

Army Wives in a Time of War:
The Effects of Social Contexts on Duty, Commitment, and Obligation

By

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Abstract

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Due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the wives of U.S. Army soldiers experienced having their loved ones in harm's way for more than ten years. This dissertation presents more than 70 in-depth interviews with active duty (regular army) and national guard wives to examine how these women understand the hardships in a military marriage. The divorce revolution and the introduction of an all-volunteer force have loosened the control that these institutions once had over the individual. Consequently, today's army wives are on their own in making sense of the difficulties they face.

This project presents a comprehensive analysis of how army wives make sense of having a loved one in harm's way at different periods of the military time cycle and in two social contexts: living on base or living among civilians (Chapter One). Army wives draw upon *duty*, *commitment* and *obligation* to answer the critical questions of *how much* they are willing to suffer and *for whom* (Chapter Two). These categories of thinking correspond to the institutional demands that both the military and marriage made on women in the past and are believed to make today (Chapter Three). For whom wives see themselves enduring hardships, however, depends on the social context in which they live (Chapter Four). Regular army wives living in a military community focus on their *commitment* to the partnership at the core of their marriage and family. National guard wives living among civilian neighbors see their efforts as the fulfillment of a *duty* to the country and even to the people of other countries. The difference is counter-intuitive but reflects how the shapes of their social communities influence the meanings wives make of their situations.

During deployment (Chapter Five), regular army wives come to see the beneficiaries of their sacrifice to include other army wives. In the military base's context of mutual scrutiny and accountability, they see this extension of their *commitment* as a way to keep their own husbands safe while fighting overseas. National guard wives, living in isolation from other army wives and separated from their civilian neighbors by the demands of deployment, find deployment to be a special period that reaffirms their thinking in terms of *duty* and sacrifice toward a greater good.

As their husbands return from war (Chapter Six), wives face the unexpected difficulties of family reintegration and shift their thinking once again. With redeployment (Chapter Seven), thinking across both military and civilian contexts converges. By the second, third, and even fourth overseas combat tour, both regular army and national guard wives are making sense of what they still have to endure in similar terms.

Over the cycles of military deployment, reunion, and redeployment, army wives come to share an understanding of risks in terms of individual *obligations* and reciprocities (Conclusion). Initially, social context divides their thinking into open-ended terms of *duty* and *commitment*. As they move through these cycles, both the amount of hardships and for whom they see themselves suffering become more specified and narrow in terms of *obligation*. This shift is not catastrophic for military marriages, but constitutes the adaptive process by which army families *become* resilient. The convergence in their thinking toward more individualistic terms does not reflect a broad historic trend toward individualism or the unavailability of patriotic sacrifice as a justification, but it is a reflection of the different contexts of place and time in which they live their lives.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women in my family whose lives and relationships have been touched by war: Suzanne, Bonnie, Rita, Dana, Elizabeth, and Jana.

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I would like to acknowledge particular wives, Family Readiness Group leaders, Public Affairs Officers, and entire army aviation units for their assistance and hospitality. Unfortunately, given the conditions of confidentiality promised by my research protocol, I cannot. Needless to say I am indebted to them and hope everyday for their safety.

*Now he talks of going abroad, fighting for strangers,
But he'll stay at home with me and free from dangers;
I'm afraid the broiling sun might spoil his beauty,
And if I was with my love, I'd do love's duty.¹*

This dissertation asks the question: how do army wives² make sense of having their loved ones in harm's way? At one level, it is not unlike an inquiry into the personal and emotional adjustments of anyone who has a loved one in some kind of danger, whether because of a similarly hazardous occupation (commercial fishing), a risky past-time (sky diving), or some other circumstance that puts their lover in jeopardy (chronic illness). Although some answers to such a question can be found at the level of individual psychology, army wives present a case where the answer is a combination of sociological and psychological factors working together. The way they make sense of their imperiled relationship, while also dependent on their individual personalities, is shaped by broader relationships in the social world and contributes to our understanding of larger social situations.

First, army wives do not only have a loved one in harm's way; they also have a loved one in harm's way *on behalf of others*.³ As such, they present an interesting case of the tension between individual gratification (having a loved one near and safe) and the sometimes excruciating demands of society (supporting a loved one as he goes to fight for others). How individuals and their social groups and contexts reconcile these contested desires is a fundamental concern to those interested in individuals and the societies in which they live, particularly the relationship between intimate and social lives (Foucault 1990, Freud 2005, Giddens 1992, Slater 1963). That army wives have loved ones in harm's way on behalf of others also addresses one of the original and fundamental questions of sociology: the question of sacrifice or how individuals come to subordinate their particular interests to the general interests of society (Durkheim 2001, Hubert and Mauss 1964). This study will examine the degree to which wives think in terms of sacrifice while having their husbands in danger.

¹ "A Blacksmith Courted Me" traditional ballad, collected in 1909 by Ralph Vaughan Williams from Mrs. Ellen Powell, Westhope near Weobley, Herefordshire, and published in his and A.L. Lloyd's Penguin Book of English Folk Songs. Performed by Shirley Collins on Heroes in Love 1963.

² This study set out to answer this question for spouses in general -- husbands and wives with partners in harm's way. As will be discussed in the methods section below, only one army husband volunteered to participate. The reader should consequently bear in mind that though the subjects will be referred to as wives, the sample was not intended to include them alone. Furthermore, the research did not initially set out to examine the gendered dynamics specific to being a woman with a loved one in danger.

³ Not everyone might agree that serving in the military is an example of altruism or facing danger on behalf of others. However, 83% of those Americans polled do feel that military personnel and their families "have had to make a lot of sacrifices" since 9/11 (Pew Research Center 2011). Regardless, of whether we agree that military service is performed on the behalf of others, we can take an interest in how those closest to soldiers do or do not see what they do in terms of sacrifice.

Second, army wives must try to make sense of an imperiled relationship in the context of two overlapping institutions that have undergone significant transformations in the last fifty years – the military and marriage. Changes in these specific institutions purportedly reflect more general shifts in social values towards individual interest (Bellah, et al. 1985). The end of conscription and the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force beginning in 1973 mean that wives must also make sense of what is fundamentally their husbands' choice to be in harm's way. The divorce revolution and the growing prevalence of alternative households since the 1970s also mean that wives must make sense of their choice to stay with a husband occupationally and habitually in harm's way. Both of these institutions have loosened the compulsory bonds that once held their members to them. In this broader social context, how will wives make sense of sticking to husbands and to the Army when confronted with the difficulties of war? To what extent, can their example tell us something about how either new family arrangements or the volunteer army will hold up to stress in a social era of pervasive individualism (Bellah, et al. 1985)?

Third, how army wives make sense of their situation will tell us something about military marriage, which is an interesting social phenomenon in and of itself. Existing in the overlapping space of the institutions of marriage and the military, the number of military marriages has exploded in the last fifty years. Soldiers, who were once mostly unmarried young men, are now both men and women and often married. Throughout history, the selection of who fights wars on behalf of a society reveals something of the values that society assigns to different statuses (Weber 1978). Shifting from fighting wars with mostly unmarried men to married men and women indicates a shift in more than just the organization of war, a change which will be better understood by listening to those closest to it. Furthermore, the expansion in military marriages has mostly come in the lowest four ranks of enlisted soldiers. This group presented interesting sociological questions even before the beginning of the war. The level of pay and benefits these soldiers receive is not designed to support families, and yet, their rate of marriage was much higher than their civilian counterparts (Segal & Segal 2004:35). Long before the outbreak of war in 2001, sociologists wondered how the military would deal with the burdens placed on these families by the difficulties of military life (Segal & Segal 2004:36-37). While this study does not separately analyze how wives of enlisted men make sense of their situation, it does address the overall social questions raised by the emergence of the married soldier.

Before presenting the method by which this study investigated how contemporary army wives think about having a loved one in harm's way, this chapter introduces some of what we already know about military marriages and the dilemmas that wives of soldiers face in the current war.

Marriage and the Military during the Global War on Terror

As mentioned above, in the United States during the 1970s both marriage and the military as institutions experienced profound changes. The military ended the use of conscription and re-organized as an all volunteer force (AVF). The call to duty was answered by a smaller group of self-selected citizens who willingly chose to serve. In the same decade, the

permanency of the bonds of marriage began to fade in the face of legalized and no-fault divorce. Alternatives to marriage, like cohabitation, began to replace it as the exclusive gateway to adult relationships. After the 1970s, couples were less likely to marry or stay married, and if they did marry, it came to be seen as an important but personal choice. These changes corresponded with what was observed to be a broader shift in social values from a sense of collective obligation to an individual responsibility for personal expression and fulfillment (Bellah, et al. 1985, Lasch 1979).

One repercussion of the shift to an AVF was that military service for many soldiers would no longer be a brief period during which other life course developments would be put on hold. Increasing numbers of junior enlisted soldiers saw the military as a career during which they would also have a family.⁴ Where marriage and the military might once have been seen as antithetical, particularly for enlisted soldiers,⁵ marriage in the military became more commonplace even compared to the civilian world. For instance, in 1977 only 11% of enlisted soldiers entering the Army were married, compared to 34% of their 18-24 year-old civilian counterparts. By 2009, 18% of enlisted soldiers entering the Army were married, compared to 11% of their civilian 18-24 year-old civilian peers (Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness 2011: D 9). In 2009, 58% of all soldiers were married, compared to 55% of all Americans (Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness 2009:34-35).

The expansion of numbers of military wives that began in the 1950s continued to occur after the establishment of the AVF and among the ranks of soldiers who would be at the greatest risk of fatality or injury should another war or conflict occur.⁶ This, along with changes in marriage, would present a particular dilemma to the wives of soldiers. While unmarried conscripted soldiers had parents and family who worried and had to make sense of sending sons and brothers to war, married volunteers were more likely to have wives who had to make sense of the dangers of military service and, to some degree, their choice in the matter. Parents do not choose their children, but wives, despite the folk notion that we cannot choose whom

⁴ In 1952, 34% of all army soldiers were married. In 2007, 63% were married. Most of the change occurred among enlisted soldiers: the percentage of enlisted soldiers climbed from 30% in 1952 to 60% in 2007. The percentage of married officers declined slightly from 79% in 1952 to 77% in 2007. Interestingly, the percentage of married officers reached a peak of 85% in the early 1970s and then declined, perhaps reflecting the effects of the divorce revolution occurring in the wider society. The decline might also reflect a shift toward individualized marriage, with younger officers waiting to marry until they have established their careers by attaining the rank of captain or even major (US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences 2007).

⁵ The antithesis of marriage and the military was traditionally captured in the saying "If the Army wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one."

⁶

Ratios of Army Officers to Enlisted: Force Composition, Deaths and Wounded in Action					
	Officers: Enlisted	Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan 2001-2010)		Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq 2003 – 2010)	
		Deaths	Wounded	Deaths	Wounded
Ratio	1:5	1:6	1:11	1:8	1:15

(Washington Headquarters Service, [Directorate for Information Operations and Reports](#), Military Personnel Statistics (Rank/Grade)) (Leland & Oboroceneau 2010)

we fall in love with, do choose their husbands, particularly after the 1970s in the United States. This element of choice combined with the dangers of military service forms the basis of the dilemma in a military marriage after 1973: how to justify supporting a loved one who has volunteered for an occupation that could put them in harm's way.⁷ This study will show how contemporary military wives respond to this dilemma.

The dilemma wives face is shaped not just by changes in the military and marriage but also by changes in the kind of war their soldier-husbands are fighting. After the switch to an AVF, the end of the Cold War saw a re-organization of the army into a smaller force stationed in fewer, larger, and more isolated mega-bases. As part of a revolution in military affairs (RMA) these reforms also sought to decrease the number of soldiers while enhancing capital- and technology-intensive weapons systems. The vision was to create a military that could be deployed with relatively few soldiers and fewer casualties to the American side. Such a war could be fought against the oppositions or, at least, without the active support of the public (Kennedy 2005).

The Global War on Terror that began in 2001 was not the war the RMA had anticipated. In order to occupy two countries, a more substantial force was needed. In addition to multiple redeployments of twelve to fifteen months for regular Army soldiers, National Guard units are deploying to overseas combat in unprecedented numbers. Unlike Vietnam, units rotate in and out of combat as groups, but National Guard units often bring in outside soldiers to make up their full cohort, and regular Army soldiers still change units every three to four years.

The dangers that soldiers face in this war are unique. Doing the work of nation building and counter-terrorism, soldiers engage in asymmetrical combat in a war without a "front." As you will hear from interviewees, the level of violence is less than many wives expected. However, it is diffuse. Insurgents ambush patrols, attack convoys with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and launch mortars into bases with seemingly random frequency. Given the nature of this violence, the kinds and proportions of injuries in this war are also unique. Because of advances in body armor ("battle rattle") and battlefield medicine, the violence has resulted in the smallest ratio of amputations to fatalities in American military history, as well as the largest ratio of deaths to wounded.⁸ This means that the frequencies of wounded and

⁷ Some married men were drafted to fight in previous wars (Burgess & Locke 1953, Becker & Hill 1948, Hill 1949). The wives of conscripted soldiers did not share the same dilemma as wives of volunteers. Their wives could justify supporting them as loved ones taken from them by the nation. They did not have to address the element of personal choice in a decision to be in harm's way. Nor were married soldiers ever such a large proportion of the lower ranks. There was, however, an interesting phenomenon of "war hysteria" marriages – a significant rise in the rates of marriage at the beginning of both world wars (Burgess and Locke 1953, Bossard in Becker & Hill 1948).

⁸

Comparison of Death, Wounded and Amputation Statistics in American Conflicts		
	Ratio Deaths/Wounded	Ratio Amputations/Deaths
Operation Iraqi Freedom	1:7	1:4
Operation Enduring Freedom	1:4	1:6
Persian Gulf War	1:1	N/A
Vietnam	1:3	1:11

amputated soldiers are higher than ever before, relative to the number of soldiers who are killed. The explosive force of IED's has also resulted in a great number of soldiers returning with the heretofore rare condition of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).⁹ For military wives, their soldiers might not be killed at the front, but compared to soldiers in previous conflicts, they are likely to return home without a limb or suffering from neurological damage. Taking the high rates of marriage in today's Army into consideration, those soldiers who have been killed are probably more likely to leave behind a higher proportion of widows and orphans than in previous modern wars.¹⁰

Thinking and Contexts

In order to understand how army wives make sense of the dilemmas presented by military marriage during this particular time, this study focuses on two things: the way army wives talk about how they make sense of having a loved one in harm's way and the contexts in space and time in which they made these justifications. The study proposes that these different contexts, rather than individual personality traits or widespread shifts in cultural values, explain how army wives think about their situations.

Thinking

The first focus is on how army wives make sense of actual and possible hardships, as well as benefits, of being a soldier's wife. These speech acts are collected as evidence of the kind of thinking wives do to make their situation meaningful, not necessarily manageable.¹¹ This method borrows from other instances of social research that take speech and the justifications, narratives, accounts, and thoughts it expresses as access points to how people deploy underlying cultural and moral values and relate them to their own actions or to the situations in which they find themselves (Hochschild 1979, Mills 1940, Sánchez-Jankowski 2008, Scott &

Korea	1:3	1:25
World War II	1:2	1:54
World War I	1:2	1:45

(Leland & Oboroconeau 2010)

⁹ The incidence of TBI in the U.S. Army went from 5,000 cases in 2001 to 20,000 cases in 2010 (Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center 2010).

¹⁰ Data to confirm this hypothesis is not available from either the Department of Defense or the Congressional Research Service (personal correspondence with Anne Leland 2011/3/4). However, according to an unspecified Department of Defense source, "nearly 3,000 military spouses have been widowed during the global war on terror" (Berger 2011). Given that 6,063 US service members were killed in Afghanistan and Iraq between 2001-2011 (<http://www.defense.gov/news/casualty.pdf>), this would mean that 49% of the war's casualties were survived by widows.

¹¹ This is a warning to readers expecting a study on how army wives cope or manage their situation. While ways they think and, in particular, change their thinking over the course of the military time cycle and across different communities are part of adaptive processes that most likely help keep marriages alive, this study did not directly observe the practices by which army wives manage have a loved one in harm's way.

Lyman 1968, Swidler 2001, Vaisey 2009). Where differences in thinking appeared, those different ways that army wives talked about their marriages were grouped into over-arching categories. The differences between those ways of thinking placed in each category were analyzed. Additionally, their elective affinities to values associated with existing social models of both marriage and the military were examined.

Contexts

The difference between these categories of thought is explained through the second focus of the study: contexts. The study proposes to understand the different ways that wives make sense of having a loved one in harm's way, not by looking at their individual personalities or biographies but by looking at those around them. One critical contextual difference proposed in the research design is that living among mostly other military families, as opposed to mostly civilian neighbors, will have an effect on how army wives come to make sense of their situation. In addition to those around them, the study sought to discover the effects of different contexts in time, particularly the cycles of military deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, reunion, and redeployment.

Studying contexts as the explanatory factors in the variation of wives' thinking does not necessarily mean that I am not concerned with the individual, subjective experiences of military marriage in a time of war. While what each wife is thinking is important, this study is also concerned with patterns that emerge in their thoughts as groups across different contexts. They might not be aware of these patterns, because they, unlike the researcher, are not moving between contexts of space or listening across contexts of time. By gathering expressed thoughts in those different contexts, sorting, aggregating, and analyzing them, this study introduces the role of what is "social" into the seemingly personal justifications and thoughts of individuals regarding an aspect of personal and intimate relationships.

Studying how groups in different contexts facing a common dilemma of having a loved one in war, it was hoped, would make the processes of creating meaning more visible. People's meanings, the ways the world is made sensible for them, can be elusive and difficult to discern, but these subjective meanings are a critical part of the social actions and behaviors with which sociology concerns itself (Weber 1978:4).

Methods of research

Through in-depth interviews, the study gathers data on how army wives make sense of their relationships in a time of war and how different contexts of space and time affect those ways of thinking. Doing so required the selection of a particular sample of army wives and efforts to gain access to them in order to invite¹² their participation. In addition to in-depth

¹² Sociologists often speak of "recruiting" study participants. Early on in my research, I learned that in the military context "recruitment" has a very specific meaning, symbolically privileged to indicate how soldiers come to be in service to their nation. As one Public Affairs Officer warned me, "You don't 'recruit' wives for your study. The Army

interviewing, participant observation and content analysis were also used to gather supplementary data.

Sample Selection

I interviewed two groups of army spouses: those living in mostly military communities and those living in mostly civilian ones. To operationalize this difference, I split the sample between wives of regular army¹³ soldiers living on or near military installations and spouses of national guard soldiers living in predominantly civilian communities.

In order to compare the thoughts of wives facing the same dangers but in different contexts, the sample needed to minimize any other differences between the kinds of risks regular army or national guard units might encounter. For this reason, the sample was restricted to spouses of soldiers in combat aviation battalions.¹⁴ This kind of battalion exists in both regular army and national guard components of the Army. Additionally, aviation units have a particularly compressed rank structure. There are significant numbers of higher ranking enlisted specialists and mechanics and many warrant officers and junior officers as pilots. It was hoped that this compression around rank, as opposed to units with lots of lower ranked enlisted and a few very senior ranking officers, would avoid factors of hierarchy that appeared to affect the ways wives thought of military service. One drawback in using aviation units to find wives who are trying to make sense of having husbands in harm's way is the possibility that aviation soldiers are relatively safe when compared to other kinds of service members. Without access to rates of injuries and fatalities by kinds of army units, I cannot definitely say. I did ask participants how safe they thought their husbands were relative to others in their unit and other kinds of units. What is important for the purpose of this project is that the dangers faced by regular army and national guard aviation units is roughly the same. Published reports of army aviation crashes during the current conflict attest to that fact.¹⁵

I am frequently asked why I did not also talk to soldiers themselves about how they made sense of facing danger while leaving loved ones at home. One easy answer, as elaborated below, was access: interviewing a uniformed service member would require the official endorsement of the Army (Army Regulation 600-46 Attitude and Opinion Survey Program) for the project.

never 'recruits' wives to do anything either. Wives are civilians. They are 'asked to volunteer.' Soldiers are 'recruited'" [field notes 2008/3/21].

¹³ I refer to soldiers who are full-time active duty service members as belonging to the "regular Army." This is the common way that wives themselves referred to soldiers not in the National Guard. Given that national guard units are becoming more and more integrated into the New Rotational Army (see chapter 7), national guard troops are not so *ir*-regular, but for clarity's sake and to express the distinction that wives themselves make, I will use the term "regular army" to refer to those soldiers not in the National Guard.

¹⁴ Army aviation usually consists of helicopters, though there are a few fixed wing units.

¹⁵ Army Air Crews is a website "dedicated to the soldiers and families of the United States Army's Aviation Branch who have paid the ultimate price for freedom" [<http://www.armyaircrews.com/>]. It is the labor of love of one veteran who painstakingly compiles the details of every army aviation crash that has occurred for every kind of aircraft since its introduction into use by the Army.

Access

In order to find spouses in my target sample and invite them to participate, I first identified and located combat aviation battalions in the regular Army and the National Guard using publicly accessible information from the internet. For National Guard units, I began with the Public Affairs Officers (PAO) of each state that appeared to have a significant number of aviation units. For regular army units, I approached the PAO at the division level. From each PAO, I requested permission to contact the Family Readiness Support Assistants (FRSA) of combat aviation battalions. The FRSA's are paid staff members who provide assistance to the volunteers who co-ordinate the Family Readiness Groups (FRG) to which many wives belong and that support families at the battalion, brigade, and company levels. From the FRSA's I would request contact information for the FRG leaders of appropriate brigades and companies. To these FRG leaders I would send a request that they distribute electronically, read in-person, or physically post an invitation to spouses in their units to participate in my study. The invitation offered them the opportunity to speak about their experiences of deployment and being an army spouse. They were told that the interview would help the researcher "understand how spouses make sense of the challenges of military service."

At various levels in this process, permission was necessary, not only from the PAO's, FRSA's, and FRG leaders but also unit commanders. This necessitated explanations of the project's aims as well as sharing the approved research protocol, from the researcher's home institution. For example, it took four months of back and forth communication with the PAO at Fort Jackson to receive permission to distribute my invitation through the FRG's. I was, however, not allowed to conduct interviews on the fort or visit the fort without a military escort, per the usual regulations concerning media presence on a military post. The PAO informed me that they did not have available staff to escort me. Additionally, having an escort with me during interviews would violate the protocols of the protection of human subjects demanded by the university.

Many gate keepers eventually bought into the project given its comparative design: folks in the regular army and national guard seemed interested in how their experiences compared to one another. They seemed more comfortable when they realized the project was not just about them but about how their experiences compared to others as an instance of something broader. It was also fortuitous that a number of FRSA's and FRG leaders had been sociology students as undergraduates. The researcher's affiliation with his home institution, University of California at Berkeley, however, proved to be a liability, given its reputation as a center for anti-war activism.¹⁶ Commanders and FRSA's were assured that the rigorous

¹⁶ While I was spending six months living in the community around Fort Jackson, Berkeley anti-war protests, particularly targeting a U.S. Marine Corps recruitment office, were in the national news. On another occasion in a different state when I met a couple at a welcome home ceremony, the soldier asked me, "Berkeley? Isn't that where flying the American flag is illegal?" – a question somewhat based on the fact that during an anti-war protest, the city fire chief ordered flags removed from fire trucks to stop them from being targets during possible altercations with protestors (May and Lee, 2001).

standards of scientific inquiry that distinguish Berkeley as a premiere research university would also be applied to this project.

I encountered far more difficulties with gate-keepers in the regular army context than the national guard context. Once I got through those barriers, however, and my invitation was distributed to spouses via the FRG's, I tended to receive more responses. With the National Guard, on the other hand, the PAO's were generally very responsive and helpful.¹⁷ When the invitations were distributed through national guard FRG's, however, the flow of responses was slow. These differences in access and participant responses are discussed in greater detail in chapter 4 in the broader examination of how these two contexts differ.¹⁸

Participants were also obtained through referrals from previous participants. Once I interviewed one national guard spouse, this was the most effective way of reaching other national guard wives. Fifty-seven percent of the national guard participants did not answer the invitation directly but were referred by another national guard spouse. Only 10% of the wives of regular army soldiers who participated were recruited through referrals.

A small number of participants, less than five, were approached directly at various events that I attended in person on or near military installations or at national guard functions.

The first pilot interview was conducted in November 2007. The last interview of an army aviation spouse was held in August 2010. In the time period, the focus of the war shifted from Iraq to Afghanistan, and a new president came into office.

Sample Profile

The final sample included 53 spouses of army aviation soldiers who had deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan since 2001 (see Table 1: Sample Demographics). Of that 53, 57% were married to regular army soldiers; 43% to national guard soldiers. Only one was a husband.¹⁹ Forty-six percent of the total sample were wives of enlisted soldiers; 20% were

¹⁷ National Guards that I contacted directly at the state level were generally very receptive to the project. Utah was the exception. A battalion commander in Utah refused permission for the invitation to be distributed and contacted the National Guard Bureau at the federal level in Washington, D.C. The Judges Advocate General (JAG) office of the National Guard then informed me that my project could in no way be supported by the FRSA's or FRG leaders. With some clarifications, namely that I would never interview any uniformed service member and that my research was strictly limited to civilians (army spouses who are not also soldiers), the JAG consented to my project. At that point, the National Guard Bureau went so far as to distribute the invitation to the PAO's in every state and territory. This, however, resulted in only two additional participants.

¹⁸ Briefly, regular army wives appeared eager to speak with me because, as one told me, "civilians need to hear our story." National guard wives seemed relatively reluctant to interview because, as the following chapters demonstrate, they already spend a lot of time and energy explaining their situation to civilians – who are the majority of the people they encounter in their lives.

¹⁹ As stated above, the initial intent was to interview spouses, whether husbands or wives, of soldiers. Finding husbands was very difficult. Women make up only 12% of the uniformed Armed Forces and experience lower rates of marriage and higher rates of divorce than other soldiers (Karney & Crown 2007). Consequently, the study will refer to participants as wives.

married to warrant officers; and 33% were married to officers. On average, the participants had been married seven years. Forty-three percent of the participants described their occupations as home makers or stay at home moms.

Table: Sample Demographics

	Age	Regular Army	National Guard	Enlisted	Warrant Officer	Officer	Years Married	House wife
Number		31	23	25	11	18		23
Mean	34	57%	43%	46%	20%	33%	7	43%

In addition to these fifty-three participants, twenty other women were interviewed as pilot or supplementary interviews. These included a wife of a survivor of the attack on the USS Cole; a wife of an air force veteran; wives of soldiers in the infantry, artillery, and hospital corps; and a wife of a Marine.

Interview Questions

In order to learn about how wives think about their relationship to a loved one in harm's way, I asked a series of questions intended to elicit what such a relationship entailed and how wives made sense of it. I asked open-ended questions without any assumptions about how wives *should* think. As found research vignettes (Swidler 2001), I did ask later participants about their reactions to things previous participants had said. They were often accounts of particular instances or common expressions that I had heard in responses across different interviews. Because I included questions about data collected from previous interviews, the schedule of interview questions changed over the course of the 53 interviews and two and a half years of interviewing. The core set of questions, however, remained the same.

The interview schedule [See Appendix I] was designed in a bottle-shape relative to the intensity and difficulty of the questions. The interviews would begin with relatively easy questions about wives' childhoods and their courtship and eventual marriage. More difficult questions, first about their experience with injuries and fatalities of others, and then their fears and the possibility of their own husband's death, came in the middle. Some of the hardest questions to ask were like the following:

As a couple, did you make plans for the possibility of injury or fatality?

How do you think your relationship has been affected by this possibility?

The possibility of injury or fatality is a part of being a soldier. What does it mean to you that you are married to someone who faces that possibility?

Through responses to questions about the interview experience itself, participants confirmed that these were difficult questions. As one army wife said of her experience:

... I just spent that last hour and a half talking about what I spend most waking hours of the day trying not to even think about.

The interview typically ended with a set of simple, easy to answer demographic questions.

The interview addressed the following topics:

- family background;
- how they came to be a military wife;
- what being a military wife entails in terms of challenges, rewards, contested priorities;
- recollections of injuries in their spouse's unit and how they, other spouses, the military institutions and civilian world responded;
- times they were most afraid for their spouse's safety and who they turned to for support, who they avoided;
- how risks have affected family decisions like reenlistment and having children;
- what the death of their husband would mean to them;
- times they were most afraid for the survival of their marriage and what they perceived the threats to their relationship to be;
- what kind of recognition do they seek or have they received from others.

It is important to point out that I did not initially intend to study different contexts in time. Consequently, there are no specific questions about deployment, reunion, and redeployment. Rather data for these time periods came serendipitously from responses to open-ended questions about when they were most afraid for their husband's safety, when they were most worried about the survival of their marriage, and decisions about re-enlistment.

Lastly, the majority of interviews, 85% of the final sample, were conducted over the telephone or internet Skype. One reason for this was that participants responded from military installations and state national guards all over the country. The 15% that were conducted in-person were mostly at Fort Jackson. There was no noticeable difference in the content of in-person or over-the-phone interviews. It might be an artifact of the larger number of over-the-phone interviews, but it did sound as if participants tended to become more emotional and to cry over-the-phone. The average interview took 108 minutes.

Non-participant Observation and Content Analysis

In addition to the interviews, I lived for four months near Fort Jackson, a large, remote installation where I attended church groups for military spouses, worked as a substitute teacher in the community schools, lived as a boarder with two army families, went to shopping malls, movies, and bars where wives gathered, attended sporting events and official ceremonies, and took photographs. I also attended a number of National Guard events in two separate states: farewell and welcome home ceremonies, family briefings in preparation for reunions, a state-wide National Guard association conference, and social events. I also collected and coded over

one dozen self-help, guide books written by and for military spouses. I communicated with a number of wives via social networking sites established by national guard units. I also met with a number of service providers for both regular army and national guard families.

Goals and Overview

By examining how different contexts in space and time relate to the ways that army wives make sense of having a loved one in harm's way, this dissertation provides insight into the following areas of interest: the relationship between work and and the effects of stress on families.

Sacrifice in an era of individualism

In a social world trending toward individualization (Bellah, et al. 1985) specifically within the spheres of marriage and the military where values of individualized occupation and self development have purportedly come to the fore (Moskos 1989, Cherlin 2009), army wives still have to confront losing their loved one in service to their nation. Under the logic of sacrifice, an individual denies, even destroys, their own interests for the greater good; but under the growing influence of utilitarian and market logics, the greater good is advanced through each individual pursuing their own interests to the fullest extent possible. Given this shift towards individualization and self-interest, we might expect that army wives would see the loss of their loved ones as a risk they accepted as part of the job that their partners chose or the only job they could find. As we will see, this is not the only way wives of contemporary soldiers think about the dangers military service brings to their families. While they sometimes do see the support they offer their soldier-husbands in terms of economic obligation or individual self-development, they also see their relationships in terms of a broader social duty. And sometimes, they see their efforts in a narrower but similarly deep commitment to the social union that is their marriage. This research will demonstrate how spouses facing the loss of their husbands to war think in terms of justifications rooted in both individualistic and collectivist social values. Besides providing evidence for the persistence of communitarian values and dispositions, the findings of this study demonstrate that when wives use individualist as opposed to collectivist justifications they do so not because of purported culture-wide shifts in values, but because of specific interactions and contexts.

Institutional organization of violence

This study also contributes to what is known and what needs to be understood about the relationship of certain institutions to violence and danger. While some researchers have demonstrated how institutions prepare people for violent and dangerous work (Collins 2009, Desmond 2007, Goffman 1961), this study explores how those individuals and groups indirectly associated with an institution of violence make sense of sending a loved one into danger. The Army might make a soldier brave, but what does that make him in the eyes of his wife? As a prominent researcher on military families has pointed out, "The effects on military families of

the potential for injury in both peacetime and wartime are studied relatively seldom” (Wechsler-Segal in Moskos 1989:83). This study will address this question directly.

Work and family

In the literature on work and family, there are competing typologies of *work-first* versus *family-first* models of relationships (Gerson 2010). An army family in a time of war presents an interesting case in this on-going debate. This debate goes back as far as the American Revolution, when Continental soldiers struggled with conflicting loyalties to serve their emerging nation or fulfill their duties to provide for their families (Mayer 1996). The question of whether one should put duty to others before commitment to one’s own family is an even older question raised in the early Christian ethics of St. Augustine (Pope 1992). This study presents empirical evidence as to how army wives come to make sense of a marriage where “the Army always comes first.”

Finally, not since World War II have so many soldiers with families gone to war. As it did during and after World War II, the situation presents an opportunity to study how families respond to stress, particularly how changes in family structures, dynamics, and values that have occurred across society in the last fifty years have equipped families to face the burdens of war. This dissertation will contribute, as studies following World War II did (Hill 1949, Burges and Locke 1953), to understanding how such transformed families stand up to stressful periods.

Chapter Overview

In order to understand how different contexts of space and time affect the ways in which army wives make sense of military marriage, this dissertation proceeds as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the three overarching categories with which participants in this study think about their relationships: *duty*, *commitment*, and *obligation*. Direct quotations from the participants define the various component terms and notions that make up these categories. This chapter also analyzes the internal variation between the three categories, asking, how do they differ from each other? In doing so, it presents the two critical questions confronting an army wife: *how much effort do I put into this relationship?* and *for whom am I doing this?*

Chapter 3 examines these three categories in the institutional and historical contexts of marriage and the military more broadly. This chapter asks, given what we know about how these two institutions have changed over time, in which of these ways -- *duty*, *commitment*, or *obligation* -- would we expect army wives at the beginning of the 21st Century to think?

Chapter 4 looks at the different ways army wives think across different social contexts in the period of their marriages before their husband’s first deployment. It presents the factors that impact how regular army wives living in mostly military contexts and national guard wives living in mostly civilian contexts confront their role as wives, mothers, and citizens.

Chapter 5 looks at the stressful period of overseas deployments and presents how wives in the two different social contexts think about the many negative possibilities that the war could bring to them and their families.

Chapter 6 offers a vivid picture of the challenges faced by wives with the return of their husbands and the impact of the different social contexts on those challenges.

The focus of chapter 7 is on the period of redeployment and how different social contexts shape the thought of wives about another round of having their husbands in harm's way.

Finally, chapter 8 concludes by presenting a summary of the study's results, the implications of the findings for broader research and theoretical debates.

Introduction

Why do soldiers fight? When soldiers officially enlist, they swear to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies” and to “obey the orders of the President...and the orders of the officers appointed over” them.¹ Whether they think in these terms or not, the official expectation is that their thinking, including their motivations, justifications, and how they judge their own actions, focuses on the legal foundation of the state and obedience to authority legitimated in that framework. According to the Soldier’s Creed,² which soldiers learn during Basic Training and recite at public ceremonies, a soldier sees himself as “a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.” Less broadly, a soldier is also, according to the Soldier’s Creed, deeply committed to the immediate task before him, to placing the mission first, to never leaving a fallen comrade behind or accepting defeat. While the values implicit in both the Oath of Enlistment and the Soldier’s Creed might inform how soldiers think, it is not the focus of this project to assess the extent to which they actually do. Rather, the focus here is on how those who stand by soldiers, namely their wives, think of being married to someone who serves in harm’s way: why do women support soldiers who fight?

Army wives do not swear an oath of office nor are they taught to recite a special creed.³ They do, however, strive to make sense of the challenges and benefits that are unique to military marriage. This chapter has two goals. First it describes the ways wives justify their lives with a husband participating in the armed forces. Despite the often noted uniformity and cohesiveness of the military community (McClure 1998), respondents presented multiple explanations, not just as a group but also as individuals, for why they support their husbands. These justifications, in some ways contradictory and in other ways complimentary, work as a cyclone in the way they interact to reinforce a wife’s critical stand in the face of the dilemmas of military marriage in a time of war. I present these diverse justifications under three conceptual categories: *duty*, *commitment* and *obligation*.

Second, this chapter presents an analysis of how these three over-arching categories interact with one another. Though they may seem synonymous, the categories of duty, commitment, and obligation, as I have constituted them, differently answer for spouses two critical questions: *for whom they see themselves offering support* and *what are the limits to the*

¹ See Appendix II for complete official oath.

² See Appendix III for complete Soldier’s Creed.

³ See Appendix IV for the unofficial “U.S. Army Wife Creed.” This creed was posted on the internet. No respondent ever mentioned it. Its language and sentiment are in marked contrast to the tone and content of most interviews that I conducted.

support they will provide. Derived from these questions, I propose two axes of variation that capture the fundamental differences between the three categories of thought heard from respondents. Put together into a single framework, these axes of scope (for whom) and effort (how much) help us to appreciate *how* what wives think differs and to understand how those differences matter to the making of meaningful experience. I will also present how the axes of scope and effort correspond to important changes observed in both the institutions of marriage and the military. This coincidence will confirm the suitability of organizing the diversity of thoughts into these three overarching categories, categories that apparently help wives face fundamental dilemmas in the overlapping fields of marriage and the military.

Subsequent chapters will look at this variation in relationship to specific interactions and contexts and demonstrate *why* what army wives say varies – why they sometimes see their relationship in terms of duty and at other times in terms of obligation or commitment.

Before presenting the thoughts that comprise each of the three categories of thought, we should consider the significance of what Army wives think. Even if what wives think mattered to the course of their relationships and the outcome of their shared experience with war, would their ways of thinking have any consequence for anyone other than the 250,000 married Army couples? Is there any broader social significance to be found in the ways these women come to make sense of risking the loss of a loved one in the armed forces? The significance, as I will demonstrate, lies in the way that the results surprisingly counter what we would expect from current sociological literature. I briefly present three sets of expectations of how Army wives would think about their relationships to soldier-husbands. First, we are led to expect that social spheres or “regimes of love, of violence or of familiarity” fall outside those realms where calculable and generalizable justifications can be applied (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). Given that these imperiled marriages fall squarely within the intersections of love, violence, and family, we would not expect to find the kind of thinking that resembles systematic and observable justifications used in other, less affective, spheres. Second, given the rising trend toward expressive individualism (Bellah, et al 1985) the declining appreciation of sacrifice as a positive element in contemporary family relations (Cherlin 2009, Bahr and Bahr 2001, Popenoe 1994) and the proclaimed disappearance of commitment in personal relationships (Gerson 2010:10), we would be unlikely to hear wives justify in any manner separation from and potential permanent loss of their loved ones. Third, given the overwhelming structural power and cultural influence of the Army as an institution, what wives think and say will largely be a reflection of the official narratives imposed on them by the combined forces of militarism and patriarchy (Weinsten and White 1997, Enloe 1983).

What we hear, however, is quite different. Considering them in reverse order, respondents’ thinking is often critical of the military “command,” its official versions of military life, and its expectations of the military wife. We will hear how many wives are committed to

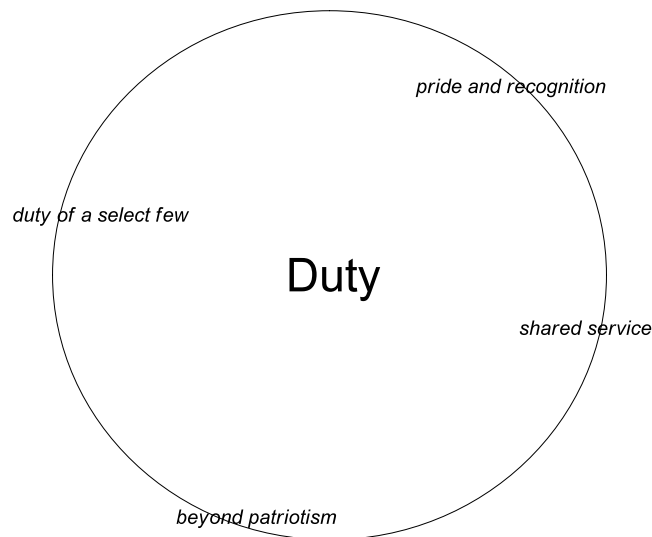
their husbands in spite of the Army and we will see evidence of the particular advocacy role that they take in the face of their husbands' typically stoic acceptance of conditions of military service. Though some justifications do reflect an emergent cultural emphasis on self-development and individual growth, others clearly reflect more communitarian, collective, and altruistic values. At times wives do think about the relationship in terms of what they are getting out of it; but at other times they emphasize the opportunity to give of themselves to something that transcends their individuality, whether that be to the nation, a high-minded cause, or their own marital union. Lastly, we do hear justifications for the challenges that arise from this particular combination of love and violence. As in other spheres, these justifications occur along discernible axes of difference. In later chapters, we will see how particular justifications occur in observable patterns, given particular contexts of space and time. For these reasons, the ways that Army wives think about their marriages and the terms with which they come to justify the hazards are interesting not just in themselves but also for what they tell us about the making of meaningful action in social contexts.

Duty

One way that Army spouses think about why they support their soldier-husbands is in terms of "duty." Duty, for the spouses interviewed here, entails service. They see not only their husbands but often themselves as serving something larger than a typical employer. They relish the sense of pride they get from the fulfillment of duty. Though they speak of duty in transcendent terms, they do not see it as a universal calling required of all citizens. Nor, on the other hand, is the cause they serve narrowly or consistently limited to a political leader, state, government, or country. Similarly, no one said she supported her husband out of a sense of a wife's duty to her husband.⁴ Instead, participants saw themselves as performing a duty. They spoke of this duty in terms of broader service and pride, as well as a special calling for which only some are suited but whose purpose is wider than the interests of any particular government or nation.

⁴ Where obedience to authority might be a core military value, as inscribed in the Oath of Enlistment, not a single army wife interviewed said she accepted the hardships and difficulties of her marriage because it was her duty to obey and follow her husband. As we will see in greater detail in later chapters, army couples do struggle but usually succeed in keeping the authoritarian practices of military culture outside of family life. Wives rarely saw themselves as subordinates to their husbands. If anything, they tended to emphasize their husbands' subordinate status with regards to the larger military institutions.

Elements of duty



For many of the women in this study, duty is tied to a sense of service that think they share with their husbands. "Service" implies more than work and distinguishes them and their husbands from other kinds of employees, mercenaries or private security contractors.⁵ Service is shared with their husbands for a larger cause. When asked how she identifies herself, as a civilian, as a military dependent, or as military personnel, the wife of a regular Army pilot, replied:

I always use the term 'we.' You know like, "we are stationed at Fort Jackson." I consider that I'm serving alongside him; it's just kind of in a different role. Not that I necessarily think that I should get a uniform⁶ or rank or anything like that. But being an army wife is not like being married to someone who works at Dell. So, I do feel like I take on some of it. I wouldn't consider myself, you know, a soldier but....

⁵ One pilot interview was with a woman married to a retired Airman currently employed in Iraq by a security firm headquartered near Fort Jackson. She told me that she learned the hard way not to tell Army wives her husband was a contractor. She said that they generally resented the amount of pay they believed contractors received and the additional danger in which contractors place uniformed service members by their presence and conduct in Iraq.

⁶ Related to this idea of wives not wearing a uniform, there is the case of Sarah Smiley, a well-known blogger and military wife who was chastised for wearing her husband's naval cap in her profile photograph: http://www.sarahsmiley.com/article_5/Military-Wife-Creates-Controversy-Wearing-Husbands-Uniform.htm. Many readers, particularly other military wives, reacted angrily to the criticism. Spouses often express that they do everything for the Army but wear its uniform.

For this wife, her husband's job in the military is different from other forms of employment because it entails service, service that she too feels called to perform as her duty, a duty not to her husband but to the same mission that he serves.⁷ Another wife, who met her husband when they were both uniformed service members, explained, "I was once a Soldier and I knew my duty was always to the mission. I still believe that, even though I now work toward that mission as a soldier's wife. The soldier needs that support from the family in order to complete the mission to the best of his ability." For spouses like her, their duty is duty to the mission. Being part of a marriage that is also part of the Army and belonging to that Army community are important, but they are subordinate to the importance of mission.⁸

Even when spouses do not see themselves as serving, they frequently speak of a sense of pride, the pleasure or satisfaction taken from their association with one who serves. Incurring honor through sacrifice, those who fulfill a military duty nourish social forces while also conferring upon themselves "the whole strength of society" (Hubert and Mauss 1964:102) that swells as pride. One wife describes the pride she feels for her soldier husband: "I think the best part of being married to a soldier is the pride that you have and knowing that you are part of what makes this country great and making sure that freedoms that we hold continue."

Also responding to the question, "What is the best part of being married to a Soldier?", another wife explains:

I really do think it's the pride. Like I'll come back to that again and again. Cause I really like to see him in uniform and to see him in formation and like, um, you know, to hear him talk about flying and stuff like that. I'm just so proud of who he is and what he represents, and what he's able to accomplish in the Army and he's a really competent guy, too; so, I just think there's a lot pride for me.

⁷ Interestingly, we will see that the military itself and the soldier-husbands are ambivalent about the idea that wives also "serve." In many ways that we shall see, the command draws an official line between "uniformed service members" and their "civilian dependents." This exclusion might reflect the underlying ways in which military service is organized by gender. It most likely also reflects the complicated distinction between the military and civilian worlds, a rift that runs through military households, in a heavily militarized, but democratic society. Nevertheless, the important point here is that army wives often see themselves as also performing a duty through service, despite official institutional practices that would have them think otherwise.

⁸ "The mission" as a concept is popular in military thinking. Like most useful concepts, its usefulness as a justification derives from a versatility rooted in ambiguity. On the one hand, it appears to allow soldiers and their families to focus on the immediate task at hand (getting through this deployment, completing this patrol) without having to account for the bigger picture (the aims of the war, the im/possibility of victory). On the other hand, the mission can be invoked to mean those broad, expansive goals (securing democracy, eradicating global terrorism). One common example of the concept's ambiguity is in the army leadership mantra "Mission First, Troops Always." The second part of the expression is a disavowal of the truth of the first part: "a readiness to put personnel at risk in pursuit of the mission"(Salam 2008).

Army wives, like their civilian counterparts, also derive status from their particular husband's accomplishments or his rank (Coser 1974). But that kind of hubristic pride is often seen as problematic, as "wearing one's husband's rank on one's sleeve" or "putting his resume on the bumper." As a wife elaborates, fulfilling one's duty through the military might engender pride but it also requires modesty:

I think there's a certain amount of humility that, um, that again comes with the pride I guess. I mean I don't go running around like 'Hey, my husband's a West Point grad.' Like I mean that's retarded. Um, but you know, so I think there's like humility that goes along with it, too, that makes it more authentic when people do find out. They're like 'Oh, wow, good for you' type of thing.

When asked about the kinds of recognition they received, military spouses say that they and their husbands do not deliberately seek it. They might be avoiding drawing too much attention to the risks they take lest recognition becomes "the pride before the fall." In a later chapter, we will consider the structural and cultural obstacles to recognition for soldiers and families in an all volunteer force, living isolated from civilian communities on large mega-bases. The combination of pride and humility might come from the sense that work in the military is a form of service, rather than employment. Service suggests subordination to some other person, persons, or purpose other than the pursuit of one's own interests. We will see that pride and recognition as elements of what make a sense of duty possible only work in particular contexts. Those contexts will be examined in subsequent chapters.

While spouses like those above saw duty as playing a large part in how they thought about their military marriage, they do not believe military service is a universal duty required of all citizens and families. All but one spouse interviewed said that it took a special woman to be married to a soldier. Some also mentioned that they do not believe that all people are suitable to be soldiers.⁹ Furthermore, none thought that conscription or mandatory military service is a

⁹ Duty for these spouses of soldiers in an all volunteer army is not the same "republican virtue" promoted by Rousseau: "Citizens are neither lawyers, nor soldiers, nor priests by profession; they perform all these functions as a matter of duty" (Rousseau, cited in Walzer 1970:232). Most of these wives, on the contrary, justify their freighted relationship out of sense of duty that is particular to them and their husbands, not all citizens. In this way, by answering the call to duty and subordinating personal interests, they gain distinction and moral superiority. This kind of distinction through service is related to a long history of exclusions and exemptions in regards to who is allowed or required to serve in the United States Armed Forces. It also turns the usual formulation of antagonism between individuals and society on its head: is the problem that some individuals are required to sacrifice their individual interests to a social collective or that some individuals are barred from making such sacrifices? (Cladis 2008: 85).

good idea. While they felt more people would appreciate what soldiers and their families go through if they also served, they said that forcing citizens to serve would place their own husbands in greater danger. Even when presented with the possibility that conscription might lessen the number and length of overseas deployments for them and their soldier-husbands, most interviewees said it was important to have soldiers voluntarily performing their duties.

Duty as a concept was not limited to national or patriotic service. While some wives did speak of the greatness of America, many emphasized how their husbands were protecting and serving people of other nations. They generally saw their husbands' work as constructive and humanitarian. Others pointed to their and their husbands' religious backgrounds as ways of understanding how the military allowed them to fulfill a religious sense of duty to serve others or to lay down their lives for others.¹⁰

In sum, the concept of duty encompasses justifications that emphasize a notion of service distinct from normal employment, a complex sense of humility and pride derived from that service, a notion that they and their soldier are uniquely called to this duty, and that this duty is a calling toward something greater than self or even national interests. Thinking in terms of duty might help alleviate a sense of work versus home competition that troubles households, not just military ones. Seeing themselves as also answering a call to duty helps them not only accept but actively contribute to making the sacrifices required by military service. What is asked of her is not asked for by a demanding, over-reaching husband nor his greedy workplace. What is asked for is asked for by a transcendent social entity (the nation) or cause (democracy). And often army wives see themselves as answering this call. We will see in later chapters, however, how this way of thinking becomes difficult to sustain in particular contexts and interactions.

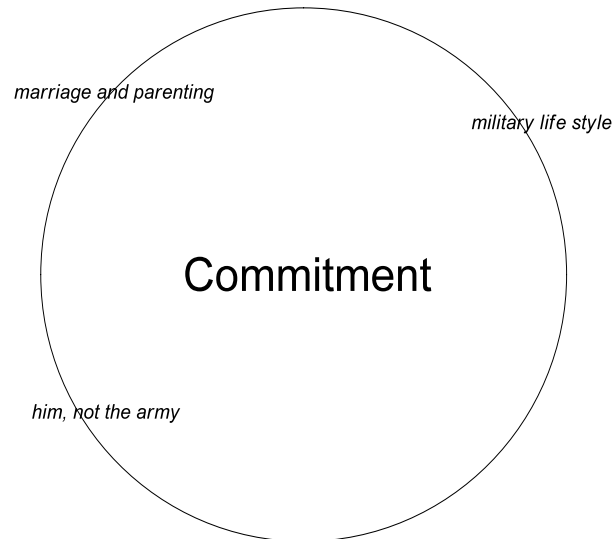
Commitment

Besides duty, wives also deploy a concept of commitment when asked to explain how they make sense of a relationship fraught with the challenges of military service. Unlike the expansiveness of the bonds of duty, commitment here indicates a more specific, narrow relationship, usually between a wife and her husband, sometimes regardless of his soldier status. Where duty introduces elements that are inclusive, social, public and even transcendent of the soldier and spouse's particular relationship, commitment is about what is immanent and exclusive, private and intimately shared between the two. Commitment in military wives'

¹⁰ Respondents quoted this scripture verse: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13 King James Bible. These wives and their husbands offer service and sacrifice for an entity that transcends even the nation.

discussions of their relationship to the military takes three shapes: the wife's commitment to her partner in marriage and parenting; her commitment to the military life style; and lastly her commitment to her husband as an individual, in contrast to him as a soldier, part of the Army or any greater, broader social entity.

Elements of commitment



At times, the bond interviewees described sharing with their husbands was not a shared call to service but a commitment to one another as a married couple and as parents. In reaction to military life, particularly its uncertainties, hardships and hazards, wives express a belief in commitment to marriage as a shared institution of fidelity, steadfast loyalty and perseverance. Their response to the challenges presented by the military as an institution was to embrace marriage and parenting. In reaction to the military, regular Army wives also saw their experience as nothing especially different than civilian marriages. They saw themselves as sharing the same commitment to the institution of marriage that civilian wives might.¹¹ Where thinking in terms of duty and service distinguished army wives from their civilian counterparts, commitment emphasizes a seamless experience between marriage within and outside the military.

¹¹ We will see in the following chapter how it is harder for National Guard spouses to think of their marriages as anything like those of their civilian neighbors.

In explaining her view that it does not take a special woman to be an Army wife,¹² one respondent presents an image of commitment based on normal expectations of marriage as an institution:

....it's not like army wives are some, super-human beings. We're committed to our husbands, we love our husbands, and we're going to do what we need to do to stay sane while they're gone. So....That's the biggest thing that I see that makes a successful army wife especially with the deployments is just to be really committed to marriage.

In the face of the often unpredictable, absurd, and terrifying possibilities presented by life in the military, wives emphasize their marital relations as refuges of normalcy – something that makes them just like other folks, who do not face the hazards of war. For some spouses, it is as if they seize upon the trials of military life to affirm their commitment to marriage. One of the good things often noted about being an army wife was that the hardships, separations, and fears made their relationship more valuable. As one wife said:

It all makes you value what you have even more. The time we are apart makes the time we are together all the more precious. It might seem weird to say but I think I am lucky that way. It makes my marriage so much better.

While perhaps making a virtue out of necessity, this wife represents how many other respondents made sense of hardships as tests that eventually strengthened their marriage. Many of them often repeated a familiar adage, “the Army can’t wreck a good marriage; but it definitely doesn’t help a bad marriage get better.” Within this perspective, the hardships of military service are less a threat than a means to confirm that one has a good marriage.

In addition to a commitment to the normal expectations of marriage, numerous spouses referred to commitment derived from parenting. Despite difficulties of frequent relocations, the long-term absences of the father, and risks of losing a parent to war,¹³ children are a common part of the military family. In public images, the military family always includes children; visually a military family is never just a couple.¹⁴ Eighty percent of married service

¹² This view is in contrast to the notion that only particular women are suited to be soldiers’ wives, presented above in the section on duty. As mentioned, respondents often expressed contradictory thoughts and sentiments. We will see in later chapters, how these different views corresponded to different contexts and interactions: why sometimes they think of themselves as distinct from civilian wives and why at other times they think they are just the same.

¹³ Given the unprecedented number of married soldiers who are parents, it is easy to imagine that the proportion of fatalities that leave behind orphaned children is higher in the current conflict than any other in the last century. Statistics on the number of children bereaved by war fatalities in the Global War on Terror do not exist publicly.

¹⁴ Why this connection between children and the military? On one level, it is part of the all volunteer force’s attempt to make military service a lifelong career. On another level, it follows a re-occurring symbolic connection between images of regeneration and death that have been observed elsewhere (Bloch and Parry 1982). Expanding

members have dependent children (Sloan Work and Family Research Network 2009); forty-nine percent of all soldiers in the army have children (National Public Radio July 6, 2011). Because of their children, many wives said that they found it easier, not harder, to support their soldier-husbands and face the uncertainties and dangers of his military engagement.

In addition to a commitment to the shared responsibilities of parenting, some wives were committed to the stereotype of a soldier and spoke of wanting to belong to a military community, to be part of its specific culture. In contrast to duty, this sense of commitment was to the community, not necessarily the military's mission. They yearned for the military way of life, to be a card-carrying affiliate of its institutions¹⁵ and even speak its "lingo," as one respondent explained, regardless and sometimes in spite of its ultimate purpose or mission. This kind of commitment is not so much to a specific individual, union or family, but it is nevertheless distinct from the kind of transcendental, expansive attachment implied by the idea of duty.

While some women's sense of commitment stems from an attraction to the military way of life, other wives expressed their commitment to their soldier husbands *in spite of* the Army. When asked what makes a good army wife, most interviewees described a woman who either supports "her husband" or "her soldier." No one said, "A woman who supports the Army." This is not to say that supporting a husband precludes supporting the Army, as discussions of "the mission" and accounts of familiarizing themselves with the job illustrate above. But at other times, they were very clear about drawing a line between husband and Army.

Gayle, raised by a grandmother who was in the Army, expresses this notion of a commitment to her husband but not to the Army when she explains her sense of identity: "Honestly, I think of myself as a civilian who strongly supports her husband. The military is hard for me; I don't approve of a lot of it. Like I said, I am a free spirit. I do consider myself a civilian." In the following chapter, we will see how this form of commitment is ironically influenced by the military context itself. Being committed to a soldier-husband despite the Army is surprisingly not unlike the bond many soldiers share with each other: they fight for one another, regardless of, and sometimes in spite of the Army. Army wives like "battle buddies" on the front line are loyal to their soldier but skeptical of the Army as an institution.

Commitment as a category encompasses beliefs and attitudes that specify and narrow a wife's relationship to her husband: as her marriage partner, as the co-parent of their children, and as someone distinct from his position in the Army. For some wives, commitment implies a focus on belonging to the Army community, without necessarily sharing its mission or call to duty.

Obligation

the number of families in the military, while fraught with problems, has perhaps had the unintended consequence of achieving this symbolic connection.

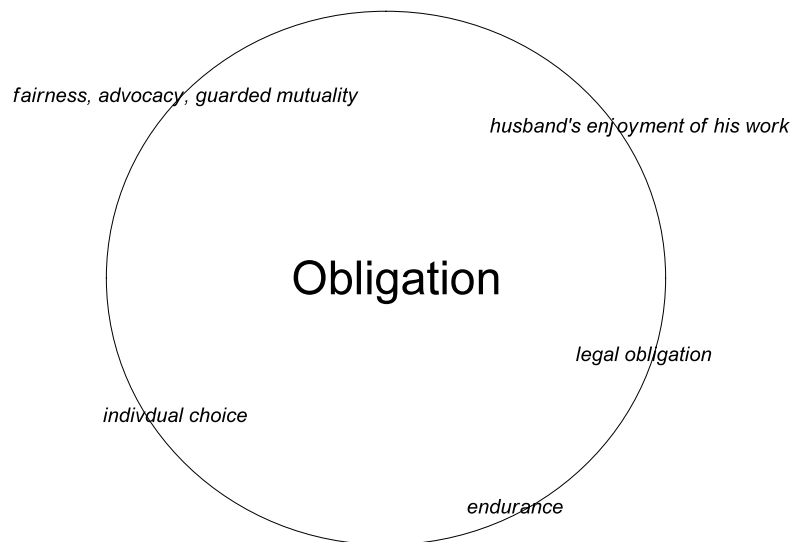
¹⁵ Some institutions specific to the military community (with civilian equivalents) include the post chapel (church), the clinic (hospital), the commissary (grocery store), the post exchange or PX (retail store), the Four Seasons store (hardware store) the class VI store (liquor store), the officers' club, the soldiers' club, the rod and gun club,

Army wives also expressed ideas about a bounded relationship to military life, one with established limits. This army wife recognizes how duty and commitment motivate her husband's endless sense of service, but for herself and her family, she asks about a different relationship to the military, one with some boundaries:

He's very protective and he always wants to do the honorable thing. His first and foremost thought is to be sure that we are safe and taken care of. That's when you are in a relationship; and now that we have a daughter, I really get the idea that he will do anything that he needs to do for his family. But that's where the military comes in. It gets in our way sometimes. The need to protect his family is woven into the need to defend his country, and so, while he has this drive to be who he is, you know, we're proud of that. But at times, it's like, okay, when do we get a break? When do we get to be not impacted by the military for a while?

This appeal for a limit, a specified and knowable amount, whether a number of months, a particular year, even a designated dinner hour, was an often heard part of army wives' thinking. This perspective that insists on a limit reflects what I term here a sense of *obligation*: "tell me what I have to endure, and I will." As such, obligation encompasses notions distinct from the open-ended expectation of burden implied by either commitment or duty. Obligation suggests reciprocation, and with reciprocation, a sense of fairness, for which army spouses often become the sole advocates in a hierarchical and authoritarian social sphere. Wives also spoke of an obligation to support their husbands in the kind of work he does because it derives from the kind of person he is, even if that combination of risk and personality endangered the family. There is also a reoccurring perspective that a spouse and her husband have formed an obligation out of active, personal choice. Once freely chosen, however, a virtually inescapable obligation binds them and their husbands to the Army. The period of this obligation comes with a limit, a limit that wives accept as a known quantity. They endure this period of time out of a sense of obligation.

Elements of obligation



Military spouses talk about standing guard for a sense of fairness in the face of what they often portray as an insensitive, over-reaching bureaucracy. This fairness is at the core of their obligation, an obligation of guarded mutuality between them and the Army. One wife explains the difference between her and her husband's relationships to the Army: where he is bound by duty to serve in silence, she is compelled to speak up:

...with the Army, there is no talking back; there is no giving your input ... and my husband is very used to that. I mean especially at West Point, too. He's spent his whole life, you know, from high school on, basically taking orders and taking anything that comes at him, and I'm more of a fighter. You know, if something's unfair or something's not right, I like to say something about it in a respectful manner but still, you know.

In an interesting reversal, this wife presents a relationship where her husband fights unquestioningly for the Army while she is ready to fight the Army itself. In a military couple husbands and wives need not have the same relationship to the Army. In fact, we will see how many find it important that they do not. Where he is bound by duty, she is at times driven by a sense of fairness, equivalency, and obligation, both her obligation to the Army and the Army's obligation to her husband, her family and herself.

Spouses have also called on the command to enforce the fairness of obligations between them and their soldiers within the family. At Fort Jackson and other military installations, a parent-teacher meeting is a soldier's "place of duty" for the day.¹⁶ The command can and does intervene on behalf of spouses in many other aspects of family life. In one instance, an interviewee who was separated from her husband went to his commander to

¹⁶ <http://www.hood.army.mil/13sce/about/pdfs/PolicyLetter08.pdf>

complain that she had not received any financial support from her soldier. The money appeared in her account the next day. Under the Military Code of Justice, the command can also become involved in cases of adultery.

Besides a reciprocal obligation between wives, soldiers and the army, interviewees also justified their support for their husbands out of recognition of their husbands' passion or love for the work. Many wives expressed this obligation to their husbands and to their sometimes reckless thrill seeking, despite the risks, in an occupation that he enjoyed. Marcia explains why she supports her husband in doing a job that he loves, even if that job threatens to take him from her:

When he is happy and when he is doing something he loves, it makes our lives happier, it makes our relationship better and that is my job as a wife to make sure that he is supported in the things that he is doing and the things that he needs from me because he then is able to give us the quality time. It's not so much the quantity of time, but the quality of time that we spend together.

For some wives, emphasizing their husbands' enjoyment of the work, which as Army Aviation soldiers can be particularly thrilling, is an important way of accepting the dangers. This reasoning reflects a sense of obligation rather than duty because they feel that their husbands would take these risks even if they were not serving others.¹⁷ The army provides opportunities or outlets for their husbands' risk-taking. The enjoyment that he finds in military service also outweighs any negative consequences for their committed partnership.

At times, Army wives make clear that they have chosen the difficulties of military marriage. Just as their husbands signed a contract to enter the Army, Army spouses make sense of their relationship drawing on the broader cultural and political justifications for an all volunteer Army. Under this logic, it is perceived as fairer to let those who want to defend the state do so rather than forcing everyone or some portion of the population to do so (Levi 1997).

Once those who volunteer do so, however, they are compelled to stand by their choice; it is difficult to exit a military contract, and even when the contract expires, the Army can retain a soldier's service under a "stop-loss" policy. Alongside this, wives accept the perilous relationship to their soldier-husbands through the idea that they freely and knowingly chose it. One wife explains:

I don't think he [her soldier] wants to say, 'Yeah, the Army comes before you, honey.' It doesn't sound too good, you know. But, you know, I am a realist. I knew what I was getting myself into and I am a big girl.

¹⁷ In the next chapter, we will see how this kind of thinking reflects the values of contemporary individualized marriage, in which personal development is more important than performing prescribed roles and fulfilling duties entailed in them.

Regardless of how bad things get, the notion of a choice freely made obligates spouses to the relationship to their husbands, his role as a soldier, the Army, the war, and its dangers.

Though spouses might describe their relationship as freely chosen, they know that their soldier-husbands, once having agreed to serve the military, are bound by law to fulfill their contract. If they refuse to go to work, they can be imprisoned and, in a time of war, even possibly executed. Their obligation to him accepts this specific relationship he has to the Army. In response to the question about the expression “In an Army marriage, the Army always comes first,” three separate wives answer, respectively:

...but the bottom line is – he signed a contract for six years. The government owns him for six years. So there’s no point in me getting mad.

It’s tough when you really start to learn that the Army considers a person it’s property.

Yeah, absolutely [the Army comes first in an Army marriage]. I mean like, they could, he could be charged being AWOL [Absent Without Leave] if he’s not there when he’s supposed to be so yeah, absolutely.

Like wives who stand by relationships to men held in the state’s penal institutions (Comfort 2008), these military wives at times justify the support they offer husbands out of a sense that he is bound to his agreement to serve: having made this choice, they now have no other choice but to support him.

While this legal obligation might breed a kind of resignation or acceptance, it also underscores that this relationship, like the military contract or commission or even a prison sentence, has a finite time limit. In this way, obligation is different than duty or commitment: it is something that can be quantified and, in becoming so, it can be endured. As one wife explains:

I have said it (that the Army comes first) many times, and my husband doesn’t approve of that. But deep in my heart, I do know that it’s true and most of the time I am okay with it. I am okay with it, and that’s the way it’s going to be for a while, and he has about 4 more years until he hits twenty [the number of years at which her husband can leave the Army with a full pension]. That’s the way it’s going to be.

In summary, obligation conceptually reflects some of what is specific to a volunteer Army. Wives emphasize that they “signed up for this” and that they knew what they were getting into. At times, they also see their husbands as the kind of men who want to face danger, and they recognize an obligation to support him in the military as the best fit for the kind of person he is and wants to become. In such a relationship, they also expect to “give what they get” within a legal framework that insures limits and reciprocity. With such expectations, they

see the hardships of military service as a matter of calculated endurance. In this perspective, they make sense of what is asked of them as what they have agreed to do.

Effort and Relations: How *duty*, *commitment* and *obligation* vary along two axes

I have demonstrated that the reasoning Army spouses provide for supporting their soldier-husbands coheres around not one but three over-arching justifications – *duty*, *commitment* and *obligation*. Having shown *what* wives say, I now present an analytical framework with which to understand *how* those three categories critically differ from one another. The differences between the justifications encompass variation that is important for a spouse making sense of her relationship to a loved one in harm's way. In that imperiled relationship, she confronts the questions: 1) For whom does she offer this support? Is it for herself? For her husband? For their family? For the nation? Or for an even wider cause like democracy? Or an even more expansive entity rooted in her religious beliefs? And 2) how much will she offer in support of this relationship? Is she willing to go on sacrificing without end? Is there a limit to what she will offer and endure?

While seemingly synonymous, duty, commitment and obligation, as justifications, provide different answers to these two questions. Duty implies endless effort for a greater cause. Commitment also suggests an unlimited willingness to sacrifice but for a narrower object – for a specific loved one or smaller circle of relations to whom one is specifically committed. Obligation, however, entails clear expectations of effort between a narrowed scope of individual recipients. Combining the two questions to form axes of *scope* of relations and specificity of *effort*, we see the relative position of each conceptual category (see Figure 1, at end of this chapter). *Why* spouses need different answers to these questions becomes clearer when we consider the specific contexts and interactions of military life, to be presented in subsequent chapters. Here we consider *how* the justifications differ.

Considering the general contexts of marriage and the military in which spouses are forming these justifications, it is not surprising that these two questions, *for whom* and *how much*, reflect observed changes occurring within those two larger spheres. These two questions capture fundamental dilemmas faced in both the military and marriage broadly and drive the transformation of both. Observed shifts in marriage, from an institutional to companionate to individualized model (Cherlin 2009, 2004), follow differences of scope of relations, narrowing them from broad extended community and kinship networks to the nuclear family and then to the tenuous partnership of two individuals. Similarly, an important aspect of the transition from an institutional to an occupational military (Moskos 1988) is the specification of any particular job that a soldier does for the army. Both of these changes occur along similar gradients. “For whom?” reflects a *scope of social relations* in both army spouses’ justifications and sociological models of marriage. “How much?” similarly reflects a *specificity of effort* in both their justification and models of a military in historical transition.

Along the axis of effort are the different amounts of hardship and suffering that wives are willing to endure. This axis answers the question *how much*? It parallels a critical difference between the institutional and occupational army. Under the institutional model of the army, a

service member is primarily a soldier, a “generalist,” ready to fulfill unspecified tasks, with diffuse role commitments (Moskos 1988:16). He is willing to provide whatever amount of effort the service requires. Under the occupational model, the service member is, in contrast, a “specialist” with specified responsibilities and areas of competency (Moskos 1988:16). He provides the amount of effort demanded of him by his job description.

Just as the specificity of tasks and effort within the military are purportedly shifting, the amount of effort specified in what wives say, in the concepts of duty, commitment and obligation, varies. Similar to the institutional army, duty and commitment imply that there is no end to what a wife would do to support her husband. As one wife explained when asked if she felt she and her husband had done enough for their country, she does not know how much effort would fulfill either her sense of duty to the Army or her commitment to her husband:

Um, no. I think we've done lots, but you know, it's a big animal, the military, and what we're going through in this stretch of our history, I don't know how much is enough but we're not done. He's not done and because I have been drawn into the capacity I'm in now, I'm not done either.

In contrast to the unspecified and open-ended effort entailed by either duty or commitment, obligation helps a wife believe that there is some specified amount of effort that she is expected to offer, some clear limits to her waiting, to the loneliness and fear she must endure. Similar to a soldier's job description in the occupational army, obligation indicates that a soldier's wife will do what has been specified, what she has come to expect are her tasks. One respondent points out the importance of clear and defined expectations between the spouse and the Army:

I think it's important to set expectations for people and stuff and so, I think that has been one of the, that was one of the quickest learning lessons....The Army is not going to sugar coat it and work really hard to like baby the families. You know, they do what they do, and most commanders try to give you as much information as they can and try to be as accurate as they can...

In certain contexts, as will be described in subsequent chapters, clear expectations are not available, and it is harder for a wife to make sense of the support she offers in terms of an obligation. Also, given the violent nature of military service and the possibility of being called upon to make the “ultimate sacrifice,” it is hard to see how such a bounded sense of relationship could sustain a military marriage (Moskos 1988:5). If one holds to a sense of obligation and its specified limits and reciprocations, one would have to develop distasteful equations that assign a blood price for a lost life¹⁸ (Quinn 2009, Zellizer 1979). At other times and in other contexts, however, we will see how obligation is at the core of how wives make

¹⁸ In several interviews, \$250,000 was mentioned as the amount of money a war widow would receive.

sense of what they have endured and are willing to endure, regardless of the looming possibility of experiencing a loss that has no substitute, no equivalent.

Wives also invoke various social relationships when justifying their relationship to a husband in harm's way. This axis of "relations" answers the question *for whom?* It reflects a variable in the changing nature of marriage. With the shifts from institutional to companionate and finally to individualized marriage, there has been a successive narrowing of the social relationships encompassed in marriage. Institutional marriage located a couple in a broader network of kin and cultural expectations. Companionate marriage focused on the couple itself as a dyad of intense romantic love. Finally individualized marriage has emerged as a form of personal expression, in a negotiated relationship with another, equally self-expressive partner (Cherlin 2009, 2004).

Just as the scope of relations within marriage has been shifting, the breadth of social relations implied by spouses' justifications varies. Similar to institutional marriage, duty implies a connection to some social entity greater than a specific employer, one's family or husband. As one wife explained, having a husband in the Army was about being part of something bigger than Wal-Mart.¹⁹ Commitment and obligation, on the other hand, imply narrower scopes of relating. Commitment, like companionate marriage, is mostly focused on the couple, and when thinking of their relationship in terms of commitment, many spouses focus on the bond to their husband, exclusive of and at times in spite of the Army. As another wife explains, "Jack has a job to do and he's a tool for them (the Army) but I kind of separate the two." Obligation, like individualized marriage, encompasses notions of personal negotiation and individualized expectations. When asked what kind of recognition she and her husband got from others, one wife replied, "This is what we signed up for. We knew what we were getting into. Nobody else owes us anything." Unlike the public recognition for a duty fulfilled to a greater cause and different from the bond of commitment between two partners in marriage and parenting, obligation reflects a scope of social relations centered around individuals and their choices.

Placed in this analytic framework, we can see how the concepts of duty, commitment and obligation variably answer an Army spouse's critical questions of *how much* and *for whom* she will endure in a relationship imperiled by war. Why the answers to these questions differ, or why spouses variably draw on three concepts instead of just one or two, will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

The correspondence between duty, commitment and obligation and the shifts in efforts and relations has two significances. First, it is a confirmation that what I have heard and the categories around which I have organized those thoughts are neither unreasonable nor unexpected given existing research models. Second, these three concepts, duty, commitment, and obligation, map onto the gradients or axes of variation in those pre-existing models confirming the significance of the variation captured in their constitutive ideal types: institutional, companionate and individualized marriages and institutional and occupational

¹⁹ While in terms of personnel, Wal-Mart with 2.1 million employees (Biseda 2006) is actually larger, it lacks the kind of greater purpose that Louise and other spouses see the Army, with 570,471 personnel Department of Defense Personnel and Military Statistics 2011(<http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/ms0.pdf>), as having.

militaries. Both of those models developed by Moskos and Cherlin respectively, however, intended to do more than describe variation. They sought to indicate a direction of change. The next chapter will demonstrate that the justifications collected from army spouses do not substantiate the predicted movements toward individualized marriage and an occupational army.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have heard how army wives think about being married to a loved one in harm's way. There is no predominant way that they make sense of a relationship situated between the bonds of love and the violence of war. Rather, I heard a variety of justifications that cohere around three conceptual categories: *duty*, *commitment* and *obligation*. Internally, these three categories differ from one another in terms of scope of relations and specificity effort.

When wives made sense of their relationships in terms of duty, they saw themselves as ready to give selflessly and without limit to a cause or "mission" greater than themselves. The scope of relations was broad, and the amount of effort was limitless. This overarching sentiment included notions of service, pride, humility, recognition, and distinction.

Alternatively when wives deployed the concept of commitment to make sense of having a loved one in harm's way, they still saw themselves as willing to give without limit but to a narrower social relationship. The amount of effort and support they were willing to expend was, in these instances, still limitless, but the scope of relations was narrowed. Instead of duty to the nation or a transcendent humanitarian cause, they spoke of commitment to their partner in marriage and parenting. Sometimes this commitment was to the community itself -- the particular institutions, cultures, and practices of life on a military base -- but not to the Army's mission. Overall this sentiment captured thoughts that focused on marriage and parenting, the military life style, and a relationship to their husbands in spite of the Army.

Wives also tried to make sense of having husbands in harm's way by thinking in terms of specified amounts of effort and narrowed scopes of relations. They could support an imperiled partner as long as they knew precisely for whom and what they would have to endure. I present these thoughts under the category of obligation. Obligation encompassed notions of holding the Army to its promises and advocating for fairness in a relationship of guarded reciprocity between the command and the wife. Under the category of obligation is also the idea that a wife has freely chosen this situation and that she owes nothing to anyone else and has nothing owed to her that has not been specified. When thinking in terms of obligation, wives are thinking about how many months a deployment is supposed to be and how many deployments can be expected in a given number of years; they are not thinking about recognition from civilians for a selfless duty performed for the good of the nation. When making sense of the dangers involved in marriage to a soldier in a time of war, wives sometimes see those hazards as what their husbands, as inherent thrill-seekers, want in their line of work. As part of an emerging form of marriage focused on each partner's self-fulfillment, a wife feels

obliged to support such an adventurer husband in a career that, though dangerous, makes him happy.

The axes along which these justifications vary, of scope and effort, parallel observed transitions in the institutional fields of marriage and military. As such, they capture fundamental dilemmas that face anyone involved in either or, as in the case of army wives, both institutions: are expectations of effort specified or unspecified? Is the scope of this relationship narrow or expansive? That the three groups of justifications fall along these gradients assures us that I have organized the disparate and multiple thoughts of army wives into meaningful categories. To paraphrase Swidler, these overarching categories are significant cultural tools which these women varyingly deploy in facing the personal and structural dilemmas of military marriage (Swidler 2001).

Returning to our initial expectations drawn from current sociological thinking, the categories that army wives use in thinking about their relationships have broad significance. First, this is a clear case in which people do indeed develop justifications in the “affective regime” of human relations, even when their dilemma revolves around a combination of love and violence. Where obligation introduces what is specifiable or *calculable* to justify a wife’s support for her soldier-husband, the other two, duty and commitment, build justifications upon what is *incalculable* – an unspecified amount of effort, an unlimited gift of love in the face of potentially complete destruction. In short, even within the realm of the incalculable, people develop justifications.²⁰ In later chapters, we will see that these justifications follow observable patterns and relationships with specific contexts of space and time.

Second, we can conclude that the justifications wives deploy reflect more than a false consciousness imposed by a hegemonic military and patriarchy. When wives talked about the hardships they endure as fulfillment of a duty, it was never as the duties of a wife to her husband. Their presumption that they, too, serve the nation is less evidence of an encroaching militarist ideology than evidence of a threat they as women and civilians pose to exclusions that have traditionally determined who is and is not eligible for military service. They are the ones encroaching on the Army’s domain. When they make sense of their relationship in terms of commitment to their partner, it is usually with reluctant acceptance of, if not outright, resistance to the Army. When they think in terms of obligation, they guard against the institution’s excessive demands and serve as advocates for their otherwise silent, stoic husbands. While these justifications are imbued with ideologies, they are more complicated and dynamic than some views of militarism and patriarchy would have us believe.

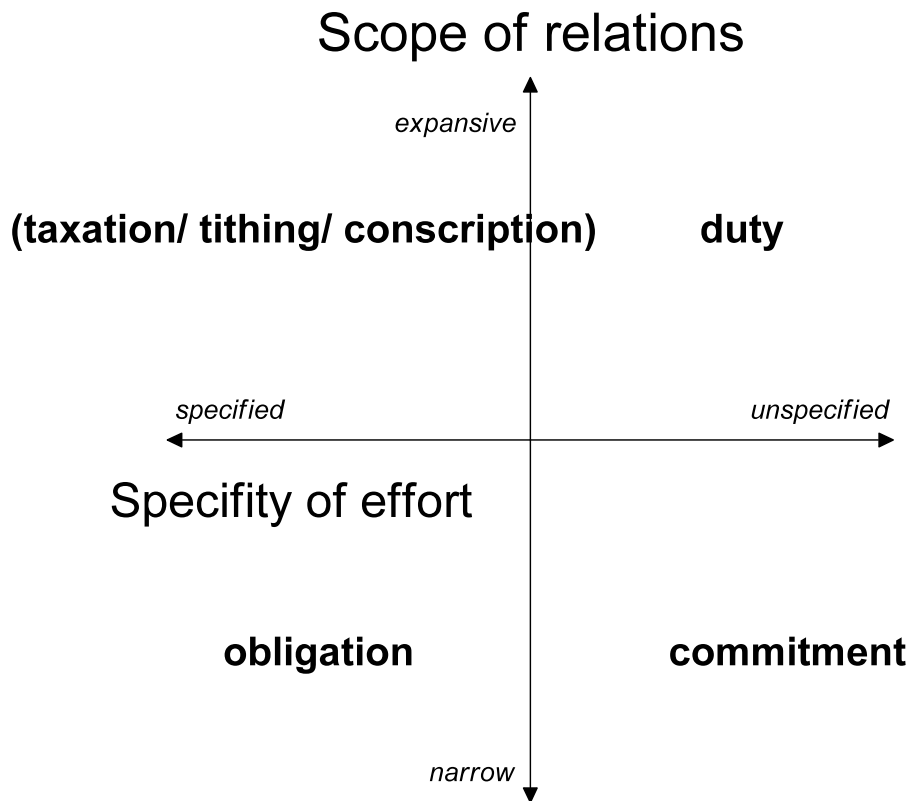
Third, these justifications significantly vary along a spectrum of altruism and individualism. When wives think in terms of duty, they invoke a notion of sacrifice. They see themselves as willing to make sacrifices and support the sacrifice made by their husbands in the

²⁰ That two justifications (duty and commitment) center around incalculable, unspecified amounts of effort while obligation is focused on what is calculable in relationship of reciprocal exchanges confirms what Thévenot and Blotanski write about affective relations being on a border between the calculable and incalculable: “The emotionally intense scene, in which people connected by an affective link are involved, is precisely set at the border between a regime of action which aims at dismissing the measure of equivalence and, on the other hand, a regime of action in which people bring back such measures of equivalence and lay stress on them” (1999: 362).

name of some greater, social cause. When wives think in terms of commitment, they understand their hardships for the sake of the deep-felt union that they share with one other person. When they think in terms of obligation, they focus on the consequences of individual choices and clearly delineated relations that they have individually with others and the Army. They make sense of what they endure by knowing what exactly is expected of them and what they will receive in return. While this individualist perspective is strong, it is not the only justification that army wives deploy. The next chapter will explore how these justifications fail to confirm predictions of ineluctable trends towards individualism and “de-institutionalization,” in either the military or marriage. Subsequent chapters, however, will demonstrate that through specific interactions and contexts of space and time, wives do tend to come to speak more in terms of obligation than either duty or commitment.

Figure 1

Variation of duty, commitment and obligation along axes of effort and relations



Introduction

This chapter places the ways that army wives think about having a loved one at war within the broader historical and institutional contexts of marriage and the military. The previous chapter introduced the three main categories – duty, commitment, and obligation—that organize the way army wives think about their relationship to a husband in peril. It showed that these categories vary from one another by differently answering the questions *for whom?* and *how much?* wives are willing to endure in a military marriage. These two questions underlie the fundamental dilemmas created by a life that requires combining the military and marriage. They also delineate broader changes in the institutions of the military and marriage. This chapter establishes that duty, commitment, and obligation share an elective affinity with values associated with different forms of marriage (institutional, companionate, and individualized) and the military (institutional and occupational) identified by sociologists.¹ It, however, challenges sociologists' claims that both institutions are headed ineluctably in a particular direction of deinstitutionalization. Instead, the data presented here show that previous ways of organizing and therefore thinking about the military and marriage persist, not just residually, but in ways that are significant to how army wives make meaning of their experience of the challenges of military marriage.

The Institutional Context of Marriage and the Military

Two prominent sociological models of changes in the military and marriage have been developed by Charles Moskos and Andrew Cherlin, respectively. Both portray the military and marriage as “de-institutionalized” institutions.

In his Institution/Occupation Hypothesis, Moskos claims that since the end of the draft and the founding of an all volunteer force (AVF) in the 1970s, the military increasingly organized around an *occupational model*. The armed forces have become less a unique institution and more like civilian workplaces. In addition to structural changes in compensation, evaluations, legal expectations, and the separation of residential and work life, there have been shifts in the kinds of values emphasized within the organization. Under the older *institutional model*, soldiers legitimated their service “in terms of values and norms, that is, a purpose transcending individual self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good” (Moskos 1988:16). They saw their

¹ This chapter also amends the predominant institutional/occupational model of transition in the military by adding a middle category to describe the experience of military life organized around small scale groups of affinity – what I term a “comradeship” model. In this paradigm, soldiers make sense of military experience neither as service to a larger institution (institutional) nor as the pursuit of individual interests in a career trajectory (occupational) but through an affective sense of belonging and bonding to those nearest them with whom they share the experience of war. I base this model on observations of psycho-social experience of war in WWI (Freud 1959 and Rivers 1918) and WWII (Stoufer et al 1949 & 1950).

participation in the military as “a calling captured by words like *honor, duty, and country*” (Moskos 1988:16, original emphasis). Their point of reference was the Army, and their responsibilities, at any given moment, expanded to whatever the service required. In terms of the axis of effort presented in the last chapter, the amount of effort that the institutional Army can require from a soldier is unspecified.

Under the occupational model, soldiers legitimate their participation in terms of the marketplace: is this the optimal opportunity for them to exchange their labor and skills? They think first in terms of their individual careers and how far they will individually progress either inside or outside the military. This is a job within which “rights are counterbalanced by responsibilities to meet contractual obligations” (Moskos 1988:17). Their point of reference is with an occupational group outside of the military, and their responsibilities and the effort they contribute to the armed forces are specified and clearly delineated. Again, in terms of the axis of effort from the last chapter, the occupational Army specifies what is required of each individual soldier according to his or her job title or “military occupational specialty” (MOS).

Moskos positions this particular shift in the organization of the military within a broader “master trend” in western societies towards greater bureaucratic rationalism (Moskos 1988:17). In this overarching trend, integration becomes more functional and individualistic than normative and collective. Moskos understands the transition from an institutional to an occupational military in those terms.

Specific to military spouses, the shift from an institutional to an occupational model brings about a change in their role. They no longer live on post as an integral part of the social life of the military, but instead are more distanced from the military community, both physically and socially (Moskos 1988:16). Given this change, we would also expect a shift in the values that wives use to legitimate and justify being married to a soldier. We would expect them to view their husbands’ position in the military like any other civilian job.

Just as Moskos worried about the consequences of this shift in values for soldiers’ mission performance, we might ask, which values – occupational or institutional – will sustain a wife’s support for her soldier-husband in a time of war? Will conditions of war “re-institutionalize”² the military and bring the concept of duty to the fore, for soldiers and their spouses? Or have wives come to make sense of the dangers that military service brings to their families exclusively in terms of calculated risks taken in an occupational labor market? Three decades and three wars later, to what extent has the shift that Moskos observed in the late 1980s taken hold in the lives of military families? If Moskos’ model of the occupational army is correct, wives will see the hardships and dangers they face as calculated and acceptable risks, like those of any other occupation. They will make sense of the support they offer their soldier-husbands in terms of a choice they made and of an obligation they are bound to fulfill, not as a duty to their country, but a contractual agreement, laden with benefits as well as liabilities.

² While Moskos saw an overwhelming trend toward occupationalism, he did note a few counter-examples of what he called “re-institutionalization.” One example, mentioned above, is the decision to rotate troops through combat as units instead of individuals.

According to Cherlin, marriage has also experienced de-institutionalization, as the social norms that define partners' behavior weaken, and there has been a general shift from a companionate to an individualized model of the marital experience. Throughout the postwar era under the companionate type of marriage, partners derived gratification from playing strictly defined marital roles: being good providers, good homemakers, and responsible parents (Cherlin 2004:851). In companionate marriage, which itself superseded an older model of institutional marriage (Burgess & Locke 1945, cited by Cherlin 2004), partners develop intense sentimental bonds to each other, emphasizing the romantic relationship at the core of a nuclear, rather than an extended family. With a shift towards an individualized type of marriage in the 1970s, roles have become more flexible and open to negotiation. Partners derive satisfaction from "development of their own sense of self and the expression of their feelings" rather than satisfaction from successfully playing roles of wife, mother, husband, or father (Cherlin 2004:852).

Consequently, the practical importance of marriage declined while its symbolic importance remained if not increased (Cherlin 2004:855). Marriage, which was once the foundation of adult life, is now its capstone, as more and more couples regard it as something that they achieve after other aspects of life have been accomplished (educational and career goals). Marriage becomes a marker of prestige versus conformity. The general significance of this is that marriage will still be a common relationship but more of one of distinction than a fundamental union through which couples universally accomplish, together, the tasks of life.

Like Moskos, Cherlin locates these changes in the form that marriage assumes within larger master trends in American society. He attributes the shift away from a relationship ensconced within larger kinship networks, to a nuclear family, to one that is ultimately the tenuous union of two self-interested individuals, to the rise of "expressive individualism" (Cherlin 2009:29). Within this larger trend, marriage partners are foremost concerned with their personal development, sense of fulfillment, and happiness.

It is unclear what the consequence of this purported shift from institutional to companionate to individualized marriage is for military couples.³ On the one hand, we might expect that individualized marriage offers relatively little practical support to soldiers and their spouses. What roles they could perform for each other are unclear and are constantly open to negotiation. On the other hand, given the uncertainties and unpredictability of military life, such flexibility could provide contemporary army wives with advantages not available to women in the past who dealt with having husbands at war while constrained by the values and expectations of previous models of marriage (institutional or companionate). Additionally, individualized marriage's emphasis on independence and self-development might better enable spouses to handle long periods of separation. And if the meaning of marriage is now rooted less in practicality than in symbolism, is there a better sphere than the military to find esteem and to gain prestige? If marriage signifies that one has it together, might sustaining a marriage to a

³ While the case of army wives helps us examine the question of how well suited individualized marriage is for the conditions of military service, it also has broader significance, providing an example of how well individualized marriages stand up under any kind of stress.

soldier indicate that one really has it together? Either way, if Cherlin's description of an individualized marriage holds for army couples, we can expect wives to make sense of the particular conditions of military marriage in terms of self-development, flexibility, and symbols of prestige and success.

Taken together, we would expect from these models of de-institutionalized marriage and the military, that contemporary Army spouses would make sense of having a loved one in harm's way by saying something like:

- It's a job like any other job.
- The dangers he faces are risks we have accepted in the performance of a job we both signed up for.
- Nobody owes us anything more than what we agreed to.
- We aren't doing anything more than what we agreed to.
- It's important for his own self-fulfillment to do what he does, and I find in this military marriage the opportunity to develop who I am as well.
- We are the kind of people who are strong enough and successful enough to face these hardships.

In the analysis below, we examine what army wives say in relation to these expectations. How do their thoughts correspond to different models of marriage and the military? We find that although duty, commitment, and obligation correspond to the changing models of the military (institutional, comradeship, occupational) and marriage (institutional, companionate, individualized) that Moskos (1988) and Cherlin (2004) identify (see Table 1⁴), no particular concept emerged as dominant in the justifications that military spouses apply to their relationships. Given the shift in marriage and the military towards individualism and de-institutionalization, respectively, we would expect wives to think mostly in terms of obligation. However, respondents shared other ways of thinking that match older models of both institutions.

Table 1: Categories of Justification Corresponding with Paradigms of Military Organization and Models of Marriage

	Duty	Commitment	Obligation
Military organizational paradigms	Institutional	Comradeship	Occupational
Models of Marriage	Institutional	Companionate	Individualized

⁴ The thoughts represented under the category of duty correspond to the values in both the institutional military and institutional marriage. Commitment matches companionate marriage and points to an intermediary, affective relationship missing in Moskos's Institutional/Occupational hypothesis that I term "Comradeship." While obligation corresponds to what other researchers claim is predominant in both today's occupational military and individualized marriages, it is not the only kind of justification wives call on.

Institutional Military, Institutional Marriage and Duty

In contrast to Cherlin's and Moskos' claims regarding the trend toward the de-institutionalization of marriage and the military, thoughts and attitudes associated with an institutional army and institutional marriage help to frame the ways that contemporary army spouses are making sense of the dilemmas of military marriage. For many wives, support for their soldier-husbands is motivated by something larger than their personal relationship and they are willing to go to any end for that purpose. Under the institutional model of the Army, the organization secures its legitimacy "from values and norms ...transcending self-interest in favor of a presumed higher good" (Moskos 1988:16). Soldiers see themselves as pursuing a calling or vocation "captured in words like *duty*, *honor*, and *country*" (Moskos 1988:16). Their wives, similarly, see themselves supporting their soldier-husbands out of a sense of duty. This is not the duty of a wife to her husband, but it is a duty she shares with him to serve something larger than herself and her marriage.

One wife of an in-flight paramedic links duty to one's husband and to one's country when describing how the events of September 11, 2001 affected her family. On that day, her husband decided to join the Army National Guard. Rather than enlist herself, this wife chooses to serve her country by caring for her soldier husband and their children:

I didn't think [to join after 9/11] because I was a mom. I had two daughters at the time. [Pause.] That's all I ever wanted to do was to be a mom and take care of the family. My feeling, when he came to me to tell me he wanted to join the military, my thought was that my job was to support him and that's the way I can serve my country is to take care of our kids and our family, while he is doing what he needs to do.

This respondent's sense of duty is not limited to the duty of a wife to her husband. Instead, she said that she and her husband will encourage all of their daughters to "look to the military after finishing school" and consider joining it.

The repeated references to a sense of shared service demonstrate that the institutional army's notion of a military vocation is still meaningful. The Army is more than just a husbands' job. For this spouse, quoted above, her husband's participation in the military is different from other forms of employment because it entails service, service that she too is called to perform in her role as an army wife. Many spouses echoed the view that they perform an important function in serving and working alongside their husbands to advance the military's mission. For these women, the "something greater than themselves" is the cause or purpose encompassed in the "mission."

When asked how they justified a relationship in which the Army always took precedence, wives often quoted the Army's saying, "Mission First." In this, they accepted the institutional value of sacrifice (Moskos 1988:16) for a greater purpose. When asked how they

identify themselves, as a civilian, a military spouse, or someone in the military, most respondents said they think of themselves as a military spouse. Most said that no matter the location, whether on or off post, they showed their military cards when asked for identification. In this way, spouses that I interviewed shared a primary identification with their institutional role characteristic of soldiers in an institutional army (Moskos 1988:18).

As noted in Chapter 2, wives often see no limit to what they will do in fulfilling their duty and supporting their soldier-husbands. As one wife, whose husband has been deployed two times to Iraq and two times to Afghanistan, explains:

When will I have done enough for my country? I don't know. I don't think you can ever do enough for your country. Have you done enough for your country?

This open-ended sense of duty parallels a characteristic of the institutional army in which a soldier's duties are not limited to their military specialties (Moskos 1988:18). Under the institutional army, a soldier and his wife are both subject to the "requirements of service," whatever they may be.

The institutional army is different and apart from the rest of society. In their separateness, soldiers "enjoy esteem from the larger society" (Moskos 1988:16). Similar to the esteem that soldiers enjoy, we have seen how important the pride that comes from recognition is to the wives' thinking. In an all volunteer force, wives also see this service as the calling of a unique, distinct group of soldiers and families and not as the universal duty of all citizens.

Respondents also insist that their marriages and families are as divergent from those of civilian society as the structures of the military itself. Respondents often made note of how civilian friends or family could sympathize but never quite understand their situation. As one respondent explained:

Everyone always says, 'I know how you feel, my husband, when he goes away on a business trip, it is hard' and it's like, 'yeah? I'm sure it is hard for you, but your husband is just on a business trip; he is not in a war zone. You get to talk to him any time you want to and he will come home soon.' So people don't understand that; they try to empathize with you, but they can't. Only people that fit in that situation (can).

In this light, the experience of a military wife is one that can only be shared with other military wives. It is, in this instance, as divergent from civilian experience as the institutional army is from civilian employers.

Beyond values and identifications, structural features of an institutional army also persist. For regular Army families, work and residence are still adjacent. Though more families might live off post, they tend to live in remote communities dominated by a military presence. That is, since the end of the Cold War and the concentration of army posts to a few, rurally located mega-bases, they might live off post or "on the economy" but in towns that are mostly

Army.⁵ Additionally, spouses and families still seem to be integral parts of institutional life in the army, though in different forms from what spouses often called the “Old Army.”⁶ The officers’ wives clubs with their tea parties disappeared, but the Family Readiness Group, integrating all families attached to a particular unit, emerged. This might be an instance of “re-institutionalization” or the reinvigoration of institutional features (Moskos 1989:23) that came with current war.

Values and characteristics associated with the institutional army persist in the sense of duty that respondents call upon to justify their marriages to soldiers in the global war on terrorism. In contrast to sociological models that assert its demise (Moskos & Woods 1989), the institutional army and its values are still significant. In subsequent chapters, we will, however, see that this significance is dependent upon particular contexts and interactions, so much so that at times and places, they do recede behind other values.

If duty, as a category of thinking among contemporary army wives, is consonant with the values of an institutionally organized Army, duty also corresponds with the values of institutional marriage. The factors that supported institutional marriage were largely external, formal, and authoritarian and included the law, mores and public opinion, tradition, the authority of the family head, rigid discipline, and elaborate ritual (Burgess and Locke, 1953:vii). One entered marriage and held it together not so much for the sake of one’s partner as for the expectations others had for the married couple. In various ways, the concept of duty deployed by contemporary army spouses reflects these same factors and values.

Wives, particularly those living on or near large bases, mentioned that the support they offered their soldier-husbands was often rooted in the expectations of other army wives. What they pushed themselves to do was not so much what their husbands asked of them as it was what other wives – representing the Army’s extended family – expected from them. “Sucking it up” and “keeping a stiff upper lip” were two things that other soldiers’ wives demanded and demonstrated by example. They presented and enforced a code of behavior that included how to handle deployments as well as interactions with other soldiers.

⁵ Unlike regular Army families, National Guard families do live amidst predominantly civilian populations. Given the institutional values that dominate the culture of the National Guard – particularly the notion of a *citizen-soldier* who has a separate, civilian occupation, the thoughts and attitudes of Guard spouses also correspond to the ideal type institutional army. The National Guard is in ways similar to examples that closely approximate the ideal institutional force: the Swiss militias and the Israeli Defense Force (Moskos & Woods 1988: 12). The comparative cases of Army and Guard families will be considered in the next chapter on the effect of context on justification.

⁶ When asked if the Army was what she thought it would be before marrying, one wife described her expectations based on the image of the Old Army: “I did expect the tight knit...I don’t know what you call it...you see it in movies....where they are sitting around having their coffee and tea and wearing gloves. I kind of perceived that and it really didn’t really happen that way. Part of me is glad and the other part of me is a little disappointed. But that’s the Old Army I believe. That’s the one my grandparents were in.”

The institutional family is a patriarchal one with a strong family head. In the extended, patriarchal family, there is “practically complete subordination of the individual members of the family to the authority of the patriarch” (Burgess and Locke 1953:23). In the institutional family this subordination includes the eldest sons, even after they have established their own households. Similarly, in a military family, the patriarchal figure is not always the soldier-husband. He, too, is subordinate to the authority of the Army generally and his commander specifically. Numerous respondents spoke of the intervention or presence of this external authority in their relationships. One wife, who admitted to having picked a boyfriend who would shock her father, later encouraged her boyfriend-turned-husband to join the Army to get discipline and structure. Another wife related how the command intervened to insure that her estranged husband paid for her support. In direct and indirect ways, army spouses support their husbands not because he tells them to but because they know their husbands are themselves subject to another authority, characteristic of the factors that hold together institutional marriages.

In institutional families, marriages are typically arranged by parents with an emphasis on *prudence* as opposed to *romance* (Burgess & Locke 1953:23). None of the respondents in this study were in arranged marriages, but, like with institutional marriages, there was a great emphasis on their adjustment, not to their husbands, but to his extended “family group” – in this case, the Army. As one spouse responded when asked about her expectations before becoming a soldier’s wife:

I had an idea of what it would be like and what would be expected of me, but that idea was so far from reality. There were so many things I had to learn about, about how the chain of command works, about how we would get a place to live, where I would find a doctor, how to register my car. Where we would buy food. Simple things, like getting groceries, requires an ID card and takes place in a “commissary.” I had never heard that word before we married. So, yeah, there were a lot of things I was learning about the military while I was also learning what it was like to live with him.

In this way, wives of soldiers adjust to marriage both to an individual and the encompassing institutional world to which he belongs. Additionally somewhat like how wives accepted marriages that were either arranged or at least mediated by an extensive institutional kinship system, the values motivating army spouses are at times more pragmatic and tough than idealistic and romantic.

The historic functions of the family (economic, educational, recreational, health, protective, and religious) are found within the institutional family (Burgess and Locke 1953:23). Many military families, given how often they relocate and the wages and benefits that can support a single-worker family, do perform many of those functions domestically. A number of the interviewees home-school their children and run businesses from their homes. They seem to structure recreational activities for their children rather than relying on whatever the neighbors are doing. Where the soldier of the traditional army had every aspect of his life taken

care of (his food, clothes, shelter, hygiene, recreation⁷), many of those functions in the all volunteer force have shifted to his wife.⁸ Even when resources and services are available for families, many of them choose to decline them. Here, one wife explains the struggle she experienced before allowing herself to use the resources available to her and her family:

I think there is a fine line between “No, I can do it; I can do it” and the other part going “I can’t.” You kind of have to give in a little and go “Okay. I think my kids are better if they go to the sitters or the day care for a couple of hours.” You are not a bad mother.⁹

To the consternation of those trying to assist military families, many army wives and their soldiers try to do it all on their own. This desire is rooted in how their sense of duty parallels aspects of the institutional family (a family that fulfills most functions for itself) as well as the notion that they, as both soldier and soldier’s wife, are the ones who serve others, and are not in need of help themselves.

Comradeship Military, Companionate Marriage, and Commitment

As we learned in the last chapter, Army spouses are not always thinking of service to a greater cause or their duty in the eyes of an extended community. They also find the reasons and motivations for supporting their soldier-husbands inside their own marriages, within the commitment they have to those in their immediate family. Justifications based on commitment correspond to many of the characteristics of companionate or companionship marriage. Cherlin observed that relationships described by this ideal type, like those described by institutional marriage before them, would also fade from significance (Cherlin 2004:848). The responses of military wives, however, indicate that commitment between partners is an often heard justification for facing the dangers of war.

Similar to companionship marriage, commitment as a justification for the bond between a wife and her soldier shares many aspects of the comradeship between soldiers. Moskos’ institutional/occupational model of change in the military lacks an intermediate category that describes intense, interpersonal relationships. Drawing from other literature concerning the military, the middle category of comradeship best describes a military experience organized around small groups that share strong personal affinities.

⁷ The term GI stands for “government issue,” indicating that everything the soldier would need is provided by the government.

⁸ A study of laundry in the military, like barbering in other communities (Sanchez-Jankowski 2008), would reveal, given the particular importance of uniforms in the military sphere, many implicit social relations and their transformations over time. For instance, “sudswomen,” the women who washed clothes by day and, according to some, offered sexual services by night to early American soldiers, were the first women to be issued military orders by the US Army, long before any spouses were officially recognized as accompanying their husbands (Alt & Stone 1991:21).

⁹ Fort Jackson has four day care or “child development centers.” Families with deployed soldiers receive free hours every month. Otherwise, day care at these nationally accredited centers cost less than \$4.00/hour.

More than “hatred of the enemy,” more than what they were fighting for, and even more than simply “getting the job done” so they could go home, the thought that motivated American soldiers in World War II was “not letting the other men down” (Stouffer et al. 1950b:178).¹⁰ What kept them fighting was the bond they had with their brothers-in-arms. Other researchers and commentators have pointed to the way that this bond seems to exist, not just co-exist; it is the fundamental way participants understand and survive the experience of war (Moore and Galloway 1992).¹¹ To ignore this bond, wrote Freud, would pose not only a theoretical but also a practical danger.¹² As W.H.R. Rivers, treating shell-shocked soldiers during World War I, discovered:

...men of unquestioned bravery could succumb to overwhelming fear and ... that the most effective motivation to overcome that fear was something stronger than patriotism, abstract principles, or hatred of the enemy. It was the love of soldiers for one another (quoted in Anderson 2006).

In this light, soldiers will do whatever they have to do, not out of a sense duty to country or obedience to authority, but out of a commitment to those other soldiers they have come to identify with, care for and love. Among other things, this comradeship model of military organization can help explain the apparent paradox between American soldier’s ideological cynicism¹³ and their motivation to fight.

Similarly, commitment as a justification for supporting her fighting soldier explains a wife’s willingness to endure hardships, but not for any social connections broader than her own nuclear family. Comparing the long-term bond that she shares with her husband to the ones he shares with his comrades in the National Guard and at his civilian job as a firefighter, this wife explains why she is not jealous of those other relationships:

¹⁰ The largest proportion of surveyed Soldiers believed they were fighting to survive; followed by keeping what we have (not dominate the world); and then to guarantee democratic liberties [Stouffer et al 1950 vol 1: 434].

¹¹ “Another and far more transcendent love came to us unbidden on the battlefields as it does on every battlefield in every war man has ever fought. We discovered in that depressing, hellish place where death was our constant companion that we loved each other. We killed for each other, we died for each other and we wept for each other. And in time we came to love each other as brothers. In battle our world shrank to the man on our left and the man on our right and the enemy all around. We held each other’s lives in our hands and we learned to share our fears, our hopes, our dreams as readily as we shared what little else good came our way” (Moore and Galloway 1992: Prologue).

¹² “The neglect of this libidinal factor in an army, even when it is not the only factor operative, seems to be not merely a theoretical omission but also a practical danger.” (Freud 1959:34)

¹³ Only 5% of American soldiers surveyed during World War II gave “idealistic reasons” as their incentives to fight (Stouffer et al 1949:108). And 48% sometimes or very often thought that war “was not worth fighting” (Stouffer et al. 1949:153).

Probably less me than the rest of the wives because we have been together for so long, we have basically grown up together. He has a bond with the firefighters that he works with and he has a bond with the guys in the unit that he works with, but we have been best friends forever and still are; so, I have an easier time sharing him than the rest of the wives do.

Because she and her husband have been together since high school and weathered many family crises, including two floods and a bankruptcy, she has a commitment to him that is not threatened by the comradeship he shares with his colleagues.

This commitment helps her make sense of what she does, for her life partner and their children, not necessarily for the nation or its war aims. And just as comradeship can motivate a soldier to fight regardless of how he feels about his military or political leaders, commitment explains how wives can support their husbands without, and perhaps in spite of, supporting the Army. As another wife states:

I don't trust the government's decisions about why we are there; I don't know how honest they are with us about why we are in Iraq and Afghanistan; [my husband] has a job and he's a tool for them, but I kind of separate the two. I don't like our policies at all.

In this instance, this wife did not express a sense of doing her duty to support her nation and its leaders; but this does not stop her from supporting her husband out of a sense of commitment to him, as her husband, not as a soldier.

While not exactly promiscuous with whom they share the bonds of comradeship¹⁴, most soldiers probably have more than one battle buddy. Unlike comradeship among members of a platoon or company, an army wife's commitment to her husband does not, or in the minds of many interviewees should not, include more than one soldier. Yet, as one wife explains, the possibility of sharing that intimacy, particularly in a community filled with so many men like her husband during long periods of his absence, is always there:

An army wife is committed to her husband. And that means a lot of things. One is fidelity of course. I think there's such an opportunity to be unfaithful. Even the Army - I've never been close to cheating but I could see how somebody could. You know like I got to that point last time [her husband's last deployment] because of that second year-long deployment. If I really wanted to do something, I could do it, so easily right now and I didn't. And um, so I think being committed to your marriage [is what it takes to be a good army wife].

¹⁴ In this way, comradeship is different from the broader identification with the entire Army implied in duty and the values of the institutional military (Moskos 1988: 16). In the next chapter, we will see that in the context of the military post, soldiers can sometimes lack any sense of duty or commitment towards other soldiers whom they do not know.

Living in a community with so many other men who themselves value the shared bonds of comradeship and whose training and professional disciplines result in a uniformity of appearance, one can recognize the temptations to find substitutes for an absent partner.

If an army wife has a legitimate opportunity for her commitment to be extended beyond just her own husband and children, it would be her commitment to the military life style – to the military institutions, practices and values that she enjoys as an end in themselves. Numerous spouses recognized having an attraction to men in uniform and to the military way of life before marrying their husbands. As one wife shared:

...I always wanted to be a card carrier, you know like someone who could actually get on post with an I.D. card and stuff....it felt like I was on the fringe of belonging to the military. So, I think there was an aspect where it would have been cool to be officially affiliated.

This wife liked the idea of being part of the military even before meeting her current husband, not because of the Army's mission or greater purpose but out of an attraction to its way of life.

Frequent moves to remote and even sometimes foreign duty stations is another aspect of that way of life and a commitment to it that contrasts with aspects of institutional marriage. Numerous interviewees discussed marrying a soldier as a welcome opportunity to leave their hometowns and to get away from extended family. Travelling the world with their soul mate became a romantic escape from the pressures and restrictions of a broader kinship community and an opportunity to focus on the relationship at the heart of a companionship marriage.

Another wife provides a final example of how some army wives, in this case her mother-in-law, pay closer attention to the benefits of the military life style than to the military mission in which their soldiers are involved. When she first moved to Fort Jackson, her husband was deployed before she was even able to unpack. Her mother-in-law, a lifetime Army spouse, called her and, according to the interviewee, was more interested in the quality of the PX¹⁵ than the details of her son's deployment. While the mother could have been avoiding a difficult subject, the respondent used this example to illustrate how she felt some wives came to make sense of such difficulties: by committing to the institutions and practices that make up the military life style.

Comradeship as an organizing framework for military experience also draws on attachments to aspects of a whole way of life, not just the intense bonds shared between soldiers. The loss of these affective bonds might play a large part in the difficulties soldiers experience when leaving combat or veterans experience when leaving the military.¹⁶ In sum,

¹⁵ Post Exchanges (PX's) are non-profit retail stores run by the Army and Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES) for soldiers and their dependents. Any profits that are accumulated are returned to the community, usually to the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) services, including the youth centers, gymnasias, swimming pools, roller rinks, etc on post.

¹⁶ With regard to the effects of trauma, it is important to note that soldiers experience many situations that could be traumatic. The question is why some events and not others become so. The answer is often not in the specific

the sense of commitment with which wives justify the support they give their husbands parallels the comradeship that underlies how the military experience holds together. They both reflect intense feelings shared between a close group of members, each willing to go to the furthest ends for one another.

Where commitment, as expressed by interviewees, reflects values of comradeship in the military, it also captures attitudes and thoughts associated with the companionship model of marriage. This model is intended to capture the American family from 1945 to the 1970s. When comparing this model of marriage to the older institutional type, Burgess and Locke (1953: vii, my emphasis) explicitly reference comradeship: the unity of the companionship marriage “inheres less and less in community pressures and more and more in such interpersonal relationships as the mutual affection, the sympathetic understanding, and the *comradeship* of its members”. In this kind of marriage, a wife and husband are comrades, committed to one another and their family, around a bond of shared affections. Their union is not a means to some other end but an end in itself.

This is the kind of motivation captured in the notion of commitment used by the interviewees in this study and deployed as a way of understanding why they support their soldier-husbands. The marital relationship itself with its expectations of commitment becomes the source of their capacity to endure the very challenges presented to it by army life. Thus, holding a military marriage together seems to depend on a commitment to doing so. As one wife explains:

I don't think there's anything that you're born with, you know, that makes you more able to [hold a military marriage together], but I think it really comes down to, like, to, to taking your wedding vows seriously.

More specifically, Burgess and Locke described the permanence of companionship marriage as depending on “the tenuous bonds of affection, temperamental compatibility, and mutual interests” (1953:24). These are aspects of a relationship that are internal to it: as long as they really love each other, they can keep it together through anything. This is a sentiment offered at times by many spouses. Given the serious challenges external to a military relationship, we will hear what happens to this kind of commitment-centered thinking in specific interactions and contexts.

The division of labor characteristic of a companionship marriage finds a parallel in the sense of commitment, but there are also specific difficulties for this separation of roles in the context of a military marriage, particularly deployments. In a family centered around companionship marriage, each partner performs a specifically defined role (Cherlin 2004:851). In that role, each member does their part with an unbounded sense of loyalty – willing to do whatever they must as wife, husband, parent or child. Unlike duty and institutional marriage, commitment and companionship marriage imply specific roles and spheres; effort in those

level of horror in this or that episode but what is happening to the interpersonal bonds or, as I call it here, the comradeship, that have heretofore made terrifying events tolerable (Freud 1959:36).

spheres is unbounded. Under commitment and within a companionate marriage, an army wife will do whatever she needs to out of a relationship to her husband and family; she does not serve the military or the nation alongside her husband. We will see how problems in this committed partnership emerge when the husband is absent on deployment and his wife assumes his specific role.

From the outset, commitment, as a justification for military marriage, does not match another aspect of companionship marriage: democratic decision making. According to Burgess and Locke (1953:23), companionship marriage was based on an equality of partners and consensus in decision making. Within the military context, it is hard for husbands and wives to see themselves as equals. As soldiers, the partner who is a uniformed service member has greater access to the institution but is also subject to conditions that the civilian partner is not. As noted above, the exception here is not that the soldier-husband retains the traditional, institutional family's position of absolute patriarchy, but that he is subject to the external authority of his commander and the Army. For an army couple, making decisions, democratically or otherwise, might seem pointless, given the exigencies of military life.¹⁷ Commitment to her husband, therefore, is not based on nor sustained by a sense of democratic or consensual decision making – something “we as a family” have chosen.

In the comparison of companionship marriage to commitment, we see how this model of post-world war era marriage persists in the ways that today's army wives justify supporting a loved one in harm's way. To understand the threats to their relationship that they endure, they fall back on a particular image of that relationship very much like companionship marriage: a close union centered on personal bonds of affection and mutual interests shared by partners with specified roles. The challenge to commitment will come with the absence of one of those partners: with his leaving, what happens to his specific roles and their shared affections?

Occupational Army, Individualized Marriage, and Obligation

Obligation, as one set of attitudes and beliefs justifying support for a husband in harm's way, is the closest fit with Moskos' and Cherlin's contemporary models of the military and marriage: an army organized like any other economic institution around assumptions of self-interested, rationalizing actors; a marriage that advances the overall development and happiness of the individuals who are party to it, not necessarily the success of the union as an end in itself. Obligation as a category of thinking implies clear expectations with specified tasks and negotiated amounts of effort, like the conditions of employment in the new army. And like the characteristics of individualized marriage, this justification is about the obligation of husbands and wives to each partner's individual development and fulfillment.

The occupational army is driven by market principles with a core assumption that “no analytical distinction exists between the military and other systems, in particular, no difference

¹⁷ Some wives clearly note that being in a military marriage relieves couples of having to make difficult decisions. As this wife explained, “There's no point in deciding whether or not to buy a house, which neighborhood to settle in, and stuff like that. The Army is going to decide where we live and pretty much what house we will be in.”

between cost-effectiveness analysis of civilian enterprises and military services” (Moskos 1988:17). By extension, soldiers themselves are regarded as rationalizing, interest-optimizing individuals finding legitimacy for their employment (not service) in economic rather than normative values (Moskos 1988:16). In such an army, compensation is largely cash-based, in the form of salaries and bonuses, and, as such, is compared to levels of compensation for similar forms of work done in the civilian world. The authority of the Army is seen as limited to the workplace; off post and out of uniform, a soldier and his family are not beholden to military laws or codes.

When wives say, which they do often, that the Army is a job just like any other job, they reaffirm this notion of the Army as an occupation and their connection to their soldier-husbands as, what I have categorized here, an *obligation*. In these instances, they understand their involvement with the Army as the result of choices they have individually made (to marry someone involved in the military); and they are now taking personal responsibility for the consequences of this decision. If they endure hardships and face uncertainties and risks of loss, they do so not out of either a sense of duty to a greater entity or passionate commitment to their marital union, but because “this is what I signed up for.” As one wife explained:

I think people who enter their marriage very aware of what they're doing... I think that's the type of woman that works in the Army. Who's like, someone who, who gets married not just because she got knocked up or not just because they've been dating for six months and they're head over heels in love and whatever. But someone who like, actually walks into it with eyes wide open with what uh, what being a military wife is going to be like, and what being married for a lifetime is like.

Unlike the romantic affections of “head over heels in love” partners in a relationship justified by commitment, cool and pragmatic assessments are at the core of obligation. When wives deploy this justification for supporting their husbands, they share characteristics of the calculating and rational actor assumed to be in the middle of the new army-as-occupation.

Implied by knowing what they signed up for is a particular limit or boundary to the effort they expect to make towards their obligation. They can support their husbands because they know what to expect; they inform themselves and demand to be informed. As another wife related:

I don't understand the wives who just sit there waiting for whatever will come next, for whatever the Army throws at them. I want to know as much as I can about what he's doing over there, about what his job is.

Along with knowing her husband's job is the ability and willingness to complain when those prescribed tasks are exceeded. If the prohibition of trade unions among American soldiers is a persistent legacy of an institutional army (Moskos 1988:20), the advocacy performed by the growing number of army wives is an indicator of the emergent army-as-occupation. Many

respondents recounted the story of the spouse who reported her husband's commander to the Inspector General for violating the "family time" policy on Fort Jackson. One interviewee, herself a lawyer married to an aviation pilot, became a full-time advocate for other soldiers whom she felt were being denied medical discharges that they deserved.¹⁸ Her advocacy, she believed, led to problems for her husband with his command and, in turn, difficulties in their marriage, one of a handful that ended in divorce over the course of this study.

Just as obligation implies knowing what the Army and their husbands owe them, it brings with it knowledge of what they owe as military spouses. Many spouses spoke of the support they offered as an obligation, particularly when they spoke of it in terms of specific expectations, as well as tasks and responsibilities clearly prescribed by their position. Like the soldier in the army-as-occupation, they see what they have to do as specified in its substance and quantity. This is often in direct opposition to those other tendencies of the Army, particularly in its institutional and "greedy" (Coser 1974) forms, which demand an unlimited contribution from all its members, uniformed and otherwise, soldier and spouse.

Lastly, the soldier in the sociological model of army-as-occupation tends to think of his individual career. His ties are somewhat less to the Army as a whole than to his professional trajectory through it, or, if the conditions arise when it would be more advantageous to himself to do so, outside of it in the civilian economy. Similarly, wives who conceive of their support in terms of obligation also acknowledge, along with limits and reciprocity, the possibility of leaving either the military or their marriage. As one wife responded when asked if she could see her husband doing anything besides being in the army:

I am not sure what he could do, but he's been deployed four times already. We have both decided that if they tell him that he's deploying again within the next six years, we are not re-enlisting.

Obligation, unlike duty and commitment, suggests a point at which wives will no longer offer support – a point at which in their best interests, they are no longer obliged to do so.

A wife can see her relationship to her soldier-husband as her obligation to do her job, just as he might see his position in the new army as a job, with specified tasks and an individualized sense of responsibility. And like a job (in contrast to service), she sees the possibility of quitting.

The way army spouses justify support for their husbands, under the over-arching category of obligation, also corresponds to aspects of individualized marriage. In this kind of union, partners find satisfaction in terms of "the development of their own sense of self and the expression of their feelings" rather than from successfully playing the role of wife or husband (Cherlin 2004:852). The focus of such a partnership is on how well it contributes to the

¹⁸ The best articulation of this advocacy role that I have heard is in the documentary "Off to War: From Rural Arkansas to Iraq" (Reynaud & Reynaud 2005) about a local Arkansan National Guard unit episode about wounded soldier who returns and never complains and wife ends up having to bitch

development of its individual members.¹⁹ There is no obligation to a relationship that holds a spouse back from his or her furthest achievements or highest degree of happiness. Obligation is to whatever moves each party along in their overall trajectory of success and fulfillment: the sense is that “each person should develop a fulfilling, independent self instead of merely sacrificing oneself to one’s partner” (Cherlin 2004:852). The justifications that army spouses offer for supporting their husbands reflect aspects of individualized marriage, particularly in terms of accommodating their partner’s particular passions and relying on openness and communication.

One of the surprising findings of this study is the wives’ acceptance of danger not because they believe sacrifice is necessary for a larger cause (duty) or for the family (commitment), but because they want to support their husband’s enjoyment of his work. Spouses spoke of their husbands’ passion for risk taking and excitement, such as flying helicopters in dangerous situations, riding motorcycles, or other thrilling but risky pursuits. Even if these pursuits would temporarily or even permanently take him away from her and their children, she accepted them out of an appreciation of the kind of person he needs to be and the career trajectory he is pursuing. As one spouse explains when asked if she could see her husband doing any other kind of work:

No. He would have to have a good reason. I could never ever see him leave it. I just can’t see him do it. He worked too hard, for too long to do it. Even the transfer from the Coast Guard to the National Guard unit took three years and he almost did say, ‘I’m just going to finish my time out of the Coast Guard, I’m going to miss deployment and I am just going to have to live with it.’ And I told him, ‘You are absolutely not going to do that, you are going to keep pushing it.’ And he said, ‘But I don’t want this to be hard on you guys’ because he was really getting stressed about getting this transfer done, and I said, ‘You need to do it. You know you need to do it, I know you need to do it.’

Making an important distinction from the kind of thinking centered around duty, this wife in this instance emphasizes that her husband needs to do this, not that his unit, the Army, or the nation needs him to do it. As in an individualized marriage, she is there to support him in what is necessary for his own development and fulfillment. She sees that he needs to follow his trajectory and that she and their daughters cannot expect him to stop pursuing what is essentially a part of him on their account:

I wouldn’t have [asked him to quit] because if I would have stopped him he would have regretted it for the rest of his life, and it would come to a point

¹⁹ This focus on the family as a device for individual development rather than on the family as an end in itself can also be seen in the relationship between parents and children. The family becomes less a site of building strong interpersonal bonds of affection and attachment (as it was during companionate marriage) than a site for the concerted cultivation or orchestrated childhoods that develop the children into the best possible individuals they could be (Lareau 2003)

where he would have constantly wondered if he could have made a difference. So, there was never a thought of asking him to stop.... There are certain people that are put on this earth to do certain things and he is one of them.

In this instance, obligation reflects the values of contemporary, individualized marriage: partners supporting one another in their particular course of self-development. What is unique here is the emphasis on essentially *individual* characteristics and callings, not on what the union or marriage itself entails as a *collective*.²⁰ If obligation and individualized marriage mean supporting a husband in what he does out of his own sense of enjoyment or fulfillment, they also imply that a military wife, too, can and should develop in her own direction. Many spouses spoke of the hardship of military marriage as an opportunity to grow or rediscover their own independent capacities. They do not see themselves as sacrificing or suffering for either a greater cause or out of commitment to their husbands and their marriages; rather, they are finding an opportunity to prove they can do it on their own.²¹ Military marriages differ from the ideal type individualized marriage in that many army spouses do not work outside of the home;²² however, the demands of single-handedly running a household as well as the obligations to “volunteer” for her husband’s unit make being an army wife “the toughest job in the army.”

If individualized marriages hold together, they do so because of a strong component of explicit communication, negotiation, and flexibility (Cherlin 2004:852). To support one another in each partner’s individual pursuits, those directions must be articulated. Spouses cannot rely on traditional assumptions of what a husband or wife must do given their respective roles. As noted above, obligation as a justification for military marriage is based on information. Both the Army and a military spouse’s husband need to keep her informed. We will see how information as an aspect of obligation varies according to contexts and interactions: at times spouses want to know everything and are told everything; at other times they would rather not know and their husbands prefer not to share. This variation in openness corresponds to shifts in the kinds of justifications wives use to make sense of their imperiled relationships.

Obligation as a justification for military marriage reflects the focus of individualized marriage: a marriage should be a union that helps each party pursue their

²⁰ Those wives’ acceptance of their husbands as thrill-seeking, risk-taking, danger-facing men was not part of their image of what all men should be. Consequently, it was not an extension of cultural expectations of masculinity. If there is an external, cultural image at work here, it is that “real men” put their wives and families first. Young men, boys without wives and children, should be flying helicopters, dodging bullets, parachuting out of planes, traversing foreign mountains. All of these women had to make sense of not having that husband who in some ways did not act like a husband. They do so in ways far more interesting and complex than the simple acceptance of gendered expectations.

²¹ Writing on the military family, Wechsler-Segal (1988:86) points out that “separations also have potentially beneficial effects. They allow for individual growth and for development of the marital relationship.”

²² Military spouses are less likely to have employment outside of the home than their civilian counterparts (Lim, Golinelli, and Cho 2007.) Forty-one percent and forty-six percent of officer and enlisted spouses respectively are employed in the civilian labor force.

individual trajectories of self development and fulfillment. Through this lens, an army wife makes sense of hardship as an obligation not to her nation or even to her partner as husband but to his needs as an individual, with essentialized personality characteristics. Support for him in his endeavors does not mean sacrificing her own interests. Under the notion of obligation and within the framework of individualized marriage, separation becomes an almost welcome opportunity for her to develop her own independent capacities. The military, however, presents difficulties for two aspects of individualized marriage: employment for wives outside the home and constant communication between partners.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that army wives are not thinking in terms of just one model of marriage or the military. They draw on the entire spectrum of institutional and historical paradigms and their associated values to make sense of having a loved one in the military. At times, their thinking corresponds to models thought to be superseded by historical shifts towards individualism and de-institutionalization. Neither Cherlin nor Moskos believed that the emergent ideal types would preclude any possible co-existence with the other, earlier types (Moskos 1988:25, Cherlin 2004), but the predominance of an occupational military and an individualized marriage that they describe, respectively, was not reflected in the present study's interviews, except in specific contexts and circumstances where obligation came to the fore.

This detailed correspondence between duty and institutional marriage and an institutional military, and between commitment and companionate marriage and a military of comradeship, demonstrates that these elective affinities are more than just residual remnants of past modes of living and thinking within both institutions. Their correspondence points to important contexts and interactions that very much still exist and shape the way people make sense of their situation. If wives think in terms of duty or commitment, it is because in particular contexts that is the best way to make sense of their situation. If army wives begin to think more in terms of obligation, we know they did not think so from the outset. We cannot say that such a shift is the result of mega-historical trends that have already altered their ways of thinking towards individualism and deinstitutionalization.

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I presented three categories of justifications that represent what Army spouses think about both the risks and benefits of their military marriages: *duty*, *commitment*, and *obligation*. I examined how these categories relate to the larger historical and sociological contexts of what has happened to the military and marriage over the last century. In this chapter, I take up the question of how immediate contexts influence which of these justifications an Army spouse draws upon. Army spouses live in either predominantly military or civilian communities. In which of these environments – civilian or military – do spouses tend to think in terms of duty, commitment or obligation? What factors in these two environments shape the justifications that military spouses use when thinking about their relationship to a loved one in harm's way?

The literature is in disagreement as to the influence of the military over the lives and ways of thinking of military soldiers and their spouses. One strain of the literature coheres around the proposition that the Army, organized as an all encompassing “total” (Goffman 1961) or “greedy” (Coser 1974, Wechsler-Segal 1988) institution, strongly influences how soldiers and their wives think and feel (Nadelson 2005, Radine 1977). These values include a “devotion to duty” and associated notions of service, sacrifice, and honor (Weiss et al. 2010, Exum & Coll 2008, Bondy 2004, Daley 1999). Given this, we might expect to find that the degree of influence that the Army holds over military spouses depends upon the given situation, exercising more influence over those in the midst of the military context and less over those living among civilians (Zimbardo 2007, Goffman 1961). We would also expect that regular army spouses, immersed as they are within the Army's social world, would think in terms of military institutional values like duty and service while national guard spouses, living mostly among civilians and tenuously connected to the military, would tend to think more in terms of commitment or obligation.

Another strain of the literature holds that while the contemporary active duty or regular Army is organized less as an institution than as an occupation (Moskos & Wood 1988), the National Guard is comprised of part-time citizen-soldiers and is driven by institutional values that are widely shared between the citizenry and its military (Haltiner 1988, Gal 1988). Keeping in mind this distinction, we would expect spouses of regular army soldiers to express values that correspond to the framework in which military service entails obligations similar to “just any another job,” while wives of militia or national guard soldiers express institutional values, such as duty and service, that are reinforced by interactions with their civilian neighbors. Lastly, there is a third literature on sacrifice, which is an underlying aspect of duty. This literature argues that social sacrifice is not just the act of exceptionally altruistic individuals but requires the transformation of profane objects into sacred ones (Hubert & Mauss 1964).¹ By

¹ For the violence and destruction inherent in sacrifice (Hubert & Mauss 1964:35) to be more than murder or everyday, individual loss, it must occur to a worldly object or person in a symbolically distinct sphere. Institutions,

traversing distinct profane and sacred spheres, suffering becomes ennobled as sacrifice and justified as an exigency in the fulfillment of one's duty to greater, even sacred, cause. Given this, we would expect to find that wives of national guard soldiers, traversing as they do distinct spheres of civilian and military work, will be more likely to frame their experience in terms of sacrifice and duty. Regular army wives, married to soldiers who are incessantly immersed in the military world, are more likely to experience social fatigue than a sense of sacrifice. Experiencing a kind of routinization of suffering, regular army spouses' thinking will come to center on narrower commitments and specified obligations.

We will see in this chapter that contextual factors matter a great deal in linking the military and civilian environments with how army wives think about their relationship to their husbands and the benefits and risks of their military marriages. Although regular army and national guard wives face the same dilemma, because they live in different contexts they do not understand the risks and losses of military marriage in the same way. Spouses living in the military context tended not to think in terms of duty or obligation. The category of commitment best captured the kinds of justifications that they deployed. Spouses living in the civilian context tended to think in terms of duty, rarely invoking commitment of obligation. These findings suggest that there is a dynamic, particularly countervailing and traverse, relationship between contexts and how people think.

Before we can explore the dynamic and contingent factors that contribute to these differences in thinking, we need to address whether the two groups face the same risks living in contexts that are actually different.

Comparative Settings: Regular Army and National Guard

Regular army and national guard spouses constitute two distinct groups, living in different contexts, but facing the same dangers and hardships associated with the overseas deployment of their soldier-husbands.

The National Guard is a significant part of the government's military forces. Of the uniformed members of the Department of Defense force, forty-five percent are reserves, which include the Army National Guard (Powers 2011). There are 549,015 active duty soldiers in the Army, and 358,391 in the Army National Guard (Department of Defense 2009). From 1974 to 2009, the Guard has remained roughly the same size, but given the reduction in active duty forces, its proportion of the total force over the past forty years has climbed to thirty-nine percent. The National Guard is not a small, insignificant hold-over from previous organizations of government force. The husbands of national guard spouses are part of a persistent² and growing component of how Americans organize and think of those who participate in war. How

with clearly demarcated boundaries and institutionally specific social worlds, help create this sphere. But for the meaning of sacrifice to take hold, the object must move both in and out of that sphere. The remains of the object, once sacrificed, must exit the sacred sphere, be returned to their profane origins, and be placed in contact with "the persons or things that are to benefit from the sacrifice" (Hubert & Mauss 1964:43-49).

² The oldest unit of U.S Armed Forces is the Massachusetts National Guard, founded as the Massachusetts Bay Colonial Militia in 1636 (<http://states.ng.mil/sites/ma/Pages/Default.aspx>).

national guard spouses justify their relationships with their citizen-soldier husbands is interesting not just because of what their relative proximity to the civilian world tells us about the actual effects of a civilian-military gap, but also because they comprise roughly one quarter of all spouses of uniformed Army soldiers.

Interestingly, regular army soldiers are more likely to be married than National Guardsmen. Fifty-eight percent of army members are married (Department of Defense 2009: 35); the total ratio of soldiers (549,000 army active duty members) to family members (854,000 dependents, including spouses, children and other folks officially recognized as receiving support from a soldier) is 1:1.6 (2009:49)³. By comparison, forty-five percent of army national guard soldiers are married (2009:99). The total ratio of guardsmen (358,000 army national guard members) to family members (473,000 dependents) is 1:1.3 (2009: 113). The difference between soldier to family ratios does not seem remarkable and could be explained by national guardsmen being older. There is, however, no clear explanation for the differences between regular army and national guard marriage rates.⁴

The relative availability of material and institutional resources is an aspect that differentiates the two contexts. It contributes to the sense of obligation expressed in one of the justifications heard from regular army spouses: that they support their husbands in return for what his military service provides for her and their family. This justification of obligation is, however, not unheard of among guard spouses. It is enough to state that the relatively higher marriage rates among regular army soldiers does not preclude a comparison of how their spouses and the spouses of guardsmen think about their marriages.

This project compares how two groups of spouses make sense of the dangers that military service brings to their marriages. Thus, the critical question is, do their husbands face similar dangers? One response to this question is based on current military policy; the other is derived from casualty statistics.

The U.S. Army operates under a “One Army” concept (Crowley 1998). This means that all components of the army, both active and reserve, are called upon to perform the same

³ The ratio of soldiers to dependents has a historical precedent. During the Revolutionary War, American units received extra rations for women “retainers” at the ratio of 15:1, or one extra ration of food for every fifteen soldiers. Wives were largely expected to stay home and not follow the troops. British units, with their longer standing practices of officer-approved “military marriages,” supplied women at a similar ratio of 100:6 (Mayer 1996: 128-130).

⁴ Nor is there a clear explanation for the phenomenon of higher marriage rates among enlisted regular army soldiers when compared to civilians of comparable ages (Segal & Wechsler Segal 2004:35). The wages and benefits of lower ranked soldiers are not sufficient to support a family (Segal & Wechsler Segal 2004:36), and yet these soldiers are more likely to be married than civilians of similar ages. As one spouse explained, “Why am I a soldier’s wife? It’s definitely not for his pay (laughs).” One possibility is that there are more benefits on or near base that an regular army soldier can use to support a family (housing, medical care, tax-free and subsidized retail). Regular army soldiers, because they work full-time, might also be paid more, though it is unclear if their full-time military wages surpass those of guardsmen, receiving the combined pay of their civilian and military jobs.⁴ Additionally, soldiers in the regular Army might feel more of a need to have an intimate relationship outside of the totalizing institution that is the army. This dynamic will be discussed further in relation to spouses who focus on their commitment to their marriage partner, in spite of his involvement with the Army.

functions.⁵ In the current conflicts, National Guard units were some of the first to be deployed to airports, bridges, and other critical domestic sites thought to be vulnerable in the period immediately following September 11, 2001. Since ground combat operations began in Afghanistan (October 2001) and Iraq (March 2003), guard units have participated in numbers not seen since World War II.

As of January 2008, National Guard soldiers made up seven percent of the U.S. Forces in Iraq and fifteen percent of those forces in Afghanistan (Congressional Research Service Report for Congress 2008).⁶ They suffered eighteen percent of the total casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan combined (Powers 2011) (compared with 0.2% of U.S. casualties in Vietnam (Moniz 2004)). Thus, the chances of a National Guard soldier being deployed to either combat zone are relatively lower. The probability of his being killed there, however, is higher than for regular army soldiers.⁷ In 2004, analysts concluded that Army National Guard soldiers were “about one-third more likely to be killed in Iraq than full-time active-duty soldiers serving there” (Moniz 2004). As the respondents for this project were only spouses of soldiers, regular army and National Guard, who had experienced at least one overseas deployment, it is safe to say that their loved ones were in similarly dangerous situations.⁸ However, as will be evident, their perceptions of those dangers were largely influenced by different contexts in which they lived, and, in turn, this influenced the kinds of justifications they used.

This project included spouses of soldiers serving in army aviation units, both in the regular Army and the National Guard. I intentionally recruited among these units in order to identify and compare similar units. Most soldiers were either in the flight or ground crews of Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters, aircraft that generally support combat troops but are not

⁵ When I was first negotiating access to interviewees, I was told by one Public Affairs Officer, who misunderstood the research question to be a comparison of regular army and guard soldiers, that my research was “invalid” as “there is no difference between them; they are all One Army” (correspondence 2/2008).

⁶ I have reason to believe that the percentage of Guard troops in Iraq since 2008 has increased. Since the beginning of 2011, for instance, all army aviation in Iraq has come under the command of the National Guard Task Force Condor, a brigade “comprised of seven Battalions assigned under its Headquarters and Headquarters Company and manned by over 3,500 Soldiers representing the Army National Guard, Army Reserves and Active Duty Army. In all Task Force Condor will be one of the strongest National Guard Combat Aviation Brigades ever assembled for combat operations” (Task Force Condor Farewell Ceremony program, fieldnotes 11/2010).

⁷ It was difficult to find any government report that clearly compared the casualty or injury rates of regular army and Guard components. A clear imbalance would threaten the “One Army” notion. Given that, it is curious that by patching together statistics from different time periods, I discover that regular army and Guard soldiers experience the same casualty rate. Between 2001 and 2011, 2,820 regular army and 863 Army National Guard soldiers were killed in Iraq and Afghanistan (Powers 2011). From 2001 to 2004, 280,000 regular army soldiers and 90,000 national guardsmen were deployed overseas (Powers 2005). We find that the percentage of deployed regular army soldiers who died was 2,820/280,000 or 1%. The percentage of deployed national guardsmen who died was 863/90,000 or 1%. This is a rough estimate limited by available reports and relies on an assumption that the relative deployment rates did not change from 2004 to 2011.

⁸ For example, the helicopter shot down on August 8, 2011, transporting a team of Navy SEALs was flown by a blended crew of both regular army and National Guard (Nebraska and Arkansas) aviation soldiers <http://www.armyaircrews.com/chinook.html>.

actually combat or assault aircraft.⁹ The important point is that husbands of spouses in both groups flew similar helicopters, in similar missions overseas. Both groups also mentioned helicopter fatalities that occurred domestically, either on training missions or deployments for natural disasters. In this regard, National Guard units, conducting domestic missions after returning from overseas deployments might face greater dangers.

Perhaps, all military personnel, whether regular army or National Guard, are equally dispersed throughout the civilian population. Available statistics (and much of the interview material in subsequent chapters), however, demonstrate that regular army personnel are largely concentrated in isolated, rural areas within the continental United States (CONUS) or on overseas bases in Europe and Asia (OCONUS).

Since the end of the Cold War and the ensuing process of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), the regular Army is concentrated in fewer locales, on larger “mega-bases.” Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the military has increased the security at most bases, severely limiting civilian access.¹⁰ Of thousands of local labor markets within the United States, there are only thirty in which the military plays a disproportionate role (Segal & Wechsler Segal 2004:7). There are three labor markets with over fifteen percent military employment, including the town known in this dissertation as “Crossville.” The base near that town, known here as “Fort Jackson,” was at the time of the interviews “the largest military base in the free world,” housing ten percent of the entire U.S. Army. Five thousand officers and 45,000 enlisted soldiers were assigned to the fort (Fort “Jackson” Public Affairs Office Fact Sheet 2008). Eighteen thousand family members lived on post and 90,000 lived off post in nearby communities.

Four states, Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, and California have the most active duty military personnel (Segal & Segal 2004:6). Fifty percent of all regular army soldiers stationed in CONUS live in just five states. Ninety percent live in just twenty-one states (Department of Defense 2009:53). In contrast, fifty percent of select reserves (including the National Guard) reside in thirteen states. Ninety percent are spread out between thirty-five states (Department of Defense 2009:90). Given these statistics, we can assume that regular army soldiers and their

⁹ I did interview one spouse of a regular army Apache attack helicopter pilot. I asked her why I was getting so few respondents from Apache units. She thought that Apache pilots tend to be younger and unmarried. Given their dual functions in responding to natural disasters, national guard aviation units tend to not include attack helicopters.

¹⁰ I experienced the exclusions used to create that isolation in my own attempts to gain access to interview subjects. It took four months to receive only restricted permission from the Public Affairs Office at Fort Jackson to conduct telephone or off-post interviews. I was not allowed to conduct on-post interviews or field observations as they would require an escort at all times, surpassing the manpower capabilities of their office (and violating my university’s protocol for ethical research). By contrast, the National Guard Public Affairs Office of the first state I contacted returned my e-mail within ten minutes and immediately offered the contact information of a unit with which to begin subject recruitment. It is also relevant to mention the comparative responses of regular army and guard spouses once I had access. Once the invitations were distributed, regular army wives volunteered in relatively larger numbers, eager as they said they were to let a civilian know about their lives. Guard wives, in contrast, were and still are harder to recruit, perhaps they do not look forward to explaining to yet another civilian the details of their unique, military lives.

spouses are more likely to live among other military personnel while National Guard families are interspersed throughout civilian communities. We can be confident that regular army and guard status stand in as measures of different levels of military and civilian immersion, respectively.

Two final aspects of the varying communities are relative age and geographic mobility. Seventy-three percent of all regular army enlisted soldiers are thirty years of age or younger. By comparison, sixty-two percent of national guard enlisted soldiers are thirty years of age or younger (Department of Defense 2009: 92). We can assume that the comparative youthfulness of the regular Army carries over to the spouses. Differing ages and stages of life might contribute to different narratives that the two groups use.

Regular army soldiers and their spouses are far more likely to move than their national guard counterparts. Between 2000 and 2001, thirty-seven percent of active component military personnel moved to a new residence, compared with fifteen percent of the civilian population that moved in the same year (Segal & Wechsler Segal 2004:7). As a regular army soldier's typical assignment with a unit lasts three years, every year about one-third of the active component army moves to a new duty station or makes a "permanent change of station" (PCS). This is also in contrast with national guard soldiers who are typically assigned to an armory "within reasonable driving distance" from their permanent homes and remain with that unit for the length of their career.¹¹ There is no housing provided for guard families. And members of guard aviation units, given their specialty, often come from larger than normal catchment areas, meaning that they are particularly dispersed, even for guard families.

In sum, we see that the experiences of regular army and national guard aviation soldiers are enough alike under the "One Army" framework and in their overseas combat deployments to consider as comparable the dangers that their service brings to their respective families. We also see that regular army soldiers are concentrated in particular states in predominantly military communities between which they are frequently moving. National guard soldiers and families, by contrast, live for longer periods of time dispersed among mostly civilian neighbors. We have the necessary setting to ask, how military versus civilian contexts affect the way spouses think of having their loved one in similarly dangerous situations? Will living among civilians or other military families make a difference in whether they justify their marriage in terms of duty, commitment, or obligation?

Military Context: Commitment as a consequence of military life

Spouses who lived in predominantly military communities, that is, the wives of regular army soldiers, tended to understand their relationship with a husband in the Army and the risks associated with it in terms of *commitment*. Through commitment, they justified enduring the unspecified and often unpredictable hardships and risks, in addition to temporary and potentially permanent separations as an open-ended offering they were willing to make on behalf of their marriage, on behalf of their partners. Although they expressed an awareness and

¹¹ Interview with Lieutenant William Martin, California National Guard Public Affairs Office, 9/22/2011.

even acceptance that “the Army comes first,” when it came to justifying their relationship to someone who is himself committed to “the mission,” family always came first. Although aware of the Army as an occupation with concomitant values of exchange, they did not justify their relationships in terms of mutual obligation. Living amidst the military’s intensely social context, their justifications centered on a narrower scope of relations: on their partner and not his unit, not the army, not the nation, nor its cause or war aims. What they endured and were willing to face they did for their husband, not for what the Army would give them as reward. Although they reside within an institution with core values of duty and honor (Weiss et al 2010, Exum & Coll 2008, Bondy 2004, Daley 1999); they, however, explained their relationship in terms of commitment to their specific marriage partner. Although they live within a community driven by occupational rewards and the mutual obligations of employer and employee; even so, they did not call on those rewards to justify what they endure. Many of the couples were formed around an awareness of and attraction to the values of the military community, values like duty, sacrifice, honor, and country. But if the initial attraction was to a partner *because* he was a soldier the justification for supporting him as he went to war became a commitment to a man *in spite* of his being a soldier. What factors within the military context influenced such a shift?

This section presents seven factors directly related to the social context in which army wives live that help explain why they think about their husbands and the risks associate with their occupation in terms of commitment rather than duty or obligation. These factors are: the all-volunteer nature of their community; the social fatigue caused by an intense collective life; a desire to avert association with predation, blood money and prostitution that exist within the military context; mechanisms that operate to exclude spouses from feeling a sense of shared service; familiarity with military violence; higher rates of death or injury for enlisted personnel; and intervention by the Army in family life.

Solidarity in an all-volunteer force

Living within a military community made up entirely of volunteers has a particular effect on whether wives think in either the relatively expansive terms of duty or narrower relations of commitment. While civilians on the outside of the military context might recognize the sacrifices made by soldiers and their families, those same soldiers and spouses on the inside of the military context, given the nature of a volunteer force and duty, cannot rely on that gratitude. This section explains why spouses in the military context cannot assume that their hardships will be recognized by civilians as sacrifice for the greater good and how, without that recognition, regular army wives are less likely to think in terms of duty. We can understand this as both the result of interactions that do or do not occur between civilians and military as different groups (heterogeneity) (Blau 1977) and the substance of those differences that reflects varying types of solidarities (Durkheim 1984).

In terms of interactions, it seems hard to derive a sense of distinction from a husband’s military service if everyone around oneself is also serving. When asked about memorable gestures of appreciation made within the military community, many spouses could not name one or would mention ones like official banners or ceremonies that were done by some military

personnel “as part of his job.” One representative spouse relates two examples from her experience on Fort Jackson:

When his battalion came home, there were flags all up and down Tank Destroyer Boulevard. But the soldiers who put them up. You know they were ordered to do it. And probably as punishment for some bullshit they did.

I heard later that all the spouses were supposed to get a clock or a flag or something to commemorate that deployment. But they gave them to the guys later after the welcome home ceremony. Not to us. I never found out what happened to my clock.

If recognition and a consequent feeling of pride are critical elements to justifying an imperiled relationship in terms of duty, regular army wives living in the military context do not appear to experience many spontaneous gestures of recognition.

Furthermore, being just one military spouse among many in similar relationships makes recognition and the justification of duty less likely. When asked why she did not display a service flag during her husband’s deployment, another regular army spouse responded:

What would be the point? More than half of my block could put out a flag. It wouldn’t be anything special. I know he’s gone. They know he’s gone. I know their guys are gone. What are we going to do? Have a block pity party?

For this spouse and her neighbors, recognizing the shared, homogenous experience of sending a loved one to war does not engender pride. It does not bolster a sense of fulfilling a duty together. Rather, mutual recognition threatens to concentrate their sadness. As noted in multiple social psychological experiments, group identity, including adherence to values and beliefs unique to the group, takes shape around the existence of some external reference group (Sherif 1961). Recognition from those who do not give of themselves selflessly is of particular importance to the identity of those who do act altruistically (Willer 2009).

Many regular army spouses did say that they preferred living on post around people who were going through the same experiences they were going through. As this was most often mentioned in particular relationship to periods of stress like deployment, we will examine this preference more in the following chapter on deployment. Here, it suffices to say that living in the military context helps spouses think of *belonging to* something larger than themselves, sharing a kind of mechanical solidarity. The same context, however, characterized by isolation from civilians, does not remind them of *performing service for* others different from themselves.

Living within a community of like-minded and similarly disposed individuals, a sense of solidarity around service and duty could emerge. Many have, in fact, noted the cohesiveness of military communities (McClure 1998). In this instance, however, the particular consequences of an all volunteer army become salient. Under an all volunteer force, the nation does not so

much ask all citizens to serve as some citizens choose to join. This results in different expectations between soldiers and other citizens. Soldiers and their spouses cannot automatically assume that citizens recognize the service they have performed, the duty they have fulfilled.

The all volunteer force resonates with a central tenet of liberal democracies and markets: freedom of choice. Such a society is protected by those who want to protect it; and the means of social preservation are consonant with that society's values.¹² If soldiers and their families in an all-volunteer Army do something on behalf of others, it is not only that they sacrifice their lives for the safety of others but that they also reaffirm the belief that any suffering has been meted out freely and fairly. The perspective of the civilian is not that "a soldier is someone whom I have called upon to suffer on my behalf"; rather, it is that "a soldier is someone who chose to do what he is doing." As such, civilians can feel less guilty for not having served themselves and they can feel less indebted to those who have.¹³ If they do feel guilty or indebted, that is their choice.

Outside of the exclusive military context, civilians might see soldiers and their families as doing their special part. Civilians might express their gratitude directly.¹⁴ In a sense, they applaud soldiers and their families for both serving their country and exercising their freedom to choose to do so. In the next section, which focuses on spouses living in civilian contexts, we will see how military service in this organic division of labor is recognized and invoked among national guard spouses as a sense of duty fulfilled.

But inside the military context, living on or near an installation like Fort Jackson, soldiers and spouses form a community of people who have chosen to be there. Because they volunteered, they must wait for civilians, in turn, to volunteer their appreciation, and given their isolation, not many civilians, particularly civilians without ulterior motives, are around to do so.¹⁵ Without actual interactions and gestures to confirm recognition, soldiers and spouses

¹² In this way, society is defended along a logic that is already prevalent; consequently, the process by which some end up serving in the military (and others do not) is accepted as "fair," a critical element for gaining consent to the way states arrange which of their citizens will serve in armed forces (Levi 1997).

¹³ Interestingly, no respondent ever reported encountering a civilian who denied a debt of gratitude. Obviously, such people might also be less likely to encounter military families. On the contrary, army spouses themselves would sometimes, particularly within the frame of obligation, talk about no one owing them anything because of what they and their husbands freely chose to do. This notion that service does not incur a special bond between military and civilians is interestingly paralleled in transactions throughout the rest of society. As the *New York Times* commented on David Graeber's work on the history of debt: "Picking up where Mauss left off, Graeber argues that once-prevalent relationships based on an incalculable sense of duty deteriorated as buying and selling became the basis of society and as money, previously a marker of favors owed, became valuable in its own right" (Meaney 2011).

¹⁴ Three-quarters of civilians surveyed say they have thanked someone in uniform (Pew Research Center 2011).

¹⁵ Here is a paradox of duty (that should probably be stated in the preceding chapter). For a soldier to know he is doing his duty, he needs the recognition of others, but he cannot do his duty for the express purpose of recognition. That wouldn't be "doing one's duty"; that would be "doing something to get something." Social recognition, particularly from the beneficiaries, defines the act but cannot motivate it. Some argue that one can do one's duty without regard to others (Millbank 1995, Kierkegaard 1985). But that position requires an element of duty that is socially transcendent, unmediated by social interactions, and therefore outside of the scope of

in an all volunteer force cannot assume citizens feel indebted or are grateful. In fact, many regular army spouses believed the opposite: that most civilians were either indifferent or misinformed. As one wife of an active duty soldier, living on Fort Jackson, noted:

No, I don't think my husband gets the recognition he deserves. Most Americans have no idea what we go through. I don't think they really care. And then there's the media that never shows the good that we are doing over there. So you have folks who either don't care. Or folks who don't know what they're talking about.

Wives like this one do not assume that civilians support them. They go further and imagine that civilians share the sentiment that civilians owe soldiers nothing beyond what soldiers are paid; nor do civilians owe them gratitude as soldiers who have signed up to serve in an all-volunteer force. In fact, many regular army spouses anticipate this response, when they argue, as another spouse from Fort Jackson does:

It doesn't really matter either way to me [if she and her husband are recognized for what they do]. You know, they don't owe me anything. We signed up for this, and this was our decision.

Or as another spouse from Fort Jackson asserts:

He volunteered, you know? It wasn't like there was a draft.

In this respect, regular army spouses come closer to justifying military marriage in terms of obligation than duty. They see the Army as a job, and their relationship to the Army as any other employer-employee relationship. Neither the Army nor the nation owes them anything more than what was specified in the enlistment contract. We will see shortly, however, why certain factors in the military context inhibit thinking in terms of specified obligations.

Here, we see that neither "functional interdependence" (the mutual, mostly invisible, reliance of the military and its citizenry) nor "commonly held cultural values" (like duty, honor, and country) (Blau 1977) hold those within the context of an all volunteer force in an integrated relationship with civilians on the outside.

Unlike in the past, there is no distinction within the active duty Army between those who were called upon through conscription and those who volunteered to serve. In fact, distinctions are problematic. Within the military environment, recognition might be deserved,

sociology. As I have demonstrated empirically, thoughts of duty were accompanied by a sense of pride and recognition (see chapter 2). In only a few instances, I heard the notion of doing one's duty regardless of what others think. This finding should assuage fears of an emergent military that is both separate from and resentful of a citizenry it thinks is unappreciative of its repeated sacrifices (Willer 2009, Hoffman 2007).

but one cannot seek it or recognize oneself without first being recognized by others.¹⁶ While the military is riven by hierarchical ranking, within the ranks, equality is critical to the bonds that hold soldiers together (Freud 1959). Even between the ranks, distinctions, particularly among spouses, are suspect. There is a clear normative expectation that husbands' ranks should not extend to their wives and influence the interactions between spouses, who are, as we will see shortly, officially "civilians." As one regular army spouse describes a "bad army wife":

She is the one who wears her husband's rank. Who is always 'Mrs. Captain So-and-So.' She's the one with her husband's resume on the bumpersticker of her car.¹⁷

While distinctions of rank and service experience exist, solidarity within the military community is one of equals. No member has reason to be prouder than any other. As another wife explains:

I am really proud that he [her husband] graduated from West Point. But I would be an idiot to go around letting people on base know that.

Whether they are wives of West Point graduates or not, service is something they all share, because they and their partners chose it, not because it is something required of all citizens. Regular army spouses must come to terms with an often times difficult situation that, given the military context, does not make them unique or special but, given the nature of the all volunteer force, is of their own choosing.

If soldiers and spouses of an all volunteer force living in isolation understand suffering and hardships as duty, it is more likely as duty to their profession and their professional group, not to their country. For instance, most army aviation pilots are trained at the same fort. One spouse described the experience of living there and getting to know other spouses while their husbands learned to fly:

We became like a big sisterhood. And with the guys, we were like this tribe. We all like grew up together as army wives and pilots. And we still stay in touch. And will do anything for each other.

The bond that this spouse describes is akin to *commitment* with its narrower social relations. Under the all volunteer force and within the immediate context of those volunteers,

¹⁶ In the last ten years, there have been cases of civilians impersonating war heroes. Responding to one account of such an impersonator who was inviting himself to honorary functions in the Denver area, an actual veteran explained, "You know he wasn't for real because no real soldier would go out looking for that kind of recognition."

¹⁷ At myservicepride.com, it is possible to order a decal version of a "ribbon rack," the set of ribbons worn on a soldier's chest that signifies his accomplishments and noteworthy assignments. Interestingly, I never saw one in Crossville but did see one on a bumper of a car in East Oakland.

volunteering tends to bind one to other volunteers, to others just like oneself through a sense of mechanical solidarity, and not to those others who do not serve, yet who do ultimately benefit from one's service.¹⁸ By extension, wives of volunteers also justify their hardships in terms of commitment to someone or something closer, to a partner or specific community, not to a greater good or larger social entity. It is not just the lack of interactions with civilians that would otherwise remind them of their interdependence, it is also the appearance of service as a choice under an all volunteer force and not a duty that makes it difficult to assume one is doing this for a greater purpose, for an appreciative and indebted nation. In sum, living in a military environment out of choice rather than being called up through conscription puts one in a different relationship to others, making it harder to think of *duty* and easier to think of *obligation* and *commitment*.

Social fatigue

The shared life of a military community is intensely collective. Both as individuals and as a couple, the spouse and her soldier are part of and subject to a social world experienced on and around the military installation. This world blurs private-public distinctions and structurally encompasses the soldier and his family within it. The incessant intensity of this collective life presents two critical problems for a soldier's wife: the interchangeability and expendability of any single soldier within the larger military *corps*. The intense social life and its concomitant challenges breed both a weariness and wariness of the practices and values associated with the military institution. Suffering from what I term "social fatigue," the spouses withdraw into the narrower social relationship of their nuclear family and persevere out of a *commitment* to marriage rather than a *duty* to any broader social entity, like the Army or the nation. As one regular army spouse explains:

Bottom line, for me. Yeah, there's the Army, the mission, and all that. But for me, it's got to be about being committed to your vows. To your marriage. Otherwise, there's all this temptation. Distraction. Too much to deal with.

The explanation offered by this spouse suggests that life in and around a military base is socially intense in various ways. The distinction between private and public life that holds for most civilian employees does not apply to soldiers and their families. A soldier is subject to military codes of conduct and discipline both on and off the base, in and out of uniform. Close bonds of comradeship usually mean that a soldier's "co-workers" are also a large part of his social life. Few spouses expressed any jealousy of the bonds their soldiers had with their comrades. In fact, a number hoped and expected their husbands to be closer with the other soldiers in their

¹⁸ In this, there is the distinction between "morale" and "morality" and the different roles they play in the military community (Rieff 1959:251). *Within* the military context, morale is of fundamental importance: how well soldiers cohere with one another as a group. *Between* the military and the civilian contexts, morality is the critical issue: how to deal with the taboos around violence. The latter is a question resolved through meaningful rituals and gestures that bridge the different moral spheres represented in civilian and military life.

unit. The relationship between a soldier and his superiors also pervades his broader life, including a concern for and surveillance of his domestic, family life. Two often mentioned instances at Fort Jackson were “family time” and parent-teacher conferences. Every Thursday, reveille is sounded at 3:00 pm rather than 5:00 pm, and per order of the base commander all soldiers are required to spend those two hours engaged in some sort of family activity. There is also a standing order that on parent-teacher conference days, meetings at their children’s school are a soldier’s “place of duty.”

Besides the blurring of private and public life, there are architectural features of the military environment that promote an intensified sense of social life. Security measures make for a clear transition from the exterior, profane civilian world into the sacred interior of the military installation. In contrast to the seedy garrison town, the post has no commercial advertising clutter and is constantly policed by cleaning details of orange-vested soldiers, performing penance for disciplinary infractions. Signs about safety and a strictly enforced post-wide speed limit of 30 mph (the post has over 700 miles of paved roads and over 200,000 acres) impart a pervasive sense of surveillance, restraint and discipline. At the beginning and end of every weekday, those on the fort within earshot observe “reveille” and “retreat:” a trumpet plays, everyone, whether walking or driving, stops and stands saluting in direction of the fort’s central flag pole as the flag is raised or lowered for the day.¹⁹ Though family housing units on base are not organized by units (that is, a soldier and his family will not necessarily live near other soldiers in his unit), they are segregated by rank, and the name and rank of the resident soldiers are clearly posted on the houses themselves. Spouses often spoke of the strict codicils that dictated how yards of on-post housing need to be maintained. One spouse, who lived on Fort Jackson before moving to off-post housing, explained:

I would never move back on post. They were insane about how you had to keep your yard. Even if your husband was deployed, they would give you a \$75 fine. I hear it’s better now. They have somebody who comes to help with lawns for deployed families. But I wouldn’t move back.

Another spouse who had never lived on post before talked about almost having her dog put down by the military police (MP) because of a neighbor’s complaint:

Me and the boys got a dog before Luke left. To kind of help with having him gone and for safety and stuff. Well, the dog kept digging under the back fence and getting out. Our neighbors complained one time to the MP’s and they came and told me they would put him down if they got another complaint.

¹⁹ “As the anthem or ‘To the Colors’ is sounded, the flag is lowered. The lowering of the flag will be regulated so as to be completed with the last note of the music. All personnel within sight or sound of the ceremony will come to attention and render the appropriate salute, facing the flag. Vehicular traffic will come to a halt, and the driver or individual in charge of the vehicle will dismount to render honors” (Davis 2010).

As these and other accounts of spouses' lives in the regular Army relate, behavior is scrutinized and there is noticeable pressure to conform to social expectations (Wechsler-Segal 1988).

In addition to these pressures, there are also resources. Churches, clinics, schools, banks, grocery stores, and numerous other facilities are found on post. And for those soldiers and families that live off post, the military presence is so overwhelming that the patrons of private, commercial establishments are predominantly military as well. There is nowhere on post or off that one is not likely to be interacting with or observed as a soldier or a soldier's family member. While this might also be the case in other "company towns," civilian workers and their families, for instance, are not held to the same normative expectations that stem from a discipline unique to the military.

Within this military context, there is an emphasis on being part of something greater than one's self. Explicit training as well as informal comradeship subordinate the individual identity of a husband to his unit and its mission. Two consequences of this subsumption are particularly challenging for the spouses of soldiers.

First is the likelihood of misrecognition and infidelity. The uniform literally and figuratively blurs the distinction between a husband and other soldiers, camouflaging a wife's partner within the collective body of a military *corps*.²⁰ One interviewee told of how her toddler misrecognized another soldier in a local store as his deployed father. The child excitedly shouted "Daddy! Daddy!" at the man dressed in the same uniform as his father.²¹ In addition to the uniformity of clothes and physical appearance (all soldiers are subject to the same physical fitness standards) and the blurring of private-public distinctions, the demographics of the military context contribute structurally to potential infidelity. Half of the regular Army is married, but the other half, many of the youngest soldiers, are not. While the army might portray itself as a family-friendly environment, one interviewee described the community as a "Little Las Vegas" made up of "24 hour relationships." Most interviewees discussed what they perceived as the prevalence of infidelity, particularly on a post like Fort Jackson that housed two divisions. When one division was deployed overseas, the other would be home. Interviewees defined bad army spouses as the ones who "strayed" while their husbands were deployed. Most said they knew of incidents of infidelity. At Fort Jackson, wives who were

²⁰ One way of thinking of the differences between how regular army and national guard wives think of their relationships is in terms of the kind of love objects that their husbands become for them in the libidinal processes that tie their inner, fantasy lives to interactions with those around them and the institutions that affect them externally. For regular army wives in the context of the military installation, husbands become what I term "uniform objects" of desire, attractive but also dangerous in the way they resemble and blend into the bodies of other soldiers and into the larger social body or *corps* of the Army. For national guard wives living between civilian and military worlds, between, as it were, sacred and profane spheres, their husbands become "sacrificial objects" of desire. The almost ritualistic framework of transitioning between spheres enables guard wives to hold ambivalent feelings toward a man they both cherish as a husband (love) and around whom they also rally as a soldier (death), ready to give his life for a greater cause.

²¹ Interviewees often shared accounts of children's reactions that might stand in for their own inadmissible or unconscious sentiments: the child who lost a father and told everyone in the neighborhood that their fathers were going to die as well; the teenager who during an interview said, "Yeah, if only dad had died on deployment, we would have gotten \$250,000."

looking for company from other soldiers would put a mop and bucket on the front porch of their quarters. At another post, the sign of availability was a yellow light bulb on the front porch. While no interviewee confessed to having strayed herself, they did understand the temptation. As one regular army spouse explained:

I never have. But you know this last time. I came really close. I knew it was something that could have very easily happened if I let it. And you know why it happens. You are lonely, you are sad, you are angry with him for going. And there is all this opportunity out there. Half a division of horny soldiers. Hundreds of lonely wives. What do you think is going to happen?

This raises the question as to whether adultery is as common as interviewees think. One army spouse who has published a collection of short stories drawn from her life on Fort Jackson believes that the reason there is so much talk of infidelity is because it offers army wives a way to talk about loss, a loss to adultery abandonment, that is more speakable than loss to war. It might be easier to think of betrayal than bereavement. Whether infidelity actually occurs or serves as a way to talk about death, particular aspects of the military context increase both the possibilities of losing a husband and of finding a ready substitute.

What makes soldiers hard to distinguish and easy to replace is not coincidental to the institution's mission. The possibility of dying is the last thing many interviewees said that they and their husbands and their neighbors would want to talk about. When asked how she felt after being interviewed, one regular army wife said:

Kind of weird. I feel kind of weird. I just spent an hour and a half talking about stuff I usually spend every minute of every day trying not to even think of. I never talk about him dying with girlfriends, other wives. And I never talk about it with him. That's for sure.

But the possibility of violent death is a fundamental and unique part of the army environment. As one medical officer in a Sunday school class for army couples at an off-base church near Fort Jackson explained:

Death is like the elephant in the room. It's part of my marriage. It's what I bring home. It's part of all of our marriages. I am not in as much danger as other guys but I see a lot in my work. I am around a lot of it. But I only feel like I can talk about it when I am here (in the church group of army couples).

Ultimately, the Army asks soldiers, whether infantry, hospital corps or aviation, to put themselves in harm's way and face the possibility of death. As Janowitz points out, soldiers are singularly "experts in war-making and in the organized use of violence" (1960:15). Given this, it is interesting that the fact is rarely expressed; it is, as the soldier above put it, "the elephant in the room."

Preparation for the contingency of violent death includes making any given soldier replaceable by another, making him, in a word, *expendable*. The disposability of her husband as a soldier confronts military spouses as the second challenge deriving from his subsumption within the larger *corps*. Even before injuries or fatalities take comrades away, loss is prefigured or rehearsed in the regular Army through frequent reassignments. The active duty Army regularly moves soldiers to new posts with different units every three years (Segal and Wechsler Segal 2004). Unlike in national guard units, considered in the next section, the intensity of collective life in the regular Army is constant, but transient. It keeps going on, just in a new location. Being part of something bigger includes the reality that the unit will continue without him, either after he moves on to a new unit, or when he has fallen in battle, or as he joins a new unit to replace someone else who has fallen. In this, the Army is both “first” and last.

For regular army spouses, loss in the military context goes beyond rehearsal through frequent relocations. Wives who have experienced the death of a soldier in their husbands’ units are familiar with this intense but transient sense of shared sentiment. The community comes together to memorialize the soldier and to support his survivors. But while the soldier might live on in the collective’s memory, the bereaved spouse typically leaves the community. If she is living on base, she has six months to vacate her quarters. While she is supported by the official institutions (casualty assistance officers, chaplaincy, clinics, etc.) and social groups within the community (family readiness groups), her presence is an unsettling reminder of the risks others are facing. One respondent’s neighbor lost her husband while he was deployed overseas. The family remained in their house for a few months before returning to her home town, during which time the soldier’s five year old daughter began telling all the children on the block that “your daddy’s going to die.” She would also tell the husbands in uniform that they were going to die. When she said that to the respondent’s husband, he replied, “That’s a possibility.” The respondent explained:

What could we do? I guess you just have to let them work their grief out in whatever way.... But in the meantime, we are all hearing from this sweet, sad little kid what none of us want to think but know is kind of true. You know, like this little kid telling our big secret. Yeah, our husbands could very easily die.

For this reason, among others, units might stay in touch with the wives of fallen soldiers, but those wives and their children rarely remain in the community. In the military environment, certain privileges are set aside for Army widows. There are reserved parking spaces for “Gold Star” wives outside many on base facilities. But as one spouse commented, they are almost always empty. The widows have apparently moved away. When asked, this spouse agreed that the parking spaces probably serve more as a reminder to everyone else than as a comfort to the widows.

The intensity of social life, the ease of misrecognizing one’s love object in similarly uniformed men, and the unspoken disposability of soldiers are aspects of the military context that deter spouses from thinking in terms of duty and sacrifice to the nation. To live in the

military community and to make sense of hardships and dangers in terms of duty is to come too close to losing one's husband as an individual. He becomes an entirely social object, indistinguishable from the others that make up the body or *corps* of the military force. If a wife supports her husband out of a sense of duty to a greater cause, what is to stop her from equally supporting every other soldier who is a part of that cause? In this we see that loss, in the military context, is not always caused by death. It can stem from uniformity – from the subsumption of a husband into the larger, socially intense entity that is ready to dispose of him and that presents a wife with so many ready replacements. As a counter-reaction to these aspects of the military context, the regular army spouse tends to use a justification centered on a narrower relationship – a commitment to the marriage partnership she shares with her husband.²² If regular army spouses tend to think in relatively narrower terms of “standing by their man,” it is less out of pre-disposition towards “doing a woman's duty as a wife”²³ than as a reaction to the intensity of doing their duty to the nation.

Predation, blood money, and prostitution

Just as the intensity of military collective life presented wives with the temptation of infidelity, other aspects of that context suggest the disquieting notion of personal gain. And just as wives react to the expendability of one soldier for another by turning to commitment to their marriage, spouses in the military context tend not to speak of obligations in order to distance themselves from the images of blood money, prostitution, and predation that exist in their community.

When describing what they considered to be a “bad army wife,” regular army wives frequently presented the image of a woman who only married a soldier to get his benefits, to spend all his money while he was overseas, and then only to leave him for one of the many other available soldiers. As one wife described another spouse in her husband's unit:

She made sure to marry him before he deployed, even though they had only been together for like two months. While they over there, she cleared out his bank account and even sold all his stuff. When he got back, his apartment was empty. She was with some other guy. Yeah, there are some really bitches out there preying on these young, dumb soldiers.

²² This reaction to impending encroachment and to the expansive social values that justify it is similar to the mechanism of “social regression” observed by Philip Slater (1963). In the competition for libidinal commitment, society and romantic couples work out certain compromises that allow for the partners to regress or withdraw their energies back towards their own relatively exclusive, amorous world (1963:343).

²³ Not a single interviewee invoked the notion that she supported her husband because that is what a wife must do. I did not hear conservative, traditional gender expectations often enough to warrant a separate category of justification. In fact, when such expectations were invoked, it was usually to criticize husbands for having an occupation that prevented them from being good partners and fathers.

This wife's description is echoed by other interviewees who speak of a category of predators drawn to garrison towns like Crossville to exploit soldiers. Officer wives, in particular, mentioned how the military's system of garnishing wages for alimony and child support made soldiers vulnerable to predators. This is an interesting reversal²⁴ in which the soldier, portrayed as the brave and strong warrior, becomes the vulnerable victim. It also expresses a surprising critique of the Army's attempts to make sure it does right by soldiers and their families. One way the Army promises to care for families is by offering a cash benefit to those who survive the loss of a loved one in combat. Interviewees mentioned that survivors would receive \$250,000.²⁵ Some mentioned that officers' families would receive more and those who purchased additional life insurance policies exclusively available to military personnel would receive even more. As with other difficult to express features of military life (see child's misrecognition of "daddy" above), children often provided the best examples. One teenager blurted out when I was interviewing her mother about her husband's last deployment, "Yeah, if dad had only died, then, we would be rich." The mother and other spouses cringe at the suggestion of "blood money" or other forms of compensation derived from their loved one's suffering.²⁶ Drawing away from that notion, they avoid using the justification of obligation which would suggest they are trading the life of their husband for personal, material gain.

Lastly, the military context itself attracts a discourse, if not the actual practice, of prostitution. Throughout history, it seems that where the Army goes, so go women selling sexual services (Mayer 1996, Alt & Stone 1991, Enloe 1983). There are various reasons why this

²⁴ I have noticed a number of other reversals in this project. One is the frequently heard assertion that soldiers' morale depends on their wives' disposition toward the military (McClure 1999, Wechsler-Segal 1988:93) rather than the soldiers' own immediate experience of war. In this, wives and supporting women become both the war effort's greatest boon and its greatest enemy. Another interesting reversal is the often expressed notion that citizens and their freedoms depend upon soldiers and their readiness to fight. No one ever mentioned the military's economic dependency on citizens. I perceive a third reversal in the military's emphasis on the family, particularly children. A focus on children, procreation, and life reverses the military's alternate mission of destruction. Fourth is the reversal by which the Army and its safety culture appear to be holding back reckless, thrill-seeking young men from early deaths, rather than socializing otherwise resistant men to face death and practice violence (Desmond 2007). I am interested in these "reversals into the opposite" as a cultural defense mechanism (LaPlanche & Pontalis 1973: 399) by which the community makes disturbing aspects of its reality (military service places a terrible burden on wives; the military consumes dwindling economic surpluses; its work is largely unproductive; and it asks its members to participate in sometimes fatal acts of violence) more acceptable.

²⁵ Actually, "those whose death is as a result of hostile actions and occurred in a designated combat operation or combat zone or while training for combat or performing hazardous duty, the payment is \$100,000" (<http://usmilitary.about.com/od/theorderlyroom/a/adutydeath.htm>). The payment, known as the "death gratuity," is awarded to survivors in a particular order; "lawful living spouse" is at the top of the list (<http://www.military.com/benefits/content/survivor-benefits/death-gratuity.html>).

²⁶ This presents an unsolvable problem for those tasked with ameliorating the hardships of military families; no spouse wants to say she is happy, content, or satisfied while her husband is in harm's way. In this, the logic of sacrifice and the logic of a rationally administered society that seeks to optimize customer/voter/client satisfaction collide.

might be,²⁷ but here it suffices to note that women who are married to soldiers might be tainted by association. As one young regular army spouse, who met her husband when he and her family were both stationed in Korea, explains:

I was still in high school. I dated a couple of soldiers before I met him. I guess they were glad to find like some regular girls who would date them. The Korean ladies wouldn't, unless they were whores. And a lot of guys were going to those kinds of bars. There all around the bases there. And a lot of those whores were trying to marry them. But I wasn't like that. Just the opposite. Marrying a soldier was the last thing I wanted.

As this spouse notes, sex workers sometimes are near army installations. The current wars are fought in cultures in which prostitution is particularly taboo, but the association of soldiering and sex work persists. To distance themselves from this association, spouses tend to de-emphasize the material benefits they receive from their marriage to a soldier. To do so, they express an open-ended commitment to give unspecified amounts and kinds of support to their husband over a justification that centers on mutual obligations: what she gives and gets in return.

In sum, the images of predation, blood money, and prostitution that particularly abound within the military context discourage regular army spouses from making sense of their relationship in terms of mutual obligations. This, in turn, means that if the Army is organized as an occupation, these particular conditions of its occupational community discourage spouses from seeing their husbands' military service in terms similar to other jobs.

Exclusions

When wives spoke of duty, they often mentioned a sense of shared service: that they too served the nation or some greater good alongside their soldier-husbands. Certain aspects of the military context work against that sense of shared service. These are exclusions that the army uses to define the boundaries of its institutional world and that soldiers themselves use to attempt to stake a space that is, if not completely outside, then at least on the edge of a sometimes totalizing institution.

Bureaucratic procedures and military policies frequently remind army spouses that they are "just the wife." In this sense, the military-civilian divide runs through most army households

²⁷Obviously, there are large numbers of unattached young men with incomes. More speculatively, these young men are held together by intense bonds of sublimated love (Freud 1959). Any erotic expression between them or to an exclusive object outside the group would threaten the equality of their affections. A common sexual object that they share, whether in theory or practice, resolves this dilemma. Additionally, there is an interesting commonality between prostitutes and soldiers in that they are both disposable love objects. Because soldiers are transient, in that they are frequently re-assigned and in that they face higher risks of death, they are not safe love objects. Consequently, as my grandfather, who lived in the navy town of Norfolk, Virginia, would often say, "Good girls don't go with sailors."

(though 13% of army couples are dual-career [Sloan Work and Family Research Network 2009]). To access resources and services, wives often need forms to be signed by their “sponsor” – their soldier husband. Wives are restricted from certain areas of installations and prohibited from wearing any part of the army uniform. Army wives have their husbands’ social security numbers, necessary for most bureaucratic forms, committed to memory. The command has a peculiar relationship to spouses; it cannot order them to do anything nor officially restrict their rights as citizens.²⁸ Respondents reported that soldiers are expected to “control their wives.” When talking about what constitutes a “bad wife,” an army spouse described what she has in mind:

A woman who doesn’t quite get it, you know. Doesn’t get what she’s in for and just complains and complains. And freaks out at the FRG (family readiness group). Which only gets back to the command. And the command reprimands her husbands, asking why he doesn’t have his wife under control.

For their part, some husbands would make it clear to their command that their wives were not in the army and not subject to the command’s wishes. One interviewee, a professional social worker with an off-base practice, related that her husband told his commander that she “doesn’t do bakesales” and that the unit should not expect her to. Another interviewee, who was the leader of her unit’s family readiness group, explained that soldiers had to volunteer to release family contact information before deployment and that many soldiers declined to. She shared that these soldiers did not want their wives “sucked into the Army.” A third interviewee said that she wanted to move onto post before her husband was deployed so that she could be closer to the community of other spouses. Her husband adamantly opposed such a move, arguing that he wanted to be able to come home and “leave the Army behind him.” Other researchers have noted that households on the edge of total institutions serve as havens from the institutions’ otherwise pervasive influence (Goffman 1961:11-12). Soldiers who seek such a refuge discourage their wives from thinking that they share his duty to serve the nation. This desire might also explain why young soldiers are comparatively more likely to be married than their same age civilian counterparts. Despite the wages and benefits that are insufficient to support a family (Segal and Wechsler-Segal 2004), soldiers are willing to suffer domestic scarcities in order to have some place and relationship that they hope will be outside of the Army.

Given these forces in the military context that work to exclude spouses from a sense of shared service or belonging to the Army, wives in the military context are less likely to justify their support for their husband out of a sense of duty. In various ways, the Army reminds them they are not in the Army. Their husbands want a spouse to support them, but this does not include supporting the Army. In such a context, we can see how commitment and its narrower

²⁸ I became sensitive to this distinction when approaching military gate keepers for access to interview subjects. See Chapter I.

focus come to the fore when army wives living on or near large installations think about their military marriages.

Familiarity with military violence

Though aspects of the military context work to distance military wives from life within the institution, regular army spouses are more familiar with the realities of military violence than their counterparts living in civilian communities. If not in their husband's own unit, most spouses, given the concentration of military personnel on a mega-base like Fort Jackson, knew of some soldier who had been seriously injured or killed. All regular army spouses could recall such an incident that predated their husbands' first overseas combat deployments. Spouses living in the military environment are definitely more aware of the dangers associated with serving in the military than the typical civilian. This awareness includes the fact that not all positions in the Army are dangerous; some positions are much riskier than others; and many injuries and even fatalities occur outside of combat.²⁹ This awareness has a two-fold effect that lessens the likelihood of thinking in terms of duty. First, spouses come to see the dangers that do exist as part of their husbands' essential thrill-seeking, risk-taking personalities. Second, spouses do not need to make sense of loss because they have confidence in the competency of their husbands and their husbands' comrades to keep them safe.

Wives who see their husbands as thrill-seekers cannot easily use a narrative in which their husbands are called upon to face dangers for the sake of the nation. For them, he does not face danger because he must but because he wants to. Subsequently, rather than duty, spouses talk about commitment to the kind of person who would find the opportunity to fly or jump out of helicopters wherever it was offered. These are not dangers imposed by duty to the nation; these are dangers that their husbands sought out as part of who he is. The military context in general also gives the impression, through its overbearing and often absurd safety culture, that rather than asking young men to die for their nation, it is preserving the lives of otherwise reckless thrill-seekers.

The second effect of familiarity with military violence was that spouses said that they did not worry about sending a loved one to war because they were confident in the professional competency of everyone in their soldier's unit. They did not need to invoke a narrative that would justify or make injury or loss meaningful in terms of service to a greater cause, because any danger was mitigated by the skills and reliability of the helicopter crews. They looked to the competency and interdependency among their husbands' units to assuage any fears. By extension, the narrative of commitment emphasized the interdependency and competencies they shared as husband and wife, as a married partnership. A frequent example of this interdependency came up in response to a question about how much couples choose to communicate during deployment. As one wife explained:

²⁹ In 2010, the death rate from "hostile action" was 26.8 per 100,000 service members. It was 22.5 per 100,000 service members for "accidents" (Defense Manpower Data Center 2010). In 2008, one hundred and twenty-six service members were killed in motorcycle accidents alone (Markus 2009).

Absolutely. I am totally honest with him. I think it's because he trusts me to be able to handle it. To do my job..... Absolutely. Because I trust him to do his job. It wouldn't work if we couldn't rely on each other to do our jobs. Just like he has to rely on the other guys in his unit.

Just as the dangers of flying helicopters in combat are minimized by a well-trained, cohesive crew, the hardships of sending a loved one to war are lessened by a commitment to their marriage and their positions inside that marriage. Spouses like the one quoted above make sense of what they endure as “their part” of a partnership, what they need to do and what they can do as a competent partner.

In sum, proximity to the actual dangers of military service leads wives to believe on the one hand that any dangers their husbands face are of their own choosing and, on the other hand, that their husbands' competencies will keep them safe. Both beliefs preclude a justification of danger as a regrettable but necessary part of doing one's duty to a larger cause. Rather, danger is handled through commitment to a smaller, interdependent group of competent partners that includes other soldiers and their wives.

Military status hierarchy and the suppression of duty

Despite familiarity with the reality of low casualty rates and the perception that their husbands are disposed to danger rather than being compelled to face it, army spouses know that soldiers fighting abroad have been killed and maimed. From their accounts of incidents in their husbands' units and their own estimations of their husbands' relative risk, they demonstrate that they know that enlisted men, as opposed to officers, are more likely to die or to be injured. As the wife of an infantry captain, explained:

I know Mike is the kind of guy who wants to be in the middle of the shit. Out in the front with his guys. But now he is a captain and assigned to this aviation brigade. That's killing him. But I love it.

If thinking in terms of duty translates death and injury into meaningful sacrifice rewarded with honor and prestige, it is at odds with the rank structure that serves as the predominant, everyday status hierarchy within the military context. Soldiers who are most likely to suffer injury or to die are not the ones in charge.³⁰

Though there is an often noted countervailing desire not to extend husbands' ranks to interactions between spouses and children, the wives of officers are usually the ones in charge of family readiness groups and other social functions for the unit. Officially, the leader of the

³⁰ See statistics comparing officer and enlisted casualty rates in Chapter 2. In the National Guard, there is another possible inversion of status hierarchy in that a soldier might outrank someone in the Guard who is their superior in the civilian world, either their boss, older relative, church clergy, etc. (Lt William Martin CANG PAO 2011/9/22).

Family Readiness Group (FRG) can be any one not in uniform chosen by either the commanding officer or by election from the group members.³¹ Most typically, however, the FRG leader is the commanding officer's spouse. She "volunteers" knowing that the success of his command is important to his career and that an effective FRG can contribute to that success.

Many interviewees related difficulties with their FRG, more of which will be presented in the subsequent chapter on deployment. For now, it suffices to point out how the FRG illuminates the inverse and conflicting hierarchies of status and risk in the military context and how this inversion contributes to commitment coming before duty in the thinking of regular army spouses.

Spouses of enlisted soldiers reported their frustrations with FRG's dominated by officers' wives, who themselves complained of not being able to relate to the problems of enlisted families.

Officers' wives also criticized enlisted wives for lacking an interest in their husbands' career, for not becoming more involved and informed. On the other hand, enlisted wives criticized officer wives for "wearing their husbands' rank," carrying around an undeserved sense of entitlement, and having "no life of their own." As one officer's wife shared:

I just don't get these women (married to enlisted soldiers). They don't seem to care about his job. They don't bother to learn what he does. Or become involved at all with the unit or the FRG. And then when bad stuff happens, they get angry about not understanding.

On the other hand, a spouse of an enlisted soldier described a woman she met at a base-wide meeting for spouses of deployed soldiers:

Oh, she let us know immediately that she was Mrs. Colonel So-and-So. And it turns out that's all she was. An officer's wife and mother to his kids. She had no life, no job, no friends, or anything that wasn't about being Mrs. Colonel So-and-So.

These differences between officer and enlisted families are mostly experienced during periods of intense stress and worry. Perhaps nowhere else in American society do families from such different socioeconomic backgrounds share such critical experiences as overseas combat deployment.³²

Enlisted wives and the wives of non-commissioned officers, who are often older and more experienced than the typically younger wives of captains or lieutenants, felt disregarded by FRG leaders. They saw these leaders as more interested in the commander's career than the

³¹ <http://www.fortbraggmwr.com/frg.php#3>.

³² In the periods in which most enlisted soldiers were unmarried, this was probably not a problem. During the Revolutionary War, however, General Washington and his officers were "dismayed by white women in the lower ranks of society who seemed to follow a totally different social code" and who did so in the relatively public space of the Continental Army's camps (Mayer 1996:127).

well-being of the soldiers and their families. An enlisted flight mechanic's wife felt that the FRG, led by the commander's wife, was "run more for the advancement of [the captain's] career" than in the interest of "actually helping the families in trouble. If there were ever any problems, she (the FRG leader) was all about hushing them up."

The enlisted wives often spoke of being under-appreciated and resenting what they saw as persistent favoritism among the FRG leaders for other officers' wives. One wife of a sergeant assisted the FRG leader during her husband's unit's first overseas deployment as a "person of contact" or POC. She related that she expected that she would become the FRG leader for his second deployment, but that a new commander rotated in and appointed his wife as FRG leader. The new leader was "straight out of college, with no experience in the military, let alone deployment."

Officers' wives, on the other hand, felt that enlisted wives did not understand the difference between friends and FRG members, a distinction some officers' wives maintained with respect to the army's protocols against fraternization between the ranks. As one lieutenant's wife and FRG leader explained:

There was a lot of bad feelings during the unit's first deployment. I think it came out of some misunderstanding. Some gals not understanding the difference between friends and FRG members. I have my friends who are also in the FRG, mostly other officers' wives. And just because I would do things for them I wouldn't do for everyone in the FRG, like babysit their kids, that doesn't mean I am showing favoritism.³³

An enlisted wife provided another example involving her FRG leader who collected funds from the group to buy flowers for the funeral of a lieutenant's grandfather. Earlier an enlisted soldier had lost his father, but no flowers were sent from the FRG. In an anonymous posting on an army spouse blog site, she wrote:

So we collected money for his grandfather. And cards were circulated and sent. But before when Corporal Thomas's dad died, nothing. Just because you're enlisted, does that mean your family isn't worth it? Maybe you can't score brownie points with a corporal. But a corporal still grieves. You know? That kind of stuff just really, really pissed me off.

What is interesting is that the inconsistency was not accepted as part of the natural social order. In the context of war and the unequal probability of death, it did not escape the notice of this enlisted man's wife.

³³ The FRG leader might baby-sit the children of another lieutenant as a favor to a friend. If she does not babysit the children of a sergeant or corporal, that was construed, in the opinion of enlisted wives and in the context of the FRG, as favoritism.

Duty is a justification that implies that honor will be conferred upon those who suffer and sacrifice in the course of its fulfillment. Enlisted wives leave the FRG without being recognized as having husbands who are most at risk. Nor does the prevailing status hierarchy recognize that the hardships of separation are greatest for those with the least resources with which to endure them, the families of enlisted soldiers. The pervasive rank structure within the military context, even in spaces outside of the uniformed ranks, remind those with loved ones most at risk of their subordinate positions. Many of these wives consequently turn to justifications that focus less on defending a social order that subordinates them and more on the personal relationship to their husband. They also look for support among friends, neighbors, co-workers, and co-congregants who are outside of his military unit. Similarly, wives of soldiers relatively not at risk are less likely to think in terms of duty, knowing that other wives face much greater chances of actually making the ultimate sacrifice.

Intervention in Family Life

Another way commitment is enhanced and duty is decreased in the way spouses think is their perception of what they gain through the Army's involvement in their family lives. While experiences in the FRG might turn spouses away from that specific aspect of the military community, many wives embrace the overall lifestyle of the Army as a means to fulfill their own desired ends with regard to their personal relationships. The military and its ends are, in this respect, less likely to threaten their marriage than to constitute it, to be the means to forming the kind of relationship that they want. This overall lifestyle takes shape in a kind of "company town" dominated by the military and where relations with civilians tend not to be conducive to thoughts of national sacrifice.

Numerous wives supported their husbands' involvement with the Army as a way to reform their otherwise "bad boy" partners. Spouses are not alone in seeing the military as a place for young people, particularly men, to get "straightened out," and there is some evidence to support the idea that military enlistment improves the later life chances of delinquent and troubled youths (Maclean & Elder 2007, Sampson & Laub 1996). As noted above in the section on the intensity of social life in the military context, marriage in the military includes an overarching, patriarchal presence to which both husband and wife are subordinate. One spouse, whose father was in the Army, explained what marriage to a soldier is like for her:

For me, it is like marrying an amazing boyfriend and getting to bring my dad along with us. Everything is kind of familiar and I see so many guys who remind me of him.

For some wives, this presence is welcomed as a regulating, protecting, and intervening force in their marriage. In addition to overall discipline and structure, wives noted specific ways that the command intervened with their partners on their behalf. In addition to the examples of Family Time and parent-teacher conferences, interviewees mentioned instances in which the command intervened in disputes over alimony payments, non-commissioned officers counseled

soldiers about the difficulties of family re-integration, and the military investigated allegations of adultery, which can be a punishable offense under Article 134, paragraph 62, of the Unified Code of Military Justice³⁴ One regular army spouse, who became separated from her husband before he deployed, was not receiving the financial support from her husband that he promised. She explained:

I went into the rear detachment [*members of a deployed unit that remain stateside with the families*] and told the rear detachment commander the situation. Money was in my bank the next Monday.

While some wives welcome army discipline and structure as ways to tame their husbands, others embrace the many ways in which the Army challenges their men and gives them a way to fulfill their ambitions.³⁵ Though not a wife of a regular army pilot, one interviewee explained how in the week before deploying to Afghanistan, her husband took the entrance exam for law school, which would be paid for by the National Guard. I jokingly asked if he also ran a marathon that week. She seriously answered, “No, the marathon was two weeks before deployment.” While not all soldier-husbands are such Supermen, many, according to their wives, shared a desire to be challenged that found a particular outlet in the military.³⁶

The Army does something for both groups of wives. It is, consequently, harder for them to frame their situation as one in which they serve the Army to further its ends. Rather, the Army and his participation in it create and sustain the kind of partner she desires and to whom she is personally committed. It is not so much that the Army jeopardizes the man she loves as much as it is that the Army creates the kind of man with whom she wants to be. As one regular army spouse put it:

I can’t see him doing anything else. This is what he lives for and the Army gives him the opportunity to do what he wants. And despite all the crap, I think it really is what he needs. And what I want for him.

Another way the Army helps create the kind of men that wives want their husbands to be is the physical fitness requirement of military service. Soldiers must maintain a certain weight and demonstrate their physical readiness by passing annual fitness examinations. This beneficial aspect of having a soldier-husband appears more in blogs and other social media sites than in it did in the in-depth interviews, though some interviewees did mention their husbands’ physical

³⁴ <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ucmj.htm>.

³⁵ This difference, between the driven, focused husband who uses the Army to challenge himself and the aimless, lay-about husband who is shaped by the Army, was reflected in an instance of transference in the research process. Research assistants transcribing interviews noticed that I would let some interviewees talk endlessly but cut others off. They noticed that the variation correlated with the kind of husband the subjects had and the reasons they were attracted to him. For women drawn to ambitious men, I became the focused interviewer. For women attracted to relaxed men, I let them follow their own directions.

appearance as a reason they were initially attracted to them. The anonymity of internet forums allows wives like this one, describing her pleasure at seeing her husband for the first time since completing his basic training, to be more open about the physical benefits of having a husband in the Army:

There's nothing like seeing a group of fit soldiers all standing at attention. I love the hard, firm man that the Army gave me back....Other husbands go all soft and fat. But if he stays in the Army, he's going to have to stay hard and handsome. Damn, he's so fine.³⁷

Besides disciplining and challenging her husband to “be all that he can be,” the exotic, insular, and all-encompassing institutions and culture of army life offer the opportunity to be part of something greater, but not necessarily for a greater purpose than their own achievement of a sense of belonging. Distanced from civilians and political engagement, the military context takes on the feel of a company town where the army “takes care of its own.” Spouses become part of and committed to a military subculture, not necessarily to the nation or the citizenry the military serves. In fact, civilians, particularly those living near installations, are suspected of preying upon soldiers. Spouses laughed at Crossville’s claim to be “The Most Patriotic City in America” and suspected civilian businesses’ ubiquitous signs of support as being self-serving advertisements. Many spouses living on bases resented civilians in general and the civilian media in particular as misinformed and apathetic.

One spouse felt that civilians in Crossville, living within a greater military context, get the wrong impression of army life, particularly in terms of its material benefits and compensations:

I think they thought we got paid a lot more. I am grateful for what we get; my husband gets paid very well. I am grateful for the resources. But a lot of civilian people think we are living it up. A lot of civilians think it's a lavish lifestyle. A lot think we get more than we deserve.

Army posts are often located in rural areas, as is Fort Jackson. The living standards of military families might very well be above those of families in the surrounding area. This disparity might diminish support army families receive from their civilian neighbors. Additionally, civilians living near army installations might be wary of forming close relationships with transient military neighbors. Out of “self-preservation,” civilians who live within or near garrison towns during a time of war might also fear becoming overwhelmed by the needs of their neighbors should the worst occur. One regular army spouse relates the story of her off-post neighbor:

³⁷ This post was from an internet site, HangarHuggers.com, dedicated to women attracted to men in the Army Aviation Branch. It is no longer accessible.

But I also have a neighbor who, um,... I was mowing for the first time after my husband left and, um, I was mowing, and he and I start talking, and I was like, "Yeah my husband just left you know last week or whatever," and he's like "Oh, yeah?" He said he was going. "Okay, talk to you later." And I'm like, "Wow." Like, no, "Hey, if you need anything" or whatever, um, and you know he's an older gentleman like my dad's age you know so you'd think he'd feel a little bit of that like, daughter-father-daughter thing. Nope. *laughs* He had no concern for me which is fine cause I don't, I don't need him or whatever, but it's just kind of interesting that some people don't necessarily... like I feel like a lot of people feel, um, feel called to serve those who are serving.

I asked her why she thought this neighbor was reluctant to offer help. She explained:

I think for him it was more of like, he's just, he's, I think they're a pretty private couple and they just don't, they don't want to get in my business and they don't want me to get in theirs. So I think it's um, maybe it's a self preservation thing. They think especially with the neighbor that you don't want, you know, me coming over five times a day like '...or I need help with this' and, I just think it's the worry of what I could be, you know if things got bad or whatever.

As this spouse intimates with the euphemistic "if things got bad," supporting a military family might end up involving a lot more than just mowing lawns. Neighbors, as opposed to strangers, are in a position to assume the responsibilities of caring for bereaved families. But unlike co-congregants or co-workers, they share no bond to their military neighbor other than citizenship, if that. Such a bond might be too weak to sustain caring for a grieving family. And given the number of military neighbors living outside a mega-base, they might also be frightened by the prospect of an overwhelming number of grieving families.³⁸ Either through fear or annoyance, concentration of military personnel in "Army towns" apparently does not engender supportive relations with those civilians in the area not attached to the military. In isolation and under army patronage, spouses tend to use justifications for suffering that focus more narrowly, at least on the couple itself and maybe on the broader military community. In as much as aspects of this context focus on material support, the wives also speak of obligations – what the army owes them and what they in turn owe the army as an exchange unmediated by a greater good or a broader social consequence.

Summary

In sum, the military context encourages wives to justify what they endure in terms of commitment to their marriages, rather than the broader social causes entailed by duty. While

³⁸ Symbolically, this example illustrates something of the taboo nature of sacred and sacrificial objects, of why folks keep a respectful distance from them.

the physical separation between an isolated army and its citizenry plays a role in some of these aspects, much of what hinders public meaning for the spouses of soldiers is specific to dynamics internal to the military community. In this instance, it is difficult to attribute a turning to more private understandings of risk to any gap between military and civilian experience. In the next section, where the situation of national guard families closes the physical distance between military and the civilian spheres but accentuates the differences, we will see how the gap actually generates significant meaning.

Civilian Context: Duty through difference and distinction

Army spouses who live in predominantly civilian communities, in this study the wives of national guard soldiers, tend to justify their support for their husbands in terms of duty. That is, they understand the hardships and dangers that they endure as part of a shared sense of service and sacrifice to a social entity larger than their specific marital union. Living among civilians, they understand their situation, unique among their neighbors, as fulfillment of their duty to the nation rather than as the honoring of a private family commitment. Nor do they tend to see it as an obligation incurred through a typical economic exchange, as “just another job.” How is it that wives living at such a distance from the military context come to see their relationship to their soldier-husband in terms of values that characterize the military as an institution (Moskos & Wood 1988)?

This section presents seven factors in the civilian context that bring duty to the fore in a national guard spouse’s thinking while weakening commitment and obligation as meaningful justifications. These factors are: recognition from grateful civilians; failure of civilians to empathize with national guard spouses; extended family; schools as sites of civic religion; involvement in civilian political life; involvement in civilian economic life; and the long-term and complex relationships that form between National Guard soldiers.

Recognition: Gratitude from other citizens

Spouses often remarked on how moved they were by the gestures of gratitude and recognition offered by other citizens. These were not organized parades but simple, everyday occurrences.³⁹ The most common gesture was an unsolicited and spontaneous “I just want to thank you and your husband for your service.” One wife recalls being approached in a hardware store by an older man. She was with her husband who was out of uniform⁴⁰ but wearing a baseball cap indicating his unit. She said that the older man apologized for disturbing them but wanted to thank them for “their sacrifice.” The interviewee said she was so affected that she

³⁹ Three-quarters of civilians surveyed say they have thanked someone in uniform (Pew Research Center 2011).

⁴⁰ Army regulations for both regular army and National Guard soldiers require soldiers to remove their uniforms when not “on duty” (Army Study Guide 2005). Some interviewees said that this even applies to their husbands while they commute to and from the base or to drill. This would have the consequence of reducing civilians’ opportunities to recognize soldiers and express appreciation.

began to cry. Typical of other accounts, she said the interaction moved her and reminded her of why she was so proud of her husband.

Such interactions with civilians seem to occur to regular army spouses, as well, but only as long as they are away from their predominantly military towns. One regular army spouse explained:

But you know, it's kind of interesting....My best friend lives in Fort Worth [not a military town] and when we go up there just...if they find out....We have an Apache sticker on the back of our Tahoe. So it's kind of obvious that my husband flies an Apache [an assault helicopter]. Some people will comment or come up to us and they're very kind and they thank my husband and thank me. It's like...I almost cried in front of these people, they're so thankful and so grateful. Then, you come back to a military town [like Crossville] and nobody cares. But one month, I think it was in April, my husband and I, for our anniversary, we took my children to my best friend's house who lives in Fort Worth and we went and had a weekend together. We were shopping because we were going to go out that evening. We were at Macy's and the lady asked for my husband's ID and he pulled out his ID because he is a proud military guy. The lady next to him...I mean... 'Oh my gosh I don't want to interrupt you...but thank you so much'... and it drew a crowd. I thought, "Wow. This is so interesting. We are totally out of our element; we are totally away from Fort Jackson." It was heartwarming. It was kind of nice to have that different reaction instead of them being annoyed at the fact that we are military.⁴¹

In addition to expressions of gratitude, interviewees mentioned numerous other gestures made by citizens in the civilian context that reminded military families of their special contributions to society. One common gesture was to find out that other guests at restaurants or even hotels had paid for their meals or vacations. Another spouse mentioned a Christmas tree lot that was giving away free Christmas trees to families of deployed soldiers.⁴²

⁴¹ Many wives remarked that such interactions make their husbands feel uncomfortable and awkward. Still other wives used the term "mortified" to describe what their husbands say they feel when acknowledged in public. Interviewees mostly mentioned their husbands' experiences of mortification in relation to being recognized publicly on airplanes when travelling home for their two weeks of rest and relaxation (R&R) in the middle of deployments. To understand why this interaction bolsters a spouse's sense of pride but embarrasses the soldier, we can refer to the elements of ritual sacrifice (Hubert & Mauss 1964). The sacrificial rite typically involves three parties: the *sacrier*, the patron or person in whose name the sacrifice is made; the *sacrificer*, the priest or specialist who conducts the rite; and the *victim* or *sacrificial object*, the thing that is transformed from a profane object to a sacred offering. The sacrificial object is necessarily either completely or in some part destroyed (Hubert & Mauss 1964:35). With the completion of the sacrifice, the sacrificers "confer upon each other, upon themselves, and upon those things they hold dear, the whole strength of society. They invest with the authority of society their vows, their oaths, their marriages" (Hubert & Mauss 1964:102).

⁴² The lot was far from any large army installation, but in somewhat of a testament to how military habits die hard, the lot owner, a veteran himself, required families that wanted free trees to provide copies of deployment orders.

Interviewees reported that police officers and even judges gave them and their husbands breaks when they discovered their military status. They also mentioned that local churches adopted families of known deployed soldiers, provided assistance around the house while the soldier was away, and made additional care packages to send overseas.

It was not the intention of this study to examine the motivations of these civilians, but it is possible to point out that such gestures are, by comparison, rarely reported in areas with large military installations. As mentioned above, civilians around bases like Fort Jackson appear to spouses to be more annoyed than appreciative. And while some merchants might express support for the soldiers and their families, spouses suspect them of having ulterior, more pecuniary motives.

Failure of empathy

While the gestures of gratitude on the part of other citizens contribute to a sense of sacrifice for something bigger than their own relationship, failed attempts by civilians to empathize remind spouses how extraordinary their marital relationship is. In this way, it becomes harder for Guard spouses to hunker down in a commitment to marriage like regular army spouses, when they are constantly reminded by civilians of how unique, and sometimes suspect, their marriage is.

National Guard wives report that they are frequently misrecognized as single mothers. One National Guard spouse felt that the worst part of being married to a soldier is going out with her children and feeling that others see her as a single mom. Another said, “It’s like being single without any of the benefits.” While spouses in the military context contend with a different set of misrecognitions, this is not one common to them. Living on or near military bases, a woman with children need not feel that others perceive her as single. But National Guard wives, living during deployments within mostly civilian communities, do perceive that their relationships are different from the typical marriages around them. This makes marriage less available as the focus of their justifications.

If they feel their marriages are different, it is not because civilians intentionally try to make them feel that way. On the contrary, many interviewees reported instances of friends and families trying to empathize by comparing their situations. Here, a national guard spouse expresses her frustration with women who compare their husbands being away on a business trip with her husband who is fighting in a war zone:

Everyone always says, ‘I know how you feel, my husband when he goes away on a business trip, it is hard’ and it’s like, ‘yea? I’m sure it is hard for you, but your husband is just on a business trip; he is not in a war zone. You get to talk to him any time you want to and he will come home soon.’ So people don’t understand.

The respondent’s friend, the commander of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars, interceded for her, and she got a tree without showing orders.

They try to empathize with you, but they can't. Only people that fit in that situation [can].

Another spouse shared the story of a friend whose husband, a high school marching band instructor, travelled frequently on the weekends. The friend said she could understand how the military spouses felt. The interviewee, however, flatly rejected the comparison. Another respondent mentioned the instance of her mother telling her, "How I wish I could get rid of your father for 15 months." The daughter said she was disturbed by how her mother "completely missed the difference." The difference for army spouses is that their husbands are not only away but that they are in harm's way. They reject any comparison, even with those civilians frequently away on comparatively dangerous jobs. Even though she grew up with a father who was a long-distance trucker, she did not think her experiences are all that similar to her mother's.⁴³ Surrounded by comparisons to other jobs, what their soldier-husbands do as members of the National Guard is decidedly not "just another job."

While some neighbors try to empathize, more frequently they point out how different military spouses are. Almost as common as being thanked for their service, Guard wives are told by civilians that "I don't know how you do what you do" or "I could never do what you do." Respondents are not quite sure how to take these comments, as one spouse explains:

One of the things I hate to hear more than anything like, when someone finds out you're the wife of this soldier, they're like, "Ah, I could never be away from my husband that long." You know? And you look at them and you're like, "Okay, so are you insinuating that I don't love my husband?" or, you know, "What point are you trying to get across here?" And so my brother told me, he's like, "Well," he said "actually, you know, it just means they probably couldn't stay faithful" he's like, "So it's actually a compliment you know."

The comment "I could never do what you do" is ambiguous. Civilians who make the comment could mean that real wives would never tolerate having a loved one in harm's way. They could also be deferring to what they recognize as the army couple's superior abilities to endure separation and face frightening possibilities. Civilians remark upon a relationship that is, from their perspective, both incomprehensible and awe inspiring.

These comments reaffirm the Guard wife's outsider status. Along with expressions of gratitude, however, these comments also stake a connection between the spouse and her civilian neighbors. Unlike those in other marginal groups, Guard wives are connected to other

⁴³ Trucking is among the top four occupations with the highest rates of fatal workplace injuries. Agriculture, which includes forestry and fishing, has the highest (27 per 100,000), followed by mining (20 per 100,000), transportation (13 per 100,000), and construction (10 per 100,000) (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Recall that in the same year, the death rate from hostile action for U.S. Armed Forces was 27 per 100,000 (Defense Manpower Data Center 2010).

citizens by the offering that they are making.⁴⁴ Here, we see an example of where it is not just the existence and quantity of difference but also the content and meaning of those differences that matter (Blau 1977). In their everyday world, citizens enjoy increasingly peaceful, safe and secure lives (Fischer 2010), as the state intensifies otherwise tabooed violence in a decreasing number of hands of those legitimized to wield it (Elias 1994). Other citizens become both more distanced from as well as indebted to those who practice legitimate violence. One aspect of this distance is a comparative unfamiliarity with military violence. Guard spouses mention that their civilian acquaintances tend to exaggerate the risks and think every soldier is on the front line, confronting life-threatening danger. Taken all together, there is a combination of wariness, mystery and gratitude in what is expressed between civilians and army spouses. This contributes to a sense of participating in something extraordinary, something that is usually forbidden and that marks them as different from their neighbors, but for a greater good.

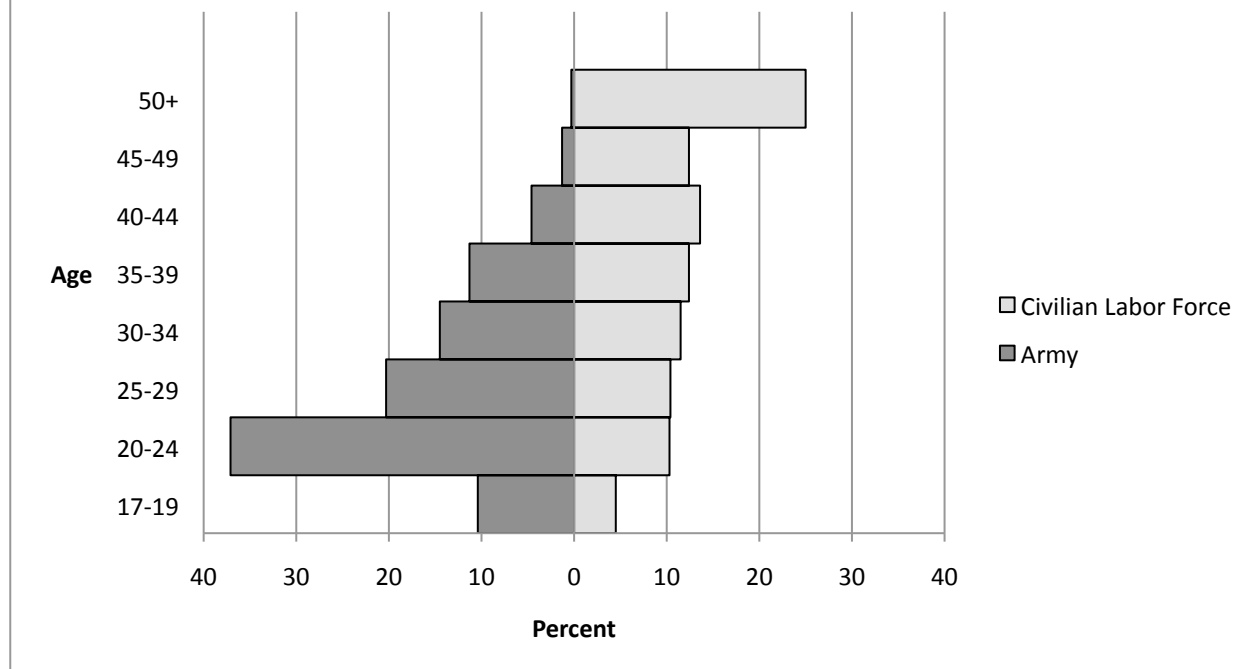
The failed attempts at empathy serve to remind army wives living in civilian contexts of the uniqueness of their marital situations. They are clearly not like the couples around them. This makes commitment to marriage, or at least “normal marriage,” a less probable justification; they are less likely to say “I am going to deal with the hardships by focusing on my marriage.” But in as much as they are unlike but still proximate to their neighbors, their participation in legitimate, state violence connects them to other citizens and reaffirms a notion of duty. Civilian neighbors might not be able to *empathize* like fellow army spouses in the military context, but unlike those military neighbors, they can *sympathize* – in that they can acknowledge a debt of gratitude for a duty fulfilled in the service of others.

Family

National Guard spouses living in the civilian context are more likely to have family nearby. This aspect of the civilian context contributes to a sense of being part of something bigger – the extended family – without the fear of a soldier disappearing into it, being subsumed into a larger mass of uniformed, indistinguishable objects. Furthermore, affective bonds formed with others in the extended family during a soldier’s absence are governed by relatively stronger incest taboos than attractions that might occur within the military community between spouses and other soldiers. From their positions specified in the extended kinship network, grandparents, parents, siblings and children contribute in different ways to supporting a narrative of duty that spouses use to understand having a loved one in harm’s way. These contributions are largely absent in the military context, made up of mostly nuclear families and unattached soldiers.

⁴⁴ From some perspectives on sacrifice, that the guard family is, relative to the regular army family, more closely connected to other citizens makes the offering all the more meaningful, somewhat akin to the difference in ancient sacrifices between killing a captured slave and killing the children of one’s own king: “...the essence of sacrifice...requires victims at the top who are not only the useful wealth of the people, but this people itself...” (Bataille 1989:61). National guard folks might not be at “the top” of their local communities, but they are more clearly of the “people itself” than regular army soldiers, sequestered on remote bases.

FY 2002 Age of Army Active Duty Enlisted and Civilian Labor Force, 17 and Older (Percent)*



*Source: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, *Population Representation in the Military Services*, Fiscal Year 2002

http://prhome.defense.gov/mpp/ACCESSION%20POLICY/poprep2002/chapter3/c3_age.htm

Many spouses reported how proud their grandparents are that they have a grandson serving in the military. As one interviewee explained:

My other grandfather is extremely proud of my husband; he tells everyone that he is his grandson. The biggest thing, that grandfather, he was on a navy boat, a resupply ship, so he didn't see much action so he worries about him more I think than some of my family members do just because he probably has a little bit of an understanding of the things he could be seeing. So he worries about him more and at first, his reaction was, 'Why are you doing this?'

This spouse's grandfather's experience puts her husband's service into a larger context. Her grandfather's response is not uncritically supportive but based on an appraisal of real risks and dangers (an appraisal that is difficult to come by in the civilian context given the tendency mentioned above for civilians to exaggerate the levels of violence). Of all their acquaintances, he, perhaps, alone has the authority of a war veteran to ask, 'why?' Confronted with such a question from someone they love and admire, her husband's choice to serve requires a different justification than "it's just a job." Other observers have remarked that many soldiers

serve as part of a “family legacy” (Bowman 2011)⁴⁵ but this does not mean their relationship to military service is uncomplicated or in any way automatic.

Few spouses reported hanging “Blue Star” or service flags⁴⁶ themselves when their husbands were deployed, but they did say that their grandparents did. Their grandparents’ experiences in World War II, Korea or even Vietnam became a point of contact to a larger historical legacy, an association with other wars, some more and others less popular than the current conflict.⁴⁷

Spouses also spoke of new found appreciation for what their grandmothers endured during conflicts with many more fatalities and far fewer ways to communicate. As one national guard spouse related:

My grandmother passed away before this war started. But everything she told me suddenly became so real. I had the same fears and understood it was probably so much worse for her without any way to know if he was ok and him being away for years. And though I know we have it easier, it makes me proud to know I am part of a tradition of service. Of sacrifice.

Grandmothers’ experiences helped contemporary war spouses put their difficulties into a larger perspective. In the civilian context, grandparents’ pride bolstered the wives’ own sense that they were fulfilling a duty. By contrast, it is important to recall that one defining aspect of the military context is the relative absence of people, family or otherwise, over 50 years of age. The

⁴⁵ “There was also family tradition. His father served with the Marines, like his father and grandfather before him. But St. George said his father was worried when Darryl decided to join. His father had come to dislike the Marines’ hard-charging, hard-drinking culture. And he worried about his son’s safety in a combat zone” (Bowman 2011).

⁴⁶ The U.S. Congress officially requested in 2001 that families with members serving in overseas combat display small flags in their front windows:

“(2) during the period in which the Armed Forces are engaged in the war on terrorism, members of the immediate family of individuals serving in the Armed Forces should be encouraged to display a service flag approved by the Secretary of Defense under section 901 of title 36, United States Code, in the window of their place of residence and wear a service lapel button approved under such section; and

(3) the President should issue a proclamation calling on members of the immediate family of individuals serving in the Armed Forces to display a service flag approved by the Secretary of Defense under section 901 of title 36, United States Code, in the window of their place of residence and wear a service lapel button approved under such section during the period in which the Armed Forces are engaged in the war on terrorism” (House of Representatives 107th Congress).

The subsequent chapter on deployment will address the reasons given by spouses for not flying these flags.

⁴⁷ As we will see in the subsequent chapter on re-deployment, grandparents are also the most vocal about their incomprehension or disapproval of multiple deployments. They don’t understand why soldiers come home and then go back.

median resident age for the Fort Jackson area is 26.7 years, significantly lower than the overall state average of 32.3 years (city-data.com). Five percent of the area's population is over 65 years of age, compared to 10 percent for the overall state (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).⁴⁸

Consequently, this source of affirmation is absent on and around large military bases. While grandparents were often mentioned as sources of inspiration and encouragement, it is interesting to note that parents generally were not. Respondents perceived even those parents who were themselves in the military as opposed to military service for their children and extremely anxious during overseas deployments. Many interviewees said that their parents warned them against marrying soldiers and that their husbands' parents tried to talk them out of joining. As one national guard spouse explained:

We met in high school and even then he wanted to join the military. He was all JROTC [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] and stuff. But his father, who had been in the Air Force, told him it wasn't a good time to join the military. All the RiFF'ing [reduction in force that occurred after the end of the Cold War]. He pretty much talked him out of it. It wasn't until my grandfather got him into firejumping that he started to think about it again.

When asked who they avoided during stressful periods like deployment, respondents often mentioned their own parents or their parents-in-law. One father-in-law, for instance, had the distressing habit of calling every time he heard on the news that a helicopter crashed, asking if his daughter-in-law had been contacted by the FRG.

Wives living in civilian contexts also mention the support of and interactions with their siblings. Brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, and nephews often help out and fill the gap in the family left by a deployed soldier. In military communities, neighbors and other soldiers not deployed also lend a hand. There is, however, a difference here between the civilian and military contexts. An uncle who takes on fatherly duties is a different kind of substitute than another soldier. In the broader context of the extended family, the uncle's role is specified by expectations and bound by taboos. Taking care of his nephew fulfills his duty within a larger institutional framework, but he will never become a rival to the absent father.⁴⁹ In the broader military context, with its uniform bodies and its ever-present but unspoken readiness to dispose of and replace the individual parts of the military *corps*, soldiers and their wives are disturbed by the possibility of other soldiers becoming daddy substitutes. When I asked two participants of an off-post Sunday School class held for deployed and reunited army couples, why they did not participate more in the group, one mentioned that her husband became jealous when he heard another father was taking his son to baseball practice. Another mentioned that she just could not stand seeing the reunited couples at the weekly potlucks; they resembled too well what she was missing. In this instance, being around others who are too much like oneself

⁴⁸ See Table 1 comparing age distribution in the military to the civilian labor force.

⁴⁹ This is not to say that the support offered in the civilian context by extended family members is not entirely free of problems. Nor that support from other soldiers in the military context always leads to jealousy or infidelity.

makes for painful reminders. By contrast, extended family members in the civilian context provide safer substitutes, substitutes who do not threaten to replace the soldier and who are fulfilling their own duties to their extended kin. In this context, wives are more likely to think of their relationship to their husband as part of something larger, but something that is not on the verge of subsuming either her or her partner.

Lastly, children, as part of the larger family, are themselves receptacles of the kind of pride that fuels a wife's sense of pride. Living among other children whose fathers are not deployed overseas, the sons and daughters of National Guard soldiers face many difficulties. But, on the other hand, they enjoy a certain distinction not possible for the children of regular army soldiers living in military communities. National Guard wives, in particular, mentioned the importance to them of being married to men of whom their children could be proud. Facing the hardships and dangers of military marriage was justifiable in terms of this context-dependent pride.

With the exception of parents, we see how the different generations of extended family found in the civilian context support a narrative based on fulfilling one's duty and serving as part of a larger social entity.

Schools

Elsewhere, researchers have demonstrated the significant role that American schools play in constructing a civil religion (Gamoran 1990). Civil religion is "a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity" (Bellah 1967), in this instance, those things students learn to hold sacred as citizens, like the flag or service to the nation, regardless of their separate religious faiths. Spouses of National Guard soldiers often mentioned specific recognition that they, their husbands, and children received through their local schools. Though these schools in predominantly civilian communities are usually less well-equipped to identify and respond to the problems associated with deployment than schools in the military context (Darwin 2006), they are important sites for shaping a meaningful justification for enduring a father's absence and risking his permanent loss. They show wives and children that what their soldiers do is important to a broader community. For example, one national guard spouse recounted an experience at her daughters' school, in a civilian community that evoked for her a sense of pride. Shortly before deploying to Afghanistan, her husband was attending a student awards ceremony and was asked by the school principal to come to the stage:

Yea, and so my husband went up and stood in front of the school and he [the principal] basically said, 'We have daddies that are special because they go and they take care of the country.' And so he had him stand up there so it was really heart wrenching, but at the same time it made my husband know that there was somebody to take care of his family while he was gone and when he came back... He just happened to be there in uniform, and they asked him to come up. They knew that he was leaving in a week and so they wanted to say goodbye to him;

and when he came back this time for his leave, school was just getting out for our daughter and we went to present a flag for the school that my husband had flown over there [in Afghanistan] for them as a thank you.

Through such interactions with schools in the civilian context, children learn to acknowledge the special contribution of soldiers to the broader community, and the wives and children of soldiers have intense emotional experiences of pride. Such rituals reaffirm that their suffering and hardships are both unique and connected to a larger social purpose.⁵⁰ Schools within largely military contexts, by contrast, are less able to instill a sense of distinction but are more ready to identify and address problems related to deployment.

In one of many similar instances, a husband who had returned from an overseas deployment and who was helping his wife in her classroom with kindergarten graduation was also asked to stand for special recognition by the school principal. At the homecoming pep rally in a small town with only one other military family, two children experienced a special sense of “homecoming” when their father, home from overseas on a surprise R&R, ran out in front of the football team to the cheers of the entire school.

Living in the civilian context, national guard spouses have access to institutions like schools and churches that offer occasions of recognition for a small number of soldiers and their families. This recognition instills a powerful sense of distinction, pride, and connection to a broader, grateful social entity.⁵¹ They do not, however, have access to institutions that provide the sort of material support found in military communities. Army clinics, commissaries, credit unions, and retail exchanges are usually far away. Their absence in the lives of National Guard families minimizes the sense that their families provide military service in return for goods and services.⁵² In this way, the civilian context undermines the idea of an exchange relationship of mutual obligations between the spouse and the Army while at the same time supporting notions of sacrifice and duty.

Civilian Political Life

National Guard units, when not mobilized by the federal government for overseas combat or other missions, are part of the governments of their respective states or territories (U.S Constitution Article I, Section 8, Clause 14).⁵³ As such, there is a closer relationship

⁵⁰ Researchers have shown that the children of soldiers who believe that other Americans support the war and that soldiers make a difference in the world are less likely to experience deployment stress: “There are also a lot of kids out there who have internalized the value of sacrifice, of selfless service, of duty. And they’re not happy about their parent being gone, but they understand it, and that helps them to cope” (Wong cited in Sample 2010).

⁵¹ Schools, churches, and similar institutions exist in the military context, but recognition from them is about *belonging* to something bigger, where in the civilian context recognition is about *sacrificing* for something bigger.

⁵² Because the material rewards are relatively fewer, it is less likely for National Guard wives to justify enduring hardships for what they will *get* out of it and more likely to justify them in terms of what they *give*.

⁵³ Congress shall have the power “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel invasions.”

between National Guard families and civilian political life. As one national guard spouse described it:

I think people in [the state they live in] see the Guard as kind of like the state police or fire department. They see the guys out in the storms, clearing roads, getting the homeless places to sleep in the winter, putting out fires. They're like a service like any other service in the government.

National Guard spouses talked about themselves *as part of* their state governments where, by contrast, regular army soldiers and families talked about *working for* the federal government rather than being a part of it.⁵⁴ This impression was based partly on observed expectations that state and local politicians would attend farewell and welcome home ceremonies for Guard units. This was most obvious in the breach when families had been promised that their state's celebrity governor would be welcoming their unit home and he failed to appear. It really mattered to folks that he was not there.⁵⁵ Mayors and Congressmen did attend other Guard ceremonies that I observed. The impression of a closer relationship between the Guard and civilian political life was also given by the fact that National Guard soldiers and spouses were more likely than regular army soldiers to contact their federal congressional representatives to report intolerable conditions at Walter Reed Army Hospital (Priest & Hull 2007).⁵⁶

One reason that national guard spouses have the sense that they are part of the civilian polity is the direct services and contact their soldiers have with the civilian population. Like the spouse quoted above, interviewees reported that when not deployed overseas, their units are regularly called to perform "domestic missions" assisting with disaster relief, responding to hurricanes, wild fires, earthquakes, winter storms, as well as rescuing lost hikers and hunters. As one national guard spouse explained:

There's the overseas deployments. But when they get back from those, it's not like they do nothing for four years, only going to drill once a month. They get mobilized at home all the time. Particularly the aviation units. For fires, rescue missions, even border and drug enforcement stuff. And sometimes stupid stuff like flying VIP's around.

Directly serving citizens and performing observable functions for their government enable spouses in the civilian context to experience and appreciate their part in the larger society.

⁵⁴ This was the case under both the Bush and Obama administrations; my research began in one and ended in the other.

⁵⁵ While the National Guard builds morale by drawing on civilian support, it is also more vulnerable to civilians withdrawing their recognition. We hear that Guard spouses are able to accommodate political opposition to the war, but indifference to the war is, as in so many other social spheres, most disheartening.

⁵⁶ Of the forty-four American presidents, 15 have served in either the National Guard, Air Guard, or some pre-existing form of the Guard, such as a state militia. This makes Army/Army Reserve the most frequent military experience among the presidents.

They can see what their husbands contribute and, most importantly, know these contributions are seen by others.⁵⁷

This is not to say that national guard families are above political debate and protest. Living amidst civilians, guard wives speak more about encountering other citizens who oppose the war politically. Rather than being discouraged by this opposition, spouses incorporated it into their justification for supporting their husband. Representing a common sentiment among national guard spouses, one wife explained with regard to those who oppose the war, “It’s because of what my husband does that they can even have those views.”

Many national guard wives mentioned neighbors and friends who opposed the war but they never said they avoided such people during deployments. Most acquaintances who opposed the war were still perceived as supportive of the soldiers and their families.⁵⁸ By contrast, most regular army wives encountered opposition to the war from a distance, usually through the media which they felt misinformed the public; rejected the notion that one could “oppose the war but support the troops”;⁵⁹ and developed a sense of resentment and superiority toward a citizenry they saw as ungrateful and apathetic. In this way, Hoffman’s (2007) fears that a resentful military is emerging in the civilian-military gap are confirmed in the regular army but not national guard context.

At such a remove from the political life and process of democracy, it is harder for regular army wives to frame hardships and suffering as their offering to national freedom.⁶⁰ National guard spouses, on the other hand, appreciate and are appreciated for the services they and their husbands directly provide to local and state governments and citizenry. Even political opposition fuels their sense of a greater purpose, as they support husband soldiers who contribute to their freedom and the freedom of their neighbors, particularly those neighbors who exercise their freedom in stating opposition to the war.

Civilian Economic Life

One obvious reason that national guard wives are less likely to see their husbands’ participation in the military as “just another job” is that they already have other jobs. Most National Guard soldiers have other forms of non-military employment.⁶¹ Through comparison,

⁵⁷ By contrast, regular army families are often in isolated, rural bases (many times stationed outside the United States) from which their husbands usually perform military functions in remote combat zones with indirect benefits to the general public. The benefits that such overseas ventures bring to the citizenry are also more contested than assistance provided at home during a natural disaster.

⁵⁸ Nine in ten surveyed civilians express pride in the troops while a 45% plurality say neither the war in Afghanistan or Iraq was “worth it” (Pew Research Center 2011).

⁵⁹ Regular army wives often quoted the slogan “If you can’t stand behind our soldiers, feel free to stand in front of them” when talking about people they felt were less than appreciative of their husbands’ service.

⁶⁰ While regular army spouses usually turn to a commitment to closer relationships like marriage, others do justify their support as a duty to some power or entity higher than a seemingly ungrateful, unappreciative, and, perhaps, undeserving nation. In this way, *church religion* surpasses *civil religion* in framing the meaning of their suffering.

⁶¹ Some are employed full-time by the Department of Defense or the National Guard. Despite the existence of agencies specifically created to encourage their employment (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve ESGR)

spouses think of their husbands' military service as distinct from their employment experiences. Service in the Guard means weekend drills, months away from home on training and combat deployments, as well as last minute disaster responses. According to interviewees, the non-cash benefits that come with service in the Guard usually exceed those of the other job, while military wages are usually lower than those in the civilian labor market. As one national guard spouse explains:

Well he's definitely not in the Guard to get rich. We couldn't survive on what they pay, but the health insurance is better than what we could get through his job. And, I guess, that they paid for him to learn how to fly.

Immersed as they are within the civilian economy, Guard families are relatively less sheltered from other tragedies and hardships not associated with military service. Interviews with Guard spouses often included accounts of other difficult life situations: bankruptcy, family deaths, natural disasters, and unemployment. By comparison, regular army families are protected from these misfortunes and are less likely to reference them in making sense of their overall situation. Either way, there is the possibility that Guard families, living as they do outside the protections and exclusions of military communities, are more susceptible to tragedies other than those associated with war.⁶² In a sense, Guard couples have lost homes, family members and jobs, and having suffered those losses, they perceive losing a husband in war as different kind of loss – a sacred one entailed by their sense of duty.

Time: long term and multiple relationships

Time itself moves differently in the civilian context than the military one. Both the seasonality and long-term relationships associated with experience in the National Guard reinforce thoughts and attitudes that frame support for one's husband in terms of duty, service and sacrifice.

In the National Guard, engagement with the military follows distinct periods of time. Those units in states and territories that regularly respond to natural disasters literally serve during reoccurring *seasons* of hurricanes, wild fires, and winter storms. As witnessed at state-level conferences, National Guard families explicitly talk about seasons. They go in and out of touch with one another depending on these seasons. For instance, from June 1 to November

and dedicated bureaus in the Department of Labor, National Guard soldiers tend to experience unemployment at higher rates (21%) than civilian counterparts (9%) (Hefling 2010). One National Guard brigade studied by VetJobs has a 45% unemployment rate (VetJobs 2010). They also experience higher rates of underemployment, somewhat facilitated by special relationships between the Guard and day labor agencies (see <http://www.laborready.com/National-Guard-Partnership>).

⁶² Interviewees, both regular army and National Guard, sometimes made a distinction between the military world and the "real world." Though fraught with dangers of war and state violence, the military world is in some ways sheltered from certain troubling realities, particularly those of an uncertain economy and the problems one comes to share with extended family (ageing parents, siblings in trouble, etc.). A LIFER, or someone who intends to stay in the military as long as he can, is derogatorily referred to as a Loser-Ignorant-Fuckup-Escaping-from-Reality.

30, the Texas National Guard families revive contact lists and phone networks in preparation for emergency deployments.⁶³ The natural rhythm allows for periods of relative social intensity, marking temporal transitions between periods of relative sacredness. Like the medieval calendar of festivals (Bataille 1989) or varying concentrations of summer and winter social life among the Eskimo (Mauss & Beauchat 1979), seasonality imparts special meaning to the hardships experienced during periods in which their husbands are endangered.

Like distinction in space mentioned above, shifts in time specific to the civilian context also help guard families distinguish between periods of overseas deployment and demobilization at home, between their federal and state functions. Figuratively, they live through seasons of war and peace, respectively. National guard spouses are married to husbands who at distinct periods become soldiers. By comparison, spouses of regular army soldiers are married to soldiers and remain within the same community whether their husband is deployed or at home. The transition that they experience is from one base to another, usually every three years.

The transience of regular army families also contrasts with the long term and multiple relationships that co-occur with a National Guard family's experience of military service. National Guard soldiers tend to remain with their units longer than regular army soldiers.⁶⁴ The Guard husbands of some interviewees have been with their particular armory more than twenty years. The collective life of a regular army unit and its larger context might be more intense and exciting,⁶⁵ but in comparison to Guard units and their civilian context, it is briefer. In addition to knowing each other for longer periods, Guard soldiers and their families often share other relationships with one another outside of the armory. Two interviewees' husbands had been best friends since middle school, and the interviewees themselves were connected by being the childhood friend of the other's sister. Some Guard soldiers serve in units with their brothers, uncles and even fathers. One interviewee's husband was deployed to Afghanistan with two other firefighters from his non-military job as a paramedic.

These relatively longer and more complex relationships in the civilian context contribute to justifying loss and hardship in terms of duty. In the military context, separations and loss become routinized in the transient social world of the regular army community.⁶⁶ Soldiers and spouses form intense relationships with folks at every new duty station, only to have to remake them every three years. As one regular army wife explained about her choice to return to her home town during her husband's combat deployment instead of staying on post:

⁶³ These are not phone trees for the soldiers but for their families. When the Guardsmen are mobilized for a domestic mission, it is often in the midst of a natural disaster that imperils their own families. The FRGs use these phone trees to check on families and sometimes co-ordinate their own evacuations (fieldnotes 2009/3/23-27).

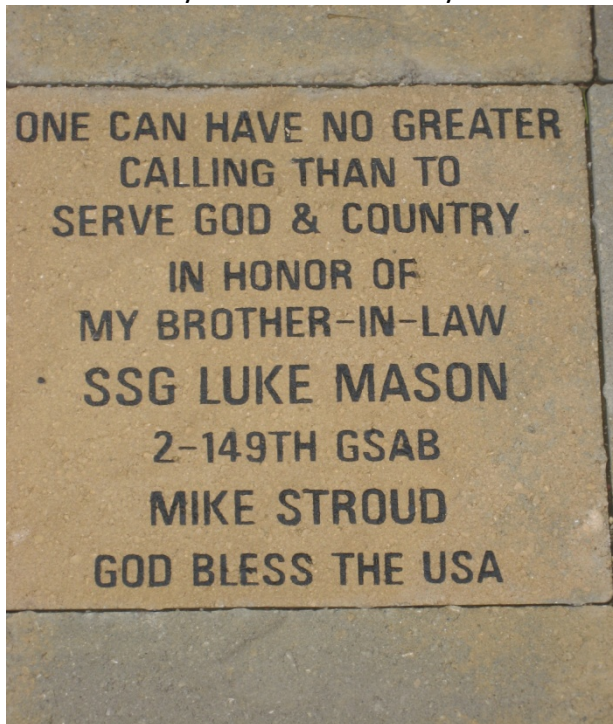
⁶⁴ Interview with California National Guard Public Affairs Officer, 2011/9/20.

⁶⁵ According to some interviewees, national guard soldiers sometimes complain of becoming tired of "the same old guys" in their units. They seem to grow bored of one another through years of familiarity.

⁶⁶ A common motivation for marrying a regular army soldier was to get out of towns where women had grown weary of their relationships with family, friends, etc. They said they were looking for a man who would take them to somewhere they could start anew. Other authors have also remarked on this aspect of military life, frequently moving, which can be seen as both a liability and an asset of military service (Wechsler-Segal 1988).

Yeah. The folks on the fort were great. But they were kind of like the folks at the last fort. And to be honest, maybe a little too like me. Going home, I knew I would be around friends and family who knew me and who could stop me from going crazy with worry. If I stayed at Fort Jackson, I think it would be like hanging out with a thousand crazy me's.

In the civilian context of long term and multiple relationships, loss is experienced as a singular event, across many enduring social entities. Without frequent reassignments, National Guard soldiers have less opportunity to practice loss. The death of a National Guard soldier is the loss of a long-term comrade. His death is also felt beyond the armory by more people belonging to other social groups – extended families, workplaces, churches, neighborhoods – that he leaves behind. The brick pictured below evidences how loss in the National Guard context evokes ties to the fallen from a community broader than the military unit itself. Hearing that they “Serve God & Country” from their countrymen also contributes to the claim’s credibility.



These multiple and long term relationships also contribute to returning fallen and injured soldiers to their status as every day, profane civilians. They are not solely remembered as soldiers, as sacred or sacrificial objects. The strength of other memories and connections bring them back to a profane existence, insuring the meaning of sacrifice by closing its ritual stages (Hubert & Mauss 1964).

One national guard widow's story provides an example of how husbands move from profane into sacred and back again to profane spheres. She married into a family with a bad reputation in her husband's small, rural town. The town had already lost a native son to the war before her husband, Jeeter, was killed in a helicopter crash in Iraq. Initially, the entire town

turned out to support her. The local government and Veterans of Foreign Wars vowed to add her husband's name to the memorial in the center of town already built for the first casualty of the war. As the months passed and the first anniversary of her husband's death arrived, the support disappeared and the memorial remained singularly dedicated to the town's first and more favored lost son. In her telling of it, "Jeeter got to go back to being Jeeter," one of the boys the town never really liked. For a time, his sacrifice drew them together, conferred upon her and the town itself the strength of their collectivity, and then played itself out, returning him to his previous status. As she explains:

For a while they were all coming over. Bringing food. Paying us all kinds of attention. Some people who never really acknowledged us before. And that was ok. I guess they needed to do something and it probably helped us. But eventually it kind of petered out. And that was ok, too. I was the wife of a hero for a bit. Then I went back to being Jeeter's wife. Or widow. I guess.

Through the thick connections surrounding him, the civilian context resolves the ambivalence underlying sacrifice: it allows the death of the soldier (the sacrificial object) on the one hand and loving the husband (profane object) on the other. It allows her to be the wife of a hero and the wife of her husband.

For more folks than just this couple, past relationships underlie the different ways that others might regard soldiers and their spouses in the unfortunate event of a wartime casualty. To her civilian neighbors, a National Guard husband is more likely to be remembered as someone besides a soldier – as a neighbor, co-worker, fellow church congregant, etc. As such, it is easier to identify with him along these lines of shared identity. Sharing his identity means sharing a sense of loss: someone like me, someone who could have been me, has died. Some normal, everyday citizen has died for his country doing what he felt he had to do, and as such, his death is a sacrifice. In contrast, when regular army widows leave the base and return to their home communities, they are the wives of professional, full-time soldiers, men who have identities that are mostly distinct and "other" in the eyes of her new civilian neighbors. The advantage that many regular army spouses saw in marrying a regular Army soldier, the opportunity to get out of their home town, now becomes a disadvantage. She returns as an "other," as someone who left to join a distinct community, as someone who knew and lost a husband that was mostly a part of that community and with few, if any connections as anything other than the sacrificed soldier, to her home community. He is always the "other" – the soldier doing his job, doing what he signed up for, as opposed to the citizen who stepped outside his normal world into another sphere to do what he felt he needed to do. Without having to go through loss themselves, by either witnessing the loss of another in their husbands' units or by imagining it,⁶⁷ wives shape different justifications in relationship to how their loss is or might be perceived by others.

⁶⁷ It might seem odd to base a conclusion on a fantasy, but images of their husbands' deaths were often reported as powerfully reoccurring fantasies. To dismiss how a wife imagines that her husband's death will occur and how

Summary

In sum, the civilian context encourages national guard wives to think of what they endure in terms of duty, as an open-ended, unspecified effort made on the behalf of an expansive social entity. Duty as a justification derives largely from the recognition of their distinction within a context of others who are not similarly serving. Awareness of their distinction comes from spontaneous gestures of recognition as well as failed attempts of empathy on the part of neighboring civilians. In this context, extended family and schools institutionally remind spouses that their hardships are part of a greater cause, but a cause that does not threaten to subsume their husbands entirely as a soldier. Their husbands, as citizen-soldiers with distinct connections to civilian political and economic life, move in and out of the military sphere. They experience military service in discrete periods of time while always connected to the longer-term relationships of their civilian lives. This movement from civilian life to military drill back to civilian life helps spouses see what they endure as wives of Guardsmen in terms of something extraordinary, as something more than just another job, as duty fulfilled through service.

Conclusion: Duty, commitment, and obligation interact dynamically with context

It is important to remember that the focus of this research is on how spouses make sense of having a loved one at war, not how they cope with the hardships of separation. Many spouses, even National Guard ones, remark that it is easier to deal with the day to day difficulties of military marriage when living in a military community. The civilian context, on the other hand, provides the perspective from which the more profound challenges of separation and potential loss can be seen as duty to some greater entity and its purposes.

Returning to the literature on institutional influence, we can conclude that the relationship between contexts and justifications is less one of correspondence than it is a dynamic interaction. The evidence did not support expectations derived from situational, permanent, or occupational influences. Regular army spouses, living in the midst of the military context, did not demonstrate “the power of the situation” by speaking of duty more than their national guard counterparts. Nor did duty appear to be so deeply in-grained by military enculturation that the two groups referenced it regardless of context. If today’s Army is organized as an occupation, spouses of regular army soldiers do not reflect it in their justifications. Deterred by images of blood price, predation, and prostitution, they tend not to speak in terms of exchange and mutual obligation.

If the National Guard, however, is organized as a militia driven by institutional values, its spouses do, indeed, reflect those values in their frequent references to duty. This is the only expectation of correspondence between organization and type of justification that holds. I

its consequences will play out for her and her family would be to forego a formative aspect of her experience, of the social context and her inner life.

suspect that is so because militias themselves are organized around a dynamic relationship between an armed element and its citizenry. This relationship shares some of the mechanisms of the dynamic influences of countervailing and traversal. In a sense, militias have values that spouses share not because militias are powerful institutions in themselves but because they incorporate mechanisms of alteration, seasonality, and transformation that make for a powerful sense of duty.

The last set of expectations proposed that the relationship between spouses' ideas and their contexts is dynamic. If families and total institutions like the Army are incompatible, the army family will be disposed to resist the values of the surrounding context. Given that regular army spouses spoke mostly of commitment and not duty, our expectation of a countervailing influence held, but only to an extent. We have shown that commitment is not entirely in opposition to the military context and is similar to the kind of bond within the Army shared between soldiers. Commitment is an extension of the military culture, just not the institutional version – not the version that has soldiers dying for their country, but the one in which they die for each other. Second, there appears to be evidence that regular army wives have not always opposed notions of duty or sacrifice, but that certain aspects of the military context move them toward narrower scopes of relation, focusing on their marriage rather than the nation.

This confirms the expectation that spouses immersed in the military context suffer from social fatigue. Under unrelenting social intensity, they turn away from expansive values like duty that initially attracted them to military marriages and turn to narrower values like commitment to marriage itself. National guard spouses, on the other hand, witness as their soldier-husbands traverse distinct spheres of civilian employment and military service. In doing so, they gain both respite and a perspective from which separation and loss appear as sacrifice for a greater good and not just personal suffering.

In this chapter, we have considered two groups of spouses who are married to soldiers. They both have access to a way of thinking that would see enduring the hardships of military marriage as doing their part for a larger cause. Only one group, those living among civilians, however, thinks in terms of duty. This tells us something about the effect of social context on shaping thoughts and attitudes. While individuals with varying dispositions might or might not answer a call to duty, particular contextual factors make it possible for some of them to persist in thinking that they are doing so. In subsequent chapters, we will see how justifications, like *duty*, *commitment*, and *obligation*, are influenced by a progression through different contexts in time within the cycle of deployment, reunion, and redeployment.

Introduction

It is one thing to be married to a soldier who is waiting to be called to combat. It is an altogether different situation to have a loved one in harm's way. The last chapter explained that wives of regular army soldiers stationed stateside at large military installations think in relatively narrow terms of commitment to their marriage, a response to the pressures of the surrounding military context. In contrast, wives of National Guardsmen, constantly shifting between their work-a-day jobs in the civilian economy and their weekend drills with the Guard, usually think in relatively more expansive terms of duty and public service. This chapter addresses the question of whether the ways in which wives think about military marriage change when their husbands are deployed to overseas combat. During this period of extended separation and heightened danger, how do regular army and national guard wives, regardless of living in either a military or a civilian environment make sense of the situation that they share? Do they draw upon ideas about *duty*, *commitment*, *obligation*, or do they adopt an altogether different way of justifying marriage to someone who is now clearly in harm's way?

From past wars, we know that wives who sent husbands to war did so with a strong sense of duty. In the American Revolution, for instance, wives saw themselves as performing "the most patriotic act" by sending their husbands to war, while they remained at home, far from military encampments, maintaining a private sphere of domestic life (Mayer 1996:124-125). Later, in "total wars" like World War II in which all available human resources, military and civilian alike, were committed to the war effort, wives saw themselves as supporting the cause and their husbands by doing "their share" in the workplace, replacing enlisted men or as new workers in expanded defense industries (Burgess & Locke 1953:611).

However, today's war is less than "total," a conflict involving a relatively small proportion (less than 1% of the national population), and there are many more professional soldiers (over half) with wives who maintain households in and around military installations (Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness 2009: 34-35). For regular army wives, we might expect that stressful periods like combat deployments compel them to embrace without reservation institutional roles (volunteering for the unit) and values (duty and sacrifice) that they perceive at other times as encroaching on domestic life (Wechsler-Segal 1988:88). As in other examples from social psychology, we might expect that the emergence of a shared, common threat would strengthen group identity (Sherif et al. 1961) and consequently result in a "rally effect" that leads to thinking in terms of a larger group or social entity, like duty. During deployments, national guard spouses share many of the experiences of regular army wives,¹ but they do so in a context surrounded by civilians. For this reason, isolated as

¹ Officially, during overseas combat deployments, National Guard soldiers are mobilized as federal troops. As such, they become active duty soldiers. And their wives become "active duty wives," issued with new identification cards and eligible for different medical, educational and other benefits. Critical to the comparisons made here, they, however, are not eligible for housing on military posts. For clarity's sake, I will continue to refer to them as

they are from a wider community of people sharing their hardships, we might expect national guard spouses to become demoralized during times of deployment and to think less in terms of duty, as many regular army wives did during the conflict in Vietnam (Matsakis 1988:xiv).

Deployments: Periods of Separation, Endangerment and Fear

Deployments are the periods in which soldiers leave home to take up continuous residence with their units, and in this present study, this meant missions in active combat areas. Sociologically, deployments are the periods during which soldiers re-enter the Army as a “total institution,” living almost entirely within the Army as a complete social world, as they had during their basic training (Goffman 1961). Unlike extended training exercises, overseas combat deployments for military wives entailed both separation and a perception of higher risks.

Before deploying to Afghanistan or Iraq, some soldiers spent months preparing at bases in the United States² or staging grounds in allied nations like Kuwait. Deployments usually lasted fifteen months, including the pre-deployment training sessions, though some wives had experienced shorter and longer deployments. Current deployments are twelve months. Many soldiers returned home for one final good-bye between pre-deployment training exercises and final overseas deployments. Many soldiers also were given a two-week rest and recreation (R&R) period near the middle of their deployment during which they were allowed to return to the United States.

Historically, there has been a lot of variation in how soldiers are sent to war. They have been sent with their units or as individuals. They have cycled in and out of combat, completing tours of duty of varying lengths, or they have gone to battle until the conflict is finished. In the “Global War on Terrorism,” the military currently pursues a policy of unit rotations: soldiers move in and out of theaters of operation with their units. Shortages of soldiers, however, necessitate individuals joining other units to fill that unit’s complement. This is particularly the case in the National Guard, where many of the deployed companies are “salt and pepper” units, composed of soldiers from different home units and armories. However, regular army soldiers might be deployed with a full complement but continue their own professional, career trajectory between assignments with particular units. This might mean they are deployed and then transferred to a new unit and duty station before their overseas deployments are completed.

According to the present study’s participants, the military now promises regular army soldiers and families a two-year respite or “dwelling time” between overseas deployments.

“national guard spouses.” The fact that national guard soldiers can “go active duty” while deployed is also why, whenever possible, I refer to full-time, active duty soldiers using the colloquial “regular Army.”

² Interestingly for this project, many of the national guard husbands were sent to Fort Jackson for three months to prepare for overseas deployment. Most of the regular army spouses interviewed lived at the same Fort Jackson. Their husbands would also participate in extended training sessions prior to deployment. Their soldiers would be on the northern section of the fort for weeks and sometimes months, without seeing their families.

National guard units are promised a four-year dwelling time.³ However, participants also shared many stories of exceptions to these promises. Additionally, during dwelling times between overseas tours of duty, national guard families experience extended stateside deployments during disaster seasons, due to hurricanes, spring floods and summer forest fires.

Overseas and stateside deployments both entailed separation. When asked what the worst part of being married to a soldier was, a vast majority of participants indicated deployments and other separations. For example, despite dwelling time promises and because of the exigencies that required his service, one wife, who had been married for eight years, had actually spent less than three continuous years living with her soldier husband. On the whole, army wives seemed to regret the lost time that could have been spent with their husbands. As one regular army wife, married for fifteen years, explained:

I've lost track of the missed anniversaries but I am pretty sure we've missed more than we have spent together at this point. I kind of accept that it goes with the territory. But I can't accept that his kids are growing up without him. Missed birthdays, first days of school, baseball games, graduations. That's just really hard for me. Hard for the kids. And probably hardest for him.

Or as another wife, a mother who gave birth while her husband was deployed, asked:

All those firsts – first bath, first haircut, first word, first birthday. Her daddy is going to miss them all. And how is anyone ever going to be able to pay him back for missing them? Those are priceless moments. And those are the moments he is giving up for his country. I hope it's worth it. You know?

However, some wives seemed to adjust to the absences, conceptualizing a kind of marriage already common among Navy families: marriages made up of regular periods of separation and reunion.⁴ Many also spoke of how the quantity of time lost to deployment intensified the quality of the time they had together. As the wife of one national guard soldier said:

I feel that being married to him and the job he does, we live more in the moment. The time we have together is precious to both of us. Nothing is wasted or taken for granted. In a funny way, I feel blessed that I am married to someone who is taken away from me so much.

The separation brought by deployments could also be a relief. A regular army wife warned me not to assume that deployments were all “doom, gloom and pining away.” As she

³ These promised dwelling times are confirmed in military media reports (Military Hub 2010).

⁴ Research among submariners' wives in the 1960s suggested that “the choice of a sailor as a husband may in part be determined by the desire for extensive separations” (Isay 1968: 647).

explained, “The day he left for Iraq was the happiest day of my life. Maybe someone would be beating up on him for a change.” She eventually divorced her husband but could not serve him divorce papers until he returned to the United States. While overseas, soldiers enjoy certain legal protections; according to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act [SCRA], they cannot be divorced, sued or have their property seized.⁵ In this sense, deployments can put a relationship and a couple’s status as a married partnership literally on hold.

While the separation entailed by deployment might be a catalyst for divorce, as with this wife and several other participants, overseas tours of duty also brought the possibility of permanent separation through fatality. More likely than fatality, soldiers could return physically maimed or emotionally traumatized.⁶ When asked what they feared most -- a physical, emotional or spiritual injury -- wives generally said fatality. As one regular army wife related her fears:

Mortar attacks on the base, a stray bullet, sniper fire. I worried that all those things could very easily kill him. I know there’s a lot more chances of him being injured, but him getting killed. That was always haunting me the first time he was there [Iraq].

Though death was foremost in many wives’ minds, they were concerned about the other possibilities as well. A regular army wife living on Fort Jackson stated about her fears for her husband’s emotional health:

I was most afraid of him physically dying but also his being broken down emotionally. I am very concerned about that. Mostly now.

Wives varied in their assessments of the dangers that their husbands faced while deployed. These assessments varied according to their husbands’ jobs, the country or province they were in, and apparently the amount of information their soldiers shared with them. As one wife explained:

I think he’s a lot safer in the air than on the ground there. Or that’s what he tells me. And I believe him. It’s not like he’s going out on some ground patrol that’s going to get hit by an IED [improvised explosive device].

From a husband of a woman soldier’s point of view, he felt that his wife, a Blackhawk medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) pilot deployed in Iraq, was in great danger. He explained that MEDEVAC helicopters were required to land in hostile situations, some contrived by the enemy

⁵ <http://www.military.com/benefits/legal-matters/scra/overview> and <http://www.military-divorce-guide.com/servicemembers-civil-relief-act-skra.htm>

⁶ See statistics for fatalities and other casualties in this war in the Introduction.

to lure in helicopters for the purpose of destroying them using IED's attached to poles.⁷ Contrary to his wife's own opinion that she was relatively safer flying MEDEVAC helicopters, he believed she was in greater danger because the red cross, a symbolic legacy of earlier western crusades, was a particular target for insurgents. Other spouses of pilots and flight crews believed there was always a degree of risk associated with flying, particularly in unfamiliar conditions and terrain. In contrast to this, spouses of mechanics and other ground support personnel were often frank about how little danger they felt their husbands were in. As one regular army wife at Fort Jackson shared:

Danger? (She laughs.) He was a fobbit.⁸ Probably safer there on base in Afghanistan than he would be here in Crossville. Behind barbed wire and guard towers. Sandbags and bunkers. I was worried but mostly when he was in transit. On his way in and out of Afghanistan. That's when a lot of guys die and when there's no way to communicate with them.

One soldier, a mechanic who was present during our interview, however, reminded his wife that one of the mechanics in his unit was killed by a mortar in the doorway to the mess tent. This shows that in this particular kind of war, with an unclear front line, even fobbits can be in harm's way. Still, many wives who noted the danger involved in deployments shared that they were not worried, given their confidence in their husbands' and his comrades' level of competency. As the wife of a regular army, warrant officer pilot said:

Yeah, it's dangerous. It's a war. And there's people trying to kill him. But I believe in him. He is a highly trained professional. He is very good at what he does. And so is everyone else around him. They spend a lot of time training and practicing for this. If there was a reason to be really worried, I think I would have heard of it long before they deployed.

This faith in the professionalism of their soldiers becomes a component of military spouses' "extended commitment," which is discussed below.

None of the participants believed that their husbands had less dangerous assignments because they were husbands or fathers. When asked whether the Army should allocate more or less dangerous jobs according to these statuses, the participants varied in their responses. A few wished that it would. As one national guard wife and mother of two children said:

I really wish it could be someone other than him. Someone without a wife or two kids who would have to go in his place.

⁷ There seemed to be evidence of a deliberate campaign on the part of insurgents to down US helicopters (Glanz 2007-02-12).

⁸ "Fobbits" was a somewhat derogatory term for soldiers who never left the "Forward Operating Bases" or FOB's; that is, soldiers who never left the relative security of the base to patrol or engage insurgents.

More often, wives felt it would be unfair for unmarried soldiers or soldiers without children to face greater dangers. As this wife and mother explained:

Everybody has got somebody. Every soldier is somebody's son or daughter, at least. It wouldn't seem right for them to have to face greater risks just because they didn't have kids or a wife. I mean I love my husband but so does that mom. She loves her son just as much.

While there is no scholarship on what soldiers in the current all volunteer Army believe about this issue,⁹ we do know that soldiers in World War II felt that their comrades with dependents should be given preference in the point system that was devised to select soldiers for demobilization after the end of the war in Europe (Stouffer 1949:527). To those soldiers, many of whom were conscripted into service, it did seem to matter if a soldier had children.

Deployments not only pose a threat to soldiers' safety, they can also be dangerous for military wives and families. National guard wives, in particular, often found themselves alone during hurricanes, snowstorms, floods or other natural disasters that called their husbands away on stateside deployments. During overseas combat deployments, regular army spouses also encountered unanticipated accidents and illnesses. For instance, one regular army wife, a homemaker living off post at Fort Jackson seven hundred miles away from her home town and family, was hospitalized for an emergency operation and faced the possibility of her children going into local foster care, before another army wife took them in. While her husband was away on deployment, a national guard wife, a dedicated volunteer at both the company and battalion level Family Readiness Groups [FRG], had to undergo surgery for a newly diagnosed degenerative disease all on her own.

As this section shows, deployments entail periods of separation and fear. For many wives, deployments are periods of loss: lost time with their husbands and time their children will never recover with their fathers. Deployments are also periods of heightened anxieties over endangerment. It is during deployments that many participants most feared for the safety of their husbands. As both periods of actual loss and apprehension for greater possible losses, deployments present a particular challenge to the ways spouses think about and justify marriage to someone in the military. Having introduced deployment as a commonly experienced temporal context in the military cycle, we now move on to how it is experienced differently across the spaces of military and civilian communities.

Deployments for Regular Army Families

⁹ Several interviewees shared their soldiers' resentment that by the eighth or ninth year of the war, they were still encountering other soldiers who had not yet deployed. Some blamed single parent soldiers, invoking special family needs to avoid deployment. Others mentioned how even those soldiers were now being deployed. While I was at Fort Jackson, the new division commander stated that the burden of deployment would be more equally shared and that the likelihood of compassionate exemptions would be decreased.
<http://usmilitary.about.com/od/terrorism/a/deploymentrates.htm>.

One might expect that seeing one's husband off to war might heighten a sense of service, of duty to the nation or some greater cause. We have already seen how for regular army wives the particular contexts of everyday life on a military base, before critical periods like deployments, tend to undermine thinking in terms of duty and focus them on the narrower relations implied in terms of commitment to marriage [chapter 4]. But during critical periods like deployment and war, we might expect that values associated with the traditional, institutional Army, like *duty*, *sacrifice*, and *honor*, would supercede those of an encroaching occupational model. Moskos termed this kind of resurgence "reinstitutionalization" (Moskos 1988:23-24). Similarly, normative expectations to behave selflessly on behalf of your husband's unit, the Army, and even the nation, not just for you own marriage, that would seem overbearing at most times, would help give one a sense of place and purpose when facing the fears of having a loved one at war (Wechsler-Segal 1988:88). For these regular army wives, however, attitudes emphasizing duty are less accessible during periods of deployment.

Deployment and the Social Concentration of Hardship

Due to the concentration of regular army soldiers in large, usually rural and remote bases, deployments have a noticeable impact on the local economy, crime rates and schools. It is harder for wives to see the greater good that is done when deployments mean that their lives, those of their children and neighbors become less safe and secure.

Troops are deployed in large numbers, usually whole divisions. At Fort Jackson, the home of one of the Army's Corps, a level of organization that is composed of two divisions, the divisions tended to alternate overseas deployments.¹⁰ These deployments emptied off-base housing units and took away retail customers. Unemployment and tax revenue rates in the town of Crossville reflected a drop in business for the first seven years of deployments. Other military communities anticipated and experienced similar economic downturns. In this way, the difficulties of deployment spread from the Army family's concerns with separation, endangerment and fear, to the local community's loss of jobs, revenue, and resources.¹¹

One might imagine that deployments would inspire the community to rally around the flag and rise to the occasion.¹² That is to say, in a garrison town at war, there would be a

¹⁰ 2011 was the first year since the beginning of the conflict that the fort's full complement of divisions and various other brigades was together "in garrison" at the same time. Interviewees were from the combat aviation brigades of both divisions stationed at Fort Jackson.

¹¹ Spouses did not mention losing jobs themselves, but they did mention economic hardships in the broader community. While other research indicates that Army families enjoy the extra combat pay that comes with deployment [Newby et al. 2005], spouses in this project never mentioned any economic benefits to deployment. This contrast during deployments between the local economy (losing business income) and their own economic situation (gaining combat pay) is instructive.

¹² This expectation of is based on the strengthening of group identity derived from the introduction of a common, external enemy [Sherif 1961] a well demonstrated phenomenon in social psychology. History, however, provides counter-examples, namely the drastic increase in crime in World War II Britain. Despite the image of an otherwise divided Britain pulling together for the common war effort, rates of robbery, fraud and black marketeering rose from pre-war levels [Mannheim 1941 and <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWcrime.htm>].

heightened sense of solidarity and moral cohesion, and people would be on their best behavior, given the sacred and foreboding venture to which all, both military and non-military, found themselves committed. However, if crime rates are any indicator of behavior, the opposite is true. Even before 2001, Crossville's crime index was higher than the national average, however, between 2002 and 2007 the index increased remarkably. The rates of property crimes (robbery, burglary and auto theft) in Crossville are among the top ten for cities of its size in the nation.¹³

While one might assume that high rates of crime are due to soldiers and their families falling victim to civilian thieves, study participants suggested that most of the crimes were probably committed by other soldiers and their dependents. In an early interview conducted near Fort Jackson, I expressed my surprise asked about the city's high crime rate and the fact that thieves would be so callous as to prey upon the families of deployed soldiers. The interviewee laughed and responded:

You don't get it. There's no one else but soldiers and their families in this town. The people stealing and robbing are probably other soldiers!

Similarly, a regular army wife living in Crossville told me of an incident in which she saw her own husband stealing body armor. During the early stages of military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, when soldiers were required to buy their own body armor (Associated Press 3/6/2004), she and her husband drove into one of Crossville's many strip malls. In the bed of the pickup truck parked next to them was a suit of body armor. Her husband quickly took the vest and other pads and put them in their car. She said that she was horrified that her husband would steal something so vital to the other soldier's survival and confronted him. He said that it was the other soldier's fault for leaving the gear unattended. Later, her husband sold the body armor at a local army surplus store.¹⁴ Clearly, economic hardships and the insecurities associated with deployment color moral decisions, including to whom one owes one's duty and of what that duty consists. If soldiers and their families rise to the occasion of war by strengthening social and moral bonds, those bonds do not appear to extend across a broad, unqualified community, to the entirety of Fort Jackson and the town of Crossville. The hardships of deployments are concentrated around a large military installation like Fort Jackson. This concentration makes it hard for regular army wives to think of their experience in terms of a duty fulfilled, for it is hard to see the greater good that is achieved and to dispose one's efforts towards a threatening social world. We will see that their thinking is focused on narrower social entities: the soldier's unit and the wife's family.

Schools' Response to Hardship

¹³ <http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/tx/killeen/crime/>

¹⁴ There were a lot of Army surplus stores in Crossville. The obvious question is, "Why would soldiers need to buy Army surplus?" Along with the many pawn shops in Crossville, these surplus stores appear to be where stolen goods, including military equipment, could be sold.

Before 2001, the schools in Crossville were the envy of the region. These schools are supported by the Department of Defense. This is part of the Army's formal obligation to soldiers and their families that no matter where their duty takes them in the world, they will receive a consistent quality of support and services, including education for their children. Several elementary schools are on Fort Jackson and only have students who are military dependents. Some of the high schools off post have student bodies made up of more than 90% military dependents. The military in many ways helped to sustain a model school system.¹⁵ Working as a substitute teacher in schools in both Crossville and neighboring school districts, I learned that because of the financial support from the federal government and the social support from the command, Crossville schools were some of the best in the state. Teachers coveted positions within the Crossville school system, and students from surrounding school districts would try to enroll in schools near the base.

After 2001 and the onset of the war, however, the schools began to face increasing discipline problems, culminating in gang violence. The local understanding of the turn around in Crossville schools was that deployments were having an effect on children, and parents, particularly fathers deployed overseas were not able to attend teacher-parent conferences designed to address them. Consequently, the schools recognized the difficulties and responded with a counseling program specifically designed for issues of military life. In one high school where I worked, there was, in addition to the regular counseling staff, a separate group of professionals dedicated to the needs of children of deployed soldiers. There were also specific accommodations, such as live satellite broadcasts of graduation ceremonies to bases overseas.¹⁶

Schools in the Fort Jackson area serviced the needs of military children but did little to publicly recognize or honor students' hardships and difficulties as sacrifices they too performed along with their soldier parents. I never observed the kind of attempts to honor publicly the hardships of deployment reported by national guard wives and discussed in the last chapter.¹⁷

As pointed out in the preceding chapter on the effect of the military context, it is hard to create and to sustain the meaning of sacrifice when everyone around is giving up the same thing. Schools, despite their observed function as sites of civic religion (Gamoran 1990) could not impart honor in a way that would carry any distinction when over ninety percent of their

¹⁵ Every school in the area was adopted by a specific unit on Fort Jackson which would provide support to the school in various ways. Generally, one unique way in which the military command supports the school is a widespread policy that parent-teacher conferences are the order of the day; that is, if a teacher of a soldier's child requests a meeting, attending that meeting is the soldier's "place of duty" for the day.

¹⁶ While I was in the area, a controversy emerged around allowing students to receive cell-phone calls from deployed parents during school. Families expected this accommodation but school officials denied it. However, one assistant-principal was himself disciplined by the school board because he suspended a student who took a call from his deployed father while in a classroom.

¹⁷ Schools attended by national guard children seem notoriously incapable of practically handling the difficulties of deployment for their students [fieldnotes from interview with Dr. Jane Darwin 3/29/2010], though according to my interviews, they excel at translating these difficulties symbolically into meaningful sacrifice. In short these schools might make a student feel good about having a father away serving his nation, but they do little to make the experience any easier.

students were equally deserving. This ecological factor of the military context undermines a possible sense of duty among both the children and wives of regular army soldiers.

Ceremonies, Rituals and Symbols the Fail to Instill a Sense of Duty

Schools, servicing children of regular army soldiers during the cycle of deployment, did not reaffirm a notion of duty like those in the civilian context. Other rituals and symbols that might have strengthened a sense of duty among spouses during periods of deployment, such as farewell ceremonies and blue star banners, also tended not to support thinking in terms of duty in the military context.

Several regular army spouses mentioned farewell ceremonies as examples of times in which they were disappointed in the military community's attempts to mark a meaningful occasion or instill a shared sense of pride. When asked about gestures of recognition from the military that touched them, many wives could not think of any. As one wife said:

Gratitude? The Army doesn't ever show gratitude.

Or another wife explained:

When it's some soldier's job to go put up banners or little flags all over base, it just doesn't seem genuine. The home-made signs that families make for their soldiers, those really touched me. But no, nothing the military has done really sticks out. I mean I remember stuff. But nothing touched me.

In spite of the usual banality of military sponsored gestures, we might expect that farewell ceremonies, the events that ritually mark the beginning of deployment for many families, would instill a sense of purpose that would include open-ended effort for a greater cause, i.e. a sense of duty.

It is important to note that in the cycle of deployment, there can be numerous farewells: separating when the unit goes into pre-deployment training; parting after pre-deployment training and before air lifting to overseas; and parting again in the middle of deployment after the individual soldier's two week R&R.

Public ceremonies for family, friends, media and the broader community seem to be held at either of the first two departures. At Fort Jackson, where regular army soldiers usually do their pre-deployment trainings on the north side of the base, wives and soldiers spend some days together before the soldiers ship off to overseas, preceded by one final farewell. The location of final farewells varies. Sometimes they are at an airport or runway; other times at a site selected as a muster point for soldiers to board buses.

Spouses were particularly dissatisfied with the latter ceremonies. Soldiers and their families gathered at facilities operated by the Army's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) services, usually a gymnasium or indoor basketball court. There seemed to be an attempt to make a festive mood with sound systems playing popular music. One spouse complained that

the music was played so loud, as if it were for a dance, that no one could talk to each other. There was no organized ceremony as such, and families just waited around until their soldiers were called to formation outside the gym. Once the soldiers were lined up outside and ready to board the buses, families were invited to come outside to see them off.¹⁸ One spouse related how as she left the gym, an MWR worker handed her a flag to wave and reminded her to smile:

It [the farewell ceremony] was held in one of the gyms on base. It was on the basketball court. It smelled like a gym. There were no tables or chairs. We sat on the bleachers or just stood around. And they played this awful top forties music so loud that we really couldn't talk. No speeches from the commander. No message from the president or anything like that. And after they called the guys out to go form up, they let us outside to wave good-bye. I remember this one lady who worked for the gym was handing us flags and telling us to smile. I thought, "Fuck you, lady." My husband is going to war. I am going to cry if I want to.

This particular gesture made her angry. Rather than hiding her grief, this wife wanted to express it. From the MWR worker's perspective, charged with managing this event, so much grief, in a context where everyone had good reason to do anything but "smile," could become overwhelming for soldiers and their families. A scene that the MWR hoped would boost morale might end up becoming a real downer. Maybe the event did not completely break down with wives and children refusing to let their soldiers go, but overall, the experience disappointed this wife. Rather than listening to up-beat pop music, she wanted to share a few quiet moments with her soldier, together with other wives sharing similar moments with their soldiers. She wanted to hear some inspiring words from their leaders, but did not. Other spouses mentioned that they refused to attend these farewell ceremonies and chose to say their good-byes at home, in private.

The Public Absence of Service Flags in the Military Context

Just as we expect farewell ceremonies to bolster a sense of duty among army wives in the face of deployment, we also expect them to use available symbols to mark their sense of shared service and pride during this period of separation and endangerment. Most spouses reported that they display signs that they are wives of soldiers. They have bumper stickers on their vehicles that declare they have "the hardest job in the Army," or they wear unit t-shirts or even fly unit flags on their homes. But few display service flags,¹⁹ also known as "blue star banners," during deployments. These flags specifically indicate that the households displaying them have soldiers currently serving overseas in combat theaters of operation. Though all of

¹⁸ For photos of this kind of farewell at Fort Jackson, go to <http://www.sibhanfallon.com/photos.html>.

¹⁹ Since World War I, the families of soldiers deployed overseas have displayed these small flags in a front window of their home or apartment. Their use was initially informal, but in 1967 the United States Congress codified their use [<http://usmilitary.about.com/od/familydomestic/a/serviceflags-uMh.htm>].

the participants in this study were entitled to display such a flag, most declined the opportunity to use this traditional and official symbol of national service to signify to others the sacrifices they were making. The experience of deployment near a large military installation, in particular, forced many wives to decline publicly displaying these banners or to confine displaying them to private spaces as symbols of personal commitment. This undermined certain ways of thinking, particularly those, like duty, that rely on distinction. Balancing what might be gained from recognition with what might also be lost, regular army wives did not see it as their duty to face risks of their own. By opting to display symbols like service flags privately, they reveal the significance of commitment in their way of thinking. Spouses gave many reasons for not displaying the blue star banner. The most common reason was that they had been unofficially warned through military channels like the Family Readiness Group (FRG)²⁰ not to do anything that would indicate they were home alone, with a soldier away. Wives said they were told to do this to ensure their personal safety as well as to prevent burglary, particularly given the high crime rates in the communities on and around military bases. Wives also frequently repeated a story of impersonators posing as Casualty Assistance Officers: people dressed in military uniforms coming to the homes of deployed soldiers and falsely notifying them of their soldier's death. When asked what they thought the motivation for such an act would be, they variously mentioned identity theft, revenge on the part of those who lost someone to the war, pranks on the part of soldiers,²¹ and a sense that there were psychologically maladjusted people out there.

Regular army wives living near large military installations also explained that they could not see the point of putting out a service flag when everyone on the street could. As one wife explained her reasons for not putting up a blue star banner during deployment:

Yeah your husband's away. So is mine. Big deal. It just doesn't make much sense to me when the whole street is deployed and everybody already knows it.

Additionally, some wives felt that the service flag could be misinterpreted as an indication that they were sexually available.²² But for most wives who did not display the service flags, the biggest reason was safety-related. They found it hard to signify to others that their husbands were away, doing their duty to make the country safe, when in so doing, they were left feeling vulnerable and unprotected. Under these conditions, living within a

²⁰ The military cannot officially deter spouses from displaying service flags, for two reasons. First, as noted previously, wives are civilians and not subject to military orders. Second, Congress has officially requested that wives display these flags (Resolution 36 of the 108th Senate, passed April 11, 2003). Various civic and veterans organizations make the flags available for free, upon request. When I contacted one such organization to ask if they knew the reason why spouses were not displaying the flags, they asked me to inform them of any cases in which military personnel had discouraged displaying the flag.

²¹ One specifically military "urban legend" that I heard several times was the story of a soldier who dared another soldier to go to his mother's house and tell her that he had been killed overseas. According to the story, the soldier does so and the mother dies of a heart attack.

²² A yellow porch light bulb at one fort and a mop and a bucket left outside the front door at another fort were, according to interviewees, other explicit signs of availability.

concentration of other military personnel and families blocks access to a symbol that could garner distinction and help sustain a sense of duty precisely during the period when they and their husbands are making sacrifices.

Although most spouses did not display service flags, there were some spouses and parents of soldiers who did display blue star banners in their front windows. There were more spouses who wore blue star banner lapel pins, had service flag magnets on their vehicles, or posted blue stars on their social networking pages. If they displayed these symbols, they used them in private spaces, to confirm a commitment to a narrower, more private relationship.

While most study participants said they did not publicly display service flags during deployment, they did say that they would give permission for the media to photograph their husbands' caskets if he were killed during deployment. Most participants stated that they felt it was important for other citizens to know the costs of the war. Apparently, however, they did not feel it was important for neighbors and passers-by to know that their household had someone serving overseas.²³ Or if they did, the significance did not outweigh the risks. While their husbands faced risks, it was not their duty, as an army wife living in a military community, to face risks of their own. During deployment, it is more important to be committed to their husband, to not do anything that might cause him to worry, such as letting neighbors know he is away. As one wife explained:

I am proud of him and what he does. But I am not going to do anything that makes him worry more while he is over there. Any worry that might get him killed. So I guess that's more important to me than letting other people know he is serving.

A sense of shared risks and recognition, just like a shared sense of service discussed earlier, could clearly fuel pride in one's soldier and a sense of duty. But, during deployment, most spouses, particularly regular army wives living near large installations, do not seek either that kind of recognition or risk. If they do display service flags, it is privately, from the fireplace mantle or within filtered, virtual social networks. The service flag becomes a symbol to share with a narrower, more confined network. It becomes more of a private sign of commitment to one another as husband and wife than a symbol of public duty.

Shared Service and the Deployment Communication Plan

Where some spouses, particularly the few who displayed service flags against all caution, might have felt that they were braving dangers along with their soldier-husbands, most indicated that their sense of shared service, the notion that they serve and do their duty

²³ One possible difference between displaying blue star banners and allowing photographs of caskets involves tempting fate. When a soldier dies, the practice is to cover the blue star with a gold one. I speculate that in some spouses' minds, hanging a blue star banner would take them one step closer to hanging a gold one. As one soldier's mother-in-law on a Facebook group page wrote, "May God Bless our Soldiers and may this Blue Star remain blue," that is, not becoming a gold one through fatality or a silver one through injury.

alongside their husbands, receded during periods of deployment. Even those wives who emphasized learning and staying informed and involved in every aspect of their soldiers' careers experienced barriers to communication with their deployed husbands.

During the current conflict, there has been unprecedented access to communication between soldiers overseas and their families at home [Schumm et al. 2004]. In some combat areas, soldiers have access to cell phone networks, internet video connections like Skype, and on-line social networks like Facebook.²⁴ Soldiers and their families can communicate as much if not more than when they are living together [Merolla 2010]. The military, however, still requires a degree of secrecy and discretion on the part of soldiers and their families. Under the guidelines of operations security or OPSEC, soldiers should avoid mentioning missions they are going on and details of missions they have completed.²⁵ For wives like those in chapter two who understood their marriage in terms of duty based on a sense of serving together, deployment puts a barrier between them and the jobs they saw themselves sharing with their husbands. Wives who prided themselves on cramming for the pilot's exam with their husbands or insisted on daily "de-briefings" about the unit's affairs were in for an altogether different experience when those husbands went to war. At various points during deployments and immediately after incidents involving casualties, the command imposes a "comblock" or communications blackout, during which soldiers are ordered to hand over or turn off their cell phones. Wives might hear through the media that a helicopter has crashed, but because of the comblock, at a time when they most want to speak with their soldiers they must wait to be notified through the Family Readiness Group if their soldiers were involved. While such comblocks are the most anxious periods for many spouses, they also contribute to severing a sense of shared experience.

Many spouses also believed that their husbands censored what they told them from overseas. They believed that their soldiers deleted accounts of the violence they witnessed and the dangers they encountered in order to not worry them. Most wives said they would have preferred their husbands to have shared these events with them, not only as part of the notion of duty through shared service but also for the purported emotional benefits of communicating potentially traumatizing experiences. When asked if she thought her husband, a MEDEVAC pilot, talked with her about his experiences of violence while he was deployed, one wife answered:

I think so. Or at least I hope so. I think it would be good for him to talk about it. And I think I can handle it. He talked about some stuff with me. The kids got to him. The kids he would have to pick up from this or that bomb in Baghdad that

²⁴ Soldiers, purportedly encouraged by the Army's Public Affairs Office, even post videos to Youtube, often of them in their overseas bases lip-synching to music videos. See, for example, Eddie Grant's "Electric Avenue" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78oxfVWI-9Y>; Lady Ga-Ga's "Telephone" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haHXgFU7qNI>; DJ Casper's "Cha-Cha Slide": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX5ZVC1YY1k>.

²⁵ <http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/sfrc/OPSECTrifold.pdf>

blew up in a market or outside a mosque. Kids the age of our kids. But I don't know if he really told me everything.

While some wives wanted to be told everything, others appreciated that their husbands were not telling them "the whole story." As one wife put it, "It's kind of mutual protection. He doesn't tell me all the bad stuff over there. And I kind of avoid telling him about the hassles and problems of having him gone." Either way, there is evidence that conditions of deployment, particularly the potential and actual violence of military work, separate the soldier overseas and his wife back at home. This separateness can dissolve a sense of shared service. Wives like this one are aware of the "distinct reality" that is their husbands' experience at war:

When he's over there, I know it's a totally different world. It's a totally distinct reality from what we have together at home. So I don't know if there's much point of him telling me about it? Will I even understand? I am never going to be there, doing what he does. Ever.

If communication became selective in one direction, it could, and did, in the other as well. Most participants admitted to censoring their own accounts of events at home. They tended to avoid mentioning the frustrations and hardships of running a household on their own, lest they worry their soldiers overseas.²⁶ Some wives kept significant events from their husbands, such as the wife mentioned earlier who was diagnosed with a degenerative disease and underwent emergency surgery without informing her husband; another wife chose not to tell her husband that their daughter had been assaulted. Keeping such knowledge from their soldiers was a common aspect of the peculiar content of marriage and parenting during deployment: commitment to a partnership with an absent partner.

Many wives said that during deployments they avoided any media communications. News reports of battles and unnamed fatalities raised their anxiety levels. Many also felt that the media misrepresented what their soldiers were doing in Iraq and Afghanistan, emphasizing the rare destructive events and ignoring the everyday humanitarian and constructive work. Consequently, women with husbands in the midst of newsworthy and world-historical events are usually unaware of the accounts given of those events by mass media.²⁷ One result of this relationship to media was a belief that most other Americans were misinformed about what they and their husbands were doing. Such a perception displaces the object of duty away from uninformed and unappreciative American civilians and frames sacrifice as being made on the part of Iraqi and Afghani civilians. This helps explain why duty among spouses transcends patriotism. But avoiding media representations that link their experience to a larger, global

²⁶ There were only a few wives who said they exaggerated the difficulties at home in order to make their husbands feel that they were missed and needed.

²⁷ On the other hand, there were a few wives who admitted becoming "media junkies" during their husbands' deployments. One wife learned from the cover of Time magazine that her husband piloted a helicopter involved in a mission that killed top leaders of the insurgency in Iraq. She distinctly remembers talking to him on that day, asking what was going on, and him saying "Nothing much."

situation also discourages the notion of duty and drives a military spouse's justifications toward a more personal, narrow commitment to her husband and his well-being.

In sum, various factors related to the military context in which regular army wives experience deployment suppress a tendency to otherwise embrace values like duty, service, and sacrifice in times of threat. The evidence above showed how the concentration of hardships in the military community, including schools, made wives feel more vulnerable than proud. As such, sites like schools and symbols like service flags were not able to generate the recognition that enduring the difficulties of deployment was part of doing one's duty. Deployment imposed conditions on communication that made it hard for wives who otherwise prided themselves on a sense of shared service with their soldiers to continue to think in terms of doing their duty alongside their husbands.

"Extended Commitment" Among Regular Army Wives During Periods of Deployment

The conditions of deployment make it difficult for army wives living around military installation to think in terms of duty. Rather than broad, societal or patriotic purposes like pride and service, the experience of deployment draws sentiment inward, within the military as an isolated community.

Wives turn to the military community as a source of empathy and support during deployment, re-enforcing a notion of commitment to the military lifestyle. But factors within that community block actual and symbolic support for enduring the difficulties of deployment and for thinking of them as something endured on behalf of a greater cause. Interactions within the narrow community impose discipline, surveillance, and accountability. These derivatives of community life underscore a dynamic of interdependency. Within this dynamic, wives see themselves as committed to other families because doing so will keep their own husbands alive. I call this kind of thinking "extended commitment."

As discussed in chapter 2, some spouses mentioned having a sense of commitment to the military community and lifestyle, a desire to be card-carrying members of a particular culture, even before their experiences of deployment. Deployment brings to the fore and strengthens a spouse's bond to the other spouses with whom they share this experience. Empathy and support might be what they most readily think they get from the community, but self-surveillance and discipline, a way of judging and sustaining one's own conduct during deployment by seeing one's own self in the experiences of others, are significant in forming the basis of an "extended commitment."

Scrutiny and discipline

Though the Army is unable to order spouses to live near installations during deployments, regular army wives recognize the pressure to do so. Most agree that an army installation is the best place to be during a deployment. Even some national guard spouses, who are not allowed to live on post even during deployment, recognized the advantages and wished they could.

Most regular army wives remained on or near post during deployment and looked to the military community for empathy. Over and over again, they stressed in the beginning of deployment the importance of being with people who know what they are going through because they had or were going through it themselves. As one regular army wife living near Fort Jackson said:

I don't know how I would have survived deployment living anywhere else but here. Here I was surrounded by girlfriends and other women who knew exactly what I was going through. Their husbands were either away or had been away. There's nothing like having someone who just gets it, because she's been there too.

In addition to empathy, spouses mentioned various forms of support that they received from being in the military community. Most of that support came in material or other practical forms from the institutions of the military community: the command, the medical clinics, the chaplaincy, the day care centers, post retail exchanges, housing office, etc. However, as the deployment continued, the support that most wives got from other wives, as opposed to military institutions, became somewhat sparse. In the paucity of that support, they discovered the limits of being with those just like them, going through the same experience of deployment.

Turning to people just like one's self in an identical situation often means they often do not have much more to offer than what one already has on one's own. Other regular army wives are not bound to other army wives out of gratitude for what they are risking, for they face the same risks. If they feel compelled to help each other, it is not out of the debt of a "grateful nation." Given the geographical isolation of posts, those who remain on the military base during their husband's deployment are usually isolated from extended family and long-term friends. If they turn to those around them, they have turned to someone who does not have much more than what they already share in common: a loved one in harm's way. As one young wife described this reality:

Who did I turn to for support? Well, there were other wives around me. And we helped each other as best we could. But you know, none of us was much better at this than anyone else. We just kind of muddled along, kind of avoided getting each other down. Because the one thing we could easily have done was just throw a huge pity party, just feel bad, all together. And sometimes that happened but we mostly tried not to.

Furthermore, given the segregation of military life by rank, young and inexperienced wives are isolated on their own, separate from the more experienced and resource-rich families of officers and non-commissioned officers [Schwabe & Kaslow, cited in Alt & Stone 1991: 130]. Where other inexperienced army wives might not be able to provide symbolic recognition, gratitude, experience-tested advice, or actual material support, they do offer something more than just empathy. Living among other spouses, watching women just like themselves every

day handle deployment, spouses acquire an expectation that they, too, can and must cope. Where civilian neighbors, family and friends might, out of gratitude and sympathy, accommodate and even indulge the hardships of a wife of a deployed soldier, other army wives expect her to “suck it up.”²⁸ As one regular army wife explains:

There was this girl who came over during the last deployment. And she was all like, ‘I’ve had it. I am ready to leave him. I can’t take it anymore. This is not what marriage is supposed to be.’ And we were all like, ‘You’ve got to get your shit together. Be strong. You see us? We can do it. So can you. Stop being a little bitch, saying you’re going home crying to mommy.’

In this way, the community of other army wives becomes a disciplinary apparatus, a way of watching one’s own behavior by watching the behavior of others, reflecting one’s own experience in the experience of others (Foucault 1995:217). Shared experience opens the way to accepting and then striving toward shared expectations.²⁹ It is not so much that some wives spouses have the extra strength to support others (they really have nothing extra to offer each other) as much as it is that they keep each other in line, upright, and held together. Whatever wives cannot give to each other in terms of support, they make up for it in surveillance and discipline. One author refers to this as the “fishbowl effect” of living on a military base during deployment (Fallon, cited by Gross 2011).³⁰

Technical Accountability

Similarly, close acquaintance with the military community and with the military as a technical profession shifts wives’ thinking away from duty and toward a particular form of “extended” commitment. Most participants could recall either a serious injury or fatality in their husbands’ units either before or during deployment.³¹ While the military has rituals to

²⁸ Indeed, some participants expressed contempt for wives who “packed up and ran home to mommy” during their husbands’ deployments.

²⁹ In this way, living within and committing to the military community is not so much a way of gathering with similar individuals and life experiences, as it is a way of referring “individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison” (Foucault 1995:182), i.e. a process of making them more like one another.

³⁰ “The spouses are made very aware that their actions on the home front have an effect on their soldier at all times. An army base is a bit of a fishbowl, and I don’t want to say that people are in each other’s business, but you’re hoping that your neighbors are doing OK. And when you think they might not be, people have a tendency to try and help them out. And that could be seen as nosy or it could be seen as being really responsible, but it’s a fine line and because it’s such a small world, I think the wives are aware of presenting a stable life.” (Fallon cited by Gross 2011).

³¹ One interesting consequence of living on a base with so many military units was that study participants at Fort Jackson reported that they frequently heard of injuries and fatalities. Several of them shared how hearing the news of an unspecified helicopter incident would first fill them with panic and terror that it could be their husband, second with relief that it was not him, and third a profound feeling of guilt that they were happy while some other wife and family was bereaved. Going through these three stages of emotional reaction prepares an emotional groundwork for the kind of cautious relationship entailed in “extended commitment.”

impart sacred and moral meanings to these unfortunate events, there is also a process of rationally accounting for casualties. It is often noted by spouses how civilians exaggerate the risks and dangers they and their soldiers face: to civilians, all soldiers are in the frontlines of combat, and all deaths are sacrifices to the nation. But within the military itself, there is a more realistic appraisal of danger. When fatalities occur, they are not solely framed as sacrifices to the common good. They are analyzed as failures of military protocol and technique, while other times they are deemed merely “accidents.”³² The Army investigates helicopter crashes and technically assesses who or what is to blame: hostile fire, pilot error, mechanical error, material failure, weather, low wires, etc.³³ Spouses are familiar with these procedures and they are privy to their results.

They see how their husbands can be held accountable for their part in what might befall their comrades. In this way, wives of mechanics, who as “fobbits”³⁴ were rarely in harm’s way, were fearful for their husbands during deployment, not because of what could happen to them, but what might happen to a crew on a helicopter that they maintained. As one mechanic’s wife explained:

Yeah, I worried about him a lot [during the last deployment]. Not so much because I thought he was in danger but that he would be responsible for someone else getting hurt. That’s what he worries about. And that’s the hardest thing to deal with in the Army. Knowing you fucked up and someone else died. I don’t think it’s the same in other jobs. But that’s like...What do you call it? A fate worse than death among these guys.

As she explains, being found responsible for a comrade’s death is a fate almost worse than death itself. By extension, having a husband who is responsible for the death of another woman’s soldier is a terrifying risk shared by all spouses connected to an Army Aviation unit. The Army’s emphasis on accountability informed a notion that wives were similarly responsible: that they supported their husbands by doing their part to keep them alive, out of a concrete commitment to him, not out of a duty to some larger, abstract purpose. Where rituals translate death into sacrifice, investigations assign responsibility, shifting how folks think from duty to commitment.

Commonsense holds that support and empathy are clearly benefits of involvement with the military community during deployment. More significantly, participants describe a context that offers a way of watching oneself and accessing doable standards of conduct. In addition to surveillance and discipline, the military community adds a different aspect to the dangers of

³² The military broadly recognizes most deaths and injuries as sacrifice to the nation. For instance, a soldier need not have been injured or killed in combat to receive honors such as a Purple Heart or a Gold or Silver Star. Participants, however, when asked if they felt all kinds of losses were equally honored in the military community, believed there was a distinction made between those more directly related to deployments and the war effort and those that occurred stateside in everyday operations.

³³ <http://www.armyaircrews.com/index.html>

³⁴ “Fobbit” is a term for soldiers who rarely leave the relative safety of the Forward Operating Bases [FOB’s].

deployment: accountability. A husband might be in harm's way but he is there with competent colleagues, held accountable to each other by high standards of professionalism. As one wife said:

I know he's a pretty competent guy. He knows his job. And so does everyone else on his crew. They train and train and train. And they get rid of the guys who can't handle it long before they go overseas. So I am pretty confident he's going to be OK.

In the overall context, soldiers and husbands are seen as people willing to die and sacrifice for their country as well as technically proficient individuals depending on one another in clear and demonstrable ways. In the experience of deployment and through their familiarity with military protocol, regular army wives' thinking focuses more on the latter. What regular army wives derive from their involvement in the military community – scrutiny, discipline and a sense of technical accountability – underscore the way regular army wives mostly think about their relationships to deployed husbands: a way of thinking I term “extended commitment.”

The Focus of thinking in terms of extended commitment

In a context that emphasizes how they compare to others like themselves, visible guidelines for behavior, and a ready sense of blame, Army spouses develop a sense of “extended commitment” to their soldiers, other spouses and the unit. This concept captures the notion that wives lend their support during deployment to others not out of a sense of duty or belonging but because they see it as what they need to do to keep their own husbands alive. At the core of expanded relations during deployment, there is still the relatively narrow commitment to their husband.

In many ways, this justification parallels the way soldiers feel about their relationship to one another in war. In World War II, the thought that soldiers reported as most helpful when the going got tough (second only to prayer) was not letting the other men down (Stouffer 1949:174). Like soldiers, wives think that they do what they have to do in order not to let their husbands down. Study participants expressed a strong sense that wives can greatly affect soldiers' safety overseas. As this regular army wife explained:

It matters to me how well you are holding up because if you start to lose it and tell your husband that you are losing it then he gets all worried and starts to lose it. And if he falls apart or is even just a bit distracted, that might mean my husband's life.

This regular army wife at Fort Jackson explains why another wife's infidelities during deployment were a legitimate issue of concern for other wives:

We had one situation during the last deployment. A wife was supposedly fooling around on her husband. And usually, I couldn't care less. But word was getting back to the guys over in Iraq and that was starting some real problems. Not just for her husband but for everyone who had to work with him and rely on him. So the FRG [Family Readiness Group] leader and even the Rear Detachment commander got involved.

Interviewees like this one outlined a series of consequences by which one spouse's breakdown or betrayal would affect her soldier's performance and consequently endanger the lives of other wives' husbands. Participants never offered stories of fatalities that were believed to have been caused by a wife having distracted or distressed her soldier, but the notion that it could happen remains.

Interactions in family support groups like the FRG reaffirmed these notions of mutual accountability. Participants felt like the FRG was less a site to which they could bring their problems than one that ensures that no problems existed. Participants complained of having honestly shared their difficulties and worries at FRG meetings, only to hear back from their soldiers overseas that their concerns had traveled up and then down the chain of command as an order to "get control of your wife, because she's freaking the other wives out." This mechanic's wife gives an example of her experience:

At first I went to the FRG for support. I was really open about how I was feeling and the problems that I was having. I was looking for help but also some confirmation: these problems are normal, right? Then I found out that the FRG leader, the captain's wife, told her husband who then told a lieutenant who then told Carl's NCO [non-commissioned officer] that I was losing it and worrying all the other wives and he needed to do something about it.

For this reason, many participants reported that they kept in touch with their FRG only in order to remain informed but never expected serious support. In this way, the commitment extended between spouses was a commitment to do their individual parts not to breakdown and to scrutinize one another towards that end. From what they said, they did this not out of patriotic duty but out of commitment to their own husbands' welfare.

Thus, thinking in terms of extended commitment, wives accept a limit on both the amount of assistance they expected to give, and the amount they can expect to receive from others. Their first and foremost commitment is doing what they can to keep their soldiers alive. If they help another family, they make sense of it not in terms of their duty to a larger mission or greater good, but in terms of ensuring that the soldier in that family will help keep their husband alive. And if they are helped, they think it is for the same reason.

Obligation Among Regular Army Wives During Deployment

While extended commitment is the predominant way in which regular army wives frame their marriages during deployment, obligation as a way of thinking begins to emerge during this period. Their relationships to the institutions that assist them during deployment influence a growing sense of mutual obligations: what is owed to them and what they owe in return. In the absence of their deployed soldiers, a growing sense of independence also leads them to think more in terms of individualized marriage, with its associated obligation for each partner to develop their own competencies and pursue their individual paths of fulfillment.

As noted earlier, Fort Jackson schools and the military command that largely funds them, acting out of an over-riding obligation to its soldiers and their families, tended to identify children's experience of deployment as difficulties that needed to be addressed and ameliorated through counseling and interventions. In a multitude of other ways using a variety of institutions and agencies, the military command takes a similar responsibility for the welfare of army families, from housing, health care, spiritual life, day care, affordable food, clothing, and other necessities. This results in a tendency to ameliorate the consequences of deployment rather than frame them symbolically as sacrifice. It reaffirms an over-arching relationship between soldier's families and the Army. This relationship is one of practical and material support and fits more closely with thinking in terms of mutual obligation: what the Army owes a soldier's family and what they can expect. Where schools in overwhelmingly civilian contexts reflect back to wives and mothers of army families a notion of duty fulfilled, schools around Fort Jackson reminded them of the obligation both have to each other. In the context of a military base, the school experience of their children impresses army wives with a sense of obligation, of making sense of the difficulties of deployment in terms of the services they can expect from the Army or other institutions to alleviate those hardships.

Regular army wives in the military context were clear that they did not look to the FRG to help them solve serious problems. Some mentioned that they sought support elsewhere in the community, like church, their neighborhood, workplace, their doctor, and even their local gym. But many spoke of deployment as a period in which they developed their own competencies, a time in which they would do things on their own.

Though regular army wives were committed to their partners during deployment meant that they found themselves in the peculiar position of being in a partnership situation where the partner is absent. Many embraced the period as a chance to learn skills, re-discover competencies they had before marriage, or more generally, build a "capacity to be alone" (Pearlman 1970:950). As this regular army spouse at Fort Jackson explained:

Before I married him, I lived for several years on my own. When he went off to deployment, I found myself doing things I used to do for myself. Fixing the car, paying the bills, balancing the checkbook, even picking the movies I would watch. I even learned some new things like fixing the sink and installing a new electrical outlet. I was rediscovering all those parts of me and new ones that I had kind of given over to him. I learned I could be alone and competent.

In contrast to a sense of duty, these wives said they neither sought nor needed recognition from others. In this regard, some wives deliberately declined resources and other entitlements available to them. These spouses decline what the Army and others owe them, often to the frustration of those charged with fulfilling the military's obligations to them and of grateful civilians who wanted to recognize and reward them.³⁵ They declined accepting one form of obligation in preference to an obligation to themselves. For them, there was a sense that they were going to "do this deployment on their own." When asked to whom she turned for support during deployment, this wife explained:

Really no one. I knew I was going to have to do this on my own. I wanted to do this on my own. I looked forward to it as an opportunity for me to grow. To prove how strong I could be.

This desire for independence during deployment does not mean spouses think of themselves outside of their relationships. Their single-partner partnerships are still partnerships. As this regular army wife who spent a deployment living near Fort Jackson explained:

I knew I had to try to do it on my own. To be strong for myself and for [my husband] and the kids. I knew he had to do it, had to be strong, and be over there without us. So I felt I had to do it on my own and be strong alone just like he was. We were still going to be a couple, going through the same things, just three thousand miles apart from each other.

In sum, spouses' desires to be independent are as much for their soldiers as it is for themselves. As we will see in the next chapter, when soldiers return, the paradoxes of this commitment emerge. But for now, deployment becomes a period in which soldiers and spouses find the opportunity to impress each other, to hold one another in awe, not because of a service as sense of duty, but because of the capacities they develop under separate, demanding conditions.

Deployment in the national guard civilian context

National guard wives endure the separations and fears of deployment while they themselves live in a mostly civilian context. Positioned on the edge of military and civilian worlds, these wives have a different experience with ceremonies and symbols than regular army wives. For them, the rituals and gestures of sending a loved one off to war instill a sense of duty. The seclusion that they experience during deployment, alone but distinguished among

³⁵ This is one answer to the puzzle of why military spouses do not use the resources available to them. Another, rooted in duty, might be the idea that they are motivated by service, not rewards, and that such rewards take away the moral meaning of sacrifice and replace it with blood price.

those not similarly sacrificing their loved ones for the greater good, bolsters this way of thinking about the hardships they endure. National guard wives tend not to think in terms of commitment because the ever-present example of civilian couples reminds them that their own partnership is somewhat different than the normal companionate marriage. Compared to regular army wives living in a military context, national guard wives receive relatively few services from the Army. It is consequently not surprising that they do not think during this period in terms of obligation.

Farewell Ceremonies and National Guard Wives

In contrast to the farewell ceremonies attended by regular army wives on large installations like Fort Jackson, the send-offs experienced by national guard wives helped sustain a sense of duty and public sacrifice. A representative example was a farewell ceremony that I attended in late 2010 for a headquarters battalion of the National Guard headed to a deployment in Iraq. It was held on a Sunday evening in a veterans' memorial civic center in the downtown area of a civilian community, across from the high school, library and town hall. The same center is rented out for other special occasions in the community, such as weddings, graduations, high school proms, awards ceremonies, and concerts. The town built the center in honor of past veterans, and statues and monuments to the members of the community who fought in various wars surround the center. There was live music provided by an orchestra of more than thirty musicians from the Association of the United States Army. The ceremony, attended by mayors and Congressional representatives, included invocations by Army chaplains followed by speeches, "attention to orders" (the reading of their mobilization orders that transform national guardsmen into active duty, federal soldiers), and formal rituals, that included the casing of the battalion's colors³⁶ and the changing of their hats from berets to combat camouflaged garrison caps. The speeches included an address by the major general of the state's Army National Guard in which he explained the battalion's current war aims in Iraq, likening them to the colonial era hero Baron von Stuben who came from Prussia to train the early American Army. The major general explicitly asked the spouses to stand and he recognized them for their service. He also asked the children to stand, place their hands over their hearts, and pledge to do their best to make their soldier proud of them when he comes home:

You can't use deployment as an excuse. Work even harder during deployment at school and around the house to make your soldier proud of you, just as he's doing something to make you proud.

³⁶ The battalion's flag was rolled up and placed in a black sheath. The speaker explained that the colors represent the spirit of the unit, its past glories, and the reason for which soldiers will sacrifice their lives. "Commanders and soldiers come and go, but the colors remain."

In the case of the National Guard, deployment is linked to a sense of duty and pride shared between soldiers and their families. The difficulties of separation are framed as part of a call to better behavior, to an even more exacting standard. In this context, the difficulties of deployment will not be ameliorated through any obligation between the Army and the welfare of a soldier's family. The general never promises that the National Guard will make this period of deployment any easier for the children and their mothers.

After the major general spoke, the brigade commander also pointed to the spouses and children as the "pillars" of a soldier's strength. He recognized that he and the soldiers were asking for additional sacrifice from their families, and said that they were "in awe" of what spouses and children do back home. During the ceremony, soldiers sat interspersed among their families, not together in military formation. Even when they stood to be read their mobilization orders and to symbolically change their garrison berets to field caps, they remained with their families. Underneath the high-sounding speeches about fighting for liberty and praises for the largest National Guard Army Aviation task force in history, there was the audible presence of babies and toddlers. This ceremony included families in both the occasion of marking the deployment and the mission of the deployment itself.

In addition to the military personnel, civilian political representatives and retired members of the battalion were also in attendance. One veteran was awarded a medal for lifelong service, pinned to the lapel of his civilian suit. The presence of civilians and veterans established the continuity between military families and the broader community, connecting them to the beneficiaries of their sacrifice as well as de-concentrating the amount of grief present. With the others in attendance who were grateful for their sacrifice and indebted to support them, wives did not need to pretend to smile. I interviewed one spouse who attended this farewell ceremony, and she said that it was well worth the two-hour drive from her home:

There is no one in his unit who lives around here. So it was really good to go and be with others. And to be with folks who were there to just show their support. It kind of ... they were kind of like an extra shoulder for my burden. Not because they're guard wives too but because they're just everyday people who came out to show how much they appreciate what he does. That made it worth the trip.

With its explicit references to sacrifice, spiritual and other transcendent entities (the unit's entities, the nation, God), and its emphasis on pride and gratitude, this national guard ceremony contributed to a notion of duty among spouses facing deployment. A wife who attended the ceremony remarked how proud she was of what her husband was going to Iraq to do, even though she personally questioned the war's political aims. By contrast, at an installation like Fort Jackson, with thousands of soldiers and scores of units deploying, it is difficult to give each departure such special attention. The procedure becomes routinized and relatively banal in the hands of MWR workers, encouraging gestures and using spaces that lack the symbolic significance of a veterans' war memorial civic center located in the heart of an otherwise civilian town. While some spaces on Fort Jackson are more sacred than others (parade grounds, memorials to fallen soldiers, museums), there was no space available to rouse

the sentiments of duty among families facing deployment. On a base like Fort Jackson, there is a sense that deployment is yet another stage in a regular army family's life, immersed as it always is within the military's institutions and community. The period comes with heightened anxieties and difficulties of separation but not with an intensified sense of duty.³⁷ In this we see how farewell ceremonies in the different contexts, civilian and military, have an influence on how military wives think about deployment.

The Seclusion of National Guard Wives During Deployment

Where regular army wives extend their notion of commitment to those wives around them going through the same experience of deployment, national guard wives draw on their interactions with people who are different from them -- civilians who do not have loved ones in harm's way and this sustains their thinking in duty terms.

While national guard units also form FRG's, these support groups played a different role in the context of deployment for a national guard wife. On the one hand, the FRG is sometimes the only connection to the military world that she would have. Usually living in predominantly civilian communities, national guard wives have relatively few points of contact with the Army: no armed forces radio, television, or newspapers and few, if any, army acquaintances in their daily lives. Despite the critical link that the FRG might serve, the geographic reality that most national guard families, particularly those associated with aviation units, come from widespread catchment areas, meant that few wives were ever involved in FRG activities. Though FRG leaders tried to host monthly meetings, many family members found it logistically difficult to attend. A consequence of this was a greater sense of isolation from other national guard wives and the relative absence of the kind of mutual scrutiny felt among wives on or near a base like Fort Jackson.

If geography isolated them from other national guard wives, the conditions of deployment itself secluded them socially from their civilian neighbors. While their husbands were deployed, most similarities between them and their neighbors receded. As one national guard wife explained:

All of a sudden we went from being just another family on the block to being that family with a father at war. It was really weird and totally unexpected. I couldn't have imagined how different I was going to feel. Friends would still want me to do things with them but I felt I couldn't leave the house or be away from my phone for fear that I would miss a call. And they just didn't get it. It was like I stepped into a whole different world, but I was still right next door.

³⁷ The farewell ceremonies instilled a sense of "sharing the experience in a public ritual" and was able to ease the pain of parting. Participants often mentioned that farewells at the end of R&R's, when soldiers returned individually after two weeks at home from overseas, were the hardest because it was usually just between a soldier and his family.

This feeling of being different but different in a familiar setting helped contribute to a sense that deployment was a distinct period in their lives, a special time heavy with sacred meaning and purpose.³⁸

Though national guard wives reported having received support and expressions of gratitude from their civilian neighbors, extended family members, co-workers, and fellow church members; they mostly emphasized a sense of being alone during deployment. As one national guard wife shared:

My mom and brother came by all the time and helped out. So did other folks. They were great. Folks from church. From work. Even the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and Legion [American Legion] helped with the lawn and brought Christmas presents for the kids. But I felt so alone. Maybe it would have been worse. But I have to say it was the loneliest time in my life.

This commonly expressed sense of isolation contributed to the way national guard wives persisted in thinking in terms of duty. Their isolation, or seclusion, is part of the conceptual prism through which they frame their personal hardships as public sacrifice and a fulfilled sense of duty.

Unlike regular army wives, national guard wives did not frame their experience in terms of commitment to marriage. The constantly available image of neighbors' and other family members' marital lives made it hard for them to think of their own marriage as anything like normal:

Sometimes. Actually a lot of the time it was hard to be around friends and their husbands. Or even my sister and her husband. It just reminded me that I was married but my husband was gone. And not just gone for a little while. Gone for fifteen months. And maybe longer. Maybe he would never come back.

Contrasting their marriage with those they saw around them made it hard to think of what they were enduring in terms of marriage itself. It made them mostly question what kind of marriage they had. One national guard wife said that the worst part of being a soldier's wife was going into a place like a restaurant while he was deployed and feeling that people thought she was a single mom. Near an army base like Fort Jackson, the wife of a deployed soldier might not fear such a misrecognition nor would she lack for examples of other marriages like her own. For these reasons, national guard wives were less likely to think in the same terms of commitment that regular army wives did.

The kind of *in situ* seclusion that national guard wives experienced during deployment helped set them apart from the everyday, profane world of their lives before deployment. The

³⁸ We can contrast this with the sense that a regular army installation, like Fort Jackson, is a distinct or sacred space. Furthermore, I contend that it is a space in which the intensity of shared collective life and sacredness is relatively incessant, outside of any variations in time like those experienced by national guard families.

double distinction they felt from both their neighbors and their own selves before deployment enforced the sense that this was a special time in their lives. Similar to the ritual motions of ancient sacrifice, the wife as the person offering the sacrifice went into a kind of seclusion. In that seclusion, she was purified and stripped of her temporal being (Hubert and Mauss 1964:20-22). Like the person performing the sacrifice, she stood “at the threshold of the sacred and profane worlds” (Hubert and Mauss 1964:23), approaching in her seclusion the transcendent forces to which she would make her sacrifice and from whom she would receive their blessings. For example, one national guard wife, usually in the center of a thick social world, explained her experience of seclusion during deployment:

Usually I am not that kind of [secluded] person. I am outgoing and extroverted. But during the deployment I found myself going mostly inside of me. I kind of cut myself off from other folks. And discovered all kinds of strengths to do what I had to do and get through it. It was like a vision quest or something. (Laughs). I think they [her best friend and her mom] understood how this was going to be a really different time for me. They were there to help out. But they kind of respected the distance that I needed.

Her sense of seclusion, of being alone and different, supported a kind of thinking about what she was enduring as the wife of a deployed soldier as “special” and “extraordinary.”³⁹ Likened to a “vision quest,” the deployment period for national guard wives becomes a temporal context conducive to thinking in terms of sacrifice. In these ways, experiencing deployment in the context of largely civilian communities sustains thinking in the relatively expansive and transcendent terms of duty, justifying what they endure in terms of something larger than themselves as individuals or married couples.

Commitment and Obligation among National Guard Wives during Deployment

Unlike regular army wives, national guard wives rarely spoke in terms of either commitment or extended commitment during deployments. One factor contributing to this is that their relative isolation from other national guard wives made it harder to have the kind of relationship with one another that encouraged extended commitment among regular army wives. Furthermore, unlike regular army wives, wives of deployed national guard soldiers are constantly reminded of how unlike other marriages, as exemplified by their civilian neighbors, their own relationship is. This context effect makes rooting one’s justifications in a commitment to marriage more difficult.

National guard wives do not have much access to military institutions and agencies that might alleviate some of the hardships of deployment. Though certain privileges and benefits

³⁹ Other researchers have shown that during deployment reserve component [National Guard] wives appear to be in more fragile states of mental health (Chandra et al. 2008) than regular army wives. This might, however, be a temporary condition tied to this distinct period of seclusion.

change for them when their husbands deploy, such as increased health care coverage, they must still access services from largely civilian sources. One national guard unit replicated a temporary commissary during a deployment by bringing in palettes of food to a hangar one Saturday every three months. Otherwise, national guard wives are largely on their own, among their civilian neighbors and this retarded the development of thinking about the deployment experience in obligation terms.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the specific ways that army wives make sense of the military cycle of deployment. It examined what deployment entails for wives, namely separation and varying degrees of fear for their husbands' safety, and what this meant for how they think about their relationship to the Army, their spouses and each other. It found that while deployment resulted in a surge in feelings of duty for national guard wives, there was a lack of patriotic fervor in the beliefs and attitudes of regular army wives toward their experience of deployment in a military context.

Despite expectations to the contrary, the broader military community does not rise to the occasion of war with greater moral cohesion and sense of patriotic purpose. Instead, it is beset by negative economic consequences and rising incidences of crime. Whereas in mostly civilian contexts schools are important civic sites that confer the distinctions of national service on national guard families, schools in the context of military towns concentrate on the negative repercussions of deployment for children. Crossville schools, heavily subsidized by the Department of Defense, recognize these hardships and help to fulfill the Army's obligation to the most vulnerable of military dependents through interventions and accommodations. Given the proportions of students who also have deployed fathers and the military's obligation to provide services and relief to soldiers' families, the schools in army towns focus more on alleviating suffering than framing it symbolically as shared service and distinction.

Other rituals and symbols associated with deployment fail within the context of a military town to instill a belief that duty will sustain war-time relationships. Farewell ceremonies for regular army soldiers usually come across as routinized and banal, in contrast to farewell ceremonies held within a predominantly civilian context conducted for deploying national guard units, which draw on symbols and relationships that remind wives of a sense of duty. Service flags or blue star banners are available to all army wives to mark their household's service during periods of deployment, but very few wives in the military context choose to display them publicly. Fear for their safety within their own community, among other d such as the difficulty of distinction in their particular context and the possibility of being viewed as sexual availability, makes it hard for them to display symbols like the blue star banner that in a civilian (national guard) context signify service to the nation and engender distinction for a duty fulfilled.

Lastly, conditions of deployment that shape communication between soldier and spouse sever the sense that they share a calling to serve together. Separation and self-censorship bring to the fore distinct realities and spheres in which husbands and wives do their separate parts:

he goes to war and she runs the home. Those wives living on or near Fort Jackson found it difficult to maintain a sense of shared service with a husband who withdraws into what becomes a total institution during war. This is surprising given both popular conceptions of the military and evidence from social psychology research on group reactions to the perception of threat [Sherif et al 1961]. Rather than promoting a sense of duty to a larger cause or belonging to a larger group, conditions in the military context during deployment inhibited that way of thinking.

While regular army wives expressed a sense of connection to other military families during deployments, what seemed to connect them was mutual scrutiny, discipline, and accountability rather than what they shared in terms of service, pride, special selection or a transcendent purpose. Wives approached and endured deployment as an act of commitment. They would do what was needed not out of a sense of duty for country, but to ensure the safety of their own husbands.

Rather than spurring an ascendancy to higher, societal or patriotic purposes, deployment experienced in a military base context involved sentiments that focused responsibilities inwardly, first within the military as a community of shared experience and then around a wife's own individual sense of competency. The military community, as a source of empathy and support during deployment, promoted a notion of commitment to the military lifestyle. But certain conditions within that community, particularly a familiarity with how military protocol holds members of a unit accountable, replace sacrificial meanings with portions of blame and underscore a dynamic of interdependency that I term "extended commitment." Regular army wives are committed to other families in as much as doing so will keep their own husbands alive. Commitment to their own soldiers also becomes a commitment to a partnership in which one partner is not there. Under conditions of separation and with premonitions of permanent loss, commitment to marriage and parenting becomes commitment to developing one's own competencies, one's own sense of independence.

In contrast to regular army wives living within largely military contexts, national guard wives did think in terms of duty during their husbands' deployments. Though geographically isolated from other women going through the same experience, and socially isolated from their neighbors who do not share the experience of having a loved one at war, national guard wives, in the very experience of social seclusion, saw deployment as a special time – a time in which sacred duties would be fulfilled and sacrifices made. While their hardships of deployment might not have been addressed or alleviated by the interventions of military institutions or by empathy from other army wives, they were more likely to frame suffering during deployment in terms of a broader social good. Surrounded by images of regular marriages, they find it hard to think of their experience in terms of a commitment to marriage; they are constantly reminded that their marriages are far from typical. Their seclusion, however, like the ritual of seclusion of those who participated in ancient sacrificial rites, puts them in the frame of mind to fulfill a sacred duty, to see what they endure in terms of transcendent purposes, broader than the interests of themselves as individuals or married couples. If national guard wives appear to rally around some patriotic purpose, it is not because they are immersed in a context with others

sharing their sacrifice, but because they are largely alone, living among the beneficiaries of that sacrifice.

Introduction

The last chapter addressed how army wives think about their relationships while their husbands are deployed to combat. This chapter will address a subsequent period in the cycle of military service: reunion. How do wives think about their relationships when their soldiers return home? We will continue the comparison of the different effects of this context in time (reunion) across the contexts of space (military/regular army and civilian/national guard) on the categories of thinking about military marriage (duty, commitment, and obligation).

We might expect that reunions are joyful periods requiring little justification on the part of army wives in terms of how much hardship they are willing to endure (effort) and for whom they are willing to endure it (scope). Reunion might relieve wives of the hard work of keeping an absent partner present in the life of the couple and the family during deployment (Boss 1999). However, this commonsense expectation of reunion as a “return to normal” is largely contested by the accounts of reunion shared by participants. Where combat deployments were clearly the period during which army wives were most afraid for the safety of their husbands, reunions were the time they were most afraid for the health and survival of their marriages.¹ We will see how wives’ thinking adjusts to the challenging period of reunion.

Despite the fears associated with deployment and the difficulties of reunion, we know that military families appear to become more resilient, at least when measured by incidence of divorce, after deployment and with each successive redeployment. Drawing on the personnel records of over six million regular army and national guard service members from 1995 to 2005, Karney and Crown demonstrated that after the beginning of the war in 2001, divorce was actually less common among families whose soldiers had deployed (2007:xxiii), and overall divorce rates rose only gradually, never actually matching the peak year, 1999, which occurred during peace time (2007:xx-xxi). In 2010, the overall military divorce rate leveled off after rising for the previous five years (Bushatz 2010). This has led researchers to speculate that while the cycle of deployment and reunion has its stresses, it also has benefits, both material and emotional (Karney & Crown 2007:xxv). They attribute this unexpected resilience to “adaptive processes” that go on in the military family but that are otherwise unobserved by their research methods.

In this chapter, we identify shifts in the way wives think about their relationship as an important part of these adaptive processes. During this period of reunion, army wives change their thinking. With reunion, regular army wives, specifically, shift away from a frame of

¹¹ I originally did not plan to write about the comparative experiences of regular army and national guard wives during reunions and redeployments. This information comes from responses to questions about 1) when they were most worried about the health of their relationship; 2) the number of times their husband had deployed; 3) the number of times their husband had re-enlisted or re-commissioned and their role in those decisions; 4) if they want their husbands to stay in the army and what they imagine their husbands would do if he left; and 5) when they would feel that they and their husbands have done enough for their country. [See Appendix I for complete interview schedule.]

thinking centered on commitment. With the return of their partner and subsequent difficulties reintegrating him into the family, ideas derived from a companionate marriage are harder to sustain. Their thinking shifts away from limitless effort on behalf of their partner/comrade to a focus on specified and calculable obligations: what exactly do I need to do and what exactly is owed our family for what we contribute? However, reunions do not necessitate such a shift in thinking for national guard wives. For them, the clear transition of their husbands between the military and civilian spheres and the public rituals that symbolically mark his return help them think of reunion in terms of a duty fulfilled and a service completed. Their thinking can now shift to commitment to marriage.

Reunions for Regular Army Families

Reunion in the active duty military context presents a number of challenges that shift wives' thinking about their relationship from commitment to obligation. Most significantly, they realize they do not have the kind of relationships with their husbands that match the model of companionate marriage around which so much of commitment is based. Additionally, regardless of the particular state in which their soldiers return, wives have to deal with a husband returning in some way altered to a household that has also changed. Though everyone is reunited, some aspects of the pre-deployment relationship are gone. Experienced in a context without many external or cultural rituals to clarify or give meaning to such change, this kind of ambiguous loss propels wives to think in more certain and specifiable terms of obligation – of what they owe exactly to their husbands and the Army and what they can expect in return.

This section will first present the general difficulties of reintegration after reunion. It will consider factors that challenge thinking in terms of commitment that are internal to the couples' relationships and then those that are external and specific to life in a predominantly military context. Lastly, it will demonstrate the factors that lead regular army wives to shift their thinking towards obligation after reunion.

Re-integrating family life during reunion: “There is no going back to normal”

The initial period of reunion might be a joyous homecoming for regular army couples on a military base like Fort Jackson, celebrating their own reunion along with those of their neighbors and other soldiers and families in their returning units. The good feelings are generated by welcome home ceremonies and private parties and sustained through long vacations or light work details that typically follow a soldier's return from overseas. Yet, participants mostly spoke of reunions as a difficult period, made more difficult by the high expectations that they themselves and others had for a joyous homecoming:

I was really looking forward to him coming home after that first deployment. Everyone in the FRG [Family Readiness Group] was so excited. The kids made a big “Welcome Home Daddy” banner out of a bed sheet. We just thought about

how great it was going to be to have them home and how relieved we were going to be.

But as another regular army wife at Fort Jackson explained:

Everyone was like “You must be so happy now that he’s home.” And I felt like I should be happy too, which made it harder to realize the real crap of being a soldier’s wife was just beginning.

Even reunion sex can be a painful disappointment. As another regular army wife told the story of her friend:

She was so excited that he was coming home. She had spent the entire deployment working out and dieting. She lost like 20 lbs. He had no idea. She got new clothes. Got her hair done and everything. It was going to be a big surprise. And when she finally met him there on the airfield, all he had to say was, “Why are you dressed like a whore?”

Unanticipated changes, in both their husbands and in themselves, are among the primary difficulties of re-integration. Difficulties also include the revelation of facts that partners kept secret from each other during deployment. Couples also have to deal with long-term emotional, cognitive, and physical injuries resulting from combat service. Unresolved issues of anger and guilt related to the experience of deployment additionally contribute to the realization that reunions are not a return to “normal” for most regular army couples.

During deployments, the roles and tasks of a household change. Wives take over many of the responsibilities previously held by their husbands. Whether intentionally or not, wives develop competencies, independence, and autonomy; all of which might be difficult for a returning husband to accept, and, in some ways, for wives to relinquish upon reunion. As this wife explained:

While he was away, I took over paying all the bills. And I actually ended up doing a better job than him. He got back and wanted to go back to doing things his way. And I was, “Un-unh. My way is better.” It was a hard adjustment for both of us.

With regards to childrearing, the changes made during deployment can be particularly difficult to deal with upon reunion. Though wives and mothers worked hard to maintain their absent husbands as a kind of presence in the family’s life,² many children saw their returned fathers as

² In addition to frequent phone calls and on line video calls, two ingenious devices that kept absent fathers present in the home during deployment were “Flat Daddies” and talking story books. Flat Daddies, an idea derived from the children’s book Flat Stanley (Brown 1964), are life-sized cardboard backed photos of fathers. Talking story

strangers. Wives, such as this spouse, spoke of how hard it was to see the pain in this misrecognition:

I knew he wanted more than anything to get home to his babies. And when he got here, they didn't know who he was. They were scared of him. And I knew that almost killed him right on the spot.

Older children might recognize their fathers but have become familiar with a new way of managing their lives with only one parent present. From wives' accounts, it was difficult for returning fathers to find their place once again in the family. As this regular army wife explained:

Before Scott left, he was the one who gave the kids their baths. When he got back, they were "No. No. No. Mommy gives us our baths." I guess he just didn't know what he was supposed to do. We kind of handled it while he was gone.

Many families outside of the military deal with absent parents; they might be divorced, immigrant workers, prisoners, or simply frequent business travelers. But most of these families, unlike military families, do not also face during that absence the possibility of permanent loss. The emotions and tensions that arise from such a possibility are often unresolved when a soldier returns home. As the wife quoted immediately above continued to explain:

We sort of survived without him. And he came home and saw that and must have wondered, "If I never came home, they would be ok without me." I think that made him really, really sad. And for a while he was kind of like a ghost just watching us, watching how we were getting along without him even though he was home, standing right there in the room.

Other wives are even clearer about the anger felt between family members upon reunion. One wife whose husband intentionally pursued an assignment with a deploying unit explained:

While he was over there in harm's way, I could never let myself feel this way. But when he got home and was safe, I was so angry. How the hell could he put me and his kids through this?

And from the other direction, one wife explained how she came to realize the down-side of unconditionally supporting a loved one in harm's way:

books are picture books with built-in recordings of the fathers reading the text. Both devices allowed deployed fathers to be present at the dinner table or at bed-time while actually deployed.

It was pretty awful for him over there. His unit lost a lot of guys. And they saw a lot of bad things. I didn't know it all at the time. And when he got back, he was like, "How could you? How could you let me go there? Did you want me to do those things? Did you want me to die?"

Given how terrible war can be, a wife might discover that upon reunion her support for him is unappreciated and that he might even doubt her motivations for standing by him while he faces the dangers and horrors of war.

Once deployment, the period during which wives most feared for their husbands' physical safety, couples started to address their unresolved feelings of fear, anger, and resentment. Given this particular difficulty of reunion, it is not surprising that this is the temporal context in which regular army wives begin to reassess how they justify having a husband in the Army.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, deployments impose certain restrictions on communication between wives and their soldiers. Beyond the protocols of OpSec (not making any references to the mission of assigned units, including their location and times of deployment as well as trends in unit morale or personnel problems),³ many couples chose to self censor what they share with one another while divided by war. These omissions come to light, however, during reunions, adding to the difficulties of this particular time period. Like the wife quoted immediately above, many wives were not aware of the amount of violence and death their husbands were witnessing; their soldiers chose to spare them the details. One wife told the following story when asked if she thought her husband shared his experiences with violence:

When they killed the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, there was a *Newsweek* story and there he [her husband] was, a picture of him and everything. His helicopter dropped the bomb. But I distinctly remember talking to him that day and asking him if anything was going on. And he was like, "No. Just the same old same old."

On the other side, wives withhold news that might distress their deployed soldiers, but when their husbands return, they must now confront a wife's newly diagnosed disease, a daughter's sexual assault, or the death of family pet, to name only three examples mentioned by participants.

Lastly, families must begin to adjust during reunions to some of the lingering consequences of combat service for their soldiers. Soldiers can return with clear physical injuries to their bodies, even amputations. Others have more difficult to identify cognitive damage, particularly Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) caused by explosions. A significant number of soldiers return with emotional and psychological damage, such as Acute or Post-traumatic

³ "OPSEC: A Guide for Family and Friends" published by 1st Information Operations Command (Land), Vulnerability Assessment Division, OPSEC Section, <http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/sfrc/OPSECTrifold.pdf> [last accessed 2101/5/5].

Stress Disorders (ASD or PTSD). Whatever the case, the soldier returns to his family profoundly changed, adding to the difficulties of reunion.

Again and again, wives shared a growing, collective realization that reunion is the most difficult period for them in the military cycle. As one wife explained:

The worst part of being a soldier's wife? I used to think it was the separations. The deployments. Now I know the deployments are cake compared to when he comes home. The reunions are the worst. And what makes it even worse is that you think it would be the best part. Wouldn't you?

Additionally, participants shared the growing *mantra* among regular army wives that "There is no going back to normal." Both soldiers and wives are forever changed by the experience of deployment. Along with these changes come shifts in the way they make sense of the hardships military marriage. We now turn to the factors that during reunion influence a shift from talking in terms of commitment to obligation among regular army wives living in a military context.

Challenges facing commitment internal

With the difficulties of reunion and the subsequent realization that "There is no going back to normal," regular army wives begin to reassess *commitment*, as the category of thinking that focused unspecified amounts of effort they were willing to contribute towards their marriage. Two challenges confront them: First, the partner who was absent during deployment is still absent in many ways at reunion, and second, given this continued absence, it is hard to recover the kind of companionate marriage for which commitment makes sense. We will address these two realizations, of *ambiguous loss* and of *a different kind of marriage*, that challenge thinking in terms of commitment.

At reunion, for many regular army families, one form of "ambiguous loss" (Boss 1999) is replaced by another. There is no closure for what was lost during deployment, particularly when that loss is something short of the clear-cut loss of death. This leads to a kind of frozen grief that makes it hard to re-invest emotionally in the same kind of relationship imagined at the center of commitment. The ambiguity also makes the open-ended effort entailed by commitment harder to sustain. Later, we will see that in response to this ambiguity, wives shift the understanding of their post-reunion marriages to the certain, specified, and calculable terms of obligation.

In general, an ambiguous loss can occur in a family from either one of two forms of absence. One is a "present absence" – when a family member is "*physically absent* but psychologically present" (Boss 1999:8 original emphasis). The initial example of this kind of present absence and resulting ambiguous loss came from Boss's research with the families of pilots imprisoned or missing in action during the conflict in Vietnam. As mentioned above, army wives during the present conflict work hard to keep their deployed husbands as a kind of psychological presence in the family despite their physical absence. In and of itself, this is ambiguous loss.

The situation of regular army families is compounded by their experience of the second form of ambiguous loss, that rooted in an “absent presence,” wherein a family member is “physically present but *psychologically absent*” (Boss 1999:9 original emphasis). The usual examples of this kind of absence are family members suffering from Alzheimer’s, drug addiction, or over-commitment to work.

From the above examples associated with the difficulties of re-integration, we can see how a returning soldier goes from being a *present absence* during deployment to an *absent presence* upon reunion. He comes home and he is not the same, but usually the home is not the same either.⁴ This compounded sense of ambiguous loss leads to what Boss terms “frozen grief” – a kind of mourning that never finds closure and is unable to free up emotional energy for investments in new or renewed relationships (Boss 1999:9).⁵ While there is no available evidence of this process in the inner lives of army wives, the proposition that un-mourned partial loss results in “frozen grief” does serve to connect the observable facts that upon reunion wives do not “re-commit” to commitment as a way of thinking about their relationships.

If it were not for the consequence of this “frozen grief,” we might imagine that upon reunion, regular army wives could start anew the kind of relationship that sustained them in what they endured during and before deployment, a kind of relationship in which commitment made sense. The compounded effects of ambiguous loss, first in the form of a present absence during deployment and second as an absent presence during reunion, however, make it hard to clearly mark what has been lost and move on to what remains. As one regular army wife explained about what made her worry for their marriage after reunion:

It’s harder and harder for me to know where we stand with each other anymore. It used to seem so much clearer. But now I don’t know. Is he the same guy as he was before? Am I the same wife? Yeah, we are still together. But are we still the same couple? Who does what for this relationship? I guess it’s true what they say: “You never go back to normal.” But where do you go from here?

In addition to the challenges that ambiguous loss presents to restarting the kind of relationship around which commitment made sense and which it helped to sustain, the compounded uncertainties make it harder for wives to talk about doing whatever is needed for the sake of their marriage. We will see later how they respond to the uncertainties of ambiguous loss by finding certainty in what is specifically and calculably owed to them – in obligation.

⁴ It is not the focus of this research, but we can imagine that for the returned soldier, his wife and children, changed by fifteen months of separation, are present absences for him just as they were probably absent presences throughout his deployment. Reunion with his family is complicated by separation from his comrades, with whom he has spent fifteen intense months of living.

⁵ Boss’s description of frozen grief draws heavily on Freud’s explanation of the difference between normal grief and depression in “Mourning and Melancholia.”

With reunion, regular army wives begin to realize they are not the kind of married couple they used to imagine themselves to be. The imagined relationship – whether one of companionship or comradeship – at the center of the idea of commitment does not hold up against the realities of life after reunion.

In chapter 3, we saw the ways in which commitment as a category of thinking matched values associated with historical and sociological models of both marriage and the military. Commitment paralleled a kind of a close union or “companionate marriage” centered on personal bonds of affection and mutual interests shared by partners with highly specified roles (Cherlin 2004:851). It also reflected a military experience organized not around either an institution or an occupation but the close affective ties of battle buddies, willing to give their all for their closest comrades.

Before deployments, regular army wives were able to frame their marriages in terms of commitment, particularly as a response to the encroaching social life on the military base. During deployments, wives extended the narrow social relationship of commitment to their husbands outward to include the wives of other soldiers, but still with the ultimate justification of keeping their own husbands safe. After reunion, however, commitment becomes less available as a way of understanding what they go through as regular army wives and why they endure it.

The biggest challenge comes from the realization that the distinct and specified roles of their relationship have collapsed. During deployment, they have taken on most of the tasks and responsibilities of keeping the relationship going. Even with reunion, they recognize that they have a marriage in which their otherwise partner, companion, or comrade is actually absent, whether physically or psychologically. They see their children growing up in the absence of a father, and they see themselves as “single parents.” Where comparison to their civilian neighbors made national guard wives painfully aware of this status early on during deployments (chapter 5), this realization came slower for regular army wives living in military communities where their situation seemed somewhat normal. What seemed normal in this context and acceptable given the temporariness and exigencies of deployment would upon reunion become more clearly “a different kind of marriage.” As one regular army wife from Fort Jackson explained what she came to understand after reunion:

I thought we'd get through it all by just focusing on being a married couple. Like I said, bottom line it would just come down to those marriage rites. To being in love and doing my part and him doing his. Just like any other good married couple. Whether they're in the Army or not. But now I know what we have – it's a different kind of marriage. We're making this up as we go along. And right now it's mostly me, to be honest.

Given the design of this research, it is hard to know if the specificity of roles breaks down as much in army marriages as these participants say, and we do not know what their husbands think of the relationship. It is clear, however, that with reunion many regular army wives'

perceptions change and lead to other ways of thinking and talking about their marriage other than commitment.

While some challenges, like “ambiguous loss” and the realization that they have a different kind of relationship than a companionate marriage, are internal, there are a number of challenges that come externally from the context of reunion with a regular army soldier in a predominantly military community. One challenge is the predominance of the kind of rituals in the military community. These ceremonies mark death but not the kind of ambiguous loss many families experience at reunion. Feelings of closure and relief that might be experienced upon reunion are complicated by feelings of guilt, given that some husbands in the community will never return and that many more have just deployed. Upon return from overseas combat, regular army husbands continue in an ongoing role as professional soldier. Still immersed within this world, their husbands’ career trajectories often include a move to a new duty station and unit within two years of returning from deployment. These moves disrupt much of the sense of commitment wives have extended to others in their husband’s deployed unit and eliminate their support networks. Taken together, these characteristics of regular army service experienced within a predominantly military context tend to undermine wives’ ability to continue thinking in terms of commitment.

When regular army units return from overseas, the military community holds public ceremonies to welcome them home. The speeches and rituals congratulate them upon a mission fulfilled and reunite them with their families. These ceremonies do not mark a transformation in a regular army soldier’s status as a service member nor as someone who might have been transformed by his experience of deployment. He is still a soldier. A wife who realizes that something has changed, both in her returned husband and in her own life, receives little public acknowledgment that though he is back, things will not be the same.

The community also holds memorial services to commemorate those members of a unit who did not return alive. These ceremonies, frequent on a large installation like Fort Jackson,⁶ help the community mark physical loss. In some ways, however, the predominance of ceremonies marking this kind of loss makes it harder for wives to recognize “ambiguous loss.” Knowing that some wives’ husbands will never return makes it difficult for other wives to recognize a partial loss. Compared to those who have lost all, wives feel guilty recognizing and grieving a partial loss. As one wife at Fort Jackson explained:

I know things are rough with me and [her husband]. That he’s gone through a lot, and that we have both come out of this deployment different people. But we came out alive. Some guys in his unit and some women’s husbands didn’t. That

⁶ At one point in the war, memorial services were becoming so frequent that the post command of two large installations, Fort Drum and Fort Lewis, proposed holding one monthly service for all soldiers who had died in the previous month (Tan 2007). Not surprisingly, members of the community balked at this suggestion and separate ceremonies for individual or groups of soldiers who had fallen together continued regardless of the effects post work routines and schedules (Bernton 2007). In and of itself, this is an interesting example of the conflict between the values of the institutional and occupational armies.

makes it kind of hard to feel bad for what we have gone through. Knowing other wives are now widows. Other kids are now orphans. What do I have to feel bad about?

Living in a military context, it is hard for wives to forget that some soldiers never return. Constant reminders of death make it harder for folks to recognize and allow themselves to grieve for less clear, more ambiguous loss. As discussed above, this inability to grieve ambiguous loss blocks emotional reinvestment in a new post-reunion relationship, the kind around which commitment would continue to make sense.

In a similar way, living in a military community like Fort Jackson, where one division leaves for overseas combat as another returns, public affirmation for one's own personal sense of relief is hard to come by. As one regular army wife said:

It's not like him coming home means it's over. He's still in the Army. And so are all our neighbors. And though he might be home, there's husbands and even wives all up and down the street who just left. So whatever hell I just went through, I can't be too overjoyed that it's over. Because it's only over for me. My neighbor has to go through it now.

We have seen that thinking in more narrow terms of commitment helps a wife handle the challenges of military service by framing her efforts around her marriage, particularly in reaction to the social fatigue and intensity of collective life in a military community (chapter 4). During deployment (chapter 5), she extends this commitment to other wives in her husband's unit in order to keep him safe. At reunion, however, this commitment to her own husband does not make a wife immune to feelings of guilt: guilt caused by feeling relieved while her counterparts are still under duress. We have heard before how the ecological concentration of a military community can turn even good news into compounded negative feelings (chapter 5). As this regular army wife related:

The thing I remember about the first casualty. It was so awful. Because I heard a crew had crashed. And I didn't hear anything from Mike because of the ComBlock. I was freaking out. And then he called me using his cell. And I was so relieved. And then I realized, "Wait. Somebody's husband is dead. And I am all happy." And then I just felt awfully guilty for having been so overjoyed.

A similar process is at work during reunions which contributes to undermining commitment and, as we will see, pushing wives into even more socially narrow terms of thinking, around individual obligations.

As one wife pointed out above, when a regular army soldier returns from deployment "He's still in the Army." Unlike national guard soldiers, he does not demobilize and transform into a civilian. And given retention demands and stop-loss regulations, few regular army soldiers find it easy to retire upon returning stateside. When he returns, he is still immersed in

the larger military milieu, his particular body remains subsumed within the Army's greater "corps." This on-going role as a professional soldier contributes to the ambiguity of reunion for regular army families, and makes it hard for wives and children to concentrate on the return of soldiers as husbands and fathers. When asked if she wants her husband to re-enlist, this regular army wife described losing her soldier-husband after their first reunion:

I guess so. At this point, I can't really picture him as anything but a soldier anymore. Like when he came home from the first deployment, I thought "Oh, yeah, now I get my husband back." But I didn't. He's still pretty much GI [government issue]. He's theirs. They own him. Maybe I get him back when he retires.

This sense that one's husband is more of a soldier than a partner in a companionate marriage seems to come to the fore at reunion, when despite returning from combat, husbands are still very much part of the Army.

As part of their continued role as professional soldiers, most husbands, within at most two years of reunion, will change duty assignments or undergo a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) (Segal & Segal 2004:7). This often means moving to a new fort in a new state or even foreign country. It also means that bonds formed during deployment with other spouses through extended commitment will most likely be severed. In addition to this loss, PCS'ing adds a whole new level of stress that shortens the period of reunion and curtails the work necessary to build a new post-deployment relationship. As one Fort Jackson wife explained:

People don't always realize that when he comes home, he doesn't leave the Army. No. He's still in it. And after he got back the last time, we had two months to pack up and move everything from one state to another. To yet another deployable assignment. No. It's not like the war is over for us. Or that his homecoming was some sort of second honeymoon. [Laughs.]

While frequent moves, often to new and exotic places, can be a positive side of military experience (Wechsler-Segal 1986:21), they can, when coming on the heels of reunion, make it harder for couples to recover. PCS'ing can also sever important relationships with other regular army wives that helped them through the difficulties of deployment and might have helped with the work of reunion. We will hear shortly how these frequent moves further dispose some regular army wives towards thinking in terms of even narrower social relations, inclining them towards the individualist frame of obligation.

In sum, various factors related to the time period of reunion experienced by wives of regular army soldiers living in a military context undermine their ability to think of their marriages in terms of commitment. We now turn to how these contexts in time and space work to influence the emergence of thinking in terms of obligation.

The idea of obligation and marriage

During the period of reunion, regular army wives living in a military context like Fort Jackson begin to shift their thinking away from commitment towards obligation. This section will describe a number of the factors that contribute to this shift, including the emergent realization that being an army wife is a job in itself, a wife's increasing role as an advocate for her husband in the face of the command structure, and the search for limits to what can be expected of army wives, by both husbands and the Army.

First, let us recall what is entailed by the category of obligation that was distinct from those of duty and commitment as laid out in chapter 2. The primary difference is the notion of "limits." Obligation entails that the effort a wife is ready to offer towards supporting her husband in his military service (*how much*) is no longer open-ended. With obligation comes the idea of specified and calculable effort. As one wife expressed the notion: "Let me know exactly what is expected of me, and I can endure it." The limits implied by obligation also refer to the scope of social relations. Under obligation, *for whom* a wife endures variously specified hardships of military marriage becomes narrower. It is not for the nation, as in duty, nor even for the familial union, as in commitment. She now understands her marriage as an individual relationship of reciprocity between herself and her partner or between herself and the Army. As such, fairness becomes an important part of this justification. Under the frame of obligation, an army wife often asks what she owes and what is, in turn, owed to her.

Obligation, as a category, reflects values in common with the army organized as an occupation and a model of individualized marriage (chapter 3). How regular army wives, who at certain points in time are so committed to an open-ended effort for the sake of their familial union, come to think in such calculating and individualistic terms is the result of factors that occur during reunion to undermine commitment (as we heard above) as well as those that promote a sense of obligation.

Upon reunion, soldiers leave the total institution that the Army becomes for them during deployment. In many ways, their wives take over the responsibilities and tasks of reproducing their husbands' unique military "labor power." In addition to feeding and clothing their soldiers, army wives provide the particular kind of mental health and other care work of which soldiers returning from war are in need. Wives might have cooked and cleaned for their husbands before they deployed, but this new dimension of their household duties drives home an emerging notion that being an army wife is in itself a full-time job.⁷ As one regular army wife at Fort Jackson explained:

It's weird because I used to be active duty myself.... And because I was a soldier, I know how important families are to the mission. Wives are critical to a good soldier. We are the ones who put him back together again. Not just after deployment. But everyday. We are the ones who make them combat ready.

⁷ Interestingly, over the last fifty years as the number of married soldiers in the Army has increased, the services that the Army itself must directly provide to house, feed, clothe, and otherwise care for soldiers has decreased. This is in the exact opposite direction of the trend in the rest of society – a trend to "exteriorize" or make public many services previously provided in the private, domestic sphere (Epsing-Andersen in Grusky 2001).

Added to this is the fact that during deployment, wives took over the full running of their household. When husbands return, wives continue performing all the roles of wife and husband, mother and father. As such there are no separate spheres or distinct roles characteristic of companionate marriage and the related idea of commitment. Nor is there a sense that this work she does at home is service she shares with her husband. The experiences of life in a military community and deployment remove from her any illusions that she too is a soldier (chapters 4 and 5). She cannot imagine any longer that she is a soldier side-by-side with her husband. On the other hand, neither is she a “volunteer.” What she now gives to her husband and the Army is not some open-ended effort, above and beyond what is expected; it is critical work required for the continued functioning of the force of which her husband is a part.⁸ As one regular army wife explained when asked if she felt she received the recognition she deserved:

I don't know if I do. I don't know if the military really recognizes what I do. But it's really clear about what it expects from me. I used to think that this was just his job. But now it's pretty clear it's my job, too. Just a different one from his. Yeah, I don't think they recognize that. Hell, they don't even pay me for it. But it's a job just the same.

This emergent sense of army-wife-as-job parallels the model of the military organized not as an institution but as an occupation. As workers, army wives make sense of their marriage in workplace terms: what am I expected to do, how much, and when? As this regular army wife explained:

After that [first deployment], I just learned that I can endure anything as long as I know what is expected of me. We have to move in two months. Sure fine. You are deploying again for fifteen months. Sure fine. Just don't tell me we're moving but not when. Or you're going overseas but don't know when you will be back. I guess I became less of a patriot, you know, the good little army wife willing to take whatever the service requires or whatever the saying is.

This wife, like many other regular army wives after reunion, is still putting out the effort for her husband, the Army, and the country. What better helps her now make sense of that effort is specifiable and calculable quantities. Interestingly, in this way, regular army wives' justifications shift from what Boltanski and Thévenot call the incalculable affective regime or “régime d'agapè” to that of a regime of equivalencies (1999:362) – a way of thinking with specifiable, calculable quantities.

⁸ This kind of relationship, between individuals and institutions to which they are not formally a part but which greatly influence and shape their lives, is the subject of “institutional ethnography,” first proposed and then advanced by Dorothy Smith (Smith 2005).

Along these lines of equivalencies, regular army wives living in a military context when talking about life after reunion start to mention clear reciprocities: what they owe the Army and what the Army owes them. One common topic was the number of years they foresaw their husbands remaining in service before he could retire and receive some portion of his pension. As this wife explained when asked how long she wanted her husband to re-enlist:

We have talked about it. For however long it will take him to get full benefits. I think that is thirteen more years. But there's a lot of other things that go into the calculation. I think he owes them thirteen before they give him 100%.

Other wives spoke of obligations entailed by their husbands' education and training. As this pilot's wife explained:

Well, after his ROTC scholarship and then Fort Ruckers [where he was trained to fly helicopters], he still owes them five years of service. We have to give them what we owe them. After that, I don't know how much longer we will stay in.

Wives also spoke of the material and otherwise concrete benefits of past deployments and further service:

Yes, deployments are hard. But I don't know if you know but there's combat pay and other incentives. And for [her husband], deployments are a real good opportunity for promotion.

In this way of thinking, wives understand hardships as being counter-balanced by what they get out of enduring it.

Another factor that contributes to regular army wives becoming more preoccupied in their thinking with equivalencies, reciprocities, and fairness is their growing role as advocates for their husbands after reunion. Wives spoke of having to confront the Army in various ways to protect their husbands' welfare and interests, particularly after deployment. Many of these instances involved medical conditions that wives felt were not properly diagnosed, treated, or accommodated for. As this regular army wife of a soldier who was eventually diagnosed with TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury, see chapter one) explained:

I knew something was wrong. He knew it, too, but would never say anything to anybody. I was the one who had to insist that they check him out again. I was the one who had to argue for his treatment. And even argue with his CO [commanding officer] about the kind of details he was being put on.

Other wives also stood toe to toe with the military command advocating for their soldiers. They are often emboldened by their experience of surviving that first deployment. As this wife at Fort Jackson explains:

When we PCS'd here they told him this was not going to be a deployable assignment. But when we got here, they tried to move him to a unit that was deploying in three months. [He had just finished a fifteen month deployment.] I went to the command and demanded that they either re-assign him or cut us loose. They made him rear detachment [part of a unit that remains stateside for the duration of a deployment]. I don't think I was being scared. We did our deployment. The Army owed us dwelling time. I was mad as hell. I wasn't going to allow them to do this to him.

Given any soldier's tendency to suffer stoically, it is often up to the wife to break the silence when the Army over-reaches its demands. Interestingly, the wives can come across as the combative fighters and the soldiers as the passive victims in these conflicts with the military command. By acting as advocates, wives can protect their husbands' careers by making themselves into the "bad ones" who are defying the command structure. However, "not being able to control one's wife" can also be a liability for a soldier's career. Most significantly, in this role as advocates, wives shift their thinking away from open-ended effort to specifiable and clear obligations.

Many wives spoke of a desire for limits after the experience of their first deployment. This desire is one final factor related to reunion that contributed to a shift toward obligation. Before and during deployment, fear kept anger in check for many wives who were otherwise outraged at the situation in which they found themselves. Reunion was the opportunity for them to confront this anger by standing up to demands made upon them by their husbands and the Army. As this regular army wife from Fort Jackson explained:

When he came back, I laid it on the line. I said no more. He was assured that I would tolerate anything -- put up with all of his crap. But that was not the case. He got home and I told him the way it was going to be or I was ready for him to leave again. And not to Iraq. His NCO [non-commissioned officer] tried to warn him that reunion is never pretty. But he didn't believe him. And, oh boy, was he in for a surprise.

Laying it on the line, as this wife did, often meant setting specific limits of what they were willing to endure before they would do what was once unthinkable: withdraw their support and leave. This sea change in thinking from commitment comes because the experiences of deployment and then reunion have forced wives to find their limits. As this wife at Fort Jackson said:

I couldn't believe how angry I was. I just had my first baby, and he was deployed. I had our child alone. And he comes home and decides that his buddies have convinced him that getting a motorcycle would be a really good idea. And I said no. I will put up with the helicopters and the hard landings and the people

shooting at him but I am not also putting up with a motorcycle. I told him his time for toys is over and he owes it to me to grow up.

This limit setting, like the increasing role of advocacy mentioned above, is a factor contributing to the emergence of obligation and reflects the negotiated nature of contemporary, individualized marriage (Cherlin 2009), a model of marriage that shares many values with obligation. In this kind of individualized marriage, nothing is taken for granted; partners cannot assume that workable roles will be prescribed for them by tradition. Explicit communication and readjustments become necessary. As deployments have taught them, a wife cannot always expect that her place is beside her husband. And as reunions teach them, a husband cannot always expect to be his family's strongest advocate and protector. From the example above, a committed wife might not accept a husband and father performing such a dangerous job, but an obligated wife need not go so far as to accept the added dangers of a motorcycle. As each member of the individualized marriage pursues their own course of action, often imposed on them by external circumstances, they can best rely on a negotiated sense of obligation to support one another.

We see how these three factors (work, advocacy, and limits) associated with living in a military community during the period of reunion lead regular army wives to shift from thinking of their relationships in terms of commitment to obligation. As wives begin to realize more and more that being an army wife is a job in itself, as they take up the role of advocate for their soldiers, and as they struggle to set limits on what they must endure, they begin to justify their relationships in terms of calculable efforts, reciprocities, and fairness. The shift from open-ended marital commitment to specified obligations provides empirical evidence for changes that were only speculated upon elsewhere. This shift is clearly one of the important but previously unidentified "adaptive processes" by which army families find the resiliency to survive the challenging cycle of military service (Karney & Crown 2007). Furthermore, obligation marks a shift in focus from the emotional and symbolic benefits of military service to the material and concrete ones (Karney & Crown 2007). It also reflects a change from the values of romantic idealism expressed in categories like commitment and duty to values of rationalist pragmatism associated with obligation (Moskos 1989:17).

Duty and Marriage

Duty, the third category of thinking heard from participants in this study, was not prevalent in the way regular army wives talked about reunions experienced in a military context. Beyond accounts of their initial attraction to men involved in the military or their initial expectations of what life as an army wife would be, regular army wives never really spoke in the terms of duty. They rarely framed their relationship in terms of open-ended effort provided for the benefit of an expansive or transcendent social entity, like "the Army" or "the nation." In the next section, we will see how reunion for national guard wives helps bring a close to their sense of duty, how reunion in their particular spatial context gives them a sense of duty fulfilled.

Reunions in the national guard, civilian context

With reunion, national guard soldiers cross a boundary between serving as mobilized federal troops and being citizen-soldiers. This transition, along with accompanying rituals and public ceremonies, helps national guard wives bring closure to the deployment experience and think in terms of duty fulfilled. This makes it easier for them to start relationships anew and shift their thinking about marriage in post-deployment life towards commitment. In contrast to regular army wives, obligation rarely appears as a way of thinking for national guard wives when they talk about reunion. The following sections will address the two factors related to reunion in the civilian context -- transitions and resuming civilian roles -- that encourage both a sense of duty fulfilled and renewed commitment.

The Role of Transitioning and Marriage

Reunion for national guard soldiers returning home from overseas deployments means more than just coming home to their families. It involves a series of multiple transitions that, along with accompanying rituals and ceremonies, help mark a distinct end to their deployment experience. This crossing between the military and civilian worlds helps national guard wives to feel that the performance of their sacrifice is complete and that their duty to a greater social entity than just their marriage has been fulfilled. The public rituals of homecoming in the civilian context also help national guard wives to grieve for the “ambiguous loss” that they, too, experience in the context of deployment and reunion.

One very clear transition for national guard soldiers is their “demobilization.” At most welcome home ceremonies, in the presence of their families and friends, official orders of demobilization, written by high commanding officers and sometimes even the President, are read aloud. With the issuing of these orders, the soldiers go from being mobilized troops under command of the federal government to national guardsmen under the command of their state governor and militia. After hearing the orders, guardsmen ritually replace their field caps with garrison berets.

Up to the point of demobilization, a number of other rituals and ceremonies help welcome home the guardsmen and mark their transition back into the civilian community. Sometimes soldiers of a returning guard unit parade through the center of town before arriving at the official welcome home ceremony, usually held in a civic building memorializing veterans of previous wars. More frequently, soldiers return on buses that are greeted by family, friends, and other citizens lining the streets of their home towns. Even before coming home, soldiers are welcomed at airports by special receptions. One national guard wife explained a ritual performed as her husband’s chartered flight taxied towards the terminal:

When they were out on the runway, their plane was saluted by two fire engines. They sprayed an arc of water over the plane as they came up to the airport. They

said it was a special honor and a way of washing away all the bad stuff that happened to them over there.

In addition to gestures such as this ritual cleansing,⁹ returning guardsmen are often greeted by organized contingents from the veterans' motor cycle group the Patriot Riders Guard.¹⁰ These veterans typically form a reception line holding flags and shaking the hands of each returning soldier.

Some national guard wives spoke of other gestures made towards them and their soldiers at reunion that showed the gratitude of other citizens and marked the period as a special occasion. As this national guard wife related:

After he got home from deployment, we went on vacation. We stayed for a week at a hotel at the beach and got to know some of the other guests. They were really nice and appreciative. So much so that when we went to check out, we discovered that someone paid for our entire bill!

Another national guard wife told this story of a forgiving police officer:

It was the first week they were back and a couple of us went out together. We got pulled over for speeding. Mike explained that he and his buddy had just got back from Iraq. The officer let us go with just a warning.

These gestures of generosity and clemency, often spontaneous and unsolicited, let guardsmen and their wives know that their service is important to everyday citizens. Along with the public ceremonies and rituals, these gestures impart a sense that their duty to the national interest

⁹ Interestingly, Freud pointed out in the early days of World War I the ambiguity with which "uncivilized" cultures treated returning warriors, both welcoming them home as victors but also cleansing them as men tainted by the death and violence they have experienced. He first contrasted this with the unambiguity of a joyful homecoming among for the soldiers of a "civilized" society: "When the furious struggle of the present war has been decided, each one of the victorious fighters will return home joyfully to his wife and children, unchecked and undisturbed by thoughts of the enemies he has killed whether at close quarters or at long range. It is worthy of note that the primitive races which still survive in the world, and are undoubtedly closer than we are to primeval man, act differently in this respect, or did until they came under the influence of our civilization. Savages – Australians, Bushmen, Tierra del Fuegians – are far from being remorseless murderers; when they return victorious from the war-path they many not set foot in their villages or touch their wives till they have atoned for the murders they committed in war by penances which are often long and tedious" (1915:295). The film *The Welcome* documents the explicit incorporation of Native American purification rituals as part of a therapeutic process for veterans (Shelton 2001).

¹⁰ The Patriot Riders Guard was initially formed to protect the funerals of soldiers from protestors from the Westboro Baptist Church. The veterans would position themselves to block the protestors from the sight of the funeral or rev their motorcycle engines to drown out the protestors' taunts. The outpouring for these funeral vigils was so great that the Guard began to organize welcome home ceremonies. I witnessed one funeral vigil and several welcome home ceremonies.

has been fulfilled and that their sacrifices are recognized. This message comes directly from citizens, not politicians or other members of the military charged with soldiers' morale.

As mentioned above, at reunion for national guard soldiers, veterans from previous wars play a significant role. Their participation helps bring closure to both returning guardsmen's and their own experiences of war. It also helps national guard wives imagine their returned husbands as members of the civilian community. Many of these volunteers who go out of their way to insure that soldiers from their community returning from war are warmly welcomed home are veterans from the conflict in Vietnam. In greeting the returning guardsmen they help bring closure to their own experiences. And their presence, dressed as grizzled, somewhat age-worn bikers, is a somber reminder of the pain of war. I asked one national guard wife what she thought of Vietnam veterans greeting her husband. She said:

At first I thought it was kind of weird. Who are these biker dudes standing in my way, getting at my husband before I do. Like where are the politicians in suits and the boy scouts waving flags? Why is it these old biker dudes? And then I saw how Chris shook each and every one of their hands and how he started to cry. I guess it meant so much to him to be welcomed home first by these guys. These guys who definitely had it worse than we have. That meant a lot. I was glad they were there.

In addition to the mostly Vietnam era veterans of the Patriot Rider Guard, other veterans in the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars play significant roles in welcoming national guard soldiers home at reunion. Their presence, unique to the civilian context of the national guard participants, allows these wives to see a bigger picture, to see those who have fought before as soldiers and what they have become as civilians. They can better perceive their duty as a discrete part of a larger tradition and history shared with others. As one national guard wife explained:

When he came home, he wasn't hanging out with guys in his unit anymore. But all around us were people who had done their part, too. Maybe in a different war or at different time. But they let us know they were grateful for his service and that they were there, surviving. And that we would too.

This is opposed to active duty wives in the military context, where the burden of war appears to be entirely upon them and is experienced largely in isolation from other citizens.

While the participation of veterans helps wives put their duty in context and to imagine their husbands as returned citizen-soldiers, the public rituals of homecoming in the civilian context work to recognize ambiguous loss, a situation in which a loved one has returned but is in some ways still absent. With this external recognition of ambiguous loss, national guard wives are better able than their regular army counterparts to grieve the partial losses of deployments and reunions. Where public ceremonies in the military context emphasize the

clear-cut and total losses of fatalities, the ritual emphasis on transition back into the civilian context for national guard families publicly marks the dual nature of the citizen-soldier.

Just as these rituals publicly recognize her husband as both a soldier and a citizen, the national guard wife can on a private level see him as both a warrior and a husband. The public statement of duality helps national guard wives recognize ambiguity on a personal level.¹¹ As one national guard wife explained the personal meaning she found in the public ritual of shifting field caps to garrison berets:

When [during her husband's welcome home ceremony] they took off the camouflaged hat and put on the black beret, I knew he was home. And when he gets home and takes off the uniform, I know he's mine again. He's still a soldier, but he's also a civilian. And in the same way, he can be the Army's and be mine, too.

With this recognition, they can begin to grieve what was lost when their husbands were psychically present but physically absent during deployment (absent presence) and what is lost now that many of their husbands are emotionally absent but physically present upon reunion (present absences). As they mark transitions and ambiguity, these ceremonies and gestures help wives to recognize what is a partial loss and ultimately to complete the process of grieving for what was lost, even if partially, during deployment and upon reunion. This achieves two things: closure and the ability to re-invest emotional energy in the relationship that follows reunion.

With these two achievements come two consequences for the ways in which national guard wives think at reunion. First, with this closure, we hear an end to talk of duty. The transition from civilian to military (deployment) and back to civilian (reunion) parallels ritual movements from profane to sacred and back to profane. Completing this cycle makes a national guard family's sacrifice complete, just as it did in ancient, sacred offerings (Hubert and Mauss 1964). This successful completion of sacrifice was evidenced when most national guard wives stated that they feel that after one deployment, they and their husbands have done enough for their country. As this national guard wife said:

Oh, easily. I think we have done our part with that first deployment. Our sacrifice is done. We gave our fifteen months and more.

¹¹ In her research with families of Alzheimer's patients, Pauline Boss noted the case of an Anishinabe woman whose mother was suffering from dementia. Her culture allowed her to perform a ritual funeral for her mother, enabling her to recognize and grieve the ambiguous loss of a parent who, though still physically present, was psychically absent (Boss 1999:17).

Second, a completed sense of grieving makes emotional energy available for reinvestment in new relationships. With this ability to start anew with their returned husbands, we see national guard wives shift to another way of thinking about their relationships, to one focused on commitment.

Formation of Commitment to Marriage

As national guard soldiers transition back into their lives after deployment, they resume a wide range of roles and relationships that are distinct from the military. They become more like their neighbors, co-workers, extended family members, and co-congregants. With her husband's transition into civilian life, the national guard wife's isolation is over. With him home and working a civilian job, they resemble the civilian couples around them. As this occurs, she thinks more and more about their relationship in terms of marital commitment, rather than duty or obligation.

The transition back into civilian work can be difficult for national guardsmen. In a depressed economy, many find that their workplaces no longer exist. Others find it difficult to readjust to a civilian workplace. As this national guard wife explained:

Mike kind of has a problem in mixed work places. He doesn't do too well around certain kinds of women. He is kind of crass and vulgar. Which I guess works with his guard buddies. But at work he gets into all kinds of trouble.

Due to these difficulties, Mike is using his military educational benefits to train for a new career in Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC). In the meantime, he and the family are living on his wife's wages as a physical therapist. She makes sense of this situation, not in terms of duty to some greater cause, but out of commitment to their relationship:

It's harder since he got back, not having the active duty or combat pay. And not having the whole war thing to help give it some kind of purpose. Now it's just us and we are struggling to make it work for us. I don't know if this HVAC thing will work out. But he's trying.

Guardsmen are immersed in a camaraderie they share with battle buddies during deployment. Some return to equally intense relationships at their civilian jobs after reunion. Though these bonds might threaten a partner, this national guard wife explains how she makes sense of the relationship in terms of commitment:

I am never jealous of what he has with his fire fighter buddies or with the guys in his guard unit. Because I know he and I are best friends. We have been together for so long and through so much at this point, that I just don't worry. I know I will always come first for him and him for me.

Resuming roles in extended family networks can both help move a soldier and his wife beyond their deployment experience but also present challenges. These challenges, like many others during reunion, are handled within the narrow confines of the marital relationship and made sense of in terms of commitment. One national guard wife told of her husband's encounter at a family barbecue:

His parents threw a big party for him with all the family when he got home. His nephews were all excited that he was home. One of them asked him, "Tio, how many guys did you kill?" He didn't ask it in a mean way. He probably thought it was really cool. Like a video game or something. But Manny really reacted badly. It upset him. So we have been avoiding parties and stuff. And it's just us together dealing with things and getting to know each other again.

Upon reunion, national guard couples handle such challenges by withdrawing into the confines of marriage. They are able to do this given the civilian context in which their reunited relationships come to resemble those of their neighbors, co-workers and other family members. During deployment the civilian context made it clear to national guard wives that, by comparison to the marriages around them, they were far from "normal" married women. As one jokingly said, "During deployment I was a single woman with none of the benefits." Or as another shared her opinion about the worst part of being an army wife, "Walking into a restaurant with the kids while he's deployed and people thinking I am a single mom." With reunion, however, they become, as one national guard wife put it, "a family just like every other family on the street." In their emergent thinking, commitment to this family helps them meet the challenges of reintegration.

Obligation and Marriage

During reunion, we do not hear obligation as a prominent way in which national guard wives make sense of their relationships. One reason for this, which persists from the cycles of pre-deployment and deployment, is that the Army never emerges as an important provider of material or other forms of support. Institutionally, national guard wives experience reunion, as they did deployment, largely outside the scope of the military, its specific expectations and demands. They do not encounter the same factors that bring obligation to the fore in the military context during reunion.

Conclusion

*A house is a home, if there is love in it,
We had a home;
We now have a house.*

We are in the same room yet worlds apart,

*And the world that parted us
Seems to be in our living room.*

*I see him this man that came back,
He looks like the man who kissed me goodbye
One cold February morning on a flight line.*

*It seems my husband did not come home
And the wife he kissed goodbye
Must still be standing on that flight line,*

*Because I am not her.
He is not him
And we are no longer them.*

As this poem, written and given to me by a participant, illustrates, the period after a soldier returns from overseas combat deployment can be a very difficult time. The experience of fifteen months separated by war is not easily integrated into a family, as it tries to come back together. The vast majority of participants, particularly those married to regular army soldiers and living within military communities, said that reunions were the periods during which they most feared for the survival of their marriage. And yet, despite the difficulties of reunion, we know that most of these marriages, as well as those of national guard wives, remain intact through the cycle of deployment and reunion. A shift in thinking for regular army wives, a shift from framing what they endure in terms of commitment to obligation, contributes in some part to this resilience. Whereas reunions, while also difficult for national guard wives, are made somewhat easier by the public rituals that demarcate their husbands' transition from military to civilian life.

For regular army wives, factors both internal to their relationship and connected to the external context of life on a military base influence the shift away from open-ended effort on behalf of their marital union. Inside their own relationships, they are confronted with the ambiguous loss of a husband who, though returned, is in many ways still absent. They also begin to realize that they do not have the kind of companionate marriage for which commitment made sense. Externally, the overall military context also works to undermine thinking in terms of commitment. There are no rituals or ceremonies through which wives can grieve partial or ambiguous loss without feeling guilty about those wives who have experienced the clear cut loss of a fallen soldier. Additionally, within the military context, their returned husbands are still immersed in their ongoing roles as professional soldiers, making it difficult to separate the returned husband from the warrior. This ongoing career will also most likely entail a stressful move, disrupting the process of reintegration and severing ties of extended commitment to other wives.

As commitment recedes during reunion, obligation comes to the fore in the ways that regular army wives think about their military marriages. Three factors primarily contribute to

this shift towards thinking in terms of specified, reciprocal efforts. First is the increasingly emergent fact that being an army wife is a job in itself. Having assumed most, if not all, household responsibilities during deployment, many regular army wives continue being in charge as they take on the tasks of caring for their returned husbands. Second, regular army wives find themselves increasingly advocating for their soldiers before the military command. Third, many wives, in an attempt to resolve unsettled issues from deployment, seize the opportunity of reunion to establish a limit to what they will endure.

Where regular army wives shift away from commitment during reunion, national guard wives shift towards it. Having been sustained in their thinking in terms of duty during deployment, they find a sense of closure and completion upon reunion. The transitions from the military to the civilian world, with their accompanying rituals and gestures, provide them with a satisfaction that their duty has been fulfilled. The same transitions and rituals allow them to embrace the ambiguity and grieve what has been lost, even if only partially, during deployment and upon reunion.

Able to grieve what has been lost, national guard wives tend to have the energy and emotions available to reinvest in a new post-reunion relationship. This is reflected in an emergent way of thinking about their marriage in terms of commitment rather than duty, as they do during their husbands' deployment. This shift towards commitment is further driven by the resumption of their husbands' roles in civilian life. As he becomes a civilian once again, together they come to resemble the relationships and marriages around them. As such, their marriage becomes a viable relationship through which they can weather the hardships of reintegration. Commitment to this confirmed relationship becomes the predominant way in which national guard wives think about their marriages during reunion.

These shifts in thinking for both regular army and national guard wives at reunion contribute to the adaptive processes that make army families so resilient during this particularly stressful period of reintegration.

Introduction

In this chapter, we consider redeployment as a new condition in the experiences of regular army and national guard wives. We will see how this particular context in time affects the ways wives think about their relationships across the different spatial contexts of life in mostly military or civilian communities. In the last chapter, we heard how the experience of reunion shifts regular army wives' thinking from commitment to obligation. We also heard how similar homecomings experienced in mostly civilian contexts shift the thinking of national guard wives from duty to commitment. In this chapter, we ask how might the ways in which wives makes sense of their relationships change yet again when their soldiers leave for a second, third, or even fourth overseas tour of duty?

We will hear that redeployments are particularly challenging to national guard families. After a national guard unit has deployed and returned once, it is hard for fellow citizens and even extended family members to rally for a subsequent second or third deployment. With the disappearance of this important source of ritual and symbolic recognition, national guard wives shift their thinking and come to focus on obligation, on how many more months of deployment or years of service they have to endure in return for how much compensation or how many benefits they can expect. Regular army wives living in predominantly military contexts, who already shifted their thinking towards obligation during reunion, continue to think in those terms through subsequent redeployments.

Before turning to the question of how army wives' experience of redeployment influences how they make sense of their relationships with their soldier-husbands, we need to review the origins of multiple deployments and what is known about the likely effects of these deployments on soldiers and their families. Two unique features of the current conflict in Afghanistan are its protracted length, now more than ten years, and the way in which the military has come to generate the necessary forces to conduct it. After Vietnam, the Army tried to avoid the rotation of individual soldiers in and out of combat. The preferred option, as exemplified in the First Gulf War, would be to create a preponderance of force (Shock and Awe) which achieves a quick and decisive victory and then withdraws. The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, required an extended presence of forces for the pacification and restructuring of the two occupied countries. In this emerging "era of persistent conflict" (Casey 2008), a reorganization of the way in which units would be organized and deployed, Army Force Generation or ArForGen, was necessary. Consequently, in July 2003, Generals Keane and McChrystal unveiled the "New Rotational Army" (www.army.mil 2003).¹

¹ At that time, General Keane also presented an overview of the history of how the military rotated forces in and out of conflicts since World War II: "My purpose today is to present to you our rotation plan for Iraq. First, I want to give you a little historical perspective. In the Army's distinguished history, unit manning and unit rotations have long been a challenge. During World War II, troops were mobilized and dispatched to the front for the duration, meaning for the duration of hostilities or indefinitely, with the exception of air crews that flew a set number of missions before rotating back to training assignments. In Korea, the Army established a rotation policy of six

Under this “New Rotational Army,” the command withdrew the units that initially toppled the enemy regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and replaced them with new units. While soldiers would deploy for a period of time, not “for the duration” of the conflict, whole brigades, not individuals, would rotate in and out of the war. Over the past ten years and in the two different countries, the length of deployments has fluctuated from initially six months to twelve, then fifteen, and now twelve and even nine months (McIlvane 2011). The returned regular army units have remained at their home stations (the permanent location of a military unit) for a “dwell time” of initially two, now three, years.

Additionally, under this “New Rotational Army,” national guard units were “formally transformed into a vital part of the deployable Army” (militaryhub.com 2010). In unprecedented numbers, national guard soldiers joined in overseas combat missions, demonstrating “a larger reliability on citizen-soldiers and community-based formations in the Army National Guard” (militaryhub.com 2010). The dwell time or period between deployments for national guard units is officially four years.

By March 2012, 311,429 national guard soldiers, or 54% of the entire “trained strength” of the Army National Guard, had deployed once to overseas combat. Fourteen percent of the entire force had deployed for two tours and two percent for three (Army National Guard Public Affairs Office 2012). More recent statistics for regular army soldiers are harder to find.² We know that in total, including active duty as well as reserve components of all branches of the Armed Forces (Army as well as Marine Corps, etc) for the years of 2001 to 2012, 1,354,500 have served one deployment; 632,600 two deployments; 250,200 three deployments; 91,700 four deployments; 33,000 five deployments; and 36,300 more than five deployments (Barnes & Entous 2012).

It is clear that under this New Rotational Army, large numbers of national guard forces are critical participants and all soldiers, of both active and reserve components, face the possibility of multiple deployments. The effects of these multiple deployments on soldiers and their families, however, are unclear. Some studies report that there is no conclusive evidence that multiple deployments have adverse effects on soldiers (Zoroya 2012). Others state that soldiers with multiple deployments are more likely to suffer from Acute Stress Disorder and

months for combat units and 12 months for combat support and combat service support units, and later went through a very complicated point system for individual soldiers. In Vietnam, soldiers rotated after 12 months in theater on an individual basis. Subsequent rotation policies have varied in response to the combatant commander's needs” (www.army.mil 2003).

² The following are statistics on deployments and multiple deployments for Army and Army National Guard soldiers reflecting the period of December 2001 to October 2004 (Powers 2005):

Branch	# Deployed	% Deployed	# One Deployment	% One Deployment	# Multiple Deployments	% Multiple Deployments
Regular Army	279,393	55.9%	182,837	36.6%	96,556	19.3%
Army National Guard	90,649	25.9%	58,133	16.6%	32,516	9.3%

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Frincu-Mallas 2010) while others find that the occurrence of PTSD is more strongly related to “severe combat experience” than to multiple deployments (Zoroya 2012). Isolated incidents, such as the army staff sergeant who was on his fourth deployment when he was accused of killing sixteen Afghani civilians (Brown 2012) as well as evidence of unethical conduct among marines in Afghanistan (Bowman 2012), have been attributed to multiple deployments.

The effects of multiple deployments on the families of soldiers are also unclear. Some report that multiple deployments are not significantly related to adolescent children’s levels of stress (Wong and Gerras 2010:vii). Others point to clear evidence of elevated levels of depression and anxiety (Lester et al 2010) and rates of abuse and neglect (Gibbs et al 2007) among children of soldiers serving multiple deployments. Some studies point out the hardships of the current military’s increased “operational tempo” and warn of impending but not yet manifested consequences (Duckworth 2009). The effects of multiple deployments on marriage and divorce among military families are also unclear. In 2010, the overall military divorce rate leveled off after rising for the previous five years (Bushatz 2010). By that same year, we know that more and more army families had experienced at least one deployment and many had experienced redeployments (Powers 2005, Army National Guard Public Affairs Office 2012).

These last facts about multiple deployments and a leveling divorce rate suggest that army families have a particular resiliency in the face of repeated separations. We also know that married soldiers are less likely to suffer from the effects of multiple deployments than their unmarried counterparts, even when controlling for age (Frincu-Mallas 2010). While it is impossible to eliminate a possible selection effect in this relationship (soldiers of a certain unknown characteristic might be both more likely to marry as well as to escape multiple deployments unscathed), we can examine what happens during redeployment to the way wives think, and identify any shifts as adaptive processes that could contribute to both the resiliency of their families and the relative well-being of their soldiers.

National Guard

While it is relatively rare for a national guard family to have experienced more than one overseas deployment in the past ten years, a subset of national guard wives who participated in this study had been through at least one redeployment.³ Though they are a small group in the

³ Twelve of the twenty-three national guard wives who participated in this study had husbands who had deployed more than once. At 52%, this is a higher proportion than is typical for national guard soldiers, 14%. The reasons why some national guard wives have experienced redeployment vary. One is simply that the war has gone on for so long that their husbands’ units have been deployed, returned, and redeployed all within the expected period of dwell time. This was the case for the wives of a particular national guard MEDEVAC from which many participants were recruited. It is also important to remember that many national guard units were the first to be deployed, though not overseas, to protect airports, bridges, and other potential targets in the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks. From this study, however, it appeared that most national guard husbands who have deployed more than once have done so as *individuals*, not with their original *unit*, and sooner than the official dwell time would have allowed. Either because of their particular skills or gaps in the complement of a deploying unit, they

study and among national guard spouses as a whole, how redeployment affected a shift in their thinking towards obligation merits consideration here. Additionally, as the war continues in Afghanistan and other potential conflicts loom on the horizon, more and more national guard wives will face redeployment. We find that duty does not come to the fore in national guard wives' thinking as it did during initial deployments. Instead, obligation becomes more of the focus for these wives, who are living in a civilian context during redeployment.

Idea of duty and marriage

National guard wives with redeploying husbands do not experience the same level of public recognition and symbolic support from their civilian community that they did during earlier periods of deployment and reunion. The absence of this interaction makes it harder for them to understand the challenges of redeployment in terms of duty. Without the gestures of recognition and everyday reassurances, it is difficult for national guard wives to see hardships of a second or third overseas tour as part of a necessary sacrifice for the greater good or requirements of service to the nation. The second time around, like during the first deployment, they are alone but, unlike that initial time, they do not feel special.

There are two reasons for the lack of community support during redeployment. The first relates to the fact that many redeploying guardsmen are leaving with some other, nonlocal unit. This unit is not the one to which they are usually assigned and with which they first deployed. It is probably not the unit closest to their own community of residence. Unlike regular army soldiers, national guard soldiers are not frequently reassigned to different units and will spend their entire careers serving with the unit closest to their home [correspondence with CANGPAO]. To change units before a redeployment is unusual. Whether it's a reassignment that they have pursued or that has been imposed upon them, redeployment breaks the connections between a guard family and the civilian community that we observed at earlier periods in the military cycle.⁴ As one national guard wife explained:

When he left for redeployment, he was seconded [a military term meaning to be temporarily reassigned to a different unit] to another unit in [another state]. So, no one around here knew he was leaving. There were no events or anything for us here. It was nothing like the first deployment, with the big farewell and fundraisers and support meetings.

transferred and then redeployed with some other guard unit. Other national guard soldiers, facing bleak prospects in the civilian economy upon reunion, volunteer to join other guard units, even those in other states, to redeploy (Robinson 2012).

⁴ I imagine that this is even truer for non-aviation units of the National Guard. This study focused on wives of soldiers in aviation units, which typically draw personnel from a larger catchment area. Soldiers and wives attached to other kinds of units, stationed in local armories, probably experience even stronger connections to the local community. For an example of this tight connection, consider the guard unit from the small town in Arkansas portrayed in the documentary film "Off to War: From Rural Arkansas to Baghdad" (Renaud & Renaud 2005).

I met one wife at a farewell ceremony for an aviation brigade, to which her husband, usually an artillery officer, had been attached. She drove three hours to the ceremony and felt it was worth it for her own sense of purpose but admitted that few people in her own hometown had any idea that her husband was deployed.

Even when neighbors, co-workers, fellow church-goers, and extended family know that a national guard family is facing redeployment, they are not always as supportive as they were during earlier periods. The reason for this lack of support is confusion. Many civilians do not understand the process of the New Rotational Army. Older folks, many of whom were significant sources of support early on, expect soldiers to stay in combat for the duration and do not understand why a guardsman would be redeployed. As one national guard wife explained:

His grandfather was so proud of him when he deployed the first time. But when it came to redeployment, he couldn't comprehend. He was like "Why are you going back? Isn't the war over?"

According to *Washington Post* journalist Petula Dvorak, many redeploying guard families encounter this question, 'Isn't it over?': "They all heard some version of the same thing. 'Whaddaya mean, deployed?' Or 'I thought everyone came home.' Or 'Isn't it over?'" (Dvorak 2012).

Whether confused by the rotation of forces or genuinely weary of the war, people in the civilian context do not appear to national guard wives as supportive during redeployment. This reveals the double-edged nature of the connection between civilian context and a sense of duty. Where civilian recognition can sustain a powerful sense of pride and duty, its absence or withdrawal can equally prevent it. Where wives once encountered statements of admiration, like "I could never do what you are doing," they are now faced with "Isn't the war over?" Being confronted with this question obviously has a different effect on how wives will think about redeployment. They are less likely to think in expansive terms of open-ended effort and the broader nation. They are more likely to start wondering themselves, "When will this war be over?" As the wife of one redeployed guardsman gave her opinion about whether her husband should re-enlist:

At this point, it's about how many more years until retirement and hoping there won't be too many more redeployments in between. Maybe that sounds awful. Like we're just in it for the money and the benefits. But that's how I manage now. I used to think different.

These are the kind of concerns and questions, "How much longer and for whom exactly must I endure?," that obligation, as a category of thinking, helps answer for the wives of redeployed national guardsmen.

What national guard wives encounter from their neighbors at redeployment also reveals the tenuousness of the charismatic aspects of military service and sacrifice. From the evidence

here, it appears that civilian communities can only rally once to provide the recognition and support that make national guard wives feel proud. After sending soldiers off and welcoming them home the first time, civilians do not seem prepared to do it again. They, too, seem to have experienced the sense of closure that their gestures and rituals offered wives at reunion. The cycle of sacrifice is complete, the duty fulfilled, and the war is over. While the New Rotational Army might have found an efficient way to generate forces in an era of persistent conflict, it depletes the symbolic and emotional ways by which communities generate a sense of duty.

One additional factor contributing to the lack of thinking in terms of duty during redeployment for national guard wives is a sense held by many that they have already done their duty. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many national guard wives feel that they and their husbands have already done enough for their country with one deployment. Redeployment, for these wives, is above and beyond the call of duty.

Emergence of obligation

As the conditions of redeployment for many national guard families, particularly the lack of civilian support, erode a sense of duty, they also contribute to a shift towards thinking in terms of obligation.

Shifts in wives' thinking are related to the same factors that lead to their husbands' redeployments. For those wives whose husbands voluntarily sought out redeployment as a preferable option to unemployment in the civilian labor market, they think about a second tour of duty in terms of economic benefits. The hardships of redeployment are understood in terms of the material rewards they provide. As one national guard wife explained:

Well, being that the economy is not very good right now, it really made me appreciate my husband's job. He has a steady paycheck. We consistently get bonuses. I know what is coming in September I know what is coming in January. I know we are going to be taken care of, those are the perks. Because I have friends that have no health insurance and their husbands have their own businesses and are about to file bankruptcy. I am...this has been a real eye opener. I have noticed that I don't complain nearly as much. I am trying to be way more appreciative.

She, like other wives of redeployed national guard soldiers, has come to focus on "the perks," not because she is acquisitive or greedy, but because in the absence of other available frames and the clear role of material forces in placing her in this situation, it makes sense. As another wife, married to a national guard flight medic who was in Afghanistan at the time, explained:

I am always proud of what he does. Saving people's lives. But when he went back this second time, I just kind of centered on why this was good for us and our kids. The pay, the health benefits, the educational assistance to us and the kids. That is helping me think it's worth it.

Other national guard wives experiencing redeployment make sense of the situation in terms not of what they will get from it but in terms of what they have already gotten and what they owe the Army. Many of their husbands received college scholarships or expensive training in flying or maintaining helicopters for which they owe the government a number of years of service. As this wife explains their obligation to endure a second deployment, "It's what we've got to do. He owes them three more years for pilot's training. Something he really wanted and could have never gotten any other way."

Compelled into redeployment by the economy, these national guard wives also speak more of the military service as a job:

For now, as long as he stays deployed and can't find anything outside of the Guard, it's his job. I think about it more and more as just another job. Which is kind of weird when you think about what the Guard is and all.

Some study participants were married to soldiers who have full-time jobs with the National Guard, servicing helicopters or conducting funeral honor guards on a permanent basis. They drill with their units on the weekends like typical national guard soldiers, but they also work throughout the week in various capacities, sometimes their regular one, for the Guard.

If economic necessity drives some soldiers to redeploy and their wives to think in terms of obligation, so to does military necessity. Wives whose husbands have been forced or pressured to redeploy because of the needs of another unit become sensitive to the idea of limits. In many cases, their husbands were required to redeploy before their dwell time had expired. In breaching its promise, the Army makes these wives focus on the fairness of what they offer and what they receive in return. As this national guard wife explained:

I was a good army wife up until they made him redeploy. Before that, I would do anything he needed me to do. I would pretty much accept anything. When during his first deployment, it got extended by three months, I was ok with that. But now, I am like "Tell me how long you want him and that's it. That's all I can handle." They said we would have four years between deployments. We had eighteen months. I am not so gullible anymore. Now it's, "Tell me how long and show me the money." If they want something more, they've got to give us something. Bonus pay. Extended health benefits. Time off towards retirement. College loans for me.

For a few redeployed soldiers, their second or third tour was not forced upon them by economic or military necessities. Their wives spoke of the reason as something "he really wanted to do." These wives made sense of the hardships and dangers that redeployment entails in terms of their mutual obligation to support one another in their own paths towards fulfillment as individuals. Very much in line with the kind of thinking associated with contemporary, individualized marriages, they understand his need to redeploy and expect reciprocal understanding from him on their own trajectories. In fact many wives of redeployed guardsmen spoke of embracing the opportunities a second or third separation provided for

their own individual growth and development. One guard wife took the opportunity to buy her own show horse and win her first riding championship (Martin 2012). As one national guard wife in this study said:

I feel like this second deployment is giving him an opportunity to do what he wants and me the chance to do what I want. I like getting back in touch with my own independence. I kind of think these deployments are making me a better woman, ready for anything, really.

The forces that give rise to redeployments for national guard families are also factors that contribute to thinking in terms of obligation. In the civilian context, guard wives focus on specific quantities of what they owe and what is owed to them in return. This thinking matches in many ways the models of an occupational military and individualized marriage.

Commitment in the civilian context during redeployment

As discussed in chapter 6, after reunion national guard wives start to talk in terms of commitment, and this helps bring them closure and a sense of fulfilled duty. It is reasonable to ask why this sense of commitment does not continue when their husbands redeploy. An important factor at play during redeployment, just as it was during initial deployments (chapter 5), is the fact that military wives, living in a civilian context, are surrounded by other couples who remind them that their marriage is different. The ever-present example of the relationships of their neighbors, co-workers, and extended family dissuades them from making sense of redeployment in terms drawn from a companionate marriage. Indeed, as many national guard wives say of deployment, and as this one wife says of redeployment, “It really hit me three weeks after he left. I am in the emergency room with our youngest. And I realize, ‘I am a single parent. I am doing this by myself.’”

Living in a context that makes it clear that they are unlike other married partners, national guard wives find it harder to think in terms of commitment to a marital union during redeployment. When she is performing both parenting roles and fulfilling all the roles of the relationship, while confronted all around her by counterexamples of partnerships in which both spouses fulfill the responsibilities of their separate spheres, it is hard for a national guard wife to see her efforts as being on behalf of her marital union.

Regular Army and Redeployment

Redeployment is much more common for regular army wives living in a predominantly military context. While disaggregated statistics for the regular Army are not available, it is safe to state that a higher percentage of these wives have experienced second, third, and even fourth deployments. In this study’s sample that was certainly the case. During these redeployments, regular army wives continue to think in terms of obligation to which they shifted from commitment during reunion (chapter 6). Reassignment and broken promises are some of the factors that contribute to this persistence. Redeployment in the military context

also further emphasizes the growing awareness that being a regular army wife is a job in and of itself, and wives come to think more and more of their marriage in the same terms of workplace obligations. Thinking in terms of obligations, both to their partners and themselves within the emergent framework of an individualized marriage, allows regular army wives to perceive redeployment as a period for their individual growth and fulfillment while their husbands pursue their career goals.

While regular army wives are typically immersed in a constant military context, changes of duty stations or PCS's mean that they relocate every three years to a new military installation. By the time they experience redeployment, they are often doing so on a new military base. Rather than connecting with the other wives in their husbands' new unit and thinking in terms of extended commitment as they did during their first deployment (chapter 5), wives tend to focus on what they need to do to get through redeployment on their own. As this regular army wife who spent a second deployment at Fort Jackson after moving there from a fort in Germany said:

The second time around I didn't get too involved with the FRG [Family Readiness Group] like I did over there or hang out with too many of the other wives like I did the first time. I just felt like I know I can do this on my own and stuck to doing what I needed to do for me and my family.

The idea that one's commitment to one's husband's safety includes helping other wives keep it together does not appear to be as strong during redeployment. The danger still remains, but redeployed and relocated wives do not focus on it. One explanation is that PCS'ing severs intense bonds formed during deployment. The loss of those relationships are part of the ambiguous and partial losses that are difficult to grieve in the military context. Having bonded closely with other wives during a critical period once before, wives of redeployed soldiers find it hard to form such relationships anew without doing some harm to older relationships that have yet to be mourned.

Many regular army wives experienced redeployment as the result of a broken promise on the part of the Army. Their husbands redeployed before the official dwell time. As this regular army wife explained:

At the time we were supposed to have at least twelve months between deployments. He was redeployed within six. I felt like I couldn't trust the Army anymore.... I was going to be a lot more careful about what I was willing to give.

Or their husbands were redeployed from a reassignment that they had been assured was non-deployable. As this regular army wife explained:

When he got this assignment and we moved here from [their last fort], they told him this unit was not going to deploy. He accepted this assignment over [another

fort] with that understanding that this was a non-deployable unit. Three months after we got here, he found out they were deploying.

Regular army wives' reaction to these broken promises is to withdraw from the open-ended efforts implied in justifications like commitment and duty. Rather, they focus on the specifiable and reciprocal aspects of obligation. As this regular army wife explained:

Maybe I lost my faith a little. But after he redeployed twice under dwell time, I just started to focus on the numbers. How many more months before he gets home. How many more assignments before we can get to a non-deployable duty station. How many more years to retirement.

Though the military context provides few assurances that reciprocal agreements will be honored, regular army wives of soldiers redeployed in breach of some promise focus more on the terms of such agreements.

After redeployment, regular army wives understand what they do in their military marriage and for whom they do it in terms of employment. When explaining how she has coped with three deployments in seven years, this regular army wife said:

I eventually just gave up any grand vision of what it was all about and just started seeing it as a job. It's his job and it's what we both have to do to fulfill his contract. And it's a pretty good job, with steady pay, great benefits, retirement with a pension and even continued health care.

Other wives saw redeployments in terms of what the Army would be obliged to reciprocate in terms of bonus pay and promotions. As this wife of a regular army pilot explained:

Well, if he's going to make a career of this, the multiple deployments are a good step towards advancement. Plus, the combat pay added to the flight pay and the other bonuses, we have been making pretty good money. Him being gone so much is just the price we pay.

Thus, many wives, accept the hardships of redeployment as a fulfillment of a workplace obligation. In describing this obligation, this regular army wife said:

I just see it as his job and this is what he has got to do. Just like any other job. I try to not let it mean anything more than that. It's just a job. Get over it.

One reason wives turn to the narrower terms of workplace obligations is that the deployments and redeployments create a cumulative and eventually overwhelming experience with death. Shifting away from justifications like duty and commitment help wives to forget and to deny just how freighted their relationship is with the possibility of the ultimate sacrifice. On the other hand, multiple experiences of deployment without their husbands dying convince

wives that military service really is a job like any other job. As one wife related this story about improved conditions in Iraq:

A friend of [her husband's] just returned from the base where he was stationed during his last deployment to Iraq. She said that the guys there now were, like, everything was calm and quiet. So good that they were like "But don't tell anyone." They are afraid the Army might take away their combat pay and make Iraq a regular duty station like Korea or Germany.

This speaks again to the tenuous nature of the charisma surrounding military service: when military service is performed successfully it does eventually become a job like any other job. When the war is won, peace will eventually follow. Even in an "era of persistent conflict" (Casey 2008), the initial intensity of war gives way to a less compelling, though no less demanding, routine of drawn-out, persistent effort. Duty and commitment, as ways of thinking that emphasize the unlimited effort and broad scope of what and to whom wives contribute towards the war, have a limited period during which they make sense. Eventually, they give way to the more narrow and specified terms of obligation, terms that better make sense of the drawn out, incessant demands of either an emergent peace or a persistent conflict.

Regular army wives discover that the flexibility and negotiated nature of individualized marriage and its associated values of obligation are well adapted to the challenges and opportunities of redeployment. From a model of marriage between two self-actualizing individuals on separate trajectories of personal fulfillment [Cherlin 2009], regular army wives can draw a number of useful strategies for coping with redeployments.

One characteristic of individualized marriage is that partners can take little for granted. They cannot draw on traditional assumptions to define their relationship. The conditions of their shared lives must be negotiated and invented. Army wives, even in the military context, know that their relationships are far from traditional. Shifting their thinking from "the way things are supposed to be" to "the way we want things to be" is a useful adaptation to their circumstances. As one wife explained when asked how the war has affected their decisions to have a family:

If I look at my sisters and my girlfriends from college, I guess I should have kid by now. But we aren't a cookie cutter family. We are an army family and that means adjusting, adapting, making it up as we go along. There's no guidebook and the examples of my family, my parents and sisters, they don't really help. [Her husband] and I have to just figure out what works for us. We are waiting for a non-deployable assignment before we start trying to have kids.

Such a negotiated relationship, however, requires explicit communication which can be a challenge for the regular army wife. She must communicate the terms of her relationship and her obligations entailed by it to both her husband and the Army. With regards to her husband, we have seen in chapter 5 how communication can be difficult given official imposed blocks (ComBlocks) and self-selected censorship, intended to spare each partner from additional

worry. With regards to the Army in general and her husband's command specifically, communication across the military – civilian divide can be difficult. Commanders are accustomed to hierarchical and authoritarian ways of expressing themselves: giving orders and expecting them to be obeyed. They are also, however, aware and, to a degree, protective of the fact that army wives are not soldiers. This can lead to both confusion as well as a greater emphasis on the part of regular army wives on clearly stated expectations and obligations. As one wife explained:

They [her husband and his commanders] are all used to giving and taking orders. But when it comes to me, they're like "You're a civilian, ma'am. We could never tell you what to do." And yet they know exactly what they want and expect me to do but don't ever tell me. It's like there's no middle ground for them; either they're soldiers giving each other orders or they're stone cold statues just looking at you. It drives me crazy. I spend all my energy trying to get from them what they want. What they expect from me.

Communication between any couple can be difficult, particularly in an era of individualized marriages which rely so heavily on negotiation. This difficulty is compounded when one partner is ensconced in the particular communication style and habits of the military. This compounded difficulty contributes to regular army wives thinking more and more in terms of clear-cut, specifiable obligations.

One example of the invented and ingenuous character of these marriages is the multiple anniversaries that army couples have contrived. Several participants mentioned having two wedding anniversaries, one for their legal ceremony and the other for the ceremony involving friends and family. Circumstances of deployment, training and PCS'ing initially necessitated the two ceremonies. But the lingering advantage of having two wedding anniversaries is that it minimizes the chances of missing both as they spend subsequent years separated by multiple deployments. As one regular army wife explained:

We have been married seven years. In those seven years we have not spent more than fifteen continuous months living together. But we have never missed a wedding anniversary. That's because we have two. One in June and the other in January.

Regular army wives accept multiple deployments out of their obligation to support their husbands in their career trajectories. As mentioned above, combat deployments are a good way to enhance a soldier's chances of promotion. However, these periods can also be seen as ways to fulfill wives' obligations to their own development personally and professionally. As noted before, many regular army wives embrace the separations imposed by deployment and redeployment as times for personal growth, to develop their own sense of autonomy and independence. As this regular army wife explained:

The first deployment I learned to take the car in for regular oil changes. The second deployment I learned to change the oil myself. Next time, I am going to learn how to rotate the tires. Maybe after that, replace the brakes.

Other wives capitalize on the time apart to focus on careers and other individual interests. As this pilot's wife, a stay-at-home mom with a law degree, explained:

He was gone and I didn't have much to do while the kids were in school; so, I started volunteering as a soldier's advocate. Eventually, it became a full-time thing and I founded an organization and started working with other folks on behalf of wounded soldiers.

The opportunities for employment around a military base during deployments might not be abundant (chapter 5), but many participants appear to find projects that help them develop during their husbands' absences. Some chose to home school their children, others started home-based businesses, like making personalized purses out of soldiers' old combat uniforms or programs such as working with prisoners on designing entrepreneurial projects.

As during previous time periods, duty never comes to the fore in the thinking of regular army wives during redeployments. This is surprising given their relative proximity to the military as an institution and its associated values of duty, service, and sacrifice. The expectation that during critical periods like deployments and redeployments, wives would rally around a sense of duty, was never evidenced during interviews. There is no reason to believe that some new factors that were not active during earlier time periods contribute to this absence in the military context during redeployment. It is important to recall that regular army wives are familiar with the terms associated with duty and many spoke of finding service to a larger cause or entity as an attractive feature in their prospective husbands, before they became soldiers' wives, immersed in a soldier's social world living lives through military cycles of pre-deployment, deployment, reunion, and redeployment.

Conclusion

Through subsequent redeployments, the thinking of army wives, both regular army and national guard, comes to converge across contexts of social place and time around the category of "obligation." This is the category we would have expected initially given overarching master trends toward individualization and rationalization in these overlapping fields of marriage (Cherlin 2009) and the military (Moskos 1989). What is interesting is that both groups of wives converge around this kind of thinking just as the stress of military marriage increases. In terms of the military, Moskos was concerned that values associated with an occupational army, reflected here in the category of obligation, would not sustain a force in times of war. He worried that ways of thinking derived from occupations and typical workplace obligations might prevail upon soldiers and their wives "to do what they are supposed to do," but not motivate them "to do more than they are supposed to do" (1989:5). Over the cycle of predeployment,

deployment, reunion, and redeployment, the opposite relationship has emerged. Regular army wives have shifted in their thinking from the open-ended concept of commitment to their marriages to the narrower, specified terms of obligation. National guard wives have shifted from thinking in terms of the fulfillment of duty to the nation to clear-cut obligations in narrow relations of reciprocity. Thus, various factors occurring in critical periods influence soldiers' wives, both in military and civilian contexts, to understand their military marriages with the concept of "obligation," a category of thinking that reflects the overlapping models of an occupational military and individualized marriage.

Policy analysts have been concerned that the values associated with individualized marriage will fail couples when they encounter stress and result in even more failed marriages (Gerson 2010:10). Duty and commitment, some feared (Popenoe 1996), were missing from these marriages and would leave couples unprepared to face the challenges of life. Surprisingly, the opposite seems true in this instance. As military couples adapt and develop the resiliency necessary to continue through deployment after deployment, wives come to think more and more in terms of obligation and individualized marriage.

One national guard wife whose soldier had deployed and then volunteered to redeploy for a second tour of duty in Iraq shared the following:

I needed to know why it had to be him. He has a wife and kids. Couldn't someone else, someone without a family go instead? But you know when I figured it out? This is going to sound funny. But I took the kids to see a *Transformers* movie, and watching the movie I realized that's what it's like. The Army saves the world from evil Transformers, and nobody even knows it. There's all this terrible stuff that could happen every day, and we'll never even know it because he's out there doing what he has to do. And he has to be the one to do it. Wife and kids or no wife and kids.

In her need to understand why her husband had to deploy, this national guard wife articulates the fundamental research question of this dissertation: how do military wives make sense of having their husband's purposefully in harm's way? This wife crafts an image of a husband humbly doing his duty to make the world safe. The story of duty is one of several stories that wives interviewed for this study told to make the hardships and fears they endured more meaningful. The several ways in which wives thought about their imperiled relationships varied less according to individual personalities than to different social contexts and periods of time. Where a wife lived and when she experienced being married to a soldier influenced the kind of sense a wife made of having her soldier-husband in danger.

This study revealed that not all army wives think about their marriages in the same way. This was true despite expectations based on perceptions of strong moral cohesion, solidarity, and institutional culture in the military (Exum et al. 2008, McClure 1998, Moskos 1989, Wechsler-Segal 1986). While those might be characteristics of life in and around the Army, they do not prevent army wives from thinking in a variety of ways about the challenges that military service brings to their marriages.

Their thinking can be organized into three over-arching categories: duty, commitment, and obligation. The variation between these three categories enables army wives to confront the dilemmas of military marriage by answering two critical questions: *how much* hardship will they endure and *for whom*. Duty implied an open-ended amount of effort offered on behalf of a broad social entity like the Army or the nation. It was evidenced when wives spoke of service, sacrifice, pride, and recognition. Commitment referred to a similarly open-ended effort, but one offered on behalf of the narrower social relationship of the marital union between wife and husband. It was reflected in ways of thinking and talking that focused on what a wife would do for her husband, in spite of his being a soldier. Obligation encompassed ways of thinking about effort and relations that are narrower and are focused on what specific quantities are expected of wives in reciprocal relationships.

These three categories of thinking also matched changes in the ways that both the military and marriage, as separate institutions, have changed over the last century. The terms

and values associated with duty closely paralleled those of what have been termed an “institutional military” and an “institutional marriage.” Duty shared with these institutional forms a concern for expectations from and dispositions towards social relationships broader than one’s own individual marital dyad or personal career. Commitment reflected the values of “companionate marriage” and a military experience organized around “comradeship.” In this way, commitment shared ways of thinking associated with a partnership with separate roles founded around deeply shared emotional ties. Obligation reflected ways of thinking associated with emergent models of an “occupational army” and “individualized marriage.” Thinking in terms of obligation corresponded to the values that help contemporary marriages sustain the separate paths taken toward the fulfillment of each partner. It also reflected the value orientation of soldiers who see the army as just another job within a personal career trajectory.

Contrary to an observed historical shift towards these newer models of individualized marriage and the occupational military, obligation was not the predominant way army wives thought, at least not at first. Over the different time periods of the military deployment cycle and across the differences of living in mostly military or civilian communities, wives went from thinking in either terms of duty or commitment towards a convergence around obligation [see Table 1].

Table 1: Categories of Thinking About Military Marriage Across Social Contexts and Time

	Pre-deployment	Deployment	Reunion	Redeployment
Regular army wives in a military context	Commitment	Extended commitment	Obligation	Obligation
National guard wives in a civilian context	Duty	Duty	Commitment Duty fulfilled	Obligation

Factors specific to particular social contexts and periods of time were found to suppress and support different ways of thinking about the challenges of military marriage. Before deployment, regular army wives living in a military context were discouraged from thinking in terms of duty by the particular nature of solidarity in an all-volunteer army and by mechanisms that exclude spouses from feeling a sense of shared service with their husbands. Familiarity with the reality of military violence, as well as the fact of higher casualty rates among enlisted personnel actually made thinking in terms of duty less meaningful in the military context for the wives of soldiers, regardless of rank. In reaction to the social fatigue caused by the intense collective life around the base, wives focused on commitment to a narrower social relationship: their marriage. The Army’s particular interventions in family life sustained a framework of thinking focused on marital commitment rather than national service or duty. Lastly, a desire to avoid association with images of predation, blood money, and prostitution prevalent in the military context led regular army wives away from thinking in the reciprocal terms of obligation.

Before deployment, national guard wives were encouraged to think in terms of duty by the spontaneous gestures of recognition they would receive from civilians and the way schools

publicly honored their husbands' service in profound, pride-instilling ways for themselves and their children. While civilians expressed support, their inability to empathize usually drove home the fact for national guard wives of how different their own marriages were from their neighbors. This discouraged a way of thinking that focused on marital commitment. Relatively greater involvement by guard members and their families in civilian political life re-enforced thinking about hardships in terms of sacrifice for a broader cause and community. Being immersed in larger social networks of family, civilian work, religion, and other community relationships also re-enforced ways of thinking in terms of service and sacrifice to something larger than their own marriage. Involvement in civilian economic life discouraged national guard wives from thinking about what their husbands do in the Guard "as just another job," as they were clearly aware of the differences between civilian work and military service.

The Cycles of Military Deployment and Marriage

During deployment, several factors contribute to a surprising lack of patriotic fervor and thinking in terms of duty among regular army wives in the military context. The concentrated negative consequences of deployment take their toll on the community as economic depression and crime. Where the students are predominantly military dependents, schools also become sites where the negative effects of deployment are concentrated. Schools respond, not by symbolically framing families' difficulties as national sacrifice, but by attempting to alleviate students' suffering. In this way, schools contribute to a wife's thinking in terms of what the military community owes her and her family, what are their mutual obligations. Just as schools might have been a site for constituting a sense of duty, as they do in the civilian context, other symbols, like blue star banners, rituals, and farewell ceremonies, given the context of a military community during deployment, fail to instill a sense of duty. Rather, through their interactions with the wives of other deployed soldiers, regular army wives persisted in thinking mostly in terms of commitment. Mutual scrutiny and accountability between wives encouraged them to extend this sense of commitment to one another, with the ultimate aim of keeping their own deployed husbands safe.

In contrast to regular army wives during deployment, national guard wives did talk mostly in terms of duty when thinking about the periods in which their husbands were mobilized. Though geographically isolated from other women going through the same experience, and socially isolated from their neighbors who do not share the experience of having a loved one at war, national guard wives, in the very experience of social seclusion, saw deployment as a special time – a time in which sacred duties would be fulfilled and sacrifices made. Living outside of military communities, the Army's institutions did little to alleviate the hardships of deployment. Consequently, it was less likely in this context for them to think about mutual obligations during this period. Surrounded by the constant reminder of typical marriages, they also found it hard to think of their experience as "suddenly single women" in terms of a commitment to marriage.

At reunion, factors internal and external to their marriage cause a shift in the thinking of regular army wives from commitment to obligation. When their regular army soldiers return to

life on their unit's "home station," wives confront the reality that their husbands have only partially returned and that their relationships are not the kind of companionate marriages in which their sense of commitment was based. In the larger community, there are no public rituals to help wives mourn partial losses. In fact, there are many reasons for wives of returning soldiers to feel guilty about the relatively larger, more clear-cut losses experienced by the wives of fallen soldiers. In addition, the husband's continued involvement with the military as a full-time regular army soldier makes it hard to separate the returned husband from the warrior and usually involves a stressful move or "PCS" to a new duty station, disrupting the process of reintegration and severing the ties built through extended commitment. With reunion, wives also become more aware that being a soldier's spouse is a job in and of itself. In addition to providing essential care for the reproduction of his military labor power – "making him combat-ready" – wives assume a greater role as advocates for their husbands in the face of the military bureaucracy. Working in both roles, as caregiver and advocate, regular army wives at reunion come to think more and more in the specifiable and reciprocal terms of obligation.

Reunion for national guard wives presents an opportunity to find a sense of closure and fulfillment to the idea of duty. As guard husbands transition from fully mobilized, deployed troops back to citizen soldiers, public rituals and gestures from the civilian community help wives to mourn what has been lost and find new emotional energy to reinvest in a post-deployment relationship. They think of this relationship largely in terms of commitment. The resumption of his civilian roles and their growing resemblance to the civilian couples around them are two factors that contribute to this emergent thinking in terms of commitment during reunion.

Redeployment for a second, third or fourth overseas tour is common for regular army wives living on or around military bases. During redeployment they continue to think in terms of obligation, but new factors specific to redeployment in the context of a military installation add to their need to think in the relatively narrow and specifiable terms of obligation. Reassignments to a new base make them hesitant to build new relationships with other wives like those that were severed when they moved. This also means they are less likely to resume thinking in terms of extended commitment during subsequent deployments. Redeployments frequently occur as exceptions to the Army's official rules about "dwell time." Taken as broken promises, redeployments encourage wives to become more guarded in their thinking about the amount of effort and for whom they are willing to endure the hardships of continued military marriage. Redeployment in the military context also highlights the opportunities of thinking in terms of obligation and its associated model of individualized marriage, particularly in regards to partners' mutual obligations to support each other's individual development. In this kind of thinking, redeployment becomes a time for wives to grow both professionally and personally. Thinking in terms of obligation is one of the as of yet unidentified adaptive processes that make army families so resilient.

While redeployment for national guard wives living in a civilian context has been relatively rare, it has significant and interesting effects on their ways of thinking. Unlike during pre-deployment or deployment periods, national guard wives whose husbands have redeployed do not receive the same kind of support and recognition from civilians that they

received earlier, which made them feel proud and encouraged them to think in terms of duty. Redeployed national guard soldiers are often reassigned to a different unit not near their home communities. Additionally, many civilians are confused by the rotational nature of contemporary force deployment. Without this civilian confirmation of fulfilling a duty to a larger cause and community, national guard wives come to think more and more in terms of obligation during redeployments. One factor influencing this shift is the depressed civilian economy that transforms service with the guard into a full-time occupation. Guard wives start to think more in terms of the compensation and benefits derived from repeated deployments than what they are sacrificing for the greater good. Like their regular army counterparts, national guard wives also come to think about reunion as a time to fulfill the mutual obligation of individualized marriage to support their husbands in their individual career trajectories while they too are supported in using the time apart to pursue professional and other interests.

Managing the Institutions of Marriage and the Military

These findings concerning how army wives make sense of their relationships and the changes that occur in wives' ways of thinking across contexts of space and time, have significant implications for how we understand the moral and symbolic connections between the military and its citizenry. They also contribute to informing broader debates about purported shifts within society and culture towards expressive individualism and marketplace rationality. The emergence of obligation in the thinking of both regular army and national guard wives' ways of thinking, at reunion and redeployment respectively, suggests that it is a source of resilience rather than peril for the institutions of marriage and the military. Coming to think in the narrower terms of obligation appears to help army families keep going, explaining the interesting phenomena that the likelihood of divorce is leveling off among army families as the war drags on (Bushatz 2010). That at certain times and in certain contexts wives also think in open-ended terms of duty and commitment has implications for the possibility of sacrifice or altruism in contemporary society. This finding also encourages a re-thinking of what some scholars consider to be the problems of an army organized around an occupational model (Moskos 1989). Lastly, these findings suggest a reconsideration of the sometimes essentialized opposition between women and war.

This dissertation has demonstrated that with their initial experiences of pre-deployment and deployment within the contexts of military and civilian communities, army wives did not think in terms of the values associated with the models of either marriage or the military thought to be prevalent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Obligation*, which is associated with the values of *individualized marriage* (Cherlin 2004) and an *occupational army* (Moskos 1989), was not predominant in military wives' ways of thinking. Rather, as a way of making sense of their military marriages, *obligation* came to the fore out of specific interactions and contexts, first in the military context at reunion and then in the civilian context with redeployment. Wives did not already adhere to terms of *obligation* because of some sea-change in cultural values that had already swept the nation. Instead, varying social interactions in military and civilian contexts suppressed thinking in terms of *duty* and *commitment* and

made *obligation* as a frame more accessible, meaningful, and applicable to emerging situations. This finding confirms the perspective that changes in cultural values occur less in a top-down manner than as individual, adaptive responses to specific structural dilemmas (Abramson 2012, Swidler 2001).

Thinking in terms of *obligation* does not necessarily lead to the collapse of institutions (the military, marriage, or in this particular case of where they overlap: military marriage) under stress. After ten years of war, divorce rates in the Army have leveled off and remain lower than they were before the beginning of the conflict (Bushatz 2010, Karney & Crown 2007). We know that with deployments and redeployments, army families confront increasing difficulties and yet they persevere. At the same time, with deployments and redeployments, army wives, both regular army and national guard, shift their thinking to *obligation*. As this dissertation argues, this shift is in response to various factors and is part of the adaptive processes that make military families resilient. The broader implication for marriage in the military and country at large is the possibility that more and more couples resemble an individualized model of marriage not out of some widespread cultural shift in values, but because that model and its associated values help them better handle the stressors that they encounter in everyday life. It might not be that there is a shift in values creating a crisis in the structure of the family; rather other crises outside of the family are causing a shift in values as an adaptive process in and for the family's maintenance. Similarly, for the military, it is not that a shift in value orientations toward individual careerism is ill-preparing soldiers and their families for facing the hardships of war, but that the hardships of war are influencing a retreat from ways of thinking in terms of *duty* and advancing ideas directly related to *obligation*.

Here it is important to note how easy it would be to fall into telling a moralizing story about how the difficult conditions of military marriage give rise to bad ways of thinking – how once selfless and altruistic devotees to broader social entities and causes (whether the nation or their own marital unions) turn into cold, self-interested, calculating individuals. The reality, however, is that wives under stress shift their thinking to ways of understanding situations that work for them, and in the process, contribute to maintaining their social unions (marriage) and the state's foreign policy objectives.

It would also be easy to tell a moralizing story about how wives come to think less in terms of duty and commitment as the wearing down of ideological justifications and false consciousness in the face of reality. But this is not a story of sentimental and delusional justifications giving way thought processes based in hard-nosed pragmatism, attuned to material conditions. The different contexts and interactions make each way of thinking as real and meaningful as the next. Thus, this is not a case of delusional, ideological or epiphenomenal subjectivities but one of establishing meaning in the context of real connections between how people make sense of situations and the social structures that shape those situations.

Though the thinking of both groups of wives eventually converged around obligation, in certain contexts they did think in terms of open-ended efforts for social entities greater than themselves. Despite warnings to the contrary (Popenoe 1996, 1994, Bahr & Bahr 2001), sacrifice, the subordination of individual interests to a collective good, is still at least a frame for thinking about behavior, if not a persistent practice in itself, among some contemporary

Americans. The findings here demonstrate that given the right circumstances, people can think in terms of sacrifice. When their suffering is both *distinct* (they are in a context in which they alone are the ones enduring hardships for a larger social entity) and *recognized* (their hardships are acknowledged by those who are its beneficiaries), then hardships are more easily framed in terms of the fulfillment of duty and the constitution of sacrifice. The findings also indicate that sacrifice and altruism are social phenomena that adhere to situations, not just to the attributes of particularly selfless, moral, or otherwise exceptional individuals.

If sacrifice as a way of thinking about suffering or as a legitimate justification might be uncommon today, that is not because of some cultural trend or shift in underlying values. Its absence is the result of particular interactions and contexts. The accounts here demonstrate that people do and can think in terms of sacrifice and that it can be a meaningful and genuine way in which they frame hardships endured for a greater cause. The evidence also shows how such a framing or way of thinking can be undermined in particular contexts of space and time. Depending on where and when they experience marriage to a soldier, army wives can think of the same experience of having a loved one in harm's way in different ways.

The effects of certain spatial contexts (civilian versus military communities) indicate something important about the difference between sacrifice and solidarity. The fact that institutions (like schools), rituals (like farewell ceremonies), and symbols (like blue-star banners) can either acknowledge or deny a sense of duty depending upon the given context demonstrates that sacrifice as a way of framing action requires a context where it is both recognized (Willer 2009) and made distinct. A wife must be both seen to be making a sacrifice and one of the few to be doing so. Among their neighbors, national guard wives might have been alone in having a loved one in harm's way and in their singularity they were also distinct. This distinction appears to have helped them sustain a sense of duty and sacrifice. Regular army wives share the same situation with those around them, and while this might be a source of solidarity and moral cohesion, it is not, as the accounts here evidence, conducive to thinking in terms of sacrifice. Sacrifice entails giving of oneself to benefit the social whole, while solidarity is about recognizing oneself in others where everyone who makes up the whole is also doing their part.

The findings here also indicate that sacrifice, as a meaningful frame of behavior, requires both spontaneity and vulnerability. In order for wives to think in terms of open-ended effort for a larger social entity, they needed to draw upon spontaneous and authentic gestures of recognition offered to them by civilians. Attempts orchestrated by the military itself to acknowledge the contributions of wives generally failed by comparison. Gestures of recognition offered by the command and performed under orders seemed to wives to be self-serving and inauthentic. The problem with civilian recognition, however, is that it can be a double-edged sword. When offered, it is a boon to a way of thinking in terms of duty fulfilled. When it is withdrawn, as it was during redeployment for national guard wives, its absence can be demoralizing. The implication here is that public sentiment is essential for fueling a sense of sacrifice, but it is also unpredictable.

The concern articulated by Moskos in 1989 that the Army under the occupational model was becoming too much like any other civilian employee and losing its institutionally specific

character might have been misplaced. The accounts here indicate that the Army has not become too much like the civilian world, but that it has become too distanced from American citizens. If *duty* as an institutional value failed to take hold in the thinking of regular army wives, it was not because they were initial adherents of seeing the Army in terms of the concept of *obligation* or as “just another job.” Unlike their national guard counterparts, regular army wives were largely isolated from contact with civilians. Their embrace of *obligation* is more of a result of decisions about relocating and the closing of bases than about the internal organization of the Army, as either an institution or an occupation.

One leading justification for removing installations from metropolitan areas at the end of the 20th Century was the sort of cost-efficiency and rationalization that Moskos sees as driving the new occupational Army.¹ Others, however, have argued that concentrating the bulk of military forces to isolated rural or even foreign bases was politically motivated either as a way to punish anti-military constituencies (Meeker 2010) or to cordon off soldiers from the kind of critical public sentiment demonstrated by civilians during the Vietnam conflict.² Though remote and cost effective, the evidence provided here about the effects of such military contexts suggests that these installations in their isolation from civilians are not to be able to afford soldiers and their families a sustained sense of fulfilled duty.

Women and War

The accounts here demonstrate that not all women are fundamentally opposed to war as some scholars claim (Ruddick 1995). Nor are those who support their soldier husbands necessarily dupes of a false consciousness imposed upon them by the forces of patriarchy and militarism (Enloe 1983, Weinstein & White 1997). Rather, the evidence in this study indicates how women manage their relationships with the military and their soldier-husbands. Furthermore, this study shows that in this on-going social and cultural dynamic, army wives are not always compliant and acquiescent, even when they support their husbands as soldiers. When they share values of the military institution like *duty*, they also present a challenge to the Army’s exclusiveness by claiming that they, too, serve. When they think in terms of *commitment*, they pointedly place their husbands first in their thinking, often in spite of the Army and his involvement within it. When they think in terms of *obligation*, they are often going toe to toe with the Army over questions of fairness and the fulfillment of reciprocal obligations. In an asymmetrical war without a distinct battle front, these wives find a clear “front line” in the management of their marriage and its place in the military.

²Interestingly, public opinion against the current war was higher sooner than it was against the war in Vietnam (Newport and Carroll 2005); yet, this widespread opposition to the current wars has not seemed to have negatively affected those wives, particularly national guard wives, in closest contact with civilian populations.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Schedule of Interview Questions

I.	Tell me a little about your background.
a	Where are you from? What did your parents do for work? What was your childhood like? Lots of people in the military are the children of army folk. Is that the case for you?
II.	How did you come to be a soldier's wife?
a	How did you meet? When?
b	What attracted you to him?
c	How was he like previous boyfriends? How was he different?
d	Was he involved with the military when you met? If so, how do you think that fit into the attraction? In what ways?
e	If he wasn't already in the military, what did you feel about his decision to join?
f	How would you say that your feelings about him being in the military have changed since then?
III.	What is a soldier's wife?
a	Before you became a soldier's wife, what were your expectations? When you became a soldier's wife, what were some of the things you realized were going to be expected of you? Who expected these things from you?
b	Have you attended an Army Family Team Building workshop or any other events/programs that helped you know how to be an army wife?
c	What is a good army wife? Tell me about some spouses you think are good army wives. Tell me about some spouses you think are bad army wives?
	Some folks have told me that a bad army wife is one who complains. Do you ever find that you have to be the one to complain, because your Soldier won't?
d	Does it take a special woman to be married to a soldier or can/should every woman be able to do what you do?

	From where do you get your strength to be an army spouse?
e	How do you think of yourself? as a Civilian? Military dependent? Military personnel? Ex when asked for ID
f	How well do you know your husband's colleagues? Their families?
g	Do you ever find that you are jealous of the bond your husband has with his army colleagues?
h	Some say that an army wife has to accept that in her marriage, the army comes first. What does that mean to you? Has that been the case in your relationship?
i	If it is true for you, how do you justify that? If it's not true, how do you resist the pressures that would make it true?
	How does your spouse feel about the saying, "In an army marriage, the army comes first"?
j	What do your friends/family not in the military think of you being married to a soldier?
k	What have you noticed that they understand about being a military spouse? Don't understand?
l	What are some of the memorable reactions you have gotten when you told folks you were a military spouse? Are there people you don't tell?
m	What's the best part of being married to a soldier? The worst?
IV.	Career history
a	Starting from now and working back to when you first met your husband, where have you lived?
b	How many times has he deployed? Where did you live when he was deployed?
	Some say that the military prefers that spouses stay near their soldiers' base during deployment. Do you think this is a good policy? Why? [Army] Do you think deployment would have been easier for you if you had been living on/near a military post? Why/not? [Guard]

C	What does he do? Relative to others in his unit, how dangerous is his job? How do you know this?
	Do you think the Army tries to assign married soldiers to less dangerous jobs? Soldiers with children? If not should it?
	Do you think Guard units are in as much danger as regular Army units?
	Has your Guard soldier been deployed within the US? To what kind of missions? How often? How dangerous?
D	[OPSEC reminder: no specific dates, locations, names of units, ranks]
V.	Can you recall when you first heard of a soldier in your spouse's unit being injured?
A	Did s/he have a spouse, family? How closely did you know them?
B	How did you respond?
C	How did the military community respond? The command? The FRG? Chaplaincy?
D	How did folks outside of the military respond? Government? Churches? Schools? Veterans groups? Civic groups?
E	Do any other injured soldiers stand out in your memory?
F	Over the past years, with other injured soldiers, how have the ways in which the communities respond changed? Have the ways you respond changed?
G	How have their losses affected you? Your spouse? How do you deal with this loss?
H	~~Do you sense that all losses are equally honored? Should they be?~~ The DoD refers to deaths and injuries as occurring under either hostile or non hostile conditions – how does that difference affect the what those injuries or fatalities mean to the community? To you?
VI.	When have you been most worried that your husband was in danger?
a	Where were you living?
b	What were you most afraid of? Physical, Emotional, and or Spiritual injury? Fatality?
c	Did your fear for him change the way you were living? How?

d	To whom did you turn for support? What did they do to help you? Church? FRG? Doctor? Spouse's employer/colleagues? Family? Friends? Work colleagues? Other soldiers?
e	Whom did you avoid? Why?
f	Were you involved with his unit's family readiness group [FRG] at that time?
	Who leads the FRG? How did s/he come to be the FRG leader?
g	Do you recall any particular dreams or day dreams from that period or about that period of time?
h	Are there any movies, songs, books, prayers, stories that helped you in that period?
i	Are there any movies, songs, books, stories that might explain to someone else what you went through in that period? What do you think of Army Wives?
VII.	Jeopardy and Meaning
	Did you ever discuss the dangers of military service with him? Was there something he said that stands out in your mind? With other wives? Other people? What did you talk about?
	As a couple, did you make plans for the possibility of injury or fatality?
	How do you think your relationship has been affected by this possibility?
	The possibility of injury or fatality is a part of being a soldier. What does it mean to you that you are married to someone who faces that possibility? ~~As someone married to a soldier, how do you make sense of that possibility in your relationship?~~
	Do you think the Army has prepared you for the possibility of your husband's injury or death? What would you change about the way that the Army prepares soldiers and families for the possibility of injury?
	How has the war affected decisions you and he have made about your family?
	How do you feel about having children in a time of war?
	As a man/woman with a wife/husband and children, do you ever think he/she has a duty or responsibility not to put him/herself in harm's way, to find a safer

	occupation?
	Some say that the greatest number of casualties in this war hasn't been individuals but relationships. When have you been most worried that your marriage was in danger? What was the source of the danger – separation, injury, infidelity, independence, changes in personality?
	Some folks talk about the problems of infidelity or 'straying' in the military community. Do you think it is a particular problem? Why or why not?
	Do you ever worry about how the violence your spouse experiences might change him/her?
	Does your spouse share those experiences with you? Would you prefer that he/she did/did not share them?
	Do you share everything that goes on at home during deployment with your spouse?
VIII.	Recognition
a	What gesture made by someone within the military (as opposed to civilian) community has touched you most? Within the civilian community?
b	Do you think more people should be asked to serve their country like you and your husband do? Should there be a draft?
c	When your husband is deployed, do you display a blue star banner? Any other signs that you are a soldier's wife?
d	The government recently lifted the ban on photographing caskets returning from overseas, provided that the family has consented. What do you think of this change in policy? Would you consent to your husband's casket being photographed for the press? Why or why not?
	Do you feel that your husband receives the recognition that he deserves? Do you receive the recognition that you deserve?
	Do you sense that the American people appreciate what you and your husband do?

IX.	How many times has your husband re-Commissioned/ re-enlisted?
a	Were those decisions you reached as a couple? How?
b	Do you want him to stay in the military?
c	If not now, when would you want him to leave? When will he and you have done 'enough' for the country?
d	What could you see him doing other than serving in the military?
X.	Demographics
a	YoB Spouse's YoB Spouses's rank: enlisted nco warrant officer Occupation Spouse's Mother's Father's Education Spouse's Mother'sFather's Ethnicity How far do you live from the nearest military installation? Religion Parents' military status Year married
	Conclusion
a	Is there anything you would like to add? Any questions you have? Any comments on the questions I asked – the wording, intent, etc?
b	Having completed the interview, would you recommend it to another spouse? Why or why not? Could you refer me to other spouses that I could interview?

Appendix II: Oaths of enlistment and commission

The wordings of the current oath of enlistment and oath for commissioned officers are as follows:

"I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God." (Title 10, US Code; Act of 5 May 1960 replacing the wording first adopted in 1789, with amendment effective 5 October 1962).

"I, _____ (SSAN), having been appointed an officer in the Army of the United States, as indicated above in the grade of _____ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter; So help me God." (DA Form 71, 1 August 1959, for officers.)

Appendix III: Soldier's Creed

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.

Appendix IV: U.S. Army Wife Creed

Author Unknown

I am the wife of an American Soldier.
I am a supporter of the United States Army -
an encouragement for the protectors of the greatest nation on earth.
Because I am proud of my husband and the uniform that he wears,
I will always act in ways creditable to him, the military service
and the nation he is sworn to guard.
I am proud of my husband. I will do all that I can to protect
and provide for my family in his absence. I will be loyal to my
husband and to the vows that we made as we entered the
covenant of marriage.
I will do my full part to carry on the values
and goals we have set apart for our family
and I will continue to instruct our children in the same manner.
As a soldier's wife, I realize that I play a vital role
in my husband's decision to become a member of a time-honored profession -
that I am doing my share to keep alive the principles of freedom
for which my country stands.
No matter what situation I am in, I will never do anything,
for pleasure, profit, or personal safety,
which will disgrace my husband, his uniform or our country.
I will use every means I have to encourage my husband to be
the best soldier that he can be.
I am proud of my husband, my country and its flag.
I will fly the flag and will always remember the sacrifices
made by my husband and by generations of men and women
that have served our beloved country.
I will try to make my husband proud of the
manner in which I accept his decision to defend my freedom and
the freedom of all American citizens -
for I am the wife of an American soldier.

(<http://usarmypmwife.tripod.com/armyfamily/id19.html>)