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Bryanna Zawodniak

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Influence of Communication and Rituals on Military Members' and Spouses' Growth Post-  
Deployment

By

Bryanna Zawodniak

Undergraduate Honors Thesis under the Direction of

Dr. Russell A. Matthews

Department of Psychology

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between the stress of military deployment separation and growth after deployment. It also examined whether communication and ritual use within families are related to more growth of military members and/or spouses out of the deployment. After military service members had returned from deployment, military members and spouses completed measures intended to assess family communication and ritual use both before and during deployment. Growth was also be assessed. I hypothesized that better communication before deployment would be positively related to communication during deployment, which would be positively related to more growth post-deployment. Secondly, I predicted that more ritual use, if coupled by adequate adaptation of rituals during deployment, would be positively related to more family growth post-deployment. Results showed that communication before deployment was significantly positively related to communication during deployment, but neither were related to growth post-deployment. Ritual use before and during deployment were not significantly related. Furthermore ritual use before or during deployment was not related to growth post-deployment, although the relationship between ritual use before and growth after trended toward significance. In the partial correlation controlling for number of deployments a significant, a positive relationship between rituals before deployment and growth after deployment was found

*Keywords:* Growth, Stress, Communication, Rituals, Military

## Influence of Communication and Rituals on Military Members' and Spouses' Growth Post-Deployment

U.S. military families face certain stressors above and beyond those experienced by most American families, namely separation because of deployment and reunion after deployment. Over three million deployments have occurred since September 11, 2001 (Shepard, Malatras & Israel, 2010) making the issues surrounding deployment pertinent to a significant portion of military families. To this end, it is important to note that deployment stress is not limited solely to military personnel, rather, it is also experienced by the family members of deployed service members (Wheeler & Stone, 2010; Wood, Scarville, & Garvino 1995). Wheeler and Stone (2010) found that spouses of deployed or previously deployed National Guard personnel, experienced stress in the areas of emotional and physical states, responsibilities of raising children, and uncertainty of about future with the military. Reunion after deployment can also lead to anger, resentment, marital conflict, marital estrangement, and children's behavioral problems (Wood et al., 1995 ). In the present study, I examined the experience of military members and spouses after they have undergone both deployment separation and post deployment reunion.

Namely, in this study I examined the possibility of growing out of the experience of deployment separation and reunion. I examined the self-reported growth of both service members and spouses after the service member had returned from deployment. More specifically, I examined the relationship between this growth and the resources the family possessed for dealing with the deployment, namely *communication* and *rituals*.

### **The Importance of Family within the Military Experience**

Previous studies have shown that family satisfaction is significantly positively related to military officers' turnover intention (Heilman, Bell, & McDonald, 2009). Conservation of resources theorists suggest that stress is derived from threats to resources, actual loss of resources, or inadequate gain in resources following investment of other resources (Hobfoll, 1989). When military service members deploy, the family experiences the new strains related to reorganization of roles and responsibilities among the family members who remain behind. These adjustments and the added responsibilities each member must take on because of the loss of a functioning member of the family place a strain on the family's resources. When service members are deployed, the military tries to supplement some of these lost resources. These resources include things such as family time, dental/medical care, adequate school, and activities for youth (Behnke, MacDermid, Anderson & Weiss, 2010).

Behnke et al. (2010) has demonstrated that family resources provided by the military (along with work resources, such as satisfactory promotion pace and workload) are the resource categories most strongly related to family separation and intent to leave the military, such that family resources mediate the impact of separation on intent to leave. This means that although family separation will likely lead to a decrease in resources for most families, those who were most satisfied with the resources that were provided by the military, were the least likely to express a desire to leave the military. Simply put, when the family is better provided for during deployments the service member is more likely to continue serving.

Furthermore, Bourg and Segal (1999) provide additional evidence that family issues are significantly related to turnover rates among enlisted Army families, as well as, that the military can alleviate some of these issues. Results from their study suggest that the spouses'

commitment to the Army is significantly related to the soldiers' commitment to the Army. Likewise, conflict between the Army and family was negatively related to both the spouses' and the military members' commitment. However, the perceived support of the Unit Leader for the family was significantly related to a lower level of Army family conflict and a greater commitment to the Army for both the spouse and the military member (Bourg & Segal, 1999). With such import of family issues on service members' career choices, it becomes imperative to understand the experience of the military family during and after deployment in hopes of maximizing the positive experience of all family members.

### **The Military Family and Deployment Stress**

Stresses such as deployment have the ability to lead to family growth. However, before looking at the precise element of growth out of deployment, one must understand the nature of deployment as a stressor. Hill (1949) details an extensive study of families whose fathers had been deployed. The study examines the experience of families throughout the entire process: beginning before deployment, continuing during deployment, and culminating in the reunion process after deployment. The results of this study aided in the development of the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment, a model for how families deal with stress, that is explained later.

Deployment stress in families actually involves two phases: the initial stress caused by the separation and the secondary stress caused by the reunion (Hill, 1949). Thus, the entire process actually consists of two types of stressors: dismemberment and accession. When the service member deploys, the family experiences dismemberment, the loss of one of its members (Hill, 1958). Because of the loss of a functioning member, the family must reallocate roles and responsibilities, which can result in what Hill (1958) refers to as demoralization. Demoralization

is defined as “loss of morale and family unity” (Hill, 1958, p. 142). In turn though, when the service member returns home, the family experiences accession, or the addition of a “new” member. Although the returning spouse is not really a new member, in practice he or she is an addition to the family because the roles and responsibilities and the overall routine established during deployment must be reorganized to reintegrate the returning family member (Hill, 1958). This can lead to another round of demoralization in the family.

All military families facing deployment experience these same stressors, however, not all families react to them in the same way. Thus, deployment stimulates crisis to a different extent in each family. Crisis is defined as “any sharp or decisive change for which old patterns are inadequate” (Hill, 1949, p.51). Some families may experience deployment separation with little or no crises, while others may be devastated by the same event. The degree to which a family enters into crisis is determined by: 1) the hardships surrounding an event, 2) the resources that a family possesses that aid in meeting these hardships, and 3) how the family defines the event (i.e., does the family believe it is experiencing a crisis; (Hill, 1949). This study focuses on the impact of resources on the experience of the crisis and growth afterward.

I focused on resources, rather than the hardships and definitions of the event because I felt these would prove to offer the greatest contribution to understanding family stress-related growth. Focusing on hardships would not have been a useful initiative because, in most cases, families cannot control the hardships that they encounter in stressful situations. In the same way, family definition of it a crisis is simply the perception of the event and thus is not likely consciously chosen. Resources on the other hand can be actively manipulated by the family, and moreover they can be taught by military programs. Furthermore, a family actually needs to experience crisis in order for growth to occur (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), but no family is

intentionally going to subject themselves to crisis in order to grow. Most families, however, will likely be willing to develop the resources necessary to grow out of crisis should they encounter one. Thus, if resources proved to be positively related to growth there are steps the military can take to capitalize on this relationship.

### **The Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment**

The Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment divides the process of experiencing and adjusting to a crisis into five periods (Hill, 1949). The first period, organization, is the family's level of function before the crisis, in this case, before the service member's deployment. The second period involves the actions or lack of actions the family takes to prepare for the deployment. This can include both emotional disturbance and proactive preparation, such as enlisting the help of extended family. Between the second and the third period, the deployment and subsequently dismemberment occurs, and thus the third period is the family's initial reaction to the separation. This is usually the lowest point of family functioning and is followed by a increase in function, period four. Period four involves the longer process of adjusting to the loss of a family member, involving the reallocation of roles and responsibilities within the family. Reorganization is the final stage of adjustment and refers to the family's final level of functioning while the service member is still deployed. This level of functioning may be lower than, equal to, or above the initial functioning at stage one.

When the service member returns from deployment, all these periods will be experienced again, but in a different manner. Period five becomes the equivalent of period one in the reunion phase, in that it is the initial level of functioning in families before the ascension of the service member. The second period of reunion phase, or the sixth period of the overall deployment experience, involves the reactions to the fact that the service member will be returning soon.



Unlike period two in the separation phase of deployment, these reactions are usually positive and may lead to a temporary spike in functioning. Between the sixth and seventh period, the service member returns home introducing families to the stress of accession. Period seven (Period three of the reunion phase) is disorganization caused by the return, which although joyful can lead to a decrease in functioning. Period eight (Period 4 of the reunion phase) marks a time of adjusting to the having the service member home and reintegrating him or her into roles and responsibilities within the family. Period 9 (Period 5 of the reunion phase) is the final state of family functioning after the entire ordeal of deployment. This is the stage I am most interested in for this study, because I hope to see if functioning at Period 9 can be higher than it was at Period 1 due to growth during the deployment. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the desired model.

### **Growth and the Military Family**

Although there is a wealth of literature linking crisis and negative outcome (Britt, Adler, & Bartone, 2001), crisis is actually also a necessary catalyst for *Posttraumatic growth* (PTG; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Also called stress related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), PTG is defined as “experience of positive change as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crisis” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1).

Specific to a military context, there are many documented cases of personal growth among military members following a traumatic event (e.g., Britt et al., 2001; Pietrzak et al., 2010; Lee, Luxton, Reger, & Gahm, 2010). In fact, growth after a traumatic event is substantially more common than psychiatric disorders (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to Britt et al. (2001) deployed soldiers experience benefits as a result of deployment. Finding meaning in work during deployment is positively related to experiencing benefits. Likewise,

Britt et al. found that hardiness is positively related to finding meaning in work, showing that hardiness indirectly affects experience of benefits. Benefits included such things as increased ability to deal with stress and greater awareness of the world's problems. Thus, these benefits are in fact specific aspects of the overall concept of growth.

Recently Peitzak et al. (2010) expanded on findings reported by Britt et al. (2001) showing that soldiers who participated in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom did in fact experience growth as a consequence of deployment. This growth was found to be positively associated with younger age, higher *Posttraumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) symptoms, greater unit member support, and greater effort/perseverance. Although the positive relationship between PTSD and PTG seems contradictory, the relationship does make some intuitive sense when viewed in light of the fact that the mechanism for growth is the reframing of previous assumptions (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Individuals whose assumptions are most substantially undermined are more likely to experience stress, but they are also afforded more opportunity for growth.

This highlights again the importance of experiencing a crisis to the experience of growth. Without the introduction of the stressor of deployment, these service men and women would likely have remained at a steady level of functioning. In the same way, families who undergo the stress of separation and reunion because of deployment have the opportunity to grow out of the crisis.

Families have been found to be resilient through non-deployment related stresses. (Greff & Merwe, 2004). While, it should be noted that resilience is not equivalent to growth, growth and resilience are very closely related. Though resilience is not consistently defined in the same manner, it has been referred to as the ability of an individual or group to continue living a

purposeful life after the experience of a traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). On the other hand, growth is the positive change that occurs as a result of undergoing stress. It involves exceeding adaptive behavior present before the traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), whereas resilience requires only maintenance of previous levels of functioning. However, it follows logically that resilient individuals and groups would be more equipped to experience growth. Therefore, resilience and growth may share predictor variables.

Divorce is one stressor through which families have displayed resilience (Greff & Merwe, 2004). Though more permanent than deployment, divorce is similar to deployment in that it involves long separation and necessary adjustment of family roles. In their study, Greff and Merwe (2004) operationally defined resilience as an increase in family coherence. Quality relationships within and outside the family, family hardiness, meaning in and attitude towards crisis, social support, as well as the coping strategies of reformulating the problem and seeking religious support were found to be predictors of resilience through divorce. Black and Lobo (2008) summarized the known influences on family resilience, noting that the key contributory factors were positive outlook, spirituality, family member accord, flexibility, family communication, financial management, family time, shared recreation, routines and rituals, and support networks.

Family resilience factors have also been examined in a deployment context. Hill (1949) noted three main family attributes that were related to better adjustment after the deployment process: marital adjustment, family adaptability, and family integration. Marital adjustment involves the degree to which partners agree on important issues. Family adaptability includes a family's ability to adjust roles and responsibilities during stresses, such as deployments. Besides flexibility in roles and responsibilities, it also includes equalitarian control and decision-making,

as well as other resources acquired during successful bouts with previous crisis. Family integration refers to the degree of interdependency present in a family, encompassing affection, family time, and family pride usually manifested in traditions (Hill, 1949).

Many of the resilience predictor variables summarized in Black and Lobo (2008) actually fall in one of the three categories of marital adjustment, family adaptability, and family integration. For example, family member accord could be considered part of marital adjustment. Flexibility is an important facet of family adaptability. Family time, shared recreation, and routines and rituals are aspects of family integration. Likewise, although not one of the three main attributes, communication, cited in Black and Lobo (2008) as a predictor of good adjustment after divorce, is also cited in Hill (1949) as a contributor to greater adjustment during deployment separation and deployment reunion.

These family attributes or resilience factors are present at period one of the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment and lead to an increased level of final adjustment for both the separation (period 5) and reunion (period 9) phases (Hill, 1949). It follows logically then that in order for these family attributes to influence adjustment to reunion they must also be present during phase five (final adjustment during separation) of the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of adjustment, so I hope to examine the consistency of these resources across the deployment period in terms of its impact on growth.

In the present study, I looked at the use of resources before deployment and the use of resources during deployment, to determine if greater family resources before deployment are related to greater family resources during deployment, and if both are related to greater family growth after deployment. Specifically, I examined the relationship between family growth and the predictor variables of communication and rituals. I chose these predictor variables, because

while certain characteristics associated with growth, such as hardiness (Britt et al., 2001), are often ambiguous and difficult to directly change, these variables can be directly influenced by families seeking to increase the possibility of growth out of deployment separation and reunion. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the military could invest in programs that facilitate families in the development and maintenance of these resources throughout the process of deployment.

### **Communication**

Communication within the family during deployment has been shown to lead to improvements in functioning during the time of separation (Hill, 1949). Families who kept up the highest level of communication during deployment separation also exhibited the highest level of adjustment after reunion. Although the number of letters written was impactful, the content of the letters was of greatest importance to adjustment. Spouses at home who were able to express their worries and struggles, and receive affection in return were most contented with the communication (Hill, 1949).

In non-deployment setting, family communication style has been found to influence family strength. Family expressiveness, a style in which family members are encouraged to conversationally communicate their feelings and perspectives, is positively related to family strength. However, structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance, which seek to force conformity by promoting conventional conformity, by either exerting power (i.e., parent on child) or suppressing unpleasant or contradictory views, are negatively related to family strength (Schrodt, 2009). Although family strength is a much wider concept than growth after a crisis such as deployment, the sixth and final attribute of common to strong families is “an ability to manage stress and crises effectively” (DeFrain & Asay, 2007, p.1). Thus, communication style will likely be related to stress-related growth in the same way that it is related to strength.

Furthermore, additional research found that structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance are negatively related to family adaptability (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). Because adaptability is positively related to adjustment in families after deployment (Hill, 1949), it follows logically that families with communication styles that promote adaptability will be more inclined to experience positive adjustment, as well as, stress-related growth, following deployment.

Moreover, better communication can distinguish between families with low marital adjustment and those with high marital adjustment (Navran, 1967). Navran (1967) attempted to determine if communication competency could distinguish between “unhappily” married couples seeking counseling, who as a group scored an average 75 on the Marital Relationship Inventory (MRI), and “happily” married couples, who on average scored a 113 on the MRI. This second group scored significantly higher on the Primary Communication Inventory, showing that marital adjustment and communication skills are related (Navran, 1967). This correlation between communication and marital adjustment may be important to families’ experience of deployment, because according to Hill (1949) the families with poor marital adjustment prior to separation returned to low levels of adjustment after reunion, even if they adjusted well to separation. Thus, for a family and its members to experience growth after the entire experience of deployment they likely need to have adequate communication skills prior to the separation.

A more recent study with military spouses and service members (Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008), depicted communication issues as key to the struggles of military families during deployment separation and reunion. The separation, as mentioned above, creates the stress of dismemberment. In the deployment context this dismemberment can lead to ambiguous loss, where the military member is physically separated from, but still psychologically connected to the family (Faber et al., 2008). In a study of families with

deployed reservists, Faber et al. (2008) found that ambiguous loss corresponded with boundary ambiguity, where families were uncertain who was or was not a part of the family, as well as who held what roles within the family. This issue was particularly prevalent in the areas of family member safety and the redistribution of roles, and often stemmed from lack of communication. In the area of family member safety, the reservists' spouses reported anxiety as a result of the lack of information about the service members' safety. This issue was intensified by the lack of open communication on the part of the reservists, who would often censor information about their situation in unavailing attempts at decreasing their families' worry. In the area of redistribution of roles, Faber et al. (2008) noted that spouses often found the lack of open communication with service members disconcerting because it required them to make decisions without the guidance of their partners.

Communication issues during deployment can also carry over to communication issues after deployment. Like separation, reunion can also lead to ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity, because although service members are physically present, they may seem psychologically absent (Faber et al., 2008). Reintegrating families have trouble reestablishing open communication after months of being closed off about thoughts and emotions because of the physical and situational separation. Struggles arise in transitioning from life as an individual to life as a communicating couple (Faber et al., 2008).

Faber et al. (2008), well as Hill (1949), focused on the impact of communication during deployment on military families. However in examining the evidence that communication influences family strength (Schrodt, 2009), family adaptability (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b), and marital adjustment (Navran, 1967) it follows logically that communication patterns prior to deployment will leave families better equipped to handle the deployment stresses of separation

and reunion. On this note, I examined spouses' and service members' reports on how they remember communication before deployment and communication during deployment in order to look at the relationship between this communication and stress-related growth in family members.

*Hypothesis 1: Better communication between spouses before deployment is positively related to better communication during deployment.*

*Hypothesis 2: Better communication between spouses before deployment separation is positively related to greater stress-related growth in both service members and spouses after reunion.*

*Hypothesis 3: Better communication between spouses during deployment is positively related to greater stress-related growth in both service members and the spouses after reunion.*

## **Rituals**

Ritual is actually a symbolic form of communication (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). A family's understanding and practice of rituals can be divided into two main dimensions: commitment to family rituals and ability to adapt rituals to fit within changing life events (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Rituals are key aspects of family integration (Bossard & Boll, 1950), and as discussed by Hill (1949), integration is one of the most important family attributes for adjustment during deployment separation and reunion. The success of rituals in contributing to family function is also intricately tied to adaptability (Wolin & Bennett, 1994), another of the attributes that Hill (1949) connected to successful adjustment after deployment.

Before looking at the impact of rituals on families encountering stress, one must distinguish between routines and rituals. Routines and rituals are both important to the definition and



function of a family. The main purpose of routine is to help with function. Routines determine what needs to be done and how it will be done, and consist of repetitive, momentary and observable actions (Fiese et al., 2002). Common family routines include such things as bedtime (Nucci & Smetana, 1996) and even chores (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996).

Rituals on the other hand describe the identity of a family. They have a more emotional and enduring effect, giving the assurance the “this is who we are and will continue to be as a family” (Fiese et al, 2002). They can include inside jokes and meaningful objects and acts understood only by the family (Fiese et al, 2002). Wolin and Bennett (1984) divided rituals into three categories: family celebrations, family traditions, and patterned family interactions. Family celebrations encompass common events shared by a culture, such as Christmas and Easter. Family traditions, on the other hand, are events unique to each individual family, such as birthdays and anniversaries. The last category of ritual seems very similar to routines in that it involves everyday practices such as bedtime stories and dinnertime that have become meaningful events for the family (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). However, routines move to being rituals when they become symbolic, rather than simply practical (Fiese et al., 2002). For example, when a bedtime story becomes an identifying aspect of a father-son relationship it transitions from merely routine to ritualistic. The disruption of routines may only lead to discomfort, but the disruption of rituals can undermine family cohesion (Fiese et al., 2002).

In general, rituals contribute to the development and maintenance of family identity in three ways: transformation, communication and stabilization (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

Transformation refers to the act of preparing for the enactment of the ritual and the transition from a time of non-ritual to ritual. For example, the arrival of grandparents before Sunday lunch can be served. Communication can be both affective and symbolic: affective in that it allows for

the expression of feeling within the safety of the ritual environment and symbolic in that simple practices become meaningful, like giving a gift at Christmas comes to represent care for and understanding of the receiver. Furthermore, stabilization gives families structure and predictability. When rituals increase stabilization, they help the family maintain an identity in the face of external change (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

As such, rituals are important as protective resources for families during times of stress (Wolin & Bennett, 1984; Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler (1993); Buchbinder, Longhofer & McCue, 2009). During the stress of transitioning to parenthood, finding meaning in rituals is related to greater marital satisfaction for both the mother and father (Fiese et al., 1993). This relationship is especially important in that parents with preschool children exhibited less marital satisfaction than parents with infants only when there was low meaning found in rituals. This means that rituals may protect families from the deterioration caused by transition. In additional research, rituals have been found to protect children in alcoholic families from negative outcomes later in life (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Those families that best maintained rituals during the most intense period of parental alcoholism, were less likely to see alcoholism continue into the next generation. This stabilizing ability should prove important to military families undergoing deployment because they must seek to maintain their identity through two major changes to the core family: separation and reunion.

Previous research has also found that rituals and routines serve as protective resources in families with a parent diagnosed with cancer (Buchbinder et al., 2009). This is especially pertinent to my study because families affected by cancer and those challenged with deployment, separations share some of the same stressors: namely the temporary loss of a family member and the threat of permanent loss of a family member (Welch, Wadsworth, & Compas, 1996).

Buchbinder et al. (2009) found that maintaining some prior rituals and routines from before the cancer diagnosis helped families maintain a sense of normalcy and familiarity. Additionally, many families tried to incorporate the changes caused by the cancer into new routines and rituals. For example, children might be given the routine responsibility of checking the parent's temperature every night. Furthermore, coping rituals, such as praying for the sick parent every night or having family celebrations to mark milestones in chemotherapy, were instated.

This ability to adapt rituals to meet changes in families' circumstances is important, because if rituals are practiced in a manner that is not complementary to the current lifestyle of the family they risk losing meaning (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Families with effective flexibility can alter the outward expression of their rituals without losing either the meaning behind the rituals or their commitment to the rituals (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). This capacity for adaptability, coupled by a spirit of commitment to rituals and routines, will be important for military family members facing both separation and reunion. They will likely need to adapt their rituals to accommodate the absence and then the reintegration of the deployed service member in order to maintain rituals that are cohesive with their current lifestyle. United through Reading, a program provided to service members during deployment, supports this concept. This program provides military members with the resources to video tape themselves reading books to their children and send these videos home (Healy, 2004). Story time is a common routine in households with young children, and this program allows it to be maintained, but adapted to the separation during the time of deployment.

Besides serving as protective resources, rituals have also been related to attributes of strong families and individuals. Rituals are positively related to cohesion and organization in family structure (Fiese & Kline, 1993). In adolescents, finding meaning in family rituals was

positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to anxiety (Fiese and Kline, 1993). In questionnaires completed by elderly individuals, rituals were indicated as a helpful resources for strengthening relationships, promoting togetherness and sharing among family members, increasing enjoyment, and encouraging communication (Meske, Sanders, Meredith, & Abbott, 1994). This relationship between ritual and communication may be important in the relationship between deployment stress and family growth because, as indicated in the previous section, communication is related to the family strength (Schrodt, 2009) and adaptability (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b) during stressful situations.

As mentioned earlier, families' level of ritual practice have two underlying dimensions: commitment to family rituals and ability to adapt rituals to fit within changing life events (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Commitment to family rituals encompasses a strong focus on the past and keeping things the way they have always been. Family commitment to rituals was found to be positively related to conversation orientation, a communication style characterized by the encouragement of open expression (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). As mentioned above, this type of expressive communication was positively related to family strength (Schrodt, 2009).

Whether a family is high or low in commitment to ritual, families that function most effectively adapt their rituals across their life span (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Like commitment, this adaptability or lack of adaptability has an impact on communication. Routinization, or lack of adaptive capacity, was positively related to conformity orientation for the Euro-American sample (Baxter & Clark, 1996). This could prove detrimental to deployed families who lack flexibility in their rituals because conformity orientation is negatively related to strength (Schrodt, 2009) and adaptability (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b).

Military members most likely to experience growth out of deployment separation and reunion will need both the stabilization that rituals provide, along with the flexibility needed to ensure that the rituals maintain their meaning across changes caused by the deployment. The task becomes then to find the balance between (1) commitment to rituals in order to ensure family integration and (2) ability to alter rituals in order to ensure adaptability during times of stress.

*Hypothesis 4: Meaningful rituals before deployment are positively related to meaningful rituals during deployment for spouses of military members.*

*Hypothesis 5: Meaningful rituals before deployment are positively related to growth after deployment for both military members and spouses.*

*Hypothesis 6: Meaningful rituals during deployment are positively related to growth after deployment for spouses of military members.*

*Hypothesis 7: Spouses of military member will adapt ritual use during deployment.*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were military service members or spouses of military service members from of any branch in the U.S. military, both active duty and reserve, whose military member has returned from a deployed operation. Both officers and enlisted personnel and spouses participated. Participants were recruited from the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, LA , and other personal connections to military families. Participation was voluntary and consent was assumed with the submission of a completed survey.

A total of 78 participants began the survey, however, only 43 participants meet the criteria to included in the study. The remaining 35 were dropped from the study either because they did not complete the survey or because they did not meet certain important criteria (ie. They were not married or in long-term relationship at the time of their last deployment). Thirty-seven of those participants are/were military members. One hundred percent (100%) of these military member were married or in a committed relationship at the time of their last deployment, and 86.5% are currently married or in a committed relationship. Approximately 81% of these participants were male. Of these 37, 24.3% are dual military (meaning their spouse has also served in the military), 94.6% are currently still in the military, 73% are active duty (as opposed to reserve), 67.6% were in the Navy, and 32.4% are in the Army. The average tenure in the military is 15.79 years ( $SD = 5.95$ ), with an average of 5.49 deployments ( $SD = 6.44$ ). In regards to the last deployment, the impact of which was specially examined by this study, 46.9% have deployed within the last year. About 10.8% deployed for less than a month, 24.3% deployed for 1 to 3 months, 2.7% deployed for 3 to 6 months, 51.4% deployed for 6 months to 1 year, and 10.8% deployed for more than a year.

Of the 43 total participants, six were non-military spouses. They are all female. All of their spouses are currently serving in the military, with 83.3% serving in the Navy and 16.7% serving in the Army. Furthermore, 66.7% have an active duty spouse. The average tenure for the military spouse is 18.67 years ( $SD = 8.12$ ), with an average of 7.83 deployments ( $SD = 5.95$ ). In regards to the most recent deployment, 50% of their spouses have returned from deployment within the last year. Additionally, 16.7% of their spouse deployed for less than a month, 16.7% deployed for 1 to 3 months, 50% deployed for 6 months to a year, and 16.7% deployed for more than a year.

In both the military member and spouse populations, 90.7% considered their spouses to be a core functioning member of their families and 74.4% considered children to be core family members. Each family had an average of 1.83 children ( $SD = 1.29$ ).

## **Materials**

*Primary Communication Inventory (PCI).* This communication measure was adapted by Navran (1967). The measure consists of 25 items describing marital communication practices. Participants responded indicating whether they (as a couple) participated in a certain behavior very frequently, frequently, occasionally, seldom, or never. Participants completed the same basic items twice: once focusing on communication before deployment and once focusing on communication after deployment. In the original measure the questions were presented in the present tense. For example, question one reads “How often do you and your spouse talk over pleasant things that happen during the day?” For this study, the measures were adapted to the past tense to measure communication before deployment. So question one read “Before deployment, how often did you and your spouse talk over pleasant things that happened during the day?” Questions were also adapted to measure communication during deployment. For this purpose, question one read, “During deployment, how often did you and your spouse talk over pleasant things that happened during the day?” Refer to the appendix for an entire list of items.

*Family Ritual Questionnaire (FRQ).* The measure is from Fiese and Kline (1993). I used the dinnertime, weekends, and vacations sections for a total of 21 items. The scale was adapted from the original measure such that participants will be asked to indicate whether they strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree with each statement about family ritual use. As with the PCI, military spouses completed the FRQ twice, once in regards to family life before deployment and once in regards to life during deployment. However, military members

only completed the FRQ in regards to ritual use before deployment, because they were not home during deployment to observe and participate in rituals. Refer to the appendix for an entire list of items

*Stress-related growth scale (SRGS).* This growth scale is from Park, Cohen, and Murch (1996). The measure consists of 15 items. I adapted the scale to range from 1-5, where 1 = not at all, 2= very little, 3= somewhat, 4= a good deal, 5 = a great deal. Refer to the appendix for an entire list of items.

*Demographics questionnaire.* This scale was created specifically for this study to supply additional insight into the characteristics of the participants. Refer to the appendix for an entire list of items.

## **Procedure**

Military members or their spouses were asked to participate in this study by their military command or through a direct email from myself or a military acquaintance. Participants received information about the study and all materials for the study via email. They were assured that their participation is voluntary and that they may drop out of the study at anytime. Consent was assumed with the submission of a completed survey. Each participant completed the demographics questionnaire, the PCI, FRQ and SRGS online. After being thanked for their participation in the study, participant were prompted to provide their spouse email addresses. The spouse will then be contacted via email and asked to complete the same survey. A follow-up email will be sent 2 weeks after the original to remind spouses about the study. The spouse, if willing, will then follow the same process: reading about the study, signing the consent form, completing the PCI, FRQ, SRGS, and demographics questionnaire.

## **Results**



Means and standard deviations for the variables of communication before deployment, communication during deployment, ritual use before deployment, ritual use during deployment, and growth post-deployment were computed for military member and spouses both together separately (See Tables 1, Table 2, & Table 3). Relationships between communication, ritual use, and growth were analyzed for military members and spouses of military members both separately and together using a Pearson correlation. Additionally partial correlations were run to determine the relationship between communication, ritual use, and growth, while controlling for the impacts of time since last deployment, last deployment length, tenure, and number of military deployments, respectively.

### **Communication**

Hypothesis 1, which stated that communication before deployment is positively related to communication during deployment, was supported. Results showed that there is a significant, positive correlation between communication before deployment and communication after deployment. This relationship is significant when military members and spouses are analyzed together (See Table 1) and separately (See Table 2 & Table 3). All partial correlations controlling for time since last deployment,  $r = .60, p < .01$ , last deployment length,  $r = .58, p < .01$ , tenure,  $r = .61, p < .01$ , and number of deployments,  $r = .56, p < .01$  were also significant.

Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Results for Hypothesis 2, regarding the projected positive relationship between communication before deployment and growth after deployment, showed non-significant correlations when analyzed for military members and spouses both separately and together (See Table 1, Table 2, & Table 3). All partial correlations were also non-significant.

Neither was Hypothesis 3 supported. Results for Hypothesis 3, regarding the projected positive relationship between communication during deployment and growth after deployment, also showed non-significant correlations when analyzed for military members and spouses both separately and combined (See Table 1, Table 2, & Table 3). All partial correlations were also non-significant.

## **Rituals**

Hypothesis 4, that meaningful rituals before deployment are positively related to meaningful rituals during deployment, was not supported. It was analyzed only for spouses of military members, because military members did not complete the FRQ in regards to ritual use during deployment. Results showed no significant correlation between rituals before deployment and rituals during deployment (See Table 3).

Hypothesis 5, which stated that rituals before deployment would be positively related to growth after deployment, was partially supported. When responses from military members and spouses of military members were analyzed together, there was not a significant relationship between rituals before deployment and growth afterward (See Table 1). However, when spouses were analyzed separately, there was a significant, negative correlation between rituals before deployment and growth afterward (See Table 3). Moreover, when military members were analyzed separately, there was a non-significant relationship between rituals before deployment and growth afterward that strongly trended in the positive direction (See Table 2). This trend existed for partial correlations controlling for time since last deployment,  $r = .33, p = .56$ , controlling for last deployment length,  $r = .30, p = .086$ , and controlling for tenure,  $r = .31, p = .081$ . In the partial correlation controlling for number of deployments a significant, positive

relationship between rituals before deployment and growth after deployment was found,  $r = .51$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Hypothesis 6, which stated that meaningful rituals during deployment are positively related to growth after deployment, was not supported. It was only analyzed for spouses of military members. Results showed a non-significant correlation between the two variables (See Table 3).

Hypothesis 7 regarding the impact of adaptation of meaningful rituals on growth after deployment could only be observed qualitatively, because no measures were found that could effectively measure the ritual adaptation. It, therefore, cannot be either adamantly supported or rejected. Spouses indicated the some rituals were adapted during deployment to different extents and others were not modified at all. Methods of adapting rituals also varied immensely by family. For instance, one family stopped going on vacations during deployment and another added a month long vacation to “get deployment off to a good start (and eat up a month of time).” Additionally one family decreased planned dinner time meals, while another instituted them for the first time.

## Discussion

This study provided ample insight into the relationship between communication, ritual use, and growth after deployment in both military members and their spouses/partners. Although not all the original hypotheses were supported, both the supported and non-supported hypotheses enlighten us to the family experience of deployment, and grant us a better understanding of the constructs of communication, ritual use, and especially growth. Results showed that communication before and during deployment were positively related to one another, but that

neither was significantly related to growth. Furthermore, results found no relationship between ritual use before and during deployment, and no relationship between ritual use during deployment and growth afterward. Interestingly though there was a very complicated relationship between ritual use before deployment and growth after deployment, such that greater ritual use was related to less growth in spouse/partners, but trended toward greater growth in military members. This positive relationship between military members' ritual use before deployment and growth after deployment reached significance when number of deployments was taken into account. These findings suggest a fundamental difference in the deployment experience of deployed military members and the "at home" spouse/partner, especially in regards to growth and ritual use. They also indicate possible importance of novelty in the experience of growth out of a trial such as a deployment. These contributions to the understanding of deployment and others like them should prove important catalysts to future research. Likewise, qualitative findings indicating the definite presence of ritual adaptation across the deployment experience proved promising for future study in this area.

## **Communication**

**Hypothesis 1.** Findings support Hypothesis 1 by showing that there is a positive correlation between communication before deployment and communication during deployment. Essentially, those who communicate best under normal circumstances will communicate better under stressful circumstances. This finding offers an important contribution in light of previous research that linked communication during deployment with higher levels of marital adjustment after deployment (Hill, 1949) and found communication to be an indicator of family strength (Schrodt, 2009) and marital adjustment in general (Navran, 1967). Specifically if

communication can be improved before deployment, it will likely be maintained during deployment, and facilitate marital adjustment and family strength after deployment.

**Hypothesis 2 and 3.** In this research study, I hypothesized a similar effect of communication on growth after deployment, such that both communication before deployment (Hypothesis 2) and communication after deployment (Hypothesis 3) would be positively related to growth in both service members and/or spouses after deployment. These hypotheses were not supported. The results, however, do not directly contradict early research that demonstrated the impact of communication on family strength (Schrodt, 2009), family adaptability (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b), and marital adjustment (Navran, 1967; Hill, 1949), but rather suggest a different way of conceptualizing the experience of deployment and the possibility of growth. Communication was cited as an important resilience factor for families dealing with divorce (Black & Lobo, 2008) and indicative of marital adjustment after deployment (Hill, 1949). Because growth and resilience are similar constructs in that they both lead to high functioning following a traumatic event, I proposed that growth would share predictor variables with resilience. However, growth and resilience, though similar, are not the same. Resilience requires only that an individual maintain the original level function after a traumatic event, while growth requires an increase in functioning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This change in functioning is brought about by a reframing of previous assumptions (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) stimulated by a crisis. Whether or not an individual considers an event to be a crisis is determined by 1) the hardships surrounding the event, 2) the resources that a family possesses that aid in meeting these hardships, and 3) how the family defines the event (Hill, 1949). To experience growth an individual or family must thus experience a crisis and be stimulated by this crisis to adjust some combination of assumptions and functional practices. Resilience however does not require that

an individual or family experience a crisis or adjust assumptions. In fact, in light of this research study's contradictory results, it could be suggested that resources that promote resilience may protect individuals from experiencing a traumatic event as a crisis in the first place, thus decrease that likelihood that growth will occur. So, it makes just as much intuitive sense that predictors of resilience would be unrelated to growth.

## **Rituals**

**Hypothesis 4.** Hypothesis 4 that meaningful rituals before deployment would be positively related to meaningful rituals during deployment was not supported. However, because this relationship could only be examined with spouses of military members, low sample size ( $N = 6$ ) may be to blame for the non-significant relationship. Besides the lack of power due to low sample size, restricting measures of ritual use to “at-home” spouses has the added disadvantage of only examining half the story. Deployed military members have the ability to maintain (through adequate adaptation) some family rituals even while deployed. For example, a father might call to pray with his young son at bedtime as he had when he was home or continue to read to his child through the Unite though Reading program (Healy, 2004). However, the available measures for family rituals were limited and not suited to measuring this type of ritual use and adaptation.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that is lack of relationship between ritual use before and ritual use during deployment is an accurate picture of the influence of deployment on rituals. Studies have suggested that adaptability of rituals is of the same importance as ritual commitment in insuring productive ritual use (Wolin & Bennett, 1984). Because the FRQ assesses only ritual commitment and not adaptability, the lack of relationship between rituals

before and during deployment may simply indicate that rituals were adapted to meet the changing needs of the deployment environment. It is important to remember that routines and rituals are not the same, because routines involve simple practices, while rituals involve meanings behind these practices (Fiese et al., 2002). Families can change routines and still maintain commitment to the meanings of rituals. For example, if a family indicated that they ate together often before deployment, but not as often afterward, this may not indicate that the ritual of eating together was any less important during deployment. Instead, the change may indicate a necessary adaption to the loss of one family member, and the importance of family dinners together might manifest itself in one very meaningful Friday night dinner as opposed to dinner every not of the week. Thus the routine, not the ritual was lost during deployment. This consistency in ritual commitment would not be evident in the current study, which examined consistency of rituals by asking the same questions about ritual use before deployment and after deployment, without accounting for adaptability.

**Hypothesis 5.** Hypothesis 5 that projected a positive relationship between ritual use before deployment and growth after deployment was partially supported when military members and spouses of military members were examined separately. When only spouses were examined, the relationship between rituals and growth was unprecedentedly and significantly negative. However, when military member responses were examined separately, the results trended towards supporting the original hypothesis. When the number of previous military deployment was controlled for using a partial regression, ritual use before deployment was significantly related to growth afterward and Hypothesis 5 was supported. Obviously, the relationship between rituals and growth is not as simple as the hypothesis suggested, so how should we

understand the complex and somewhat contradictory relationship between ritual use and post-deployment growth in the real world?

First off, the impact of controlling for number of previous deployments in finding a significant relationship between ritual use and growth, may substantiate the claim that growth requires the experience of a crisis (Hill, 1949). It is important to note that for most participants this was not their first deployment. As deployment number increases, military members and their spouses likely become accustomed to the deployment experience and thus experience less growth, despite the influence of ritual use on potential growth. Thus, it is likely that post-deployment growth in military members is in fact facilitated by family ritual use before deployment. This research study thus supports earlier studies that found rituals to important protective resources during times of stress (Wolin & Bennett, 1984; Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, & Schwagler (1993); Buchbinder, Longhofer & McCue, 2009).

It may seem odd that that these rituals were beneficial to deployed military members who were not home to protected by continued ritual use during the stress of deployment, however perhaps it is the knowledge of having a substantial position in a stable to home to return to that facilitates growth. One of the major stressors of reunification after deployment is the accession of a “new” family member back into the regular function of the family that requires a redistribution of roles and responsibilities (Hill, 1958). If a family has strong ritual use before deployment, it may prove easier for the returning member to reintegrate himself/herself back into these rituals and thus back into the family. This smooth reintegration may allow him/her to see deployment in a more positive, less permanent light and thus grow from the experience.



Conversely, ritual use before deployment appears to have the opposite impact on spouses of military members. Although small sample size may contribute to the strong and seemingly contradictory negative relationship between rituals before deployment and spousal growth afterward, there are other logical and research-supported explanations to consider. The loss of members due to deployment causes the family to reorganize roles and responsibilities (Hill, 1958). Families can enter into a state of ambiguous loss, where the military member is physically absent but psychologically present with the family (Faber et al., 2008). Strong rituals involving the deployed member before deployment may increase this sense of ambiguous loss and make the reorganization of role and responsibilities difficult or largely impossible, thus putting added stress on the “at home” spouse. While the deployed spouse may be bolstered by being “irreplaceable”, the “at home” spouse is likely to feel incompetent and demoralized and thus experience less growth through the deployment experience. Research on ritual use supports this possibility by noting that an important aspect of positive ritual use is the ability to adapt rituals across a life span (Wolin & Bennett, 1994). This ability to adapt rituals, rather than the actual presence and strength of the rituals themselves may be most important to the constantly changing family environment surrounding military deployments.

**Hypothesis 6.** Hypothesis 6 that meaningful rituals during deployment are positively related to growth after deployment was not supported, likely for the same reasons that Hypothesis 4 was not supported. During deployment, ritual use could only be measured in spouses of military members leading to low small size ( $n = 6$ ) that resulted in power too low to reveal the relationship between ritual use during deployment and growth post-deployment. Likewise as mentioned in the discussion of Hypothesis 4, the measure of ritual use during deployment only partially captured the intended construct, because it only examined ritual use by the spouse, not

the deployed military member. The deployed member's role in the maintenance of rituals during deployment could have important implications for growth of both the deployed member and the spouse. On the other hand, as discussed in regards to Hypothesis 5, the spouse's use of rituals during deployment, may in fact be an added stressor rather than a protective resource. Ambiguous loss may make adapting and maintaining commitment to rituals difficult during deployment, and the use of rituals may thus be more likely to have negative or no relationship to growth, rather than facilitate it.

**Hypothesis 7.** Hypothesis 7 dealt with the presence of adaptability in ritual use during deployment. Because the data is qualitative, the exact nature of adaptability cannot be determined at this time. It is safe to say that at least some of the families adapted rituals to meet the demands of the deployments, but the adaptations were as unique as the families likely are. One stopped taking vacations and another embarked on an additional one month, cross-country trip. One instituted family dinners and another minimized them. Weekends, however, did seem to be consistently less adapted than dinnertime and vacation. Extensive additional, qualitative and quantitative research is needed to examine the nature of adapting rituals during deployment and the impact this adaptation has on growth after deployment. However, the reports from military spouses indicate that adaptation is in fact necessary during deployment, thus supporting the findings of Wolin and Bennett (1984).

### **Limitations of Study and Modifications for Future Research**

This study gives some basic insight into influence of rituals and communication on growth in military families, although for conclusive results some weaknesses need to be rectified. Most importantly, this study provides many diverse and interesting starting points for future studies in

this area. Futures studies should first seek to eradicate numerous issues that existed within the current study as a result of limited resources, and then move on to explore other research avenues brought to light by this study..

**Study Structure.** This study relied on memories of past events and feelings, which is very dangerous because the human memory is far from complete and accurate. Future studies should be longitudinal and not entirely reliant on self-reported data. It would have be beneficial to survey families about their ritual use and communication before deployment and then again during deployment, and assess grow both immediately after deployment reintegration and again at a future time. In fact, it would be even more valuable to assess growth as a change in functioning measured before deployment, during deployment, and after deployment, rather than a simple self-reported measure after-deployment. This could be done by combining self-reported data with direct observation of family functioning and resource use across the deployment experience (although this will be highly time consuming, expensive, and still subject to bias).

**Measures.** That bring us to the second weakness of the study: the measures used. The only measure that seemed to adequately capture the construct it was designed to measure was the PCI for communication. The FRQ as a measure of ritual use and the SRGS as measure of growth did not sufficiently capture the intended constructs.

The FRQ (specifically those sections referring to dinnertime, vacation, and weekend rituals) greatly limited my ability to identify rituals that were important to military families. For instance, using this measure meaningful bedtime routines, religious practices, and other rituals were not examined. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the rigidity of the FRQ, prevented me from examining the continued ritual use of deployed military members during deployment.

Lastly, though previous studies note the importance of adaptability to beneficial ritual use (Wolin & Bennett, 1984; Baxter & Clark, 1996) the FRQ does not address this aspect of ritual use.

Unfortunately, according to my research, no other, more substantiated measure of ritual use currently exists. It would behoove future researchers to create and validate their own measure of ritual use that captures a broader range of ritual use and adaptability of rituals. Future studies examining military members should attempt to create measures that more directly examine the rituals of particular importance to military families and how these rituals are maintained and adapted by BOTH the deployed and not deployed spouse.

Additionally, the SRGS, though not a seemingly bad measure of overall growth, lacks the ability to pinpoint certain aspects of growth. It is possible that individuals grew substantially in one or two ways, but experienced no change or negative change in others. In the SRGS, these neutral and negative effects might cancel out and thus hide true growth in specific areas. When certain areas of growth such as “learning to work through problems and not just give up” are more likely to occur than others, such as “learning to stand up for my personal rights.” examining a specific stressor such as deployment separation, It will be important for future researchers to determine the most common forms of growth out of deployment and measure what variables have the greatest impact on these.

**Recruitment.** Additionally the recruitment method for the study, namely distributing emails through military contacts I had, was not pristine and led to an inadequate sample size, especially in regards to spouses of military members. While I attempted to get dyadic data by asking for the email addresses of participants’ spouse the endeavor was largely unsuccessful. Future studies with better resources should try to both avoid convenience sampling and gather dyadic

data. These dyads will allow the researcher to examine not only individual member growth within a family, but also family growth as a unit.

### **Additional Future Research**

In addition to correcting the limitations of this study, future research should attempt to expand on the findings of this study. There are many different directions future studies might take to build upon and better examine the constructs and relationships highlighted in this research study.

**Constructs: growth, ritual use, and communication.** First off, the constructs present in this study: growth, rituals, and communication need to be extensively examined individually. I would suggest that future researchers better examine the construct of growth and especially how it is different and similar to resilience. I originally assumed that resilience and growth should share predictor variables because they both lead to good functioning following a traumatic. But contradictory results from this study indicate that, because growth requires a crisis that leads to changes in assumptions, and resilience requires only maintenance of function, resilience and growth may not share predictor variables. Future studies that examine both resilience and growth simultaneously are needed to clarify this relationship. They should attempt to examine whether families who experience resilience through a traumatic event experience a crisis at all or are instead protected by resources. If this is the case, growth and resilience may be unrelated or even be inversely related because growth cannot be achieved without first experiencing crisis. Studies should attempt to determine what types or particular levels of resources promote crisis experience and the probability of growth, what types or levels of resources protect from crises through resilience, and what types or lack of resources preclude both growth or resilience (lead

to poor functioning). It will also be important to determine whether or not growth can even be analyzed as a single construct, or if, as alluded to above, it needs to be divided into more specific growth categories.

Next, future studies need to seek a better understanding of ritual use, and particularly adaptability of rituals across different stressors. This research will likely have to begin qualitatively, but should develop quickly into a qualitative assessment of the most common rituals and their impact on family functioning. Measures need to be adapted to that assess both commitment and adaptation of rituals across multiple stressors.

In regards to communication, it would be interesting to explore the exact relationship between stressors and maintenance of communication. Is there a certain level of stressor that undermines even strong communication skills? Is it possible to intentionally institute communication during a stressor such as deployment even when communication was not previously present?

**Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment.** Future studies should also reexamine the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment (Hill, 1949), especially in the context of deployments. Longitudinal studies need to be done to determine how family functioning changes from before deployment, to during deployment, and on to post-deployment, and whether or not the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment effectively depicts this experience. These studies should attempt to examine the character and situational differences between families that decrease in functioning, maintain functioning through resilience, and increase in functioning through growth. Not only will studies such as these increase the understanding of

the deployment experience, they will also contribute to our understanding of growth and resilience as separate constructs.

**Other Resources.** More specifically, studies need to examine what resources instituted at what particular points in the Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment have the greatest impact on functioning after deployment and even possible growth. There are many research-based variables besides ritual use and communication that need to be explored. These variables include such things as spirituality, family member accord, flexibility, financial management, family time, support networks, school resources, community involvement etc. Questions such as “What factors contribute to resilience?”, “What factors contribute to growth?”, and “Are any factors shared between the two?” need to be asked and answered. Studies should examine difference of experience between deployed and “at home” spouses in greater detail, because the current study indicated that resources, such as ritual use, might influence them in opposite ways or to different degrees.

**Additional Family Members.** On that note future studies should seek to analyze not only the experience of the military member and spouse, but also children and other family members directly influenced by deployment separation. More importantly, they should attempt to examine growth in the family as a whole. It seems possible that the family as a unit could grow out of stress, even if individuals did not, and vice versa. It is more probable that growth as a family, not as an individual will be most important for future family functioning and unity. A new measure would likely need to be created and validated in order to conduct this research, as most available growth indexes focus on the individual’s experience.

## **Conclusion**

It is imminently important that research be conducted on the deployment experience of military members and their families. Over three million deployments have occurred since September 11, 2001 (Shepard, Malatras & Israel, 2010) indicating that the issues surrounding deployments affect a large population. The experience of families as they undergo separation and reunion is especially important because family satisfaction and family resources and spouses commitment to military are related to military members turnover intention or commitment to military (Heilman, Bell, & McDonald, 2009, Behnke et al., 2010, Bourg & Segal, 1999). Such research will not only benefit military members, but will easily generalize to families who experience other traumas, especially those involving separation, such as divorce and death. Moreover research on resilience, growth, and resources that contribute to them within a military context, will provide insight into the basic identity of and differences between the constructs. This study provides important contributions in all these areas. It demonstrates the importance of developing communication before the stress of deployment in order to maintain it during deployment. Because of lacking relationships between communication (a resource know to promote resilience) and growth, it calls into question the relationship between resilience and growth and adds to the understanding of growth as a separate construct. It highlights the complex relationship between the protective resource of ritual use and growth and how it differs for the deployed and “at home” spouse. It notes the presence of adaptability of resources across the deployment experience, and emphasizes the need for future explorative research in this area. In fact, the greatest contribution of this study is the many possible directions it offers for future studies that aim to explore general growth, basic ritual use, communication, and/or the deployment experience as a whole. Such future research will prove vital for military families



and other who seek to maintain and improve personal and family function through trying experiences that are ever so common in life.

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Table 1

*Means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations for the variables of communication before deployment, communication during deployment, rituals before deployment, rituals during deployment and growth using scores from both military members and spouses of military members*

		N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	
1	Communication Before	43	3.71	0.39	(0.83)					
2	Communication During	43	3.42	0.51	0.62**	(0.87)				
3	Ritual Before	43	3.6	0.46	0.20	-0.12	(0.81)			
4	Ritual During									
5	Growth	43	3.62	0.6	-0.04	0.09	0.09		(0.92)	

*Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Cronbach's Alpha recorded in ( ) in diagonal.*

Table 2

*Means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations for the variables of communication before deployment, communication during deployment, rituals before deployment, rituals during deployment and growth using scores from military members only*

			M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	
1	Communication Before	37	3.68	0.4	(0.84)					
2	Communication During	37	3.42	0.51	0.60**	(0.88)				
3	Ritual Before	37	3.58	0.46	0.23	-0.1	(0.8)			
4	Ritual During									
5	Growth	37	3.65	0.6	-0.06	0.06	0.31		(0.92)	

*Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Cronbach's Alpha recorded in ( ) in diagonal.*

Table 3

*Means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations for the variables of communication before deployment, communication during deployment, rituals before deployment, rituals during deployment and growth using scores from spouses of military members only*

		N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	
1	Communication Before	6	3.85	0.27	(0.74)					
2	Communication During	6	3.41	0.56	0.95**	(0.89)				
3	Ritual Before	6	3.8	0.55	-0.22	-0.21	(0.86)			
4	Ritual During	6	3.68	0.61	0.6	0.48	0.46	(0.92)		
5	Growth	6	3.46	0.67	0.35	0.25	-0.95**	-0.23	(0.96)	

*Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Cronbach's Alpha recorded in ( ) in diagonal.*

## Appendix

### Scales

#### *Primary Communication Inventory*

Navran, L. (1967). Communication and adjustment in marriage. *Family Process*, 6(2), 173-184.  
doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1967.00173.x

*Directions:* Think about how you talked and communicated with your spouse or partner  
BEFORE THE MOST RECENT DEPLOYMENT.

Response Scale: very frequently, frequently, occasionally, seldom, or never

- 
1. How often did you and your spouse talk over pleasant things that happen during the day?
  2. How often did you and your spouse talk over unpleasant things that happen during the day?
  3. Did you and your spouse talk over things you disagree about or have difficulties over?
  4. Did you and your spouse talk about things in which you are both interested?
  5. Did your spouse adjust what he (she) said and how he (she) said it to the way you seem to feel at the moment?
  6. When you started to ask a question, did your spouse know what it is before you ask it?
  7. Did you know the feelings of your spouse from his (her) facial and bodily gestures?
  8. Did you and your spouse avoid certain subjects in conversation?
  9. Did your spouse explain or express himself (herself) to you through a glance or gestures?
  10. Did you and your spouse discuss things together before making an important decision?
  11. Could your spouse tell what kind of day you had without asking?
  12. Your spouse wanted to visit some close friends or relatives. You don't particularly enjoy their company. Would you have told him (her) this?
  13. Did your spouse discuss matters of sex with you?
  14. Did you and your spouse use words which have a special meaning not understood by outsiders?
  15. Did your spouse sulk or pout?
  16. Could you and your spouse discuss your most sacred beliefs without feelings of restraint or embarrassment?
  17. Did you avoid telling your spouse things which put you in a bad light?
  18. You and your spouse were visiting friends. Something is said by the friends which causes you to glance at each other. Would you have understood each other?
  19. How often could you tell as much from the tone of voice of your spouse as from what he (she) actually said?
  20. How often did you and your spouse talk with each other about personal problems?
  21. Did you feel that in most matters your spouse knows what you are trying to say?
  22. Would you rather talk about intimate matters with your spouse than with some other person?
  23. Did you understand the meaning of your spouse's facial expressions?
  24. If you and your spouse were visiting friends or relatives and one of you started to say something, did the other take over the conversation without the feeling of interrupting?
  25. Did you and your spouse, in general, talked most things over together?
-



*Additional Directions:* Think about how you talked and communicated with your spouse or partner DURING THE MOST RECENT DEPLOYMENT

Response Scale: very frequently, frequently, occasionally, seldom, or never

- 
1. How often did you and your spouse talk over pleasant things that happen during the day?
  2. How often did you and your spouse talk over unpleasant things that happen during the day?
  3. Did you and your spouse talk over things you disagree about or have difficulties over?
  4. Did you and your spouse talk about things in which you are both interested?
  5. Did your spouse adjust what he (she) said and how he (she) said it to the way you seem to feel at the moment?
  6. When you started to ask a question, did your spouse know what it is before you ask it?
  8. Did you and your spouse avoid certain subjects in conversation?
  10. Did you and your spouse discuss things together before making an important decision?
  11. Could your spouse tell what kind of day you have had without asking?
  13. Did your spouse discuss matters of sex with you?
  14. Did you and your spouse use words which have a special meaning not understood by outsiders?
  15. Did your spouse sulk or pout?
  16. Could you and your spouse discuss your most sacred beliefs without feelings of restraint or embarrassment?
  17. Did you avoid telling your spouse things which put you in a bad light?
  19. How often could you tell as much from the tone of voice of your spouse as from what he (she) actually said?
  20. How often did you and your spouse talk with each other about personal problems?
  21. Did you feel that in most matters your spouse knows what you are trying to say?
  22. Would you rather talk about intimate matters with your spouse than with some other person?
  25. Did you and your spouse, in general, talked most things over together?
- 

*Family Ritual Questionnaire.*

Fiese, B. H., & Kline, C. A. (1993). Development of the Family Ritual Questionnaire: Initial reliability and validation studies. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 6(3), 290-299.  
doi:10.1037/0893-3200.6.3.290

*Directions:* Think of a typical DINNERTIME (WEEKEND or VACATION) in your family BEFORE (DURING) THE MOST RECENT DEPLOYMENT.

Response Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

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### DINNERTIME

1. Our family ate together as a family regularly
2. Everyone in our family had a specific role and job to do at dinnertime.
3. Dinnertime in our family was flexible. People ate whenever they could.
4. Everyone in our family was expected to be home for dinner.

5. Our family felt very strongly about eating together. It was very important to us.
6. Dinnertime in our family was just about getting food. It had no special meaning.
7. In our family there was little planning around dinner.

#### WEEKENDS

1. Our family rarely spent weekends together.
2. Everyone in our family had a specific job to do on the weekends.
3. In our family, there were set routines and regular events on the weekends.
4. Everyone in our family was required to come to weekend events.
5. Weekends were pretty casual in our family. There were no strong feelings about spending the weekend together as a family.
6. Our family spending time together at weekend events was special.
7. There was much discussion and planning around weekends in our family.

#### VACATIONS

1. Our family regularly spent vacations together.
2. Everyone in are family had a job to do.
3. Family vacations were a time for something new. There were no routines.
4. It was OK if some members of our family decided not to go on the vacation.
5. The members of our family felt strongly that family vacations were important events.
6. Family vacations were a time to relax and catch up on work. Family togetherness was not that important.
7. There was little planning around vacations in our family. We just went.

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#### *Stress-Related Growth Scale*

Park, C. L., Cohen, L. H., & Murch, R. L. (1996). Assessment and prediction of stress-related growth. *Journal of Personality*, 64(1), 71-105. doi:10.1111/1467-6494.ep9606210694

*Directions:* Please respond to each I item to the best of your ability.

Response Scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

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Because of separation from my family/spouse during deployment and reunion with my family/spouse after deployment:

1. I learned to be nicer to others.
2. I feel freer to make my own decisions.
3. I learned that I have something of value to teach others about life.
4. I learned to be myself and not try to be what others want me to be.
5. I learned to work through problems and not just give up.
6. I learned to find more meaning in life.
7. I learned to how to reach out and help others.
8. I learned to be a more confident person.
9. I learned to listen more carefully when others talk to me.
10. I learned to be open to new information and ideas.
11. I learned to communicate more honestly with others.

12. I learned that I want to have some impact on the world.
  13. I learned that it's OK to ask others for help.
  14. I learned to stand up for my personal rights.
  15. I learned that there are more people who care about me than I thought.
- 

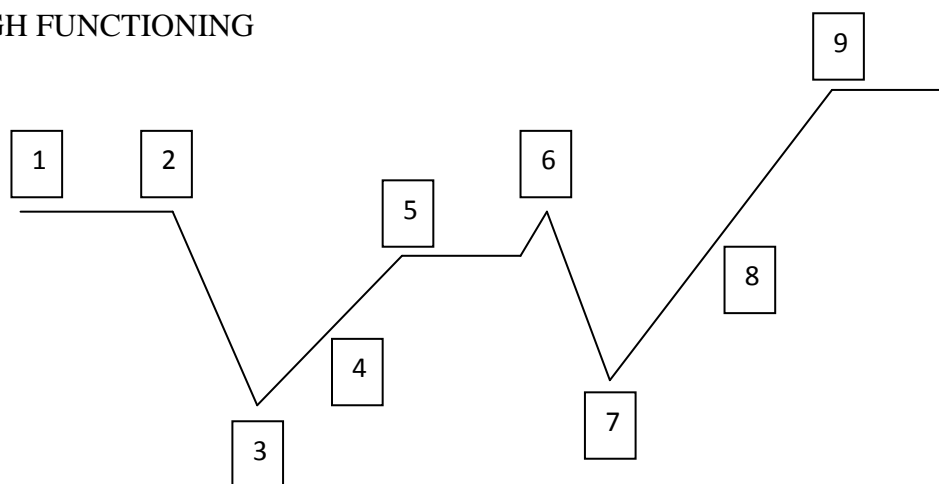
### *Demographics*

*Directions:* Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

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1. Are you and have you ever been in the military?
  2. How long have you been in the military?
  3. Are you currently still in the military?
  4. What branch of the military are/were you in?
  5. Are/were you active duty or reserve?
  6. What is your rank?
  7. How many times have you been deployed throughout your career?
  8. How long ago did you return from you last deployment?
  9. How long was your last deployment?
  10. Were you married or in a committed relationship during the time of your last deployment?
  11. Is your spouse or partner a current or former military member?
  12. How long has your spouse or partner been in the military?
  13. Is your spouse or partner currently still in the military?
  14. What branch of the military is/was your spouse or partner in?
  15. Is/was your spouse or partner active duty or reserve?
  16. What is your spouse or partner's rank?
  17. How many times has your spouse or partner been deployed throughout their career?
  18. How long ago did your spouse or partner return from you last deployment?
  19. How long was your spouse or partner's last deployment?
  20. Before deployment, when you thought about the core, functioning members of your family who was included?
  21. How old are you?
  22. What is your sex?
  23. What is your current marital status?
  24. How long have you been married?
  25. How old is your spouse?
  26. How many children do you have?
  27. How old are your children?
-

HIGH FUNCTIONING



LOW FUNCTIONING

*Figure 1.* Level of functioning during nine stages of Truncated Roller Coaster Profile of Adjustment.