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Exploring the Leadership Experiences of Male Military Spouses:

An Exploratory Qualitative Inquiry

Christina L. Parsons

North Carolina A&T State University

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department: Leadership Studies & Adult Education
Major: Leadership Studies

Major Professor: Dr. Joseph R. Huscroft, Jr.

Greensboro, North Carolina

2019

The Graduate College
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

This is to certify that the Doctoral Dissertation of

Christina L. Parsons

has met the dissertation requirements of
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Greensboro, North Carolina
2019

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Biographical Sketch

Christina Lyn Parsons was born in Shelby, North Carolina. The youngest child of Eufrocina Dawkins and the late Robert E. Dawkins, she graduated from Shelby High School in 1992 and went on to attend North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in English, Language and Literature. She also holds a Master of Arts in Human Resource Management from National University in San Diego, California.

She has lived and worked across the United States and abroad. She taught English at Marine Corps University's Resident Sergeants Course in Twentynine Palms, California. She also taught developmental writing to adult learners at Copper Mountain Community College in Joshua Tree, California. Upon relocating from California to Germany, she held the position of Director of the Carl Schurz School in Frankfurt, Germany before her family returned to the States to spend a year in El Paso, Texas. Upon leaving Texas, the family relocated once again to Parris Island, South Carolina. While living in Parris Island, she worked supporting Marine Corps families where she held the position of Family Readiness Officer for Recruit Training Regiment's Third Recruit Training Battalion. A subsequent relocation brought her family to Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. It was there she began her pursuit of a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies and Adult Education, along with her peers in the first cohort at Camp LeJeune.

A military spouse of 24 years, she is the mother of four. She is an active community volunteer who is passionate about investing in her local community. A past member of the Camp LeJeune District School Board, she is active in her local Parent Teacher Association, and she currently serves on the Community Grants Committee for the Fort Myer Thrift Shop. Currently, she works as a Senior Data Analyst in the Northern Virginia area.

Dedication

To my love, my life partner, and my husband, Driko. We have grown up, grown through, and continue to push forward in this incredible life that we have built together. I can't begin to name all of the ways I am better because of you. Before every move, you would ask me, "Babe, how do you feel about going here?" My response to you was always, "As long as there is a you and me on the other side of it, then I'm fine with wherever God sends us." I cannot begin to think of how I would have started (and finished) this long journey without you. I am proud to be known as your "good piece of gear." I'm looking forward to seeing what's on the other side of retirement!

To my children, affectionately known as my brood: Alicia, Major, Gunner, and Elizabeth. Talk about experiential and ongoing learning! You all have taught me patience, my empathy has grown because of you, and my knowledge base continues to expand because of what you all teach me. More than that, you have given me a firm understanding of why Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The world you walkthrough is so much different from mine. Thank you for opening my eyes to new ways of seeing things. I continue to be amazed at the great things you all bring to the world each day, month, year. Remember whose shoulders you stand upon as you push forward.

Acknowledgments

~ Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man ~

Sam Walter Foss

Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to see this through. As promised, You have passed through the waters with me; the rivers have not overwhelmed me; and neither has the flame consumed me. I trust that everything I have gone through to get here is so that You may use me where You may.

Thank you to my parents who instilled in me the desire to be a lifelong learner. To my mother, who learned to navigate the culture of a new world and successfully raised children who continue to excel in it and also to my dad, who encouraged me to become the voracious reader I continue to be until this day, thank you. When Driko asked you if he could marry me, you told him, "I want Christina to finish school." Daddy, I think I'm done now.

I could not have achieved the growth I did without the support of my fellow Camp Lejeune Cohort. You all have supported me in ways I can't begin to count. I am so grateful. I cannot forget to mention our extended Marine Corps family. The grace and love you showed our family through the years have been incalculable.

To my Dissertation Chair and Committee, I cannot even begin to think of how I would have advanced without your support and mentoring. Dr. Huscroft, you told me you would always take my phone calls, and you have never failed me. Dr. Okpala, your pragmatic leadership has helped me to push forward. Dr. James, your support keeps me steadfast and ready to face the future. Dr. Graves, thank you for continuing to check on me and reminding me that the best dissertation is a *done* dissertation. Finally, Dr. Graham, your keen insight has encouraged me to challenge existing frameworks. Thank you.

I am so thankful for the male military spouses who took the time to share with me some of the intimate moments of their lives. You have given me insight that I will share and use to continue making inroads on your behalf. Thank you for the work that you do providing leadership in your families.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home. The primary objective of this research was to illuminate the voices of male military spouses from the various branches of military service to share their lived experiences and with specific regard to their leadership qualities. The goal of this research is to allow male military spouses to use their own words to describe their leadership experiences and to understand the context of that leadership inside the military culture. Pleck's Gender Role Strain was used as the framework to guide this study, four major themes emerged from the data, to include Leadership Competencies, Military Lifestyle, Marriage and Family Support, and Gender Issues.

Male military spouses demonstrated that their leadership experiences parallel those of female caregivers. The differences, however, manifest in the historical, social, and cultural differences of 1) how they see themselves as leaders and 2) how they perceive themselves as being seen within the military framework. While the military has made strides in recognizing the changing demographics of its active duty families, it still has work to do in its outreach and inclusion of male military spouses in its family readiness programs. Recommendations for military leadership include highlighting both the presence and the importance of male military spouses as primary caregivers. Also recommended is working with unofficial spouse clubs to be more inclusive of and perform better outreach toward male military spouses. Recommendations for future research include interviewing male military spouses raising daughters, as studies where men are navigating the waters of raising young girls/women could hold importance not only in the realm of military families, but in the realm of families and relationships altogether, as more men begin to take on the roles of primary caregiver in the home to children of all genders.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Women have become a sustaining force within the military. To this fact, the former Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, (in a discussion with Senator Mike Rounds from South Dakota) testified that [the United States] can no longer afford to go to war without women (CSPAN, 2017). Since "women entering the military are more likely than men to have families" (Battle, 2015, p.1), then military officials need to be ready to provide the support that is befitting to their male spouses as well as the male spouses of male active duty service members. As women have impacted considerable gender and societal role changes within the military, arguably comes changing roles for their male spouses who are likely to take on the role of a dependent family member in their absence. An understanding of the military culture is crucial to providing adequate support to families with male spouses. Culture is like invisible threads woven through a fabric, holding it all together. One can't see them but start pulling them out and the fabric begins to unravel and eventually fall apart. Edgar Schein, a well-known expert in the field of social psychology, defines culture thus:

> Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration. … [and] the deepest level of culture will be the cognitive in that the perceptions, language, and thought processes that a group comes to share will be the ultimate causal determinant of feelings, attitudes, espoused values, and overt behavior (Schein, 1990, p. 11).

The way the people in the organization dress, how they solve problems, and how they relate to

others within the hierarchy are all examples of organizational culture. Shafritz, Ott, and Jang (2016) went further to say that organizational culture, "is always behind the organizational activities that can be seen and observed" (p. 292). A good example of this would be the expression of traditions such as the annual birthday ball celebrated by the United States Marine Corps.

Each year on 10 November, Marines throughout the world reflect on their fallen comrades, celebrate their illustrious history, and rededicate themselves to the promulgation of the Marine Corps. Every unit is directed to observe the Birth of the Marine Corps with, at minimum, a reading of the Birthday Message from the 13th Commandant, General Lejeune. More elaborate ceremonies often include a more celebratory and festive event that includes Marines wearing their dress uniforms and any civilians attending are also expected to don formal evening wear. These ceremonies often include cutting of the cake by both the youngest and the oldest Marine present. Indeed, while the military has five branches (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard), each branch of the military has its own distinct customs and courtesies that distinguish each branch from the other. The military culture is different than any other and navigating its nuances can be difficult. Research shows that military families and personnel experience significant challenges that require them to learn skills that will prepare them for extended periods of separation and other demands unique to the military (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Carroll, Orthner, Behnke, Smith, Day, & Raburn, 2013).

In a 2017 Facebook Town Hall meeting, then Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, noted that the demographics of the military's married population has changed significantly since WWII. As such, the way the military views the families of those who serve has undergone a significant change and for good reason. According to General Milley, approximately 10 percent

of service members were married during WWII, as opposed to 60 percent of today's force. That shift in numbers, he asserted, means that [The Army] must "...elevate taking care of soldiers and their families to a very high order in our resource prioritization in order to maintain readiness" (Milley, 2017). From ensuring family members have adequate medical care and schooling, to providing safe housing and access to childcare, to making family members aware of and providing access to social support and relief programs, the military has come to understand that it is in its own best interest to take good care of its families. General Milley asserted that "If there are overwhelming needs and concerns at home, then that soldier will become a much less ready soldier" (Milley, 2017).

Traditionally, it is normal to think of the military spouse both as a woman and a person who provides care for the children (Porter, 2014). With more women opting to serve on active duty than ever before, those views may be changing. A corollary of having more female service members and same-sex marriages is the growing number of male spouses. According to the most recent demographics report published by Military OneSource (Department of Defense, 2017), the number of male spouses has increased steadily since 2012 and, currently, approximately 8.5% of the spouses of those serving on active duty are male. While the military has made significant strides in creating support programs for its military families, most of the support programs already in place are geared toward female spouses (Lufkin, 2017). Being a male spouse in a male-dominated organization poses a different sort of challenge. Having a better understanding of the needs of the male military spouse is imperative in order to provide them the support they need to remain successful participants in the military organization.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

According to Southwell and MacDermid Wadsworth (2016), while the military understands

the family's impact on service member retention, "Husbands' accounts of perceptions of a lack of gender-inclusive support resources … suggest that the military may be unevenly prepared to support nontraditional family structures" (p. 78). The military is predicated on leadership. From the highest to the lowest level, leadership is taught to service members from day one through example as well as through inculcation, and it is expected to be a part of the daily lives of its members. Leadership in the home is part of this leadership continuum. The current study explored the leadership experiences of men as they cope with stressors of being military spouses in order to better gauge their needs in an effort to influence the military's ability to provide better support services for this demographic.

The military has come to realize the important role that family readiness has and does play on retention and recruitment of an active duty force (Obama, 2011). All of the fighting to protect and defend the rights of an entire nation is currently done by less than half a percent of the population (Obama, 2011; Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017). Accordingly, the federal government has taken the position of treating the care and support of military families as a matter of national security for the reason of force retention (Esposito-Smythers, Wolff, Lemmon, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011; Obama, 2011).

In 2013, the Secretary of Defense repealed the 1994 Combat Exclusion Policy that kept women from serving in combat (Dempsey, 2013). This meant that ground combat positions once open to only male service members are now open to females. Additionally, in 2015, the U.S. repealed the law (1 U.S. Code § 7) making same-sex marriage illegal, and now the military recognizes same-sex marriages. A corollary of having more female service members and same-sex marriages is the growing number of male spouses who are not familiar with navigating the social and cultural norms of military family life. This study contributed to the academic

literature by illuminating the voices of male military spouses from the various branches of military service, and with specific regard to their leadership qualities.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model used to guide this study was Joseph Pleck's Gender Role Strain (GRS). Pleck's model was important for undergirding this since cultural standards for and attempts to conform to male masculinity, implanted by gender socialization, lead to psychological stress rather than psychological well-being (Pleck, 1995; Harrison, 1998; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002). This is particularly important when viewing male military spouses who continue to operate either on the margins of the military spouse community as a whole or altogether invisibly. The theory posits that men may face internal struggle or *strain* when they find themselves not conforming to the constraints of or meeting the expectations of their surrounding society (Pleck, 1995).

Pleck's theory is significant to the study in that it begirds the pressure that males find themselves facing even as they live normal lives in a society where men and women are expected to fulfill very prescribed roles based on gender. These expectations can only serve as added pressure in the male-dominated culture of the military where men are expected to be warriors and not simply what Porter (2014) described as, "… the civilian male spouse left on the home front … to play a supportive role for the female active duty military member's career and to be the primary caregiver for the family" (p. 9). Primary caregivers are understood to be the ones who provide the bulk, if not all, of the work as it concerns household labor, child-rearing, and sometimes the care of extended family members when needed. If a child is sick, then the primary caregiver, if he holds employment outside the home, will likely be the one to take time off from work to provide care for the ailing family member. Likewise, he will be the one to

attend teacher conferences or, if the children are homeschooled, then he will be the one providing the bulk of the time dedicated to teaching. As Porter (2014) wrote, "He now manages life responsibilities and primary care of their children without the assistance of his military spouse, which may influence his behavior; he may also need to redefine tasks not traditionally aligned with the male gender role" (p. 10).

Poza and Messer (2001) summarized it best when they stated, "Whether spouses are in formal or informal positions, recognized or unrecognized for their contributions, they often adopt a role that seeks to preserve and strengthen family unity and the feasibility of family business continuity. Theirs is an important leadership role" (p. 34). While Poza's study referenced CEO spouses in the context of small family-run businesses, the term can be related to family units as well, where the CEO spouse is the primary care provider of the family unit. Gardner (1993) asserted that, "Leaders cannot be thought of apart from the historical context in which they arise, the setting in which they function, and the system over which they preside" (p.1). Gardner's assertion was used to form the sub-questions for this study.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study explored the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home. The primary goal of this research was to illuminate the voices of male military spouses from the various branches of military service to share their lived experiences, and with specific regard to their leadership qualities. The study focused on 10 self-identified male spouses who serve or served as primary caregivers while their spouses served on active duty.

1.4 Research Questions

(1) What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home?

The following sub-questions helped guide the study:

(2) What is the historical context for leadership in military families?

(3) What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?

(4) How do male military spouses construct their understandings of leadership?

1.5 Definition of Terms

Culture **-** Culture is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration. … [and] the deepest level of culture will be cognitive in that the perceptions, language, and thought processes that a group comes to share will be the ultimate causal determinant of feelings, attitudes, espoused values, and overt behavior (Schein, 1990).

Deployment - Strategic alignment of forces in areas outside of one's Permanent Duty Station assignment. Only the military service member deploys. The family remains behind.

Drill Field – Tour of duty where Marine Corps Drill instructors train civilians to become Marines.

Dwell time – in the military, Dwell Time is the time spent *not deployed.*

Family readiness - The term used by the armed services to reflect the ability of family members to build and sustain strengths and resilience under the demands placed on them by a military service job or career (Orthner & Rose, 2009).

Male military spouse – Man who is married to an active duty service member.

Mental labor - (also known as the mental load*)* - *Mental* labor, regarding the primary caregiver, is the 24/7 organizing, planning, remembering that goes on in the mind of the caregiver who must manage everything and everyone to keep the household afloat.

Primary Caregiver – Family member who provides care and assistance for, or manages the care of, a current military service member and the rest of the family.

Readiness - Readiness is typically described as the capability of a military force to accomplish specified missions or goals (Kamarck, 2016).

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) - When a military service member and family move from one Permanent Duty Station to another.

Reintegration - The process a military service member goes through to get re-accustomed to living life at their local Permanent Duty Station assignment upon returning from a deployment.

Resilience - Bonanno (2006) defined resilience as having the capacity to maintain stable levels of physical and psychological functioning in the face of adverse events such as having your spouse deploy for long periods of time.

Tied mover spouse - A spouse who "moves along with the other even though his (or her) private calculus dictates staying" (Mincer, 1978 as cited in Hisnanick, 2014).

1.6 Assumptions

The researcher applied the following assumptions to the study: (a) those who chose to participate in this study were honest about their status as male military spouses; (b) respondents participated solely for the sake of helping the researcher to understand the lived experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers within the context of the military and for no other ulterior reasons.

1.7 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined by O'Leary (2005) as "conditions that may impact on results" (p. 57). The United States continues to find itself in a perpetual state of combating terrorism that knows no boundaries – and teeters on the brink of nuclear war with North Korea. This environment served as a potential bias in the study. Thomson (2011) referenced the Obama Administration's Directive on Military Families (First Lady, 2010) that, "directed the national security staff to conduct a review of existing programs and develop coordinated responses to supporting military families" (p. 19). The study indicated the Government's understanding of the importance of the family's support of and potential impact on the readiness of the military members, and their willingness to support those families.

The status of the researcher, a military spouse of a Senior Enlisted active duty military member as well as the mother to active duty soldiers, may have caused bias in participant recruitment. While the population of the study was small, there may yet be replicability or generalizability to a greater population outside of this study's participants, especially as the results may relate to stay-at-home fathers in general.

Only male military spouses who were currently married were included in the current study. Participants were recruited via online methods through groups such as MachoSpouse.com and other social networking groups that target military families and, specifically, male military spouses. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and participants were given the option to withdraw from participating at any time and without penalty. Participants were able to opt-out of responding to any interview questions for any reason.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the body of literature regarding male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers as it highlights their lived experiences, specifically regarding their leadership. While researchers have made inroads into studying the military spouse population using solely male military spouses as respondent groups (Battle, 2015; Cooper, 2014), none focused on leadership. The current study elucidates how men may lead differently when they serve as primary caregivers in the home. Additionally, the study has the potential to increase family readiness as the data may assist military leaders in better understanding male military spouses' needs. Finally, the study will affect leadership in communities - eventually these military families will reintegrate back into civilian communities, taking their leadership lessons learned with them.

Demographic changes have affected not only those who serve on active duty but also the families who support them in their service. These changes may well increase the number of male spouses entering the community of military families. The current study explored the leadership experiences of the male spouses of service members and how they lead in the home as primary caregivers while their spouses dedicate their lives to the military institution. The study has policy implications, is significant to the fields of leadership, gender, and family studies.

1.9 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 was used to introduce the research study. Included in that chapter were the problem statement that underscored the importance of the male spouse to military family readiness, the theoretical framework that guided the study, the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, key definitions, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 reviewed the extant literature on military spouses and highlighted gaps in the literature related to male

military spouses. Chapter 3 discussed the methodology used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Also discussed in Chapter 3 were the role of the researcher as well as trustworthiness and transferability. Chapter 4 highlighted the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 discussed the findings, along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review included a description of the military culture within which military spouses found themselves having to function. This section sought to describe the historical, cultural, social, and political context of the military. The chapter was divided into five sections. The first section focused on military culture. Sections two focused on military spouses. Section three focused on male military spouses. Included in this section was an overview of the research available on the military spouse community as a whole, followed by a synthesis of the limited research available on the lived experiences of male military spouses. Section four highlighted the dad as primary caregiver, and section five focused on traditional families and changing gender roles. The chapter highlighted gaps in the literature as they applied to the current study.

2.1 Military Culture

The military has a unique culture unlike any other. A brief description of the military's mission and training gives the reader a foundational understanding of the organization. Reading on its warrior culture side provides deeper insight into what a male military spouse must contend with in order to successfully support his active duty service member.

2.1.1 The importance of the mission. An organization's mission statement explicitly states what the public can expect regarding the population it serves and identifies what the organization is going to do in order to attain its vision (Manning, 2003); Chandler (Werther & Chandler, 2014). The mission of the Department of Defense (DoD) is, "to provide the military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country" (About the Department). One of the ways the organization accomplishes its mission is through training.

2.1.2 Training. Each branch of the military entails recruits attending an inculcation

period designed to indoctrinate new joins into a mindset of becoming warriors. Just as, "Families are expected to socialize their members into an appropriate set of 'family values' that simultaneously reinforce the hierarchy within the assumed unity of interests (Collins, 1998, p. 64), the military uses programs such as Boot Camps and Officer Candidate Schools (OCS) to train future service members to function effectively within the military organization.

These periods are designed to break down mentalities so that, no matter where recruits hail from or what their socioeconomic background, he or she will have an ingrained understanding of what it means to serve as a member of the Armed Service. This new frame of mind is meant to allow them to overcome the adversities that, ultimately, will allow them to complete their missions in the face of inevitable danger. The well-known adage of the military force - "In Peace Prepare for War" - represents having the mindset of the constant training and maintaining readiness for war.

Service members understand that they may one day be faced with having to perform tasks that go against the reason of human nature to protect oneself. They choose to voluntarily put themselves in harm's way in order to protect and defend not just their immediate families, but also the lives of millions of their countrymen. They also understand that the possibility of deploying while on active duty is constant.

2.1.3 Deployment. A deployment is any time a service member is away from home for thirty days or more on combat, peacekeeping, or humanitarian missions (Segal, 1986). Some service members deploy for periods of more than a year at a time. Deployments are an ongoing source of concern for military families across the spectrum (Carter & Renshaw, 2015; Hilt, 2015; MacDermid Wadsworth, Bailey, & Coppola, 2017), as they have been shown to have negative impacts on marital relationships, parenting, and the mental and physical well-being of the service

member, spouse, and children (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). Another trait that sets the military apart from its civilian counterpart is its highly masculine warrior culture.

2.1.4 Warrior Culture. Edgar Schein (Schein, 1990) defined culture as, "what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration." Schein goes on to espouse that this learned ideal ultimately manifests itself in the way the group behaves outwardly, feels and thinks inwardly, and even shapes how members of the group view the world. Lunasco, Godwin, Ozanian, & Loflin (2010) designed a mental health prevention program meant to increase help-seeking among war veterans. The researcher found that "the military culture is built upon facets that are infused during basic training, reinforced by the cultural framework, and ultimately strengthens soldiers' ability to thrive in and survive combat environments" (p. 509).

In basic training, service members learn not only the history of their respective organizations (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) but also basic forms of warfighting. The cultural framework of the military provides the service members with institutional values that allow them to carry out the mission of the Department of Defense as well as their respective service branches. Finally, while not all deployments will send service members into combat zones, being sent into combat environments is an ever-present possibility. In his book, "Hollow to the Corps", Hillen (1998) asserted that "The mission of the DoD is to be prepared to deter aggressors and, if that fails, to hunt them down and kill them" (p. 39).

While this language may seem harsh to some, one researcher suggests that it is important to remember that, "certain behaviors and traits may be seen as positive and adaptive in one culture and abnormal and maladaptive in another" (Sue et al., 2008). An example of this is when members of a warrior culture speak of honor, duty, self-sacrifice, and the taking of life in defense

of the country. Particularly, to speak of seeking the demise of the adversary is common inside the warrior culture. To the contrary, to hear citizens in civilian society speak of the demise of an adversary, let alone killing an adversary, is frowned upon since such acts of violence are viewed as being morally and ethically wrong. Instead, civilians speak of self-preservation, individual effort, getting ahead for oneself and family, not for the greater good or to come together in a team-building type effort, but for personal gain.

Civilian society and general religious standards instill in children to believe the mantra of "Thou Shalt Not Kill", but all sides suffer casualties in times of war and conflict. Although many in civilian society and various religions tout peace and tolerance, military service members are taught a complete spectrum of conflict resolution ranging from peacekeeping to full-scale war. The primary "mission" of a warrior culture is warfare, and the application thereof is time-consuming to the point that it spills over into every aspect of the services member's life.

2.1.5 Greedy Institution. Coser (1974) refers to organizations that place these sorts of all-encompassing demands on those who participate in them as "Greedy." These types of institutions, "seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are *omnivorous*. Military personnel do not work bankers' hours of 9-5, nor do they hold to any normal type of regular working day, especially during times of deployment. The job is not one that can be put down or retired from at the end of the day so that members may relax and enjoy the finer things in life. From Drill Instructors overseeing the training of recruits who need constant supervision to deployed personnel standing watch and ensuring the security and maintenance of a forward operating base, some endure workdays that can run into 12 to even 20 hours per day, only to start it all over again the next day. Having a

family, then, entails having one that has fully embraced the demands of supporting such a lifestyle.

2.2 Military Spouses

The term *military spouse* nearly always brings to mind the image of a woman. The academic literature bears out this imagery that military spouses are women in its lack of male military spouses as respondents (Porter, 2014). A bounty of literature exists that highlights the psychological issues female military spouses experience when their active duty spouses deploy and reintegrate (i.e., return from deployment) that include: feelings of isolation (McMillan, 2014); contending with service members' PTSD issues (Buchanan, Kemppainen, Smith, MacKain, & Cox, 2011; Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008; Collins & Kennedy, 2008); marital satisfaction (Hogan & Furst Seifert, 2009; Lundquist & Xu, 2014; Orthner & Rose, 2009) and social support (Guay, Billette, & Marchand, 2006; Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009).

Researchers focusing on the needs of military family members have contributed significantly to the body of literature on creating programs to best prepare family members for the physical and emotional needs to endure and thrive within the military lifestyle (Carroll et al., 2013; Collins & Kennedy, 2008), but again, a preponderance of that literature centers around respondent groups that are comprised mainly of female spouses married to active duty service members. A good example of this is Orthner and Rose's 2009 study that examined the relationship between the psychological well-being of spouses and deployments. With an incredible usable response rate of 43% from nearly 25,000 respondents, the analyzed sample of more than 8000 included only female spouses of active duty military members. According to the researchers in that study, no responses from male spouses were included, "because they comprised only 3% of the reporting sample" (Orthner & Rose 2009, p. 395).

Other research on the military community address the challenges that spouses experience as a result of their marriages to military service members, to include: employment issues, higher education challenges, and solo parenting. The high mobility rate or frequent Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves associated with the military lifestyle attributes to military spouses being unemployed or underemployed at greater rates than their civilian counterparts (Harvey & Wiese, 1998; Hisnanick & Little, 2015; Lim & Schulker, 2010). Notable about the Hisnanick (2015) study was that, while the researcher looked at both husbands and wives of military service members, the methodology used was able to, "capture the essence of, but … not provide an explanation for" (p. 420) at least one aspect of the study's findings, which was that tied migrant military husbands experienced employment earnings gaps as a result of moving with their active duty military spouses. Therefore, a future qualitative methodology would shed more light on the causality of the findings.

Tied migrant/trailing spouse status of military spouses - defined by Mincer (1978 as cited in Hisnanick, 2015) as, "A spouse who 'moves along with the other even though his (or her) private calculus dictates staying (p. 414).'" A number of studies of those studies have led to subsequent literature on recommendations and policy changes that may help spouses to both attain suitable employment and gain advantages for promotion and retention in the workforce (Marshall, 2014; White House, 2011). It is not uncommon for spouses, often aware that they are not considered to be "important sources of intellectual or even market capital" (Gleiman & Swearengen, 2012, p. 78) to use their time to attain higher education - one of the reasons military spouses are often more highly educated than their civilian counterparts. This option too, however, has its challenges.

Spouses seeking to further their education often find themselves facing the challenges of

finding accredited institutions, funding assistance, and flexible classes (Gleiman & Swearengen, 2012; Jorgenson, 2010; McArthur, 2016; Olszak, 2017). Flexible classes and online distance programs become especially important when military spouses find themselves in search of childcare when assuming the role of solo parent due to the active duty spouses' long working hours and deployments. Jorgenson's findings were consistent with other researchers who found some of the top reasons non-traditional military spouses leave higher education pursuits were due to, among other things, childcare and flexible course offerings. As the Jorgenson study sampled only female military spouses, the researcher recommended, "conducting research on the male military spouse, as … there may be different findings based on the gender of the participant and it would be interesting to compare the findings as a way to look for supports and services that would assist the male spouse" (p. 116).

The issue of solo parenting is also nestled within the greater body of research on military spouses linked to issues of identity, mental health and self-care issues, and leadership within the home and family unit. A bulk of the research on solo parenting within the military community is composed primarily of female military spouse respondents acting as both mother and father. Strands of research run the gamut from stressors associated with the military lifestyle (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011; Figley, 1993); to the coping skills needed to deal with that stress (Farrell, 2014; Rea, 2015; (Runge, Waller, MacKenzie, & McGuire, 2014), and also the resilience that builds as a result of having to repeat the process of coping for as often and for as long as needed (Farrell, 2014; Kees, 2015). These issues are most often tied to the deployment of the active duty military spouse.

A number of researchers (Battle, 2015; Diaz, 2015); explored male military spouse respondents whose active duty military wives had gone through or were going through

deployments at the time of data collection. While the researchers used different methodological approaches (one qualitative, one quantitative), each agreed that male military spouses' experiences must be a part of future research studies, especially as it related to military families' experiences. Diaz (2015), whose quantitative study explored the psychological distresses male spouses experienced as a result of their active duty military female spouses' deployments, asserted that:

> a qualitative study investigating the experiences of these male spouses would be invaluable [as] qualitative research can produce more information about male spouse's experiences from their perspective and would add significant depth to this new and interesting area of the field (p. 126)

Battle's (2015) phenomenological study focused on military spouses' lived experiences while their active duty soldiers deployed. While this study focused solely on the male military spouse as a respondent, the researcher asserted still that future research on male military spouses should be conducted to both explore, "how the military leadership and community support could make a difference in the impact of deployment alleviating the "invisible parent syndrome" and also look at how to best support male military spouses in light of, "societal gender-role shifts" (p.90).

While the body of literature on the military spouse community continues to grow, more studies are needed to gain a better understanding of the experiences of these families who live a very unique lifestyle within the organizational construct of the military. Much of the research conducted on military families have been quantitative (Diaz, 2015; Marek & D'Aniello, 2014; Orthner & Rose, 2009; Wilson, 2015). While studies conducted via this methodology serve as excellent points to make predictions or test hypotheses based on numbers, they do not allow for

an in-depth understanding of why people act the way they do in various situations. To address this issue, more studies need to be conducted using qualitative methodologies. Arthur (1994) contends that, "in situations that are complicated or ill-defined, humans use characteristics and predictable methods of reasoning [that are] inductive" (p. 406). Allowing participants to tell their own stories not only gives the researcher a better understanding of what the participants thinks and feels, but it also allows the participants, themselves, to make sense of their own experiences using their own words. To this end, there have been inroads made into the lives of male military spouses.

2.3 Male Military Spouses' Lived Experiences

A handful of researchers have compiled research on the lived experiences of the male military spouse (Battle, 2015; Cooper, 2014; Marshall, 2014; Pedersen, 2010; Porter, 2014. An aggregate of the themes derived from that research includes deployments, coping strategies, military education programs for spouses, dads as primary caregivers, and changing gender roles in both society and the military. A discussion of those themes follows.

2.3.1 Deployments. While deployments continue to be a necessary part of military life, they continue to be identified as stressful for many military families (Pedersen, 2010; Smith, B.M., Brown, A.R., Varnado, T., & Stewart-Spencer, S.E., 2017). Deployments can range in duration anywhere from 30 days to a year or more. While military families may come to understand that deployments run in cycles varying from six to eighteen months between deployments (service members deploy, serve dwell time, then potentially deploy again unless they are placed with a non-deployable unit), they may not always be given much prior notice before the service member is deployed. For those in certain occupations within the military, it is not uncommon to receive orders to deploy less than a week before departure. Deployments are

emotional times, and the military offers classes that discuss the Emotional Cycle of Deployment where trained facilitators inform family members about what they can expect, emotionally, both before, during, and after the deployment.

'The Emotional Cycle of Deployment' has multiple stages and, "describes a series of transitions that service members and their partners encounter beginning with notification of an upcoming deployment and lasting throughout the post-deployment reunion and reintegration periods" (Devoe & Ross, 2012, p. 184). The Cycle begins with the pre-deployment stage where service members often begin to work longer days training in preparation for the upcoming deployment. Following the pre-deployment stage comes the deployment or separation stage, followed by the return or post-deployment stage. Researchers have found that certain behaviors are common to those going through the different stages of deployment. For instance, in the pre-deployment stage of deployment, it has been documented that while the service members begin to bond with their brothers and sisters in arms, they also begin to emotionally separate from their spouses (Pincus, 2011). Arguably, this results in frustration in the home and leads to emotional disruption for both parties.

It is during the deployment or separation stage that many family members refer to as they describe having to use 'coping' strategies. Merriam Webster defines coping as dealing with and attempting to overcome problems and difficulties (Cope, n.d.). Padden, Connors, & Agazio (2010) couch coping within the context of military deployments and note that, "The stress resulting from deployment separation necessitates a coping response to maintain health and well-being" (p. 249). The authors noted that:

1) That the term coping is used whether or not the outcome is adaptive or maladaptive.

2) Coping in itself cannot be viewed as good or bad, but rather is dependent on the individual, the specific stressor, and the outcome measure being studied.

3) Not dealing with the stress may have negative health outcomes, both mental and physical (p. 251).

2.3.2 Coping. Male spouses admitted they had to employ different coping strategies to make it through deployments (Battle, 2015; Marshall, 2014; Pederson, 2010). Many agreed that keeping a routine and trying to stay busy helped to pass the separation time, while others stressed both exercising and practicing faith-based. Coping strategies helped the men to maintain not only their own health but also the health of their marital and family relationships (Porter, 2014). The Porter study noted the few male spouses who mentioned having attended Spouses Clubs' meetings or dinners set up for deployed family members to get together and fellowship. The respondents mentioned that they didn't return either because they felt uncomfortable being the only male or because there was simply no time to attend due to their increased parenting schedules. Similarly, a male spouse attending a group event for spouses of deployed personnel admitted how he, "felt weird because I was the only male in the room, and everything was about activities for mom" (Battle, 2015, p. 69). These shared sentiments of feeling excluded from the larger group of female spouses highlight the importance for male spouses to develop other coping strategies.

With the return or post-deployment stage comes the uncertainty of the reintegration of the service member. Sometimes known as the 'honeymoon stage' due to the elation felt after not having seen the service member for weeks or months on end, it can last anywhere from three to six months (Pincus, 2001). It begins when the service member returns from deployment. It is understandable how the family may go through a period of turmoil as routines established

throughout the deployment may now have to change. Many military families may use this time to travel and visit extended family or just bond together after the time apart. Couples and family members may experience inner turmoil as they deal with a loss of independence now that the service member has returned (Padden, & Agazio, 2013). Being able to understand that those issues are to be expected and, even better, having tools upfront to deal with them arguably makes for a healthier family unit.

2.3.2 Military education and support programs for spouses. The military offers an abundance of education programs for spouses and families. While Farrell, Bowen, & Swick (2014) note that military members lean on informal network supports such as family, friends, and members of their military units, they also have access to a number of government-sponsored formal networks that offer relief and benevolent outreach. Organizations such as Family Readiness Groups, Community Services (e.g., Army Community Services), and military chaplains offer both training and information classes on regular schedules (Huebner, 2009; Farrell, et. al., 2014). These services are free of charge to service members and their families.

Some of the available education classes to families include resilience training; classes in anger management, financial aptitude, and employment and transition readiness. Some of the organizations that offer support programs include Community Services (branch-specific), Relief Societies (e.g., Army Relief, Navy Marine Corps Relief Society), New Parent Support, Relocation Support, Family Advocacy (which provides Family Counseling and referrals) and the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP).

A few of the available services include Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – a supplemental nutrition program that provides food products to families who meet certain guidelines. Despite the moniker, male providers are eligible to apply for this assistance program.

Additionally, Military OneSource purports to be a one-stop-shop that provides resources and referrals for any needs military service members and their dependents may have. Researchers studying the lived experiences of male military spouses found the men had both positive and negative experiences with some of the organizations offering services. These included: awareness of services provided, access to services, and wait times to receive service. A majority of the males responding agreed that support programs were targeted toward female spouses (Pedersen, 2010) and also cite this as a reason for not attending. Arguably, many men fail to learn about available services by missing out on these meetings, which are also used as informal information sessions. At least one spouse admitted that "being with all the mommies got 'old' but [he] put [his] baby first so that he could get interaction with other little children his age or his size or whatever" (Pedersen, 2010, p.87). It is possible to learn about available resources without personally interacting with other military spouses and personnel.

2.3.3 Access to support services. The military has done an excellent job of creating support services for families of service members. Major military installations with more than 500 service members offer Community Service Centers. According to the U.S. Army (Army Community Service), these centers:

> Facilitate [the] commander's ability to provide comprehensive, coordinated, and responsive services that support the readiness of Soldiers, civilian employees and their families.
>
> Maximize technology and resources, adapt to unique installation requirements, eliminate duplication in service delivery, and measure service effectiveness.

These centers serve as hubs where programs are set up to allow people to connect with others for any number of reasons, to include simple conversation. People are able to lean on and

network with others in the community who share common goals and experiences. A downside to these programs is that many are available on board the local military installations, making them difficult to access for those who do not live in close proximity. Huebner (2009) explained that, "Given that a large proportion of the current military population comprises service members from the National Guard and Reserve, it is important to expand the vision of formal support systems to include those agencies and organizations located outside of the military installations (p.219).

Not every military service member chooses to live on board the installation. Not every installation has the capacity to house all of its active duty members, and those who cannot find housing on base are provided with a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) – an allowance paid out to eligible service members that allows for suitable living quarters off base. In addition to those service members are the National Guard and Reserve members, also known as 'Citizen Soldiers', who are not regularly assigned to military service. Instead, these members work and live as regular citizens and may report to a military installation at regular intervals for training. When or if they are called to activate or serve with a unit, they must transition out of their regular jobs and transition back once their service is completed (Foster, 2011). Their families may have the option of moving with them. In many cases, however, as they have already created roots in their communities, they choose to stay in place while the service duty member travels, completes his or her time of required service, then returns home to live as a civilian.

These family members are the ones who find themselves lacking in support from their military family counterparts living on or in close proximity to installations. Unable to attend family gatherings put together for support or anger and emotional management classes that help members cope as part of the deployment process, they are left to look for help in their local

communities that may not always be equipped to deal with issues unique to military service families. Some service members' families rarely visit the military installations to which their spouses are assigned due to geographical location issues.

Lastly, at least one organization, the Veteran's Administration (VA), offer services only to those who have served honorably in the military and their family members. This means that only the male spouses who have served may receive these services. Some of these benefits include mental health services, disability compensation, education benefits such as vocational rehabilitation, and a host of other support services. While these services are free of charge, a primary complaint - that has also made media headlines in social media - from many recipients is the long wait times to receive service. The Marshall (2014) study affirmed that, concerning receipt of care from the VA, "all participants had concerns regarding the timeframe of getting treatment and compensation for service-connected injuries" (p. 70). This downside often adds stress to male spouses often already under duress from taking on the added responsibility of being the primary caregiver in the home.

2.4 Dad as Primary Caregiver

Cooper (2014) asserted that "The role of caregiver has historically been defined as a women's role" (p. 44). Dating back to the Revolutionary War, women's roles were primarily housekeeping, to include, "cooking, sewing, … cleaning barracks" (Albano, 1994, p. 284) and other nursing type duties. Albano (1994) went on to note that while women took on additional roles of volunteering with benevolent societies outside the home during the Great Wars, (WWI and WWII), their roles were still those of support. In fact, one of the popular slogans aimed at recruiting women during WWII was, "Free a Man to Fight!" (Katz, 1992). Men went off to war while the women took up the roles of factory workers, agricultural farmers, while never giving

up the jobs of taking care of homes and families. Things began to turn around for women, however, when the feminist movement of the late ‘1960s and 1970s came around.

The push for equal rights for women accomplished a number of things for women, to include: protection against housing discrimination; protection against pregnancy discrimination along with recovery days gained under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA); promise of higher wages under the Equal Pay Act); and the right to be treated equally as a woman, instead of *lesser than* due to one’s sex). The aggregate of these accomplishments meant not only that women would be leaving the home to work full-time in education and on the labor market, but it also opened the door for their male spouses to take on the role of primary caregiver in the home. Such changes in civilian society had an effect on the roles of men within the context of military families, as well.

As more military women find themselves deployed to both combat and humanitarian or peacekeeping efforts, more male spouses find themselves serving as the primary caregiver in the home (Battle, 2015). The literature on the lived experiences of male military spouses produced a number of themes related to being the primary caregiver not only during deployments but also simply as a result of the long hours worked by active duty service members. Namely, the male spouses noted that the care of children and home without the help of a spouse *takes up a lot of energy* (Battle, 2015; Porter, 2014). From the chores, to the planning, to the logistics – along with the mental labor that goes along with keeping everything and everyone on schedule – being a solo caregiver is mentally, physically, and emotionally taxing.

Male spouses who found themselves as caregivers once their spouses deployed noted that while their children took up a lot of time, their relationships had grown stronger as a result of the change in family dynamics (Pedersen, 2010; Porter, 2014). Dads stressed the importance of

creating and keeping routines not only to keep relationships strong, but also to help speed the time during deployments. They also noted the importance of taking 'me time' to give themselves and the family members a chance to breathe, relax, and recuperate (Pedersen, 2010). While not a recurrent theme in the extant literature on lived experiences of male military spouses, one researcher did note a respondent who admitted having daily stress over the thought of his wife dying on deployment and leaving their child motherless (Pedersen, 2010). This honest feedback could suggest that a larger group of respondents may have similar experiences but were not able to voice them in the cited study. What these themes have in common is that they show a changing narrative on how male spouses are taking on different roles in the home and in society.

2.5 Gender Role Strain Paradigm

The theoretical model used to frame this qualitative research investigation is Joseph Pleck's Gender Role Strain (GRS). Pleck's model is important for undergirding this study since cultural standards for and attempts to conform to male masculinity, implanted by gender socialization, lead to psychological stress rather than psychological well-being (Pleck, 1995; Harrison, 1998; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002; Pappas, 2019). This is particularly important when viewing male military spouses who continue to operate either on the margins of the military spouse community as a whole or altogether invisible. The theory posits that men may face internal struggle or *strain* when they find themselves not conforming to the constraints of or meeting the expectations of their surrounding society (Pleck, 1995). According to Levant (2011), the GRS Paradigm was offered:

> as an alternative to the older *gender role identity paradigm* (GRIP), which had dominated research on masculinity for 50 years (1930-1980). The GRIP assumed

> that people have a powerful psychological need to form a gender role identity that matches their biological sex and that optimal personality development hinged on its formation (p. 767).

The problem with GRIP was that it simply wasn't enough to keep up with the more modern and progressive ideas about how masculinity was being viewed. Pleck's model created a new framework within which to encompass these new ideas. The model also contains three major subtypes of gender role strain to include the discrepancy strain, dysfunction strain, and trauma strain. These subtypes will prove helpful in sorting the data collected. The first subtype of the gender role strain, the discrepancy strain, is described below. Rummell and Levant (2014) noted that:

> Gender role discrepancy strain is thought to occur when a man fails to live up to his own internalized or ideal gender role norms, which produces a *discrepancy* between how he thinks men ought to be and how he perceives himself to be" and "the strain result[s] from a person's behavior being inconsistent with socially prescribed norms (p. 419).

While the study was quantitative in nature and sought to examine the relationship between the gender role discrepancy strain and self-esteem, the authors found that - despite the fact that nearly four decades had passed since Pleck's original theory was posited - males *continue* to, "conform to the [societal] norms more than they would ideally like to have done" (p. 423). The male military spouse serving as primary caregiver, then, continues to face the struggle of figuring out how to both balance serving in the primary caregiver role while also trying to embody the epitome of what society expects of him as a man. Porter (2014) noted that this may also lead to what Pleck described as the *dysfunction* category of the gender role strain.

The *dysfunction* strain, according to Pleck (1995), deals with the idea "that the fulfillment of gender role standards can have negative consequences because the behaviors and characteristics these standards prescribe can be inherently dysfunctional" (p.17). In other words, it is quite possible for men to meet the expectations of being male in society, but they will suffer unfavorable repercussions for doing so. For example, men are told to "man up" when they miss their wives and the children are crying for mommy as opposed to women who are allowed to have tearful fits of frustration and sorrow, accompanied by the collective "shoulder to lean on" offered by the surrounding female military spouse community as well as the military leadership at large. What "manning up" may entail is putting on a mask and pretending not to feel internal pain, but the unfavorable repercussion of having to deal with hiding emotional toil still remains.

The final subtype of Pleck's Gender Role Strain is the trauma strain. Pleck (1995) raised the issue of trauma as part of his model to highlight how the concept may offer "a promising new direction in the understanding of masculinity" (p. 16) by looking at how trauma may shape the male experience. Specifically, he points to Pollack's (1992) research indicating that young boys suffer trauma early on resulting from the "traumatic abrogation of the holding environment in boys' development … that may leave many adult men at risk for fears of intimacy" (p. 45). Pollack noted that this early trauma might result negatively in males' behavior toward their female counterparts in the future. A good example of this negative behavior might be males hesitating to enter into affectionate relationships in adulthood.

Sullivan (2002) agreed with Pollack's assertion that trauma taking place early in life may lead to a lifetime of negative consequences in males. In fact, according to Sullivan (2002), "the socialization process itself is also problematic causing Gender Role Trauma" (p. 68). Sullivan's research focused on coping strategies of parents with children diagnosed with Down's

Syndrome. Essentially, he hypothesized that male parents coped differently than female parents. He stated that "following the birth of a child with Down syndrome, parents' coping strategies and the psychological consequences of these strategies, will be influenced by gender and might be in line with the GRS model" (p. 68). The results of that particular study found "significant differences between males and females" particularly in the areas of "planning, seeking instrumental social support, seeking emotional and social support and focus on and venting of emotions" (p. 70). As these are areas that might be new or challenging to male military spouses serving as primary caregivers, it is the researcher's belief that leadership (particularly how male military spouses view leadership itself and also see themselves as leaders) may present differently in male military spouses.

The military's leadership understands that taking care of families is a top priority to ensure force readiness (Milley, 2017). GRS provides a lens through which to view the male military spouses who must also contend with living inside of a unique military culture. Keats (2010) noted that military culture, "... is and has been shaped primarily by men, so there exists a cult of masculinity that views soldiers as prototypical men, whose responsibility is it is to carry out men's work" (p. 293). Pleck's work creates a lens through which to view the male military spouse experience as he goes about his daily life under the critical eye of the uniquely cultured military community, but also it gives the reader a greater understanding of ways men may be struggling even when it may not be obvious to the average observer or even the men themselves. By providing examples of how males must function on a daily basis within the confines of the military culture where they may feel constrained by the expectations of a male-dominated culture, the reader will more clearly grasp how Pleck's model provides a way to experience the

male struggle. This is particularly important in view of how society sees traditional families and also in view of how gender roles are changing.

2.6 Traditional Families and Changing Gender Roles

Collins (1998) once posited that the *imagined* ideal traditional family (similar to Smith's (1993) Standard North American Family (SNAF) - which, according to the researcher, while it did not always represent *actual* families – was one that 1) was predicated on marital and blood ties and 2) had a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife, and children (p. 62). According to Collins (1998), the traditional family ideal:

> Assumes a male headship that privileges and naturalizes masculinity as a source of authority [Assumes that] mothers comply with fathers, sisters defer to brothers, all with the understanding that boys submit to maternal authority until they become men. [Is] predicated on assumptions of heterosexism, the invisibility of gay, lesbian, and bisexual sexualities in the traditional family ideal obscure these sexualities and keeps them hidden (p. 65)

Within the context of the military, these views support majority assumption that the service member is a male and the spouse is a female who assumes the responsibility for home and children first and foremost. They reinforce the idea of the male as the breadwinner while they also continue to bolster the belief that females should be the nurturers in the family (Battle, 2015, p.78). They also underline the belief that males are the smarter, more dominant sex while females are expected to both look to them for approval while at the same time groom them to take on the position of leadership over females when they reach the age of majority.

Additionally, the premise of the *ideal traditional family* shores up the belief that males

should be the ones to hold the more aggressive, combat-related roles in the military while women should be assigned to more administrative and support roles (because the possibility of being injured in combat would harm their ability to return home to mother the children). Finally, the views on what a traditional family looks like, according to Collins (1998), paints a picture of what parenting and childbearing should look like. Such a picture depicts women in only heterosexual relationships having children and staying home and raising them. This belief leaves no room for same-sex or other non-heterosexuals to parent children or exist as families. While Collin's definition was posited nearly two decades ago, behaviors and policies both inside and outside the military institution have noticeably shifted to accommodate more modern views of both family and gender roles within the military (Crawford v. Cushman, repeal of DOMA, Equal Pay Act, Repeal of the Combat Exclusion Act).

The definition of family is no longer set in stone. Single mothers, dual-income earners, and other alternative forms of family have become an accepted part of American (and, therefore, military) society. Women are opting to have children and raise them on their own outside of committed relationships, and both single parents, as well as same-sex couples, are adopting children or having them via surrogates. With practically no limits to the definition of what constitutes a family, society's fabric has changed. Similarly, the societal changes regarding employment in the U.S. have shifted.

Expanded opportunities, as well as shortages in demand for labor in the civilian workforce, have forced not only men but also women to explore alternate forms of employment. While the majority of teachers at the K-12 level are women, it is now a celebrated role to see male teachers, serving in these positions. Likewise, with the concerted and continuous push to recruit more women into the STEM fields, more women are occupying jobs in previously male-

dominated fields as scientists, engineers, and other math-intensive positions.

Porter (2014) noted that "As the military becomes a more attractive career alternative for women, a new family design has emerged and continues to evolve - which includes an active duty wife and civilian husband" (p. 47). Across military installations and communities everywhere, male spouses are volunteering in schools, taking children to play dates at the playground, and managing households while their spouses spend their days in service to the military. Those changes in societal roles arguably impact the expectations of roles within the family. Whereas it was once the case that, "men work, women stay home and take care of the children," (Battle, 2015, p. 78), it has become more common to find men who are voluntarily choosing to become, "stay-at-home-dads because [they] and [their] partners value a parent being home with the children" (Drake, 2015, p. 10).

2.7 Summary

In summary, noting that family experiences affect the retention of active duty military members, it is to the benefit of military leadership to understand how best to offer support for these families. Studies show that spouses affect the retention of their military service members. The number of male spouses will increase with more women joining the military who marry, along with increasing numbers of same-sex male spouses. The lack of research on male military spouses should be of concern for military leadership, as it may affect the retention of a percentage of the military community. A plethora of literature exists on the military spouse (Collins & Kennedy, 2008; Orthner & Rose, 2009; Jorgenson, 2010;). Historically, however, researchers have focused on female spouses married to male members. This leaves the voice of the male military spouse unheard. While a handful of researchers have made inroads into the study of male spouses through qualitative inquiry, there are no studies that highlight the

leadership qualities of male spouses. As more dads become primary caregivers in the home while their spouses serve on active duty, learning about how they lead and what motivates them may provide indicators on how to better serve this budding population within the military community. Not only will this information allow military leadership to design programmatic changes to better support families, but it will also allow for a better understanding of leadership in communities, as these families will eventually reintegrate back into civilian communities once they have completed their terms of active duty service.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home. This section provides the rationale for using a qualitative research methodology. Also included is the strategy of inquiry along with the role of the researcher, which includes a short description of the role of Family Readiness Officers in the military. Completing the chapter is a review of participant selection, procedures for data collection and analysis, and a brief discussion on the trustworthiness and transferability of the study. Data gathered for the study addressed the following research questions:

(1) What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home?

(2) What is the historical context for leadership in military families?

(3) What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?

(4) How do male military spouses construct their understandings of leadership?

3.1 Rationale for Qualitative Research

According to Creswell (2011), qualitative research is best suited for studies where the researcher needs to learn more about a *central phenomenon* by gathering information from participants through exploration (p. 16). Additionally, "meanings can be both intricate and complex, making it difficult to reduce them to numbers", according to O'Leary (2005, p. 255). Using qualitative methodologies adds *rich context* to any quantified data.

A quantitative approach would not be appropriate for this study since that type of approach requires that the researcher, "ask specific, narrow questions to obtain measurable and

observable data on variables" (Creswell, 2011). For those who enjoy the imagery of scatter plots, bar graphs, and histograms, a good quantitative study is the way to go. While studies conducted via this methodology serve as excellent points to make predictions or test hypotheses based on numbers, they do not allow for an in-depth understanding of why people act the way they do in various situations. A good example of a quantitative approach would be the yearly release of the Blue Star Families survey of military families. Each year, the Blue Star Families organization conducts a survey of military families on what it deems a comprehensive number of different variables. For 2017, the survey had more than 7800 respondents (Blue Star Families, 2017, p. 9). Greenbank (2003) noted that policymakers often favor quantitative research, "simply because of the way it is presented" (p. 794). However, when it comes to understanding the *why* behind the numbers, using a qualitative methodology is more suitable.

To explore the leadership experiences of the male military spouse population, a qualitative approach was used. Researchers suggest that interpretive methodologies be used to further probe the needs of this often-overlooked demographic (Battle, 2015; Porter, 2014; Vogel, 2006). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) summarized that qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this study because it 1) looks at characteristics that cannot be easily reduced to numbers, 2) helps the researcher to better understand a complex construct where variables may sometimes be unknown 3) uses inductive as opposed to deductive reasoning and 4) selects a few respondents who can "best shed light on the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 96). Finally, qualitative methodologies allow room to, "give the narrator full voice" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Lopez and Willis (2004) noted that there is more than one approach to phenomenology and that when researchers fail to clarify their approach, interpretive (hermeneutic) versus descriptive (eidetic), the resulting research may prove to be "ambiguous in its purpose, structure,

and findings" (p. 726). Following is a short description of each approach, along with characteristics of each.

3.2 Phenomenological Strategy of Inquiry

The strategy of inquiry used for this qualitative study is phenomenology. The phenomenon being studied is the male, married to an active duty service member, as he copes with the stressors of being a military spouse who is the primary caregiver in the home. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research study because "A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 76). Following is a brief discussion differentiating two types of phenomenology, descriptive and interpretive. Derived from the works of the Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) respectively. The approaches have both similarities and differences that will be spelled out below.

Descriptive phenomenology - also called Husserlian or eidetic - requires the researcher to bracket or set aside any personal biases when collecting the data. This type of approach also directs researchers to work to achieve transcendental subjectivity - a way of continuously assessing the researcher's own biases to ensure they are not affecting the collected data. According to Lopez & Willis (2004), "Husserl believed that subjective information should be important to scientists seeking to understand human motivation because human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real" (p. 727). This subjective information - things we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell, but simply *know that we know* - can be measured through the phenomenological approach. The authors point out another concept posited by Husserl known as *radical autonom*y, which states that, in contrast to the researcher's own worldview, humans are responsible for influencing their environment and culture and that they, in effect, are

not products of their surrounding culture, society, and politics (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). The authors note that, in addition to bracketing, another way to achieve transcendental subjectivity is by limiting the literature reviews conducted prior to the study as it may increase the researchers' bias.

Interpretive phenomenology - also called hermeneutic phenomenology and associated with the historic scholar Martin Heidegger - is in stark contrast to the Husserlian approach in a number of ways. Heidegger believed (as does this researcher), "... that humans are embedded in their world to such an extent that subjective experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural, and political contexts" (Lopez and Willis, 2004, p. 729). Also, those who align with the interpretive approach disagree with Husserl's stance on bracketing. Rather, they hold to the belief that "we are unable to completely bracket prior conceptions and knowledge - we are necessarily embedded in a historical context" (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 415). They agree, however, that making their assumptions explicitly known upfront is imperative to the study. Lopez and Willis (2004) point out that an important part of interpretive phenomenology is that, "the meanings that the researcher arrives at in [this type of research] are a blend of the meanings articulated by both participant and researcher within the focus of the study" (p. 730). The authors go further to note that this mutual understanding of the findings is subject to change, depending on what is happening in and around the world of both researcher and respondent. In essence, this is why we describe the methodological limitations (what is going on in the world at the time of the study, what are some of the socioeconomic factors generally associated with the sample group, what are other factors that might have affected the study, etc.).

Based on the differences between the approaches to phenomenology, the researcher chose to approach this study using the interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenological method 1) in

order to embrace and not have to bracket the researcher's personal knowledge about the subject, 2) to create an understanding based on mutual interpretation between the researcher and respondent, and 3) to be able to explore leadership qualities of male military spouses within the context of the military community.

3.3 Role of the Researcher

Researchers are considered instruments of data collection in qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Cultural background, personal experiences, values, and world views can have a negative effect on research. Readers of the research must understand the person's background who is completing the study. It is for this reason that researchers approaching a study using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, "make preconceptions explicit and explain how they are being used in the inquiry" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). I have been married to an active duty U.S. Marine for more than 20 years. As my husband was assigned primarily to infantry units, there were no male spouses because 1) there was no recognition of same-sex marriage and 2) only very recently have females been allowed to join infantry units, so my experience with male spouses was extremely limited. It was only when my husband was serving in units outside of the Infantry that I had the opportunity to encounter a few male military spouses.

When my husband served as a Drill Instructor, I was a stay-home mom. His position required him to work 80-100 plus hours per week, so I experienced firsthand the amount of stress involved with caring for the family while the spouse works an extremely demanding job. The service member is not deployed, but they are hardly ever home longer than enough time to sleep. Separated geographically from close family, I had to depend on other fellow military spouses to make it - all women. It never occurred to me early on that male spouses needed support, also. Those views changed when I became a Family Readiness Officer (FRO) for a Training Unit in

the Marine Corps.

Family Readiness Officers are civilians attached to military units who serve as liaisons between the Command and family members to ensure family readiness. According to Marine Corps Order 1754.9A, "The Corps' most valuable resource is the individual Marine and their family. It is imperative to the success of the Marine Corps enterprise that Commanders advocate and promote the Unit, Personal and Family Readiness Program (UPFRP) by acknowledging the link that exists between personal and family readiness and operational unit readiness" (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2012, p. 2). Our mantra, as those who embodied the importance of taking care of the families of our Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers, was, *If your family is not ready, then you're not ready*.

Having successfully navigated our first tour on the Drill Field, I knew the tremendous amount of stress that families would have to endure in support of their service members. One of the roles of the Family Readiness Officer was to manage unit volunteers. Spouses loved volunteering, as it gave them the opportunity to feel part of the Marine family - and, on occasion, they got the opportunity to see their spouses during working hours. As a volunteer manager, I would query spouses on both their interests and leadership abilities in order to put them in roles best suited to their abilities. Often, spouses would respond with "I'm just a stay-at-home mom or wife; I don't really *do* anything" - to which I would then respond with rapid-fire questions of "who manages the home? who prepares meals? who gets the kids ready for school?" Poza (2001) refers to spouses as *CEOs* who carry on family traditions, facilitate communications between family members, and serve as the benchmarks of emotional intelligence in the home. When service members are putting in long work long and simply have no time to contribute to the household or family, it is the spouses who are often putting in tremendous amounts of *mental*

labor to act as career and retirement planners, counselors, and even logistics specialists as they play very active roles in their spouses' careers and potentially have to manage major household moves every two to three years.

As no male spouses participated in family events, I surmised this must have been an issue for them, also, but how was I to know if they never showed up to be asked? I knew they were part of the population, and I would run into them from time to time outside of casual or official events. How was it, I wondered, that they coped with the stresses of being primary caregivers while their spouses worked extreme hours? Especially in a military environment where leadership is enshrined in every aspect of the culture, how were these male spouses exhibiting leadership in their own homes? Did they see themselves as leaders? How did they construct their understanding of leadership? This experience, coupled with having two children join the military (which may one day make me the mother-in-law to a male military spouse), piqued my interest in studying leadership aspects of male military spouses.

My experience as both a military spouse and mother to service members makes me an empathetic researcher. I also understand the need to "make any preconceptions explicit and explain how they are being used in the inquiry" - as per the interpretive approach to phenomenology - (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730), and this was the intent in writing the role of the researcher.

3.4 Participant Selection

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) explained that "How you identify your sample must depend on the research question(s) that you want to answer" (p. 147). For this study, the researcher used a combination of recruitment efforts, to include convenience sampling, snowballing, and engaging in social networks for both military spouses in general and those social networks targeting male

military spouses, specifically. Convenience sampling, according to Lewis (2016), "is often used in the beginning of the sampling process when the number of participants available is small" (p. 55). I identified two male spouses who met the criteria of being married to service members while they served on active duty and who also self-identified as both male and as being the primary caregiver in the home. This approach led to snowballing, which allowed for the recruitment of other potential respondents. Respondents who interviewed were given the researcher's contact information to share with others who fit the criteria for the study.

Additionally, the researcher engaged with several social networks on Facebook. Such interaction presented opportunities for the researcher to engage with both military spouses in general and also targeting male military spouses, specifically. A few of these groups included Military Spouse Networking, Black Military Wives Support Network, and Macho Spouse – Male Military Spouses. At least one of the groups, MachoSpouse.com, posted the study details online. The ad was removed once the data collection was complete.

As this study explored the leadership qualities of male military spouses, the researcher recruited participants that represent this population - 10 male military spouses - nine who are married to their currently serving Active Duty military service members and one who is married to his recently retired from Active Duty service member. Participants were married to service members in all branches of the U.S. military, both CONUS (Continental United States) and Hawaii.

Table 1 provides a snapshot of each of the participants at a glance.

Participants at a Glance

Pseudonym	Years Married	Spouse Service	Children	Employment Status
Hunter	7	AF O	Twin boys, 3	P/T from home
KJ	5	Army O	Daughter, 2	P/T outside home
Marion	5	Army O	Son, 6	Active Duty
Joshua	5	USMC O	Daughter, 4 Daughter, 1	F/T stay home dad
Rich	5	AF Reserve O	Son, 2	Active Duty
Jamal	14	Army O	Son, 11 Daughter, 8	Active Duty
Paul	13	AF O	Son, 12 Daughter, 6	F/T stay home dad
Luke	20	Army E	Daughter, 21 Daughter, 14	F/T outside home
James	12	USMC E	Son, 11 Daughter, 8	F/T stay home dad
Russell	8	Army O	Daughter, 12 Daughter, 9	F/T stay home dad

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher collected data for this study by conducting semi-structured interviews via phone calls with each of the respondents. To ensure participants' protection from harm, the researcher took the following steps: reviewed the interview protocol with colleagues to ensure questions were worded in such a way that would not cause emotional distress, embarrassment, or loss of self-esteem. The researcher used Creswell's (2011) suggested outline to build an informed consent form and had participants give their informed consent well before any interviewing began. A rich description of the study was given that covered the purpose of the study, risks associated with the study, expected benefits, confidentiality, and explained the participants' rights to voluntarily withdraw at any time during the study (Creswell, 2011).

To ensure participants' rights to privacy, respondents' real names were not used at any time in the publication of any findings. All respondents were assigned aliases. Any and all correspondence, field notes, and documents associated with that respondent were labeled with that respondent's alias. The researcher interviewed 10 male military spouses for this study using open-ended, semi-structured interviews designed to explore the leadership experiences that emerged as the respondents shared their lived experiences of being military spouses of active duty service members and also how they construct their understandings of leadership. The researcher received the consent of the respondent at the beginning of each call before continuing with any voice recording, and copious field notes were taken as the interviews took place. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with the researcher being the sole person collecting the data. Once all data was collected, the researcher used LeCompte's (2000) five-step approach as an outline to ensure data analysis procedures were accurate.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

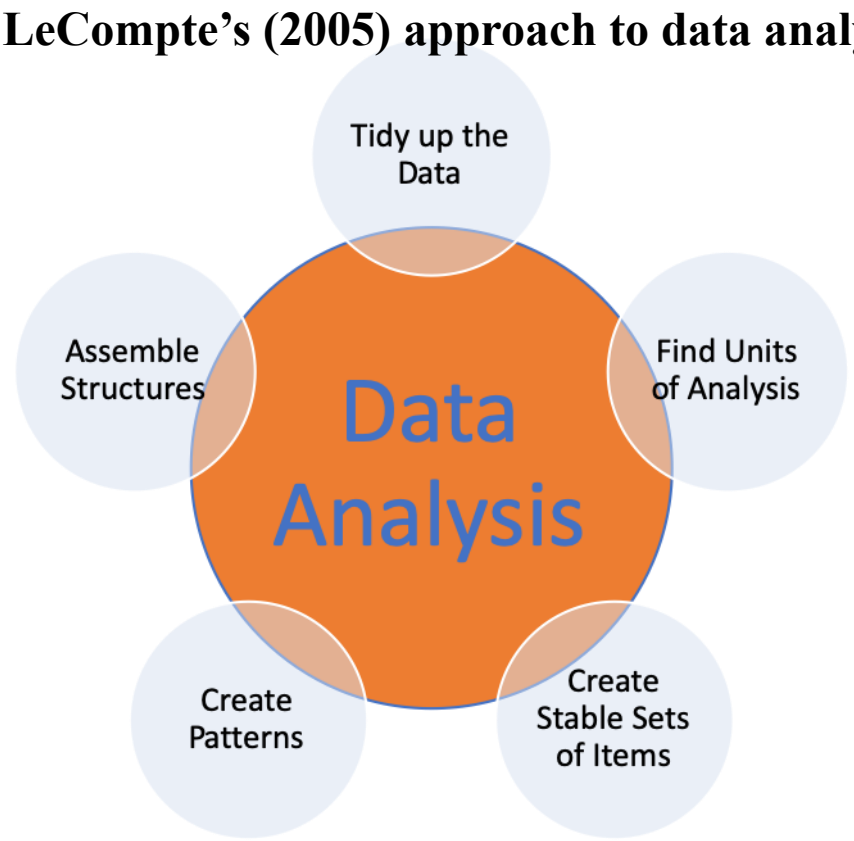

Figure 1: LeCompte's Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures followed LeCompte's (2000) five-step approach as an outline to ensure data analysis procedures were accurate. Steps included: 1) Tidying up the data, 2) Finding items or units of analysis, 3) Creating stable sets of items, 4) Creating patterns, and 5) Assembling structures (p. 148-152).

3.6.1 Tidying up the Data. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher took the next step of what LeCompte (2000) calls *tidying up the data*. This included reviewing the transcripts to ensure accuracy. There were a few occasions where parts of the interview were inaudible during the transcribing. The researcher noted these parts and sent the transcript back to the respondent for correction. There were also transcribed parts that simply didn't make sense

in the context of the interview. These were also noted and respondents were asked to help clarify the data.

3.6.2 Finding Items. The next step was finding items or units of analysis to code. LeCompte (2000) noted that this is accomplished by "repeated readings through field notes, interviews, and text to identify items relevant to the research questions" [and that] "Concentrating these items in data involves systematic processes of looking for frequency, omission, and declaration" (p. 148).

- Frequency -- items that showed up in all or most of the respondents' interviews
- Omission -- what *didn't* show up that the researcher believed *should* have
- Declaration -- items respondents emphasized to the researcher by participants to be of high importance

3.6.3 Creating Stable Sets of Items. The next step was to create stable sets of items where units were put into groups or categories. This is where internal validity came into play. The researcher looked at the categories and decided whether they made sense.

Once the units were grouped or categorized, the researcher moved on to the step of *creating patterns,* which involved "reassembling [the stable sets of items] in ways that began to resemble a coherent … description of the … phenomenon under study" (p. 150).

The researcher used Spradley's (1979) semantic relationships (see Table 2) as an example to create stable sets of items, using "X" is a kind of "Y" (p. 111) for the first emergent theme:

The final step of the process, assembling structures, is where the researcher put together a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being examined. LeCompte (2000) summarized the process thus:

> In the item stage of analysis, researchers create taxonomies of "things" at different levels of abstraction. To the extent that these taxonomies are pervasive, they are grouped into patterns in the pattern stage of analysis. In the structural stage, patterns are grouped into structures, which help to describe or explain the whole phenomenon (p. 151)

Table 2
Example of Spradley's semantic relationships

Individual Items (X's)	Taxonomic Name (Y)
Empathy	
Adaptability	Leadership Traits
Self-Awareness	
Service	

3.7 Trustworthiness and Transferability

LeCompte (2000) asserted that performing meticulous analysis on collected data is not enough to constitute good research findings. To accomplish what constitutes good research findings means the "analysis also must yield results that are meaningful to the people for whom they are intended and described in a language they understand" (p. 150). To attain the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher incorporated strategies of providing thick, rich descriptions, member checking (i.e. respondent validation), and researcher reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to attain what Creswell (2011) calls *triangulation or "corroborating evidence from different individuals … types of data … or methods of data collection" (p. 259)*. The researcher also sought input from the respondents during all stages of the process, as suggested by LeCompte (2000), to include asking participants to verify the truthfulness of the

interviews/correctness of the transcripts. Participants were asked specific questions when it came time to code the data and when there were questions about the transcript.

For this study, the researcher encouraged respondents to assist the researcher in a task Borgatti (1999) deemed "pile sorting." This particular task entailed having participants sort coded data into categories. While the population of this study of 10 participants was small, there may yet be replicability or generalizability to a greater population outside of this study's participants, especially as the results may relate to stay-at-home fathers in general.

3.8 Summary

This study explored the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the family. Based on Creswell's (2011) recommendation to use a qualitative study when there is a desire to explore a central phenomenon, a phenomenological research design was used in order to explore the central phenomenon of leadership in this community by interviewing 10 male military spouses who are married to active duty spouses and self-identified as primary caregivers. The researcher followed Creswell's (2011) recommendations on data collection procedures and followed LeCompte's (2000) recommendations to analyze the collected data. Trustworthiness and transferability of the data were accomplished by incorporating strategies that included respondent validation and pile sorting.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This chapter discusses the overarching themes that emerged during the transcription of the data from the male military spouses' interviews. A qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews was used to collect data on a sample of 10 self-identified male military spouses who served as primary caregivers while married to service members who were serving on active duty. This chapter is organized into sections headed by each of the four overarching themes that emerged during data analysis: (a) Leadership Competencies, (b) Marriage & Family Support, (c) Military Lifestyle, and (d) Gender Issues. The four major themes that emerged, along with their subthemes, are listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Major Themes and Sub-themes

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Leadership Competencies	Empathy Adaptability Self-Awareness Service
Military Lifestyle	Military Culture Family Readiness Issues & Invisibility
Marriage & Family Support	Parenting Teamwork & Collaboration
Gender Issues	Gender Role Norms/Expression Gender Role Stereotypes

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the leadership experiences of male military spouses who served as primary caregivers in the home while their spouses served as active duty service members. The goal of this study was to both allow male military spouses to reflect on their own leadership as leaders in the home while at the same time create a space for male spouses to share their experiences with both the military and larger community *outside the*

gate. This goal of this study was to give voice to the participants, located across the Continental US and Hawaii and also representing each of the US military service branches.

The following central research question and sub-questions used to guide this study:

1. *What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home?* (Central research question)
2. *What is the historical context for leadership in military families?*
3. *What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?*
4. *How do male military spouses construct their understandings of leadership?*

The interview questions were used to collect data for the research questions. The data collected produced themes and sub-themes that answered both the central research question as well as the guiding questions. Readers will note that each of the participants has a short biographical write-up at least once during the study, the first time the participant is introduced. Emergent themes were common to all participants' reflections on their experiences.

4.1 Theme 1: Leadership Competencies

The first theme, Leadership Competencies, represented common traits that emerged from the transcripts with the male military spouses. The sub-themes of empathy, adaptability, self-awareness, and service fall under this theme. Empathy included the respondents being able to perceive accurately how their wives, other male spouses, and also children felt as they went through similar experiences of (1) being primary caregivers and (2) being the children of active duty military parents. Self-awareness includes being able to look at oneself and figure out the why of one's actions, particularly with regard to leadership. Being self-aware prepares you for a future thing – the ability to reflect. Adaptability, according to Goldman (2011) talks about male spouses' ability to "juggle multiple demands without losing their focus or energy, and are

comfortable with the inevitable ambiguities of [military] life" (p. 103). The last sub-theme in this category, Service, focuses on volunteerism and other ways male spouses give back and contribute to their local communities as well as their spouses' military units. A review of the transcripts showed that all of the male spouses interviewed exhibited characteristics of leadership competencies.

Following are a list of participants' responses and quotes that offer a more explanatory investigation of the sub-themes.

4.1.1 Empathy. The spouses who took on the role of primary caregiver all found they had developed or grown in their sense of empathy toward not only their wives and their fellow male spouses whom they knew to be going through or had gone through the same experiences, but also to their children who live with unique circumstances as a result of being children of active duty mothers. Such empathy grew out of not only monotonous household chores and duties, but also experiencing emotional situations they never would have had the chance to encounter had they not been serving in their current roles.

Participant 1: Josh. Josh and his active duty wife have two daughters under the age of five. He has been a full-time stay-at-home dad to both girls since their first daughter was born. As a prior military officer, he spoke about his time on active duty and how he felt he had to "suppress emotion" in order to effectively complete the required military training and accomplish the mission-oriented function of the job.

Josh reflected upon his expanded sense of empathy almost in contrast to the person he felt he was as an active duty officer. He spoke briefly about how the military required a different kind of thinking - a suppression of emotion - in order to embrace the "mission first" mindset needed to accomplish the mission. He stated, "… so it's been one of those things where I don't

know if before that I would have been able to really demonstrate or connect emotionally to the level that I feel I can now."

After leaving the military and becoming a full-time caregiver to the couple's two daughters, however, he reflected that:

> "Well after having two girls and spending so much time with them … it really … kind of helped me return and even grow on as far as compassion, empathy, being nurturing. Reconnecting with my emotional side." He went on to say that, "having daughters and spending so much time with them, dealing with everything associated with the physical and emotional support which is required of stay-at-home parents you know, really helped me redevelop, re-energize that sense of empathy and just emotional breadth. The spectrum of my emotions is just broader now, even more so than it was. I really feel deeply and strongly, really connect, especially when it comes to one-on-one interactions."

Participant 2: Jamal. Jamal, who is part of a dual-military couple, and his wife have been married for 14 years and have two children under the age of 12. He spoke about how becoming the family's primary caregiver not only expanded his sense of empathy but also grew him as a leader. This was especially coherent in his interview when he talked about not having previously had empathy for those who were in the military without a family care plan (FCP): "If you don't have an FCP, then you don't need to be in the military." Comparing his current behavior to his previous behavior before having children and taking over primary caregiver duties, he recalled that his duties, "made me sympathetic to my soldiers that have kids." After becoming the caregiver, he said that:

> " … [being the primary caregiver] made me sympathetic to my soldiers that have kids. Because now … if I ask a soldier, 'hey, why are you late?' and [that soldier says] 'Oh, I had to go send diapers to the school', Now I understand. I have a perspective of what that feels like and what that is. So it just gave me a greater situation of what single parents, male or female, go through. I think that grew me as a leader because hey, I get it now."

Participant 3: Russell. Russell is a full-time stay-at-home dad to two very active girls. In addition to being the primary caregiver for his daughters, he is also the primary caregiver for his mother, who has significant health issues and also lives in the home with them. Russell weighed in on his own sense of empathy as it related to not only his children but also all the military children who were going through a separation from their parents serving on active duty. One particular incident stood out that he shared during his interview:

> When we were at our last duty station, [my wife's unit] got deployed to Afghanistan and one of my daughters was probably four or five. She took it okay when my wife first left. Then we had a video chat and I was talking to my wife and I asked my daughter, 'Do you want to talk to Mommy?' and she was like, 'No!' I said, 'Okay, why not?' and she said, 'because I'm mad at her.' It dawned on me that she was really upset about it, and I had to explain to her why my wife had to be there. That it was nothing against her, but that it was okay for her to have those feelings and be upset.
>
> I used that experience because when I worked at my last job, we had a meeting with all of the kids who had parents who were deployed along with my wife, and we had to sit through where we had all the kids talk about how they felt.

> I told them how I felt to hear that from my daughter about how she felt and how it hurt me to know that she felt that way. So I understood all of the kids' feelings with their hurt, but they got my point of view of how their parents or their parents who were deployed feel. It made me understand that my set of kids or the kids that I'm around, even though they don't show it, they're going through something. All kids do that, but they know how to hide it better than adults" –

Participant 4: Marion. Marion is also part of a dual-military couple. He and his wife are the parents of a six-year-old son. During the interview with Marion, the conversation led to a discussion of how one respondent's military command used part of a family readiness meeting to share with the spouses and other family members everything the military was doing to ensure the safety of their spouses as they were doing their jobs both at home and while deployed. Similar to Russell and his experience with his children, Marion's focus was on his son as he shared his insight on empathy:

> Another thing was having, believe it or not, having the children talk to each other. Because it's one thing for a parent to...Like, my little boy. Sometimes, he listens better to me than he listens to his mom, but sometimes he just doesn't want to listen just because I'm dad, right?
>
> Whereas, if another child tells him, then he kind of believes it more. Having the children talk to each other, and especially the ones that their parent was on their floor for this deployment, whereas the other child, maybe that was the first deployment or the second deployment for their parent.

4.1.2 Adaptability. Adaptability was another theme that fell under the umbrella of leadership competencies. In their conversations on leadership experiences, many participants found themselves relating times when, no matter how much they had planned their days, some days they simply had to make do with what they had or find ingenious solutions to common problems.

Participant 2: Jamal. Jamal discussed how he perfectly practices adaptability when he talked about how he earned the title of "Mr. Bag Lady." The discussion stemmed from his description of what he goes through in a typical day as primary caregiver:

> So going back to getting them ready, getting them to school, that's the first part. And then dealing with all the issues that come along with that, which is coming home, doing homework, or working through their issues or 'I forgot this thing at school' and 'I need to go home and get that.' It's always something, so I kind of anticipate - like my wife usually does. Again, that I didn't appreciate - I anticipate what they need throughout the day.
>
> I would be that guy with, I always put extra stuff in my bag: extra underwear, extra clothes, extra diapers, extra food, extra snacks. I was that guy, Mr. Bag Lady. So if they left a thing, whatever it was, I would bring it out of my trunk and try to get it. Yeah, it worked some of the time, but not all the time.

While Jamal's approach was trying to anticipate and be prepared for what he could, he ultimately understood that sometimes you just have to take what comes and figure it out on the go.

Participant 5: Paul. Paul, who retired from active duty, has been a full-time stay-at-home dad to the couple's two kids, a son (12) and a daughter (6) since their son was born. He summarized

perfectly what it meant to “figure it out on the go” when he talked about not only juggling the schedules of his very active kids but also simply being the “go-to” person for everything that happens in the household. He stated that:

> You can’t plan too far ahead. I never, I never grasped that concept until I was out of the military, out of working for the University of Oklahoma, and at home. You can’t plan far enough too far in advance. Stuff like that, “definitely I can’t plan, you can’t plan too far out. That’s a huge thing that I’ve learned from transitioning from working outside the home to working in the home.”

No matter how many reminders, calendars, and apps available, sometimes you just have to roll with the punches and, with a lot of patience, you figure out how to make it all work.

Participant 6: Rich. Rich is married to an Air Force reservist who has been called to active duty. The couple are parents to a rambunctious two-year-old son. Rich had an interesting story to share about adaptability when he talked about how he and his wife managed to continue giving his son breast milk while she was deployed for a time:

> But I will say she went TDY for a week to two weeks I think right when he was a couple of months old, and then so he was still breastfeeding so like I've truly never understood when people called it liquid gold. But the breast milk was huge ... We wanted our son to ... all of the health benefits of that so I went ... it was literally ... people thought I was like ... it was funny because I had friends that they thought that I was like this mad scientist because I'm like "You know what? 2/3 milk, 1/3 breast milk" ... you got to spread it out cause obviously she's not there to make more milk. We actually ended up overnighting because I actually

> ran out. We had to overnight and it's safe because you can go to like Fed-Ex and they do like that ice. I can't think of the name of it ... the dry ice.

There were other paths Rich could have taken, with the path of least resistance probably being to simply purchase formula and put up with whatever crying would ensue as a result of the baby switching over from breast to regular milk. With a bit of innovative thinking, however, and the willingness to try new things, he and his wife made it work for their family.

4.1.3 Self-Awareness. Most of the spouses' reflections on self-awareness came to light as a result of their reflections not only on their personal leadership styles, but on their daily, short, and long-term experiences as male military spouses.

Participant 3: Russell. Russell's take on his personal leadership style stemmed from a discussion of the particular leadership qualities he felt were needed to teach his daughters right from wrong. After sharing an episode where his daughters were having a disagreement with one another, Russell told what shaped his own understanding of leadership and how that influenced how he led his daughters by example.

> The thing that shaped leadership for me was probably when I was in high school and the high school football coach had me come out for football. From there, coaching back then was more in your face. Your feelings weren't spared. You got their attention when you did stuff right. They were harsh on you, but you got the praise as long as you did your job. If you didn't do your job, you were going to get an ear full of it.

Participant 7: Hunter. Hunter's sketch of his personal leadership style began with a look at how his leadership was shaped by his work history prior to marrying his wife. According to Hunter,

not only the type of work that he did but also the location of his job were critical in shaping his ability to lead. He reflected that:

> I worked in sales for 10 years. That had a big impact on my leadership style. I didn't work in a very wealthy area. I worked in a pretty rough area of DC for a while. It's a different now, but when I first started. I'm 36 now and when I first started there I was in my early 20s. I couldn't walk down the street without getting messed with. I had to go with somebody that I worked with that knew the streets a little better than I did.
>
> You learn *street smarts* doing that stuff, that was very influential at the time, being a younger guy in the Inner City by choice. A lot of people are not there by choice. I chose to go to that job to do that, and it was very influential. It was very difficult at times, but you learn how to, you can get someone to come in and be happy with you and be happy with the product and the stuff that you're selling. It pushed off my leadership style. I was selling myself. It doesn't matter what the product is, I'm selling myself.

Much of Hunter's self-reflection on leadership was part of our discussion on his service to both the local community as well as the military community. As a full-time, stay-at-home dad to twin boys under the age of five, Hunter gives a lot of time to not only his wife's unit for morale events, but he also volunteers in his local community outside the gate. His ability to "sell himself" is what he attributes to his success in the volunteer field.

4.1.4 Service. The majority of the male spouses interviewed spoke of ways they volunteered not only as part of their spouses' units but also in various ways in the local communities. Many expressed wanting to volunteer simply as a way to give back to their

communities, draw people together in a common cause that also benefits the volunteers, and also simply as a way of networking.

Participant 8: James. James, who has been married to his active duty military wife for nearly 13 years, proudly identified as a retired Marine. The couple has two children, a boy and a girl. James is a full-time stay-at-home dad. He talked about the importance of volunteerism not only as a way of giving back to the community but also as a way of leading by example.

> I would actually go and take our kids and especially during the holidays, we would help put baskets together for some of the single Marines at the barracks. In a way, I was using that also as a tool to show them as far as trying to contribute and trying to help others because you have to fill them in on the resources to do so.

Participant 7: Hunter. Hunter talked about his desire to reach "outside the gate" to the local community. One of the mantras that the military teaches to military spouses is to *bloom where you are planted,* and this is one of the ways that encourages the embodiment of this mantra.

> There were a couple things in town recently that I'm itching to volunteer for … There's a homeless population here that the local citizens are always complaining about, the homeless population, and it just feels like there's some need there, so that's my next issue. Should I do something there cleaning up their camps and stuff? … Normally I focus on the military stuff just because that's what we've known and the community we are … everybody knows each other and if you're going to go around the base, then you're going to run into people.

Participant 4. Marion. Marion discussed a unique way that his unit was able to assist spouses in their volunteer service. They helped them to not only give back to the local military community

but also allowed them to develop their professional skills by putting their talents to use. He recalled specific spouses where this was the case:

> We had another male spouse, that had never been in the military, that when he moved, same deal, he lost his job in construction work, and couldn't find another job. They had a baby, too, so we found a way for him to do stuff to volunteer with the unit. He actually helped design and make one of our obstacle courses. We had another young man with web-ops design, that was similar. If there was something like that, where we could give them something to do, we did that.

Participant 10. Luke. Luke gave a different perspective from the other male spouses interviewed when it came to serving, specifically with regard to the FRG program. He found that while he wanted to be involved in the program, the other spouses in the unit saw him as "the guy" and, from his perspective, assumed that he wanted to be in charge. This was almost a deterrent keeping him from serving. Sometimes he simply wanted to be part of the group without being tasked with always leading the charge.

> I know with my wife's FRG, I used to go, and there as well, you wouldn't see many male spouses. I know with my wife's FRG, when I would go, they would always try to stick the man in charge of things – "Luke" needs to do this, "Luke" needs to do that and I don't know if that's a deterrent for other men because I know being there, they would always put me in charge of trying to do something and that females were always trying to volunteer me to do a job.

Participant 5. Paul: Paul talked about how he had been active in several Key Spouse groups that supported his wife's unit in the past. However, for this current separation period, the pressures of having a deployed spouse, coupled with raising two children with active school and social

schedules, did not give way to contributing as much volunteer time as Paul had been able to contribute in past units.

> You know, they have a thing now, and I've been in it several times at different squadrons [my wife] has moved around to while we've been here at [our current duty station]. It's called [name of specific readiness organization]. …I've been a [name of specific readiness organization] for quite a while.

4.2 Theme 2: Military Lifestyle

The second theme, Military lifestyle, represented another common theme that emerged from the interviews. Included in this theme are the sub-themes of military culture and family readiness issues and invisibility. Military culture includes the attitudes, values, and behaviors that are associated with how military spouses viewed the culture-specific to the military.

The next sub-theme, family readiness issues and invisibility, encompassed military spouses' attitudes concerning the military's family readiness programs (system), whether it was talking about military family readiness organizations specific to their branch of the military to their views of the program, to how the program could be better run in the future. Invisibility includes being overlooked; being invisible to the larger spouse community; not being heard. A review of the transcripts showed that a significant number of the male spouses interviewed discussed aspects of both military culture and military family readiness, while a few expressed the concept of invisibility.

Following are a list of participants' responses and quotes that offer a more explanatory investigation of the emerging themes.

4.2.1 Military Culture. The military culture was another sub-theme that emerged from the transcripts. Codes associated with the theme included issues of hierarchy ("complaining up

and not down"); Officer vs Enlisted rank structure and expectations (fraternization); Respondents talked about a span of items describing military culture, ranging from real and perceived differences between Officer and Enlisted ranks, perceived expectations of military spouses on both dress and behavior, as well as the expectations of workload for active duty military, to name a few. The following interview quotes support the theme of military culture.

Participant 7: Hunter. Hunter's statements on military culture arose when he shared a memory about putting together a morale event for his spouse's unit. To give a bit of a background on how he was able to put together an event that would be not only shared but thoroughly enjoyed by all members of the unit, he shared this:

> Enlisted can become friends with other enlisted, but it's kind of frowned upon to be an officer hanging out and doing fun things with a subordinate. Like we can't go. Like I'm friends with a sergeant, but my wife can't be really good friends with a sergeant. She can be cordial. They can come over, but the way I was able to do things where it was all of us was through a unit event. So by renting that van and taking those guys to an event, well the officers were allowed to go, too. So they got to have that little scorch of fun that you have with all of your friends, real friends, for that moment in time.

Participant 3: Russell. Russell commented on his perceived expectation the military has for spouses of, in his case, military officers to dress in a particular manner.

> The expectations of her are that, because she's an officer, I can't be very ghetto about anything. So if I dress the way I used to when I was younger, it would be frowned upon. They would think I was a thug.

Participant 8: James. James talked about an aspect of military culture that affects a large number of active duty military members and their families, which is the separation from extended family members. James expressed a sense of isolation arising as a result of this separation:

> You know, we missed all those occasions that they [non-military family members] get to experience on a weekly basis and being in the military making those sacrifices and serving away from your hometown. You know, it does, at times make it difficult by not having that extended family in times of need you know when an emergency does come up.

***Participant 4 Marion*.** Marion addressed the aspect of military culture alluding to what Coser (1974) calls the "Greedy Institution" aspect of organizations. He pointed to the fact that oftentimes, it is more of an expectation than not for active duty military parents to work long and/or irregular hours. Just before he described a typical "day in the life" of serving as primary caregiver, he commented that "First of all neither of us work extremely long hours right now at least with these two jobs that we're in. Now that's an oddity."

Participant 9: DB. DB's discussion on military culture came when he expressed both surprise as well as disappointment when he sought to join the Officer's Wives Club and found that he would not be readily welcomed by the other members. He first talked about not knowing there were different clubs on base, the difference between an officer *wives* club and an officer *spouses'* club:

> It's just it's so ingrained in the culture of the military, where the female is the spouse. I mean hell, they still have Officer and Enlisted wives' clubs -- that men can't join -- which is bananas. Like hey. So they have two separate clubs: they

> have officers spouse clubs here at our current duty station, and then they have an Officer *wives* club, which is strictly women only.
>
> Which is, you know. Yeah. It's bananas. Because I called up and I was like, "Hey, you know, I'm thinking about joining the spouses' club." And they were like, "Oh, no, I'm sorry, Sir. We're a *wives* only club." And I'm like, "Well that defeats the whole purpose of EO (Equal Opportunity).

He went on to express further frustration at being told that he couldn't join the one Officer *Wives'* Club (and the fact that the one for *wives only* still existed, in light of the times):

> I was like, "Women serve too, you know. Didn't know if you guys got the memo." And then if the president was being snooty or whatever, but she was like, "Yeah, well we just, this is a traditional wives' club and it's mostly for career wives who have been in the military for a while." And then she suggested me to the Officer's *spouses'* club, which is more a gender-inclusive if you will.

4.2.2 Family Readiness Issues and Invisibility. Family Readiness Issues emerged as a sub-theme among the respondents. Common sentiments expressed by respondents included a focus on the family as an issue of retention and recognition and inclusion of male spouses in family readiness events. Invisibility is feeling that one is not being seen or heard. Male spouses expressed this sense of invisibility inside the larger military spouse community as well as when it came to being recognized within family readiness programs. Coded terms included being overlooked, not being heard, and not feeling included. The following interview quotes support the theme of Family Readiness Issues and Invisibility.

Participant 7: Hunter: Hunter volunteers a considerable amount of time with his wife's military unit, and he has received multiple awards recognizing his efforts. His discussion of family readiness evolved as an extension of a reflection on his personal leadership style.

> I'm a little different than a normal military male spouse, but when it comes to the guys and not wanting to do stuff, that is an issue I was having the whole entire time I was at our prior duty station and here. The male military spouses don't go out, and they think that everything is based on painting events and those types of parties. But it's true, that is the primary way that things happen. Like if you even are a spouse group right now on base, it's all focused.

He then went on to express curiosity as to why there was so little participation from the other male spouses when it comes to Family Readiness events. By his estimation, he calculates that at least of a third of the active duty members in the unit are married to male spouses – quite a large number for an active duty unit. Such a large number of male spouses should certainly produce more than enough spouses to show up for family readiness events. He recalled that:

> Like right now there are 150 spouses, and so at least a third of those guys. There should be, a third, a half, a third of the people that are on active duty in the military that are married are male spouses. All the wing guys are married, they all have male spouses somewhere. Those guys have jobs. Typically, I don't see them out very often. Even our Commander is a woman and her husband, he comes to the events and stuff, but he doesn't, he's not a leader in any of the events. He's not a Key Spouse. I think you have the opportunity to do something like that, but I guess he decided not to do that.

Citing his own willingness to participate more so than the average male spouse, he pointed out that at even a larger than usual event that involved both active duty members and their spouses, again, he was the only male spouse present:

> I've been to a lot of different events and we had a thing at [our previous duty station] called Spouses Night Out when we were there. All of the big, the spouse club has a big party for all of the spouses on base, basically. It was 400 women - and me.

Participant 3: Russell. Russell expressed a sentiment that is common for most of the male spouses interviewed. While he acknowledged that the military has made earnest attempts in its family readiness platforms to be inclusive of all spouses in their recognition of their support, that support continues to be targeted toward female spouses.

> … the only time I feel that males don't get anything is on Spouse Appreciation Day because you go to the activity and it's basically geared all toward women. We were at [our previous duty station] and I signed up for it because it was free. They've got a little activity. So I went to it and the lady asked me, "Are you sure you want to do the pedicure thing?" I was like, "Why not?" So they were wishy-washy about certain stuff, but the parents that were there, I knew them or I knew their kids so they were all like, "Oh, come with us. Do this, this, and this. You need to do this activity or that" and so I was like, "Okay."

Like other spouses, he recalled a spouse appreciation event where all spouses were invited. Upon arrival, however, it was clear that the activities were targeted toward only the female spouses in attendance. He recalled that:

> the only time I feel that males don't get anything is on Spouse Appreciation Day because you go to the activity and it's basically geared all toward women. We were on [a particular base] and I signed up for it because it was free. They've got a little activity. So I went to it and the lady asked me, "Are you sure you want to do the pedicure thing?" I was like, "Why not?" So they were wishy-washy about certain stuff, but the parents that were there, I knew them or I knew their kids so they were all like, "Oh, come with us. Do this, this, and this. You need to do this activity or that" and so I was like, "Okay."

Participant 2: Jamal. Jamal echoed Russell's sentiment that oftentimes the military's readiness organizations do make earnest attempts to show spousal appreciation, but their attempts continue to perpetuate the exclusion of male spouses. Jamal brought up a specific organization and noted that its gender-specific nomenclature excludes men:

> I think we should create some of those similar groups like the [name of specific readiness organization] that I spoke about earlier, similar support groups for men. But you can't counsel the same way. We have to restructure it in such a way that it's men-friendly. Cause men don't have teas. "We're gonna have a spousal tea." No, that's not what we do.

Much to his dismay, he, too, recalled that the activities are aimed toward the female caregivers.

> It's all based on the woman, as opposed to the male caregiver. In that group, they give a lot of substantive advice and keep them connected. But on the male side, if I was a male spouse, which I am, without any kind of connection, if my wife was not military, then I'll be out of luck. I would not have an outlet to find out the things the [name of specific readiness organization] is finding out about.

***Participant 4: Marion*.** Marion has served on active duty longer than any of the other spouses interviewed, and so he is able to take a further look back at how things have evolved in the area of family readiness events. Specifically, he referred to how the formality of readiness events has changed. He recalled that:

> A lot of times, back when my wife and I first came in, right? The social events, or the family readiness events, would be very formal. They would be very much, almost a prescribed dress code. You had to watch what you say because there was the spouse of the higher commander there. Those types of things kind of discouraged people from participating, fully supporting. We don't so much do that anymore.

Participant 10: Luke. Luke also reached back farther into the past to shed light on how the priority of families has changed in the eyes of the military. He had this to say:

> People always make these little jokes about families and family. I think for my first 10 years in the military, families were not a priority. The family wasn't a priority. Your wife could be pregnant at the hospital about to have a baby while you're out in the field training, and they [the Command team] wouldn't bring you back in until the doctor made the call to say the baby's on way. That's crazy. The military can definitely have a major impact on the family.

While Luke's comment addressed what he framed within the context of a family readiness issue, it highlighted an aspect of how military spouses are viewed that continues to prevail in spite of the increased number of women serving on active duty.

> There were quite a few male spouses in the unit that were men. You know, usually, there aren't that many. But I think, you know, in a man's mind, when

> they say "FRG" family readiness, I guess it kind of seemed like it was the female's role. You know, because normally the only [male] person you would see [at Family Readiness meetings] would be the Commander because, of course, he was in charge of the program. But you would very seldom see other male spouses there.

He also weighed in on the lack of a number of male spouses who participate in family readiness events. Something that stood out in Luke's comments was the assumption, in this case, that the Commander was a male.

Participant 5: Paul. Paul's comments about the family readiness program were somewhat specific to his wife's branch of the military, and they concerned his ideas on how to make improvements for the program's viability. Paul's had this to say:

> When I was a Key Spouse, we had some mil spouses, male and female that were very plugged in, very active and things like that, and then we had a lot of spouses that did not want to be emailed, that did not want to be called, did not want to be contacted even when their spouse was deployed. So it's kind of a fine line that you have to walk. I would say [name of specific readiness organization] program. The only thing that I think that would help support mil spouses more – and the Navy has an ombudsman program where the people are actually paid to do basically the same work that the [name of specific readiness organization] do for the Air Force, but all [name of specific readiness organization] are unpaid. I think they should create paid positions. Yeah, I think it would be of great importance. You would have a [name of specific readiness organization] at the Wing level that would interact with all of the [name of specific readiness organization] that were

> paid, but because we're a volunteer program, a lot of times, it hit and miss, how helpful they are during deployment. And a lot of times, it's hard to get spouses to volunteer to be [name of specific readiness organization]. But I think if they were paid, it would help the system run much better.

Participant 9: DB. Db expressed a sense of invisibility when he talked about his personal experiences with his wife's FRG unit. As he recalled looking at the outreach and marketing of the events, there was nothing in the advertising that felt welcoming to male spouses.

> Boy, it's pretty freakin' awkward, man. Because for the Army to be so gender-neutral, there is still a bias when it comes to FRG. Like everything is geared towards traditional domestic roles. You know, so they'll have spouses' wine nights or spouses' pajama parties. And obviously, a male spouse can't go to a pajama party. I can't go to it. But do you see what I'm saying?
>
> So a lot of it, you just kind of look at the news and be like, "All right, man. Whatever." You know what I mean? It's just, I don't think they do it intentionally.

DB went on to talk about his experiences at the meetings. While he makes mention of the fact that some leaders try to show inclusion by taking a vote, it becomes blatantly obvious that because there are so few men attending the events, then his voice will never be heard if he is the only one voting for something other than the norm.

> I mean even when you go to FRG meetings, it's still a lot of, there's still a lot of negative stereotypes and it's only perpetuated when you go there, you know, you're the only male spouse in there. And they're talking around you as if you're not there. You know what I mean? And it's difficult to get your ideas heard when there's 14 women and one guy. And they're like, "Oh what do you guys want to do

by show of vote, who wants to do a wine night?" You know, there are 14 yeses and there's one no. You know what I mean?

4.3 Theme 3: Marriage & Family Support

Marriage & Family Support. The third theme to emerge in this study was Marriage and Family Support. Included in this category are the sub-themes of Parenting, and Teamwork & Collaboration. Parenting covered raising the kids, to include family domestic chores (patrol-based duties), and childcare, along with the mental load that encompasses all of those things. The mental load is defined here as the 24/7 organizing, planning, remembering what goes on in the mind of the caregiver who must manage everything and everyone to keep the household afloat (includes planning AKA "planning forward" as stated by Jamal).

4.3.1 Parenting. At home, men take care of seemingly menial tasks that include waking children and getting them ready for and off to school and daycare, washing dishes, and even simple dusting and light cleaning of the home. Looking deeper, however, we see that these tasks carry a much deeper meaning and require the mental labor of daily, short- and long-term planning. One spouse, Rich, described what he does on a typical day off from his paid job.

The description included chores he takes care of so that his wife doesn't have to be concerned with both her job and the additional tasks of domestic chores after work. He used the term "Patrol Based activities" to describe the performance of household duties. In short, the terms amounts to, "Anything you can do to improve your fighting hole. This includes the constant improvement of your fighting position. In household terms, it includes things like cleaning it, adding to it, making it yours" (G. Parsons, personal communication, February 23, 2019).

Domestic Chores or “Patrol Based Issues” (as was a term used by two participants to describe these domestic duties or chores) included all of the work done to ensure the smooth running of a household. One participant was describing some of the chores involved as part of his parenting duties when he used the term “patrol-based duties” to describe “[all of the] ways that I could show my wife that I appreciate her by not leaving everything to her when I get off.” He was the second of two respondents to use the term, so when asked to define the term, which was new to the interviewer, he stated that it was a term familiar in the Army Ranger community, and he defined it this way:

> In the Rangers, patrol-based activities, you get there and the first thing you do is you set it up and you pull security but while you're there, there are other things that you have to do. Like, I don’t want to get into military jargon, but you got to draw your sector, you got to start prepping for re-supply, make sure that everybody has water and all those things. I woke up this morning and I'm like, okay, I have to make sure that I wash all the linen and make sure that I get the bathroom clean. I have to do all these things, it’s like a laundry list of things you have to do, every single time. So every time I have free time at home I do these things.

Some of the respondents took time to chime in about the mental load they take on as they try to balance the demands of life. Of note in these reflections is the amount of effort the participants put into ensuring the children are ready to start and be prepared to successfully make it through their days as opposed to the shorter, hurried amounts of time participants spent on getting themselves ready. Participants noted planning for up to an hour ahead of time to get the

children out the door, while spending sometimes as little as five minutes to get themselves ready. Hunter noted here that:

> On a normal day, a day that she's working and on day shift or overnight or the day after an overnight, she's sleeping or she's just not here. So I have to get up with the boys, get them good ready for school, feed them, get lunches ready, all the normal parenting stuff like you got to take them potty, brush their teeth. And then you have to get yourself ready to go, but you can only give yourself three to five minutes because I drop them off on the way to work at this point.

4.3.2 Teamwork & Collaboration. Finally, Teamwork & Collaboration, a term used by Goleman (2011), is used to cover a leadership competency where "players generate an atmosphere of friendly collegiality and are themselves models of respect, helpfulness, and cooperation. They draw others into an active, enthusiastic commitment to the collective effort, and build spirit and identity. They spend time forging and cementing close relationships beyond mere work obligations" (p. 105).

Participant 2: Jamal. Jamal began by sharing a snapshot of a typical day in his life where he detailed his efforts of getting the kids ready for school, getting them home, doing homework, and then starting all over the next day. He shared a particular scenario that allowed us to see a lived experience that also represented the mental load that often accompanies parenting:

> Okay. So right now my eight-year-old has a problem with brushing her teeth, and she started to lie about brushing her teeth. So I asked her, "Jenn, did you brush your teeth?" This was three days ago, Monday. "Jenn, did you brush your teeth?"
>
> "Yes, Daddy."
>
> I said, "Well which toothbrush did you use?"

"The orange one."

I said, "So, I'm getting ready to go upstairs to touch the orange toothbrush. Will it be wet?" And she gave me a look so I knew then. I said, "Last opportunity, did you brush your teeth?"

"No, Daddy."

And I told that story just to tell you this. The whole story, the similar story with, you know, take a bath and I say, "Well did you wash your neck?"

"No."

"Did you wash your back?"

"No."

"Did you wash your feet?"

"No."

"What did you do in there?"

So because she lied to me it's my responsibility now, I brush her teeth in the morning, I brush her teeth in the evening, I bathe her in the evening. So I'm teaching her ... Oh she doesn't like it either, I said, but I'm teaching her if you lie to me there are consequences. And I'm also, so I'm giving her, I don't even remember what the question was. So that takes my time. So this morning I'm in the bed, I'm like, "This is Veteran's Day I can have a day off. I can sleep in." So she gets in, "Daddy, I'm ready."

I'm like, "Ready for what?"

"I'm ready for you to brush my teeth."

> I told her if she brushes her teeth and not tell me and I don't an opportunity between now and today's the last day, then I'm gonna brush them again. So she and woke me up so I could brush her teeth. So those types of things take a little time. So this is the last day. The last day I will bathe her. And we'll see if she figures it out next week.

In addition to the snapshot moments Jamal talks about that allow us to see into his life as a dad, he talks about how he deals with the mental load of keeping everything in order. In this particular case, he specifically points out that he is not a planner, but then he goes on to detail all of the efforts he does put into keeping everything organized.

> So because I'm not a planner it takes me effort to plan. And if it's not on the calendar and something else pops up I'm like, "Okay, what do I do? Where do I go?" It takes effort for me to do that and my wife laughs at me all the time. I'm not a multi-tasker whatsoever. But she can do five things at one time and do it well. But the thing that I try to do is I write stuff down. So if I have the kids and I'm doing something I write stuff down and if I write it down, if it's deadline I have to meet I put it in my phone or make some type of alert otherwise I will forget it. So that's how I deal with it. I don't keep it in my head I have to physically do something. So write it down, put notes, reminders, whatever. It helps me to get ... or tell somebody else, "Hey, if I'm here at 3:00, I'm wrong." You know, I have to You know, I enlist the help of anybody, any place I can.

He then detailed how he and his wife work together as a team to make the family work.

> So how we've coped is my wife an avid planner. I'm talking, I'm so not the planner. I'm am, "oh we'll do this; maybe we'll do that", but her day is *planned*.

> So her day is planned so when she's working, I'm giving up part of my manhood by saying this, but she has *everything* planned. It's on a calendar. If I look at that calendar everything is, if it's on the calendar, then that's what I do. So she has my day scripted. Now, of course, the script always changes or sometimes changes and it's hard to go with that, but the same things apply; I still fill her shoes. About a month ago, she was TDY'd to Maryland for 30 days, so for 30 days I had to do everything that she does.

Participant 3: Russell: Russell's comments on marriage and family support emerged as he shared his lived experience as a primary caregiver dad raising two girls. He also talked about the support he gives his wife simply by being an active listener she can vent to without fear of leakage outside the job. First, he shared his lived experience by sharing a snapshot of his daily routine:

> Okay, typical morning: my youngest daughter, her alarm goes off at 0645 so that's what time my alarm goes off. So I'll get up, brush my teeth, get dressed, and then I'll head down and make sure that she's moving and getting dressed and brushes her teeth. After she brushes her teeth, she'll come upstairs and I'll do her hair. I'll brush it out, put it in a ponytail, and make sure she gets her shoes on. By the time that's done, it's usually about 0700, 0705, that's when her older sister's alarm goes off.
>
> I make sure she's moving and out of the bed, because most of the time they'll sit up and go, "I'm up." And I'll say, "No, you're not up. You're in bed because if you lay back down, you'll go back to sleep. So I'll make sure they're moving. So after the oldest one is moving around, I make sure [my daughter] is eating her

> breakfast, getting her coat on, getting her book bag. Then, depending on the weather, we leave to walk to school, or I'll drive to drop her off.
>
> Then as soon as I come back, I have to make sure the oldest one has her watch on with the alarm so she knows what time to leave the house to catch the bus.

As he went on to express a common sentiment of stay-at-home parents and other primary caregivers – that the job is hard, yet underappreciated, one could feel the heaviness of the mental load he was carrying:

> Having to wake up and get two kids who don't like to wake up, get them up and ready for school. Then, when they're off to school, that gives you your time that if you're going to work out, to go work out, go grocery shopping and stuff like that. Or make appointments. That's usually when I do my appointments for my mom.
>
> In the morning, I take her to her appointments. Then, I pick up the youngest one at school and I tutor her until her sister gets home. Then make sure her sister, if she has homework, to do it. Then I have to get them both ready for track practice, take them to practice, become a coach. Then bring them home, make dinner.
>
> For anyone who says that being a stay-at-home parent is easy and they're not busy, they are quite busy. You have some free time, but for you to get in what you need to get in and need to do, but other than that …

Russell went on to share some quips about his own parenting and even talked about his personal style of leadership:

> I take my kids to school since I've been a stay at home since we've been out here in Virginia and Maryland, probably about five years. I'll walk my kids to school because the school is so close they can't ride the bus. So I have to teach them

> crossing the street, not talking to strangers and stuff like that. My oldest, she decided she wanted to start to walk to school with her friends and her sister, so I had to set out the rules. Sometimes I would follow them and make sure they were doing what they were supposed to do and not cutting through the forest out here. My leadership is hands-on.

It was clear, however, that he did not see himself in a leadership role in the home until a watershed moment at the airport:

> I didn't know I was the go-to until my dad died, and I had to leave for Kansas. It was the first time that I had to leave them. They were used to mommy leaving or going TDY (Temporary Duty) and stuff like that, but this was the first time that Daddy will be gone for a week or so, and they were hysterically crying when I was at the airport.
>
> I was like, "What is going on?" And they were like, "You're always here. You're never gone." And it dawned on me that they're used to Daddy. Daddy's their constant. Without daddy, I guess there's no direction for them. They feel lost.

Russell went on to talk about the support he gives to his wife in her career. He spoke about adaptability earlier in the interview and stressed the importance both patience and listening play in a successful marriage. Here, he talked about how he supports his wife through listening and why it is so important:

> My wife has probably come home and told me many stories about stupid stuff that happens at work, or dumb things the Command they want to implement, but when she would tell me, I would say, "That sounds dumb." But she'll use me as for example when a situation comes up about how to deal with it. I would give her

> my input and she would tweak it to how it fits under the [military's] structure because basically, you can't cuss someone out.

He added that "they sometimes have an outlet, but sometimes they don't. Most of the time, they just need someone to vent to about stupid stuff they have to deal with."

Participant 8: James. A number of couples who often start out as dual-military make the decision that one half of the couple will leave military service to be the primary caregiver simply due to the nature of the job. James was generous enough to share his own experience of when he and his wife made the decision that one would retire from the military and the other would continue:

> You know, being military spouses, it's not easy. This week, [my wife] left Monday. She's in [traveling] and right now she's on her way back with the rest of [her team] — all the [team members who serve] here in this district. I've been doing it now for well over six years now. It's no big deal that she can walk out that door and go do what she's got to do knowing that everything here on the homefront is being taken care of.
>
> So just having that understanding of knowing that that's her role, and that was the agreement that we both made when I decided to retire in late 2011 when I finally, I was like, you know what, this is getting way too hard, way too difficult, especially with both of us being senior enlisted, and then [the kids], they were, they weren't even going to school yet. The agreement was that she would charge on and do what she had to do, and I would stay home and fill the role as the caregiver and provider

James also shared a typical day in his life as a caregiver. While his summary is short and to the point, it created a clear picture of just how busy something so simple can truly be.

> I leave the house by 730, I drop them off at school, and then normally I go do an hour at the fitness center here. Then I come back home. I do chores. I mean, there's always something to clean, something to wash. There's always something to do here at the house. I have my days pretty much planned out and I just stick to that.

And he also shared a small snapshot of the daily struggles of parenting when he said:

> You know, just to show them, every morning you get up. [My son], even up to this day, the first thing he does when he gets out of bed is he, he makes his bed, and that's one thing that we have to do. We struggle a little more with [my daughter] (shared laughter at this comment). She's, she's not much of a morning person, but you know, that's where I try to focus on having a lot of patience - a lot of patience. And then, you know, just putting in the work each day.

What looks like monotony, however, also peeks at the mental and emotional burden that comes with parenting and marital support. There is the monotony of doing the rote work of domestic chores, combined with the sometimes self-imposed acceptance of putting one's own desires aside for the sake of the family. James showed a sense of optimism as he shared his take on how he and his wife continue to make it work year after year.

> Even now in the mornings, [my wife's] here before we go to school. She leaves the house normally around seven, right around 730-ish and at that time the kids are finishing their breakfast and they're all getting up and just kind of throwing everything in the sink and you know, we rush out the door and I come back to an

> empty house. The dogs are here, but I already know it. It's like a horse being led to water and I just, the first thing I do is go wash my hands and I come straight to the sink and it's one of those things that I've come to terms to accept and I understand that it's not something that I'm going to be doing forever. Eventually [the kids] will eventually grow up and hopefully do great things and I think it's just made me a better individual as far as understanding that life is difficult and I'm just glad that I was very fortunate to have met someone like [my wife's], who's strong like her. I think we kind of balance each other out in that way where the times when I did, I'm not going to say whine or complain, She just kind of set me in my place and made me realize, you know, this is something that we agreed on. It wasn't going to be forever, and she just had to remind me of that. You've seen it time and time again in movies where everybody rushes out of the house, and the mom is just stuck there and guess whose job it is to clean up after everybody? This guy.

James shared Russell's sentiment about having a listening ear so that his wife could vent about her work frustrations and anything else on her mind. He noted that because of her leadership positions at work, venting to anyone else might be detrimental to her own leadership and advancement opportunities.

> I kind of knew my role and what I could and couldn't say, especially after some of the talks that she would have after she would come home at times. I think for her just to kind of, she would ask what my thoughts were and how she should react to certain situations that she was running into at work. I think that made our life easier because at least she had someone to come home to and then talk about what

> she's going through at work and get some thoughts and feedback where the family who's just the one individual that resource at home where wanting to talk about it and then too, get some reinforcement from their spouse.

Participant 7: Hunter. Hunter's experience as a primary caregiver stood out among the respondents since he was the only one to be a primary caregiver to his spouse for a few years before the couple decided to have children. He shared that:

> I was able to take care of her, anything that she needed. She was working a rotating shift, so all of her lunches were ready. The house was always relatively clean as well as I could keep crap clean. Taking care of that stuff was done. If there were vacations, I would book it. I will take care of all that stuff. Incidental stuff like I would go to the commissary. I take care of all of that.

As the couple also has children who "just need a little extra help," working outside of the home has been a challenge. However, he does have a part-time job that allows him to work from home and visit the office on occasion. When asked to share a typical day, the first thing he asked was also giving the rest of us a peek into his busy schedule. One could almost feel the wheels of his mind begin to spin as he geared up to answer the question:

> You have to pick the day because we have a rotating schedule. Is it a day shift day, the swing shift day, a midnight day, a mid-day like overnight, or just a day that she has off? Everyone is different.

With so many choices, I said to him, "I don't know what a swing shift is. Tell me."

> On a normal day, a day that she's working and on day shift or overnight or the day after an overnight, she's sleeping or she's just not here. So I have to get up with the boys, get them good Ready for school, feed them, get lunches ready, all

> the normal parenting stuff like you got to take them potty, brush their teeth. And then you have to get yourself ready to go, but you can only give yourself three to five minutes because I drop them off on the way to work at this point.

He shared some of his parenting experiences as he talked about a typical day in the life of a dad. Hunter also hinted that the children react differently to him as opposed to how they treat his wife depending on whose turn it is to put them to bed.

> I come home and either I'll take a nap. I took a nap for almost two years. I was watching those boys, so when they napped, I napped. It's a hard habit to break, those naps. So I'll have a nap, or I'll clean around the house, or I'll watch TV or something. And then it's time to go get the boys and then the clock starts again because it's the end of today and they're excited to see you. You go get them, make the dinner, play with them. There's snacks, potty, we watch a little TV or we go outside. Mostly it is TV. I get in trouble for that with my wife. She gets mad at me for that. And then we do that. It's three hours from the time I pick them up until bedtime. And then bedtime is just really super, duper smooth. It's usually just me, so bedtime is very smooth. If it's just me, then bedtime will go very, very smooth. They just go right to bed.
>
> If their mom is there, it's usually a totally different animal. They're running around and it's like the role reversal that I remember when I was a kid. When my father would come home we would all be rowdy in yelling and running around, but when it was time to go to bed with mom. But when dad said "get in bed" we would go to bed. That's what it's like with me. And then after they go to bed we have a couple of beers and hangout. Usually, that's my relaxing time. I'll play

> video games, watch TV, and wait till either my wife gets home or we go to bed because there's a lot of nights, there are almost four nights every cycle that I don't get to see her when I go to bed. And then there are two days where I wake up with her not here.

He went on to talk about how he and his wife negotiate their roles as a couple in order to make it all work. Hunter had this to say about how he views leadership in the home:

> We do run the ship here like it's joint leadership. We work together. In any family at home, you have to be the head of the household at some point. Everybody gets a shot is I guess the best way to say that, yes, I consider myself to be a leader at home.

4.4 Theme 4: Gender Issues

The final theme for this study was Gender Issues. Gender Issues encompass how the participants view and react to gender role expression (how males choose to embody gender roles), and gender role stereotypes (roles society *expects* males to embody) in society. Participants reflect on how they often embody the gender role norms and fill the expectations that society has of them as men, in general - expectations that have the potential to cause emotional harm to them, if they are not adequately prepared to acknowledge and confront it. Other times, they discuss how they spurn gender role stereotypes simply as a duty of their being the primary caregiver and actively embrace the model of what Participant Josh describes as "dad is the new mom." The sub-themes in this category include gender role expressions and gender role stereotypes. The next section includes significant quotes from participants that represent codes within the overarching theme of Gender Issues.

Participant 1: Josh. Josh talked about how he and his wife both maintain traditional gender role values in some aspects of their life, and they also find that in other parts of their lives they have taken on what society would deem to be antipodal behavior for traditional male and female roles. He stated that he and his wife had " … for the most part broken from tradition" as far as traditional gender roles are concerned. Not only did he admit that, "I do all the cooking, most of the I would say tidying, not necessarily deep cleaning, but tidying," but he also went on to proudly admit that he embraces the role and even said that, "I have a t-shirt that says "Dad is the new Mom." He also had to this to say:

> So, I mean we very much fulfill opposite roles and we sometimes flip. You know I mean just dealing with like traditional roles. Like traditionally like dad takes out the garbage. You know I still take out the garbage. I still do you know work around the house.

Josh is able to enjoy the best of both worlds in a sense. While he is able to embrace this flipping of what people expect of a normal couple, he also admitted to being able to enjoy the skin he's in as a man and not have to conform to some of what he considers to be the more painful expectations women have to face.

> I feel like you know, as a guy in general, you know I avoid so much of the traditional politics of being a stay-at-home parent because I'm a guy. Like I just showed up to the playground in sweatpants and an old t-shirt and everybody just, they accept that. There are a lot of moms that are out there and it's a fashion show.

Josh admitted to still allowing the women in the house and family to have their way when it came to certain things. For instance, he admitted to allowing his wife to do what he called the

"sappy sentimental stuff" such as decorating for the holidays. He also went on to confess that as the primary caregiver, he would probably have even more support from extended family during his wife's deployment times since "Grandma, both grandmas would be here probably twice as much. Yeah, because … they have they maintain that traditional concept of … a woman needs to run the house." He also talked about how he still continues to embody at least one deep-seated belief of how men simply don't reach out for help as much as they should – something that has been shown to be deeply important to the success of family members of active duty service members:

> I think that men, in general, are less interested in social support than women, in general. I think that men, generally, don't rely on support networks as much as they maybe should. Maybe it's part of the male persona to you know deny help as opposed to the women being more accepting of help. It's more of a male self-concept thing. You know, if it happens I can do it, I can do it all myself and I don't need any support. Maybe some of that is tied into the fact that you know, if my wife were to deploy I can almost guarantee that I would get more familial support from the women in my family than if it were the other way around.

Participant 5: Paul. Paul shared the same sentiment as Josh went it came to describing values seen as typically embodied by males in general. He began by describing the "stereotypical environment" of what society sees as typical of the makeup of military families:

> You kind of hear the act, military families where the typical environment would be male being active duty and the female being at home, the male doesn't really get involved that much in the house, you know? A lot of the males don't get involved that much in the house. You know, you wouldn't know how to register

> their child for school or anything like that, and you know, that's the stereotypical environment that you hear about.

He then went on to admit to continuing to uphold personal beliefs on how men act, even if those actions are detrimental to their physical and/or emotional well-being:

> I think that men, generally, don't rely on support networks as much as they maybe should. Maybe it's part of the male persona to … deny help as opposed to the women being more accepting of help. It's more of a male self-concept thing. You know, if it happens I can do it; I can do it all myself, and I don't need any support.

Participant 3: Russell. Russell, too, shared what he described as how people see as stereotypical of the makeup of military families, as it relates to gender. "Historically," he said, "it's usually the male is in the Army. The female is usually stay-at-home, which is so 1940s. Today, the majority of women work and probably 20% of the husbands are at home." As primary caregiver, Russell admitted that "I'm the one who makes sure their clothes are washed, they've washed, they've eaten, they have food, they have money in their accounts for lunch," and he even commented on his personal leadership style:

He then went on to share a study he found on the internet that supported males being stay-at-home spouses, especially when circumstances made it more favorable for the male to stay home while the woman worked:

> There was a study I saw on the internet that showed a woman and a man, the husband. Both had jobs, but hers paid a little bit more so she decided that she would keep working. Well, they both decided that he would stay at home and take care of the two kids while she kept working and she was able to pursue more

> while he stayed at home. I think she's making six figures now, but she wouldn't have been able to do that if they were both still working. She benefitted from him and even though people look at her funny like "You should be the one at home." She says she enjoys her job and that she couldn't see it any other way.

Participant 8: James. James seemed to be in a continuous state of questioning whether the problem was him or others when it came time to carry out regular duties as the primary caregiver. He shared an experience many female primary caregivers encounter on a regular basis and are never questioned about. His experience, however, proved to be slightly different:

> You know, society has a way of tagging it as being more of a feminine role and so my first experience was when I took [my son] to an eye appointment there [at our previous duty station] and I go up to the receptionist. I gave her, at that time [my son] was under 10, so he didn't have an ID card yet. I presented my tan ID card and the response I got was basically know okay, well where is the mother? And I was like okay well I'm filling that role now as the mother. My wife is the active duty Marine, and she's the one, she's currently at work. And it was, it kind of threw me back a little bit and made me think, well was it just in the way that I approached her, or was it my mannerisms, or was it just that she was expecting something a little more? I don't know what she was expecting, but it just, it just kind of threw me off.

***Participant 6: Rich*.** Rich's discussion on gender emerged as part of a discussion on how male military spouses support one another in the wake of their active duty spouses' long hours and deployments. One of the perceptions that bothered him most, he admitted, was being referred to as his son's babysitter instead of being seen as doing a normal part of being a dad:

> I'm a little bit different, it's funny because I've walked out, when my son was an infant, with those little, you know those harnesses that you put a baby in? … I don't care because I'm 39 and I'm well past that age that I care what people think. But I think for some of the young guys it's like, "Man why does that young guy carry that baby like that?" I'm kind of past that age and hopefully my guys see me ... In my last unit, I took my son into work a couple of times. I just had to do something, and we couldn't get a babysitter for a day and my boss didn't care. They would see me and be like, "Uh oh, XO is the babysitter today." And I'd be like, "I'm not babysitting, it's my son. I'm watching my son, I'm not babysitting."

He, too, admitted that some parts of society continue to be almost backward in their thinking as to who should be playing what roles in society, as it relates to gender. He said, "I think there is a stigma that you have to do certain things but it's not 23 A.D. it's 2018. Whatever that is that *your part* is, you gotta do. Rich also admitted that while society has somewhat advanced in its thinking about what behaviors are and are not acceptable regarding gender roles, he has come to the conclusion that he simply does not care what society thinks when it comes to certain aspects of how he expresses his love for his son:

> So that perception, but as far as showing my son emotion, love in public, I care more about what he thinks, which is being happy and feeling loved than what a stranger thinks … I'm definitely at the point where I don't really care, I just want my son to smile when he sees me smiling and have a love for him.

Participant 9:DB. DB talked about gender as it relates to what is really a normal occurrence for most military spouses married to active duty service members - transferring to new duty stations and starting over. On the one hand, he expresses a typical male response of being emotionally

stable or not showing emotion. On the other hand, he admits to the difficulty of dealing with an injured ego when going into new situations and feeling like he has to explain what is commonly a normal situation for female spouses:

> It's frustrating as hell because you know as a guy, it's extremely difficult to be, yes, as a male spouse because when you get there, and you don't have a job or a career, people start looking at you crazy like, oh, you're a man and you're unemployed? Yes, yes I am. You know, and you got to tell everybody your life story just to get the interview.
>
> That part I found extremely difficult. For the most part, I'm just kind of, it is what it is. Just go with the flow. I don't think, I don't know. I've been out, separate from society being in the military for a while, but I don't think men should cry over spilled milk if that makes sense. If it's time to pack up and move, man you got to be successful wherever you're going. You got to get out and get it. That's your job as a man no matter what situation you're in, you got to provide, so you got to get out there, you got to make it happen.

4.5 Summary

This chapter summarized the most notable findings of the study and answered the questions guiding the research study. Included with the emerging themes from the transcripts were short biographies of the ten respondents interviewed for the study. Themes included: Leadership Competencies (empathy, adaptability, self-awareness, and service); Military Lifestyle (military culture, family readiness issues and invisibility); Marriage and Family Support (Parenting and Teamwork & Collaboration); and Gender Issues (gender role norms/expressions and gender role stereotypes)

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Future Research

~ Social norms are created by human beings,

and there is no social norm that cannot be changed ~

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers in the home. The primary goal of this research was to illuminate the voices of male military spouses from the various branches of military service to share their lived experiences, and with specific regard to their leadership qualities. The literature review and the findings reveal that while much research has been done focusing on military spouses in general, much of that research has focused on female spouses and many of the military programs in place to support military spouses continue to market to and provide outreach primarily targeted at female spouses of active duty service members.

While male military spouses contend with many of the pressures and obstacles confronted by female spouses who must function within the parameters of the military culture, the male spouses - while they have made incremental gains - continue to find themselves on the margins or altogether invisible when it comes to family readiness events. Information from this study looks at the historical factors of how the military has viewed male spouses as primary caregivers within its institution and also looks at the social and cultural factors that affect the current day leadership experiences of the male spouses. Implications of the findings are discussed in this final chapter, in addition to discussion on the theoretical framework. Also

included are recommendations for military leadership as well as recommendations for future research.

5.1 Alignment of Results with Research Questions

The following questions guided the current study:

1. What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as the primary caregiver in the home?
2. What is the historical context for leadership in military families?
3. What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?
4. How do male military spouses construct their understandings of leadership?

5.1.1 Research Question 1: Lived experiences. The study's central research question was, "What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as the primary caregivers in the home?" The leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers are outlined in chapter 4. Those lived experiences highlight how male spouses experience leadership at home, at work, and in the community. Asking the participants to describe their personal leadership styles was a gateway for many to discuss not only how they experienced leadership in their daily routines, but also over time. What emerged were the themes of Leadership Competencies and Marriage and Family Support that directly related to RQ 1.

As the participants took time to self-reflect on their leadership styles and how they implemented/experienced that leadership on a daily basis and over time, shared traits of leadership (empathy, adaptability, self-awareness, and service) emerged. Additionally, the participants reflected on how they supported their marriages and also received the support of

extended family and community to maintain strong bonds. They realized that they have a great influence on the success or failure of their families. Many discussed a newly found or an improved sense of empathy as they not only had children, but also found themselves serving as the primary caregiver for those children and sometimes even caring for extended family members while their spouses served on active duty.

The leadership experiences paralleled those of female spouses, but they were depicted by the language of males who understood that they were commonly viewed as being in violation of social norms within the military culture where the male is usually the active duty service person and the female is the primary caregiver. By raising children and instilling in them the idea that one doesn't have to conform to society, it was almost as if they were giving themselves permission to embrace their roles as caregivers.

Another commonality expressed by a bulk of the respondents included service by giving back to and engaging with the community through both formal and informal networks. While DB stated that, "a lot of [male spouses] tend to lean towards volunteering, social clubs, stuff like that. Coaching youth sports. That sort of stuff" as a way of decompressing, other spouses like James noted that it was a way of demonstrating leadership to in a number of ways: (1) he was showing his children how giving back to the community makes it a better place while and (2) volunteering in the community makes you more aware of what the needs of the community are and what resources are out there.

> I would actually go and take [my daughter] and [my son] and especially during the holidays, we would help put baskets together for some of the single Marines at the barracks. In a way, I was using that also as a tool to show them as far as trying

> to contribute and trying to help others because you have to fill them in on the resources to do so.

Literature published on military spouses highlights the importance of service as a way to build social capital and expand the social support networks necessary for the well-being of families and community members. Huebner, et al. (2009) discuss the role that both formal and informal networks play in allowing military spouses to make the connections that ultimately build stronger families. Specifically, they state that military family members who choose to give their time engaging in the community:

> were more likely to report a strong sense of community when they perceived higher community participation (members and families participating in base events and activities), greater community connections (members and families experiencing ease in connecting with others in the base community), and higher levels of community capacity (community members demonstrating shared responsibility and collective competence in their community) (p. 220).

Table 4
Alignment of Themes with the Research Questions

Theme	Alignment with Research Questions
Data supporting theme one and theme two related to findings related to RQ 1. **Research Question 1** 1. What are the leadership experiences of male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers?	**Leadership Competencies** Empathy, Adaptability, Service, Self-awareness **Marriage & Family Support** Parenting (patrol-based duties, childcare, mental load); Teamwork & Collaboration

Table 4 Cont'd
Alignment of Themes with the Research Questions

Theme	Alignment with Research Questions
Data supporting theme three related to findings related to RQ 2 & RQ 3. **Research Questions 2 & 3** 2. What is the historical context for leadership in military families? 3. What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?	**Military Lifestyle** Military culture, Family Readiness and Invisibility **Gender Issues** Gender role expressions Gender role stereotypes
Data supporting theme four (Gender Issues) related to findings related to research question four. (data on Gender Issues also related to RQ 2 & 3, but also supported RQ 4). **Research Question 4** 4. How do male military spouse construct their understanding of leadership?	**Gender Issues** Gender role expressions Gender role stereotypes Self-awareness

5.1.2 Research Question 2: Historical context. The second research questions was, "What is the historical context for leadership in military families?" The historical context for leadership in military families is such that female spouses were the only recognized primary caregivers. Additionally, families were not considered a priority as weighed against the needs of a mission-first oriented, greedy institution. While many of the male spouses interviewed could not give exact dates or histories of significant events impacting major military culture, they were readily able to access their own personal histories and things that have happened in the past while their own families have been serving. These short histories allowed us to gain insight into the historical environment in which male military spouses have had to evolve. One spouse,

Russell, had this to say about the history of how military families have typically been seen in the past as far as which spouse serves as which takes care of the home: “Historically, it’s usually the male is in the Army. The female is usually stay-at-home, which is so 1940s. Today, the majority of women work and probably 20% of the husbands are at home.”

Luke, a retired Senior Staff NCO married to another Senior Staff NCO (both now retired from Active Duty), recalled a time when the military was still of the mindset that families were almost a necessary evil or something to be disregarded altogether:

> … people always make these little jokes about families, and family. I think for my first 10 years in the military, families were not a priority. The family wasn’t a priority. Your wife could be pregnant at the hospital about to have a baby you’re out in the field training, they wouldn’t bring you back in until the doctor made the call to say the baby’s on the way. That’s crazy. The military can definitely have a major impact on the family.

The literature supports the assertion that, historically, military spouse caregivers were primarily women (Cooper, 2014). Their primary duties were to perform housekeeping and other nursing type duties (Albano, 1994). The importance of understanding the historical context of leadership, according to Gardner, is that such contexts “perform (or cause to be performed) certain tasks or functions that are essential if the group is to accomplish its purpose” (p. 1). In this case, the purpose to be accomplished by the male military spouse is to take on the lead as the primary caregiver. Understanding the historical context allows the males to understand the foundations of leadership of the organization in a historical sense, while at the same time allowing them to forge a new way ahead.

5.1.3 Research Question 3: Social and cultural context. The third research question was, "What is the social and cultural context for leadership in military families?" Upon asking the participants to describe the military's influence on their leadership as primary caregivers, many participants would immediately respond that "the military doesn't really play a part in how I lead my family," while others admitted that there is simply no way to avoid its impact on leadership in families. Many referred to the pervasive impact of military training, (how the demanding work schedule for active duty spouses affects family life).

While a number of the respondents answered that the military had no impact on their leadership styles or how they led their families, they then proceeded to detail how the military did, in fact, have a great deal of influence on how they lead their families, be it through decisions they chose to make – volunteering with their spouses' units or conforming to perceived expectations of behavior or dress code - or even NOT to make – I didn't want to live on base because, "if we didn't mow our lawn you wouldn't have some Sergeant Major telling you to mow your lawn" or, "I don't really like hanging out on base with other military spouses because they gossip" or "I know being there, they would always put me in charge of trying to do something and that females were always trying to volunteer me." What ultimately emerged were the themes of Military Culture and Gender Issues that directly related to RQ 3.

One participant, Josh, stated that he and his family chose to live off base "because [his spouse] doesn't like to deal with the rules associated with on-base and always having to be prim and proper and everything else." Another aspect of military culture that emerged was the rank structure. As spouses are purported to have no rank within the military structure, they should be able to associate with whomever they wish, both professionally and personally. In reality,

however, the rank structure of the active duty spouse often carries over into the private lives after work and affects both active duty members and spouses.

One participant described how the rank structure, particularly the differences between officers and enlisted personnel, played a part in how he had to work to overcome certain restrictions in order to put together successful recreational activities for all members of a unit to spend time together and enjoy themselves without fear of negative consequences for fraternization.

> Enlisted can become friends with other enlisted, but it's kind of frowned upon to be an officer hanging out and doing fun things with a subordinate. Like we can't go. Like I'm friends with a sergeant, but my wife can't be really good friends with a sergeant. She can be cordial. They can come over, but the way I was able to do things where it was all of us was through a unit event. So by renting that van and taking those guys to an event, well the officers were allowed to go, too. So they got to have that little scorch of fun that you have with all of your friends, real friends for that moment in time. You know, you have a beer. Those were the events.

The literature affirms the pervasiveness of culture within the military. Adhering to certain standards of dress and behavior may seem unorthodox to civilians. Further, the rank structure may be seen as derogatory, especially for those in junior positions in the hierarchical. However, Sue et al. (2008) remind us that some things seen as abnormal and dysfunctional in one culture may actually be beneficial and adaptive in another.

5.1.4 Research Question 4: Construction of understanding leadership. The

fourth and final research question was, “How do male military spouses construct their understandings of leadership?” To gain an understanding of how male spouses constructed their understanding of leadership, I asked participants the interview question of, “What influenced/influences the way you think about leadership?” The themes and sub-theme of Gender Issues and Self-Awareness directly related to RQ 4.

Answers ranged from lessons learned in childhood, to prior work experience, to aspects of military culture. Luke’s description of what shaped his understanding of leadership supported Pleck’s assertion that, “Demands for masculine sex-role behavior are often made by women in the absence of readily available male models to demonstrate typical sex-role behavior (Lynn, 1966, as cited in Pleck, 1981, p. 19).” Luke, who shared that he was raised primarily by women (growing up between his mother’s and aunts’ homes), shared that his upbringing played an important part in his leadership. He also used gendered terms to describe the work habits of the women who raised him. A self-described busy man with an incredible work ethic, who is always doing something, he shared this about himself:

> Well, I think it came up from my upbringing and then just you know working as a young man… you and with all females because I had more female figures in my life coming up as a kid than males and. I lived with my aunt, you know probably ten years and she was just a workaholic. And then my other aunt was a workaholic and they were the most, *these women would work like men* and it was like when they would get up in the morning, everybody else had to get up as well. And when you got up, you had to start working and you had to do something. You just didn’t sit around and lounge around the house. And that's kind of how I grew up.

> You know it wasn't just sitting around doing nothing if you're up, you're going to be doing something constructive and that's, that's stayed with me even through my 25 years in the military and I'm even that way now. When my feet hit the ground in the morning, I gotta go do something. So I got I is just drive me nuts to just sit around and just do nothing. I gotta go do something and normally it's something dealing with working with my hands or being outdoors or something and that's kinda, and I kind of you know that all came from my upbringing, definitely. I didn't get it from the military. My work ethics definitely didn't come from the military. It definitely came from my upbringing as a young boy.

Paul, too, talked about how lessons he learned from his own father growing up influenced the "life lessons" he found himself imparting to his own son:

> And I think life's lessons are worth a lot. It's lacking with a lot of kids today. Because when I was growing up, my gosh, my dad, he said "you want to mow lawns in the neighborhood?" I said, "heck yeah." He says, okay. You got a lawnmower? And I said, "Uh, yours." And he says, "Well you can rent mine until you can afford to pay for your own." And I did.
>
> I started a lawn service when I was like 13, 12 years old. And I had my own equipment. And I did my own lawns. I bought my first car. And you know, that was just my dad giving me a life lesson. And he grew up on a farm where there weren't two pennies to scrub together. He didn't wear shoes except for Church and Christmas, you know? So I think life lessons in the house are very, they work. And I try to tie it in with my kids as much as possible.

Joshua, having been a military officer, summed it up nicely when he stated that, "it's hard to train a Marine Officer not to be a leader." Many of the respondents who had military experience referred to that experience when speaking of how they constructed their understandings of leadership.

As male spouses in this study have continued to self-reflect, their understanding has helped them to grow in their own self-acceptance. A major part of emotional intelligence is being able to look inside oneself and come to grips with who we are as people and see how that shapes us as we relate to the world around us. The collected data points for how males constructed their understanding of leadership build support for this study's theoretical framework, namely in that they support what Pleck (1981) refers to as *identification modeling*.

According to the author, "sex role identify derives from identification modeling" (p.19). In support of his own gender role strain paradigm, the author cited Kagan's (1964) assertion that, "If a six-year-old boy is identified with his father, he necessarily regards himself as possessing some of his father's characteristics, one of which is maleness or masculinity" (Kagan, 1964a as cited in Pleck, 1981, p. 19). This was evidenced in Paul's response to how he constructed his understanding of leadership.

5.2 Gender Role Strain

Gender Role Strain provided the theoretical framework that guided this study. The paradigm highlights the struggle of male military spouses to gain visibility and acceptance within both the civilian society as well as inside the military community. It also shows the need for both military and other academic scholars to critically examine how extant support programs view the needs of male military spouses. The theory is broken down into three major categories of Discrepancy, Dysfunction, and Trauma.

5.2.1 Discrepancy. Participants in the current study showed that males are evolving beyond the feelings of discrepancy described by Rummell and Levant (2014) who stated that:

> Gender role discrepancy strain is thought to occur when a man fails to live up to his own internalized or ideal gender role norms, which produces a *discrepancy* between how he thinks men ought to be and how he perceives himself to be" and "the strain result[s] from a person's behavior being inconsistent with socially prescribed norms (p. 419).

Jamal, a dad who regularly takes his daughter out on dates so that she will "know exactly how she should be treated like a woman", finds it disconcerting that people find it to be an anomaly that a dad is taking his daughter out – as if it's out of the norm. It shouldn't be abnormal, but it should be normal. Similar to Rich, who said (in reference to his co-workers who commented that he was "babysitting" whenever he would bring his son into the office), "I'm not babysitting, it's my son. I'm watching my son, I'm not babysitting." Jamal summarized it thus regarding how he sees himself in a society that believes he should act in a manner different than how he actually does. "But I got delivered from people years ago so I don't mind the looks, I don't mind the comments, in fact, they're comical to me now." In other words, the *discrepancy* is not with dad, but with society, and so the internal strain for these respondents is no longer there.

5.2.2 Dysfunction. Some of the participants of the current study validated that the dysfunction strand of Pleck's Gender Role Strain still continues to define male behavior. This dysfunction, according to Pleck (1995), deals with the idea "that the fulfillment of gender role standards can have negative consequences because the behaviors and characteristics these standards prescribe can be inherently dysfunctional" (p.17). What this amounts to, essentially, is men suffering emotional consequences when they strive to embody what they believe is society's

prescribed behavior for them as men. Luke shared a story of how he didn't cope so well with some of the challenges of parenting when his wife deployed to Afghanistan for a year. The dysfunction of the behavior was that he didn't ask for help, even when he knew he needed it. Instead, he opted to risk overcompensating rather than ask for what was essentially an easy fix, had he sought help.

> I will say this for sure, and I've talked to male spouses about this. I think what men do, we just talk about the problem: 'Man that was crazy.'; 'Ooh, I don't ever want to go through that again'; 'Man, I'll be glad when she gets back.' We talked *about* the problem. We don't talk about *this is* the problem. Let's talk about how are we going to fix *this problem* so it won't happen again. So we can educate other people: if this happens, this is what you do.
>
> For me, I still didn't figure out some of the things or the issues that I was dealing with. I used to talk to other male spouses and they didn't, either. What we did was, we just dealt with it. We didn't t try to figure out how to fix it; we just dealt with it. And there *was* a way to fix it, but a lot of times as males, I guess our pride, our ego just won't drive us to the point where we will go and ask for help for certain things.
>
> I think the fear of somebody saying, "Dang, man, you don't know what the different sizes of a bra is or the difference between a tampon and a maxi pad? And I still don't know! So we don't ask for help because I think our pride won't allow it, so I think we would just go to Walmart and buy one of each. Everything that's pertaining to feminine hygiene we'd just buy it all rather than just ask somebody, 'what do I get for 12-year-old who's on her cycle?'

> We won't ask. We'll just try to figure it out for ourselves and continue to mess it up, you know? There are just some things that men, we just don't ask. We just don't tell anybody and that's the same thing as spouse abuse. There's a lot there. Maybe not as many, but there's a lot of cases out there with male spouses getting abused by their female spouses, and it's not being reported.

5.2.3 Trauma

The trauma strain of the theoretical framework deals with what Levant (1996) refers to as the "male socialization ordeal" (p. 6) wherein major consequences occur as a result of young boys being robbed of the "tranquility of childhood" (p.6). The cause of this childhood loss is explained more fully by Pollack (1992), citing Pleck's research:

> [Pleck] points to Pollack's (1992) research indicating that young boys suffer trauma early on resulting from the "traumatic abrogation of the holding environment in boys' development … that may leave many adult men at risk for fears of intimacy" (p. 45). Pollack noted that this early trauma might result negatively in males' behavior toward their female counterparts in the future. A good example of this negative behavior might be males hesitating to enter into affectionate relationships in adulthood.

None of the males interviewed for this study suggested anything that would have been indicative of the trauma strain. Many of the respondents displayed the characteristic of self-awareness wherein, they did a deep dive into their personal histories to explore their personal leadership styles, as well as reconstruct their understandings of leadership. Perhaps future studies might address this particular component of the Gender Role Strain, particularly as it may relate to the relationships between men and their wives, or men and

their daughters.

5.3 Discussion

From transactional to laissez-faire, to democratic leadership, and other types of leadership styles, the data collected provided numerous examples of leadership that were evident in the lived experiences of the male military spouses who serve as primary caregivers. What was also evident in a review of the transcripts, is that many of this study's participants subscribe to what Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011) describe as a *faulty* view of leadership. Such a view, say the authors, is shaped by the belief that leaders should be viewed as individuals apart from their followers, and is "cultivated by those who are ignorant of the science of leadership" (p.16). While it was apparent that some of the participants did not necessarily see themselves as leaders - particularly the ones who had no military background - they do, indeed, practice leadership continuously. They do so in their homes, their communities, and their workplaces.

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of male military spouses who serve as the primary caregiver. It is significant to the field of leadership as the findings add to the body of knowledge on the science of leadership. Exploration of leadership inside of different contexts can help researchers better understand and add to the science of leadership. Additionally, it presents the military with an opportunity to implement low-cost interventions that may help spouses/primary caregivers to begin to view leadership from different perspectives. This may, in turn, help them to practice leadership differently and embrace their roles more readily, thereby increasing their resilience and shoring up force readiness through family readiness. This could be done through online learning, pocket guides, or curriculum guided conversations inserted into existent programs provided through new or existent family readiness programs.

5.4 Recommendations for Leadership on Family Readiness Programs:

While all participants mentioned family readiness programs in their interviews, they were somewhat divided on the current state of military family readiness programs depending on their personal experiences. Commanders at all levels view their family readiness programs differently and seemingly rank family readiness high on their list of priorities, but many fall short of genuine concern about the program at-large. While the importance of Family Readiness may be well-publicized and rated as a matter high on any Commander's list of priorities, the actions of the Command in how they implement that importance is what will begin to improve morale.

Commands are briefed on the knowledge that more male military spouses continue to fill the ranks of family members. However, it is not always apparent that they take this into consideration in the implementation of their unit programs, as they continue to not only market their programs toward female spouses, but they also fail in their outreach efforts to the growing demographic of male spouses. Huebner (2009) affirmed that …

> An organization that operates from a building community capacity perspective … Places more effort on outreach than on marketing. There is a not so subtle difference between outreach and marketing, mainly that outreach moves to where people are, where they live, and where they associate (p. 221).

However, the military is to move forward in its implementation of family readiness programs, it must be willing to acknowledge through actions that it recognizes the growing demographic of male military spouses as primary caregivers.

1. As family readiness continues to be a critical matter that will ultimately, if not

given proper attention, degrade combat readiness and retention, the subject should be formally addressed by both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees for mandated funding to assist the Services in caring for their demographically diverse families. In understanding family diversity, male spouses as primary caregivers should be at the top of the awareness list for each lawmaking body.

2. Direct Division Level commanders and below to ensure that onboarding Commander Courses give attention to the evolving family dynamic that includes male spouses as primary caregivers. Commanders require a keen understanding of family readiness, which includes an awareness of male military spouses. During Commander meetings with spouses, attention should be given to how male spouses should be included in all family networks.
3. Spouse clubs, although not officially affiliated with any particular service, should be made aware of their potential divisiveness when they exclude spouses of any rank, gender, or orientation. What this means for grassroots units is that they must become proactive in their outreach. One of the implications of this is that there should not be any *wives* only clubs, because all it takes is for one spouse to be left out in order for the sentiment to prevail that all spouses are not welcomed. This includes re-branding unit events that hold gendered representation such as Diva Day, Mani/Pedi Spa Day, or posting event flyers that depict male combat boots and a pair of high heeled shoes to represent military couples. An alternative might be to host a day of miniature golf where the flyer includes simply a unit crest and states that all family members and friends are invited to socialize.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative phenomenological inquiry explored the leadership experiences of male military spouses who served as primary caregivers while their spouses served in the active duty military. The findings were intended to highlight the realities of this population in order to improve understanding of their lived realities and offer them better outreach and support both within the military community and the greater outside community. Suggestions for future research are as follows:

1. This research study addressed the leadership experiences viewed from the lenses of male military spouses. The demographics of the current group included male spouses who were married to senior enlisted personnel or officers who were Company Grade (0-3) level or higher in rank. All spouses interviewed had been married for more than five years. Future studies should focus on younger spouses married to either junior enlisted or junior officers whose experiences may prove to be very different simply due to their ages and having less exposure to the military culture, and possibly the amount of money available to the participants and their families.
2. An item frequently discussed by respondents of the current study was the issue of finances. Of note was that many acknowledged that it would be beneficial to have either dual incomes, where either a current caregiver spouse had some sort of income (earned, portfolio, or passive) or the active duty spouse was senior enlisted or officer with more current disposable income. What is it like for junior spouses whose finances do not allow for them to participate fully in activities that would draw them into networks where they could gain more of the advantages of being socially connected within the military community?

3. Each male interviewed who had daughters made it a point to comment on the relationship with the daughter. They expressed a range of emotions from exasperation to delight in terms of raising members of the opposite sex and how it seemed to hold a special meaning in each of these interviews. One male mentioned how frustrating it was in that he had to learn so much, especially with teen daughters who were going through menstrual cycles – a foreign territory. Focusing on studies where men are navigating the waters of raising young girls/women could hold importance not only in the realm of military families but in the realm of families and relationships altogether, as more men begin to take on the roles of primary caregiver in the home to children of all genders.

5.6 Summary

This chapter covered a number of topics. Included were discussions on male spouses' lived experiences of leadership, the theoretical framework of Gender Role Strain, recommendations for Service Chiefs on Family Readiness Programs, and Recommendations for Future Research. Respondent interviews showed that participants exhibited common leadership traits, were impacted by the unique military lifestyle, shared common marriage and family support characteristics, and discussed how gender roles played a large part in their understanding of leadership.

5.7 Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the leadership experiences of male military spouses serving as primary caregivers. The objective was to illuminate the voices of male military spouses married to active duty members from the various branches of military service to share their lived experiences, with specific regard to their leadership qualities. Data were collected from ten self-identified male military spouses living in both the continental United

States and Hawaii. All participants in this study had served as primary caregivers to their families while their spouses served on active duty. The goal of this research was to allow them to use their own words to describe their leadership experiences and also to understand the context of that leadership inside the military culture.

Analysis of the interviews showed all of the participants' answers supported at least some of the aspects of Pleck's Theory. It appears that a growing number of male primary caregivers are growing beyond what Pleck describes as strain: (1) the strain of men working through the internal conflict of on the one hand trying to be what is expected of them by society as what real men are as opposed to having a growing confidence as well as a changing and more forgiving society that has no real expectations/ gender-neutral society where men are seen as equal and formidable caregivers in a society where women are taking on more leadership roles. Male military spouses have demonstrated that their leadership experiences mirror those of female caregivers. The differences, however, manifest in the historical, social, and cultural differences of 1) how they see themselves as leaders and 2) how they perceive themselves as being seen within the military framework. These spouses, in the current context, show that they require more focused support from the military in order to continue to be successful as leaders of the household while their spouses serve on active duty. This will serve to have a positive impact on the success and future retention of military families where the males serve as primary caregivers, as well as positively impacting overall force readiness. This study's findings contribute to the greater body of knowledge because it presents a new discussion on both how male spouses are viewed within the unique environment of the military and how males experience leadership as primary caregivers in the home. Additionally, it allows for the widening of the lens on how

those outside of academia begin to understand what Haslam et al. (2011) refer to as the "science of leadership" (p. 16).

5.8 Reflections

Conducting this study opened not only my eyes but also many doors to me. I was compelled to knock on doors and make relationships with people I otherwise would have never had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas and form relationships with. As a military spouse of more than twenty years, I find myself in a place of contentment. Marriage and children were never something I had envisioned for myself, let alone being married, having multiple children, and no career to steadily count on to make my own money, or have a career to call my own – independence and self-actualization. As a young military spouse, I was simply trying to understand not only how to raise children and be a wife, but also how to navigate the idiosyncrasies of military culture while supporting my husband and also holding on to some semblance of myself while still chipping away at my undergrad degree one course at a time. My own views have shifted in a more empathetic manner toward male spouses who have to function as caregivers within both the military community and outside the gate.

Most enlightening about the data collection process was realizing that the interview process itself caused respondents to do a deep-dive into why they do what they do. The shared satisfaction that came from thoughtful reflection upon being asked a question and hearing, "You know, I never thought about that. Ha!" It is my sincere hope that these short interviews will have an impact on their future leadership experiences (self, community, marital, and otherwise). As they look at how and why they do things, their own self-reflexivity may cause them to change or improve their leadership skills, which directly impact the readiness of the family to support the active duty spouse in their duties and responsibilities to the military. This ties into and re-

emphasizes the military's mantra on Family Readiness to those serving on Active Duty, "If your family's not ready, then you're not ready."

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