Online Support Communication Among Military Spouses

Larissa Krenzer

University of Texas at El Paso, lkrenzer@miners.utep.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd

Part of the Communication Commons

Recommended Citation


This is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.
ONLINE SUPPORT COMMUNICATION AMONG MILITARY SPOUSES

LARISSA KRENZER

Department of Communication

APPROVED:

________________________________________________________________________

Richard Pineda, Ph.D., Chair

________________________________________________________________________

Ann B. Horak, Ph.D.

________________________________________________________________________

Stacey K. Sowards, Ph.D.

________________________________________________________________________

Benjamin C. Flores, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
Copyright ©
by
Larissa Krenzer
2013
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Ericka and José for being my role models in life, who with their constant love and support have showed me that I can achieve anything with hard work.

And to my wonderful husband Dennis, who believes in me, and encourages me. His love and his determination inspire me every day.
ONLINE SUPPORT COMMUNICATION AMONG MILITARY SPOUSES

By

LARISSA KRENZER, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2013
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ANALYSIS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. REFERENCES</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. CURRICULUM VITA</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

United States service members and their families know that they constantly face the uncertainty of deployment. In recent decades the tempo of deployments has been dramatically increased in order to support ongoing conflicts with no unforeseen end in sight to these pressures (Merolla, 2010). A greater need for understanding the nature of coping methods and communication used by those family members left behind is crucial, now more than ever. A critical examination using communication theory as a platform is justified for intellectual purposes as it is for practical purposes to inform and highlight how service members and their families mediate and alleviate stressors they face on a daily basis. The environment in which all families communicate influences the behaviors used to exchange information (Burns & Pearson, 2011). This means that communication between military families can change radically when they are facing a deployment or separation during regular operation cycles, but especially during times of conflict when the stakes and risks are higher for the entire family. These duty separations are stressful not only for the service members that deploy, but also for the family members they leave behind, in particular for spouses (Dimiceli, Steinhardt & Smith, 2010). It is possible that the challenges military spouses face during a deployment, can be managed by employing support groups, networking of other military families and spouses of deployed soldiers, as well as the support from extended families (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Regardless, these challenges are unique to the military family community and can cause feelings of isolation due to lack of empathy and understanding from civilian families and other community members (Maguire & Sahlstein, 2012). Civilian families certainly face unique familial stress, but I argue that the issues facing military families are situated in a unique context, complete with unique
language challenges and communicative practices that are not understood in the civilian community.

It is important to understand that military culture and military communities are unique and diverse groups of people within American society who are distinctively understood separately from the civilian world (Hall, 2011). Members of the military have distinguished themselves by living a different way of life in all aspects; including distinctive work habits, daily routines, family life and expectations as well as a vocabulary and lexicon that is unique to those involved. Communication within the military is understood thoroughly by those associated with the military lifestyle. With this being said it can be determined that communication can best be transferred between those within this distinct culture. This opens ample opportunities for communication to be used as the space for study and research of military culture.

Within a community there is a necessity for members of that community to communicate when faced with issues or concerns. These could include unique pressures and stressors such as deployment or separation, relocation to a new military base, concerns within the community in regards to quality of life, or even support within a smaller group in the community. While pressure and stressors are many, there is a need for support from others with an understanding of the culture.

With the advancement of modern technology information exchange has rapidly increased, allowing communities to adapt and branch out in a more global manner to provide assistance with stress on a broader spectrum. These communities may often share common bonds and experiences which may provide a means for others to provide the support needed by referencing and using their own experiences to offer solutions or suggestions to those facing stress and requiring assistance. Additionally, the use of computer mediated communication may
enable those seeking help to receive feedback and suggestions rapidly, from a variety of sources which can potentially increase the bonds within the community when offering assistance with coping with stress related with deployments or separations due to the military. For the purpose of this study, the phrase “military spouse” will refer almost exclusively to women driven by data that indicates 93% of all military spouses are women according to the department of defense 2011 demographic study (Militaryonesource.com).

The purpose of this study is to better understand communication used by military family communities during deployments or separations within unofficial, social media platforms such as Facebook. Additionally I will be analyzing data contained within specific mediated social media to understand the how communication forms communities amongst military spouses. I will be using the communal coping theoretical framework to analyze the data collected and determine how language can serve as a coping method within the military community. This theory suggests that collectively addressing issues within a group with others who are facing the same circumstances is beneficial to the group as a whole and to the individuals involved (Maguire & Sahlstein, 2012). Communal coping also implies that individuals exist in groups and that distress felt by one member can have a similar effect on the other members (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Communal coping is characterized by the shared appraisal of stress and a shared action orientation toward managing a stressor (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan & Coyne, 1998). In the military community, spouses share common stressors and the need for communication in order to alleviate them. In this study I will analyze the use of social media and computers mediated communication in unofficial outlets by military spouses. I will argue that communal coping is constituted by language in the messages posted by the spouses.
The intent of my study is to better understand how communities are formed through the use of these unofficial social media outlets used by spouses of military service members who are deployed or separated over long distances. I will also evaluate the content of information exchange in regards to military culture and coping with the circumstances and stressors through use of communication.

In chapter two I will review past research that has been done in the communication field as well as other fields that are relevant including military culture and computer mediated communication. Also, I will synthesize studies that have been previously pursued to determine what could be developed further through my research in communication. In chapter three I will give a detailed description of the textual analysis that I conducted for my study. I will also identify the Facebook pages I used to source and retrieve my data. Chapter four will be a presentation of my analysis and organization of the data collected. The chapter will also include a multitude of examples that further highlight the themes that emerged in the data. In chapter five I will summarize my findings and make a closing argument about the significance of the project as well as present some limitations to my project.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to develop my argument it is first important to consider the existing body of research on communication in the military, among spouses, and through the uses of computer mediated channels. While certain work has been produced on all of these areas, I believe my project is significant because it examines Facebook and computer mediated communication and the intersection of that technology with communal coping amongst military spouses. In this chapter I address fields of work on military culture, life as a military spouse and stressors faced in this community as well as work on computer mediated communication. I conclude the chapter by presenting the research questions that guide my project.

Military in Communications Studies

Wiens and Boss (as sited in Maguire & Sahlstein, 2012, p.103), describe military deployment as “defining experiences for military service members and their families” and that deployments are “one of the most widely recognized and documented stressors for military families.” This could lead to a possibility of unique bonds formed specifically between military families to deal with these stressors. Maguire and Sahlstein (2012) also argue that while family life contains many pitfalls and promises, deployments make it easy for families of deployed service members to focus on the pitfalls. Communication or lack of communication about these pitfalls creates pressure on spouses, especially where domestic duties might multiply or unique responsibilities appear that previously were the purview of the deployed service member. Often these are not “discovered” until the deployment begins, which only serves to magnify the tension and stress facing spouses. While the focus may be on the pitfalls faced by the families because
of the deployment, often times there may be support networks available to assist in dealing with these stressors and challenges from within the military community.

Past research in the communication field in regard to military families and deployments focused on various aspects, including studies concerning relationship maintenance, coping with deployment, communication during the deployment (see Maguire, 2007 and Merolla, 2010), and the stressors affecting families during deployment (see Dimiceli et al., 2010). Additionally many studies have been done with a health focus on service members and their families in regard to the effects of deployments and how the experience has influenced and impacted them mentally and physically. Some of these studies focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and how deployments can negatively impact service members with this particular disorder as well as the burden PTSD carries for families of those suffering (Kgosana & Van Dyk, 2011). These studies have brought many issues into perspective; however there is a lack of research on the use of computer mediated communication and social media for support and stress relief during deployment for the spouses left behind in the communication field. The lack of said research certainly justifies this project, particularly given the spread of portable, digital communication technology amongst service members and the increased use of technology during deployments. The era of handwritten notes delivered slowly across the globe has been replaced by nearly instantaneous connections facilitated by cellular phones, text messaging, and internet-based, social media.

Maguire (2007) studied relationship maintenance for deployed service members and their families. In her study she determined that mediated communication is essential to maintaining a healthy relationship between deployed service members and their spouses. Most research on deployments and relationship maintenance focuses on the effects deployments have for the
individuals involved in relationships causing them to feel anxiety, uncertainty, loneliness and a overall decrease in their relational closeness and relational support (see Merolla, 2010). Aside from relational maintenance strategies in regards to maintaining a healthy relationship during deployment, studies have also been done using strategies for parenting during the deployment (see Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusny, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2011). While my project does not delve exclusively into the study of communication related to parenting, it is clear that there are many implications and lessons to be learned from coping communication as it relates to instructive and reactive parenting situations.

Other studies have focused on aspects of military life such as pay, reenlistment incentives, promotion, leadership, training and the atmosphere within a specific unit adjustment as well as focus on interaction of the military environment factors using variables such as quality of life and adjustment (Maguire & Sahlstein, 2012). These studies may provide insight into the climate faced by service members, however they limit research questions to studying support and effects on the service member exclusively and they fail to demonstrate the support that the families left behind face. Existing studies are beneficial to understanding the concerns faced by service members in regards to their working environment, however more research would be useful in understanding the concerns of family members of deployed or separated service members. As United States forces ramp down conflict operations, there is a key window to add to the body of scholarship on communal coping both drawing from lessons learned and projecting ideas to be tested in the next time of conflict.

There is limited research on the interaction between spouses of separated service members when the spouse elects to remain in one specific location with limited family support throughout the term of the separation. More research on spousal interaction of deployed service
members could possibly open up a whole new point of view on the effects of deployments on military families and the stressors faced by those left behind. Understanding the way spouses interact with each other based on a common bond formed would broaden the knowledge available to better comprehend the aspects of what family members of deployed and separated service members face. Furthermore, additional research would help illuminate the inherent value of family members to the overall mission goals of United States forces. Often times while the research focus is rightly placed on deployed troops, the nature of military values emphasize the family. If these values are accurate and to be upheld, then research should focus on families left behind as instructive and ideally prescriptive.

**Stressors and military families**

Military families will inevitably face multiple, complex and dynamic stressors during a deployment or separation causing those left behind to have needs that previous to the deployment or separation were not evident (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007). Some of these needs may possibly be new to spouses and families of deployed service members; however there is also a possibility that others within the military community have faced these needs previously. Due to recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, military families are now experiencing stressors that were previously unforeseen in their daily lives (Pittman, Kerpelman, & McFaden, 2004). Dimiceli et al. (2010), cited uncertainty, lack of support, and giving up their career as major sources of stress for military spouses during more recent deployments. These stressors could be uniquely identified specifically to the military community and it is possible that other support groups outside military families or agencies lack experience dealing with those issues. While the United States military has faced a constant deployment cycle over the last several decades, the two recent conflicts have gone on longer, often times with far devastating impact. Several times
throughout these conflicts the government has announced the end of major combat operations only to see guerilla-style insurgency spike rapidly. This uncertainty combined with communication technology and rapidly delivered news coverage has magnified stressors to rather high levels hereinbefore not seen.

Studies have similarly been conducted in regard to working parents who travel and are frequently away from work forcing family members left behind to manage the absence of the family member who frequently leaves for extended periods of time (Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian, 2005). Although similar in context to military absence during deployment, these separations will likely induce different stressors due to the nature of the environment, tasks requiring completion, and available resources of deployed or separated service members. Some differences of support in dealing with the stressors involved with non-military separation of families involves the facilitation of support within the family unit (Zvonkovic et al., 2005), whereas separated military families may look for support within the family and may also depend upon one another as they would their extended families (Sahlstein & Maguire, 2012).

Schumm, Knott, Bell and Rice; Wood and Scarville (as sited in Zvonkovic et al., 2005), found that stressors for military families increase when service members face relocation, deployment, or training. Deployments may increase stress experienced by families of the service members with the possibility of burdening the families with worries or responsibilities usually handled by the service member. M. W. Segal (as sited in Segal, 2006) identified stressors faced by families as injury or death, long hours of work shifts, frequent relocation, isolation, adjusting to a new culture and atmosphere, the structure an operation of the military itself, and the separation itself as well as the following reunion between the service member and family. While
these stressors may or may not be specific to military families, perhaps there is an increased frequency among military families with these stressors due to the nature of serving in the military or having a family member serving.

This study will identify stressors specific to the military community during a deployment or separation and analyze the use of informal computer mediated communication support and the formation of communities and the communication utilized within these unofficial support groups. Upon complete analysis of the data I hope to develop a perspective regarding informal computer mediated support systems within military communities including many aspects of those support systems such as how they are formed, the language used within the community and the different concerns and aspects of military life being addressed within the Facebook posts.

**Computer Mediated Communication**

Walther (as cited in Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007), described Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) as synchronous or asynchronous electronic mail or computer conferencing by which senders encode in text messages that relayed back and forth between receivers and senders. From its inception, the study of CMC focused on developing communication technology, but certainly as digital communication has become more ubiquitous the field has grown to reflect wider access and greater societal impact. A small body of research on CMC and military families has been pursued in the communication field. Maguire (2007) determined that in long distance relationships, such as those experienced by couples or families during a deployment, mediated communication was essential to perform relationship maintenance during separation and serves as an essential support system for deployed service members in addition to being useful in helping with stress relief of spouses. Lewandowski et al. (2011) studied CMC as well as face to face interactions in support systems for military
personnel. Their study found that the medium played a significant effect on the support received and the mental health of the individuals receiving support. Although in this study the researchers found that military personnel attained a higher level of support through the use of face to face communication; results using military spouses as the subjects could yield different results, due to the fact that the culture between spouses differs from that of military personnel while deployed. Differences in lifestyle, attitudes, bonds and concerns may contribute to the environments that form during the separation for both the spouses and the soldiers. Factors such as temporary relocation during the deployment or separation or the removal from their extended families make it difficult for military spouses to receive constant face to face support from their support system (Hashmand & Hashmand, 2007). Moreover, the constraints of the military lifestyle such as isolation from the non- military community as well as the physical and physiological separation from the deployed soldier may influence the coping strategies available to military spouses (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003).

Research on the role technology plays in terms of deployments for service members and their families has also been done with a focus on the different health aspects involved throughout the course of the deployment and upon return from deployment (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, and Greenberg, 2010). Green et al. (2010) found that the use of these technologies not only has an impact on the relationships of service members and their families but that they influence service members’ mental health as well. As technology use during deployments and especially during combat deployments becomes more widespread, research needs to account for the impact it can play for service members and their families and dependents.

There have been different academic studies with ambiguous results on whether CMC allows for or creates expressive space for communication that is similar to face to face
communication. The use of mediated communication creates new limitations in interpersonal communication and on how successfully messages are carried across (see Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy & Tibbles, 2008; Taddei, Contena and Grana, 2010). Some scholars have found email as the least effective form of CMC due to its lack of cues and because feedback can be delayed and therefore can increase inaccurate communication and miscommunication (Byron, 2008).

With continuously emerging technologies, new studies have focused on social media and their use as CMC. Social networking sites such as Facebook allow for an instant exchange of information with other users who share a certain connection (Hunt, Atkin & Krishnan, 2012). According to Facebook.com, the social media platform’s mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2012). Recent research has been done to study Facebook using social and medical approaches. Triga (2011) analyzed the written material produced on Facebook groups protesting against higher toll-posts in Athens. Greene, Choudhry, Kilabuk, and Shrank (2010) examined the content of health-seeking behavior and information-sharing on Facebook support groups for patients with diabetes and found that use of Facebook as a community could enhance identity and provide logistical support.

Furthermore, social networks now have surpassed all other means of keeping in touch with people, including face-to-face contact (Kim & Shin, 2002). Due to a constant flow of information that is shared on Facebook and the magnitude of messages that can be exchanged with over 400 million users, it provides a large basis of research for that has intrigued scholars in the Communication field (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee 2012, as cited in Greene, Choudhry, Kilabuk, &Shrank 2012). However, though extensive research has been done on the military in many
fields including the communication field, there is no research to my knowledge that links Facebook and the military or the military family unit.

This new fascination with Facebook, the ongoing military deployments and the lack of research relating the two, provide a good basis for my study.

Wright, Wright and Bell (as cited in Lewandowski, Rosenberg, Parks & Siegel, 2011) have argued that CMC used as social support provides a broader perspective for people to communicate with others who are also restricted to a particular time or space. This can be related to this study because for military communicate within their own space that is secluded from the outside civilian space.

The scope of existing literature, while incredibly informative, has several gaps which I aim to address with my thesis project. While my research questions are not exhaustive, my intent is to draw attention to an important issue in communication and expression as it relates to military, familial support structures. My project aims to examine the following two questions:

RQ1: How is “community” communicated by military spouses on unofficial spaces such as Facebook pages?

RQ 2: How is communal coping constituted rhetorically by military spouses on unofficial spaces such as Facebook pages?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter is divided into two parts; a review of the literature on the theoretical framework of communal coping and a detailed explanation of how I approached the source material for my thesis. Understanding the theoretical framework is a good start to the process of analysis, because it provides a foundation from which to extend the existing work on coping and unique communities. My own analysis, presented in chapter four, builds off the theoretical work, however in this chapter my intent is to highlight how I processed the source material to cull out data necessary to answer my research questions.

Theoretical framework

According to Koehly, Peters, Kuhn, Hoskins, Letocha, Kenen, Loud, and Greene (2008) communal coping is a conceptual model that incorporates the conjoining, interactive support processes that families use to cope with a shared threat. Communal coping occurs when a group begins seeing a problem as “our problem” instead of “my problem” and therefore seeks a solution pulling in all members of a communal group regardless if the stressor produces the same consequence for all of the members of the group (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). Some examples of communal coping used in social groups include studies on health compromised smokers and HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa (see Montgomery, Watts, & Pool, 2012; Rohrbaugh, Shoham, Skoyen, Jensen, & Mehl, 2012).

Communal coping can be used by individuals, such as military spouses, to form a bond with a group of other people facing the same stressors and dealing with their issues collectively. At a general level the communal coping theoretical framework proposes that people who communicate about their uncertainty and stress as something they can solve together and
overcome as one can develop a greater sense of resilience (Afifi, Felix, & Afifi, 2012). This creates the need for the formation of communities that maximize the use of communication in regard to whatever common dilemmas are present. While the focus of this project is on military families, the literature on communal coping speaks to circumstances prevalent in other communities where familial and communal pressure exists. Any additional insight into communal coping is important to add to the base of this literature.

Upon closer examination, communal coping can be extended to include group efforts to take action against what is seen as a group problem or stressor. This could include the use of communication to address the group problem and correspond with a collective solution to the issue. On the other side of the spectrum lies the concept of individualism where the problem is seen as a self responsibility and the actions taken are by one’s self to solve and cope with the problem. The other coping processes demonstrated include help and support seeking, seeing an individual problem as a group responsibility, and individual support provision where a group problem is seen as an individual’s responsibility. Regardless of which aspect of communal coping is highlighted each element involves communication as a focal point in the resolution of the group or individual problems.

In regard to interpersonal communication research, communal coping has been used to study various troubles faced by individuals. This theoretical framework has been used by Koehly et al. (2008) to study sisters in families where hereditary breast and ovarian cancer clusters exist and where communal coping and interaction were significantly associated with lower stress levels. Afifi, Felix, and Afifi (2012) have also pioneered the application of communal coping to study whether or not communal coping could help minimize uncertainty among families and communities coping with natural disasters. While the stressors in these cases are immediate and
usually associated with a sudden, unpredictable event the after effects are certainly longer. Afifi, Hutchinson and Krouse (2006) studied and introduced a theoretical model of communal coping in post divorce families, and in naturally formed social groups such as patients with chronic or terminal illnesses. Furthermore, Maguire and Sahlstein (2012) studied various methods of stress coping methods implemented by military wives during wartime deployments using the communal coping theory and found that amongst other methods, information from fellow military wives were identified as a critical coping resource. This is important to my research because if communal coping can be constituted with words in a Facebook support group then perhaps this coping resource could further provide assistance to those military spouses who lack face to face support and access to information.

The framework has also been used by Joseph and Afifi (2012) to study how individuals who share similar stressors opt to find solutions individually using protective buffering. They define this as the dimension of the communal coping framework where the individual decides that the stressor is “our problem” yet the solution is “my” responsibility in order to avoid disagreement. This demonstrates how communal coping is used with a lack of interpersonal communication to resolve issues or deal with stress. The researchers studied military wives’ use of protective buffering with their husbands during deployment to alleviate stress.

Communal coping is the theoretical base of this project, utilized in order to identify how a group of individuals collectively share the same problems or concerns they face due to a military deployment and the military lifestyle. Alleviating those stressors through other individuals facing the same problems demonstrating the our problem- our responsibility approach and the communication inherent in seeking the appropriate help through the means of informal support systems and CMC. I will use this theory to argue the structure of community
formed by the individuals on the Facebook pages through the use of communication with their communal coping process. In addition I will analyze and argue the rhetorical construction of communal coping within the Facebook pages

**Method and Procedure**

In accordance with the guidelines by Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the research method for this study was to engage in a textual analysis of the artifacts, in this case Facebook posts. In broader use this methodological approach allows researchers to look at documents and media closely in their entirety and thereby capture the details and contexts that may be hidden (Mishra, 2012). I decided this was the best approach for my project because it would be a powerful tool in analyzing the material that has already been posted by military spouses. Furthermore, Bronstein (as cited in Mishra, 2012), says that textual analysis is a preferred method for researchers who want to create interpretations of content that are theoretically valid.

Initially I explored the possibility of gathering data from other social networking sites such as Twitter and MySpace. However after some consideration I decided to use Facebook exclusively due to its popularity, the amount of groups dedicated for military spouses on the social network, and the lack of words limit per posting. I felt that Facebook would be the best resource to collect data in which spouses felt they could type a message that could be as long as it needed to be without being limited. I searched for groups for military spouses, to find the groups I used key words such as “army wives,” “Military spouse,” “Deployment support,” and “Fort Bliss.” In addition, I searched for pages with names of Army units in Fort Bliss that I knew from my husband being stationed at Fort Bliss. Once I found groups I looked at their composition and specifically I searched for those that were open to the public and did not require any kind of membership to view the posts and comments on the page. I used my own Facebook
account to conduct my research because I did not believe that creating a separate account would affect my research in any way since I did not interact or post in any of the pages, and as previously stated the pages used were all open to the public.

I collected data from a total of 10 Facebook pages including division and company level Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) connected to Fort Bliss as well as pages created by military spouses for other military spouses whose husbands are deployed and pages created by military spouses for other military spouses stationed in the same area. A division is one of the larger level units in the military consisting of tens of thousands of soldiers that are then divided into brigades, battalions and companies. A company is the lowest level of unit in that can have an FRG. In total there were 1,352 posts collected from the following pages: Fort Bliss spouses, The REAL Army Wives of Fort Bliss, Bliss Babes, Echo Co. 123 BSB, (Brigade Support Battalion) Echo. CO. 123 BSB (Brigade Support Battalion) FRG, 1st Armored Division, Our Deployment 101, Our Love is Deployment strong, Military Spouse Central and Strong Military SO’s.

After searching for and identifying the pages I intended to use I printed all comments and posts from December 1st 2012 to February 28th 2013. The decision to collect data from this time frame was based on the assumption that because of the holidays, posts from December would provide insight to questions and information that were not found in other months. January provided continuity from December in case any users or comments were still receiving feedback. The month of February became the end of my timeline for collection because there were no significant shifts in patterns in relation to January and I felt that enough data had been collected to properly access the content.

A preliminary reading of the data was done for general understanding. In this stage of the research, I took notes of phrases that continuously appeared and also paid close attention for
words or terms that were found in previous studies on communal coping and the ones done on social groups and Facebook. The posts were meticulously read a second time and highlighted in different colors in regard to broad themes that emerged in the data. All printed pages were then put into document protectors and binders for accessibility. Finally, a fourth reading was done to merge similar themes and finalize categories for analysis. This was the longest step of the collection and analysis portion due to the large amount of data that was compiled and the number of overlapping categories within the posts. Analyzing and sorting data into the final categories took nearly three weeks before I began the documentation of my results. When documenting the analysis section, I made the decision to copy the postings verbatim including spelling errors, grammar errors and emoticons because I felt that it helped illustrate a more realistic view of the lives of these women and also served to bring into light other mitigating circumstance such as education and social class.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will evaluate recurring themes that emerged upon examination of the data collected from my resources. I will also determine which themes provide the most insight for the users and which themes are simply supportive in nature. I will use a comparative analysis at times to demonstrate the frequency of some themes in relation to other themes. This comparison of occurrence will give me an idea of how these communities function and the stressors that affect their everyday lives. A higher quantity of postings throughout all pages used to collect data can be indicative of a larger need by spouses for support in those specific areas. I will also explore the concept of community and how it is formed on these pages that at times transcend geographical boundaries. I will investigate how the language that was used in the data attributes to support and assistance of military spouses facing similar circumstances.

Upon analysis of the data collected, four major themes emerged. These four themes, expressed through language presented on the social media site, developed a support channel for spouses in their times of need and the information exchange established a sense of communal coping with one another. The major recurring themes established within my data set were help/support, which contains sub areas of structural help and emotional support, opinion, information and events. These themes contained useful information and the information offered was influenced by the individual persons experience with the subject matter covered.

Many aspects draw people together and a common bond within people’s lives can be one of the strongest influences for building a relationship with others facing similar life events. While a sense of community within the military is a predominant and recurring theme, there are many different types of communities within the larger military community (Hoshmand and
Hoshmand, 2007). In the psychology field, a sense of community is a feeling that members belong to a group and matter to one another within that group and develop a shared faith that the members needs will be met by their commitment to be together (McMillan and Cavis, 1986). My findings focus on the community evolved out of a necessity for support during times of crisis and uncertainty. A common bond shared by military spouses can be a vague sense of what will be happening with their lives in the foreseeable future.

In addition to a strong sense of community developed by military spouses comes a need for support in overcoming obstacles. Although there are support programs in place, according to a 2006 survey conducted by the National Military Family Association, less than half of dependents actually used these programs and a smaller number even indicated that support programs were not available for them (Hoshmand and Hoshmand, 2006). These feelings that dependents’ support needs are not being met may lead to a development of a different arena of support. This support can be developed through communal coping within their support groups or through those with whom they have established a bond. The aforementioned community which develops out of the necessity for support shares commonalities in the realm of what is expected of them and what kind of rhetorical representation is used to establish their communal coping methods.

Two different types of support groups emerged from the data; one being global, on a large scale throughout the world, and the other much more local, focusing on the tighter community set in a smaller geographical context. Due to the nature of my research and considering the enormity of the military, the global support groups and pages where worldwide response and participation can be seen allowed for a large amount of personal experience and knowledge to be directed towards the key. These global groups contain a large number of
participants as well as a large number of followers and some contained responses and assistance in the thousands due to the influences such as experience and knowledge of the individuals. A cursory inspection of the global support sites does not necessarily reveal where these groups are physically, but references in comments suggest a broad global reach, consistent with the deployment spread of the contemporary United States military. Global support can have a broader span of coverage due to the nature and structure of those groups.

Aside from globally positioned groups, there are more locally focused support groups. These have a more direct connection and affect on the community and may only impact a single military base or town. While some bases in the United States are situated in metropolitan areas (eg Ft. Bliss, Texas) many bases are still located in smaller communities. These local groups may have less participation than a global group, therefore less experience and knowledge, although they do provide a more direct influence on those involved. They tend to focus primarily on local issues and aspects that directly control the outcome of more local events or happenings. Regardless of where the support originated from, specific themes are inherent within these groups with many different contributing factors dependant on community being addressed.

**Advice/Opinion**

**Advice**

In many instances users sought advice from other members of the community. The advice could be anything from helping make life choices or guidance based on personal experience. Since advice is based on personal opinion, some of the military advice provided was the result of a past experience of another Facebook user and may have contained specific language or phrases identifying the response as advising on the issue rather than providing an answer in regards to the protocol to resolve the issue. The resources analyzed when broken down in respective elements
of locally based and globally based pages varied on specific details and areas of concern from the users. With locally based pages the advice tended to be geared towards the local community and generally stayed within that realm, however they did sometimes go beyond just local. “For those with kid’s What is your best advice for parenting during deployment? How can we as parent make sure kids are resilient?”¹ (The REAL Army Wives of Fort Bliss, January 24, 2013)

With the globally focused pages, the information and advice was directed more towards the larger more global community instead. “Who do you think should be at the homecoming celebration?” (Military Spouse Central, February 17, 2013). This post was in regards to a homecoming from a deployment. The user was showing a concern whether or not to include extended family, in-laws or just keep it within the central family members and was seeking advice from spouses who may have already experienced a deployment. Both sides provided advice and other than the differences previously stated, the initial postings were responded to in different manners. This particular post generated 126 responses, some locally focused pages produced less comments and this may be due to the fact that the responders may have had limited knowledge of the subject matter so may have opted not to comment. The globally requested advice, since it was global, is a more general question geared towards a less specific focus.

Im desperate looking for advice: My 18 month old daughter

doesn’t want to try new foods. She most of the time ONLY drinks fruit juices and milk!! And when I get lucky she eats chicken nuggets and hot dogs, yougurth animal crackers, bananas and strawberries and cereal. I don’t know what else to do; I’ve tried eating with her, showed her pics of food, videos, bought colorful plates but nothing worked; any advice? PLEASE :’(²

(The REAL Army Wives of Fort Bliss, January 22, 2013)

¹ Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
² Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
In either instance the advice provided can be essential to building strong relationships because there is a certain development of trust when one person provides advice to another to meet one of their personal needs. Since this posting and others like it may not seem unique to the military culture, there are other factors to consider that still make them part of the military lifestyle. Other factors such as separation from their support systems could influence their need for the use of Facebook in resolving issues such as these. These questions could possibly be answered on another more professional forum or by family members, however in these cases the user may not feel that their family is close enough to support their needs due to the fact that the other users may be facing the same issues under similar circumstances and have developed a sense of community with the other users.

Furthermore, this situation could be more complicated due to additional cultural or geographical barriers. If the soldier and his family were stationed overseas, there would be limited access to familiar foods. The user may also feel like there are no other assets to address this issue in another culture. She may have feelings of isolation therefore turning to the people she feels connected and bonded to would be her preference for support.

I analyzed six locally based Facebook pages from the Fort Bliss/ El Paso area and found since locally focused advice is only useful to that local community, the information being exchanged is limited. The limited advice can still have an impact since the advice requested may be more specific in detail and requests are generally made in regards to local issues. “Any suggestions on a garage in the El Paso area to get a car serviced?” (Fort Bliss Spouses, February 15, 2013) Locally based pages tended to be more immediately community oriented. This could be because the local people involved have a greater sense of specificity in regards to what is going on within the immediate community. A local Facebook page can be paralleled to using a
directory in the sense that there are quick and impersonal requests seeking a short answer to the posted request.

Some postings throughout both global and local pages were links posted to direct users to another website providing advice on military related issues.

Most anyone can tell you that missing milestones and special events is just part of living the military life. Ali Gibbs, military spouse (and brand new mom) gives her advice on how to cope when deployment means missing family milestones.

(Military Spouse Central, January 31, 2013)

The posting contained a link to an article at www.veteransunited.com containing advice on coping with deployment issues. This demonstrates that some advice postings are not directed at anyone in general, but just provide outside resources for additional advice. These types of posting occurred in both global and local pages and the structure was identical in both aspects since they just provide a link to another resource.

Globally based advice requests seemed to be more emotionally structured and helpful in an emotional manner rather than the physical manner seen with local pages. Some posts were there to provide support and inspiration for the members who may have been facing similar hardships to others in the community. “The military can make you feel so small sometimes. That is how I describe the feeling that my kids (and I) get every time my husband goes away. How do you cope?” (Military Spouse Central, January 7, 2013) Since these postings were supportive advice rather than specific to a certain area of the community, members were able to provide a wider range of responses within the limitations of the initial posting. Some postings were used to convey messages of having a positive demeanor and looking forward to the future.
Hello everyone!! I hope you all have had a good week so far! We’re almost to the end of it, then we can mark another week off the calendar, more days closer to seeing your loved one again!!

Tonight I was having a rough night. And it’s ok to have those! One of those where we just want and need our guys next to us and not thousands of miles away right?! I allowed myself to be all sad about it for a few minutes, ok maybe almost an hour, or two lol :) but then turned it around and made it a positive moment. So with that said I wanted to post this note on here and hear from you now. Let’s all feel positiveness to each other! What are you thankful for?! I know a lot of us are going through a not so happy time. Now I completely understand we aren’t the ones deployed and we’re not by any means doing the amazing job that our loved ones are doing through day and night wherever they may be. But they are ours, our family. The ones that get us through a rough day the ones we come home every night to and have dinner with. We miss them!! So now I will start with that. I miss him like crazy right now, but instead of feeling miserable, I feel thankful now to have such an amazing husband! Do you know how many people wait their whole lives for a love like the one you have? He/she may not be physically next to you at the moment but you know you have that already! How lucky are we?? =) Now let’s hear from you. It can be the little things we take for granted sometimes too. As
simple as you’re thankful for your good health right now. For technology at your fingertips that is allowing you to read this on a night where you just can’t sleep ;) it can be rough sometimes but remember we’re all strong and we can do this and more!!

(Our Deployment: 101, January 23, 2013)

These messages were generally responded too in the same manner; positive and future/goal oriented.

I’m thankful for FB! He last deployed in ’06 and the technology now is helping me get through this! I couldn’t imagine going weeks without hearing a word... I can send him a message whenever I have something to say, he gets to see the pictures of our daughter and how she’s growing and what we’re doing, he can write me any time he can, and I still get butterflies when I see he’s on

(Our Deployment: 101, January 24, 2013)

While some of these postings are not a direct request for advice, the responses contain information which can be taken as advice by anyone else reading the replies. This was a recurring pattern in the advice offered on the globally focused Facebook pages. These types of posts can be helpful for these spouses not just to answer specific questions or to assist with concerns but can aid in them developing an identity besides being a spouse coping with a military deployment but form a sense of validation as an individual.

Upon analysis of the speech structure used within the advice requests and submissions, there are specific requests focused on the military community and the stressors they face. In

---

3 Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
addition the attitude and tone used within the speech is either grateful, even before the posting to show a sense of appreciation that others may not be able to relate to, or may seem anxious with concern because the stressor being faced is an important concept to the user asking for the advice.

The amount of globally focused advice postings was slightly higher than posts on local pages. This does lead to the conclusion that although these pages are used to support communal coping, seeking advice is not as relevant as initially anticipated.

Opinion

Opinions of users were also found in the Facebook pages analyzed. The users would either ask for opinions or give opinions. In some instances the opinions were simply a user asking a simple open ended question allowing for other users’ opinions on a certain subject. “What does family mean to you?” (Military Spouse Central, February 20, 2013) This is a general question and included a photograph of a man in uniform holding the hands of his children as they are walking, perhaps to provoke emotions and a sense of pride in the service member as well as the reasons to continue supporting the deployed service member. These postings seemed to me that they were there in some cases to perhaps take the users mind off of a deployment or separation from their spouse by keeping their mind occupied. Some opinion postings were actually focused on the subjects of deployment and homecoming.

I have a question. I know my homecoming isn’t for, like, ever but what do people normally wear? I want to wear cute sweats and a t-shirt and tennis shoes because when time comes I just want to run and tackle hug him and a dress and heels would get in the way of that. Lol Suggestions? I always wear sweats. I’m known for it.
(Our Deployment: 101, February 7, 2013)

Opinion postings did not show much variance based on whether or not the Facebook page was a locally or globally focused one. There were some cases where the posting on a local page was focused on a local concern or issue in the community.

Any ladies in El Paso know of a place that will rent out a bridal gown, my husband and I don’t have wedding pics :( and we want to take some pictures to have a memory of it…. Please help, we would appreciate it. Thank you ….

(Fort Bliss Spouses, February 12, 2013)

This type of post could be indicative of many factors to include age and education level as well as social class. It is common in the military for individuals to marry young or this particular post could demonstrate a lack of financial resources when the user was initially married. Additionally, it could demonstrate that the user’s husband had faced relocation or deployment shortly after the couple got married. This is also an example of users turning a public domain into a private one

The globally focused pages held opinion posting that were universal, therefore could be used locally as well as globally. Many different opinions within the text lead to a better understanding of what others would be going through and may develop a deeper sense of community and belonging with others through this understanding.

In some user postings the opinion would develop into a discussion over a certain subject.

What does everyone think about the DOD proposing that spouses have a rank?! I for one think it’s ridiculous! As much as I appreciate and understand the daily sacrifices that spouses go
through, I believe their husband earned that rank, they have no
right to pull it or use it to bully someone or better their chances at
something.⁴

(Strong Military SO’s “We can do it”, February 1, 2013)

These postings contained several in depth comments and responses in participation from
the other users on the page. The language used within posting of opinions varied from accepting
tones to some tones of strong disagreement on a subject. Regardless of the tone used the
language involved was in depth utilizing various military specific terms and on open forum
pages not specifically ran by a unit, they were sometimes very aggressive with their tones.

Haven’t heard anything about this either but you are right, my
husband EARNED his rank. I don’t go into his work place just like
he don’t go into mine, I think the wives that think they can “hang
out” at their husbands jobs and where their husbands rank irritate
me!!

Strong Military SO’s “We can do it”, February 1, 2013

While some of these situations may enforce a strong development of community, the
opinions of disagreement may do just the opposite and hinder the strengthening of relationships.
Regardless of the direct effect the discussion or opinions may have on the community, some
postings are just a forum for discussion of nothing related at all to the stressors one may be
experiencing and this may be enough to serve as a coping method.

With approximately 25% of all posts pertaining to advice, opinion, or discussion subjects,
I have determined that although these areas may play an important role in the building of bonds

⁴ Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
between users and the mitigation of certain stressors, there are other areas which also contribute to the users’ relief.

**Help/Support**

Additionally, one of the other major recurring themes that were present related to requests for help and support. Although the issues that were discussed about were vast, I was able to group the themes into two: structural help and emotional support.

**Structural Help**

For global based pages the discussion for structural help was on broad issues such as care packages and change of duty station, pay issues, and deployment technical guidelines such as what to expect and timelines.

> My husband is down range and our bah has not kicked in? We got married in December and he filed a month ago today. Is there anything I can do to see why it hasn’t kicked in yet? anyone I can call? thanks!^{5}

(Our Deployment: 101, February 14, 2013)

The user makes use of a Military acronym BAH, it stands for Basic Allowance for Housing, the user also mentions that her husband is “down range” which is a military term. This was the case with the majority of postings for structural help, both local and global in the data collected; they contained Military acronyms that are not explained. The common use of this military language is specific to the community and creates a sense of togetherness. Furthermore, it also isolates them from others in the community who are not related to the military lifestyle in any way.

Another prominent recurring theme for questions in the structural help category at a global level was care packages especially for those who had not previously experienced a deployment.

^{5} Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
Hi, my husband is in Afghanistan and it is my first deployment.

I want to send baked goods like brownies in packages. What’s the best way to keep them fresh?

(Strong Military SO’s “We can do it”, February 7, 2013)

Asked one user and the replies were 40 in total. Some users spoke of regulations and what could not be sent by mail, others shared experiences both good and bad on how to get the best price on postage when shipping the packages. Like in most of the discussions on global Facebook pages the replies were varied as far as military branches and it also varied on where the women had sent the packages to.

Other structural help issues were questions about relocation, and the different circumstances that go with a military move. Moving is part of the military lifestyle but I accordance with the data, the details about the move are not always made clear from the military’s standpoint. Some spouses turned to these pages for help and guidance on the steps for the move.

Hello all! This is more of a question for the wives. My husband just received news he (may) be coming home early, which only gives me a short while to get things together and packed up. He is permanently stationed in Germany, and I haven't made the move yet (I am planning to when he comes home). I have already submitted the EFMP paperwork and all of the documentation I need to provide in order to move, (except for pets yet) but I need to get my priorities in check for my side of things with moving. I want to make sure I don't overlook anything. Are there certain
things I need for Europe? Should I sell most of my things and start over? Are there things I shouldn't go without? It's a lot to handle for being newly-weds and I want to get us off to the right start. Any advice would be very helpful.

(Our Deployment: 101, February 8, 2013)

The answers to relocation questions were extensive and detailed primarily by others spouses who had recently done the move or had been living in Germany for some time. Some were step by step guidelines on how to get even the smallest detail planned. Others provided links with helpful information. One user responded that she was in the same process and her and the Facebook user who posted the original comment shared comparisons back and forth starting with

That's crazy we are in almost the exact same situation. I'm sure you've done this but my husband needed copies of all of my stuff to apply for command sponsorship so make sure you have copies of your passport, drivers license etc.! Where in Germany are you headed?

(Our Deployment: 101, February 8, 2013)

At times in the theme certain comments or postings were answered by spouses who felt that they possessed information that others did not due to husbands rank.

Hello Ladies! My husband is now in Korea. korea , he mentioned to me that he'll hardly get a chance to eat at the dfac and yet BAS is taken away from him. To me this is completely unacceptable, if this was the case why take BAS away? and wouldn't it be easier for soldiers to pay their meals at the dfac themselves? Any of you
ladies back here stateside have this issue? Any advice please.  

(Military Spouse Central, December 3, 2012)

This particular post is not about a deployment, but a soldier stationed at a duty station overseas serving an unaccompanied tour where his family will not be joining him. The concern addressed is that he will not be able to eat at the DFAC (Dining Facility). When a soldier is unaccompanied at this duty station he is issued a meal card to eat at the DFAC, therefore he will not get paid BAS (Basic Allowance for Sustenance). One response from a wife was not helpful, but instead the poster said, “My husband gets BAS because of his rank so I am not concerned with him having it taken away.” (Military Spouse Central, December 3, 2012) This post is an example of one that was counterproductive where the communication within the community was not effective. Furthermore, it enhances the segregation of the spouses based on their husbands rank. This post was one of few on these pages and was not with the majority of the effective posts.

On the local level, for structural help the subjects ranged from “where to” directions, to local laws, policies within the specific post infrastructure. On a Fort bliss page one user said:

I need help. My husband hasn't taken me to get my ID yet and we have been here for a while… But he's literally ALWAYS in the field. We've gone to the office twice and waited as long as we could (with our seven month old). I really need to be able to get on post and buy groceries… Can I go without him if I explain that he's in the field and has been????

(Bliss Babes, January 23, 2013)

---

6 Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted
A military identification (ID) is crucial to military spouses because they know what it is like when their husbands are constantly away for training and how difficult it is to obtain any resources without the ID. Some responses to this post provided alternatives for this spouse to do while her husband was at training. Others offered childcare so she could go get her ID and one particular post offered her solution to her having to wait for her ID problem by referring her to a website where she could get a number so she wouldn’t have to wait at the actual facility. Some responses to this post, also mentioned the option to go to a grocery store that was not inside a military installation. In this case, that could be a valid solution, yet if the case were that the spouse was on a military installation overseas, her option for groceries would be limited due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with the area or products.

The great majority of the data in the structural help theme has mundane and not particularly life threatening subjects. “I can’t remember but is Soto gym open 24 hrs?” (The REAL Army Wives of Fort Bliss, January 30, 2013), “Does anyone know if there’s a catholic Ash Wednesday mass anywhere on ft bliss?” (Fort Bliss Spouses, February 13, 2013). However these are obviously stressors and common bonds that the members of these Facebook pages are burned with and the answers and support found about them in the pages allows them to build a sense of community. These questions were often repeated and asked over and over yet, in the time frame where data was collected; the answers although repeated or similar were in the majority of the cases answered again as well.

Emotional Support

A recurring theme within the data collected was emotional support. Spouses often turned to the support pages claiming they had a problem and needed help with a personal problem. The topics for these problems included depression, anxiety, adultery, loss of income and sadness.
These problems often came in conjunction while the Users’ spouses were either recently home from a deployment, deployed or about to deploy.

On the global pages, users were open to sharing their feelings of distress and their need for help:

Hello Everyone! I have a question for you ladies. My husband is coming back from his first deployment soon. I know he is having some problems right now with his temper and other things. I am worried he will come back a total different person and won’t love me the same anymore. I know he has changed because of the deployment. Can other ladies who have been through deployments with their SO [significant other] give me any pointers or advice on what to expect. Please and thank you for reading this.

(Our Deployment: 101, February 7, 2013)

Replies to this post were mostly long and included support from spouses who had experiences similar outcomes after their husbands came back from a deployment. The language in these posts was warm, affectionate and calming. “Be the wife you were when he left…” (Our Deployment: 101, February 7, 2013) These types of posts generated long discussions and replies.

Even though question that promoted emotional support were prominent. Some emotional support posts on global pages were not specific to any person; they were simply messages of encouragement that were posted by users to motivate the rest of the members of the group. “There’s a saying that I believe: distance does to love what wind does to fire; it extinguishes the weak but fuels the strong. LIKE if you agree!” (Military Spouse Central, January 6, 2013) This post received 2290 likes, 17 comments and 265 shares. This was just a message that perhaps had
a different meaning for each of the people that read it. These kinds of messages were posted at least once a day in each of the global pages where the data was collected from.

Some emotional support comments were accompanied with pictures, usually the pictures have quotes as well: “It hurts now but nothing compares to the happiness that awaits you.” Are the words on a picture that is posted with the message: “stay strong loves :)” (Our Love is Deployment Strong, January 22, 2013). Another picture example was a collage filled with multiple pictures with words of encouragement such as “Because with every passing minute we’re one minute closer to being together again.” (Love is Deployment Strong, January 28, 2013) This helps with support because it has a total of 184 “likes”, but also develops bonds and even influences users to use terms of endearment although the users have no face to face contact. One response was, “I love this picture hun.”7 (Love is Deployment Strong, January 28, 2013) These kind of posts although were not answering any questions, were well received for they were posted repeatedly and “liked” by numerous of the Facebook users in the groups.

At a local level, the emotional support posts were generally more personal than in the global pages. Posts were situation specific questions that received answers from the community in the pages. The posts on local pages were less deployment – centric, for the most part the emotional support posts were regarding, adultery, weight loss and pregnancy.

Recently found out I was pregnant after just having my baby barly 4 months ago by emergcy C section. I was told my best option was to have an abortion, because if I went through with the pregnancy there is a very high chance it could kill me and the baby since my utris is not healed. I’m not looking for critics because trust me I am one of those people who was againt it all cost. But now all I see is my baby and I

---

7 Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted.
don't want put that kind of risk on my family. Any advice would nice,

I really just need someone to talk to. ⁸

(Bliss Babes, February 4, 2013)

The users who needed emotional support in the local pages were going through hardships or stressful situations. Because military spouses are usually stationed away from their families, these pages also become an outlet for support on issues that although are not military specific, have an impact on their lives. Additionally, since some posts are related to concerns in the user’s personal life, these are times when Facebook turns from a public forum to a more personal forum for them. This type of question is best suited for a doctor or medical professional rather than other Facebook users. This is one example of how social class and education might play a role in why some users depend on forums such as these. They may lack the knowledge of the appropriate resources to express their concerns. Furthermore, if this user were stationed overseas, the feeling of isolation and fear of the unknown culture and foreign healthcare system could influence her decision to post private and intimate information on a public forum.

Help and support made up 41% of total postings. This theme was in majority of the postings and it makes perfect sense since the Facebook pages are primarily there to offer support to military spouses.

Events

Another recurring theme within my research was the discussion of events. The global pages held few postings in regards to events; however the postings from global pages were focused on military wide events.

This week is Military Saves Week and is meant to help inspire financial literacy and smart ways to save money. We are happy to

⁸ Facebook posting has been replicated with spelling and grammatical errors as originally posted.
announce that we will have a giveaway this week and you could
win a Save Big Bucks Basket” that includes: $150 Amazon Gift
Card, Dave Ramsey, Financial Peace University”
(Military Spouse Central, February 25, 2013)

The posting included a link to an article on www.veteransunited.com which went more in depth
on this military wide event. The event is open to all within the community and welcomes the
community. We can also determine that this event is legitimate since there is a follow on article
at a legitimate website and the user posted their name and credentials within the posting.

Other global events were simple events in the forms of contests for users to enter.

We’d love to hear your stories, tell us one thing that has made your
marriage STRONGER. If we select your story we will publish it
and you can win free stuff! Submit your story here:
http://www.veteransunited.com/spouse/your-stories/
(Military Spouse Central, January 9, 2013)

While these events are not traditional in a sense of what an event may be perceived as, they are
still events within the group to help build bonds. Since events are essentially information
distributed to the users, there were very few comments on the events. A common trend with
globally based events was the posts most likely included an incentive to participate. Since the
event were virtual in a sense or less physically social and more emotionally or mentally social, a
physical aspect was offered to potentially make the event seem more worthwhile. While some
events were essentially contests offering prizes for participation, other global events offered a
chance to show support. Some events were used to show support for military service members
around the world. One event in particular asked users to wear red on Fridays for deployed
Soldiers. The photo simply states “RED Fridays REMEMBER EVERYONE DEPLOYED” (Our Deployment: 101, February 15, 2013), this posting received 375 “likes” from other users demonstrating support and a bond with others on the page.

More locally focused events would show events that members within the region could actually attend. “Gems, minerals, jewelry, uncut stones, jewelry repair, educational displays we will have it ALL at the Museum ROCKS Gem and Mineral Show. For only $4!” (Fort Bliss Spouses, February 12, 2013). Since these events are within the community and some require actual attendance the posting are on a certain level, time sensitive. If a user misses the post they may miss the even so it is important that the agency or people posting the event ensure their information is presented with enough time for users to react.

Some posts were just following ups to a question that had been previously posted yet they did not provide any details in the questions. “How can I get the certification” (Fort Bliss Spouses, February 16, 2013) or another user may want to let others know they would be attending. “I will be providing cookies for the bake sale, any other takers?” (Echo Co 123 BSB, January 15, 2013) This projection of involvement from some users could prompt others to join with them in the event and build greater bonds between them.

Family Readiness Groups are key elements when it comes to posting about events. They are the primary source of information for deployed Service member spouses and majorities of FRGs have pages on Facebook. They utilize Facebook or other social media to distribute information because it is easier to distribute on a large scale using social media. FRGs may use Facebook to let spouses know information regarding deployment, “Our main body 1 has arrived safely! We will update daily when the other main bodies arrive. Remember OPSEC!” (1st Armored Division, January 2, 2013). In this case the post was regarding Operational Security
(OPSEC) which essentially calls for military personnel and their family members to wary of the information that they put out on social media or verbally prior to soldiers leaving or arriving from a deployment. Out of all the types pages from which data was collected, FRG pages were the only ones that constantly reminded users to OPSEC, this may be due to the fact that the Command has access and in fact monitors those pages.

Additional events such as upcoming meetings were addressed at times.

Echo Company Families, please join us at the next FRG meeting on Thursday. This will be an opportunity for us to welcome back the Company Commander CPT XXXXXX and re introduce him to all the new families.9

(Echo Co. 123 BSB FRG, February 22, 2013)

Some pages involved information about unit specific events in their postings. “Company run...great participation Eagles..keep going. 5.23 Miles at 45.08” (Echo 123 BSB, February 9, 2013). Regardless of what an FRG will post or who it is directed at they seem to use their pages strictly to conduct business and keep family members informed.

The FRG uses many military terms within their discussion. This may be due to the fact that FRGs have connections to the military and their operating procedures are outlined within military regulation. The context of FRG pages is very professional and since these pages are monitored, they tend to have less unnecessary posts with no direct link to events or Soldiers within the unit. The users may also be reluctant to post on these pages since they could be worried that their spouse will be adversely affected if they say the wrong thing and users know that these pages are monitored by individuals within the unit. FRG Facebook pages contain a vast amount of information specific to the spouses particular unit and could serve as great tools

9 Names have been omitted from some posts
for service members or their spouse both during deployment or when back in a garrison environment.

I found that 8% of all posts throughout the ten Facebook pages analyzed were outlining events to the community. A majority of all postings in regards to events were on the locally focused pages. This may be why there were a small percentage of event postings since they were primarily found on only four of the analyzed pages and the dispersion was not paralleled by the event postings on the globally focused pages.

Information

The Facebook pages analyzed also carried a large amount of information. The information contained in the pages varied from news stories to general outlets of any type of information that would be good to know for spouses. One of the main factors that can ease a spouse during times of uncertainty can possibly be accurate and relevant information in regards to their concerns.

Locally based Facebook pages could contain information about questions, directions and news within the community.

Fort Bliss Early Release!

Fort Bliss Garrison Command has declared personnel are to be released early at 1100 hours due to Sever Weather. Tomorrow, Jan. 4, only key and essential personnel are to report for duty. Base Opening delays will be announced as necessary. Please drive safely.

(1st Armored Division, January 3, 2013)
Similarly, the FRG Facebook pages contained information pertinent to the specific unit. This information is to keep all those individuals associated with the unit informed on what is happening within the unit. “SGT XXXXXX Promotion and SPC XXXXXXXX Re-UP!!”

(Echo 123 BSB, January 10, 2013) I also noticed that local Facebook pages sometimes contained global information in addition to the locally featured information.

Globally based Facebook conveyed information on a larger scale that was usually national or international. “Presidents Day is not just for the kids to be off school, check out all the things you didn’t know about Presidents Day!- www.veteransunited.com” (Military Spouse Central, February 18, 2013).

The language used to convey information throughout all Facebook pages analyzed is simple and straightforward. It seemed that it was just a matter of letting people know what the needed to know and that was it. Since some information was merely reposting of news stories with a link associated, “‘Changing the Culture’ Helps Fort Bliss Lower Suicide rate- www.elpasotimes.com” (Fort Bliss Spouses, February 11, 2013), some postings lacked a personal aspect. This was primarily on the global Facebook pages; however this was also the case on some of the local pages.

INCOMING!!!!!!!!! Soldiers E1-E6 Ft Bliss homes has immediate availability for 2 & 3 Bedroom homes in select neighborhoods!!! There are no pet deposits, no first & last month’s RENT or utility deposits. You pay a prorated rent based on your daily BAH. Please contact the wait list team at the Kelly Park office. 915-XXX-XXXX.11

---

10 Names have been omitted from some posts
11 Any personally identifiable information has been protected
The REAL Army Wives of Fort Bliss, February 22, 2013

The language contained on all information posting was clear-cut which would appear to be the most effective way to distribute information. On this particular post as was the case with all the other themes language that is military specific was used without being explained. BAH stands for Basic Housing allowance.

The information postings contributed to 26% of all data gathered. This was another rather large section and as previously stated with the help and support section. This could be a reflection of the assumption that these pages are in place to offer support and providing information could be one form of support for spouses. The support received in the form of information can dramatically affect many variables within the military spouse community. Information exchange can be vital to many aspects of a separation such as timelines, expectations, protocol, assistance or simply offering support to an individual.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication used by military families within social media outlets such as Facebook during times of separation or deployment. While research driven by communication and psychology frameworks have dealt with communication issues and challenges in the military environment, research on coping and military spouses has not been conducted extensively. In fact I believe that this is an area ripe for additional research not only to test theoretical ideas, but also because it is likely to provide insight to the military and military social service providers in terms of what is necessary to help acculturate and integrate spouses more into the military mission. Also my research signals the necessity for further developments in communication theory to study the military as a whole and spouses as a unique group of people. Although service members themselves receive information and training for deployments or separation and have a greater and perhaps different understanding of military culture from their spouses, there is still a need for the advancement of information flow between the spouses and military. As discussed in my literature review, there has been research conducted on relationships between communication and morale, mental health and family support. Greene et al (2010) stated that communication can affect morale, family support and personnel’s mental health. I have determined that if spouses have the means to communicate and stay informed with other spouses or their service member, this can be enhanced by having proper knowledge of the information being presented further improving the service members family support, morale, and mental health. The enhancement of spousal support from the military can develop an improved means of communication to be utilized further improving the areas previously mentioned.
This research can be applied in other fields of communication to benefit the understanding of other social groups and the communication within those groups. The possibilities are limited only by the wide array of social groups available to research. All communities communicate in different manners and develop their own culture which is dependent on their specific methods of communication. Further understanding of these particular communities and their communication methods can be applied in other groups can be shared amongst other social groups to gain a broader spectrum of information on what may work or may not work overall.

The results of this research indicate that through the use of social media pages, military spouses can acquire information, provide information, exchange all types of information and seek support. In my findings I can relate that the problem being addressed in a “we” perspective is comparative to other studies which determined that, “we-talk is a meaningful marker of communal coping.” (Rohrbaugh et al, 2012) With my study I have determined that although the communal coping was done online, users utilizing communal coping had effective problem solving capabilities and networks. There are many different facets to the types of communications used and the information exchanged as well as the actual language used when utilizing these media outlets. I have discussed my methodology in conducting my research and executed my research in accordance with the standards I outlined. In the process I analyzed my data and specific themes emerged in regards to types of support and discussion topics I would be further exploring. Upon sorting the data into the appropriate themes, I have drawn conclusions in regards to social media and how communities are formed and utilized to provide support when dealing with different stressors.
I have determined that strong bonds are formed through the use of social media sites and communities are developed through these bonds. The communities are strengthened by the members who provide support to one another in all aspects whether it be advice, opinions, help, support, information or event information. Upon further examination I have assessed the language used within these communities and found that there is a common language used which is known by all members and demeanor which can change based on individual moods, values, and experience.

The different themes identified demonstrate how although the main focus of the analyzed social media pages was primarily aimed at support; there is more than just one specific type of support. Users were inclined to seek support emotionally, find new methods of coping, keep occupied despite their situation and offer assistance to other based off of their own life experiences. These methods of support were all communicated through various submissions on Facebook pages and were all directed towards an audience of peers. The support themes contained large amounts of data for spouses seeking to find support and the pages appeared to be well used by all involved.

It is apparent after, my analysis that throughout the communal coping process displayed on Facebook pages through various postings, military spouses seem to form an identity that at times was separate and distinct from the military or being a military spouse. They found a space where being a soldier’s wife was not their primary identity, although some of the questions where military related. Furthermore, rank structure of spouses was not a primary determining factor in a majority of these posts contributed to a deeper sense of validation and separation from the military aspect of these postings. The status of military fiancés and girlfriends being factored in on some Facebook pages integrated those particular members as a part of the coping process.
within the community as well. A larger project including survey data might reveal a different conclusion, but the expression used by fiancés and girlfriends in my analysis provides a unique insight.

The language contained in these posts varied based on what information was distributed, what information was sought, what questions were asked and the specific type of forum the page could be classified as. Outward projection of a spouse’s demeanor was looked at and analyzed to determine how the language constituted communal coping and how offered insight into how the community was built and enriched by the language used in postings. Language played a large part in the conclusions reached in my research and was a crucial filter used in the data gathering and classification process.

There are limitations with my research and these limitations may or may not provide different results. One limitation may be the use of other social media outlets. Other outlets such as twitter or Myspace could be used to develop a larger scale of what types of support and communication the military spouses use to convey ideas. Aside from different outlets, there may be different functions going on within the specific unit which may produce different results. Additionally, different levels of family readiness groups may affect research done since at different levels varied information may be provided and larger family readiness groups have a larger basis to cover since they affect more service members. Types of units whether combat focused, combat support focused, medical, or military infrastructure units may also yield different results since the will have a different overall mission and have different concerns from the spouses. Another thing to consider is my limited time frame of three months. This time from can be directly related to the previously stated aspect of the different functions. There are also
many more private sources and more public sources that may provide different results if they were to be used in my research.

Further research could be done using longer time periods to gather data from as well as using more social media outlets. There may also be different themes to determine different aspects of support systems. The addition of a survey instrument would also reveal a richer set of data, especially if interviews could be conducted online and face-to-face. I believe the results would not likely change with such an addition, but merely add to the richness of what spouses have to say about coping and their place in the military environment. Additionally, there are other family members besides a female spouse who may be affected by deployments such as male spouses, partners, children, parents of service members, or extended family. Research on these other family members may influence results and provide a separate conclusion.

In conclusion I have determined that many factors are involved in the support systems within social media outlets to build the bonds and promote communal coping. The language used to establish and enhance communal coping varies depending on the type of outlet and the individuals involved. There seem to be recurring themes within my research that are included on all pages and these themes support community growth and communal coping in all areas explored by my research. Furthermore, I have determined that the content of support, specific outlet used to convey support, and language used to communicate the information all greatly influence the results of building relationships and promoting communal coping
REFERENCES


Lynn K. Hall EdDNCCCLPC (NM)ACS (2011): The Importance of Understanding Military Culture, Social Work in Health Care, 50:1, 4-18


Military One source [https://militaryonesourcemil/footer?content_id=267470](https://militaryonesourcemil/footer?content_id=267470)


CURRICULUM VITA

Larissa Krenzer was born on January 4, 1987 in Los Angeles, California. She is the daughter of Jose Martinez and Ericka Diez-Gonzalez. Larissa graduated from Technologico de Monterrey campus Chihuahua for high school in 2005. She went on to the University of Texas at El Paso where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication/Print Media in 2010. In 2008 she completed an internship with The El Paso Times. In the fall of 2011 she began work on her Master of Arts degree in Communication at the University of Texas at El Paso. That same year she started working as a teaching assistant in the communication department at the University of Texas at El Paso. In December 2012 she moved with her husband to South Korea where she currently works as a broadcast journalist intern with The Armed Forces Network.