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National Guard Families: The Relationship between Institutional Discourses and Lived Experiences

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NATIONAL GUARD FAMILIES: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Sociology

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my brother, Sgt. Casey L. Saunier (USMC), my mother, Donna B. Saunier, my grandmother, Lois Broussard, and my grandfather, Davey L. Saunier, who were my biggest cheerleaders and left us too soon.

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ABSTRACT

National Guard families live in two different worlds. On the one hand, they are civilians with civilian jobs. On the other hand, they are also part of the military that can be activated at any time. Living in these two worlds simultaneously affects these families differently than families who live either entirely in the civilian world or the military world. The purpose of this qualitative study was to take an ethnographic look at how National Guard families navigate and adapt to these conditions. This study utilized three methods of data collection: analysis of self-help books aimed at helping military spouses through the military lifestyle, observations of Yellow Ribbon events held throughout the state aimed at helping National Guard couples with the reintegration process, and interviews with National Guard couples who had experienced at least one deployment while married. The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of the self-help books and observations were the cultural and institutional discourses that perpetuated and reinforced a 1950's family ideology of separate spheres for men and women. Through these books, women were being taught how to live up to the culturally accepted standard of a Super Spouse, while men were spoken of in terms of being a soldier with little to no responsibilities at home. The second major theme found that the lived experiences of National Guard families reflected that 1950's family ideology but this standard caused spouses to have feelings of being overwhelmed during deployments, especially with a perceived lack of support from the National Guard. The last theme focused on the experiences of soldiers and their spouses upon reintegration, which included encounters with boundary ambiguity, difficulties in communication, and issues with drug and alcohol. However, the majority of these couples did show resilience by managing to keep their marriages together despite the obstacles they underwent.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The lifestyle led by military families is different from the lifestyle of many civilians. On the positive side, the economic structure of the military provides for job stability and paid healthcare immediately upon signing up. Upon marriage, soldiers get additional pay in the form of off-base housing allowances and if they are separated from their families due to military assignments, family separation pay. Due to these positive economic circumstances, marriage rates in the military are higher than marriage rates in the civilian sector (Hogan and Seifert 2010; Karney and Crown 2007; Karney, Loughran, and Pollard 2012; Lundquist 2004). In addition, military servicemembers also marry at younger ages than their civilian counterparts (Lundquist 2007).

While these economic circumstances provide for a positive incentive to marry, especially at an early age, military marriages based on economic incentives are built on weak foundations that may not be able to withstand the negative aspects of the military lifestyle. This is one reason why divorce rates in the military are higher than divorce rates in the civilian sector (Karney and Crown 2007; Karney et al 2012). Servicemembers work long and often unpredictable duty hours (Burrell, Adams, Durand, and Castro 2006). In addition, there are frequent geographical relocations, sometimes to foreign countries, extended separations, and risks of injury or death on combat deployments and training missions (Burrell et al 2006; Lundquist 2007). Separations put a strain on marital relationships by impeding communication, problem-solving, and other activities that promote intimacy in marriage. The experiences that each spouse encounters during the separation can change them for better or worse. When the family is reunited, an adjustment for the entire family is in order. Due to the frequency of separations, readjustments are constant.

In order to combat these negatives, the military provides a plethora of support services to military families free of charge. The website, goarmy.com, lists the following services available for families: relocation assistance services, money management services, military family support and advocacy services, legal assistance services, deployment services, child and youth services, and Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program. The unstated purpose of support programs is to aid in lowering the divorce rate and elevating retention rates. Families who feel the military provides a satisfactory lifestyle with the appropriate amount of support to combat the stressors of this lifestyle are happier and not as eager to leave the military lifestyle (Pittman, Kerpelman, and McFadyen 2004).

The discourses coming from these support programs and self-help books available to military spouses encourage a traditional breadwinner-homemaker family structure with the gender norms that go along with this type of family structure. This is beneficial to the military because it provides the military with volunteers, aka wives that do not have full-time jobs, who are willing and able to support soldiers which aids in combat readiness (Weber 2012). By keeping military spouses' content with their lifestyle, the military has minimal disciplinary problems with soldiers and higher retention rates, which has an impact on national security efforts (Segal 1986). In order to maintain an all-volunteer military, it is important to have individuals who want to serve and once they sign up, it is just as important to keep them. When wives have problems with the military lifestyle, the soldier is often put into the predicament of choosing the military or their spouse.

While civilian lifestyles can be stressing at times, civilians typically do not have to deal with the type of stressors that military families face but neither do they receive the benefits that the military offers to newly enlisted recruits. The typical markers to adulthood for civilians are

graduate high school, attend college, get married and then start a family. This explains the lower marriage rates of civilians compared to military servicemembers and their later age at marriage (Karney and Crown 2007). Lacking the benefits to marriage, civilians tend to postpone marriage until later in their life when they are more financially secure. In addition, the breadwinner-homemaker family structure encouraged by the military does not translate to the civilian sector. Women today are more educated and are participating in the workforce at higher rates than in the past (Pew Research Center 2015). This is because in today's economy, it is often necessary for both people in a marriage to work full-time jobs to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Traditional gender norms are declining in today's families with families becoming more egalitarian (Pew Research Center 2015).

National Guard families are stuck in the middle of these two worlds. Active duty military families and National Guard families lead very different lives from one another. Not all soldiers in the National Guard are employed by the military on a full-time basis like active duty soldiers consequently National Guard soldiers do not receive the marital incentives to marry like active duty military soldiers. Many have civilian jobs that they return to upon coming back from deployment. They perform their duties mostly on a one weekend a month/two weeks a year schedule with the exception of being called to duty during natural disasters. This is different from active duty soldiers who upon returning from deployment, work alongside their fellow soldiers on a daily basis. With regards to their spouses, Army spouses tend to be located in a particular geographic area and live in close proximity to the unit their soldier is assigned. National Guard spouses are spread throughout the entire state. The unit a National Guard soldier deploys with is not necessarily the unit in his/her hometown, which also means that the spouses within that unit are not in close geographical locations to each other. Therefore, during

deployment, National Guard wives may not know the other wives in the unit or know how to get in touch with them to seek support during deployment. In addition, these spouses are more likely to have full-time jobs and/or careers which does not follow the traditional breadwinner-homemaker family structure that is perpetuated through military discourses.

Where there is a wealth of scholarship on military families and how they cope with deployments, the majority of these studies pertain mostly to Army families or the military in general. National Guard families are sometimes noted in these studies but are often a side note. National Guard families are important for sociological attention for a variety of reasons. My study advances the present knowledge in military sociology, family sociology, and gender studies by filling in the gap in the literature regarding National Guard families and the unique experiences they go through by straddling both civilian life and military life. This study highlights the unique adversities experienced by these families and the strategies they develop to cope with these challenges. In addition, this study highlights the role of military discourses in influencing perceptions and expectations of National Guard families and their family life during deployment. By exploring the military side of National Guard families' lives, a more refined picture of them and their particular needs can be utilized by the military to provide resources specifically geared towards these unique families.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of National Guard families going through deployments. Specifically, I asked, (1) How do institutional discourses influence families' expectations and perceptions of the deployment experience and their family life during the deployment cycle? (2) How do National Guard families make sense of deployments? (3) How do these perceptions and expectations influence family resiliency?

To answer my research questions, I utilized an ethnographic approach to better understand the lives of National Guard families before and after deployment. I used three methods of data collection: a content analysis of three self-help books aimed toward helping military wives navigate the military lifestyle and deployments; 64 hours of observations at Yellow Ribbon events aimed toward helping National Guard couples reintegrate after deployments; and seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with military couples who had experienced at least one deployment while married. I obtained interview participants through snowball sampling, beginning with couples that I knew personally. I used Charmaz's Constructivist Grounded Theory (2014) for analysis of data.

As the human instrument of data collection for this study, I remained as vigilant as possible throughout the data collection and analysis processes of this study by staying cognizant of my biases and assumptions. My role in this research is emic. I have been a National Guard wife for 13 years. This experience was both a help and hindrance to doing this research. Due to my insider status, I had to be aware of my body language and the words I used during interviews so as not to project my biases onto the participants. I took great caution in not influencing them in their responses to my questions. However, my insider status allowed me to build rapport quickly and obtain richer information. In addition, my gender allowed me to see and obtain a fuller understanding of my women participants' points of view.

There were several limitations to this study. As with any interview data, my data is only as accurate as of the truthfulness of my participants. Due to the amount of time that had passed between the deployment experience and the interview, something may have been forgotten or misrepresented. There is no longitudinal data for this study as each participant was interviewed only once. Generalizations to other National Guard organizations should be made with caution as

data from this study came from only one geographic area and was limited to interviews with seven couples.

Chapter 2 contains a literature review of the pertinent data related to military families and deployments. It also discusses the theoretical framework which guided the data collection for my study. Chapter 3 is a detailed methodology of the data collection methods and analysis of the data. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of this study as it pertains to institutional discourses regarding the military's expectations of families. Chapter 5 discusses how these discourses influence how families make meaning out of separations and the military lifestyle. Chapter 6 discusses the aftermath of deployment in regard to either resiliency or divorce. Chapter 7 concludes with a brief synopsis of the findings and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will discuss the current literature available on military marriages and deployments. Special attention is called to the stressors involved in the deployment cycle, as well as resiliency upon reintegration. The chapter concludes with the theoretical framework that guided my data collection and analysis.

MILITARY MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES

Numerous studies have shown that marriage rates in the military are higher than those who have never served (Hogan and Seifert 2010; Karney and Crown 2007; Karney et al 2012; Lundquist 2004). Since 2001, the military has seen a gradual increase in marriages while civilian rates of marriage have steadily declined (Karney and Crown 2007). As of 2014, 55.2% of the military population was married compared to 51.6% of the civilian population (U.S. Department of Defense 2015). Whether studies are performed pre-9/11 (Lundquist 2004) or post-9/11 (Hogan and Seifert 2010), the results are the same. Military personnel have a higher propensity towards marriage than civilians. Hogan and Seifert's study (2010) of 78,943 individuals, both veterans and nonveterans, showed that veterans were three times more likely to have ever married than their civilian counterparts. This trend transfers to minorities as well. Lundquist (2004), a social demographer with a specialization in race and ethnicity, found in a comparative study of military enlistees and civilians that racial marriage trends in the civilian world do not translate to the military world. Whereas in the civilian world blacks are more likely to be unmarried, have nonmarital births, and to experience more marital instability when compared to whites, within the military these marital patterns all but disappear (Karney et al 2012; Lundquist 2004). She found that both black and white enlistees had higher propensities to marry than their civilian counterparts (Lundquist 2004).

The military offers benefits that tend to encourage marriage by providing incentives to marry for individuals who may not have married if they were not in the military. These benefits include free spousal health insurance, basic housing allowance (BAH), basic subsistence allowance (BAS), special pay upon deployment such as separation pay, stable employment, educational opportunities, and career mobility (Hogan and Seifert 2010; Karney et al 2012; Lundquist 2004). Karney, a social psychologist who specializes in relationship processes and interactions within the context in which they occur, explained that time spent in the service has the potential to encourage marriages (Karney and Crown 2007; Karney et al 2012). For the poor and working class, as well as for racial and ethnic minorities, active duty military service provides a positive influence on the likelihood of marriage by providing service members with benefits and employment stability immediately upon graduation from high school (Lunquist 2004). When a soldier deploys, the military does not provide support to their unmarried partners. Hence, getting married prior to being deployed is a way for the soldier to financially support their partner (Karney and Crown 2007).

However, these benefits and incentives to marry that are available to the active military are not available to National Guard soldiers, except in the circumstance of deployment. In 2014, 45.3% of the Reserve and National Guard components were married (U.S. Department of Defense 2015). For the Army National Guard, 40% of soldiers were married in 2014 (U.S. Department of Defense 2015). This was a 16.2% drop from 1995 when 56.2% of National Guard soldiers were married. Two studies have revealed that marriage rates of National Guard soldiers and Reserve military members tend to reflect rates much more similar to civilian rates (Hogan and Seifert 2010; Karney and Crown 2007). Karney and Crown (2007) found that trends

in marriage between the National Guard and active duty military are similar but the rates of entering marriage are less for the National Guard than for active duty.

There are many explanations for why National Guard marriage rates are closer to civilians than active duty military. One explanation is that National Guard soldiers tend to lead lifestyles that more closely resemble civilians than active duty personnel. For example, National Guard soldiers tend to have jobs in the civilian job market rather than in the military. They do not receive all the benefits of active duty soldiers for getting married except in the case of deployments, so they do not have the incentives to marry that active duty soldiers have. Additionally, rates of entering marriage are different in the National Guard because members are typically older and already married when they enter the Guard (Karney and Crown 2007).

Divorce Rates

Divorce rates in the military peaked in 1999, then fell to an all-time low in 2000 and have been steadily climbing since (Karney and Crown 2007). As of 2005, 3% of active duty personnel were divorced, which is similar to the percentage in 1996 (Karney and Crown 2007). In 2014 divorce rates for active duty rose to a little over 4% (Department of Defense 2015). Women soldiers married to civilian men account for the highest percentage of the divorce rate, while men soldiers married to women civilians make up the lowest percentage (Karney and Crown 2007).

Karney et al (2012) analyzed the active duty population from 1998 through 2005 to determine the likelihood of divorce between service member and their comparable civilian counterparts. They also wanted to determine if the wars had any effect on the rate of divorce in the military. They found that the likelihood of divorce, across rank, age, and race, was no more likely to occur in the military than in the civilian population (Karney et al 2012). They also

found that this stayed consistent both before and after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began (Karney et al 2012). However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because their analysis ended in 2005. Since 2005 there have been many more deployments, with many soldiers being deployed multiple times after 2005.

Other studies indicate that there are higher rates of divorces in the military when compared to civilian divorce rates (Hogan et al 2010; Lundquist 2007; Negrusa and Negrusa 2014; Negrusa, Negrusa and Hosek 2014). Hogan and Seifert's study (2010) compared veterans and nonveterans from the ages of 23 – 25 years old and found that active duty service members were significantly more likely to be divorced than their comparable civilian counterparts. One reason for higher divorce rates is that enlisted personnel who marry in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities and benefits provided by the military to married couples are starting their marriage on a weak foundation that may not be able to withstand other stressors that go along with being married in the military (Hogan et al 2010; Karney and Crown 2007; Lundquist 2007). Within the military, studies show that those who are enlisted, women and have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms are at the greatest risk of divorce (Karney and Crown 2007; Lundquist 2007; Negrusa and Negrusa 2014). The length of time deployed also plays a role in the likelihood of divorce, but the effect is the largest for couples who were married prior to 9/11 (Negrusa et al 2014).

Divorce rates in the National Guard are slightly different from the active duty component of the military. From 1996 through 2000 the National Guard, like active duty military, experienced a decline in divorce rates followed by a sharp increase in 2000 (Karney and Crown 2007). Unlike the divorce rates in the active component, divorce rates in the National Guard were higher in 2005 than in 1996 (Karney and Crown 2007). In 2005, slightly over 2% of

soldiers in the National Guard divorced (Karney and Crown 2007). By 2014, this percentage was 3% (Department of Defense 2015). Similar to active military, the risk of divorce was highest for those enlisted and for women (Karney and Crown 2007).

These numbers are of concern to military leaders because half of military personnel are married. Divorce and unhappy marriages can damage the readiness of individual soldiers (Segal 1986). It has also been found that men soldiers who are married have less disciplinary problems than those who are not married (Segal 1986). This is why it is so important to understand not only the role of the military but also the role of deployments in soldiers' marriages.

STRESS AND RESILIENCE DURING DEPLOYMENT

Separation from one's spouse is not an uncommon occurrence in the military. Even during peacetime, there are training exercises or specialty schools that can take a soldier away from his family for a few days to a few weeks or months at a time. Soldiers can miss pregnancies, the birth of their children, the growth of their children, birthdays, anniversaries, and many special events and milestones due to military obligations (Drake 2004; Segal 1986). Although separations and missed events are frequent, deployments add additional stresses to the military family. Deployments and separations hold different experiences depending on the type of mission the soldier going on, the length of the mission, the notification time involved, even the ages of family members (Pavlicin 2003). Living in a constant state of limbo, military spouses experience emotional stress and anxiety not only about role and responsibility reassignments each time their soldier leaves and comes home but also about whether their soldier will come home with psychological problems, life-altering injuries, or if they will come home at all (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, and Markham 2011; Faber, Williton, Clymer, MacDermid, and Weiss 2008; Warner, Appenzeller, Warner, and Grieger 2009; Wheeler and Stone 2010).

In some ways, sending a soldier off to war is like dealing with the death of a loved one. When first finding out about an upcoming deployment, some spouses will experience shock, denial, anger, and can emotionally detach from their soldier to emotionally prepare themselves for the future deployment and separation (Pavlicin 2003; Riggs and Riggs 2011; Yablonsky, Barbero, and Richardson 2016). Many families experience this, but it is especially common in families that tend to blame the separation on the soldier (Riggs and Riggs 2011). The pre-deployment transition is mostly filled with feelings of uncertainty about the future and staying busy with tasks that need to get done before the soldier leaves (Yablonsky et al. 2016). After the soldier has left, spouses may experience the psychological, social, and somatic manifestations of grief, especially in the first few months. They experience despair and panic, and as a result, may detach from social networks (Aho, Tarkka, Astedt-Kurki, Sorvari, and Kaunonen 2011; Kaunonen, Tarkka, Paunonen, Laippala 1999). Some spouses will blame their soldiers and direct their anger towards them even though it is the situation they are angry with and not their soldier (Aho et al. 1999; Wheeler and Stone 2010). They may become disoriented and depressed, have trouble concentrating, and might not be able to cope with the sudden responsibilities that have been thrown on them (Pavlicin 2003; Wheeler and Stone 2010). Many spouses have trouble sleeping in the first few months, which leads to physical symptoms as well as having little energy to be able to deal with the deployment (Burton, Farley, and Rhea 2009). Typically, those individuals who feel they have less perceived control over the deployment tend to experience the most stress (Allen et al. 2011).

On top of dealing with the emotional aspect of deployment, families must deal with the physical changes in their family structure. If children are involved, each time a service member leaves, a two-parent family suddenly becomes a one-parent family. Power dynamics are

renegotiated, and the family's flexibility is tested (Riggs and Riggs 2011). Everyday routines from managing the home to paying bills to parenting must all be handled. Similar to couples who divorce and find themselves having to adapt to their new role as single parents, military spouses must do this for each deployment and separation. Initially, taking over as the sole parent, sometimes results in increased stress levels, a decrease in parental competence and an overwhelming sense of being alone (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, and Christopher 1999; Wheeler and Stone 2010).

Suddenly becoming physically detached from their families, deployed soldiers face different stressors. They often have little control over their ability to discipline or comfort their children (MacDermid, Schwarz, Fabter, Adkins, Mishkind, and Weiss 2005). Some spouses may purposely withhold information from their soldiers regarding their children's problems to avoid distracting or worrying their soldiers (MacDermid et al 2005). Also, the time difference between Iraq or Afghanistan and the United States prevents soldiers from having the ability to intervene immediately if a problem does arise (MacDermid et al. 2005). This inability to react quickly has the potential to result in soldiers experiencing feelings of powerlessness in their involvement in their children's lives and may hurt reintegration back into the family later (MacDermid et al. 2005).

Separations interfere not only in parent-child relationships but also in marital relationships, especially for new marriages and those that had problems before the deployment (Segal 1986). Negative communication, such as being unsupportive, feeling like essential items are being left out of discussions, discussing unresolved problems in an unhealthy manner or discussing issues out of the spouse's or soldier's control, can add additional stress to an already stressful situation. For example, after negative phone calls from home, soldiers reported having

to decompress before they felt like they were emotionally fit enough to go back on a mission (MacDermid et al. 2005). Gaps in technology can make communication infrequent and difficult. Sometimes communication is impaired because soldiers cannot share everything with their families because of safety reasons (Yablonsky et al. 2016). For some couples this leads to fewer feelings of connection and less satisfaction with the relationship overall (Baptist, Amanor-Boudu, Garrett, Goff, Collum, Gamble, Gurss, Sanders-Hahs, Strader, and Wick 2011). The physical strains of being separated along with the psychological strains can make deployments overbearing at times. The mental, emotional, and physical stresses of deployments provide the rationale for why positive coping strategies are so crucial for the well-being of the family and the marital relationship. Although a soldier may be deployed for a year or more, the family must be able to function without him/her and be able to come together again at the end.

Coping Strategies that Aid in Resiliency

Everyone experiences the stressors that come along with deployment at some point in the deployment cycle, but not all military families tackle those stresses in the same way. Families that can cope with deployments healthily tend to have firm beliefs that aid in dealing with the separation. For spouses, these beliefs include optimism for the future, a sense of mastery, spiritual philosophies, and a positive outlook on military life and its purpose, including patriotism and a sense of pride in the contribution of their soldier (Patterson 2002; Riggs and Riggs 2011; Wheeler and Stone 2010). Soldiers who adapt to deployments healthily tend to find the deployment meaningful and fulfilling because they are using the skills they learned in training (Karney and Crown 2007). Similar to spouses who build a new family with the other spouses of the unit; soldiers also build a surrogate family with the other soldiers around them (Yablonsky et al. 2016). When husbands and wives are enjoying their Army life and agree with

the current mission the soldier is on, they experience less stress than couples who do not like living an Army life or who do not agree with the current mission (Patterson 2002; Allen et al. 2011). Deployments could be beneficial for couples who enjoy the Army life because it provides room for each spouse to grow individually and adds appreciation and romance to the marriage (Segal 1986).

Other couples may not know how to deal with the stresses that come with deployment in a healthy manner. For these couples, there are countless self-help books that offer advice on how to alleviate some of the worries and stresses that come along with deployment. A search on Amazon returned 354 books specifically for military spouses dealing with deployments. Many of these books are written by military spouses who have previously experienced deployments themselves. Topics covered include finances, dealing with the emotions of the separation, how to deal with everyday chores around the house, how to communicate effectively with your spouse/soldier, how to deal with children and their emotions, family support groups and what to expect upon return of the soldier.

Communication during Deployments

Communication between spouses is especially important during deployments when it comes to decreasing stress. In its various forms, such as letters, phone calls, email, and care packages, it allows for spouses, soldiers, and their children to be able to stay connected to one another. Frequent and meaningful communication between spouses is reassuring for wives and increases marital bonds and satisfaction (Baptist et al. 2011). For wives, communication has been found to provide relieve and support, help build trust, and provide the opportunity to express their need for their spouses (Baptist et al 2011; Wheeler and Stone 2010). By being able to hear their soldier's voice, a spouse's stress and anxiety with regards to injuries to their soldier

are relieved, even if only temporarily (Baptist et al 2011; Wheeler and Stone 2010). Keeping connected and feeling supported by their soldier in their everyday activities, spouses developed a greater appreciation for their soldier and their relationship overall (Baptist et al 2011). The same goes for the deployed soldier. Communication not only provides much needed emotional support but also a connection to the outside world (MacDermid et al 2005).

Family Readiness Groups

In order to help families during deployment, the military began to set up Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) in the early 1990's (Drake 2004). According the Department of the Army (1993), the FRG is "an organization of family members, volunteers, soldiers, and civilian employees belonging to a unit/organization who together provide an avenue of mutual support and assistance and a network of communication among the members, the chain of command, and community resources" (DA 1993:608). Each military unit has an FRG headed by the spouse of a soldier (Drake 2004). The benefit of FRGs is that spouses have a readily available social support network that can help out in times of need, particularly during deployments (Segal 1986).

When not deployed, the FRG is not very active and mainly exists on paper (Drake 2004). During deployments FRG meetings are held once a month (Drake 2004). The FRG leader acts as the liaison between command staff and the families (Drake 2004). The purpose of these meetings is to give families updates on the unit's activities and any other information command feels the families need to know, such as general information regarding what the unit has been doing on the deployment and when the unit will be returning home (Drake 2004). It also provides family members the opportunity to socialize with others who are going through the same stressful situation. Spouses experience more stress during deployments when they are either unaware of the resources available to them to help them cope with the deployment or they

feel those resources are inadequate (Allen et al 2011). It is the FRG's goal to remedy this and help spouses by giving them the resources to manage their stress and enable them to cope with the deployment in a healthy manner.

REUNION AND REINTEGRATION INTO THE FAMILY

Even though the return of a deployed soldier is an occasion to be celebrated, the weeks and months that follow can also be pervaded by stress and anxiety. Reunion and reintegration into the family requires adjustments for all family members and can be ripe with tension (Segal 1986). Each spouse will experience their own unique stresses and anxieties in relation to transitioning back into the family (Allen et al 2011). Allen, a psychologist specializing in couple functioning in military marriages, along with her colleagues, surveyed 300 active duty Army couples within one year of a deployment. They found that a soldier's stress upon return home related mostly to issues with combat experiences they had while deployed (Allen et al 2011; Erbes, Meis, Polusny, and Compton 2011). For many soldiers it is hard to let their guard down, especially after experiencing intense combat or a traumatic experience during a deployment (Baptist et al 2011). They may withdraw from family and friends because they do not know how to compensate (Baptist et al 2011; Faber et al 2008). Soldiers who are vulnerable to stress, especially soldiers who have PTSD, tend to have a hard time re-connecting emotionally to their wives and children (Baptist et al 2011; Erbes et al 2011; Goff, Crow, Reisbig, and Hamilton 2009). According to the National Center for PTSD (2014), approximately 11 – 20 % of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan war experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a “medically recognized anxiety disorder that can develop in anyone after they’ve been exposed to extremely stressful conditions” (Slone and Friedman 2008:150). As a result of this they may not be able to take over their household duties as fast as their spouse may like.

Coming Home: The Spouse's Experience

Some of the strategies that helped spouses get through a deployment, such as developing a new routine with regards to managing the household, the finances, and the children, have the potential to make reintegration more stressful. Many wives discover new skills and become extremely proud of their newly found independence (Enloe 2000). They could be resistant to giving up their hard-earned independence and their decision-making authority (Baptist et al 2011; Faber et al 2008; Riggs and Riggs 2011). The extent to which individuals have changed during the deployment will increase the complexity of the reintegration into the family (Riggs and Riggs 2011). Some spouses are reluctant to go back to how things were because they don't want to have to worry about readjusting again if their soldier must re-deploy (Baptist et al 2011). Ambivalence, anger, and emotional detachment from the soldier are common, especially if the soldier is experiencing PTSD symptoms (Goff et al 2009; Riggs and Riggs 2011). Some situations that may cause conflicts are when it's time to make major decisions together for the first time and disagreements or criticisms regarding childrearing (Riggs and Riggs 2011). Each spouse is at first confused as to what their roles and routines are supposed to be now that the soldier has returned home (Riggs and Riggs 2011).

Reintegrating into the Family

Upon reunion the first major tasks to accomplish are redefining family roles, managing strong emotions, replacing emotional constriction with relational intimacy, and creating shared meanings of the deployment and reintegration (MacDermid et al 2005; Riggs et al 2011; Walsh 2002). A family member's role will not return to exactly the way it was before the deployment and some military service members expect that their family systems will have stayed the same

while they were deployed (Baptist et al 2011). A new “normal” for the family needs to be established.

A study of returning reservists reported that soldiers and family members tend to experience the most stress due to boundary ambiguities (Faber et al 2008). Boundary ambiguities occur when roles and responsibilities in a family change and the new rules are unclear. Much like boundary ambiguity found in divorced families and stepfamilies (Madden-Derdich et al 1999) military families must renegotiate their roles each time a soldier returns after an absence. After having the sole responsibility of the children during the soldier’s absence, spouses must learn to once again share responsibility with another parent. The changing family structure and the impact this has on the spouse’s prior ways of parenting require a redefinition of self (Madden-Dedrich et al 1999). This could result in negative effects on the marital relationship and also the stability of the marriage in general (Steward 2005). In addition, these effects may be worse for wives because wives tend to hold stronger definitions of family than husbands (Steward 2005). Therefore, the boundary ambiguities wives face when their soldier returns home has a stronger effect on her because she must redefine her role within the family. Her identity shifts from single parent back to a co-parent, which adds stress to the marital relationship.

The adversity that military families face with deployments can result in different outcomes for different families. Many military families have shown time and again how resilient they can be. Being resilient is not only about managing stress, shouldering a burden, or surviving; it is also about transformation and growth. Walsh (2002) has argued that some military families become stronger because the deployment can provide a wake-up call as to what really matters in their life. By maintaining communication and making meanings of crisis

situations by sharing beliefs, and developing a positive, hopeful outlook together as a family can promote the family's resilience (Patterson 2002; Walsh 2002). In the face of adversity, Walsh has shown how it is important that families remain flexible, share leadership, provide mutual support and work as a team to overcome adversity (Walsh 2002). My study builds upon the existing literature on military family's experiences with deployment by concentrating on one branch of the military: The National Guard. As stated earlier, most studies on military families and deployments focus on either the military in general or on the Army, with the National Guard included in study as a side note. My study highlights the unique experiences of National Guard families and their experiences with deployment and reintegration. I pay particular attention to how institutional discourses shape their perceptions and experiences with deployments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I used three major theoretical paradigms to guide my study. These three frameworks were chosen because of their complimentary nature to each other: symbolic interaction, social constructionism, and feminist theory. These theories guided my exploration into the effects of institutional discourse on National Guard families and their abilities to adapt to their shifting reality. The next three sections provide greater insight into how I integrated each of these three theoretical paradigms into my study.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is a sociological perspective that focuses on the meanings of things that people learn and their subsequent actions in everyday life based on those meanings (Williams 2008). In his book, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Blumer (1969) laid out the three main premises of Symbolic Interactionism. The first premise is that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that things have for them" (Blumer 1969:

2). In other words, all things are assigned meanings by people; meanings are not inherent, in that they do not simply appear out of thin air (Williams 2008). The second premise states that the meaning of things is derived from the social interaction that one has with others (Blumer 1969). People learn what meanings objects hold through interactions with other people or through other forms of interaction, such as media consumption (Williams 2008). The last premise is that these meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process that individuals engage with as they deal with the thing they encounter (Blumer 1969). The social action that a person will take in a particular situation will be based on their motives, attitudes, status demands, role requirements, and past experiences that pertain to that situation.

Social interactions and the subsequent meanings attached to them form an individual's social identity. Identities constitute the self, which is constructed through social conditions and the biographical history of an individual (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). In the case of military wives, the military as an institution will construct the military aspect of their self, or their military identity. It is through interactions with others that their military identity will take shape. Depending on the circumstances, identities and the meanings attached to them will change (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Regarding National Guard spouses, their identity shifts from civilian wife to military wife at the time of deployment but it is not a complete shift of identity. National Guard spouses are in the middle of two worlds. They are not entirely military spouses nor or they entirely civilian wives. They live in the middle of these two worlds when their soldiers are deployed. They can experience ambiguity or a sense of disorientation due to being stuck in the middle (Turner 1974). Turner (1974) calls this in betweenness, liminality. Liminality occurs when a previous identity is being restructured to a new identity, but the process is not

fully completed (Turner 1974). When this occurs, a person experiences a sense of disorientation and new perspectives begin to be formed.

During deployments, there is no escaping the military wife identity. Military discourses become part of their everyday life and becomes a means through which they construct their military identities. It informs wives as to who and what they should be during and after deployments and mediates who and what they are (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Military discourses provide the culturally endorsed template of the super spouse for wives to follow in order to shape their identity as the military wife (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). However, they are still civilian spouses engrossed in the civilian world while trying to navigate their military spouse identity leading to feelings of isolation and disorientation.

As military families navigate their way through the deployment cycle, individual family members will develop their meanings of the deployment based off their interactions not only with their spouses but with others, such as civilians. According to Patterson (2002), interactions within the family as well as with interactions with others outside the family will shape the meaning making process and is one of the critical pieces of family resilience. The meanings that they develop from these interactions will inform their social actions. The military spouse who relies on negative media reports of the war will develop a different meaning of the deployment from the spouse who relies only on positive information from their deployed soldier or the unit's FRG.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionist perspectives are closely related to the theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism. Whereas symbolic interactionism focuses on interpersonal interactions, social constructionism focuses on the construction of reality from a societal level. From a social

constructionist point of view there is not one “true” reality but multiple realities that are dependent upon individuals’ perspectives and interpretations of events (Esterberg 2002; Guba and Lincoln 2005). The emphasis is on how individuals construct and interpret their reality (Esterberg 2002). Due to social inequalities based on characteristics such as race or gender, multiple realities can coexist in one event. The representation and subsequent construction of the event hinges on the type of inequality being experienced and the differing power relations that play out in interactions between the individuals involved in the event. This is one of the reasons why not all military families experience the same deployment or even several different deployments in the same ways. A variety of factors, such as, soldier rank, gender, race/ethnicity, and parental status, all act together to influence each person’s perception of the deployment. These perceptions have consequences on family adaptations to separations and reunions.

A study measuring military couples’ psychological well-being, physical well-being, Army life satisfaction and marital satisfaction based on separations found that it was not so much the number of times the family was separated as much as the perception of the experience itself that determined these four variables (Burrell et al 2003). A person’s particular perception of an event aids in the construction of that person’s reality. If the military lifestyle is perceived as a good fit for the family, the reality of the deployment itself becomes a positive experience (Pittman et al 2004). During the deployment if the family perceives that they dealt with it in a competent manner, adaptations after reunions were positive (Pittman et al 2004). However, if the family felt unsupported by the military, the reality of the deployment becomes negative (Pittman et al 2004). As such each of these perceptions affect the way that spouses interpret their experiences in the military.

Feminist Theory

Similar to social constructionism, feminist theory is interested in how gender inequalities are constructed and maintained over time (Esterberg 2002). The difference from social constructionism is that feminist theory accounts for the sociohistorical context of gendered power relations that lead to the social construction of knowledge (Mann 2012). Feminists believe that reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that are now reified in structures that are real (Guba and Lincoln 2004). Dorothy Smith (1989) has argued for a sociology of women that would begin with the standpoint of women's everyday lives in order to understand how their experiences with inequality are rooted in social practices and social institutions. This allows for a fuller understanding of society as a whole and reveals the hidden power relations and assumptions made in producing knowledge (Smith 1989; Mann 2012). Knowledge production from a gendered standpoint important because it produces multiple meanings and realities (Mann 2012).

Women in the military, regardless of whether they are soldier or spouse, develop meanings through interactions with others in the military community. The military communicates their family-friendly ideology to those in the military community. In Weber's (2012) analysis on military discourse and the construction of masculinity and femininity, she stated that while the military promotes family readiness, it is readiness as it pertains to the soldier's ability to go to war. It is readiness to support the soldier and readiness for the absence of the soldier in the family (Weber 2012). The military depends on the supportive, dedicated wife who manages everything while her soldier is gone. (Weber 2012). National Guard wives feel isolated from the civilian world and their husbands, and it is precisely this sense of isolation that provides the opportunity for the military to perpetuate traditional gender roles regarding

their responsibilities to the military and to the military family (Enloe 2000; Segal 1986; Weber 2012).

The military provides a script for spouses to learn their new roles and responsibilities and to help families during deployments (Enloe 2000; Segal 1986). These scripts have become institutionalized within the military and seasoned wives teach new military wives what is expected of them, both during deployment and reintegration (Enloe 2000; Segal 1986). These scripts provide the ideal model for wives to follow and portray it as a worthy sacrifice (Weber 2012).

An example of how gender roles affect families can be found in households where the woman is the soldier and the husband is a civilian. This type of family has the highest divorce rate within the military. One explanation for the high divorce rate among this group is that this type of family makeup runs counter to traditional gender roles of the husband as provider and the wife as caregiver, especially during times of deployment. One study has found that within the military, civilian husbands have lower marital satisfaction when compared to civilian wives (Southwell and Wadsworth 2016). Typically, when a woman soldier is deployed and the civilian husband is left at home, they do not feel they have the same support as civilian wives, which causes them to feel less satisfaction with the military lifestyle than civilian wives (Goodman, Turner, Agazio, Thjoop, Padden, Greiner, and Hillier 2013; Southwell and Wadsworth 2016). This is due to military programs being geared towards wives because of their ascribed role as that of caregiver, whereas civilian husbands do not have these roles (Goodman et al 2013). The civilian husbands in Southwell and Wadsworth's (2016) study stated they felt like outcasts within the military community.

Military spouse identities are shaped through discourses from other military spouses as well as from the military. The interactions that military spouses have with these others informs their meaning making and perspectives pertaining to their deployment experiences. Due to the masculine nature and the perpetuation of tradition masculine/feminine roles, women experience deployments differently than men. The analysis of self-help books, field notes, and interview transcripts were shaped by the theoretical paradigms of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and feminist theory. By using these as a guide to my analysis, I was able to obtain greater insights into the making of the Super Spouse identity and the subsequent meaning and perceptions associated with this identity. In the next chapter, I discuss my methodology for studying National Guard Families.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

The purpose of my study was to explore National Guard families' experiences with deployments in order to understand their perceptions of the deployment and how these perceptions were shaped by the institutional discourse surrounding them. Interviews, observations, and textual analysis were performed and guided by three research questions: (1) How do institutional discourses influence families' expectations and perceptions of the deployment experience and their family life during the deployment cycle? (2) How do National Guard families make sense of deployments? (3) How do these perceptions and expectations influence family resiliency?

In this chapter I explain the methodology I utilized to answer my research questions. I address the following issues: (1) the rationale of my research approach, (2) a description of my research sample, (3) the type of information I needed to complete the study, (4) an overview of the research design, (5) data collection methods, (6) data analysis, (7) ethical considerations, (8) issues of trustworthiness, and (9) limitations of the study.

RATIONALE FOR A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research aims to understand complex social processes and meaning making (Esterberg 2002). Due to the exploratory nature of my research questions and their focus on meaning making, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. A quantitative study with pre-established hypotheses looking for relationships between variables was not suitable for the purposes of this study. Qualitative methods were the best way to obtain in-depth, rich data to understand the social complexities at work surrounding deployments in a National Guard setting.

RATIONALE FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic researchers record and observe a particular group of people in order to understand their social world and their culture (Charmaz 2006). Multiple means of data collection are utilized to achieve this. This guides the researcher in ways to see, organize and understand the experience under study (Charmaz 2006). The purpose is to learn what it is like to be a member of a particular group from the group member's perspective.

This methodology was a good fit for the purposes of my research. In order understand how perceptions of deployments and family life are formed, I needed to observe and talk to the members of my research sample. Ethnographic methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the culture of National Guard families and how discourses surrounding that culture shapes its families and their perceptions of deployments and family life.

THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

The research sample for this study came from a National Guard component located in the southern part of the United States. This National Guard component has a rich history of overseas deployments. They were activated in 1990-1991 in support of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, again in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and have since activated multiple brigades, battalions, and companies to wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition to these deployments, this component has had multiple activations throughout the state to respond to various natural disasters.

I used snowball sampling to aid in the selection of participants for interviews. Snowball sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling that initially uses a small pool of informants who in turn nominate other participants who fit the eligibility criteria for the study (Morgan 2008). Being a National Guard wife, I had ready access to a large number of soldiers and their spouses.

Initial interviews were conducted with people known to me within the National Guard. From these individuals, I obtained referrals to other families who fit my eligibility requirements.

Eligibility requirements for participation in this study were as follows: Participants must have experienced at least one deployment, but multiple deployments are preferable. They must also have been married at the time of deployment but do not necessarily need to be married at the time of the interview.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

I utilized three methods of data collection: content analysis of self-help books, observations at Yellow Ribbon events, and interviews of soldiers and spouses who had been through at least one deployment while married.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

My content analysis consisted of three self-help books written by current and former military spouses: *Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families* by Karen M. Pavlicin, *Army Wife Handbook* by Ann Crossley, and *Today's Military Wife* by Lydia Sloan Cline. These books were chosen because when I became a military wife these were the books recommended to me before my husband left on his first deployment for me to learn what to expect during and after the deployment.

Surviving Deployment: A Guide for Military Families is a self-help book written by Karen M Pavlicin, a Marine Corps wife, who has been through multiple deployments and has volunteered to work with military families. This book came out in 2003, right around the time that deployments were picking up due to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This book was a mass marketed book. I purchased mine on Amazon when I learned my husband was going to be deployed for the first time because I had no idea what to expect. The purpose of this book is to

learn what to expect, how to prepare, and personally as individuals and as families during a deployment separation.

Whereas *Surviving Deployment* was concentrated on getting through a deployment, the *Army Wife Handbook* is more of a how to book, how to survive Army life in general. It is very matter of fact and to a certain extent abrupt. It explains traditions that should be followed and what is expected from a spouse at different levels of the soldier's rank. Yet, they emphasize that a spouse should not "wear" their husband's rank. What is meant by this phrase, is that sometimes, wives, especially officers' wives, let their husbands' rank go to their head, so to speak. They tend to look down on other spouses whose husbands are not at the same or higher rank as their husband. This book cautions spouses against acting like they are the Major, Colonel, or General and accentuates that this is their husbands rank, not theirs. The book emphasizes that respect is earned, not simply given because of your soldier's rank. This is one example of the mixed messages army wives receive: on the one hand, they are told not to wear their husband's rank, and on the other hand, it is saying that if your husband is of a certain rank there are certain responsibilities and etiquette you need follow according to that rank. Nonetheless, the message is clear: regardless of rank, the family comes second to the military and to the military community.

Today's Military Wife is a self-help book contains many do's and don'ts's for military wives. Much of it concentrates on having a positive attitude. It encourages spouses to make sacrifices in order for the military to work but these sacrifices should be seen as an honor. While not as abrupt as the handbook, it still conveyed that if a spouse is not ready to make sacrifices and learn how to live on her own, she will not make it through the military lifestyle.

OBSERVATIONS

I attended three separate Yellow Ribbon events held throughout the state. The first event took place in 2014 in the southeastern part of the state. The second event took place in 2016 in the northern part of the state. The third event took place in 2017 in the central part of the state. Each event was three days long for a total 64 hours of observations. The first day consisted of registering the soldiers and their guests and giving them the itinerary for the weekend. The second day, which lasted from 8 am to 4pm consisted of speakers and breakout sessions on various topics. The mornings were spent in a large ballroom with a motivational type speaker. The afternoons consisted of several breakout sessions where soldiers and their family could pick which sessions they wanted to attend. These sessions would last from 30 minutes to one hour. Speakers would build rapport with the audience by discussing their time in the military and their own experiences with deployments and reintegration. The purpose of this was to not only engage the soldiers but to let them know that what they are feeling upon return from the deployment was normal.

These events are mandatory for the soldiers but not for the spouses and/or family members. The purpose of Yellow Ribbon events according to staff at the events is to help normalize the reintegration process for families. It is supposed to help families understand that they are not alone and are designed to spark discussion between spouses about topics they may have been hesitant to bring up on their own. It is also supposed to help to ease the reintegration process through providing social support, as families may not realize that other couples are going through the same things that they are.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted seven interviews with a total of 10 participants¹. Three couples were interviewed together, while the four other interviews were with one spouse only. All participants identified as non-Hispanic Caucasian. Ages ranged from 27 years old to 58 years old. Two participants had master's degrees, six had bachelor's degrees, and two had some college. All participants had children at the time of deployment. Marriages ranged from three years to twenty-three years. Except for the couple that has been married for twenty-three years, all other couples were on either their second or third marriage. Three of the couples were dual service couples, while the other were made up of military husband/civilian wife.

DATA ANALYSIS

All data for this study, field notes, content analysis, and interview transcripts were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006). Developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's, grounded theory is method of collecting and analyzing data which "rests on the crucial assumption that through interaction and the use of language and communication, individuals construct society, reality, and their selves" (Charmaz 2006). Through qualitative research methods, such as participant observation and interviews, researchers interact with participants to develop a portrayal of their worlds (Charmaz 2006). The main advantage of using this type of analysis is the ability to let the data guide the research rather than using a theory or hypothesis to guide data collection.

Grounded theory is, therefore, not a theory as the name suggests but a system of practices and principles that lead to ways of collecting and analyzing data that result in the development of theory grounded in the data. In grounded theory, hypotheses are not developed from the start as

¹ See Appendix A for Interview Guide

in quantitative studies, instead hypotheses and theory is formed through a series of qualitative steps. These steps include interviewing, observations, and analytical memo writing. Instead of these steps being mutually exclusive of each other, in grounded theory these steps are married together through the simultaneous involvement of each one at each stage of the research project (Charmaz 2006). Codes and categories are constructed from analysis of transcripts and memos, not from preconceived hypotheses developed at the beginning of a research project (Charmaz 2006). The development of the theory is advanced through each step of data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2006). The resulting theory closely fits the data, is useful, conceptually dense, durable over time, modifiable, and holds explanatory power (Charmaz 2006).

Coding of my interviews, observations, books, and memos began with line-by-line open coding. Each written line received a code. After open coding was completed, I began focused coding. Focused coding examines the most frequent codes that appeared during the open coding phase (Charmaz 2006). At this stage, I analyzed all the codes looking for similar ideas and put them into categories. This process streamlined the earlier developed codes into categories that made the most analytical sense (Charmaz 2006). At this point more complete categories and subcategories were developed.

The final stage of coding was theoretical coding. This is used to determine the types of relationships that have developed between the categories and subcategories established during the focused coding phase. Theoretical coding allows researchers to begin making sense of the data by establishing the relationships and developing the concepts behind each code/category. This where the analytical story begins to be formed (Charmaz 2006).

In order to complete this study, I received permission from Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B), the National Guard Bureau in Washington D.C., and the state Army National Guard².

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study. First, generalizations to other populations should not be done due to the limited number of interview participants and observations. In addition, all interview participants were white, so findings should not be extended to racial and ethnic minorities. The experiences of my participants are also particular to either dual service couples or couples with a civilian wife. I was unable to interview couples with civilian husbands.

As with most interview data, the data collected from my interviews are only as accurate as the participants' memories of the events surrounding the deployment. Hindsight may make events that seemed devastating at the time of occurrence, not so important in the present. The accuracy of my participants statements could not be verified, again making statements only as accurate as their memories. In addition, cross-sectional data was gathered rather than longitudinal. If couples had been interviewed at the time of the deployment and right after reintegration, the data obtained may have been different.

The next three chapters contain the findings from my data analysis. Chapter 4 will discuss the cultural discourses from self-help books available to military spouses to navigate the military lifestyle and institutional discourses from Yellow Ribbon events. Chapter 5 interrogates how couples make meaning of deployment and the extent to which cultural and institutional discourses shape individual meanings, perceptions and narratives. In chapter 6, I discuss the

² The approval letter from National Guard Bureau and the state Army National Guard is not attached because of confidentiality issues. The state included in this study did not want to be identified.

issues with reintegration that military families confront at the end of deployments. I also highlight the factors attributed to resiliency in military families. Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the findings, sociological and theoretical implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4. WELCOME TO THE MILITARY: LEARNING TO BE A MILITARY WIFE THROUGH CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how military wives learn the military lifestyle through institutional discourses. To investigate this matter, I used three self-help books available to military spouses to learn how to adapt to the military. The books included *The Army Wife Handbook*, *Today's Military Wife*, and *Surviving Deployment*. In addition to the analysis of these books, I also attended three Yellow Ribbon events to observe the information being given to National Guard couples following their deployment. This chapter lays the foundation for the narratives I showcase in Chapter 5 by showing where these institutional discourses originate that ultimately aids military couples in making meaning of their deployments.

Three main themes emerged from my analysis: gendered cultural discourses, constructing the culturally endorsed military wife, and reactions to National Guard discourses. I will first discuss the gendered cultural discourses that military wives learn from self-help books. This will lead to a discussion on discourse functioning as a guide to the making of the culturally endorsed military wife. I will end this chapter by discussing the National Guard's contribution to military discourse through Family Readiness Groups and Yellow Ribbon events.

GENDERED CULTURAL DISCOURSES

Drake (2004) states that civilian norms for family structure do not work well with the military lifestyle because military spouses must be extremely adaptable. They are expected to provide a traditional nurturing home while also being ready at a moment's notice to function as a single parent when their soldier is called away. Army spouses are indoctrinated through military programs to adapt to the traditional breadwinner homemaker family and are encouraged to participate in military programs that perpetuate and reinforce this ideal.

The military is a predominantly male occupation and has been since its inception (Enloe 2000). Although more and more women are joining the military, traditional gendered beliefs are still very prominent (Enloe 2000). One of the ways gendered beliefs are perpetuated in the military is through the use of gendered terminology in self-help books geared towards military wives. One of the first things brought to the attention of the reader in the preface of *The Army Wife Handbook* is justification of the use of the term “Army wife.”

Although the book’s title and most of the text refer to Army wives, rather than Army spouses, it is because the overwhelming majority of military spouses are female. Army husbands (men married to wives who are serving on active-duty in the Army) who are socially active within their military communities can find a great deal of information in the book that applies to them. – *The Army Wife Handbook* pgs. xviii - xix

Although a justification is given for the use of the term “Army wife” rather than “spouse” this terminology excludes Army husbands who are civilians and Army husbands in dual-service marriages that stay behind when their wives are deployed. In addition, when performing a simple Google search for Army spouse books pertaining to Army husbands, not one book specific to Army husbands came up in the search. This exclusion of Army husbands leads to them feeling like outsiders within a woman dominated domain, i.e., the world of The Army Spouse.

Spouses who are men are spoken about in terms of joining programs available to women spouses. However, they are talked about differently than women:

Husbands who have the time and interest to join wives’ clubs are always real assets. They bring a fresh perspective to projects and activities, as well as strong arms and backs when they’re needed. Many clubs have reached out and welcomed them into their membership. While this may require a few word changes in the club’s constitution, that’s not hard to accomplish. It isn’t even necessary to change the club’s name from wives’ club to spouses’ club, though some clubs have done so and it does send the right message – that all Army spouses are welcome, regardless of gender. – *The Army Wife Handbook* pg. 202

This statement reveals how men are not pressured to join the clubs in the same way women are. As the phrase “time and interest” suggests, this is an option for men, whereas for women spouses it is more of an imperative. There seems to be so few men that enter this domain that it is not even “necessary to change the club’s name.” It is acknowledged that some clubs do change their name to incorporate men spouses, but the predominant name is still “wives’ club.” Men are still seen as outcasts in the role of soldier’s husband. This lends itself to a lack of support for men spouses - both active duty soldiers and civilians. In addition, it appears they are welcome more for their strength than anything else, perpetuating dominant stereotypes of masculinity and reifying the traditional masculinity/femininity division of military culture.

Another group of spouses excluded from the gendered terminology used in these self-help books are women soldiers. The only mention of women soldiers in all three books was found in *Surviving Deployment* in the chapter of learning what to expect upon homecoming. There is one sentence in the book that centered around a woman soldier’s coming home and having to deal with the additional strain of fighting in a culture that does not fully accept them. These books either completely dismiss women soldiers who stay behind or wrongly assume that they go through the same stressors as civilian wives. In the next chapter, I will discuss the special issues that women soldiers face as they make meaning of deployments as spouses and soldiers.

Military wives are encouraged to devote their efforts to the military community. As stated in *The Army Wife Handbook*:

Traditionally, it was accepted that officers’ wives would devote their time and energy to husband, family, and community. Military wives who went to work found that they had to make choices between the responsibilities they felt toward their family, and their traditional role of unit and community service. – *The Army Wife Handbook* pg. 289

When discussing men civilian spouses, *The Army Wife Handbook*, states that, ““Army husbands” are those men who are married to women in the Army. Many of these men have full-time civilian or military careers of their own” (Crossley, 201:2007). They are not pressured like women spouses to put their soldier’s career first to the detriment of theirs. This perpetuates the traditional man breadwinner/woman homemaker family structure. Due to women spouses being encouraged to volunteer and not have paying jobs, they are encouraged to be part of the team. The implication is that if they do not participate, they are not doing their wifely duty to their soldier or to the military in general. “Wives who are actively involved in clubs and other civic activities seem to have the most successful military husbands” (Cline 2003:89). The implication to this is that the spouse is just as important to their soldier’s career as the soldier.

The unstated purpose of self-help books and general discourse in the military is to shape military Super Spouses who can do everything that their family and the military needs while maintaining their composure and making it look easy. Although this is an ideal that not many can live up to, it sets the standard for wives to live up to. The discourses circulating in these books center on making the spouses of soldiers feel important to the military and consequently they will strive to achieve this standard. To add encouragement to strive for the Super Spouse persona, spouses are told about the personal satisfaction they will gain from helping out other families and continuing the traditions of Army wife-as-servant. As one author elaborated, “As you support your husband, and care for the families in the unit and your Army community, you will gain great personal satisfaction in knowing that your efforts are improving the quality of life for everyone” (Crossley 2007).

In addition to gaining personal satisfaction from their roles, military wives are told that it is their duty to support their soldier. As Weber (2012) stated, wives are important to the military

as it pertains to their mission: war readiness. They are told they are just as important to the success of the mission as their deployed spouse. Spouses are encouraged to feel pride for what their soldier does. Just as it is their husband's duty to go to war, it is the wives' duty to support that effort. As another book expresses, "Spouses of those military personnel also have a duty: to support them and, throughout the changes in our world and daily lives, to send them off to do their duty with love, prayers, and the confidence that we will be here waiting when they return" (Pavlicin 2003).

CONSTRUCTING THE CULTURALLY ENDORSED MILITARY WIFE

In order to understand how National Guard couples navigate two worlds, it is important to first understand the military culture and lifestyle. The military life is different from civilian life. In addition, the National Guard life is different from active duty life. However, National Guard programs are based off active duty programs with little regard to the lifestyle differences. The self-help books that are at the disposal of new members to the National Guard are also based off active duty experiences. These books are written by veteran spouses to new spouses and cover subjects ranging from military customs and protocols to handling the various stressors that come with deployments. In essence, they are teaching new wives how to be independent but at the same time to 'know their places' (Weber 2012).

Both, *The Army Wife Handbook* and *Today's Military Wife*, contain a great deal of information on the military lifestyle that new spouses must become accustomed. *The Army Wife Handbook* explains to spouses that their soldier may not have the time to spend with family as they would like. As a soldier rises in rank, so does his responsibilities to the military. In response, so will the wife's responsibilities. They are told the soldier may not have as much time or energy to deal with family issues (Crossley 2003). These statements set the stage for helping

spouses to understand and, more importantly, to accept that the military will come first, and the family comes second. It is the spouse's job to accept orders and understand that the military is not a democracy. Learning and accepting this will make for a happier life (Crossley 2003).

Drastic change is inevitable and continuous, and this is what makes military life unique.

Self-help books and speakers at Yellow Ribbon events tell couples that deployments are a learning and growing experience for everyone involved. Spouses must educate themselves about the military lifestyle in order for them to be comfortable with it (Crossley 2003). They warn many times that deployments can make or break a marriage. Absence from a spouse can either make the relationship stronger or tear it apart. If there is a fracture in the marriage prior to deployment, the deployment will not make the issues and problems go away, in fact, usually it will magnify them. Deployments will not solve problems, rather, they must be confronted and dealt with prior to the separation (Pavlicin 2007).

Speakers at Yellow Ribbon events reiterate this by telling families that deployments and drill weekends are a part of National Guard life that must be dealt. As Cline (2003:235) makes clear in *Today's Military Spouse*, "you don't have to like it, but it's critical that you understand it." While this is important for spouses to understand, National Guard spouses are not living this life daily. They are constantly back and forth between civilian life and military life, unless their husband works full-time for the National Guard. All of these discourses regarding the acceptance of military life set the stage for making spouses understand that their opinions do not matter nor do they have a choice as to when and where their soldier will deploy. As Pavlicin (2003:xiii) plainly stated in *Surviving Deployment*, "I quickly learned that in the military, my opinion didn't count."

Separation

Being separated from your spouse is a stressor that couples must learn to cope with during deployments. Separation is part of the lifestyle and learning to adapt is essential. Emotional preparation is important. Self-help books encourage spouses to see separations as a positive challenge. Cline (2003:245) writes, “with a positive attitude, a sense of adventure, and a determination to cope, separations don’t have to be so bad.” By stressing the positive attitude in preparation for the deployment, wives are being told not to show they are upset. This is because when the soldier knows their family is going to be okay while they are gone, he is able to concentrate on his mission. Readiness for war is the priority. This discourse is contributing to the production of the Super Spouse identity that projects to the world that she is ready, willing and more than capable to experience such a lifestyle.

In *Surviving Deployment*, Pavlicin elaborates that, “Super Spouses find a balance between work and play, between time for others and for themselves, and they find out and respond to their own limits” (Pavlicin 2007:101). Wives’ individual attitudes, skills, and knowledge are a big part of what makes coping with deployments manageable (Pavilicin 2007). This discourse centers on optimism, being in control of your life, having a good support network, flexibility, and the ability to survive on your own as special skills to help a spouse cope with the stress that comes along with separations. This kind of discourse around individual issues obscures the social regulations placed on wives. This neoliberal philosophy encourages them to view their deployment experience individually without recognition of the role of the military in their experiences. Wives are being told that if they have negative experiences within the military it is the wife, as an individual, the made the experience negative, not the impact of the military.

In essence, this ideology is rendering the military as invisible and separate from the individual experience.

Books also advocate that separation is a time for wives to grow and mature, a time for couples to grow closer and appreciate each other more. *Today's Military Wife* states that separations from your spouse are positive experiences. Cline (2003) writes in *Today's Military Wife* that it gives each person a break from the other. "And when you realize how many little things, he does around the house you appreciate him all the more when he gets back" (Cline 2003:248). Pavlicin (2007) advocates that wives find a new talent while the soldier is gone in the very first chapter; "New and added responsibilities can be overwhelming, yet they also develop new skills and uncover hidden talents. Separation can also be a positive opportunity for personal growth that will change you outlook on life forever" (Pavlicin 2007:1). Wives are seen as needing to be encouraged to go on with their lives during deployment. These books operate pedagogically, that is they teach wives how to be independent.

The purpose of teaching this independence, while it can be viewed as a good thing, is mainly to support the military effort of war readiness. As Weber (2012) points out in her article, families who can take care of themselves while their soldiers are away, are seen as assets because when soldiers do not have to worry about their families they can concentrate on their mission. In addition to teach independence, these books are also teaching pride in that sense of independence. This is the projecting of the neoliberal point of view that a spouse must pull themselves up by their bootstraps in order to have a positive outlook on the deployment experience.

REACTIONS TO NATIONAL GUARD DISCOURSES

Support programs for military families began to be developed during the Persian Gulf War (Pavlicin 2007). Quality of family life became a buzz word when it was realized that families had an impact on soldiers' ability to be ready for combat. Active-duty Army spouses have a plethora of programs available to them for support before, during, and after deployments. Military discourses and self-help books encourage the participation of spouses in military programs. They are advocated as the chance for new spouses to make new friends to help combat feelings of isolation during deployments.

National Guard spouses do not have the privilege of these programs year-round. The major support group available to National Guard families during deployments are Family Readiness Groups, which only activate during times of deployment. The purpose of the Family Readiness Group is to help wives cope better during separations. The military has come to realize that families that are satisfied with the military lifestyle are more likely to stay in the military and lessen the stress that soldiers feel on deployment regarding their family (Cline 2003). To help couples reintegrate, the National Guard hosts Yellow Ribbon events 90 days following deployment. These are the two major formal support systems that National Guard spouses have at their disposal to learn how to cope with the deployment cycle that many may only experience every five years or so.

Reactions to Family Readiness Groups

National Guard soldiers are encouraged to have their wives join the Family Readiness Group (FRG) associated with their deployment unit. The purpose of FRGs is to provide support and assistance to family members through a communication network between its members, the chain of command and community resources (DA 608-47). Each unit that deploys, whether as a

company, battalion, or brigade, has an FRG associated with it. It is a ready-made support group for family members during deployment. Meetings are held once a month to inform families about the unit's activities overseas to help ease anxiety by providing information. Another benefit is to be able to socialize with others who are going through the same thing (Drake 2004; Segal 1986). This is especially important for National Guard spouses, who are living in the civilian world while experiencing an event specific to military lifestyle.

Some spouses do not participate in FRGs for a variety of reasons. One reason is due to the geographical distribution of residences of the soldiers. Many soldiers drill and deploy with units that are not close to their home. Geographically, spouses can be separated from the unit. In my experience, for my husband's second deployment, I was 90 minutes away from the unit and hence, the FRG. For spouses with children, this can prove to be an inconvenient hardship, which can further isolate them.

In addition to geographical constraints, not everyone fits in or gets along with the people in their FRG, a factor that can contribute to a lack of spousal support and camaraderie during and after deployment. On the third day of Yellow Ribbon, there is a special session held just for family members. The soldiers are not allowed into these sessions. The purpose of these sessions is to allow wives to voice the issues they had during deployment and are currently experiencing during reintegration.

While observing one of these sessions, I noticed multiple instances of disgruntlement with the FRG. I documented this through what was said by participants and by what I observed through their body language. In this particular session that took place at the 2016 event in the northern part of the state, I was sitting in the back of the room as people came in to take their seats. One of the first things I noticed was that the spouses were showing very little

acknowledgement of each other. You could tell that some of them were strangers. This behavior is indicative of spouses not participating in the FRG during deployments. It shows a lack of camaraderie between them, which indicates a lack of support from each other.

Many would come in, take their seat, and begin playing on their phones. Some of the women sat in groups of two or three and whispered to each other. One such group came in and sat in front of me. The group was composed of three white women who looked to be in their late 20's. When they noticed an older woman sitting on the other side of the aisle from them, they snickered and rolled their eyes. When the session began, the older woman spoke out many times when someone would complain about how the FRG was run. It was at this point that I learned the older woman was FRG leader. She was the mother of a soldier rather than a spouse. One of the women sitting in front of me said, "she needs to shut up." This comment is an indication of not only disgruntlement but also indicates a power struggle between the FRG leader and its members. Due to National Guard spouses living in liminality, the sense of disorientation that occurs during deployments produces boundary ambiguities. The ambiguities experienced by the spouses leads to the refusal to accept someone as a leader. Spouses may feel that mothers do not belong because once married, the spouse should be the number one in the soldier's life.

During the session, many spouses voiced that they did not feel supported through the FRG and did not feel the information coming from the military was enough. One spouse stated that she felt the soldiers were being give too much information at one time and not sharing it with their spouses because it was information overload for them. This implies a lack of communication not only between the National Guard and spouses but between the couples themselves. A few spouses suggested having a briefing before the deployment for them to obtain the information themselves. A young white woman stated that she was frustrated with the lack of

information from the National Guard and FRG, so she took it upon herself to research what to expect during deployment and reintegration. She, and others whom I later interviewed, shared that they did not participate in the FRG because it was more a popularity contest than a support group.

The lack of information coming from the National Guard leaves wives with no choice but to take it upon themselves to conduct their own research and form their own support groups. They are then inoculated into the military culture through the discourse found in self-help books which pertain more to active-duty wives than wives of National Guard soldiers. The discourse from self-help books shapes their perceptions of their deployment and reintegration experience. Lacking military support leads to a negative perception of the deployment and impacts how couples make meaning of the deployment experience (Pittman et al 2004). This is important because it can affect the readiness of the family and the soldier for the next deployment and have implications for retention efforts (Allen et al 2011).

Discourses from Yellow Ribbon Events

While FRGs are there to help families during deployment, Yellow Ribbon events are held after deployment to help couples with reintegration. The events are mandatory for soldiers but optional for spouses. Participants are not held to only spouses but also to family members of the soldier. Each event is three days long. The first day is registration day. The second consists of multiple speakers and sessions aimed at helping spouses understand what their soldiers went through during deployment and aiding in communication between couples. The third day has one more family only session and the awards ceremony.

On registration days, I observed such traditional gendered behavior as women standing behind the men, rather than side by side, when registering and walking about the room. If

children were with them, the woman tended to the children while the man registered. After the man registered, he would receive a bag with the itinerary for the weekend and other information the family would need. The man almost always handed this bag off to the woman to keep track of. There were only a handful of times when I noticed the man tending to a child. It is possible that the man taking the lead is simply due to the fact that he is the soldier. However, this behavior was observed all weekend long. The women tended to stay one step behind the men. Out of all the couples that I observed very few were holding hands and standing next to each other. There are two reasons for this lack of intimacy with each other. First, the couple may not be reintegrating in a healthy manner. On the other hand, public displays of affection, although not explicitly noted anywhere, is frowned upon. While this is a weekend for couples, this is also part of the soldier's job to attend these events. Couples may feel this is more a work weekend than a couple's weekend and feel the need to act accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, the women at these events did not show the camaraderie that the men so frequently portrayed. Throughout the weekend, very few women would hang out or talk with each other, whereas the men would laugh and joke around with each other. The women in the group were not included in the conversations, but instead, they stood behind men, usually playing on their phone or looking around the room. One reason for this lack of camaraderie might be because few women actively participate.

The second day of the event began at 8am. Everyone gathered into a large room, with multiple round tables, where the participants had breakfast earlier that morning. The opening session lasted two hours. A Yellow Ribbon staff member announced the guest speaker, a white man who had been on multiple deployments, and might as well have been a motivational speaker. His speech was aimed at the soldiers, communicating that what they experience upon

returning home is normal. This information is also beneficial to spouses, since it lets them know that what their husband is going through is normal or, it might inform them as to why their husband is acting a certain way.

The speaker discussed common changes among soldiers when they return home - short attention spans, anger and the inability to feel emotion and advised that these are normal responses that come from being hyper-vigilant while on deployment. Soldiers are often unable to shrug off those small annoyances that most people are able to soldier, especially at first. He explained that their perspective had likely changed, since they have been dealing with only serious issues while on deployment, and people caring or worrying about mundane things can set off feelings of anger. During this part of the speech, I observed some of the men looking at each other, smiling and nodding at each, as if to say, "I told you that was normal." As Allen and colleagues (2011) found in their study, transitioning back into family life came with its own anxieties. The speaker in this setting is fulfilling a normalizing function, helping the soldiers reconcile feelings of anxiety and abnormality.

The speaker then turned his attention to the spouses and advised them that it takes a while for soldiers to be able to shut down after a deployment. For the last year they have been going from zero to sixty in a second. It takes much longer to come down. They are used to either/or with nothing in the middle. Soldiers have to work to change their thoughts from thinking everyone is out to get them to emphasizing with other people and considering their feelings. He also warned that one of the more common negative coping strategies among soldiers immediately after returning home is turning to alcohol and advised spouses to watch out for the negative signs and to intervene by either getting their soldier help outside the military or speaking to one of the soldier's friends to intervene. Although on the surface, this seems helpful

advice, it is important to note how this rhetoric also reinforces the traditionally gendered role of wife as caregiver.

After the morning speech, participants were able to choose among smaller classes. The number of classes offered depends on the size of the event. For example, the 2014 event had over 900 participants with 18 classes. There were stress relief activities such as painting, massages, yoga, self-defense class and a fitness and nutrition class. There were also financial classes such as VA benefits, VA home loans, VA healthcare, a business class for entrepreneurs, investment class, employment assistance and education benefits. Lastly there were seminars regarding relationships such as addressing your stress, resiliency, the emotional cycle of deployment, distress from deployment, jumpstart communication and finding a balance. These sessions are interactive. Rather than having to sit and listen to a speech, these classes encouraged participation through various activities. Regardless of the size of the event there are always classes on stress and communication. As such, I now focus my discussion on these two topics.

The destressing class was focused mainly on alleviating the soldier's stress. The leader of the class was a veteran who opened the session with stories of his experiences once returning home from deployment. He began by explaining that when soldiers returned home, they often find that everything has changed, they no longer know their place, and feel as if everyone is competing for their time. This ambiguity adds to the soldier's stress. The advice given to cope with this stress was not to find a balance but to define a new normal. It is spouses (wives) who are told to change here and told to find a balance. This is one more example of the expectations placed upon wives to be Super Spouses who need to take care of their soldier and help him reintegrate.

At every Yellow Ribbon event, there were at least two sessions on communication upon reintegration, suggesting that reintegration is difficult for many families. The general advice given to couples is that reintegration takes time, typically up to a year. They stressed the importance of clarity in conversation, keeping the lines of communication open, and telling the truth. The handout for Communicating Clearly states, “families may find themselves feeling like strangers and face-to-face communication is different than what they have been used to over the previous year.” In addition, many soldiers in this session talked about “stone face,” which is a coping skill in the military that does not transfer to the civilian world. A soldier at the event explained it to me as not showing emotion when talking to others during the deployment. When asked why they continue to do it once they get home, they explained how hard it is to detach from the deployment because they don’t know when they will have to go back because the military is unpredictable. This “stone face” is part of their masculine identity as a soldier, one that is often incompatible with family reintegration.

Another major theme in communication classes focused on the changes that inevitably occur at home while the soldier is deployed. Speakers explained to soldiers that while they are deployed the world at home did not stop. Using the metaphor of deployments as a time capsule, they emphasize that even though the soldier is isolated from their family because of the deployment, their family is at home growing and changing. One soldier told me that he was briefed about this prior to returning home and advised to “tread lightly,” meaning not to try to take over immediately because his spouse had probably been doing everything, both husband and wifely duties, for over a year. While seemingly good advice, this rhetoric can also contribute to boundary ambiguities upon reintegration, a theme I return to later. Specifically, because this advice is based on the premise that communication between husband and wife should already be

solid upon reintegration, wives might misinterpret any lack of interest in participating in things at home as rejection.

Institutional discourses from self-help books, Yellow Ribbon events and FRGs produce and perpetuate the traditional gender roles of man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker. These discourses reinforce the idea of masculinity as the ideal for soldiers and femininity as the ideal for wives. Masculinity is reinforced through discourse focusing on the soldier as the husband and the emphasis on his military career coming before the family. Femininity is reinforced through discourses describing wives as caregivers and servants, who need to learn to accept the fact that they will come second to their husband's military service. The language used to prepare couples for deployment and reintegration revolves around the individual characteristics that will help couples with their coping skills. This leaves out how military discourse and interactions with others influence how couples will come to make meaning of their experiences. Even the perceived lack of communication from the National Guard will shape the meaning of deployment. In the next chapter, I discuss how institutional discourses influence the perceptions and subsequent meaning making of deployment experiences for National Guard couples.

CHAPTER 5. THE MEANING OF DEPLOYMENT: PREPARING FOR THE SUPERBOWL VERSUS BEING THE SUPER SPOUSE

The purpose of this chapter to explore the deployment experiences of National Guard couples. Data were gathered through interviews conducted with National Guard couples, who had gone through at least one deployment while married and conversations overheard at Yellow Ribbon events. Three themes emerged. The first theme focuses on the differing perspectives of soldiers and their spouses. This theme encompasses not only differing perspectives of couples, but also the perspectives of soldiers as women. The second theme is communication during the deployment and effects of this communication on the deployment experience. The last theme pertains to finding support during the deployment in a community where there are not many resources for support. I will show how the institutional discourses that National Guard couples are exposed to are linked to the way they make meaning of their deployment experiences.

DIFFERING PERSEPCTIVES OF THE DEPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

When couples are alerted to the fact that a deployment is pending, the meanings the soldier and their spouse attribute to this are often very different. Some soldiers may become excited because it is time to practice the craft they have been training for. Their spouses, on the other hand, may become filled with anxiety and worry about their soldier. However, the meaning of the deployment is not be same for all soldiers. Women soldiers experience and perceive the deployment experience differently from men soldiers. Gendered meanings hold true for the person left behind to take care of the home. Men, who stay home while their wives are deployed, have a different experience from women who stay behind while their husbands deploy. This section will discuss these gendered differences in perceptions and the subsequent meaning of deployment.

Gendered Differences in Soldiers' Meaning of Deployment

Jason was active duty Army before becoming an officer in the National Guard. He and his wife, Cynthia, married while he was active duty. Since joining the National Guard, he has been deployed twice. When Jason left for his first deployment, his job while overseas was to be administrative. However, during the deployment, his job changed to commanding a unit. Part of this new assignment would be going outside the wire (getting off base for the purpose of combat missions). While Cynthia voiced issues with this, as will be discussed later, Jason could not have been more excited. Jason stated,

In the military, you practice your craft all the time. The deployment is your Superbowl. If you train your whole life to go to the big game, you want to know that you are good enough to do what you do. During the first deployment, I got a chance to lead soldiers in combat and it was probably the most rewarding thing, other than marrying my wife and having children, that I have ever done. At that point in life I had trained my entire adult life and I had gotten into the game and we were successful. There was no greater satisfaction that I had as a soldier

For Jason, being deployed and leading a team in combat was what being a soldier is all about. As Karney and Crown (2007), stated in their study, the ability of soldiers to adapt in a healthy way to deployment makes the deployment experience meaningful and fulfilling because they are using skills they have practiced during their military career. For Jason being able to take command of a unit and go on combat missions, is a huge part of his identity as a soldier.

Amy, on the other hand, had a different perception of going on deployment. Amy and Mike are a dual service couple who have each experienced one deployment while married to each other. For Amy the most challenging part of the deployment was leaving her daughter. She had to fight a lot of guilt about leaving her daughter and her husband and continued to feel this overwhelming guilt upon return. Amy stated, "as a mom leaving was super hard. It is still not socially acceptable for mom to go off and go away to war and leave your children." Even when

Amy returned, it was hard to let go of the guilt of leaving because close family would say things like “how could she have left?” People judging Amy shows that a woman’s worth continues to be judged using normative values of society as woman as wife and mother, man as breadwinner (Harris 2009). Amy’s guilt of leaving her children behind can be attributed to the cultural ideal of intensive mothering, as described by Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006). Women are expected to sacrifice whatever is necessary to ensure their children are taken of, while men are not held to this standard (Bianchi et al 2006).

The difference between Jason and Amy’s account of the meaning of deployment is that Amy identifies more with her culturally acceptable identity as a mom and wife, rather than as soldier. Women soldiers live between two worlds of being a soldier and being a mother and wife, which is the traditional conception of gender roles (Weber 2012). The meaning of woman is married to the concept of femininity and motherhood, not the masculine warrior hero archetype of the military (Prividera and Howard 2012). The duality of masculinity/femininity is still the norm in the military, which leads to differences in meanings for men soldiers and women soldiers. The traditionally gendered beliefs of man as soldier and woman as wife is still prominent and part of gendered identities (Enloe 2000, Prividera and Howard 2012). Regardless of if a woman is a soldier, she is held to the patriarchal standard of woman being mutually exclusive from soldier (Prividera and Howard 2012).

“I Couldn’t Keep Up” Being the Super Spouse

When I interviewed dual service couples who had each been on a deployment, I asked whether it was easier being the soldier on deployment or the spouse back home, the unanimous response was “the soldier.” Amy’s husband, Mike described it this way, “when you are on deployment, you know you are okay. For the ones back home there are so many unknowns. Are

they okay? Are they being shot at right now? Why haven't they called in a couple days?" Jason described combat deployments in terms of it being like the wild, wild west. There is no time for the soldier to think and they forget about the world. While soldiers are dealing with the stress of combat, the spouse at home is living in limbo, worrying about their spouse, while taking on new roles and responsibilities (Allen et al 2011; Faber et al 2008; Warner et al 2009; and Wheeler et al 2010).

Negotiating Feelings of Loss of Control

The Army Wife Handbook, Surviving Deployment, and Today's Military Wife reinforce the idea that spouses need to accept the military lifestyle, in particular, the spouse's duty to accept the lifestyle and the lack of control that comes with it (Cline 2003; Crossley 2007; Pavlicin 2003). Some spouses have difficulty with this lack of control and not being able to control the deployment. Allen et al.'s (2011) found in their study that this lack of perceived control over the deployment experience leads to increases in stress levels. Cynthia, who has been through two deployments with her husband Jason, laughingly admitted that she is a control freak and a planner. When Jason called to inform her of his change in status, the entire meaning of the deployment changed for her. Cynthia stated the new assignment was "not cool with me because the intent was to ride a desk." She stated that not only did she not have control over if he went on deployment or not but when he shared that his assignment had changed, she said "oh no, that was not good. That was not supposed to happen." The meaning of the deployment took a turn for Cynthia. Deployments are never easy but when you know your soldier will not be "outside the wire," they are a little easier to deal with. When Jason was given the new assignment, her stress level increased. This increase in stress levels is due not only to a perceived lack of control but also to trying to live up to the ideal of the military Super Spouse.

This lack of control can make things especially difficult when the soldier calls home and does not sound like himself. On Jason's second deployment, there were times he would call home and "it sounded like him, but it wasn't him." He sounded miserable on the phone. She began crying stating the "desperation of not being able to be there" with him was overwhelming. She worried about him constantly. She felt like she lost her lifeline. She kept thinking to herself that "it was not supposed to be like" that. He was going to do a desk job and then come home. It made this deployment very scary for her. She said, "I was more worried about him on the second deployment and his mental state than the first deployment when I was seeing and witnessing death and being shot at." As she stated, he was supposed to go over there do his desk job and come home. As Jason explained, the reason he sounded so miserable was because on this deployment he was not "in the game." He said, "it was a hard pill for him to swallow." She was trying to be there for Jason in his time of need but was helpless. Her identity as wife took over making her feel inadequate in her role as caregiver. For Jason, his identity as soldier was being compromised by not being able to go on missions.

Negotiating Feelings of Being Overwhelmed

The ideal of the Super Spouse, balancing work and place, making time for others and yourself, and learning your limits (Pavlicin 2007) can lead to feelings of inadequacy especially when responsibilities become overwhelming and you cannot find that perfect balance. Many spouses experience "Murphy's Law" As Pavlicin (2007) states in *Surviving Deployment*, "deployment virtually guarantees one of the kids will get sick, a major appliance will break, the car will start leaking oil, and the dog will run away." Amy, part of a dual service couple, joked about her Murphy's Law experience,

One time I came home and went to turn the water on. There was no water. I was freaking out. I was upset and started crying. I called a friend in tears saying I had

no water. He was like calm down. I'll be right there. He and another friend came over and I'm crying. I don't know what they did but I had water. They were like it's going to be okay. I'm pretty hand and self-reliant but that was just I don't know. It's funny now.

Suddenly a two-person household becomes a one-person household. There is only one parent, one person to cook and clean, and one person to take care of the yard. Everything falls on the shoulders of one person, which in and of itself can be overwhelming and hard to cope with at first, then add in the stress of constantly worrying about your soldier and it becomes overwhelming. Amy would get overwhelmed because she was "trying to be everything." She stated normally could handle it but with Mike gone, it became too much for her to handle.

It is not only Murphy's Law that leads to feelings of being overwhelmed. Christine, who has been through four deployments with her husband, Joey, found it was just the everyday things that made her feel overwhelmed. For their first deployment, it was the first time they have been separated since there were married five years before. At the time of the deployment they had two children, ages three and four years old. As she stated, "I just wasn't handling it all that well. I could not keep up with the housework. I couldn't keep up with bringing the kids to the doctor, and they were in karate and gymnastics." Christine quit her job to stay home due to the overwhelming stress she was under. She also went through a major depression for the first time in her life. She did not talk to anyone and stayed isolated. This emotional toll on Christine can be tied to Allen et al.'s (2011) findings, which found that when spouses do not know about or feel resources are inadequate, they have a harder time coping with the deployment. When I asked why she did not reach out to anyone in the military to help her, she stated it was because she did not know anyone and did not feel like she could handle putting one more thing on her plate by going to FRG meetings. As will be discussed in the next section, many spouses did not

participate in FRG meetings due to everything else they had to do, leading to a lack of feeling supported by the National Guard.

When Amy deployed Mike also found the everyday things overwhelming. Instead of trying to find a new routine that would work for him, he tried “to maintain what Amy brought to the table when she is home and tried to do things the way Amy did them.” The only thing he did differently came to discipline of the children. Mike is also a soldier, who works full time for the National Guard, because of his job he felt he needed to be sterner with the children than Amy. Amy spoke of her experiences in terms of her identity as mom and wife, whereas Mike would often interject into his explanation of things, his job as a soldier. Even while “trying to maintain what Amy brought to the table,” his main identity was still as soldier, not as father and husband. Even in everyday life, men identify as soldiers and women identify as mothers and wife, supporting the traditional gendered ideology perpetuated through military discourses.

THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN COUPLES DURING DEPLOYMENT

Studies have found that communication during deployment, especially those that are frequent and meaningful increases marital bonds and satisfaction (Baptist et al 2011; MacDermid et al 2005; Wheeler and Stone 2010). However, depending on the soldier’s location, communication is either readily available or spotty at best depending on the communication infrastructure available on the base. Couples are advised that regardless of the communication availability, it is imperative that they keep the lines of communication open because this has an impact on reintegration (Cline 2003; Crossley 2003; Pavlicin 2007).

Nina and Donald experienced two deployments while they were married. Nina would get depressed each day Donald didn’t call or email her. She became “obsessed” with waiting by the phone or constantly checking her email for communication from her husband. She would email

him every day, sometimes begging him for an email back just saying hi. She stated at the end of the day she was “devastated” if she did not hear from him. It completely consumed her time. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this lack of communication during the deployment between Nina and Donald was one of the reasons for their eventual divorce.

In addition to communication infrastructure, communication between spouses can also be impeded during deployment due to security issues. The simple question, “how was your day?” sometimes cannot be answered honestly. Cynthia remembered when Jason was active duty, “they warned you. Be careful of what you say on the phone because someone is probably listening to see if they can get some information from the soldier talking to someone back home.” This can impede meaningful conversations between spouses, which can lead to greater stress levels among spouses if they feel their soldier is not being completely honest with them.

Another impediment to communication overseas is when there is an incident overseas and a soldier is wounded. When this occurs, communications are shut down. This is to allow for family notification of the wounded soldier’s condition. However, sometimes soldiers are able to send out a quick email or call home for a minute before communication is shut down. When this happens, rumors spread quickly. Just like the game of telephone, the more people the information goes through the more distorted the information. Not being able to talk to your soldier makes hearing these rumors especially difficult to deal with. Cynthia would hear about incidents regarding Jason’s unit overseas and worry until she was able to talk to him. She thought it was easier to deal with the physical danger he was in rather than dealing with the rumors.

This would lead her to become hypervigilant and constantly on edge. Cynthia and Jason live down a dead-end street where virtually no one drove down. During the deployment, if she

would spot a strange car coming down the road, she would panic. There were days when she would stand at the window just waiting to see if a strange car would pass. Jason knew her stress level was high sometimes because he would not be able to call home for 48 hours. Cynthia stated those were the days when she would stare out the window. She stated, “it was a constant fear.”

Even for couples serving overseas together, stress levels would increase when incidents would occur, and they couldn’t talk to their spouse immediately. When Alex and Holly, a dual service couple, deployed together, they were separated from each other sporadically throughout the deployment. One night the zone Holly was working in was hit with rockets. It took Alex five days to get in touch with her, even though they were in the same country. He said those five days were the biggest challenge of the deployment because he was worried about her, but he also had to keep his head in the game.

Self-help books suggest couples discuss expectations regarding communication prior to leaving for the deployment (Cline 2003; Crossley 2003; Pavlicin 2007). Since soldiers tend to forget about the world while on deployment, they also forget that at home, the world keeps spinning. Some soldiers expect the world to stop when they call home. Jason would be disappointed if everyone wasn’t home when he called. Cynthia would have to explain that they had cheerleading practice or football practice or some other extracurricular activity she had to get the children to. Jason laughed at this point in the interview stating, “I forgot they had a life outside of mine.”

While Jason was understanding of Cynthia not being able to answer the phone or not everyone being when he called, Kenneth expected Leslie to drop everything when called. Leslie and Kenneth are a dual service couple that have each been through one deployment. When Kenneth deployed, they were not yet married. Kenneth would expect Leslie to drop everything

when he called. Living up to her expectation as wife as cheerleader and supporter, she did as he asked. Leslie stated,

When he deployed, when he would call, he would expect me to drop everything. He expected to be the center of attention. I didn't like it, but I had to deal with it. I knew when he was awake and when he would go to bed at night. So, I would have to run around and get everything done for when he called. I was working a full-time job; I had the kids. It wasn't easy to make sure that I could devote all that time to him, but I had to. My days were longer, and my nights were shorter. He demanded that time. Whatever it took for him to be successful in his deployment I made sure he had what he needed. I wanted to make sure he was successful.

Leslie is the epitome of the concept of the Super Spouse. She took care of everything she needed to take care of even if she didn't like it. The Super Spouse concept defined her identity even though they were not married at the time of Kenneth's deployment.

However, when it was Leslie's turn to deploy, the same rules did not apply. Leslie explained, "when I would call, he couldn't talk, and I was deflated to nothing. How could I give all my time to you, yet you don't return it to me?" Leslie would go on to justify this by stating that he was working and that the only way he could deal with her being deployed was to throw himself into his work. Kenneth also justified this reaction by stating that he was working in a hospital, seeing patients back to back, and did not have time to talk to her. These stark gender differences in expectations when it comes to communication portrays traditional gender differences in expectations. Leslie, as wife, is supposed to be there for her husband. This is her role as wife as servant. Kenneth, on the other hand, does not have to live up to this expectation. His role as breadwinner and soldier are more important than hers. Even though Leslie was "deflated to nothing" her identity as Super Spouse caused her to justify his lack of support to her when she needed it.

Regardless of communication impediments, every spouse I talked to stated that when they would finally hear their soldier's voice, they were extremely relieved. Leslie stated she

would have borrowed money or gone into debt to have Facetime with her husband while he was deployed. She said the relief of hearing his voice and seeing his face took all the worries away and helped her tremendously throughout the deployment. For Cynthia, she would try to stay strong and put on a happy face, but some days were easier than others, usually the days she was able to hear from Jason.

FINDING SUPPORT DURING THE DEPLOYMENT

For Jason and Cynthia, being former active-duty Army, found that it helped with their subsequent deployments in the National Guard. Cynthia found that the Army prepared them much better for deployments and separation. A big difference for them between being active duty and being a part of the National Guard was the support received not only by the military but by the surrounding community. In their experience, while living on the military base, when soldiers deployed, the whole post and the whole community rallied around the families. When a unit was getting ready to deploy, the military would notify the schools and talk to the local the churches. This got the entire community behind the families. Jason stated “knowing the family is taken care of is one less thing the soldier must worry about on deployment. The soldier is better able to focus on his job when the bullets are flying.”

In their experience, when you are in the National Guard, unless there are many soldiers from the same community deployed at the same time, the community does not rally around the families. Everyone is too wrapped up in their own civilian lives to understand the stresses that deployment brings. Cynthia stated that “some people would say the dumbest stuff.” She understood that it was well-intentioned, but it was still dumb. She stated people just did not have clue of the stress she was under and the stress they were adding to her plate. Cynthia stated, “I just wanted to scream, I don’t give a shit about the bake sale. My husband is being shot at every

day; would you like to talk about that? I don't care if we haven't met the quota for the bake sale." She was in survival mode, putting on a happy face and acting like everything was fine on the outside, while inside she was screaming. She stated, "she would wake up in the morning, put a smile on her face and go about her day," portraying the ideal Super Spouse, who can handle it all without complaint.

Without much military support during deployment, military spouses have no choice but to lean on civilians who may or may not understand what they are going through. Cynthia and her children found support through her Bible study group while Jason was gone on deployment. She didn't have military support so the people in their Bible study group would take them fishing at one of the member's pond at his house. She stated that they were the ones who had her back. One of her friends was married to a veteran, and she understood what Cynthia was going through. She would bring her meals and leave little gifts at her door, like wine or bath salts. She would also get together once a month with a few wives whose husbands were also deployed that lived near her and either go to the movies or just hang out together and talk. I overheard a conversation between a few spouses at a Yellow Ribbon event state that if they ever had to go through a deployment again, they would take it upon themselves to form a group for support rather than relying on the military and FRG.

Others found support from their family. For Leslie, her support came from her brother, mother, and sister. Her brother was the one she leaned on the most because she knew he could tell him anything and it would not go anywhere. She stated that she was selective about what she told people. She would say certain things to certain people that she knew could handle what she was saying. Mike depended on his sister and brother when Amy was deployed. Being a soldier himself, his friends in the Guard would also help him out when they could. Christine would talk

to her brother a lot, but she was disappointed with the feedback she would receive, which was usually “it will get better.”

Out of everyone I interviewed, no one participated in their FRG. For some it was due to geographical constraints, for others it was due to not wanting to get caught up in the popularity contest. For Nina, on her first deployment with Donald, she found that she had nothing in common with most of the people in the Family Readiness group due to her age. Many of the participants were mothers rather spouses. However, because the communication with her husband was lacking, the FRG gave her much of the information she needed but she did not get involved. By not participating in the FRG, regardless of the reason, leads to a perceived lack of support from the military which leads to a negative perception of the deployment experience (Pittman et al. 2004). It also leads to a negative perception of the National Guard in general, especially when the term family friendly is thrown around but not follow through with action.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the purpose of Yellow Ribbon events is to provide support to families when it comes to reintegration. At one of the Yellow Ribbon events, I asked a staff member what their perception is of the reception of Yellow Ribbon by soldiers and their spouses. He told me that he felt experienced (older) soldiers were more grateful for Yellow Ribbon events than the inexperienced (younger) soldiers because when the National Guard first started deploying in 2004, they did not have Yellow Ribbon to help them with reintegration. This is contrary to what I observed at Yellow Ribbon events and what I was told by my interview participants. From my observational viewpoint at each event I attended, neither experienced nor inexperienced soldiers enjoyed or were grateful for the weekend as both young and old either displayed or verbalized not wanting to be there. During the event, especially in the larger and longer sessions, soldiers and spouses were playing on their phones. At one event, the soldier

sitting next to me was shopping on Amazon during one of the speeches. Body language, such as sitting with the arms crossed or staring up at the ceiling, also portrayed a lack of interest in the event. Many participants verbalized their angst over the weekend by stating things like, they were not having fun, the weekend is “stupid”, or they didn’t understand why they had to be there in the first place.

I asked Jason and Cynthia about their experience at Yellow Ribbon events. Jason explained, “I didn’t get anything out of it. I don’t need advice...It was miserable. I played on my phone.” Cynthia felt the same way stating, “Yes, it didn’t do anything for me. I didn’t need them to do anything for me...You’re run through like cattle and checking the box.” In addition, Jason and Cynthia felt that it was taking time away from their children and was “mandatory fun.” Jason put it like this, “When you tell me I have to find a babysitter so I can go do some mandatory Army fun, yeah, I’ll show up for our mandatory fun and screw on my little happy face and then I’m going back to my life.” These statements portray a lack of interest in support from the military. However, when you do not feel like you are getting support during the deployment, you may not be open to support after the deployment. In addition, feeling like you are “run through like cattle and checking the box does not portray a family friendly ideology, neither does having to find a babysitter. Yellow Ribbon events do offer babysitting services but during Jason and Cynthia are not comfortable leaving their children with just anyone.

Alex viewed it as a “drunk-fest.” When I asked what he meant by that, he stated that all he did all weekend was drink with his buddies. They went to the sessions because they had to, but they did not really pay attention to the speaker. Again, this shows a block towards being open to receiving military support. However, due to the masculine nature of the military, this unwillingness to be open to support services could be attributed to the stigma associated with

asking for help. In an institution of hegemonic masculinity, seeking support or even the perception of needing help, could be seen as a sign of weakness, which threatens the perception of masculinity that soldiers are encouraged to display.

Everyone I interviewed stated that support from the National Guard during deployments is lacking, however, no one really knew what they could do to help these families. As Alex stated, not only are you dealing with people from all over the state at the same time but there are a thousand different issues. “There is just no way to get it right.” Families are different from one another in terms that they come from different backgrounds and have different characteristics. However, what I observed and learned from my interviews is the support is there, it is a perception of a lack of support that is the problem. In the analysis of self-help books, all of them encouraged and advocated in the participation in support programs. However, at the same time, it could be seen as a sign of weakness for families to seek support, because women spouses’ behavior is seen as an extension of their husbands’. As described above, even for spouses to seek support could be seen as threat to a male soldier’s masculinity in the sense that he cannot take care of his family.

The experiences of both soldiers and spouses while separated from each other has an impact on the effectiveness of reintegration when the soldier returns home. In the next chapter, I discuss issues with reintegration and the differing outcomes of deployment as it pertains to National Guard couples.

CHAPTER 6. COMING HOME: ISSUES WITH REINTEGRATION AND RESILIENCY

The purpose of this chapter to examine what happens upon reintegration with National Guard couples. Data for this chapter came from interviews with National Guard couples, three couples interviewed together, two wives interviewed apart from their husbands, and two men soldiers interviewed apart from their wives. Three major themes emerged after data analysis: factors affecting reintegration, factors leading to divorce, and resiliency. I will first discuss the changes that occur within marriages due to the experiences of soldiers and spouses while on deployment. Next, I will discuss the various factors that led to divorces with the individuals that I interviewed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of what couples attribute their resiliency. I will show how experiences on deployment along with institutional discourses shape the reintegration process and its outcome.

FACTORS AFFECTING REINTEGRATION

Leslie, who has experienced deployment as both a spouse and a soldier best describes what it is like for a soldier coming home.

You have to adapt. You don't have an option. You have to improvise and go through it. It's a challenge. You're living in society one day and then you're plucked out and taken away from everyone you love and everyone who loves you and your family. Then they put you in a zone that is very, very dangerous and you may or may not come home and when you are done, they pluck you back out and put you back in society. It doesn't work that easy because everything you have had happen over there, you have to deal with over here and reintegrate. Your thought processes are not the same. You've changed whether you want to admit it or not, you have changed. You are a changed person that will never be the same person you were. You try to act the same but you're not. It forever changes you and that's a challenge. You have to grow through the experiences.

Leslie's explanation of the reintegration process portrays why military life is unique from the lives of most civilians. Typically, civilians are not taken away from their lives, placed in a dangerous zone, and then expected to go home like nothing happened. However, in the life of

National Guard members, that is exactly what happens and is now what is expected. Just as spouses are told to view deployments as growing experiences (Pavlicin 2007), Leslie states that it is important for soldiers to grow through their experiences as well. Her statement puts the responsibility for adapting on the individual person similar to the way self-help books put the responsibility of experiencing deployments in a positive manner on the individual spouse, without situating the individual within the context of the institution.

Experiencing Boundary Ambiguity

As the advice books and seminars at Yellow Ribbon advise, some soldiers may take more time than others to disconnect from the deployment. Reintegration takes time for both the spouse and the soldier. After being separated for a year or more, both spouses will have experienced events that changed them and their perspectives. Cynthia found that after the second deployment, Jason returned a little lost. She found he had trouble reconnecting with the family. This is explained by the identity soldiers must adopt on deployment. This identity includes being stoic and not being emotionally vulnerable. Due to this, re-connecting emotionally to the family is challenging for soldiers (Baptist et al 2011; Erbes et al 2011; Goff et al 2009).

In Jason's case, his job also kept him away from the family, which further exacerbated reintegration problems. His job was two hours away, so he only spent weekends at home. The children were so used to him being gone all the time, they no longer asked where he was going if they would see him packing or when he would be returning home. When he would return home, the children would just look at him and say, "oh hey dad, you're back" and go back to whatever they were doing. He and Cynthia laugh about it now stating that at least the dog is happy when he comes home. With the family becoming used to Jason being gone Jason was confronted with feelings of "where do I fit in." He stated, "they didn't need me, why do I need to be here." Jason

was experiencing boundary ambiguity that many soldiers experience upon reintegration (Faber et al 2008). However, in this case, Jason was not able to fully reintegrate into the family before having to return to work, leaving him unable to rectify the feelings of boundary ambiguity by renegotiating family roles immediately upon return. While he was home physically, psychologically he was absent, which Faber et al (2008) found in their study of returning reservists.

Rather than feeling boundary ambiguities related to not knowing his place in his family, Mark experienced ambiguity due to losing his family. Mark was served with divorce papers shortly after he began his deployment. Upon return home, he did not know where he fit in anymore. He did not identify with the soldier identity as much as the other soldiers I interviewed. Rather, he identified more with being a husband and father. Losing his family meant losing that part of his identity.

Changes in Identities

As Madden-Dedrich et al. (1999) found in their study of returning reservists, constant renegotiation of family roles changes identities. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jason identifies more as a soldier than as a husband or father. These frequent separations from his family and lack of time to fully reintegrate explains why his identity shifted from husband/father before deployment to soldier after deployment. Gubrium and Holstein (2001) explain that a person's identity will depend on the context and the social interactions they participate in. Due to Jason being away from home and being surrounded by interactions with other soldiers more than interactions with his family, his main identity became one of soldier with husband/father second.

Christine, who has been through four deployments and multiple separations from her husband, Joey, due to military obligations states that Joey had changed due to his deployments.

She feels he is cold to her and distant. “Before his deployments his demeanor and everything was more outgoing. He was way more affectionate,” stated Christine. He would send her cards telling her he loved her and other things. Then one day, the cards just stopped coming. At the time of the interview, Christine and Joey had not been intimate in months. She would ask Joey to sit with her on the couch while they were watching television and he would reply, “no, I’m fine over here.” When she asked him one day why he did not show the affection towards her that he used to, Joey replied, “That guy is dead.” For Joey, his identity as romantic husband was completely buried by his deployment experiences. The type of boundary ambiguity being experienced by Joey is ambiguous presence (Faber et al 2008). Ambiguous presence is a psychological disconnection from the family (Faber et al 2008). While many soldiers are able to adjust relatively quickly, unfortunately due to Joey’s many absences from the family, he has not been able to readjust.

Christine feels like this disconnection is personal rejection but states that she knows it’s not. Once Joey returned from deployment, he became hard on himself and “always belittles himself.” She stated that she tries to encourage him by keep all the negative things to herself. She doesn’t want him to feel guilty or put a heavier weight on him than he is already carrying. Christine felt like he was there physically but not mentally. Joey refused to be interviewed, so I can only speculate about why he withdrew from Christine and family life. However, previous studies have found that when soldiers are dealing with issues related to combat experiences, if they do not know how to compensate, they withdraw from family and friends (Allen et al. 2011; Baptist et al. 2011; Erbes et al. 2011; and Faber et al. 2008). However, for Christine this put an additional burden on her. She is identifying with the military wife identity prescribed by self-

help books that state it is the duty of the military wife to support their soldiers throughout the changes they face (Pavlicin 2003).

Alex admitted in his interview that he came back a different person and reintegration was also hard for him handle. As he explained, “there was little to no affection at home, including sex.” He came back a cold person and the bond he had felt with his wife was gone. It got to the point that Alex did not want to go home after work because he did not know what he would be facing. This lack of a bond led to arguments regarding Holly’s son who was living with them. Alex did not agree with his behavior and the way Holly would “let him get away with everything.” He stated Holly’s son would not help out around the house and would sit around and play X-box all night and day. When he would confront Holly with this, Holly would take her son’s side. The difference between Alex and Holly’s situation and other couples’ situations upon return is that they deployed together. Rather than renegotiating familial roles and responsibilities, because of the detachment from each other that occurred while on their deployment (to be discussed in a later section), neither one of them tried to remedy the situation. Both spouses were experiencing issues related to combat experience which impeded their communication with each other and led to eventual divorce.

Communication Difficulties upon Reintegration

Upon return many couples find it hard to communicate with each other. This is why there are so many sessions regarding communication at Yellow Ribbon events. During Leslie and Kenneth’s interview, Leslie stated she was given the advice that upon Kenneth’s return, she should not ask him what happened while on deployment. They told her, when he is ready to talk about it, he will talk about it. This was hard for her to take because they were extremely close as a couple. She felt as a wife he should be able to tell her. However, as a soldier, she knew he

could not breach anything and there were certain things he could not talk about. Some soldiers do not want to tell their spouses what they have experienced. Jason stated in his interview, “I’ve told her some, but she doesn’t need to know all of it. Sometimes ignorance is bliss.” Cynthia accepts this because she feels she knows enough about what happened during his deployments and does not want all the “gory details.” By accepting that their soldier will not tell them everything, Leslie and Cynthia are accepting their identity as military wife by knowing their place by not asking question and understanding that the military comes first before marriage (Weber 2012).

For Nina the lack of communication was the hardest part of the reintegration process with Donald. When Donald would not talk to her but was obviously going through something, she would worry about how much stress he was under and constantly ask herself, “Oh my God, what did he go through?” The few times he would talk to her, he was drinking. When he would get drunk, he would talk about things he saw over there, try to show her pictures and get emotional. Seminars on communication at Yellow Ribbon events warn that if the communication is not good during the deployment, communication upon reintegration will be even harder. Donald and Nina did not communicate well during the deployment. He barely called her, and they only communicated through email a few times during the entire deployment, even though she would beg him for information. All of this put additional strain on Nina both during and after the deployment. For all of these couples, their husbands did not seem to have as many issues with the lack of communication between them. This is because wives tend to hold stronger definitions of family than husbands and these definitions can have negative effects on the marital relationship and the stability of the marriage (Madden-Dedrich et al. 1999; Steward 2005).

Compensating with Drugs and Alcohol

In addition to withdrawing from family and friends upon reintegration, some soldiers will turn to alcohol and drug use in order to compensate for the things they cannot talk about. Except for three of the couples I interviewed, all others dealt with issues of alcohol and/or drug use upon return. When Donald returned from deployment, he drank more and began using drugs. His sister enabled him by supplying him with the drugs. Nina would pull her sister-in-law to the side and tell her that what she is doing is not helping her brother. She explained to her sister-in-law that she did not understand what was going on. She explained that he wasn't sleeping at night and crying all the time.

Christine had issues with Joey drinking too much to the point that some nights she was afraid to go to bed while he was up drinking. It got to the point where their daughter tried talking to Joey because the drinking really bothered her. He would justify it by saying he was not hurting anybody or spending a lot of money. He stated that he was not going out and getting drunk at bars so they should be happy. When Christine would try to talk to him about it, he would tell her to stop accusing him of being a bad person.

When Alex and Holly returned from their deployment, Alex stated that for the first 45 – 60 days, he and about 15 other soldiers he returned with were at the non-commissioned officer's club every night getting "sloppy drunk." Mark, who deployed once during his marriage to his first wife, stated that for the first six months after his return home, he would buy whiskey by the case. For Mark, the situation was a little different. Not only was he dealing with the stress of returning from deployment, he was also grieving the breakup of his marriage. He stated he still deals with the aftermath of the deployment and depression, but he now knows how to deal with it in a manner that doesn't involve getting "sloppy drunk."

When I asked these wives whether they told anyone in the military about their soldiers' issues both of them said no. They felt like the people in the military were their soldiers' friends not theirs and they were not comfortable talking to anyone about it. At one of the Yellow Ribbon events, one spouse recommended to another that she and her husband get counseling to combat the issues they were facing as a couple. Almost the entire room screamed out, "oh no, you cannot bring that up!" This suggests not only a stigma regarding counseling but also a disconnect between military wives and the military. The stigma regarding counseling can be attributed to the masculine identity that soldiers must identify with in order to fit into the military. Part of this masculine identity is being strong and able to face adversity without the help the others. Although wives are coached to help their soldiers when they return, if there is a disconnect and sense of not belonging to the military family, who are they to turn to when they need help. The comment at Yellow Ribbon, "oh no, you cannot bring that up!" reflects the part of the military wife identity to know their place and not to ask for help for their soldier. In addition, the Yellow Ribbon events did not specifically address drug and alcohol issues up returning from deployment. The majority of my interview participants verbalized issues with drugs and/or alcohol up return. However, with spouses not feeling comfortable enough to go to someone in the military for help and the military remaining largely quiet on the subject, spouses are left in the position of dealing with this issue on their own, which leads to harder reintegrations.

DIVORCING AFTER DEPLOYMENT

While attending my last Yellow Ribbon event, I asked one of the staff members about how many participants they had signed up for the weekend. He informed me that he really did not know because many of the soldiers changed their registration upon return from deployment. Soldiers sign up for Yellow Ribbon events prior to leaving for deployment and list the people

that will be accompanying them to the event. The soldiers that changed their registration when they came back from deployment were taking their wives off the list and adding their girlfriends. He stated he began to notice the changes at the prior Yellow Ribbon event he attended the year before. This suggests that marriages are breaking up soon after the return from deployment since Yellow Ribbon events are held 90 days after return. This could be a sign that divorces are increasing in the National Guard. This could also explain why I observed a lack of camaraderie among the women participants at the Yellow Ribbon events. While I cannot speculate as to what caused the divorces of the Yellow Ribbon participants, my interview participants with the exception of one couple had all experienced divorce. In the next two sections, I will discuss what led to the divorces of three of my participants. For two of them it was infidelity, one on the part of the soldier; the other on the part of the spouse. For the other couple, it was the experience of deploying together and not having spousal support that led to the eventual breakup of their marriage.

Infidelity

Kenneth, Leslie, Jason and Cynthia all stated in their interviews that one of the hardest things about being separated is not having the ability to physically touch their spouse. Missing physical contact is why self-help books advise spouses to avoid hanging around with people of the opposite sex (Cline 2003; Crossley 2007; and Pavlicin 2003). While this could be good advice, it is assuming the traditional conception of heterosexual gender relations excluding from the conversation those that are not heterosexual (Weber 2012). The military is beginning to experience many changes regarding sexuality in the military. For one, homosexuals are now allowed to openly serve in the military and homosexual marriages are also recognized in the

military. These changes will require a change in discourses surrounding marriage and the assumption of the traditional dichotomy of masculinity/femininity.

Alex has been in the National Guard for over 20 years. Because his longevity in the National Guard, I asked him what his perception of infidelity and divorce in the military was. He explained,

When people are away from each other, sometimes bad things happen. Whether male or female, they will go about three months before getting lonely. They will go out and meet someone and it turns into a bad situation. It's great for nine months but your soldier eventually comes back. I've seen it. I hate it but it happens. I'm fighting for my country and you are having a good time with whoever...it's just a bad mix. There's no fix for that.

The overwhelming sense of being alone has been found in previous studies pertaining to the adaptation of spouses after the deployment begins (Madden et al. 1999; Wheeler & Stone 2010). The emphasis as part of the Super Spouse identity is to the ability to survive on your own (Pavlicin 2003). Cheating on your spouse contradicts the Super Spouse identity because it is part of a spouse's duty to her husband to be waiting for them when they return from deployment (Pavlicin 2003). Therefore, a huge part of being the Super Spouse is being independent. If a spouse is independent and can survive on their own, they will not need to rely on anyone to help them; thereby, limiting the chances of them meeting someone that could entice a lonely spouse yearning for physical contact while their soldier is away for a year.

Mark had a unique experience when it came to infidelity. When word came that Mark was to be deployed, he admitted that he did emotionally withdraw from his ex-wife before the deployment. He stated he did not even realize that was what he was doing. According to studies, this is a common response in order to emotionally prepare for the deployment (Pavlicin 2003; Riggs and Riggs 2011; Yablonsky et al. 2016). Not only did Mark withdraw emotionally he also pulled himself out of making decisions. He told his wife, "I will be gone for a year, you have to

learn how to do this on your own.” This withdrawal of support could have translated into feelings of him not caring for her. As Segal (1986) found, when spouses do not feel supported, especially in new marriages, like Mark’s it adds stress to an already stressful situation. Whether this led to his wife’s infidelity or not, I can only speculate. However, two months after deploying, Mark was served with divorce papers.

The divorce affected Mark to the point where it affected his performance during the deployment. He would have panic attacks to the point of passing out. He would get angry quickly. He got into a verbal altercation with one of his superiors. He stated his head wasn’t in it anymore. However, he would constantly ask to go on missions because he felt that was the only time things made sense to him. He stated when he wasn’t idle, he did not have to think about what was going on back home. He lost his identity as husband, and in order to cope with that loss, he threw himself into his identity as a soldier. His reaction to the news supports Segal’s (1986) study stating that divorce damages soldier’s readiness and leads to disciplinary problems.

While Mark experienced divorce and infidelity prior during the deployment, Nina and Donald were divorced after the deployment due to infidelity on Donald’s part. Nina and Donald had been married for three years for his first deployment. Both were in their early 20’s at the time of the first deployment. After he returned home from the first deployment, on top of Donald’s drinking and drug use, she became suspicious of infidelity. She would find text messages from other women on his phone, he would hang up the phone when she would walk into the room, and he would always go running or play tennis with other women. Despite her suspicions, because she had quit her job to stay home with their daughter while Donald was deployed, she was not financially secure enough to leave him. They went through another

deployment together before she was able to finish school and gain financial stability to be able to divorce him.

Self-help books and advice received during Yellow Ribbon events warn couples that deployments have the ability to break a marriage (Cline 2003; Crossley 2007; Pavlicin 2003). If there is a fracture in the marriage before deployment, the deployment will not make it go away, it will magnify it. This is exactly what occurred to Nina and Donald. There was already a fracture caused by his infidelity before Donald left for the first deployment causing a lack of trust toward Donald. Add to this the lack of communication between Nina and Donald while on the deployment, and the fracture grows due to fewer feelings of connection, further decline in trust, and less satisfaction with the relationship (Baptist et al. 2011).

Lacking Spousal Support

Dual service couples have the second highest divorce rate in the military after women soldiers married to civilian husbands. This can be attributed to this type of couple not fitting with the culturally approved traditional marital arrangement of man soldier married to civilian spouse. Gender roles in dual service couples are not as clear cut as in the typical military marriage because either soldier could be deployed at any time. In addition, there is no one person, typically prescribed as the woman in the marriage, to adopt the gender specific identity of the Super Spouse, who's duty it is to be there for their soldier whenever "he" needs her to be. When a married couple deploys together, they are faced with new challenges that run counter to the traditional marital identities reinforced through institutional discourse.

Alex and Holly deployed together to the same combat zone after seven years of marriage. Both were very excited to be able share this experience with each other. What they did not know was that it would tear them apart. When I asked Alex, how the deploying together affected his

marriage, he said, “it destroyed it.” When he and Holly deployed together, there were four other married couples who deployed with them. All four of them are now divorced. He stated that you would think that deploying together would bring you closer as a couple because you are both able to understand what the other one is going through, but it is the opposite. It actually divides you as a couple. He believed that one of the problems was that both were going through same level of stress simultaneously and you cannot hide it. It is hard to be with each other every day over there and go through the same things. He added, when one of you is at home, at least one of you is not operating at a high level of stress and can be supportive to the other spouse.

Alex went on to explain that while they were on deployment, their marriage came second to his job of making sure his soldiers were okay. Alex had 142 soldiers under him. When he and Holly would come back from their dinner, soldiers would be lined up outside their sleeping quarters. Every night she would ask, “how many are going to be lined up Cynthiaght?” It was something that happened every night and became a huge source of contention between them because she felt rejected by him putting his soldiers first before her. One night their base was hit with a rocket propelled grenade. Alex left to go check on his soldiers to make sure everyone was okay. Holly became upset because he was leaving her alone. Alex told her that she was fine and alive, and he needed to go check on everyone else. Her response to him was “Well, I’m your wife.” Alex felt a loyalty to his soldiers and did not want to turn his back on them when they needed him.

This scenario portrays Alex as putting his soldier identity ahead of his husband identity. Holly, on the other hand, wanted him to put his husband identity first. It is hard to live up to the traditional gender roles prescribed by institutional discourse, when you are both on deployment. As Gubrium and Holstein (2001), identities shift according to the context you are facing. With

Alex and Holly's situation, there was either no room for the Super Spouse or she did not want to accept that role because of the context of being in a war zone. Holly did not agree to an interview, so I was able to obtain her point of view on the subject. However, regardless of her acceptance of the Super Spouse identity or even her identity as a wife, she did not support Alex in his choices to take care of his soldiers first. She did not submit to the identity of wife as servant without complaint. She vocalized her dissatisfaction with the situation, but Alex was not receptive due to his engulfment into the soldier identity. Their marriage was lacking the supportive, dedicated wife who manages everything (Weber 2012). However, the support was lacking on each part. As Amy and Mike, and Kenneth and Leslie's relationships have shown, it is not necessarily the gender of the person being supportive but the fact that each spouse supports each other.

ADAPTING AND OVERCOMING: RESILIENCY AFTER DEPLOYMENT

Fortunately, the majority of couples manage to get through deployments without a breakup in their marriage. The couples who have successfully made it through deployments had several habits in common. The most valuable habit was understanding each other and working as a team (Walsh 2002). They kept their lines of communication open and figured it out on their own. They understood what the other needed from them. Jason and Cynthia developed a special code to talk to each other. Cynthia would ask Jason "how was your day?" If he replied, "it could have been better." She knew they had been hit that day and it was not a good day. She would be careful with what he told her at that time in order to not add more stress to plate. For Mike and Amy, it was simply understanding that each person needs to vent sometime. When Mike would call home from deployment, Amy would let him vent about what was going on overseas, and then Mike would let Amy vent about what was going on back home. These two couples support

previous studies (Patterson 2002; Walsh 2002), which found that when couples are able to communicate with each other, the marriage is able to withstand stressful situations.

Leslie keeps the lines of communication open with Kenneth especially when she feels she needs time with Kenneth. She admits that she may feel guilty for asking but sometimes she doesn't. She states "this is her marriage. The Army will always be there, they (as a couple) may or may not." She feels it is important to carve out time to be together when one spouse is needing the time. She believes that for their marriage to survive she needs to be independent to a degree so they can each do what they need to do to make it work but she works every day on supporting him no matter what.

We face the same challenges as everybody else, we may make it look easier sometimes because a lot of people look at us and don't see the challenges. But we have the same struggles. We just deal with them differently. I choose to be happy; I don't choose to live in the pain. We do our thing and at the end of the day we come back and have together time. I think that lead to our success, getting back to the basics and focusing on each other.

Out of all the people I interviewed, Leslie personified the Super Spouse identity. In the quote above, she uses very similar words to describe her marriage as the words found in *Surviving Deployment* when describing the Super Spouse. The difference is Leslie put it in terms of her marriage rather than as an individual. This also shows how strongly she clings to the identity of military wife and wife as servant. Even though she is also a soldier, her and Kenneth's marriage and behaviors towards each other takes on the form of the traditional gendered ideology perpetuated by the military, i.e., a clear division of the concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Christine also clings to this Super Spouse identity when she speaks of her husband's deployments as his sacrifice. Throughout the interview, never did she put herself into the equation and talk about their sacrifice. She views it as her duty as a wife to support her husband no matter what kind of hardships she is going through. Christine states, "he is sacrificing his time

away from us to have better pay and insurance.” She feels lucky that she is able to stay home to take care of the kids, while he is away fighting for our country. Her words are portraying her subservience to Joey. He is “sacrificing,” while she is able to stay home. The things she does not mention is her sacrifices such as her feelings of being overwhelmed, of having to quit her job to keep up with all her duties or having to get on medication to cope with the stress.

When I asked Jason and Cynthia what they felt kept them together all these years and throughout the hardships, both adamantly stated, their faith in God and in each other. Before their first deployment, they had many major life stressors that hit all at once. In 2000, they lost a baby. In 2002 they had a baby and lost their house in a hurricane. Then in 2004 Jason deployed. It was five years of nothing but stress. Cynthia stated, “The thing about Jason and me, one of the reasons we are still married throughout all that is because of our faith. We have such strong faith and our marriage was grounded on that from the get-go. It sustained us.” According to Jason, “Our relationship is like titanium. It’s bulletproof. You can’t go through losing two babies, losing a house, building a house, and two deployments. Who does that and sticks with it?” Cynthia replied, “not many I’ll tell you. There is no way we will get a divorce. If you can live through that much hell and still be married, there is nothing else life can throw at you.” By Jason and Cynthia sticking together and making meaning of their adversities together through their faith, they have shown that resiliency is possible.

As previous studies have found remaining flexible, providing mutual support and working as a team helps couples to overcome adversity and become resilient (Patterson 2002; Walsh 2002). For the couples who have stayed together, deployments provided a wake-up call as to what was important in life and made them stronger. All of them realized the importance of communication with each other. Leslie calls for a time-out with Kenneth, Jason and Cynthia

developed their own form of communication to understand how each other's day was going without have to ask, and for Amy and Mike it was understanding that each person needed to vent out their frustrations. They maintain flexibility to adapt to whatever military life or life in general throws at them. Each of these couples share their feelings with other, support each other unconditionally, and maintain a positive outlook on life which has sustained them through the hard times.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore through qualitative analysis the unique experiences of National Guard couples during and after deployments. Literature regarding military families is lacking in focusing on this branch of the military. The goal of this study was to fill this gap in the fields of military sociology, family sociology, and gender studies by paying particular attention to National Guard couples rather than subsuming them under active Army experiences. The research questions posed for this study were: (1) How do institutional discourses influence families' expectations and perceptions of their deployment experiences? (2) How do National Guard families manage deployments? (3) How do perceptions and expectations influence family resiliency?

Analysis of self-help books and discourses from Yellow Ribbon events showed reliance on a 1950's family ideology that is rarely found anywhere else in America today. Self-help books perpetuated the gendered separation of spheres where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the homemaker. Women spouses were spoken of in terms of Super Spouses, who could handle everything, if they must, without complaint. She is the ideal spouse that can balance family and military obligations with elegance and grace. Her job is to keep her husband as worry free as possible, so he is able to concentrate on his mission. As Weber (2012) found in her study, the purpose of this type of discourse is to keep with the military's mission of family readiness as war readiness. When soldiers know their families can function without them, the soldier is not distracted from their job by problems going on at home. However, the construction of the Super Spouse leads to feelings of being overwhelmed and lacking control when spouses find they cannot live up to the ideal of the Super Spouse.

While this type of ideology may work with active duty military families because they are isolated from civilians, in the sense that they live either on base or in communities surrounded by other military families, and frequent relocations make it harder for spouses to have careers, National Guard families do not live in this type of environment. National Guard families live in the civilian world, where it is either necessary for both spouses to work or both spouses want their own careers. With more women now getting college degrees and delaying marriage and motherhood in order to concentrate on their careers, the 1950 ideology of separate spheres does not translate well to National Guard families.

National Guard families are living in two worlds, with one foot in the civilian world and the other foot in the military world. The constant back and forth between worlds creates stress for spouses during times of deployment because they are isolated from other National Guard families that are spread throughout the state and also isolated from civilians in the sense that civilians do not understand the stresses added to military spouses when their soldier deploys. Due to these stresses, the military has created support programs to aid spouses through the deployment process. However, my interview participants did not feel supported either during or after their deployments. While the resources were there in the form of Family Readiness Groups, my interview participants did not participate due to either being too far geographically from the meetings, or because they felt that Family Readiness Groups were more of a popularity contest than a support group. During my observations at Yellow Ribbon events, the competition between some of the women and one Family Readiness Group leader was obvious. This lack of perceived support from the National Guard creates additional strains on families already under stress. Spouses stated during interviews and during conversations overheard at Yellow Ribbon events, that due to the lack of military guidance, many do their own research on how to cope with

deployments, which comes from the available self-help books geared towards active military spouses and advocates for the 1950's gendered ideology of the Super Spouse.

In addition to regular deployments, National Guard spouses are also being separated from each other due to jobs in other states or countries because of the greater reliance on National Guard soldiers by the military. This enhances marital strain, especially when there is lack of perceived support and feelings that families do not matter in the military. Joey and Christine, who have been married for twenty years and have two children together, have not lived together in over four years because of his assignments to different states in addition to his deployments. She is one of the spouses that left her job because of feelings of being overwhelmed with the additional duties thrown on her during her husband's frequent absences and not having support from the military. Due to the constant separations, they have not been allowed to fully reintegrate with each other and create that "new normal" that is imperative for couples. Prior to 9/11, this was not the norm for National Guard families. The norm was one weekend a month, two weeks a year, not the relentless separations being experienced currently.

Upon return from deployment, it took soldiers a few months to transition back to the civilian world and family life. Some experienced boundary ambiguities in trying to determine where they fit into the family now that the family had a new routine. Part of feelings of boundary ambiguities stemmed from changes that occurred to the soldier due to his experiences during the deployment. Many felt they came back a different person and their spouses confirmed these feelings. While many were able to rectify these issues by communicating with each other and remaining flexible, others were not. Some spouses were reluctant to ask questions, others did not want to know about their soldier's experience and soldiers did not want to discuss their experiences. This lack of communication led to a lack of intimacy for a few of the couples that

eventually resulted in divorce. Many soldiers were unable to compensate with their experiences at first and turned to drugs and alcohol. This was another area where they felt they did not have military support. Spouses did not know who to turn to for help or were reluctant because of mental health stigma in the military community.

However, many of these couples have shown resiliency. The couples that stayed together had several things in common. First, communication between the couples remained open and supportive. They tried to understand each other and remain flexible in their responsibilities. For three of the couples, they did follow the breadwinner/homemaker family ideology, which helped them to make time for one another. In addition, the couples that stayed together were college educated, and officers rather than enlisted personnel, which previous research has shown to make a difference in the likelihood of staying together (Hogan et al 2010; Karney et al 2012; Lundquist 2007; Negrusa and Negrusa 2014; and Negrusa et al 2014).

This study has expanded existing knowledge regarding National Guard couples and their lived experiences within the National Guard. By utilizing three methods of data collection, I was able to connect the discourses coming from self-help books and the military of the ideal Super Spouse and the advocacy of the 1950's family ideology to the stresses that National Guard families experience during and after deployments. This ideology, which was also prominent in my interviews, adds stress to already stressful situation by having wives trying to live up to the *Leave it to Beaver* mom ideal, taking care of everything while looking and acting like nothing is wrong but in reality trying to live up to this ideal led to feelings of being overwhelmed. Many spouses stated they did not want to participate in FRG meetings because it added one more thing to their already full plate of responsibilities; however, it could also be postulated that they did not want to participate in case they let it slip that everything is not alright.

Discourses that perpetuate the breadwinner/homemaker ideology omit women soldiers and military husbands from the conversation. Women soldiers are assumed to carry the same burdens as men soldiers, which mostly concentrates on combat experiences and their responsibilities as soldiers. However, through analysis of interviews with women soldiers, I found women's feelings about deploying are quite different. While the men viewed it as a way to practice the skills they have been learning through their training, women soldiers did not speak of deployments in that manner. Rather, when asked about their deployment experience, they concentrated on their identities as mothers and wives and the guilt they felt when having to leave their families behind. Their husbands did not view themselves as spouses that had to hold it all together while their wives were gone. Rather they spoke of how they kept busy with the careers and hobbies. The men identified as soldiers more than husbands, while the women identified as mothers more than soldiers.

Feelings of not being supported by the National Guard is a threat to national security in terms of recruitment and retention. Many National Guard soldiers have served in an active duty branch of the military prior to enlisting in the National Guard. With rising deployment rates and separations from families becoming the norm in the National Guard, married former service members may be influenced by their spouses not to join the National Guard because National Guard life is beginning to reflect the active duty life that they just left behind but without active duty resources at their disposal. Current soldiers in the National Guard can also be influenced by their spouses to not re-enlist. If the nation is to avoid a draft and keep an all-voluntary military, it is very important that spouses are kept happy. In order to do this, recognition of different types of families besides the 1950's version needs to be acknowledged, and even encouraged.

Military self-help books should be revised to read not as how to be the perfect military wife but how to navigate the military lifestyle but keep your own identity. Rather than advocating for the 1950's family ideal, books should explain how to find a balance with additional responsibilities when your spouse deploys. Military spouses need to know that it is okay to not be okay. In addition, the books also need to focus on men as military spouses and include them in the conversation, not just civilian men but military men as well. With the current acceptance of non-heterosexuals into the military and gay marriage, future self-help books need to acknowledge this change in family structure. Furthermore, rather than leaving National Guard spouses out of the conversation, they need to be included also and not left as a side note. It needs to be acknowledged that their lives are different from active duty military families and that they have different needs.

As stated earlier, the lack of support and/or the perception of a lack of support for National Guard families is a major complaint coming from spouses and soldiers. This issue must be addressed if recruitment and retention rates are able to sustain an all-volunteer force. While it may seem to be a difficult task because of the geographical distribution of servicemembers and their families through out the state, it is not impossible. National Guard families need to know before deployments happen that the military cares what happens to them. One way to do this is to have events centered around spouses throughout the state and not just at local armories. These events should not be unit specific but for any National Guard members in that area. This way spouses could meet with one another, regardless of if their soldiers are in the same unit. A monthly newsletter to families regarding what is happening around the National Guard may also help them to feel more included in the National Guard family. This would help families connect before deployments occur when their stress levels are already high. These things can help to

connect spouses to one another and help them to not be so resistant to attending FRG meetings and Yellow Ribbon events with a negative frame of mind.

There is much more research that needs to be done regarding National Guard families. Future studies should concentrate on women soldiers in order to better understand their experiences of being women in an occupation dominated by men. In order to get a better understanding of what is happening at FRG meetings, future studies should include observations of these meeting along with interviews with the participants. In addition, this study did not include non-white interview participants. Future studies should include this demographic in order to understand their experiences with the National Guard and deployments. Furthermore, studies need to include civilian husbands, who were also left out of this study. Lastly, non-heterosexual soldiers and their spouses should be studied to understand the needs they may have due to being in an environment that perpetuates a gendered ideology of masculinity/femininity. Despite these limitations, this study offers insight into and expands our current knowledge of the lived experiences of National Guard families and deployments. My results confirmed the findings of Weber (2012), which found a military reliance on traditional gender identities to maintain war readiness, and further contributed to gender studies, family sociology and military sociology by explaining the effect of this reliance on National Guard families.

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Initial Question

Talk to me about your deployments, such as:

How did it affect you and the people around you?

What do you remember most about your deployments?

What did you find to be the most challenging parts?

Finding Out

How did you first learn that your spouse was being deployed?

How soon before the departure date did you find out that your spouse was leaving?

Was it a mandatory deployment or a voluntary one?

What were your initial feelings about going through a deployment?

Did you have any preconceived notions or ideas about what the deployment experience would be like?

How did you tell your children?

What were their reactions?

Preparation

How did you start to prepare for the deployment?

Did you and your spouse prepare together?

Did you have any opportunities to attend pre-deployment briefings?

Did they help in your preparation?

How did you feel about the briefings?

During Deployment

Who provided you with the most support during the deployment? Friends, family, military friends?

Friends

How many friends do you have in the National Guard?

How would you classify these military friendships? Close friends or acquaintances?

During deployment, do you rely more on your military friends or your civilian friends?

If you made any new military friends during the deployment, do you maintain them after deployment? If so, how?

Family

How did your family help you during the deployment?

How did your in-laws help you during the deployment?

FRG

Did you attend FRG events prior to and/or during the deployment?

Were you involved in the FRG? If so, in what ways?

How did you feel about your FRG?

Would you have done anything to change it? If so, how?

Emotions

How did you feel those first few months after your spouse left?

How did you cope with any feelings of loneliness?

How did you cope with any feelings of worry?

How did deployment rumors affect your mood?

How did you feel those last few weeks before your spouse came home?

Children

How did your deployment experiences differ depending on how old your children were during the deployment?

How did your children deal with the deployment?

How did their actions influence how you dealt with the deployment?

Did you and your spouse have a plan for disciplining the children while your spouse was away?

Does your disciplining differ depending on whether you are together or on a deployment?

How did your children communicate with your deployed spouse during the deployment?

How did this communication affect the way they dealt with the deployment?

Spouse Communication

How did you communicate with your spouse during the deployment?

Did you ever withhold any information from your spouse?

Why did you feel the need to do this?

When your spouse came home, did you eventually tell them the things you withheld?

Marital Stress

What are the issues that you and your spouse disagree over the most?

How do you typically resolve those issues?

How did your financial situation change during the deployment?

Was this change a source of stress for you and your spouses?

How did you deal with any financial issues that came up while your spouse was deployed?

Have either of you had to deal with infidelity? How did you resolve this? Does past infidelity continue to be an issue in your marriage?

How has your marriage been affected by deployments?

Have either of you ever thought about or talked about divorce?

How did you resolve this?

Soldier Experience

Have either you or your spouse experienced any traumatic events during a deployment?

How did these events affect your marriage?

Did you communicate these traumatic events to your spouse immediately?

Homecoming

How did you prepare for the homecoming?

Did you make any special plans?

Post-Deployment

What was it like being back together again?

What were the first few weeks and months like?

What were the most positive aspects of having your spouse back home?

What were the challenging aspects of having your spouse back home?

How did you adjust to being back together again?

How did your life change once you were back together?

Yellow Ribbon Programs

Did you both attend the Yellow Ribbon event following your deployment?

What was your most positive experience regarding this event?

What was your negative experience regarding this event?

What was your overall perception of the event?

Was there anything you would have change with the event?

Strong Bonds

Have you and your spouse attended a Strong Bonds weekend?

What was your most positive experience regarding this event?

What was your negative experience regarding this event?

What was your overall perception of the event?

Was there anything you would have change with the event?

National Guard

In general, what is your perception of the National Guard when it comes to families?

Are the programs that have implemented positive changes?

Do you feel that they help families deal with deployments?

Closing

There is very little research in this area and we know very little about the experiences of National Guard families and their lives surrounding deployments. Is there anything you would like to add that you want people to know about the lives of National Guard families?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX B. IRB APPROVAL FORM

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
131 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/irb

Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html>

A Complete Application includes All of the Following:

(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.

(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)

(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)

(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)

(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Kimberly Boudreaux

Rank: Student

Dept: Sociology

Ph: 3372786514

E-mail: kboud45@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Dana Berkowitz, Dept. of Sociology, Assistant Professor
(225) 578-5348
dberk@lsu.edu

IRB# E8293 LSU Proposal # _____

☒ Complete Application

☒ Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

The Impact of Deployments on National Guard Marriages

Study Exempted By:

Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb

4) Proposal? (yes or no) ☒ No

If Yes, LSU Proposal Number _____

Also, if YES, either

☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

Exemption Expires: 4/30/2016

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

LA National Guard Soldiers, Spouses, and Ex-Spouses

*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature

K Boudreaux

Date

4/19/13

(no per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted _____ Category/Paragraph 2

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes ☒ No

Reviewer

Mathews

Signature

Robert Mathews

Date

5/1/13

Consent Form

Study Title:
The Impact of Deployments on National Guard Marriages

Performance Sites:
Yellow Ribbon events, Strong Bonds events, Family Readiness Group meetings, deployment ceremonies, homecoming ceremonies

Contacts:
Kimberly Boudreaux (337) 278-6514
Dr. Dana Berkowitz (225) 578-5348

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to determine how marital stresses that arise during and after deployments are dealt with by spouses and to determine the role and impact of National Guard programs in promoting healthy marriages following deployments.

Subjects:
Louisiana National Guard soldiers, spouses, and ex-spouses older than 18 years old who have participated in at least one overseas deployment. Pregnant women will be excluded from this study.

Number of Subjects:
100

Study Procedures:
Interviews approximately one hour in length will be conducted with each study participant. The interview questions will pertain to stresses that arise in marriages at different stages of a deployment and how these stresses are dealt with. Observations will be made at different events sponsored by the Louisiana National Guard that pertain to marriage resiliency.

Benefits:
There is no real benefit to participating in this study.

Risks:
The risks to this study involve loss of confidentiality and distress to questions during the interview process. To protect confidentiality all names will be changed in any notes that are taken and upon transcription of the interviews. All audio files of the interviews will be password protected. All documents related to this study will be kept in a locked drawer. After the study is complete all data will be destroyed. To avoid distress, the interviewer will go at the pace set by the participant. If at any time the participant wishes the interview to stop, the interview will be stopped.

Right to Refuse:

Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy:

Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information of individuals will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosures are required by law.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Matthews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Study Exempted By:

Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 4/30/2016

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Education

Ph.D. (pending), Louisiana State University, Department of Sociology
Ph.D. Dissertation: National Guard Families: The Relationship between Institutional Discourses and Lived Experiences

M.S. 2011, Southeastern Louisiana University, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
M.S. Thesis: Matricide

B.S. 2009, Southeastern Louisiana University, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice

A.A. 2007, Baton Rouge Community College, Department of Criminal Justice

Employment

2014: Graduate Assistant in Sociology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA

2015: Adjunct Instructor in Sociology, South Louisiana Community College, Lafayette, LA

2015 – 2016: Adjunct Instructor in Sociology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA

2016: Adjunct Instructor in Sociology, South Louisiana Community College, Lafayette, LA

2018: Adjunct Instructor in Sociology, South Louisiana Community College, Lafayette, LA

2018: Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Sociology, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches, LA

Research Interests

Family and Marriage, Qualitative Methods, Gender Inequality, Military, Criminology

Publications

ARTICLES IN PREPARATION:

Boudreaux, Kimberly. "Segregated Service: Race, Class, and the AFQT."

Hickey, Darien A., Kimberly Boudreaux, Danielle Jo Thomas and Michael Cope. "The Undead Institution: Assessing the Persistence of Gender Norms in *The Walking Dead*."

Teaching Experience

Introduction to Sociology
Social Problems
Sociology of the Criminal Justice System
Family and Marriage
Introduction to Criminal Justice
Community Corrections
Juvenile Delinquency
Sociology of Deviance
Criminal Justice Ethics
Criminal Justice Research Methods
Race and Ethnic Relations

Conference Presentations

03/2015. Hickey, Darien A., Kimberly Boudreaux, Danielle Jo Thomas and Michael Cope. "The Undead Institution: Assessing the Persistence of Gender Norms in *The Walking Dead*." Paper presented at Southern Sociological Society annual meeting in New Orleans, LA.

6/2011. Boudreaux, Kimberly. "Matricide: Offenders, Victims, and Circumstances." Paper presented at Homicide Research Working Group Annual Meeting in New Orleans, LA.

Professional Activities

7/2014. Qualitative Data Analysis mini-conference. Louisiana State University.

3/2016. Teaching the Class You've Always Wanted: Teach Without Limits webinar series. McGraw Hill Education.

3/2017. Effective Ways to Increase Student Engagement and Retention in Criminal Justice. Cengage Learning.

3/2017. Best Practices to Develop Critical Thinking and Decision Making in Criminal Justice. Cengage Learning.

Professional Organizations

Homicide Research Working Group

Southern Sociological Society

American Society of Criminology

American Sociological Association