that when she and her husband deployed together, they returned to find their children, ages three and five, functioning quite independently. Sarah says

> I looked in her eyes and said, 'Honey, the three year old and the five year old are not supposed to be independent.' . I felt differently. I don't want to get out but I think that children don't deserve that. I mean it would be one thing if I was dead and he didn't have a mom, but he had a parent. He had two parents. So I'll force him to go years of his life with either one of us gone or both of us gone. David and I are so different in our discipline styles. Our kid will be a nervous wreck.

The dual-military couples believe that the children can be negatively impacted by the demands placed on the parents. Much like families in which both parents work full-time, there isn't as much time to spend with the children

which may hinder scholastic achievement and they become more self-sufficient at an earlier age. This increased independence is not necessarily viewed as a positive attribute particularly for young children.

Theme 8: Perception of Military Wives

When asked about their social interactions with other military wives, most participants said they chose to have limited to no contact with other spouses. The most commonly cited reason was that many military wives "wear their husband's rank". In other words, some wives expect to receive the same courtesy and deference from the wives of lower-ranking personnel as their husbands. Rachel gave the example that if "…you're active duty lance corporal and you disrespect the sergeant's wife, it's just like disrespecting the sergeant." This expectation, however, was seen as unreasonable by the wives in this study. Shelley spoke about her experience with officers' wives when she was in the Air Force:

> I kind of like separated myself from that just because of the stigmatism. When I was in, I didn't like how the wives reacted to certain things. Like some of them would take the rank of their husbands. Like a lot of officers' wives don't work and they join the officers' wives club. Then they do things and they get together and all this, and some of them may say, "Okay, my husband is a captain and your husband's a second lieutenant so I outrank you." No, you don't because you don't have rank as a civilian. So I didn't want to do that at all.

Staci identifies with the delineation between military husband and civilian wife and says "They have all these stereotypes about military wives. Well, some military wives fall in that category but me myself, I feel like a civilian." However,

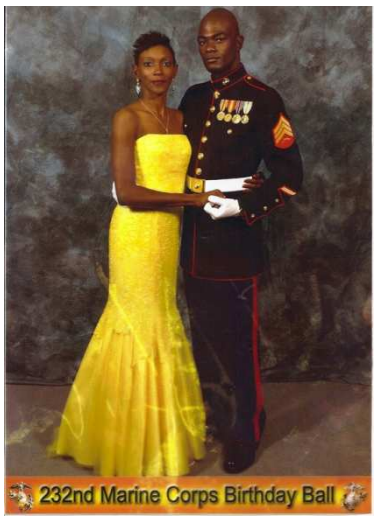

Figure 7: John and Staci at a Marine Corps Ball.

pictures of her and John at the Marine Corps Ball elicit Staci's perspective on her role as a military wife:

> …there's a way a wife has to represent herself when you go to Marine Corps balls. To me, according to his rank I feel like this, I like to complement my husband. I've seen people go to the ball and they look like they should be on a pole. It's all a manner of respect and how you carry yourself.

The likelihood that a spouse would take on their husband's rank depended on the level of officer. Felicia states "I guess it's probably a bad perception, but the officer wives, they're more - I guess because their husbands are higher rank, they feel like they're more upper class or whatever." Interestingly, senior officers' wives tended to be more "laidback", according to Felicia, than the midgrade officers wives. Connie makes a similar observation and distinguishes between the wives of lower- and higher-ranking officers

> Then what was so funny, it would be the ones whose husbands maybe like a lieutenant or a captain that acted like that but then the wives whose husbands were like a colonel, they were the nicest, sweetest ladies; but the ones who were the lower ranking officers, they always seem to have the big time attitude. Even sometimes with the enlisted, on the enlisted side, it would be like that, too. So I think because the ones who have been

> in a while with their husbands and part of the military for a while, they came up doing the time where it could have been really, really bad. They were more humble about stuff than the other ones.

Connie goes on to recall her interactions with spouses in the wives' club and says "a lot of them were really nice but then [there were] those who were big into the clubs…and just they're mean and their attitudes and stuff, I just didn't particularly like being around [them]."

As the wife of a commissioned officer, Jeanine is familiar with the perception of officers' wives as elitist and has tried to distance herself from that image, especially when she participated in an Officers Wives club:

> Someone's going to wear their husband's rank, and because I would see that, I never want to be categorized as, oh, she wears her husband's rank or she's trying to wear her husband's rank because I've never wanted to be one of those where, oh, she's an officer's wife. Oh, she's so snobby and – I said I never wanted to be categorized as that. I always wanted to just be a down-to-earth person like as if I was just, we were all just worked together and I was just, you didn't notice me as an officer's wife, not in the way I act. But you wouldn't know, you wouldn't know it from me till you had asked, "Well, what is your husband's rank?" something like that. I never wanted to be portrayed to be like that.

Jeanine left the club when she began working citing that it was "time-consuming".

Rachel makes a distinction between the service branches in how rank is exhibited among spouses. Based on her brief tenure in the Enlisted Spouses Club, Rachel says that rank plays more of a role in the Marine Corps than it does on the Air Force base: "There is a written rule that there's no rank here, but when you're in the club, there is plenty of rank. That's the Marine Corps. With this base, there was none of that 'my husband's a staff sergeant. Your husband is E3, so you have to listen to me'. You know, there was none of that here.

Figure 8: Lawrence at his Promotion Ceremony.

Among the study participants, Marcia spoke most passionately about her disdain for wives who assumed their husband's rank and the social interactions that are mandated for officers' wives. A photograph of Lawrence's promotion ceremony reminds Marcia of when they lived several miles away from the base in Washington, D.C. where Lawrence was posted which she described as "good" because "I didn't have to do that officer's wife crap because they were – we lived so far away. So really, there was no expectation or if there was, I didn't know that." Marcia also mainly befriended enlisted wives because they "just were more regular people. They weren't so hung up on being important." In reference to the wives of officers, she says "I didn't really care too much for officers' wives because I thought they were just kind of full of themselves. They were – it was just a whole – they weren't regular people. They seemed to be a little bit more socially kind of constipated stuck-up or something like that and just more normal relationships as far as I was concerned, I found with enlisted people."

Gwen has looked outside the base installation to find a social network of people that understand her life as a military spouse. She attends a military wives

group at her church and has found the support that has been absent since moving to Tampa:

> Some of them, their husbands are retired. Some of them, their husbands are contractors that used to be in the military and not necessarily retired. Some of them are young. My age or a little bit younger. So, it's been a real blessing just to be in their presence and just to hear the wisdom that comes from the older women who have gone through things. For the younger women who are being innovative in certain areas where it's like "Oh okay. I didn't think of doing that" and that support has been really good.

Some spouses chose not to participate in spouses' clubs, which are overwhelmingly composed of white women, because of the racial dynamics they experienced. Connie spoke about her frustration with the cultural divide in the clubs:

> Well, I don't want to sound prejudiced or racist or whatever but I just really didn't want to be around that and – because even though you're military, you're still culturally different in your way of thinking with certain things especially when you get around certain wives until they - it was just - I don't know, it just become, sometime it would become annoying. When I was in the military, it would become annoying when spouses would be around because it was like you were constantly trying to make them feel comfortable around you. That's just something that aggravates the heck out of me when [you] are trying to make people of other races feel comfortable.

Race also plays a role in how spouses are initially categorized by other spouses. African-Americans are generally assumed to be enlisted which is consistent with military demographics. However, making this assumption can be annoying for the wives of commissioned officers and presents as a teachable moment for some. Gwen says,

> I kind of got this feeling whenever I'd be in a conversation with anybody that they would assume my husband was enlisted because I was black because whenever I told them he was a captain or a major they go, "Oh."

> [Laughter] I think it was an opportunity for people to learn that because you just don't see it as much especially in the Air Force. I think now is a good opportunity for people to see that black people are not only enlisted.

The common perception is that the military has its share of women who wear their husband's rank, or expect the same level of deference, and are best avoided. Many wives in this study have made the conscious decision to not associate with other military wives or to socialize with wives whose husbands have lower ranks just to avoid the power dynamic that exists in those circles. They also look outside the military community to establish a social network that can meet their emotional and spiritual needs such as churches, civic organizations, and their neighborhoods.

Theme 9: Responsibilities of Officers Wives

The officer's wife has formal and informal responsibilities that are not expected of enlisted wives. For example, when Lawrence was staff judge advocate, Marcia was responsible for hosting events for the spouses of his subordinates. There was a time when the fulfillment of those duties was a reflection of the husband and impacted his reviews for promotion. When asked if this continued to be the case, Lawrence responded "It did in a sense but that wasn't really something that concerned me. So, I wasn't one to push – 'No, you have to do this stuff'. When things came up that we had to attend, I'd ask her to go along but if she really didn't like it, that's fine."

Jerry also agreed that a wife can still affect the career of her officer husband, especially among the higher ranks. He talks about some of the conversations he's had at events that were not attended by Gwen:

> You know, it's almost you're looked at as one unit. So I don't tell her this, obviously, but some – not necessarily this assignment – but some of the ones that I go to, just in conversation, like, "Hey, well, where's your spouse?" And you've got to… like she's expected to be there. And when you're not, I'm like, "Oh, she had" such-and-such. "Oh, okay." And you can tell it's like, oh, okay, you're not fitting our criteria here.

Being an officer's wife did not come easily to Marcia who rejected that role early in Lawrence's career. Although she made an attempt to conform to the expectations associated with the position (e.g. joining the officers' wives club), she ultimately decided that her primary mission was to preserve their family. Marcia recalls:

> That was my primary mission which was why officer's wives club and the rest of that stuff didn't appeal to me. That's not what my primary function is. It wasn't even so much of his career. I wasn't trying to tank his career. I mean, I wanted to be supportive and I tried. He probably needed a different wife to really thrive in that kind of environment but given who I am, I did the best I could but my priority was – it would be the family. Granted he understood that that's not who I am and so he never coerced or forced or encouraged me to suck up or whatever in order to make it any better. He accepted what I fit on in. When he really needed me that time when he was SJA (Staff Judge Advocate), I stepped up to the plate and gave it my best effort but that was about the only time I had to really do it. He never ever said to me otherwise like "why don't you…" because he knew that I wasn't. It wasn't me. I couldn't do it. I did the best I could and that's all I could do.

The responsibilities of an officer's wife are not easily accepted by some military spouses. While there is a caretaking component in which they address the needs of lower-ranking service members, the majority of their work is political and involves entertaining higher-ranking members and making appearances at both formal and informal events. While it has been acknowledged that wives can impact the career progression of their husbands, the officers' wives in this study have chosen to limit their involvement in such activities with their husband's

support. They decided that it was more important to devote their time and energy to their families rather than conform to the expectations of the military.

Theme 10: Transition to Civilian Life

Three of the spouses have experienced some challenges with transitioning from military to civilian life. Sarah talks about the common problem for military spouses of finding employment and adjusting to no longer being a financial contributor:

> Now for me since I'm no longer in the service, it's hard to find a job every three years when we move. Then I would stop with - I had to choose like I have to find another career or you start - unlike when we were both in the military we moved somewhere we both had a job. Now we move somewhere and he has a job and I feel like I'm just stuck like Chuck which really - at first every time we move I go through the same sadness like great, what do I do now? I just felt miserable because my whole life I've been self-sufficient and I love David, but I'm not used to having to depend on someone else financially.

Sarah also describes feeling a loss of identity because she went from being seen as a high-ranking officer to one of David's dependents, much like their son. She says "When I got out, now I had to get an ID card under David. Now my social security number is no longer valid, I have to use his to make medical appointments, to do anything." She's continuing to adjust to her new identity as stay-at-home mother and wife.

Since Jeanine retired from military service, she still contributes to the household budget. Her challenges revolve more around adjusting to the culture of the civilian sector. Jeanine says:

> Yes, it was hard crossing over to the civilian sector because the whole career, Navy career, you just like – you go from station to station. You always know or you get prepared to where you're going to go to. You're

> going to work there for the next two or three years and that's it. It's always decided for you, but when you cross over to the civilian, you just don't know, "Okay, what kind of job am I going to get selected for, or what am I going to work or what I'm going to have to work." It might not be something that I want to do, but in order to bring forces together as far as our finances and being able to still maintain the level where we're at, of course we wanted to. So I want to be able to pick right back up and go off to the civilian sector, but it was a little difficult and hard to me being that you get to see the gap of being out the military and retired and you go on to the civilian sector. Well, it's hard to find a place where you could fit and then your income and trying to find something you're going to qualify for and settle in to. To stay somewhat comfortable, but it was difficult in finding that. I felt I was behind the times.

At the same time, Jeanine feels like she has more control over her life since retiring.

> Yes, more in control than I was, yeah, more in control of making decisions because before, more so I just did what the military told me. They always say you're a part, you're government-owned 24/7, you're like you're not I guess. So now, you know I have to really be in control, really take the reins on making the decisions and stuff. So that aspect is a lot different, yeah.

Anxiety about life after retirement didn't affect Connie until her husband Howard retired from the Air Force. Looking at a photograph of Howard in Korea during his last assignment before he retired prompted a discussion about how Connie, like many people in the military, develop the habit of keeping boxes to use for future moves. Prior to Howard leaving for Korea, they bought a house in Florida where Connie lived with her mother and they planned to settle after he retired. Throughout Connie's time in the military, she toted boxes around that she used to move her possessions for every relocation, some that had never been unpacked. It was her mother that provided the reality check she needed to accept this new phase of her life:

> And then when we finally did, got everything unpacked and I don't know if I had told him I was thinking, okay maybe I need to save the boxes, the little boxes because we might move again and I remember saying that to my mom and my mom was like, "You're not going nowhere, you're here to stay and if you do move out of this house you can always buy some new boxes." And then all of a sudden it kind of clicked like, "Oh, yes, I am retired. He's about to retire, too. This is where we're going to be for a while." So it took a while to - it took a little bit to kind of get used to it.

Adjusting to life after the military has been an adjustment for a few wives, especially after having served for several years. It requires a shift in identity in which one goes from military leader to civilian employee or to full-time homemaker, all of which are valuable yet completely unfamiliar. For those who are accustomed to having their space dictated by the government, it is necessary to relearn how to control their movements and make decisions about what their place will be in society.

Theme 11: Deferred Education

Some spouses have had to defer their educational goals because of the job-related responsibilities of their military husbands. This is the case with both Felicia and Staci who spoke openly about their frustration with their circumstances. Staci says,

> I really hate that right now I'm in a situation where if I start going to school, I don't know if I'll be able to finish out because even though I've been – I've finished some schooling already this past year but I don't know if they're going to – you know how much longer we'll be here. How much longer we'll be here, if I'll be able to finish by one year and being able to transfer somewhere else because it is like if I start, I might have to start in the middle of the semester so that's something I hate.

Felicia attributes conflicts in the early years of her marriage to the delay of her educational and professional pursuits so she could be with Matthew, an aspect of

military life for which was unprepared. She says “I didn’t know that I would have to give up certain things too, so that was kind of the conflict with me because I’ve always been career-oriented and I didn’t know marrying someone in military I would have to put that aside.” When she found out they were going to Turkey after they married, Matthew told her that she wouldn’t have to work and could just go school. However, Felicia only completed three classes during the two-year assignment due to a limited offering of courses. Today, Felicia is concerned about her employment prospects as she works toward her bachelor’s degree.

The educational dreams of two wives have been deferred due to the responsibilities of the military and the complex nature of the marriage. For Staci, the frequent relocation of her family makes it difficult to locate a school that can meet her educational needs and family responsibilities and also reduces the amount of time she has to complete a program. It is a frustrating experience which can easily evolve into feelings of apathy and eventually total abandonment of educational goals. For Felicia, her delay in education initially seems related to a lack of available resources when stationed overseas. She remembers there were a limited number of courses she could take on base so she was unable to continue her education. Early in their marriage, there also seems to have been a lack of spousal support in her endeavor to pursue an education. Currently, there appears to be more support and a greater resolve on Felecia’s part to finish her degree.

Theme 12: Issues of Race

> I just think that as an African-American family, we have to deal with things that your typical military family – whatever other racial profiling may be,

> they don't have to deal with. We still have to face the institutionalized prejudices that had been put in place over a millennia since we've been here in this country. They may be subtle. They might not be out in the open. They may be hidden behind closed doors but they do exist. [Chris]

Far from the color-blind characterization in the literature, the prevailing perception of the military among participants is that it is a microcosm of larger society. It is an organization composed of individuals who bring their internalized prejudices, biases and stereotypes. Mark calls it "the human factor". However, unlike the civilian sector, "there are more controls in place, that's all. There's more regulation" according to Howard.

I observed a reluctance among a few of the participants to categorize people and/experiences as racist. They see individuals as a product of their environments who exhibit in their interactions, subconsciously or deliberately, the views they inherited.

> When we say racist, I try to be careful using that card. I think it's more they speak the same language like if I use the term we'll go white boy. Naturally, we know what I'm talking about. They have the same codes they grew up with in whatever country. Now we've got a lot of bama type who did grow up with [Unintelligible] in their house and they speak the same language. You're sitting there and you're listening to them and they're laughing and joking I was fishing and tucking and you're looking out like what are you talking about? [David]

> Just the schools of thought are different, typically, that I've found. Especially growing up. You know, we're brought up a certain… well, it's been my experience that we've been brought up a certain way. Totally different cultures, totally different what-have-yous. And you're thrown in the military where the majority doesn't think the same way you are, so not only is it a learning process for your job and then following the system, but you're trying to figure out your counterparts, say, and how they act, how they think, and all that kind of good stuff. And that's been a challenge for me, I think, in my career. [Jerry]

Chris expressed a common sentiment among African-Americans that he had to perform at a greater level than his white counterparts in order to be considered equal. This applies to both enlisted and commissioned officers. “Just to be equal and to stand out from them, you really have to go above and beyond. You have to be the subject matter expert. You have to be above reproach when it comes to dignity and integrity. If you don’t – you slip up once then you’re considered the bad guy forever. There’s no recovery.”

Inherent in the need to be above reproach is the unspoken directive to assimilate into the dominant culture as Jerry describes:

> It has taken a good while, and I'm still learning, how to play the quote-unquote game, you know. And that has been challenging, I think. A lot of the things that I wouldn't necessarily think of, you know, they do think a certain way. …and the things …I enjoy aren't necessarily things that my counterparts enjoy. But I've got to learn to enjoy those things. Not just go to those things, but act like I enjoy those things in order to kinda fit in, so to speak. So that's been kind of a challenging part for me.

Several participants shared experiences where they felt discriminated against for being African-American. For example, Chris said

> When I was a young enlisted troop, I was in a squadron, there was only about, a squadron of about 80 people. Only about seven or eight African-Americans in the entire squadron. So I was in law enforcement. So we would have patrol duty. It was okay for two white guys to be on patrol duty and ride together, but it wasn't okay for two black guys to be on patrol duty and ride together. So I'm like, WTF? "Why can't him and I ride together, but you two guys ride together every night?" "No, no, you just can't do that." "Why?" But no explanation was given other than the undertone is because you two are black. That's why we don't trust you to ride together. It was never vocalized in that manner, but that's how it was taken. Because why else couldn't two young, same guys, same rank as the other two guys, ride together? Same responsibilities. You know, "Why can't we do it but then yet you guys do it every night?"

In a similar vein, Jerry points out that African-Americans don't have the same level of anonymity as their white counterparts:

> I think another point in dealing with the race that you were talking about is the fact that because there aren't very many of us, it's very easy to point out when you're not present at something. Because one of the things I've noticed is that, where some of my counterparts cannot show or not do something…It is extremely obvious when you are not there. And it's almost like a, "Okay, got it," kinda deal. Okay, "Where is he?" "I haven't seen him." "Okay, got it." And it can have unspoken consequences, I'll say that, for not showing and not being at different locations. But it's very obvious. So you've really got to be on your game all the time.

There were also several occasions when Sarah was incorrectly assumed to have held a lower rank. She tells a story about an encounter with a coworker in Germany:

> We went to Germany and we were staying in the hotel I was in making something to eat in the kitchen and this guy that was also going to my same office and he had on his uniform and he's, "Hey you just got here?" I'm, "Yes." He said, "Where you working?" I said. "I'm going to 5th Corps G1." He says, "Oh yeah? Maybe you work for me." I said I don't know maybe I will. I walked out, went about my business, I saw him at work three days later. He was, "Hey ma'am. I'm so sorry."

The man thought Sarah, an O-3 Captain was actually a Specialist, an enlisted rank of E-4. She's also had a Lieutenant stop and ask her while she was wearing her physical training (PT) uniform why she had not saluted him. She simply replied "I don't salute people I outrank."

A lack of cultural sensitivity is observed in a military grooming policy requiring service members to be clean shaven. Like many black men, Jerry gets razor bumps from ingrown hairs after shaving too closely or too frequently. It is

possible to get a no-shaving chit, or medical waiver, but according to Gwen, that option is not looked upon favorably by others:

> But a lot of black man will not carry that because, or they will continue to shave and just deal with their pain, because what is it, it's frowned upon. It's like you're not being a team player. But medically you have this issue and they don't understand it. So here he's been in pain for the last 10 years. As an officer, that could like almost ruin your career, you know, if you run across the wrong person who, you know, this or that.

The participants in the Marines perceived the branch to be almost impervious to racial discrimination. Michael reiterates that the Marine Corps is "merit-based" and that their system is "different among the other branches." John attributes the Marine Corps' infrastructure to not experiencing bias in any aspect of his military career including promotions and awards. He states that "they're not tolerant of that type of stuff. They focus on the mission and anything that's going to hamper or cause detrimental change or the mission not getting complete, they're not going to put up with it." John has had the opportunity to sit on the board that evaluates promotions and says that the only time there may be bias is when a board member places greater weight on certain activities:

> you may have a member that's just strong on PT. If they don't have a certain PT score, then he's not going to – feel like their promotable. Or you may have another member who is strong on deployments, if the member doesn't have the deployments that he or she may not feel that - stuff like that. Or even with martial arts belts because at a certain rate, you're supposed to have a certain belt. You may have a member who is strong on MCMAP. If you don't have a certain belt, then yes.

Overall, Michael and John express significant confidence in the Marine Corps' capacity to minimize incidents of racial bias.

Through the interviews, I learned that all of the military branches acknowledge the racial and ethnic diversity of their organizations by promoting standard events such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage Month. A photograph of Bernard and Sheila revealed that he had been an active member of the African American Heritage Council while stationed at Langley AFB which was organized, according to their Facebook page, to educate "all government linked personnel at Langley on Black culture and history" (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Langley-AFB-African-American-Heritage-Committee/156548101063199).

Most of the military members in the study acknowledge that the military is not a colorblind institution but one that reflects the prejudices and biases of the people it comprises. While there is a reluctance to characterize events as racist, many participants were able to identify when they experienced at least one negative race-based incident. There is also the perception that they must work harder and smarter than their white counterparts in order to be just considered average, a sentiment that is commonly expressed among African Americans.

Chapter Six

Discussion and Conclusion

This research, based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 African American military couples explores how they cope with the challenges of military life. Despite a proliferation of research on military couples and families, I argue that the voices of African American service members and their families are largely ignored or muted due to presumptions of "color-blindness" in the military institution. In order to evaluate if the study has provided insight into the experiences of black military couples, it is important to frame the discussion within the context of the original research questions that guided this dissertation research:

Research Question 1: What marital challenges do military couples experience?

The couples in this study have experienced several types of challenges that are unique to military life. Based on the interviews, duty-related separations (i.e. deployments, field exercises, etc.) are an integral part of married life in the military yet how couples experience the separation depends on the purpose of the absence. Deployments, particularly to areas of conflict, can be quite anxiety-producing for the spouse who is left behind. Concerns about spouses being injured or killed are never far from their thoughts and yet must be suppressed in order to perform daily activities. In most cases, the wives who have their own military background demonstrate more empathy for their husbands because they understand the mental and physical challenges of being deployed.

At a certain point in every military career, a service member must decide whether to stay in the military or return to civilian life. The financial benefits, potential for relocation and future deployment, and the opinion of spouses are factors that influence the decision but don't all carry the same weight. A photograph of Bernard's retirement ceremony elicited memories of two years prior when he received a long-awaited promotion and had to decide if he would take the promotion or retire after 23 years of service. Until that point, he doubted that he would be promoted and told Sheila he was going to retire and they would return to her home state, which filled her with excitement. She had grown to miss her family and friends and was really looking forward to reconnecting with them. However, the appeal of the promotion and accompanying financial benefits outweighed Sheila's objections and he reenlisted for an additional two years. The situation was a point of contention for the couple which is reflected in Sheila's tempered smile in the photograph. They eventually compromised with the agreement that Sheila would stay with Bernard for the first year and then move back to her home state during the second year and prepare for Bernard's return. While not necessarily a duty-related separation, it is a situation that military couples often encounter and can have a positive impact on the relationship depending on their ability to negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Another common challenge among military couples is the tendency for the military member's career to take precedence over their spouse's educational and professional goals, such as Staci and Felicia, who have had to delay their

education due to the nature of their husband's jobs. At the time of the interviews, there were five wives that were pursuing higher education. There seems to be a correlation between when a wife is able to regularly attend classes without interruption and the phase of her husband's career. Jeanine, Shelley and Felicia are working on their degrees at a time when their husbands are toward the end of their military careers or have already retired. This relatively stable time provides them the opportunity complete a program without concerns about whether or not they will find a comparable program if they should have to relocate. There also seems to be a correlation between attending school and family planning. Although Rachel and Sarah are taking classes while their husbands are at the mid-way point of their careers, they have also completed their families as far as their concerned. They now see this time as their chance to work on their personal goals including attaining a degree. This is particularly important for Sarah who is redefining herself after leaving the military.

Research Question 2: How do military couples build stable marriages?

The stability of these marriages is embedded in the choices they made to maintain their relationships. One of the factors that allowed Marcia to survive over 20 years of being a military wife is that Lawrence didn't pressure her to be the quintessential officer's wife. Marcia was repelled by the politics of promotion and the unwritten, and sometimes written, rules of engagement for officer's wives that could positively or negatively impact their husband's careers. While she may have organized an occasional event early on his career, there came a time when she made the choice to not engage in the officer's wife subculture and Lawrence

supported her in that decision. She opted to not attend every military social function, interact only with people who she enjoyed, and devote herself to being the best wife and mother she could be. Marcia's choice and Lawrence's support of her choice reinforced the stability of their marriage.

Shelley made the choice to leave the military in order to stay with her husband rather than deploy to Afghanistan for 18 months. Initially, her decision didn't appear to be a significant sacrifice since she had only been in the service for five years and had an educational background on which to fall, yet it was a choice that changed the course of her life and simultaneously solidified her commitment to Chris.

Sarah made the same decision to leave the military but her choice affected her stability of her marriage to David indirectly. While the primary reason for her separation was to take care of her medically at-risk child, the secondary reason was so that her husband David would not have to stop his military career. It was an act of sacrifice for someone who had an esteemed military career in her own right and could have progressed to the higher ranks. Instead, she was willing to forego her career because she knew David well enough to know that, rightly or wrongly, he would not cope well with being the husband who followed his military wife from post to post. This is not surprising because while there are some men who are comfortable being the military spouse, it should also be noted that least-stable military marriages involve a military wife and civilian husband (insert Karney).

Studies have suggested a positive correlation between religion and marital stability (Lehrer, Robinson, Lambert). Participant narratives indicate that most couples base their marriages on interpretation of Christian doctrine (i.e. “he’s supposed to take care of me like the Word says”). Furthermore, some spouses viewed God as an active participant in their marriage. The strongest example of God’s perceived influence in a marriage is reflected in Marcia’s statement that Lawrence was a gift from God. Her belief had a profound impact on her commitment to him through years of relocations, deployments and not being able to work in her field of expertise. When I asked her if she ever thought about leaving Lawrence since she was so disheartened by military life, she responded incredulously as if I had suggested that she suffocate him while sleeping. That was never an option that entered her mind because for her, there was a clear distinction between Lawrence’s job and who he was as a person. He was, and continues to be, a good husband and father of their children. I’ve heard stories of wives who leave their military husbands because they cannot cope with the demands of military life. For them, their husbands and the military are so intricately linked that it is impossible to decipher which is causing the most unhappiness and so they detach from both.

Another commonality between these couples that appears to contribute to marital stability is the clear, yet flexible delineation of roles in their relationships. Some studies examining gender role dynamics in couples suggest that the division of family roles into stereotypical male and female roles is more characteristic of white families than black families (Beckett, Eriksen, Kamo).

Statements from participants in this study, however, are consistent with research that suggests black couples adopt more traditional gender roles at home yet simultaneously demonstrate egalitarian attitudes (Haynes, Glauber). For example, John and Staci and Lawrence and Marcia illustrate the classic breadwinner-homemaker family structure with corresponding gender based domains. However, Staci and Marcia are also responsible managing the finances, typically a male domain. The wives expressed little dissatisfaction with the gender division of labor at home, particularly those that were full-time housewives. Both spouses had a similar perspective on who should be responsible for what in the household or were able to effectively negotiate those responsibilities.

There was only one question that people really had to stop and think about how to respond and their responses tended to always be short. When I asked each spouse in what ways they could use more support from their spouse, almost all of them said they couldn't think of anything more their spouse could do. After reinforcing the confidential nature of the individual interviews, it was absolutely fascinating that most people could not identify one thing their spouse could do to provide more support. I did hear from Jeanine that she would like Mark to show a little more empathy about her struggle to adjust to being retired from the military and find a civilian job. But she also associated his lack of understanding to simply not knowing what it's like to be retired and that he would soon discover for himself that it's not such an easy adjustment. Jerry mentioned that he would like to come home to a more orderly house but recognized that

Gwen, who was pregnant at the time, was doing the best she could. However, he also acknowledged that he was getting used to having a toddler in the house which meant that the house was not always going to be as immaculate as it used to be. These minor issues were the extent of the responses and did not appear to have much of an impact on their relationships. I still wonder, however, if the spouses were reluctant to voice their complaints because of concerns about confidentiality.

Research Question 3: Do African-American military couples face distinctive issues or challenges?

As a unit, African American couples are indirectly impacted by the racial experiences of the service member within the context of military duty. Whenever I broached the subject of race in the military, a few participants believed they were not impacted by racism and many were reluctant to use the term "racist" when describing incidents that they perceived to have racial undertones. Rather, they preferred to view these incidents as being influenced by the stereotypes that people have about African-Americans or the lack of exposure to different ethnicities. Supporting results in the study by Hosek (2001), participants readily agreed that the military has processes in place to monitor fairness in terms of promotion and assignments. There are even programs to acknowledge the diversity of the military force and increase cultural sensitivity. The most meaningful data, however, are the stories I heard from participants that described their daily interactions with other service personnel that comprise the military.

In his examination of blacks in the workplace, Chester M. Pierce (1988) first identified racial slights as “microaggressions” or assaults that negatively impact the self-esteem of African American men. Racial microaggressions are subtle yet hostile interracial interactions that convey negative or denigrating messages to people of color (Constantine and Sue 2007; Franklin 1999). These messages, whether deliberate or unconscious, act as mechanisms of social control and serve as reminders of one’s designated inferior status. For example, growing up my mother had a history of immediately addressing microaggressive acts as they occurred. It was not uncommon for my mother to ask to speak to a manager at a department store when a salesperson attended to a white person first even though my mother was next in line. As a teenager, I thought she was just being hypersensitive and but I now understand that what she experienced was a subtle act of aggression of which I was completely oblivious. I apply the term to describe experiences such as Sarah being assumed to be lower ranking than she was or Chris not being allowed to patrol with another black peer because of how it might be perceived although there were no objections to two white servicemen working together.

Overall, these couples exhibit a unity of purpose that contributes to their marital stability. It is apparent in how they talk about issues of race and their experiences of microaggression in the military. There is a mutual understanding that racism is weaved into the fabric of society and will touch their lives on a regular basis. Acceptance of this fact doesn’t translate into dismissal of frustration or the perspective that one should “just get over it.” Rather, the

emotional support these spouses provide to one another when faced with microaggressions serves as a buffer to the potentially harmful psychological effects of racism that has been documented in the literature (Painter 1993).

They have explicitly agreed and committed to maintaining traditional gender roles in their families which is reinforced by their strong Judeo-Christian faith. This is a belief system that designates husbands as the head of the family with wives playing a more supportive, albeit significant, role in the management of the relationship and the household. For example, Sheila and Bernard were initially living separately when Bernard was transferred to a post in another state and they agreed that Sheila would stay and continue to work during his three-year assignment. However, when the physical distance became a source of contention between the couple, they decided that Sheila would terminate her employment with the school district and move to be with Bernard. That single decision simultaneously reinforced Bernard's position as family leader and gave prominence to his career path. Similar to military structure, there is a clear hierarchy and chain of command that is designed to establish order and maintain stability in the system. Although this model of marriage clearly has roots in patriarchy and has been associated with the subjugation of women, it has been embraced by the couples in this study as a structure that provides a stabilizing force in the family system.

Also embedded in their unity of purpose is the tacit and shared definition of black masculinity and how it factors into decision-making. Sarah's decision to separate from the military to take care of their child was largely influenced by her

knowledge that David could not take on the role of military spouse without it damaging his identity as a man. For these husbands, their masculinity is tied to the belief that men are supposed, and in Biblical terms "created", to be the primary breadwinners in the family which is facilitated by their mid-to-upper level ranks and corresponding pay grades. Even the husbands that are retired from the service and have transitioned into civilian jobs continue to bring in the majority of the household income thus fulfilling their purpose as the primary provider for the family.

The most remarkable demonstration of unity by these couples was evident in the consistency of their joint and individual interviews. As previously mentioned, there is a possibility that the story a couple tells during a joint interview may represent the perspective of one spouse more so than the other or may be distorted to present an idealized reality (Valentine 1999). This distortion of reality can be amended during individual interviews when the influence of the other spouse is diminished by their absence. However, the couples in this study exhibited few inconsistencies in their joint and individual interviews which reinforced their behavioral presentation as a cohesive unit (sitting together, making eye contact, displays of affection). While they may not agree on certain points, spouses revealed a significant level of awareness of the thoughts and feelings of their husbands or wives. In other words, they agree that communication is critical to maintaining a stable relationship and will discuss their perspectives on relationship and family issues despite the potential for discomfort.

While the unity of purpose demonstrated among these couples may inform us about what contributes to the strength and stability of their marriage, it is not a phenomenon that is necessarily unique to African American military couples. Anecdotally, I am aware of black civilian couples that collectively process racism and provide the emotional support necessary to buffer its toxic effects. Similarly, there are civilian couples that subscribe to traditional gender roles that are reinforced by their involvement in a faith community. So the question remains, what is it that makes the marriages of African American military couples more stable than black civilian couples? Similar to Lundquist (2006), I agree that for these ten couples, their relatively high-income and access to important resources (e.g. healthcare and housing allowances) may mitigate the stresses associated with military life. I further speculate that unlike the civilian world, military couples are enmeshed in a subculture that espouses hierarchy, "traditional" family values and gender roles, all of which they incorporate in their family structure and may play a significant role in the stability of black military marriages.

A Review of the Methodology

A brief discussion of the methodology used in this study is warranted since it was experimental in nature. The combination of photo elicitation and open-ended questions during the interview produced data that addressed the research questions and allowed for the development of the themes. Furthermore, this approach also elicited information that may not have necessarily been pertinent to the research questions but did contribute to a more nuanced picture of military life for these couples. For example, I learned about military rituals and their

importance to the couples such as the annual Marine Corps Ball which was the setting for photographs of both Marine couples who recounted a time of happiness and close interpersonal connection. For Staci, it was an opportunity to be a graceful and dignified representative of her husband. For Rachel and Michael, the picture of them at the Marine Corps Ball indicates that their marriage was stable. According to Michael, "If we weren't at the ball, marriage probably was in trouble. I've been to every Marine Corps ball. Usually, when we at a Marine Corps ball, it's a happy time and our marriage is not really on a downturn."

Promotion ceremonies were also common among the photographs selected by participants. These events are a highlight for any serviceperson and bring back particular memories of extended family members coming from near and far to witness their loved ones get promoted. For Mark, it was particularly important for his parents to be present when he was promoted to a W-04. Typically service members get promoted by their command officer at a ceremony in front of their peers but Mark was granted permission to have his promotion conducted at a base near his parents who were unable to travel due to medical issues. It was also through his picture that I learn Mark comes from a military family in which he and all three of his siblings were at one time active duty in the Navy. His father and brother are both currently retired from the Navy.

The first photograph Howard and Connie selected to discuss was of a ceremony commemorating her promotion to E6. She was 34 and pregnant with their first child dressed in a white maternity uniform and being pinned by two

senior officers flanked on either side. What is striking is the portrayal of a woman who embodies three identities, a "wife, mother, and a career military female" as stated by her husband Howard. For Staci and John, their picture represents strength, flexibility and the ability to endure the sometimes hectic life of the military. It also symbolizes the support they provided to each other during a time when both of them were ambivalent about being in Kentucky.

It was also through photo-elicitation that two couples disclosed the loss of a newborn child due to medical complications early in their marriages. For Jerry and Gwen, the photo revealed Jerry's profound level of grief which was previously unknown to his wife and fostered a deeper discussion of their shared loss. The picture of Lawrence and Marcia's newborn child who did not survive was when she realized that she didn't like being in the military. The event "colored the whole rest of the Air Force career for me" says Marcia. "This is our first tour and I discovered I hated it. I hated being away from home. I didn't like being an officer's wife. It came with too many obligations that I didn't feel comfortable with." Marcia was also resentful that Lawrence was still being sent on assignments during the time when their son was still alive but in critical condition. She says "The expectation is you got a wife, let her deal with it. There was seemingly always a pull between what the Air Force expected." All of these events and the meaning attached to them emerged during photo-elicitation as significant occasions that may have gone unacknowledged during a traditional interview.

Among the all of the photographs I reviewed, the image of Jerry in uniform holding his son is one of the more striking images in its portrayal of military hardness juxtaposed with the softness of a newborn baby. He was participating in six weeks of field training and received a surprise visit from his wife Gwen and their son. Jerry recalls that he had not seen his son for two weeks and was in full military mode:

> I had just got finished… well, all day I had been yelling at people and what-not. And so it was kinda strange to swap roles..I'm in that role of being hard, you know. Yelling and doing what you need to do to train people, and then they pop up. And I got my son here and it's like, okay, I can be dad again.

However, the degree to which he could engage emotionally with his wife and son was limited not only because he was working at the time but also due to his awareness that he wouldn't be 'dad' again for another two weeks and didn't want to "be moping around here when I've got folks watching me". In fact, Jerry says that soon after the picture had been taken, he was ridiculed by another service member for the perceived crack in his hardened façade.

Jerry speaks eloquently about the duality of being an officer in the Air Force and being a family man and recognizes the necessity of being able to navigate between those roles. Inherent in that movement is acknowledgement that the skills and communication styles utilized in the military sphere are not necessarily appropriate to use in personal relationships, a point that seems inconsequential to Matthew and his authoritarian approach to household management.

Conducting both individual and joint interviews was intended to safeguard against the domination of one spouse and to insure each person's voice was heard. Most of the participants didn't appear to be inhibited around their spouses during the joint interviews and thus individual interviews were used to explore those areas that were unique to their experiences. I also used the method to identify any differences or conflicts in the perspective presented by each spouse and address them if appropriate. Interestingly, there were no inconsistencies between the individual and joint interviews with the exception of one couple. While it may be indicative of a larger relationship issue, I believe the discrepancy in how they viewed the reintegration process was not critical to the results of the study.

Conclusion

In this project, I set out to explore the experiences of African American military couples and how they cope with the challenges of military life. I explore this particular topic because much of the literature tends to focus on the deficits of black families and the factors contributing to the dissolution of marriages and the breakdown of black families. While these studies are responding to the staggering divorce rates that are often reported in the media, their approach ignores the remaining percentage of African American couples that are in stable, long-lasting marriage. I chose to examine black marriages by seeking out couples who appeared to be successful in maintaining healthy relationships believing they could contribute a more strengths-based perspective to the conversation.

The military has propelled African Americans into the middle class since it became an all-volunteer force and blacks enlisted in record numbers in search of a better quality of life and to demonstrate that patriotism is not unique to white America. This collage of stories presents the lives of a segment of middle-class black America that is rarely portrayed, much less analyzed in the literature. Although there is no refuting the increase in female-headed households in the black community, the narratives of these couples remind us that there is still a significant percentage of African American families that are led by couples who experience struggles and manage to overcome those challenges. Perhaps it is their understanding that the roles and responsibilities in their relationships must be clearly delineated yet flexible enough to accommodate the changing demands of the military which contributes to the survivability of their marriages. Maybe having the perspective that their spouses are 'gifts from God' has a buffering effect against decisions that can negatively impact relationships such as delaying or sacrificing educational and professional goals for the sake of their spouses' career or wellbeing. The sources of resilience for these couples requires further study but they are a resource that can offer valuable insight into the factors that contribute to the sustainability of healthy marriages and families in the African American community.

This study also complicates research that characterizes African Americans as having lower levels of marital quality than other groups and report more negative behaviors of their spouses. While my interactions with the couples were limited and did not specifically address the issue of marital quality, the

photographs selected by these couples and their stories chronicle relationships that have been, and in some cases continue to be, tested by the demands of the military and yet maintain an abiding love and friendship that has endured the duration of their marriage.

I also chose this particular topic to further explore the assertion of the military as a colorblind institution that is prominent in studies of the military. The notion of any institution being characterized as immune to issues of race is a difficult to embrace, particularly as a woman of color. My suspicions were also reinforced by the pilot study I conducted as well as informal conversations with personal acquaintances in the military who shared experiences that contradicted the claims in the literature. I felt it was important to present an alternative, more nuanced, view of race in the military by including the voices of people who are most impacted by it.

Limitations of the Research

Although the conversations with these African American couples in the military allowed me to identify 12 key themes about their experiences, these findings are not generalizable to all black couples in the military. While the sample size is appropriate for a qualitative investigation, this study included only 10 non-random African American couples that varied widely in age, length of service, length of marriage and military status (active-duty vs. retired). It could be argued that the heterogeneity in the sample ignores the influence of factors such as the stage of marriage, varying social norms during military service, generational gaps, and corresponding worldviews. That is, the retired couple that

has been married for 35 years is going to have a different perspective than the active-duty couple that has been married for five years. Additionally, the sample does not include a single couple in which the wife is the only service member in the relationship which undoubtedly would describe very different dynamics and life perspectives. In a related issue, the retrospective design of the study also limits the generalizability of the findings. Although semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain an understanding of participants' experiences in the military, the accounts of these narratives may be distorted to some degree because they were recalling events that occurred up to 30 years before the interviews.

Another limitation of the study is that data are primarily derived from the semi-structured interviews. While I did attend a few social functions with one of the couples, I did not have the opportunity to observe the day-to-day activities of military couples and their interactions with each other. Therefore, I was unable to actually witness how the military may have impacted their daily lives.

Possibilities for Future Research

It is impossible to paint a complete picture of the lives of African American military couples and their experiences so what I offer here is a snapshot of what they have chosen to share with me and hopefully it will offer some insight and peak interest into how couples maintain stable marriages despite the demanding, and sometimes unreasonable, expectations of the military. Despite the limitations of the study, it raises some important questions that might be valuable to explore in future research. What safeguards could be put in place to prevent dual-military couples with children from being assigned to simultaneous duty-

related separations? What accounts for the non-utilization of military marriage enrichment programs by African Americans? How effective are current diversity programs in the military and do they address racial microaggressions? My hope is that those who are truly interested in supporting our military personnel will use the stories of these 10 couples to influence military policy that will better serve those who serve their country.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS!!

Join a Research Study of
African American Military Marriages

This study looks at how married
African American members of the armed forces
cope with the challenges of military life.

You may be eligible to participate if you are:

- Married
- Active-duty military personnel
- Retired military personnel (within 10 years)

For more information, contact:
Emelda Curry, PhD Candidate, Principal Investigator
Phone: (800) 370-2556 or
Email: ecurry2@mail.usf.edu

USF
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
IRB#00003134

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Method:

1. Researcher will conduct face-to-face joint interviews with 5-10 African American military or retired military couples utilizing pre-selected photographs (approximately 60-90 minutes per interview)

2. Researcher will interview in-person each spouse within 90 days of initial joint interview based on participant availability (60-90 minutes per interview)

3. Researcher will conduct final face-to-face joint interviews with 5-10 couples within 90 days of individual interviews based on participant availability (60-90 minutes per interview)

Logistics:

1. Researcher will contact each couple to:
    a. Arrange interview time
    b. Inform couple about the purpose of research
    c. Request couple to collect photographs and bring them to initial interview
2. Researcher will convene additional interviews at the participants' convenience.

I. Initial Joint Interview

Introductory, open-ended questions using photos

1. When was this picture taken?
2. When you look at this picture, what do you see?
3. What was going on in each of your lives at the time?
4. How does this picture reflect the relationship at that time?

Specific Open-Ended questions

Phases of married life

1. How long did you date before getting married? Did pre-marital counseling?
2. What was your married life like for you during the early years?
3. How have things changed since then?

Advantages and disadvantages to military life

1. What are some of the pluses of being married while in the military?
2. What are some of the minuses?

Coping with marital challenges

1. What have been some of the high points of your marriage?

2. What have been some of the low points of your marriage?
3. How did you cope with the low points?

The role of race and class in the military

1. To what extent has race been an issue for you in the military, if at all?
2. Do you see class as being an issue in the military? Why or why not?

Final Question

Is there anything else you would like to add?

II. Individual Interviews

Specific Open-Ended Questions

Military Member:

1. In what ways do you think the 'insert military branch' is different than other branches in terms of how couples experience military life?
2. In what ways, if any, does the 'insert military branch' acknowledge diversity in its organization?
3. Tell me about the path your career has taken or took in the military? How would you compare the assignments? In what way, if any, does/did being African-American play a role in how your career progressed?
4. In what ways does rank in the 'insert military branch' impact how you experience military life, if at all? How does it impact you and your spouse as a couple?
5. What does/did a typical day in your life look like?
6. In what ways do you feel supported by your spouse? In what ways would you like more support from your spouse?
7. How often have/had you been separated due to deployments, field training, etc.? What was that experience like for you?
8. How do/did you cope with problems/issues when separated from your spouse?
9. How was the process of reintegrating upon return? How does/did the 'insert military branch' help with reintegration?
10. How would you describe you and your spouse's involvement in managing the household? Raising your child(ren)?

Military Spouse:

1. In what ways do you think the 'insert military branch' is different than other branches in terms of how couples experience military life?
2. In what ways does rank in the 'insert military branch' impact how you experience military life, if at all? How does it impact you and your spouse as a couple?
3. Tell me about your experiences as a military spouse. How often do/did you interact with other spouses? Describe those interactions. In what way, if any, does being African-American influence those experiences?
4. What does/did a typical day in your life look like?

5. In what ways do/did you feel supported by your spouse? In what ways would you like/have liked more support from your spouse?
6. How often have/had you been separated due to deployments, field training, etc.? What was that experience like for you?
7. How did you cope with problems/issues when separated from your spouse?
8. How was the process of reintegrating upon return? How does/did the 'insert military branch' help with reintegration?
9. How would you describe you and your spouse's involvement in managing the household? Raising your child(ren)?

Final Question

Is there anything else you would like to add?

III. Exit Interview

Specific Open-ended Questions

1. How have things changed, if at all, since we first met?
2. Who do/did you mainly associate with, people in the military or civilians? Why?
3. What kind of support do/did you receive to assist with challenges of military life?
4. To whom do/did you turn to in time of crisis?
5. How would you describe your spiritual beliefs? What spiritual/religious practices do/did you engage in?
6. What role, if any, do/did your spiritual beliefs and practices play in your relationship? In how you cope with military life?

Final Question

Is there anything else you would like to add?