Communication in Families During Military Deployment and Reintegration

Bri Tamasi

University of North Texas

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Literature Review

Scholars (Knobloch & Wilson, 2015; Merolla, 2010; Parcell, 2014) have studied military deployment in relation to reintegration writ large. However, scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Parcell & Maguire, 2014) have focused on reintegration specifically and other scholars (Merolla, 2010; Rossetto, 2015a) have discussed relational maintenance between spouses, generally wives, and service members. Within the topic of relational maintenance, scholars (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Parcell & Maguire, 2014; Rossetto, 2015a; Solomon, Dekel & Zerach, 2008) have delved deeper into the intricacies of relational maintenance, specifically focused on stress. I will review literature regarding stages of military deployment in general, reintegration of service members, relational maintenance between service members and service member's families, and stress.

Stages of Deployment

Knobloch and Wilson (2015) identified five main stages of deployment for military personnel: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment (combined in this literature review as deployment/sustainment), redeployment, and post-deployment. Researchers (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011; Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015) have discussed the uncertainties that riddled families during this time of anticipation. Scholars (Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015) discussed how the daily life changes the family anticipated experiencing affected the topics families chose to discuss or to avoid. Other scholars (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011) discussed the levels of relational satisfaction between service members and

their spouses, noting that martial satisfaction decreased as the military personnel moved from pre-deployment to deployment.

Many scholars (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Merolla, 2010; Owlett, Rochards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015; Parcell & Maguire, 2014, Rossetto, 2015a; 2015b) have researched the effects of the deployment phase on service members and their families. Families experience emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, loneliness, sadness, and uncertainty while at home awaiting their service member's return. Rossetto (2015a; 2015b) has discussed the coping mechanisms at-home family members use when managing their emotions during their husband's deployment and still attempting to perform the roles of mother, as well as father, for their children. Scholars (Rossetto, 2015a; 2015b) also discussed helpful and unhelpful types of support that come from the social network of the at home wife during the deployment of their service member. Scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013;) have noted that families experience similar feelings during redeployment that families experience from pre-deployment to deployment.

Scholars (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011; Parcell & Maguire, 2014; Solomon, Dekel & Zerach, 2008; Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015) have stated that service members experience stress, manage topic avoidance, and coordinate adjustments during their time of post-deployment, usually a period of 3-6 months after the service member returns home. Wilson, Gettings, Hall, and Pastor (2015) described the difficulties families have when attempting to aid their service member in seeking help to cope with mental illnesses. The scholars (Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015) emphasized the importance of the approach to the topic as well as the difficulties that can come with convincing

a service member that help does not imply weakness or that the service member lacks normalcy in relation to civilians. Parcell and Maguire (2014) further described how "the honeymoon of reunion is interrupted by the reality of reintegrating the service member back into the family" (p. 141). The service member and their families experience a realm of difficulties accompanied by vigorous relational maintenance in order to remake their families while reintegrating their military personnel back into the civilian lifestyle.

Reintegration

Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, and Theiss, (2013) claimed reintegration of the service member into her/his family results in anxiety, relational uncertainty, and topic avoidance. Scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013) emphasized the difficulties families face when reconstructing their daily routines to reincorporate husbands back into home life. Families have to renegotiate spousal interdependence and recreate cohesive routines to implement back into their lives. The family having to readjust routines can include renegotiating domestic tasks, parenting miscommunications, spending time with shared and separate social networks, and finding time for the couple to spend together.

Researchers (Parcell & Maguire, 2014) also discussed the difficulties partners have when reestablishing what their communication patters look like during the reintegration stage. Parcell and Maguire (2015) explained how service members decide what to disclose and not disclose to their partners in regards to the previous deployment and whether or not to disclose negative aspects of their experience for fear of losing face. Scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013) described the difficulties regarding the process of reintegration in order to return to a stable and functioning spouses and families have to practice relational maintenance in order to work through miscommunications and challenges.

Relational Maintenance

Merolla (2010) described maintenance as "communicative and cognitive activity occurring both strategically and routinely that solidifies relational bonds" (p. 6), highlighting the continuous use and complexity of maintaining. Maintenance, when practiced relationally by families, involves support, resilience, coping, topic avoidance, and turning points.

Scholars (Rossetto, 2015b) mainly discussed support in relation to the support wives received during a husband's deployment. Rossetto (2015b) claimed outside support from support networks could come in helpful as well as unhelpful forms for military wives during a husband's deployment. Rossetto (2015b) described support as helping another when they appear to need aid. The scholar (Rossetto, 2015b) also noted that support could come in differing types including instrumental, informational, emotional, self-esteem, and social network support. The wives perceived varying types of support directed as helpful or unhelpful depending on the situation. Rossettto (2015b) explained that when wanted, support could benefit a military wife and improve her ability to cope with her feelings and parent her child during her husband's deployment, however, unsolicited advice, pity, complaints, and lack of awareness from a second party proved stressful and burdensome on the already struggling military wife. Joseph and Afifi (2010) further argued how wives of military personnel could fear the risks of disclosing information regarding stressors to their deployed husbands. However, when wives did disclose stressful information, the wives disclosed with the intent to inform, not to seek social support, as wives generally did not expect social support from deployed service members.

Scholars (Rossetto, 2015a; 2015b) have discussed families' and spouses' redevelopment as a unit and recreating a normal for the family to abide by as aiding in building resilience in the family. Scholars (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015;

Rossetto, 2015a) have identified the resilience within families in regards to the communication between mothers and children. Rossetto (2015a) identified a direct relation between children's stress levels to parental stress levels, however, the children interviewed proved much more aware of their father's deployment situation than their mothers perceived (Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015) and this awareness of situational factors, when discussed, increased family resiliency.

Scholars (Rossetto, 2015a; 2015b) have also discussed different types of coping among military wives in order to maintain their relationships with their husbands and maintain their marital satisfaction. Rossetto (2015a) reported four types of coping: "my problem, my responsibility", "our problem, my responsibility", "my problem, our responsibility", and "your/our problem, your/our responsibility". Rossetto (2015a) identified the benefits of each situation and explained that individual coping as well as familial coping could utilize similar strategies. Rossetto (2015b) also stated that support could positively effect deployment coping among wives, so upon the return of their husbands, the family could communicate effectively and efficiently.

Researchers (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015) have discussed the difficulties couples face when negotiating topic avoidance versus disclosure. Maintaining a spousal relationship and showing one another support could conflict with distressing or sensitive topics. When renegotiating how the military member fits back into the lives of her/his family, families could avoid certain topics, engaging in protective buffering, however, ignoring certain topics could cause the family more detriments than benefits (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Joseph and Afifi (2010) explained that an increase in avoided topics could lead to greater uncertainty in the relationship and this uncertainty could lead

to greater marital dissatisfaction. However, overcoming the risks of disclosure could benefit the couple as open communication lead to greater marital satisfaction (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese, and Roberts (2015) also discussed how children, when communicating with their deployed parent or their at home parent, managed topic avoidance through trial and error, noting which topics upset parents and which topics proved agreeable and light hearted in an attempt to avoid adding to the stress their parents already experienced due to the deployment.

Scholars (Parcell & Maguire, 2014) identified the effects of turning points in families, both during a service member's deployment and within the service member's relationship with her/his spouse. Parcell and Maguire (2014) identified the detriments to the service member missing out on certain life events, such as birthdays, weddings, the birth of a child, or even illness could disrupt the inclusion of the military member in the family and leave the service member feeling left out or cause feelings of sadness, adding to the stress of deployment. Turning points within the service member's relationship could include the service member's deployment, notification of deployment, and reunion.

Stress

Scholars (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Parcell & Maguire, 2014; Rossetto, 2015a; Solomon, Dekel & Zerach, 2008) have studied stress of military members, their spouses and families in regards to deployment and reintegration, scholars have focused on relational uncertainty, relationship dissatisfaction, and depression/PTSD.

Scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch & Wilson, 2015; Owlett, Ruchards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015; Rossetto, 2015a; 2015b; Solomon,

Dekel, & Zerach, 2008) have studied relational uncertainty in regards to military personnel and their families. Scholars (Owlett, Ruchards, Wilson, DeFreese, & Roberts, 2015) noted that when children feel uncertain about their deployed parent's safety, family communication could help to manage those uncertainties. Researchers (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013) also identified three types of uncertainty: self-uncertainty, partner-uncertainty, and relationship-uncertainty. Individuals lacking of confidence within the three types of relationships tended to do less in regards to maintaining their relationships and caused greater unrest in the relationship with their spouse upon the homecoming of the service members.

Researchers (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013) discussed relationship dissatisfaction, closely related to stress and relational uncertainty. Scholars (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013) stated topic avoidance could lead to dissatisfaction. However, when a service member returns home and the family participates in the reintegration process, relational dissatisfaction is not uncommon and families can work through the dissatisfaction with open, honest communication (Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013).

Scholars (Solomon, Dekel, & Zerach, 2008; Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015) discussed how families talk to their service member in regards to mental illness and PTSD. Wilson, Gettings, Hall, and Pastor (2015) explained that discussing the issue of mental illness or seeking help for PTSD could prove difficult for the service member's family due to the unwillingness of the military personnel to acquire help. Problems Wilson, Gettings, Hall, and Pastor (2015) described when a family broaches the subject of seeking help included: reminding their service member that just because they need help, they still are normal, convincing their service member they are not weak for needing help, creating a persistent yet patient environment when discussing the topic of seeking help, and wanting the service member to open up yet

realizing the family member does not fully understand. These issues created communication

boundaries between the service member and their family and family members attempted to cope

by offering support and space, yet still encouraging their service member to seek the help they

needed.

Scholars (Knobloch & Wilson, 2015; Merolla, 2010; Parcell, 2014) have studied military

deployment and military reintegration as a whole. Other scholars (Knobloch, Ebata,

McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Parcell &

Maguire, 2014) have focused on specific aspects of reintegration. Researching further, scholars

(Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Knobloch, Ebata, McGlaughlin, & Ogolsky, 2013; Knobloch, Ebata,

McGlaughlin, & Theiss, 2013; Parcell & Maguire, 2014; Rossetto, 2015a; Solomon, Dekel &

Zerach, 2008) have focused specifically on stress, depression, and other difficulties military

families face during deployment of military personnel. Scholars (Merolla, 2010; Rossetto,

2015a) have looked into relational maintenance and provided evidence that communication

between family members and understanding between spouses creates an environment where

families can thrive even after a difficult situation, such as deployment of a loved one.

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