

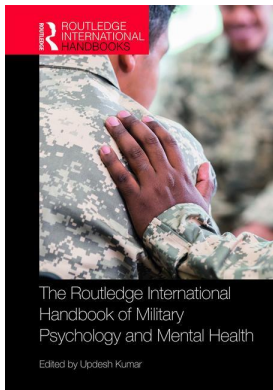
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REINTEGRATION AND MILITARY FAMILY HEALTH

Military training and its relationship to post-deployment role conflict in intimate partner relationships

*E. Ann Jeschke, Jessica M. LaCroix, Amber M. Fox,
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Background

Transitioning from the deployment environment to the home environment is considered by researchers and service members alike to be one of the most stressful and demanding aspects of military service (Cameron Kelly, Howe-Baksdale, & Gitelson, 2011; Glynn, 2012), making it difficult for everyone involved (Sayers, 2011; Marlantes, 2011). Reintegration is an experience shrouded in unfamiliar emotions, behaviors, and adjustments. A successful homecoming requires service members and their families to adapt to the changes that have occurred during deployment. The family unit's critical role in the health and combat readiness of the service member necessitates that helping professionals focus on family health (Cabrera, Figley, Yarvis, & Cox, 2012; Cooper, Pasquina, & Drach, 2011; Duncan, 1976). Researchers studying the post-deployment reintegration process have shown that maintaining a cohesive support network, especially within the family structure, reduces the likelihood that service members will experience mental health conditions (Borus, 1973; D. W. King, King, Foy, Keane, & Fairbank, 1999; L. A. King, King, Fairbank, Keane, & Adams, 1998; Koenen, Stellman, Stellman, & Sommer Jr, 2003). For this reason, policy makers and researchers have "taken an avid interest in developing tools to make the transition process easier for service members and their families" in order to reduce the potential for long-term psycho-social difficulties stemming from post-deployment reintegration (Garber & Zamorski, 2012, p. 397).

Theoretical objectives

We theoretically engage the broad question of how post-deployment reintegration impacts family health by focusing on the service member's intimate partner relationship within the larger military life-cycle. Our specific goal is to construct a meaningful frame for post-deployment challenges that are experienced across the military and impact the well-being of each partner and the intimate partner relationship. This frame can serve as the foundation from which other

more specific post-deployment challenges can be explored. We present two different ways in which reintegration challenges in the intimate partnership have been framed; next, we attempt to integrate cogent insights from both frames to articulate a more nuanced foundation upon which a broader set of post-deployment challenges impacting intimate partner relationship health can be based.

Key definitions

We use the term *intimate partner relationship* to include any current or previous pair-bonded partnership wherein both parties are/were dependent on each other to achieve certain outcomes, needs, or goals in life (Finkel, Simpson, & Eastwick, 2017). Types of relationships included within our definition are: current spouses (including common law), dating partners (including first date), former marital partners (due to separation or divorce), and former dating partners (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 1999). We rely on the Centers for Disease Control (Saltzman et al., 1999) categorizations of violence as: physical, sexual, threats of physical or sexual, and emotional (including coercive tactics). The word *universal* is also important to our analysis: we want to achieve the most good for the most people by capturing challenges most service members and intimate partners experience, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, military branch, rank, and/or career specialty.

Theoretical orientation

We want to avoid too narrowly framing reintegration challenges for several reasons. First, a narrow frame risks seeing a partial image as the whole picture. This picture could potentially cause the needs of many service members and their intimate partners to go unexplored and unmet. Second, if reintegration challenges go unmet, they could, in turn, lead to chronic behavioral health concerns and a possible reduction in combat readiness. Third, we are working within a logic like that of worker's compensation. Namely, if the job causes certain negative health outcomes, then there is a responsibility for the employer to provide resources to counteract the consequences of degraded health.

Outline of analysis

Current research on military family health focusing on intimate partner relationships tends to fall into two general categories. One body of literature examines the relationship between reintegration challenges and intimate partner violence (IPV). In contrast, an emerging body of literature looks at reintegration challenges as role conflict relative to role adjustment after periods of separation. We provide an overview of each set of literature to evaluate how insights from both work together to address reintegration challenges faced by most service members and their intimate partners. The first two sections of our analysis focus on the IPV frame. Specifically, we critically review literature linking military training with post-deployment IPV. Next, we consider the role of military training in the creation and maintenance of the warrior ethos and rigid masculine identity, which may provide a pathway for IPV. The third section expands on the notion of role conflict found in male gender role conflict (MGRC) to broaden the IPV frame. To address universal post-deployment reintegration challenges, we identify enhanced cognitive flexibility as one strategy for ameliorating rigid role identification.

Section I: Military training and interpersonal violence

We begin with literature that has the potential to achieve our goals because it is based on military training. Within this frame, popular press and research connect military training to IPV. Some even suggest that when it comes to issues of family health, not enough time has been spent evaluating the connection between military training and IPV (Gimbel & Booth, 1994).

In *Odysseus in America*, Jonathan Shay (2002), a clinical psychologist best known for his work with Vietnam veterans, suggests that military training and combat exposure lead service members to engage in uncontrolled fits of passion upon coming home from deployment. Shay claims that the effective service member is trained by the military to excel at the art of deception, disregarding rules, responding with instant aggression, and suppressing emotions, particularly compassion, horror, guilt, tenderness, and grief. Shay illustrates how military training develops a warrior spirit in service members that is nourished by bitterness, violence, and anger, and suggests that one of the ugliest outcomes can be seen post-deployment, when male service members express “hostility and habitual disrespect toward women” (p. 65). Shay argues that “rage and the inability to have authority over anger is the single most destructive” aspect of service members’ post-deployment life (Shay, 2002). To Shay, these post-deployment challenges are rooted in military training that benefits combat missions but presents in the civilian world as aggressive, even criminal, behavior. Shay concludes that what the military prizes in most service members during times of war is precisely that which makes service members least suitable for domestic life post-deployment.

More recent research also illustrates IPV as a significant concern for service members post-deployment. Williston and colleagues report that “military-related calls into the National Domestic Violence hotline increased from 457 in 2006 to over 1,100 in 2010, and 61% of these calls reported physical abuse” (Williston, Taft, & VanHaasteren, 2015, p. 55). The authors suggest that the etiology of IPV in these situations is in the service members’ military training, therefore setting them apart from their civilian counterparts. It is the mission-driven violence and aggressive nature of military training imparted on service members that make this population more prone to IPV upon coming home. The authors also posit that IPV may be more prevalent among the cohort of service members who have been deployed in support of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) due to the occupational stress of ambiguous missions and multiple deployments.

We turn to a military narrative that illustrates the very personal reality of post-deployment IPV faced by service members and their intimate partners. In the book *Thank You for Your Service*, David Finkel (2013) includes the filed report stating the nature of Corporal Jessie Robinson’s violent attacks against his wife. In the report, Kristy, Jessie’s wife, describes how Jessie repeatedly shoved her, would not let her leave the house, and taunted her. Jessie said that she was lucky she had not made him mad enough to beat her more. As the previous research supports, Kristy assumes that her husband’s violent behavior is caused by his training and combat exposure. She concludes that there is no other explanation for why her normally funny, charming husband would be so aggressive.

There is no doubt IPV can be a reality of post-deployment reintegration. Having said that, two key issues need to be acknowledged. First, the connection between military training and IPV is not inevitable in the case of every service member. Second, while theoretically, a causal link between military training and IPV has been postulated, an empirical basis for this assertion is non-existent—scientifically, we must acknowledge that correlation does not mean causation. Relying on this insight and respecting the reality of IPV in the military population post-deployment,

we move forward to evaluate whether this initial set of literature achieves our goal of framing a universal set of reintegration challenges that are experienced across all service members and their intimate partners.

Assumptions and logical inconsistencies of military training as etiology of intimate partner violence

Connecting IPV to military training provides a broad way to explore reintegration challenges for intimate partnerships. Ostensibly, all service members receive military training. However, there are conceptual problems with the way press and researchers have connected military training and IPV. The first problem is that much of the literature speaks about military training in generic terms, without making any distinction between the many types of military training. The conflation of military training with combat training, as well as the conflation of deployment with combat exposure, narrows the focus to a select group of service members—predominantly male, enlisted, and in combat arms. Furthermore, it focuses on the male service member as the perpetrator of violence against the intimate partner. As it stands, this perspective excludes female service members and service members who function in support roles. The latter category of service members are much more in number than those serving in direct combat roles. More importantly, a recent meta-analysis established that service members experience a high level of IPV victimization (Sparrow et al., 2018). On the logic provided by the research above, IPV does not immediately appear to meet our objective of framing reintegration challenges experienced by most service members and their intimate partners. We will return to a new logic in the next section to continue our analysis of IPV relative to military training. We turn now to explore our second point concerning workers' compensation.

If combat training and/or combat exposure is at cause for IPV, the military would need to research and develop resources regardless of our utilitarian analysis. In evaluating the workers' compensation logic, we come upon a second logical inconsistency when attempting to connect combat training and/or combat exposure to IPV; that is, the implicit logic assumes a contradictory notion of adaptability. In the literature above, combat training and/or exposure, to the exclusion of any other type of experience, is given pre-eminent power to form a rigid service member. According to those who forward this perspective, upon returning home, service members are rigid and violent. The implicit logic appears to be that the psychic skills formed by combat training are forged in the crucible of combat, hardening service members such that they are inflexible upon coming home. However, if it is true that combat training takes a pacific civilian and creates an aggressive, yet highly adaptive service member, is it not logically consistent to assume that the same person, when given proper reintegration resources, would return to a state of tranquil domesticity? However, the narrative frame does not discuss reintegration training as an option, only that combat training and/or combat exposure is at cause for criminal behaviors in the service member.

The final assumption we want to challenge is that all violence is of the same nature. In other words, the previously mentioned literature assumes that the purposeful application and management of violence on the battlefield is equivalent to violence expressed as outbursts of uncontrollable rage in domestic settings. While there is certain "common-sense" logic in this assumption, it leads to the superficial conclusion that IPV is an inevitable consequence of combat training and exposure. Clearly, not all service members who experience combat training and/or exposure engage in IPV, and there are many service members—as well as civilians—who have experienced no combat training and/or exposure but nonetheless perpetrate IPV.

Violence is a complex human phenomenon. Many conceptually sophisticated thinkers have struggled to taxonomize the various nuanced forms of violence. Adriane Raine's (2013) book *The*

Anatomy of Violence drives home the aforementioned point. The insights Raine gained from tests performed with incarcerated perpetrators of domestic violence established that there can be different forms of aggression. Raine's experience highlights the distinction between *reactive* and *proactive* aggression. The former is a result of an individual spontaneously responding without forethought to a provocation, whereas the latter is planned and premeditated. Measuring for reactive and proactive aggression, he found that IPV was "strongly characterized by reactive aggression" (p. 85). Although we do not wish to draw exact comparisons between Raine's experiments and combat training, it seems fair to say that combat training is based on planned, non-reactive aggression. In fact, just war theory, the ethical framework that is meant to guide service member actions in combat, is based on the notion of restraint where the moral use of aggression is proportional to the operational context. Practically speaking, service members in combat arms are trained to engage in a highly controlled escalation of force that moves from shout, to shove, to shoot. Additionally, these service members are taught to recognize and respond appropriately when *de-escalation* of force is warranted, i.e., when to move from shove to shout, rather than shoot.

While it is likely that combat training is connected to IPV in some instances, the strength of that association is hard to evaluate given the complex nature of IPV. Considering the logical inconsistencies discussed, we cannot conclude that combat training and/or combat exposure is a direct cause of IPV in all cases. However, the previous literature raises an important question that must be answered to thoroughly evaluate whether IPV is a wide enough frame to capture universal reintegration challenges; that is, is there a general form of military training that all service members experience that might lead to post-deployment IPV? We continue in the next section by exploring the extent to which military training as the formation of a masculine warrior ethos may be connected to IPV.

Section II: Military training as formation of masculine warrior ethos

Realizing that IPV is a reality for some service members post-deployment and that military training may be one of the notable causes for this form of aggression, this section continues to explore whether military training due to its contribution to the formation of the warrior ethos engenders a rigid masculine identity that may subsequently contribute to IPV. Since all service members are encouraged explicitly and implicitly to form a warrior ethos across the military life-cycle, this literature allows us to consider the IPV frame in relationship to all service members.

Warrior ethos is a term that is often heard in relation to military values. It has been variously captured across times through implicit or explicit warrior codes related to the profession of arms and war fighting cultures. While there is no one explicit and delineated definition of warrior ethos according to which all service members are uniformly trained, it is a general notion that permeates the values, habits, traditions, actions, and identities of all service members. As the warrior ethos applies to all military branches, career specialties, ranks, and genders, we rely on this construct to establish a way to explore a general military training that could potentially be connected to IPV. We begin by looking at ways in which the warrior ethos manifests as masculinity and move forward with research on masculine gender role conflict (MGRC) to establish if IPV is sufficient to capture the most pervasive forms of post-deployment reintegration challenges.

Attempting to define the warrior ethos as masculine is difficult because both the warrior ethos and masculinity function as amorphous, although potentially meaningful, ideals that are not specifically delineated by exact content. These culturally normative standards constitute and guide interpretation of value and meaning through symbols, language, and embodied action. Although it is difficult to reduce the content of the warrior ethos and masculinity to a specific

set of qualities, signs, empirical perceptions, or behaviors, by structuring meaning and behavior they serve as a medium of reflexive self-interpretation, self-enactment, and enactment with others in dyadic and group relationships. In spite of the complexities of attempting to concretize these concepts, we rely on Leo Braudy's (2003) meticulous analysis to establish that the warrior ethos is (and likely always has been) intertwined with socio-cultural concepts of masculinity.

In his book *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*, Braudy (2003) evaluates how men of war become men of peace by performing a historical investigation of ideal masculinity relative to military norms. His analysis establishes that prior to Napoleon Bonaparte, military training was not connected to a masculine warrior ethos. Instead, the warrior ethos was connected to a man's genealogy, body type, or aristocratic standing. With the development of nation-states and the need for standing armies, Napoleon grounded warrior ethos in a form of military training that was able to take any common man and transform him into a warrior. By the end of World War I, military training was seen as the method for forming not only combat service members, but also masculine warrior ethos both inside and outside of the military.

In the history of the word "man," even the very structure of Indo-European languages has been heavily influenced by "wartime masculinity ... and the language of social class" (Braudy, 2003, p. 4). Braudy cogently argues that military masculinity defines being a man in Western society, and that war is a social institution that binds together different masculine rites and traditions. Even though what is coded as masculine constantly changes across cultures and contexts, what has been deemed as man, manly, or masculine is coupled with a set of martial qualities that are attributed to the warrior ethos. Braudy explains that the larger enterprise of war—not just combat—emphasizes "the physical prowess of men," distills "national identity into the abrupt contrast between winning and losing," and "enforces an extreme version of male behavior as the ideal model" of manhood (p. xvi). In times of war, the effort to systematically and uniformly engender a masculine ideal across the military "becomes a top-down and bottom-up effort" (p. xvi). As such, the warrior ethos, especially in war-time "ensures a belief in a purified, totemistic, and one-sided masculinity as a way of ensuring victory" (p. 54).

Considering how many women serve in the military, the reader might be thinking that the creation and maintenance of the warrior ethos does not apply to roughly 15% of the military population (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2016). Although not the focus of his book, Braudy (2003) notes that women have always been engaged in the profession of arms, although rates have fluctuated across history. His insight is that women shape the masculine warrior ethos by altering what is labeled as masculine, not by de-coupling masculinity from warrior ethos. As such, female service members are still expected to develop and comport to a masculine warrior ethos to succeed in the profession of arms. One of the most basic forms of training that instills this warrior ethos is drill. At the beginning of the seventeenth century when Napoleon was attempting to mold average men into noble warriors, drill became the basic form of military training, to promote cohesion and a warrior identity.

In his book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*, William H. McNeil (2008) confirms Braudy's previous point through an analysis of synchronized group movement in military drill practice. In this book, McNeil shows how drill practice consolidates military groups, instills identity, alters human feelings, and orients behavior around a common unified goal. After describing his experience in Army basic training where he drilled for hours, McNeil concludes that what seemed to be pointless marching was the means of creating and establishing his identity as a good warrior. Everyone in the military experiences drill as the foundation of all other training. Drill imprints a holistic military identity through movement, symbols, language, habits, and tradition, allowing service members to embody a warrior ethos.

Unlike the medieval period wherein codes of conduct for both masculine warriors and female maidens were explicitly articulated, modern warfare maintains more implicit expectations around masculine and feminine behavior in relationship to the warrior ethos and intimate partnership. In the book *Women and War*, Jean Bethke Elshtain (1995) provides a detailed analysis of how men and women, as combatant or noncombat warriors, are allowed participatory action when functioning in relationship to masculine warrior ethos. Like Braudy's analysis, Elshtain (1995) views the warrior ethos in dialectic tension with the broader socio-political discourse. While recognizing that women have taken part in war, she notes that even if they wore a military uniform, most women have only served as witnesses to men's courage and the results of violent action. Rarely are women who serve as "the ferocious few" allowed to take center stage. Dominant social discourse and contemporary popular understanding have developed symbols, language, and structures that delineate men as fighters playing the role of just warrior and women as non-combatants playing the role of "beautiful soul," even if these women serve in the military. Elshtain (1995) suggests that among the parts women have played in the social narratives of war, they have always been given the socially sanctioned position to act as sexual and maternal partners to men. Until recently, women were not allowed to engage in combat positions. This change in social expectations of gender roles came with mixed reception. Disagreement persists when discussing women serving in combat positions (Sparkjoy Studios, 2009; Swick & Moore, 2018). Breaking out of gender roles, regardless of a person's relationship to the military, is difficult. Implicit ways of being, written into social expectations and norms, serve as moral codes that permeate our collective social consciousness in times of war and peace (Braudy, 2003; Elshtain, 1995). As Braudy explains, the specific content concerning "what male and female represent often doesn't matter as much as their opposition to each other" (Braudy, 2003, p. 213).

At this point, we have established that the warrior ethos is masculine, that all service members are trained in this warrior ethos, and that this ethos both implicitly and explicitly shapes expectations of intimate partner relationships. We now turn to a body of literature on the topic of male gender role conflict (MGRC). Emerging from gender theory and developed in parallel with social role theory (Eagly, 2013), this area of psychological research evaluates how patriarchal social structures not only negatively impact the well-being of women, but also men through gender role conflict. Since the 1960s, there has been growing interest in the way gender identity shapes the experience of being men and women in the world. First, researchers evaluated the subordination of women within hierarchical male structures known as patriarchy. In the late 1970s, researchers also became interested in exploring how restrictive gender roles are harmful to men (Hancock, 2001).

MGRC is based on the assumption that men and women are socialized through rewards and punishment as well as behavioral modeling to conform to gender stereotyped roles (Eagly, 2013; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986; Pleck, 1983). Gender identity sets implicit expectations of behavior for oneself and others. As such, gender identity guides intra- and interpersonal behavior. Individuals may experience gender in more flexible or rigid adherence to socially sanctioned expressions of gender. MGRC suggests that when men rigidly identify with a confined understanding of "gender roles, and the obligations inherent in these roles," this rigidity "can serve as gender-specific stressors" (Mussap, 2008, p. 72). Rigid identification and adherence to stereotyped male roles has become known as hegemonic, conventional, or traditional masculinity (Barrett, 1996; Cowan & Mills, 2004; Gallagher & Parrott, 2011; Mussap, 2008; O'Neil, 2008). In other words, gender role conflict emerges when one person's rigid adherence to a traditional gender identity conflicts with his/her reflexive behavior towards him-/herself or interpersonal behavior with another person. Similarly, gender role conflict

can emerge when someone else's behavior conflicts with a person's rigid gender bound expectation of others' behavior. Restrictive and rigid attachment to gender roles can have negative consequences not only for men but also women, their careers, family, and interpersonal relationships (O'Neil, 2008).

Having established that a masculine warrior ethos shapes the gender identity and conformity of both male and female service members, we assume both men and women service members experience MGRC because their warrior identity is formed, enacted, and judged against a masculine ideal. Unfortunately, O'Neil and others do not provide a definition of traditional masculinity that can link a masculine warrior ethos to MGRC. Therefore, we turn to psychological scales that measure MGRC to gain a clearer picture of the operant definition of masculinity against which gender role conflict is being evaluated. MGRC scales capture a set of prescriptive and proscriptive social norms, known as masculine ideologies that regulate men and women's behavior in relationship to gender ideals. The following constructs are aggregated from these 16 measures: *independence* (self-reliance), *avoiding femininity* (anti-femininity), *achievement/status driven*, *providing for family* (responsibility), *rationality*, *physical toughness* (aggression/violence), *restrictive emotionality* (stoicism), *sexuality* (anti-homosexuality, entitlement to sexual dominance, entitlement to offspring), *control*, and *risk-taking* (adventure) (Thompson Jr & Bennett, 2015).

To link the masculine warrior ethos to IPV requires that we first establish a link between the masculine contents in MGRC and those the military seeks to form when developing a masculine warrior ethos. In other words, we are seeking to understand how MGRC might mediate the relationship between warrior ethos and IPV. Colonel Theodore Scott Westhusing (2003) addressed the topic of the formation of warrior ethos within American war fighting. Many of the personality attributes assigned to the scales of MGRC are present in Westhusing's analysis of warrior ethos, such as toughness, responsibility, competition, aggressiveness, focus, achievement, risk-taking, and rationality. It seems there is at least some overlap when considering the contents of masculinity found in MGRC and the military warrior ethos.

Within the MGRC literature, there is a specific interest in relating traditional masculine behavior and gender rigidity to interpersonally violent behavior, especially in relationship to same-sex relationships, intimate partner relationships, and children. Research examining hostility posits that interpersonal aggression is common in instances where people do not adhere or conform to traditional gender roles (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Wirtz, Poteat, Malik, & Glass, 2018). Indeed, the recent controversy regarding transgender people joining and serving in the military illustrates the extent to which rejection of gender nonconforming individuals is socially and institutionally sanctioned (Philipps, 2018). Interpersonal aggression is an outgrowth of gender dissatisfaction and gives rise to a need to maintain control and exert power over others. There is a significant correlation between gender role conflict (GRC) and positive attitudes toward different instances of sexual violence toward women, including sexual harassment, rape myths, hostile sexism, and self-reported sexual and dating violence toward women, suggesting that restrictive gender roles are associated with potential mental health issues across genders (O'Neil, 2008). If MGRC is one possible byproduct of the formation of a masculine warrior ethos, this would potentiate troubling incidences of IPV and might serve as our frame for common reintegration challenges.

Obstacles to linking masculine warrior ethos to intimate partner violence through male gender role conflict

While the general contents assigned to masculinity by the MGRC literature seems to comport well to aspects of masculine warrior ethos, the challenges of connecting this to IPV are many.

Unfortunately, O'Neil (2008) does not provide specific details or statistical information that allow us to evaluate the significance of connections between MGRC and IPV. The specific articles captured in O'Neil's meta-analysis, as well as subsequent publications attempting to assess the relationship between MGRC and IPV, focus solely on men as perpetrators against women and rely on college-aged men or prison inmates to test hypotheses (Cowan & Mills, 2004; Gallagher & Parrott, 2011; Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002; Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005; Mussap, 2008). These results are not necessarily generalizable to a military population because military training and its contribution to the formation of the warrior ethos includes both competitive and collaborative attributes. In Westhusing's research, which relies heavily on just war theory, the author articulates a set of collaborative virtues that serve to moderate violence and allow for service members to flourish in the civilian life they seek to protect. He states that the military achieves its mission of decisive victory by subjecting members to "codes of behavior in accord with the common life (*sensus communis*) which they protect. The explicit and implicit norms within such 'codes' are expressed not only by the force of custom, but are also expressed in the moral and legal structure of the military" (Westhusing, 2006, pp. 5–6). In a detailed analysis, Westhusing articulates how virtues such as benevolence and justice function within the warrior ethos; however, for the purposes of this book chapter, it is enough to point out that military training seeks to form a masculine warrior ethos that can contain aggression and counteract rigidity in service members.

Another obstacle to connecting a masculine warrior ethos to IPV through MGRC is that there has been no justification given for choosing the content that was included in traditional masculinity. Instead, MGRC is based on a static and historically concrete definition of traditional masculinity. Originally, O'Neil (1981) relies on a definition of traditional masculinity that was defined from popular press, commercials, and social journals from the 1970s to capture normative social opinion on manhood. While Braudy (2003) and Elshtain (1995) rely on popular culture to explicate the shifts and contents of gender, they are both careful to avoid linking exact behavior to outcomes and provide meticulous justification for every connection they make. Furthermore, Braudy's (2003) analysis shows the complex dialectical tension that links social change to a constantly adapting masculine warrior ethos to interpreted categories such as gender and violence. Relying on a static definition of gender, O'Neil (2008) links traditional masculinity to violent behaviors against women. Thereafter, he develops measurements that test for a connection between masculinity and violence. This measurement then proves his assumption that traditional masculinity leads to violence. In so doing, MGRC inadvertently reifies the very patriarchy it is attempting to counteract.

Furthermore, to give the military singular credit for inculcating a masculine warrior ethos which leads to IPV would contradict the central claim of all the literature upon which we rely. Braudy (2003), Elshtain (1995), and O'Neil (2008) all claim that masculinity, whether traditional or as a warrior ethos, are in dialectical tension with broader social dynamics. Connecting masculine warrior ethos to IPV through MGRC does not provide a means to sift out what aspects of traditional masculinity have been formed before joining the military.

If all service members are formed in a masculine warrior ethos and masculinity is directly linked to IPV, then there would be more cases of IPV across the military. Based on meta-analytic methods, Marshall, Panuzio, and Taft (2005) found that rates of IPV experienced in the military and veteran populations ranged anywhere from 13% to 58%. While Marshall, Panuzio, and Taft (2005) are seriously concerned with the prevalence of IPV in military and veteran populations, they are cautious of making any strong statement about linking military formation directly to IPV due to an inordinate number of confounding variables. Without ignoring the impact and reality of IPV in the military, forming service members in a masculine warrior ethos does not necessarily entail reactive violence amongst intimate partners. Additionally, the

previously discussed research attempting to connect MGRC to IPV focuses only on two forms of interpersonal violence: first, men's perpetration of violence against women intimate partners and second, men's perpetration of violence against men who fail to achieve standards of traditional masculinity. IPV in the military remains a serious issue that needs to be addressed. However, given the difficulties directly linking military training with IPV, and similar issues linking military training with IPV via MGRC, IPV alone cannot provide a wide enough frame to create a foundation for universal reintegration challenges.

Evaluating military training, MGRC, and IPV gave us two critical insights with which we will proceed: first, that rigid identification with a role can lead to interpersonal conflict in intimate relationships, and second, that individuals are highly adaptive and able to take on new roles or role-bound meaning when given the proper training.

Section III: Role conflict as the frame for universal reintegration challenges

Without dismissing IPV as a very important reality in the military, this section explores a body of literature related to natural role conflict that emerges after periods of separation. To widen the notion of role conflict beyond that contained in IPV, we turn to empirical literature on intimate partner relationships.

When evaluating post-deployment intimate partner relationship challenges, it is important to understand that both partners in the intimate partnership as well as the relationship itself are constantly adapting and changing across the military life-cycle. As the service member changes, so does the intimate partner and the intimate relationship. Finkel, Simpson, and Eastwich (2017) established 14 core aspects of relationships that together provide a comprehensive relationship theory. This comprehensive relationship theory articulates what a relationship is, how a relationship operates, what tendencies people bring to a relationship, and how context affects a relationship. Since we are evaluating common reintegration challenges within the context of the broader military life-cycle, relying on this integrated model is helpful because it views the relationship in the context of broader social structures as the partners and the relationship change across time.

Relationships depend on specific qualities of each partner as well as the unique patterns that develop within the relationship (Finkel et al., 2017). People bring basic personalities, temperaments, standards, and goals to a relationship that influence the dynamics of each partner and the well-being of the relationship. As interdependence between partners increases, they merge to share similar thoughts, feelings, intentions, and patterns of behavior. Shared experiences also provide the opportunity for each person to establish his/her unique role within the intimate partner relationship. Intimate partner relationships are embedded in a social milieu that shapes the trajectory of both partners and the relationship and establishes contextual dynamics within which the relationship ebbs and flows. Overtime, everyday events impact the development of relationships, for better or worse. As such, partners constantly evaluate each other against an ever-shifting set of negative and positive constructs and perceptions. Conflicts surrounding miscommunication and/or misperceived expectations challenge the stability of relationships over time. However, high external demands on the relationship, such as long periods of separation, perceiving other relationships as more valuable, death, and disaster, predict a worse relationship quality when the demands exceed partners' coping resources. The way people evaluate their partner, cope with stress, and resolve conflict impacts the relationship. Relationships wherein each partner perceives the other as having good intentions, and wherein each partner resolves conflict in a mutually amicable way, generally have more stability across time.

When looking at the military life-cycle, service member intimate partnerships experience both chronic challenges and acute stressors. An understanding of intimate partner relationship development helps to establish that long periods of separation, due to deployment or other causes, could be detrimental to the well-being of the intimate partner relationship. During periods of long separation, service members and their intimate partners forego consistent and everyday opportunities to merge through shared cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral interactions. Separation hinders the ability of shared goals and trajectories to establish daily routines. Consequently, each partner must establish a new set of individual goals and trajectories relative to daily tasks that must be accomplished in his or her unique environment, without the physical presence of the other partner. While the intimate partner relationship may still exist during a deployment separation, the thoughts, perceptions, expectations, feelings, intentions, and behaviors that define each role continue to shift on an individual level rather than a dyadic level, limiting the extent to which each partner's role evolves synergistically with the other.

As our introduction noted, all service members come home from war changed. However, often missed during discussions of reintegration challenges are the difficulties faced by intimate partners, who also change during and after deployment-related separation periods. Intimate partners, regardless of gender, take on expanded responsibilities such as care giving, household duties, handling finances, employment, and managing a long-distance relationship with the deployed service member. One of the most important and demanding aspects of reintegration is a reallocation of these roles (Bommarito, Sherman, Rudi, Mikal, & Borden, 2017). One study on post-deployment reintegration found that one in five service members and their intimate partners experienced significant difficulty with reintegration challenges related to: uncertainty about domestic roles, adjusting to new routines, no longer feeling needed by the intimate partner, and re-establishing joint decision-making. Over half of those studied experienced moderate difficulties in one or more of these areas. As intimate partners engage the process of becoming reacquainted, sharing experiences that occurred during separation, restructuring daily routines, redistributing chores, managing strong emotions, and renegotiating responsibilities, military intimate partners report insecurity, numbness, stress conceding autonomy, and awkwardness surrounding sexual intimacy. These stressors lead to problems reconnecting, difficulty communicating, and heightened conflict (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012).

During deployment separation, each partner's role changes because the intimate relationship is no longer the center of gravity defining the roles of each intimate partner. Considering role adaptations that occur during a period of separation, it seems that role conflict in the intimate relationship is likely to emerge as a natural aspect of post-deployment reintegration because each partner will need to redefine boundaries of their own and their partner's role to re-engage in a collaborative intimate partnership. Some degree of role conflict during reintegration and subsequent role adjustment is to be expected in all military intimate partnerships. However, just because something is normal does not mean it does not present salient challenges to intimate relationships. If unaddressed, role conflict could lead to confusion within the partnership that might prompt or reinforce rigid role conformity in either or both partners, leading to a disintegration of well-being in the intimate partnership. Furthermore, role conflict, as established by the MGRC literature, can emerge as an outgrowth of entrenched and rigid role conformity. In other words, a service member or intimate partner might experience heightened role conflict if either or both partners attempt to rigidly conform to the roles that emerged during general military or specific deployment related separation where intimate partners are away from each other in different locations for an extended period of time.

Role conflict and implications for future research

Relying on the concept of role conflict in relationships after periods of separation seems to expand upon some of the insights learned from the IPV frame to include other post-deployment challenges without necessarily eliminating the significance of IPV when discussing military intimate partner relationship well-being. First, role conflict views the post-deployment reintegration as one aspect of relationship development within the larger military life-cycle. Second, role conflict focuses on both intimate partners as well as the intimate relationship. Third, role conflict applies to any period of separation that occurs across the military life-cycle and is not dependent on rank, military career specialty, deployment type, or gender. Fourth, role conflict allows for challenges to emerge organically as part of the natural reality of reintegration. Finally, role conflict does not exclude the possibility that rigid role conformity may contribute to more extreme versions of interpersonal conflict that manifest as IPV. As such, role conflict facilitates discussion about: (1) how military training may lead to rigid identification with aggression or combat trauma, (2) power dynamics illustrated in the MGRC literature, and (3) IPV as a highly prevalent reality among service members and their romantic partners. In fact, role conflict and subsequent difficulties with role adjustment can provide nuanced insight into how to continue researching IPV within the military community. Consequently, it seems that role conflict as a natural or chronic consequence of separation across the military life-cycle is well suited to achieve our normative goal of finding a way to frame common post-deployment reintegration challenges that serves the most people across the military.

The vulnerability-stress-adaptation (VSA) model of relationship dysfunction fits into the broader theory of relationships on which we are relying and confirms the common challenges of role conflict as a normal part of role adjustment following reintegration, as well as concerns expressed by the IPV frame (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). VSA imports a diathesis-stress model to relationship dynamics to evaluate the interaction between predisposed vulnerabilities each partner brings to the intimate relationship and the impact that life stressors have on intimate relationship well-being over time. According to VSA, vulnerabilities of each partner and the strength of the intimate partnership is tested when partners respond to stress through positive or negative behavioral activities to manage conflict. The theory assumes that links between predisposed vulnerabilities, stressors, and behavior patterns manifest in both adaptive and maladaptive ways, leading to changes in relationship stability over time. The theory seeks to explain how intimate relationships develop, succeed, and fail over time and what adaptive qualities lead to stable partnerships.

Langer, Lawrence, and Barry (2008) utilized the VSA model to study 103 newlyweds for three years to determine the extent to which pre-existing vulnerabilities as personality traits contribute to physical aggression when mixed with the stress of adapting to marriage. Results indicated that individuals under increased stress had more difficulties employing adaptive behaviors, such as active listening, when attempting to engage in relationship-supporting behaviors. Further, personality traits, such as trait impulsivity and trait aggressiveness, were associated with perpetration of physical aggression for both men and women. Further, husbands' trait aggressiveness was associated with wives' experiences of stress as well as wives' perpetration of physical aggression. As such, when applying the VSA model to role adjustment after periods of separation, we see that role conflict is a common reintegration challenge that can potentially lead to more profound problems depending on the interactions between pre-existing vulnerabilities and chronic stress on both the individual and dyadic levels.

Having achieved our normative analysis, we wish to briefly suggest potential directions for future research. A number of recent studies and policy papers have started to investigate the

common reintegration challenges discussed above and concluded that resilience training in the form of developing life-skills for both partners is essential (Bommarito et al., 2017; Danish & Antonides, 2013; Marek & D’Aniello, 2014; Park, 2011; Sayers, 2011). However, these studies do not provide specific suggestions for what type of resilience training might work best when addressing common reintegration challenges such as role conflict. We suggest that researchers focus on developing and piloting reintegration programs that seek to counteract the rigid role identification that contributes to interpersonal conflict.

Cognitive agility

Research on cognitive agility largely stems from organizational and decision-making literature. *Cognitive agility* is defined as the ability to deliberately adapt cognitive processing strategies in accordance with dynamic shifts in situational and environmental demands (Good & Yeganeh, 2012). Cognitive agility is composed of three core components: the ability to *focus* on relevant information, *openness* to new information, and *cognitive flexibility* to move between the two perceptual lenses. Focused attention refers to one’s ability to oppose and effectively manage incoming distraction. Openness refers to one’s ability to observe and to seek new information in any environment. Finally, cognitive flexibility refers to one’s ability to switch mental activity in favor of what is most appropriate given the situation and environmental demands, i.e., the ability to go back and forth effectively between focused attention and openness.

Cognitive agility is a tool for dynamic decision-making (Brehmer, 1992). Dynamic decision-making has four distinct characteristics: (1) a series of decisions is required; (2) decisions are interdependent; (3) the state of the decision problem changes, both as a consequence of the individual’s actions as well as the actions of other people; and (4) decisions must be made in real time (Brehmer & Allard, 1991). Dynamic decision-making has been studied in the context of military operations (Brehmer, 2012), but as outlined above, role adjustment following reintegration also requires dynamic decision-making. To the extent that partners become rigid in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors prescribed by the roles that have evolved during separation, the dynamic role adjustment process becomes more difficult. The service member and his or her partner struggle with dynamic decision-making within their relationship due to their cognitive rigidity.

Cognitive agility training, with its emphasis on enhancing focus, openness, and especially cognitive flexibility, may improve dynamic decision-making not only in operational settings, but also within intimate relationships. Cognitive flexibility, while identified as one component of cognitive agility, has also been explored independently of the focus and openness constructs. Dennis and Vander Wal (2010), developers of the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory, state the following: “there is no consensus within the literature about precisely how to define or measure this construct. Generally speaking, the ability to switch cognitive sets to adapt to changing environmental stimuli appears to be the core component for most operational definitions of cognitive flexibility” (p. 242). In addition to the ability to disengage, switch, and revise a mental set, cognitive flexibility is marked by the ability to inhibit habitual responses (Rende, 2000), for instance, responses habituated from rigid role identification. Cognitive flexibility has been linked to several beneficial outcomes, including greater overall psychological well-being, better stress management, reduced overall stress, long-term post-trauma adjustment, and higher life satisfaction (Keith, Velezmore, & O’Brien, 2015). In contrast, cognitive *inflexibility* is the inability to adapt cognitive processes to new situations and ultimately contributes to difficulty identifying problems and effective solutions (Schotte & Clum, 1987). Thus, cognitive agility training—with

its focus on enhancing cognitive flexibility—may benefit service members and their intimate partners during reintegration and subsequent role adjustment.

Reintegration programs for military intimate partner relationships targeting cognitive agility developed within a VSA framework could be an important asset to the military because such programs focus on counteracting role rigidity and enhance adaptive, flexible thinking. Enhancing cognitive agility would enable each partner to learn to adjust to new roles when navigating through novel situations unfolding in uncertain, dynamic environments. The capacity for adaptive thinking is a central element of operational resilience in the face of unexpected challenges and could also become a central element of intimate relationship resilience if targeted resources are developed to meet the needs of the intimate partnership during separation and reintegration. In this way, improving cognitive agility could enhance combat readiness both in times of war and peace by equipping service member and their intimate partners with skills needed to adapt to ever-changing individual and relational demands. Military leadership training programs have already been exploring cognitive flexibility training for service members in the context of virtual game-based learning (Morrison & Fletcher, 2002; Raybourn, Deagle, Mendini, & Heneghan, 2005). For example, a program at Fort Leavenworth that provides training in cultural competencies for service members incorporates cognitive flexibility training to promote adaptability to combat zones (Griffin & McClary, 2015). Further, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) has partnered with educators and scientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) to develop complementary cognitive agility programs for Special Operations Forces (SOF) members and their spouses. In addition to enhancing overall mission readiness, programs such as those supported by USSOCOM also have the potential to reduce role conflict in intimate partnerships during the post-deployment reintegration process. Future research should explore the feasibility and acceptability of cognitive agility programs among military personnel and their intimate partners, as well as establish their effectiveness in improving relationship functioning.

Conclusion

Transitioning from deployment to home is a stressful experience within the military life-cycle. In this chapter, we focused on the intimate partner relationship to broadly understand ways in which post-deployment reintegration impacts family health. Applying a utilitarian justification to our analysis, we first thoroughly explored IPV and concluded that logical inconsistencies make it difficult to uniformly apply IPV across the military as a frame for understanding common reintegration challenges. We also evaluated the extent to which military training contributes to IPV, as it is a serious concern that must be addressed. However, literature supporting this link tends to conflate combat training with general military training and creates a narrow research agenda, one that potentially overlooks subtler, yet broader, psychological concerns. Without dismissing IPV as a very important reality in the military, we illustrated that role conflict as a likely universal aspect of post-deployment role adjustment could serve as a foundational frame to capture a broad spectrum of conflict that ranges from simple misunderstandings to extreme IPV. We concluded by suggesting that expanding cognitive flexibility literature and developing training aimed to reduce rigid role identification among service members and their intimate partners could help reduce role conflict.

Note: The opinions and assertions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Uniformed Services University or the Department of Defense.

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