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# The JOURNAL of MILITARY and GOVERNMENT COUNSELING

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**June, 2018**

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## **Letter from the Editor**

The *Journal of Military and Government Counseling (JMGC)* is the official journal of the Military and Government Counseling (MGCA; a division of the American Counseling Association). This journal is designed to present current research on military, Veteran, and government topics. There are exciting changes coming for the journal – more on that as it all falls into place!

This issue presents the *Competencies for Counseling Military Populations*, which has been in development for some time. The MGCA Board of Directors has approved the competencies and encourages anyone working on presentations or articles to use them as you develop your work. The second article describes an equine-based summer program for military children. The third article is a research article of Facebook use by Army wives when communicating with deployed spouses. A graduate student led research project is the final article and uses a wellness approach for career counseling with Veterans in college.

I am still seeing an increase in submissions and gladly welcome more submissions for the JMCG. As we have moved to four issues per year, I do hope that we sustain the submission. So, ask around where you work – or try writing yourself. I'm advertising for submissions through ACA channels.

Benjamin V. Noah, PhD  
*JMGC Founding Editor*

## **Introduction to the *Competencies for Counseling Military Populations***

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The publication of the *Competencies for Counseling Military Populations* is the culmination of vision and research supported by the Military and Government Counseling Association (MGCA) Board of Directors. The Board of Directors appointed a Task Force in October 2016 to develop the CCMPs after the advocacy efforts of three MGCA members (see Burgin, Prosek, & Atkins, 2017 for abbreviated version). However, the need for competencies in the counseling profession long precedes the recent advocacy efforts (see Fenell, 2008). Often, military researchers cite the recent inclusion of licensed professional counselors as employable in VA hospitals and related health centers as a catalyst for counselors' education on military cultural and clinical interventions. And while this is true, in actuality, counselors have long served military populations in community and private practice settings as military connected individuals and families impact all communities. A significant landmark for counselors who provide services to military connected families was the Congress mandated requirement of the Department of Defense to create rules for independent services provided through TRICARE (Federal Register, 2011). The study by the Institute of Medicine titled, Provision of Mental Health Counseling Services under TRICARE (2010) helped support the primary rule changes allowing counselors to be independent practitioners. These efforts involved significant advocacy from organizations such as but not limited to the National Board for Certified Counselors, Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the American Counseling Association, and the American Mental Health Counselors Association. Counselors understand that the need for highly qualified practitioners is essential given the scope and ongoing nature of current global conflicts. The increased inclusion of counselors in VA hospitals and clinics coupled with limited long-term funding to support mental health needs of those receiving VA services creates a necessity for guidelines to effectively counsel military populations.

The authors of the CCMPs were intentional with their vision to respect the unique clinical needs of military populations, while also representing the philosophical foundations of counseling: prevention, development, empowerment, and wellness (Remley & Herlihy, 2016).

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During Task Force meetings, members often brought the discussions back to providing counselors with competencies that respected the strength-based perspectives of counselors, a perspective Task Force members foresee service members and their families will appreciate, given the values of military culture. Additionally, Task Force members continually worked toward writing competencies that provided general guidelines, allowing space for the individual experiences of military populations. For example, the Task Force, when applicable, denotes potential for different needs based on military status: Active Duty, Reserve Components, Veterans, retired military members, and military families. However, the commonalities shared among military populations are far greater and competencies were written to reflect a counselor's ability to interpret based on the individual military-connected client.

Congruent with other competency documents published by American Counseling Association divisions, the CCMPs support ethical decision-making in counseling and supervision, guide the development of curriculum in counselor education, and serve as a resource for research in counseling with military populations. While the Task Force created these competencies with longevity in mind, similar to other competency documents, the CCMPs will be evaluated in the future for relevance and context within the military culture and the counseling profession. It is important to note that the intent of the competencies is to provide a broad overarching framework vs. a specific prescriptive requirement. When implemented by counselors, they should be viewed through this lens.

In conclusion, we, as authors and leaders on the Task Force, thank the MGCA Board of Directors for their continued support to bring this document to counselors at-large, as well as the many reviewers who provided feedback to improve the scope and readability of the ocmpetencies. Finally, we must acknowledge the counselors, supervisors, and educators who are already "serving those who serve" (MGCA, n.d.) and the future counselors who will proudly and competently follow.

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## **Competencies for Counseling Military Populations**

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The Competencies for Counseling Military Populations (CCMP) offers counselors a framework of foundational principles and practice for working with military-connected clients. CCMP represents all military populations including Active Duty, Reserve Components, Veterans, retired military members, and military families; and counselors should interpret each competency with understanding of foundational differences in experiences among these military populations. Counselors working with military populations can use the CCMP as a resource in their clinical and ethical decision-making processes, as well as for training and supervision purposes. In October 2016, the Military and Government Counseling Association (MGCA) appointed a Task Force to develop the competencies. The Task Force member composition was intentional to capture the diverse experiences of military-connected counselors and counselor educators. The Task Force followed a structured process in the development of the competencies including: review of previous counselor competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA), review of the current research related to counseling military populations, conceptualization for a framework of competencies, formulation of competencies, and feedback with MGCA board members and reviewers representative of MGCA members at-large.

The intention of the CCMP is to provide a research-based set of guidelines that represent military considerations through the lens of a counselor professional identity: a strength-based philosophy grounded in principles of empowerment, wellness, prevention, and development. The framework for the CCMP is organized by seven core components: military culture, ethics, system features, assessment of presenting concerns, identity development, treatment, and advocacy. Additionally, to encourage counselors' competence and understanding of military structure and language, an overview of military key terms are defined.

**1. Military Culture** represents general information about the functioning and worldview of military service members and their families.

The professional counselor:

- a. Can identify the Active Duty service branches of the U.S. armed forces, and understands that each branch adheres to specialized structures, roles, ranks, and terms.
- b. Is aware that differences in military culture exist between each branch of service.
- c. Is aware that differences in experiences may exist between Veterans who previously served and Service members/Veterans who currently serve, as well as Veterans who served in different eras.
- d. Acknowledges values, beliefs, traditions, and functions of the military that influence the client's worldview.
- e. Is aware of the mission-first value system of the military.
- f. Acknowledges sacrifice, honor, and humility as values for Service members.
- g. Recognizes the importance of collectivism within the military culture, including a desire to limit risk or harm to others.
- h. Explores the introjection of military culture in the client's personal and professional functioning.
- i. Respects the individual motivations of Service members to enlist or commission in the military, as well as their individual experiences during their time in service and decision to leave or retire from the military.

- j. Recognizes the unique within group cultural differences of Service members including gender, race, ethnicity, age, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability-status, and religious/spiritual orientation.
- k. Understands the potential for variance in the resources and support systems available to Reserve Component Service members.
- l. Seeks education on the training methods and objectives of military operations, including potential differences among combat zones.
- m. Is aware of the potential for differing worldviews between Service members and civilians.

When working in military employment settings, the professional counselor:

- n. Is aware of, respects, and adheres to military base policy, protocol, and standard etiquette practices.

**2. Identity Development** represents the whole person concept of military life including one's personal identity as a Service member and connection to mission and core values of working as a military Service member across the lifespan.

The professional counselor:

- a. Understands that the military experience may be fused into all aspects of self, including cognitive, behavioral, affective, social, and spiritual components.
- b. Respects that Service members may integrate their core sense of self with military service identity such as style of dress and methods of communicating and relating to others.
- c. Understands the mental toughness and physical preparation required to make the choice to put self in harm's way in service of others.
- d. Understands the fusion of one's sense of self may be related to specific occupational roles and connection to specific units, jobs, positions, roles, deployments, and key training experiences.
- e. Understands how military rank, structure, and career progression influence sense of self.
- f. Respects Service members' perceptions of their military experiences, positive or negative, and regardless of societal or political opinions.
- g. Understands the professional career lifecycle experienced by Service members may have unique requirements for career progression and that roles, perspectives, limitations, and expectations may vary.
- h. Understands identity development related to transitions to civilian life such as ending of enlistment, retirement, separation, and physical or psychological injury.
- i. Has awareness of potential for grief and loss associated with transitions across the military career lifespan.
- j. Is aware of potential transition concerns associated with health resources, including continuity of care relative to health insurance.
- k. Understands that Service members may vary and exhibit unique characteristics based on generational affiliation.
- l. Understands the emphasis Service members may place on physical fitness related to self-concept.

- m. Has awareness of the role that aggression and targeted violence have related to self-identity and membership in a warrior culture.

- 3. Systems** represents general information about how Service members' families, spouses, and children experience the nature and structure of the military lifecycle including, but not limited to, deployment, health and wellness, employment, long periods of separation, consequences of injury, and retirement.

The professional counselor:

- a. Can identify the stages of military deployments and the unique interpersonal and intrapersonal factors of each; and recognizes the variable of length and types of deployments.
- b. Is aware of unique characteristics of military families including demographics such as age of marriage and blended families, which may vary by branch and type of service.
- c. Is aware of the complex nature of stressors faced by military families including factors related to separation and relocation.
- d. Understands that Reserve Component families must often negotiate the complexities of two worlds, both civilian and military, with varying degrees for structural support from both worlds.
- e. Understands the high level of adaptation and resiliency skills are beneficial for military families to meet the common demands of military lifestyle including stress, uncertainty, and frequent separations.
- f. Is aware of the roles and expectations experienced by military families including factors such as separation, career evolution, and transition.
- g. Is aware that dual-military marriages may be characterized by unique challenges such as the de-synchronization of training, deployment, and advancement opportunities, given the need to balance the goals and duties of both military careers and familial obligations.
- h. Is aware of the unique identity developed by children raised in military households and challenges placed on military families, to include adult children of military upbringing.
- i. Is aware of the potential physical, cognitive, and emotional demands of military service and the resulting impact, on self and others, of serving in a high-risk occupation.
- j. Understands potential of familial impact related to military retirement including the implications of the type of discharge from the military as well as medical retirement.
- k. Respects the unique and sometimes challenging decisions military families make in service of their fellow Service members, community, state, and country.
- l. Is aware that relational dissatisfaction in military marriages/relationships may be associated with combat exposure, traumatic-brain injury (TBI), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance use, and infidelity.
- m. Understands that the custody or conservatorship of children in military families may be impacted by training and deployment of military caregivers.

- 4. Assessment of Presenting Concerns** represents common areas of clinical concerns that Service members frequently present when seeking mental health services.

The professional counselor:

- a. Understands that military-connected clients are often concerned that they will experience stigmatization, which creates barriers to seeking mental health services.
- b. Recognizes the prevalence of TBIs and head injuries during military service and is aware that TBIs are associated with higher rates of other mental health and physical symptoms.
- c. Is aware that the number of Veterans seeking and receiving treatment for PTSD continues to increase in congruence with continued military missions.
- d. Is aware that combat exposure increases the risk of co-occurring concerns such as substance use disorders and suicidality.
- e. Understands the importance of assessing trauma in all military personnel given service-related injuries are not always combat-exposure related, and that secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, and preexisting trauma may exist.
- f. Recognizes that moral injury is a prevalent concern among the broad range of symptoms that may manifest following traumatic exposure.
- g. Recognizes that alcohol is the most prevalent substance Veterans misuse and frequently co-occurs with other mental health concerns and suicidality.
- h. Is aware that the unique stressors and differences in each branch of service results in significant differences in the levels of at-risk behaviors among Service members.
- i. Has awareness of current military sexual trauma (MST) rates among women and men Service members and recognizes that increased mental health disorders are often observed in those who have experienced MST.
- j. Becomes knowledgeable of the variances in current suicide statistics among Active Duty, Reserve Components, Veterans, retired military members, and military families when compared to national statistics.

- 5. Treatment** represents general information about unique concerns that may arise in the treatment of military-affiliated clients and approaches supported by research for military populations, including best practices of military care systems, as well as holistic, wellness-oriented services.

The professional counselor:

- a. Is aware of evidence-based treatments utilized by the U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- b. Recognizes that treatment needs may include a range of presenting concerns prevalent among Service members (e.g., sensory impairment, decreased memory/concentration, headaches, sleep disturbance, physical symptoms, and interpersonal isolation).
- c. Is aware of the adjunctive interdisciplinary services (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy, command consultation, embedded behavioral health, chaplaincy, and peer support) available within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- d. Understands the effects of pharmacotherapy and supports appropriate client medication management services as needed.
- e. Supports coping skills development for effective functioning within several areas

- including career, recreation, housing, justice involvement, financial solvency, and interpersonal relationships.
- f. Considers inclusion of the military member's family and social supports in treatment.
  - g. Continually assesses for the nature, frequency, and severity of trauma exposure, as well as ongoing stressors and protective factors, such as social support, substance use, risk-seeking behaviors, and financial stability.
  - h. Is aware of holistic, mindfulness-based treatment approaches that are supported by research for military populations.
  - i. Seeks strategies to improve military members' access and engagement in mental health services.
  - j. Recognizes that operational tempo impacts scheduling for mental health services.

When working in military employment settings, the professional counselor:

- k. Recognizes that a limited number of Veterans eligible for services are enrolled for care with a Veteran Health Administration (VHA) provider.

**6. Ethics** represents counselors' self-awareness and motivation to serve military-connected clients, as well as ethical considerations working with military populations.

The professional counselor:

- a. Maintains competence by completing formal training for working with military personnel; and when possible, the training is experiential in nature.
- b. Identifies personal and professional motivations to counsel military populations.
- c. Brackets personal values and attitudes of war policies; addresses potential prejudices about military service or war; and recognizes their own political opinions of current and previous combat operations.
- d. Seeks consultation and supervision when ethical challenges arise specific to military populations.
- e. Remains mindful of legal requirements (see Federal Regulations and U.S. Department of Defense disclosure laws) in documentation and disclosure of records to service members' commands, medical board, or military court.
- f. Actively adheres to a self-care routine to prevent burnout, depersonalization, compassion fatigue, and impairment.
- g. Who also identifies as military-connected, assesses for and addresses potential countertransference.

When working in military employment settings, the professional counselor:

- h. Considers the potential impact to power differentials when taking leadership or administrative duties.
- i. Clarifies multiple-relationships in informed consent documentation and develops a collaborative plan with Service members for handling boundary crossings.
- j. Is prepared to discontinue personal relationships with colleagues when clinical services are required.
- k. Adheres to minimum disclosure requirements and need-to-know policies developed by Federal Regulations and the U.S. Department of Defense with attention to permissive language.

- l. Accepts the implications of determining fitness for duty status, honoring the client-counselor relationship in the process.
- m. Adheres to the clinical practice guidelines of employment setting with attention to flexibility within the protocols when in the best interest of the client.
- n. Considers community referrals when in the best interest of the client.

**7. Advocacy** represents counselors' ability to understand and influence individual, system, and public policy efforts to increase access to mental health resources for military-connected clients and promote the role of counseling professionals working with military populations.

The professional counselor:

- a. Advocates for strength-based, wellness approaches when counseling military-connected clients.
- b. Advocates for the development and accessibility of mental health care for military populations, with specific attention to family members, such as children.
- c. Forms collaborations among agencies serving military-connected clients.
- d. Compiles reputable non-VA resources to provide military-connected clients.
- e. Understands the complexity associated with VA Benefits programs and advocates with clients to receive the assistance to which they are entitled, as appropriate.
- f. Supports initiatives for trainings to decrease stigma associated with mental health within military populations.
- g. Supports initiatives for diversity trainings to generate positive cultural change, including the decrease of cultural stigmas of diverse individuals within military populations.
- h. Considers training opportunities to increase counselor competence among trainees and professionals working with military-connected clients.
- i. Supports prevention programs that connect military family members to the community.
- j. Advocates to change laws that conflict with counselors' ethical codes.
- k. Advocates to maintain the inclusion of counselors as mental health providers for military populations.
- l. Actively assists Active Duty, Reserve Components, Veterans, retired military members, and military families in self-advocacy strategies.

## **Military Definitions**

### **Military Employment**

**Twelve Types of Military Service** include five Active Duty service branches and seven part-time service branches. Part-time duty includes five Reserve forces and two Guard branches.

**Active Duty** service branches refer to the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy.

**Reserve Forces** refers to the Air Force Reserve, Army Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Navy Reserve. Members of the Reserve are citizens who combine a military role or career with a civilian career. They are not normally kept under arms and their main role is to be available to fight when the nation mobilizes for war or to defend against invasion. Members of the Reserve forces are civilians who maintain military skills by training, typically one weekend a month and two weeks a year.

**National Guard** consists of two separate entities: the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard. The National Guard are Reserve components belonging to a particular state. State governors or territorial adjutant generals hold the authority to call National Guard members to Active Duty for state missions such as responding to natural disasters. However, during times of war or national emergencies the National Guard can be called to Active Duty at the behest of Congress, the President, or the Secretary of Defense, thus they are a dual state-federal force.

**Reserve Components of the Armed Forces** are the Reserve forces and National Guard entities collectively referenced.

**Enlisted** Service members are those who joined the service and signed a contract of enlistment for a specific period of time. They are assigned to specific occupations within their service branch and can be considered the “workforce” of the military. Enlisted service members follow the orders of officers and tend to have specific jobs within the projects assigned.

**Noncommissioned Officers (NCOs)** are enlisted Service members who obtain their positions of authority by promotion. They are the primary leaders for most of the military personnel. They are in charge or control as opposed to command their units. They insure their subordinates are properly trained and cared for and can do their assigned jobs proficiently.

**Warrant Officers (WOs)** are initially appointed to the rank of officer by a warrant from the Secretary of a Service as opposed to by a commission from the President of the United States. Warrant officers are technical experts in specific, critical fields such as pilot or imagery interpretation. Warrant officers are higher ranking than enlisted members, but lower ranking than the lowest commissioned officer rank. The Air Force no longer uses the warrant officer grade.

**Commissioned Officers (Cos)** hold commissions from the President of the United States and are confirmed by the Senate. They have completed a college bachelor’s degree and have either completed Officer Candidate School (OCS), Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), graduated from a service academy for their branch of service, or received a direct commission. Commissioned officers are considered leaders of those who have enlisted status and may be viewed as managers of projects.

**Pay grade** is an administrative organization system to create standards for salary compensation, in which higher pay grade numbers represent higher pay.

**Rank** is an organization system that denotes the level of responsibility or authority of the individual. Rank corresponds with pay grade; therefore, also follows the ascending order in which a higher pay grade number indicates a ranking with more responsibility. (See Appendices A and B for rank structures.)

**Military Occupation Specialty code (MOS)** references the specific job a service member is assigned to in the Army and Marines. In the Navy and Coast Guard the term is *rate* and the Air Force uses the term *specialty*.

**Military Discharge** denotes the way in which Service members are released from their obligation to the military. Many, but not all, discharged individuals may be eligible for benefits. Eligibility for benefits is assessed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For example, Service members with a service-related injury may be entitled to a degree of disability pay.

**DD214** is a Report of Separation issued by the Department of Defense upon a Service member's discharge, separation, or retirement. The DD214 provides information needed to verify benefits, retirement, and employment.

**Honorable discharge** indicates that a Service member has met or exceeded conduct or performance standards and will be eligible for all benefits upon discharge.

**General discharge under honorable conditions** indicates that a Service member is considered to have satisfactorily met conduct or performance standards and will be eligible for most benefits upon discharge.

**General discharge under other than honorable conditions** indicates that a Service member is considered to have fallen below conduct or performance standards and will be eligible for benefits pending review from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Dishonorable discharge** is a punitive discharge which indicates that a Service member has been convicted by a court-martial conducted by the military and is not eligible for benefits upon sentencing.

**Honorable retired** indicates that a Service member has met or exceeded conduct or performance standards and will retire after more than 20 qualifying years of service. These individuals are eligible for all benefits and retirement pay.

**Retired service-connected disability discharge** indicates that a Service member developed a disability due to injury or illness incurred or aggravated during active military service and is unable to continue to serve. These individuals are eligible for benefits, but also additional disability pay.

## **Military Lifestyle**

**Base** refers to a Department of Defense installation, also known as a camp, post, station, yard, center, or homeport where military members and their families may live, train, or conduct service related duties.

**Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH)** is a standardized amount of the money distributed to Service members for housing costs. The allowance is based on several factors including geographical location, pay grade, and number of dependents. The allowance is subject to increases each year, similar to a cost of living raise.

**Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS)** is a standardized amount of money distributed to assist Service members for partial food costs. The allowance is based on the cost of food by geographical location. Adjustments are made annually based on the average cost of food.

**Commissary** is the grocery store located on base. **Exchanges** are the base department store. Service members, dependents, and retirees are allowed to shop at these facilities.

**Dependents** are the spouse and children of the Service member. Children can include step-children and adopted children.

**Family Support Groups** refers to a formalized network of spouses to provide support to other spouses and families in the service branch. The Army and Navy have the Family Readiness Group (FRG). The Air Force has the Key Spouse program, Marines have the Family Readiness program, and Coast Guard has the Work-Life program. All programs share similar purpose to relay information from the command to the families.

**Permanent Change of Station (PCS)** refers to the relocation or transfer of a Service member to a new geographical assignment (e.g., duty station, base). Service members usually have opportunity to rank preferences for the new assignments, often referred to as a *dream sheet*. The amount of years at each assignment varies based on the service branch.

## **Operational References**

**Combat Zone** is an area the President has designated for combat or engagement by the armed forces through an Executive Order. Other terms used include *in theater* or *operation*. Examples of combat zones include, but are not limited to World War II (American, Asiatic-Pacific, and European–African–Middle East theaters), Korean War, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

**Deployment** refers to the process of moving forces into an area of operation. Areas of operation include active-combat zones and regions identified in multinational partnerships.

**Hazardous Duty Incentive Pay (HDIP)** is paid to Service members who perform flight duties and meet operational requirements. Examples include demolition of explosives, parachute jumping, or experimental stress duty.

**Hostile Fire/Imminent Danger Pay (HFP/IDP)** is paid when commanders certify that Service members are subjected to hostile fire or explosions, or are at risk of being exposed to those dangers.

**Operation** is used to reference organized military action or a military mission, for example Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

**Operational Tempo** is used to reference the sequence and timeframe of a unit's training exercises and deployments.

**Redeployment** references the return of Service members from a deployment, it represents their reintegration. The term may also be used to reference the transfer of forces to a command.

**Rest and Recuperation (R&R)** describes leave time afforded to Service members in combat.

Appendix A. Uniformed Service Ranks: Enlisted

<b>Pay Grade</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Marines</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Coast Guard</b>
<b>E-1</b>	Private	Private	Airman Basic	Seaman Recruit	Seaman Recruit
<b>E-2</b>	Private	Private First Class	Airman	Seaman Apprentice	Seaman Apprentice
<b>E-3</b>	Private First Class	Lance Corporal	Airman First Class	Seaman	Seaman
<b>E-4</b>	Specialist/Corporal	Corporal	Senior Airman	Petty Officer Third Class	Petty Officer Third Class
<b>E-5</b>	Sergeant	Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer Second Class	Petty Officer Second Class
<b>E-6</b>	Staff Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Technical Sergeant	Petty Officer First Class	Petty Officer First Class
<b>E-7</b>	Sergeant First Class	Gunnery Sergeant	Master Sergeant/First Sergeant	Chief Petty Officer	Chief Petty Officer
<b>E-8</b>	Master Sergeant/First Sergeant	Master Sergeant/First Sergeant	Senior Master Sergeant/First Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer	Senior Chief Petty Officer
<b>E-9</b>	Sergeant Major/Command Sergeant Major	Master Gunnery Sergeant/Sergeant Major	Chief Master Sergeant/First Sergeant/Command Chief Master Sergeant	Master Chief Petty Officer/Fleet or Command Master Chief Petty Officer	Master Chief Petty Officer/Command Master Chief
<b>Senior Enlisted Advisor</b>	Sergeant Major of the Army	Sergeant Major	Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force	Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy	Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard

Appendix B. Uniformed Service Ranks: Officers

<b>Pay Grade</b>	<b>Army</b>	<b>Marines</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Coast Guard</b>
<b>O-1</b>	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant	Ensign	Ensign
<b>O-2</b>	First Lieutenant	First Lieutenant	First Lieutenant	Lieutenant (junior grade)	Lieutenant (junior grade)
<b>O-3</b>	Captain	Captain	Captain	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
<b>O-4</b>	Major	Major	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Lieutenant Commander
<b>O-5</b>	Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Commander
<b>O-6</b>	Colonel	Colonel	Colonel	Captain	Captain
<b>O-7<sup>1</sup></b>	Brigadier General	Brigadier General	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (lower half)	Rear Admiral (lower half)
<b>O-8</b>	Major General	Major General	Major General	Rear Admiral (upper half)	Rear Admiral (upper half)
<b>O-9</b>	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	Vice Admiral
<b>O-10</b>	General	General	General	Admiral	Admiral
<b>Special<sup>2</sup></b>	General of the Army	N/A	General of the Air Force	Fleet Admiral	Fleet Admiral

Note. With the exception of the Air Force, there are also levels of warrant officers.

<sup>1</sup>Starting with O-7, a star system is used. For example, a one-star general in the Army refers to a Brigadier General.

<sup>2</sup>The Special five-star rankings are rarely used and reserved for times of war.

## **Equine Camp for Military Children and Their Families**

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### **Abstract**

*The military qualifies as a minority culture in the United States. Military families are distinct from the majority of society by virtue of this culture. Reserve and National Guard families live within communities, yet are separate and often isolated because of their unique lifestyles. This article describes a summer camp designed for military families offering parents and children an opportunity to come together, support each other, meet other military families, and enjoy new experiences while learning about and working with horses. The article describes an innovative and creative approach to using horses to address the unique concerns and stresses of military families. The camp employed, supervised, and trained a master's-level graduate student to supervise the high-school-level counselors.*

*Keywords: horses, military children, camp*

A plethora of articles exists in the literature exploring the benefits of using equines to assist children with emotional, physical, and medical issues or intellectual disabilities, and Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. But, the literature is scarce documenting horses employed to aid children without those issues, or to help military families. The focus of this article is military families who face the unique growth obstacles by virtue of being a military family. The military represents one percent of the population, and thereby is a minority (Hall, 2016). The military is a culture unto itself with its own nomenclature, dress, behaviors, morals, and values.

Foyou (2014) has written on the military culture and how this impacts the children of the military. School teachers and counselors are often unaware that military children are in their midst. In fact, when school counselors were surveyed regarding military children, the two most salient obstacles that school counselors identified that inhibited them in working with military children were first, simply being able to identify who were the children of the military in their schools; and second, a lack of specialized training in working with those children (Waliski, Ray, & Kirchner, 2013; Fletcher & Albright, 2016). Keim and Suh (2013) found that if a school was within 25 miles of an active military base, then the children were more likely to be identified as

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children of the military. The intent of this article is to demonstrate the manner in which an equine camp functioned as a haven for military families to connect, share, and grow. Humphreys and Zesiger (2016) cited the importance of providing a nonthreatening milieu for children and adolescents of the military to express their struggles.

### **Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)**

Animal programs for helping people have become more common, and are recognized as a beneficial avenue for helping professionals, educators, and adults working with children (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association [EAGALA], 2011). The value of canines as service animals has long been recognized, but horses are newer to the service-animal and pet-therapy arenas. Equine-assisted counseling programs are facilitated by licensed therapists who are also experienced, certified equine specialists. The most notable program certifying counselors is the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA, 2011). According to its web site, EAGALA (2011) is dedicated to improving the mental health of individuals, families, and groups around the world by setting the standard of excellence in equine-assisted psychotherapy. The American Counseling Association has adopted the Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling (AATC) Competencies for incorporating animals in the therapeutic process (Stewart et al., 2016).

### **Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI)**

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) are goal-oriented and structured interventions that intentionally incorporate animals in health, education, and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted education (AAE), and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are all forms of animal-assisted interventions (PetPartners, 2016). The child–horse bond can develop the following qualities: mutual trust, respect, affection, empathy, unconditional acceptance, confidence, personal success, responsibility, assertiveness, communication skills, and self-control (Torres, Soler, Rothe, Vega, & Pazos, 2005).

### **Description of the Camp**

This article describes a 2015 camp for military children and their families in Massachusetts which employed equines as vehicles for growth. The day camp consisted of three weeks—two weeks for children of the military, and one week for the military family. Children could attend one week of the child camp and the family week if at least one parent attended the family week. There was no cost to the family for attendance. The three weeks were individually funded through grants (DoD, 2015).

### **Camp Objectives: Children Ages 8–14 Years**

- Skills for reunion and reintegration of the military family.
- Youth developed leadership skills, made decisions, took healthy risks, overcame fears, developed positive relationships, gained a sense of belonging, built teamwork through shared responsibility, became competent, and engaged in critical thinking. Staff began

each day with a review of ground rules and icebreaker activities for trust building. The schedule included an array of activities that presented new challenges, choices, and responsibilities. Age-appropriate choices were offered within each activity that provide youth with opportunities to make independent decisions and incorporate acquired skills into their daily lives.

- Build and strengthen resiliency.
- Campers were presented with real-life challenges to help overcome fears and reluctance to try new experiences. Graded skills engaged in were to groom, saddle, mount, and ultimately ride. Interpersonal skills were an on-going focus.
- Using “I” instead of “You” messages (accepting responsibility vs. blaming).
- Understanding that “active listening” skills prevent misunderstanding.
- Recognizing the impact of body language and tone of voice in conversations (the horses serve as a safe starting point).
- Learning brainstorming techniques to solve problems.
- Reflecting and reviewing what worked, what did not work, and learning to initiate change.
- Additional activities to meet specific goals and area for growth.
- Horsemanship and equestrian care promoted responsibility, competency, and mastery.
- Communication skills: receiving and giving feedback, time for reflection, understanding of body language and effective equine communication, (tone of voice, non-verbal cues, eye contact, and facial expressions); expression of feelings; decision making; safety; identifying and facing fear.
- Art and music offered creative means of expressing emotion without fear of being judged.
- Stress reduction and yoga encouraged youth to listen to their “inner selves” and how to de-escalate anger and cope with frustration and disappointment.

Campers interacted through cooperative learning, engaged in problem-solving and planning throughout the day, and strengthened relationships with each other as they became more responsible and competent in caring for their assigned horses. They addressed the animals’ needs by cleaning stalls, filling water buckets, providing new hay for bedding, grooming, cleaning shoes, brushing tails and manes. Not all children are traditional school-sport participants, so equestrian activities served, for some, as a newfound enjoyable endeavor.

### **Goals and Areas of Growth**

**Loss and grief.** Loss of the familiar and friends is common for military children, as they relocate frequently and transfer from school to school. Military children may also experience loss of life and or loss of the parent they knew secondary to traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. On the evening prior to the last day of camp, multiple Marines were shot in Chattanooga, Tennessee at two military recruiting centers (on July 17, 2015) and five ultimately died. The next morning, this event was processed with the campers and served as a segue into the acknowledgment that camp was ending. The death of the Marines served as a vehicle for discussion of loss. It was acknowledged that it is sad to lose people we love and care about in our lives. The children were asked if any of them had lost a pet or loved one. It was highlighted that

they all have two families; Mom, Dad, brothers and sisters, and the military family (Guard, Reserves). The experience of losing a pet was related to how Mom and Dad may be sad or angry today about the Marines who died. Gerwolls and Labott (1994) explain that the grief process involved in coping with the loss of a pet is similar to that of the loss of a significant human relationship. Recognition of the importance of this relationship can be affirming to the child, regarding his/her feelings (Turner, 2005). Learning how to process and cope with death can be a growth experience for the child. The children of the military are facing losses on a regular basis with moving residences and schools on a frequent schedule. More than 2 million service members have been deployed since 9/11/2001. More than 793,000 have been deployed more than once (National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2014).

Counselors modeled that it is all right and normal to experience emotions of anger, grief, and sadness. For example, a counselor might volunteer, “I lost my dog and I cried; I miss him still, but I think of how much I loved him and how he loved me. I also think of the funny things he did that made me laugh.” Goldman (2000) recommends encouraging children to express their grief and for the person with the child to also express their own sadness, and to use rituals to work through the loss. One study with children, specifically examined death of a family member and examined their interactions with horses to investigate the grief process and personal development and found positive changes in psychosocial changes, self-esteem, self-confidence, and trust (Glazer, Clark, & Stein, 2004).

Here are some examples of the types of processing questions and statements used in the discussion:

1. “How did you feel when you lost your pet? What are some of the things you did when you lost your pet? Has anyone lost a family member?”
2. “What are some good things you remember about your pet or a person you lost? What are some funny things?”
3. Concerning goodbyes: “It is important to tell people how we feel and what our thoughts are about them when we are with them. What would you say to [someone you have lost, someone you are missing] if he/she were here now?” (One boy mentioned that Paint (a horse) was leaving to go to another home, and he said Geoffrey (another horse) was going to miss him. When asked what he thought Geoffrey would feel, he responded, “Sad, of course,” and then added that “maybe Paint could go visit him sometime.” This led into a discussion of how he had recently moved from another state and missed his playground, and said he was moving back—but in reality, he was not moving back. The situation with Geoffrey allowed the boy to project his thoughts and feelings onto the horse, and then to acknowledge them in himself.
4. Most of the children had frequently experienced moving to a new place. The counselor can start a discussion about moves with “Let’s go around the circle and see how many moves people have made.” Maria had moved eight times and she was ten years old. The counselor said, “Maria, you told us it is sad when you make friends, and then you must leave.” Another young girl had just moved from Colorado in June, and knew no one in her new town. She volunteered that she missed her friends and felt alone. The camp provided a transition from Colorado, and bridged the summer gap until school started in the fall. She also fell in love with the horses, and her mother arranged for her to ride for

the remainder of the summer. She also met a friend at camp who would be in her new school.

**Safety.** Safety was an important topic to address with the children. We never promise safety, but instead assure them that the military and our government are doing the best they can to keep their parents and families safe. It was related back to their horseback riding and they were asked to remember when they first came to camp prior to meeting the horses that they were taught the nonverbal behaviors that horses exhibit to communicate to us how they are feeling or telling us something important; such as laying the ears back against their head means they are angry or giving you a warning to stop doing what you are doing. Safety is a topic addressed in the field of AAA and the safety measure of nonverbal is discussed in the literature (Gee, Fine, & Schuck, 2015). These lessons directly relate to the life of a military family where deployment places their loved ones in harm's way. They were reminded that the first time they rode a camp counselor led them around on the horse to make sure they were safe, and that they are always required to wear a helmet. Their instructors chose which horse each person would ride to make sure they were as safe as possible. This was related back to our military keeping them as safe as possible, and keeping their parents safe when they are deployed. The children were asked if they could think of any other things the military does to keep their families safe, and the children came up with examples such as the deployed parent needing to wear equipment such a helmets and flak jackets, and riding in a Humvee or other armored vehicle. In addition, to enter a military base, one must pass through security and show identification to ensure the safety of all military personnel and their families. Children and spouses also carry identification to access military installations.

**Growth.** In order to properly care for a horse, new skills have to be developed. The process of developing these skills can help children who are impatient, anxious, or have low self-confidence. The child is reassured that learning new skills takes time, and that it is not expected of them to get things right the first time. The growth observed in the campers was shared with them during their time at camp:

For example, many of you grew and overcame fear, anxiety, and shyness that you had on the first day of camp. Now, many of you who were afraid of the horses worked with them, rode them, and cared for them. Some of you thought that the horses might bite or hurt you, but then you fed them, brushed them, and even rode bareback. Some of you were quiet and shy, and did not talk to other campers the first day. Now, many of you laugh, play, share, and help each other. It is so nice to see many of you have made friends.

On day one of camp, some people dropped papers, and cups, and discarded items on the ground. Now, people pitch in and pick up trash that is on the ground, and help to clean up after an activity without being asked. It seems that our respect and caring for each other has grown along with our self-confidence and ability to overcome our fears. Would each of you mention how you think you have changed after coming to camp?

Fine (2015) cited two studies indicating that therapeutic interactions with horses had a greater positive influence on children and adolescents than classroom-based programs for improving

identity, self-satisfaction, and ego strength and decreasing behavioral problems. The eight stages of psychosocial development proposed by Erik Erikson (1956) serve to demonstrate that we pass through a hierarchy of stages, with each stage presenting a particular milestone to be grappled with at a particular developmental period in our lives. Each stage lays the foundation for the next stage in the hierarchy. Depending on the outcome we will incorporate into our belief structure a positive, coping self-identified characteristic or a limiting one. Ginsburg (2011) describes the ingredients in building resilience in children and adolescents. Adults shape a child or adolescent's ability to become resilient by three themes; unconditional love, children live up to adult expectations, and what we say is more important than words. Ginsburg (2011) delineates the 7 C's to build resiliency; competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control. These competencies are not unlike Erikson's stage of development, nor the humanistic theory of personality development, with unconditional love and becoming the master of one's own fate (Rogers, 1961). The campers are challenged emotionally, physically, and cognitively in a gentle, systematic, graded progression with unconditional acceptance as they grapple with the tasks of equine care.

**Anxiety.** Campers were asked to describe anxiety in terms of what anxiety feels like physically, emotionally, and behaviorally. Additionally, the campers were asked whether they could think of different types of anxiety, and what might cause them, such as separation, moving, meeting new people, being judged, being hurt, and so on. The behaviors of the horses were used to elicit aspects of anxiety. For example, when a horse was taken out of the paddock away from another horse, the horse left behind whinnied for the other horse. The children were asked the following questions:

Why do you think Tonto reacted like that? When did he start to whinny? How do you think Tonto felt? Why do you think Tonto began running around in the paddock? When Tonto was upset with being separated, what did you notice? Have you ever felt like that? Have any of you felt like that when your parent was deployed? Describe your thoughts and feelings. What did you do? What were your thoughts and feelings when you moved and you left your friends? How could we calm Tonto or make him feel better? Who might help you when you move? When Tonto was upset, what did you notice about him following your commands? Why do you think he did not obey? What do you think he was thinking? Where do you think his attention was? Has that ever happened to you in school when your Mom or Dad was deployed, or when you moved and you were thinking about your old home and friends? Has this ever happened when you have tried to tell your Mom or Dad or a friend something and they do not seem to hear you? Have you ever done that when you are thinking about the person you miss and you are asked to do something and you do not really hear what you were asked to do? If you have done this, has anyone thought you did not care because you were not hearing what they said to you?

A consistent finding in health related animal interventions (HAI) is the correlation between animals and a reduction in anxiety and physiological indices of the stress response, both acute and chronic (Friedmann, Baker, & Allen, 2011 as cited in Muller, Fine, & O'Hare, 2015; Friedmann, Heesook, & Saleem, 2015).

**Self-care.** Children some time balk at basic hygiene until they reach adolescence. Basic horse care is a useful way of introducing this issue. For example, horses' hooves must be cleaned out daily to prevent disease, and periodically the hooves are trimmed when horses get new shoes. This can be likened to one's feet and nails being cleaned to prevent disease. Prior to riding, horses are brushed to remove dirt and promote health. Horses are also given baths, and some horses do not like feeling the water on them, just as some do not like their hooves cleaned or trimmed. This opens the door to speaking about hygiene in general with the children. Occasionally, horses need their teeth filed, and most do not take kindly to this process; with the children, this can be related to going to the dentist. Williams (2004) suggests that the child will translate caring for the animal into caring for self. The tack (bridles and saddles) also need to be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis to keep the leather from cracking and breaking. The children learned to clean and care for the tack, which can be related to caring for one's property. Self-care translates into taking responsibility for oneself. Research suggests that youth that participate in AAA demonstrate and increase in responsibility (Chardonnes, 2009; Mariti et al., 2011). The most resiliency is shown in children with an external locus of control (Easterbooks, 2013). It may seem counterintuitive to speak of military children with a sense of control given the authoritarian structure of the military, but the strong sense of military identity, taking the idea of responsibility seriously, and internalizing a strong sense of discipline can be empowering.

**Behavior regulation.** Noah (2014) cited that parental military deployments may result in a diagnosis of disruptive mood dysregulation disorder with children exhibiting depression, anger, and mood swings. Most military children will not develop such a diagnosis, but parental separation often results in behavioral changes in activities of daily living, and social and school difficulties (Harrison & Vannest, 2008; Pavlicin, 2003; Waliski, Ray, & Kirchner, 2013). Children with behavior regulation issues may interrupt others, and demand to be first, and when told to wait, may not attend, and may continue these behaviors. This behavior can be very disruptive to the other campers and demands an inordinate amount of staff time. A behavioral contingency model, such as the Premack Principle, could be employed to curtail these behaviors and aid the child with delay of gratification and impulse control (Dewey, 2004). One method of employing this with a child who enjoys the horses and wants to ride or brush them would be to make working with the horses contingent on the child waiting his or her turn.

The horses are a vehicle to helping children understand the impact of their behavior on others. The impact the child's behavior has on the horse can be processed with the child and then the analogy generalized to the impact one's behavior has on others. For example, when the child runs and yells in the presence of a horse, the horse will throw his/her head up and shy away. The child is asked to describe his/her behavior and how it affected the horse. For example:

How do you think the horse felt when you yelled and ran up to him? Why do you think the horse responded to you like that? What would you do differently next time? Have you ever had that reaction from a person? How did he/she respond? How might you change your behavior next time?

Pendry and Roeter (2012) studied equine facilitated learning (EFL) with 64 children in the fifth and eighth grades for 11 weeks. It was a randomized controlled study with four sessions per week for 90 minutes. Post-test scores were significantly higher than pretest scores. The

program addressed social competence and measured the following characteristics; leadership, respect, communication, trust, boundaries, overcoming challenges, enhancing self-regulation, and relaxation. A second similar study was conducted in 2014 by Pendry, Carr, Smith, and Roeter that studied fifty-three children in the fifth and eighth grades assessing social competence and behavior. The children in the EFL group were compared to the waitlist group. Results indicated significant improvement in social competence with moderate treatment effects for the EFL group.

**Bullying.** Star is a horse that was rescued after she fell into a well in her pasture. She was scarred all over her body. After she was rehabilitated and introduced to the other horses at her new home, they bit and kicked her. Star served as a vehicle for projection of thoughts and feelings regarding being bullied. Star's situation also allowed the children to problem solve how Star might be helped to deal with the abuse. This in turn allowed the children to share their experiences of having been bullied themselves, or of someone else they knew who had been bullied, and some possible courses of action. Some children hugged and comforted Star, thereby engaging in self-soothing. Children of the military often become objects of bullying when they move from one part of the country to another and present in their new community with differing behaviors, dress, language, or preferences.

A study by Hergovich, Semmler and Zieglmayer (2002) found that having a therapy dog in the classroom of first graders indicated beneficial changes in social competence, empathy, greater social integration, and less aggression compared to a control group. Another study with dogs and elementary school children by Kotrchal and Ortbauer (2003) found the group with the canines were more socially homogenous, exhibited less behavioral extremes, less aggressive and hyperactive behavior, and were more socially integrated. The effects were more dramatic in the boys than in the girls. Sprinkle (2008) researched a middle and elementary school program for violence prevention using rescue dogs and found that the student's beliefs about aggression, and levels of empathy, and displays of violent and aggressive behaviors were altered. A pilot study with equines found significant positive changes on the Psychological Session Form indicating positive changes in social behaviors and support for their premise that the horses could improve children's motivation, task performance and socialization (Ryan, 2010).

**Illness.** One sick horse, Troy, was lying in his stall throughout the entire three weeks of camp. The children would often look in the stall and comment on Troy. Troy's presence brought up issues of being different from the other horses by being separated, acting differently because of being sick, and not being allowed to go outside or be ridden. Troy's condition required special medical procedures and bandages. Troy's illness facilitated a discussion by the children of their past illnesses, thoughts, and feelings via initially projecting thoughts and feelings onto Troy. DeCoursey, Russell, and Keister (2010) evaluated five studies of AAT in health care settings. They concluded that the animals offer physiological and emotional benefits that humans cannot. Most of the studies that research illness and equines focus on chronic illnesses and hospitalized patients. Some military children have had a parent return home from deployment with a brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, and the parent may have acted differently than he/she did previously.

**Identification/projection.** Brave Heart is a handsome, tall horse with a perfectly formed white heart on his forehead, and the owner of the stable bought this gelding specifically for members of the military. All the children wanted to ride Brave Heart. They identified with him in that he was different from the other horses in the stable, housed in the stable but separate and having a unique purpose: to serve the members of the military and their families. It was a smooth transition to speak of Brave Heart's unique mission in the stable and how that was very similar to the unique mission of our military families. Children of the National Guard and Reserve live in the community and do not live on a base but their differences may be invisible even if they are culturally different in many respects from the rest of the community in which they live. The camp provided a unique opportunity for children and families of the Guard and Reserves to come together for a period of time where there existed a community, commonality, and understanding and "we-ness" that did not exist anywhere else for them. They used the same nomenclature and shared the same pride in the mission their families fulfilled.

Artwork can be viewed as a projective technique; as an unstructured medium, it facilitates inner thoughts and feelings to be projected onto a blank canvas. In several examples, the shared culture of the military children became apparent through their artwork. Freud (1955) believed that animals represented projections of powerful adults and these conflicting feelings were too threatening to the child to face undisguised. The children were asked to decorate a horse with no guidelines, other than to paint on him in any manner they wished (see Figure 1). The ingrained military culture is evident in the spontaneous painting of a flag on the horse, and in their choices of paint colors. The same directions, to draw whatever they pleased, were given for their later art projects (see Figure. 2).



*Figure 1.* Free painting. (Photo by the author.)



*Figure 2.* A later art project. (Photo by the author.)

**Learning.** Children can learn or reinforce their mathematical skills through many tasks involved in caring for the horses. The children might be asked to measure out a specific number of ounces of grain. They might be asked to figure out the length of a stirrup, if for every inch of length of one's arm, the stirrup should be  $x$  number of holes up on the strap. One might ask them to figure out how many ounces of worm medicine a particular horse should receive if for each 100 pounds of horse, one ounce of medicine is given (and their horse weighs 1600 pounds). Children like to learn the names of the parts of the horse, saddle, and bridle. In one exercise, the children were asked to paint on the horse with a particular color a dot of paint where, for example the "hock" was located on the horse, followed by indicating other parts of the horse when prompted with a dot of paint. The children were also required to use the names for the parts of the bridle and saddle while they tacked the horses. Fine stated that "AAI has found a role in the education of children" and that it can positively influence academic performance (2015, p. 119). Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.; Intermountain Therapy Animals, n.d.) is the best known and largest canine reading program in the United States and in other countries. Children improve their literacy skills by reading out loud to the dog. The R.E.A.D. program has demonstrated higher post-intervention assessment scores than traditional reading programs (Heyer, 2007 as cited in Shaw, 2013). Most of the studies with animals in educational settings measure academic variables indirectly (Gee, Fine, & Schuck, 2015). They discovered only one study that demonstrated an improvement in object recognition memory in preschool children (Gee, Belcher, Grabski, & Riley, 2012).

**Altruism.** One value of the military is to give selflessly to others for the good of the majority. Children of the military assimilate the values of their parents. One activity to reinforce this value was to visit a local nursing home. The farm had four miniature horses that were taken

to the residence for a pet-therapy visit. The campers led the miniature horses around to residents in wheelchairs and people sitting in chairs awaiting the special visit. The residents were most appreciative of the campers taking their time from camp to come and visit and bring the horses. The experience was processed with the campers when they returned to the farm. The campers were asked to speak in general about their experience of the visit. Then, campers were asked why they thought we took our time to visit the nursing home, and how they thought the residents responded to the visit. The discussion of helping others that naturally resulted was related to their parent(s) in the military helping people in other countries and the United States. Children of the military grow up in homes where service members will often place the needs of others before their own and thus incorporate the value of altruism (NCTSN, 2014). Hall (2016) describes military children as extremely loyal to a cause or to friends, and as adults may sacrifice their own personal happiness.

**Problem solving.** Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) is a professional association providing standards, education, and support for EAP professionals. Not all counseling using horses involves riding. Equine assisted psychotherapy (EAP) focuses on experiential, ground-based activities. This form of equine therapy focuses on setting up ground activities involving the horse that will require the client to apply certain skills. These skills may include relationship development, coping resources, depression and anxiety reduction, and social skills (EAGALA, 2011). A horse was placed in a paddock without a halter. Three military children worked together to move the horse from one end of the paddock to the opposite end. The counselor was outside the paddock with other campers observing the activity. The children were asked what they observed in terms of which of their behaviors were successful in accomplishing the task, and which behaviors resulted in the horse not complying with their requests. They were asked to evaluate their actions and the impact their actions had on the horse. Generalization to people and the impact that behavior has on how people might respond to their actions was a natural transition. The observers outside the paddock joined in the discussion, commented on the problem-solving activity, and how behavior influenced and elicited responses. Some other ground activities included the following: retrieving a horse from the paddock, working together to clean a stall, brushing the horse, and tacking the horse for riding.

Some problem solving activities were conducted on horseback. Campers had to solve problems such as maneuvering the horse up to a gate to open it, guiding the horse through poles on the ground, having the horse step over poles on the ground, campers biting a donut off a string hanging from the ceiling without using their hands, placing a ring over a cone, and picking a ring up from a hook, all while on horseback. They also had to work together to ride side by side or in a star formation. This required problem solving and cooperation with one's partner on horseback. The problem-solving activities were staged as games, so the campers had fun while executing the activities. The problems served as metaphors for the challenges they faced as military families such as the following: a deployed parent or reunification of the family post-deployment, and with accommodation to the resulting family role shifts and duties in the home; moving from one community to a new one; being part of a culture not understood by other children; and being separated from extended family. Military families are often very resilient, flexible, and creative as a result of their lifestyle—the children learn to be autonomous and adaptable. Being a member of a military family teaches them flexibility in problem solving, which they exhibited with the horses. Resiliency is learned via their strong sense of purpose, and loyalty to their families, the

military and the country (NCTSN, 2014). “Research shows that people who experience controlled exposure to stress in childhood and adolescence cope better as adults with circumstances such as bereavement, moving, illness, and job or relationship trouble” (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 103). The children were asked to brainstorm how being part of a military family had influenced them and helped them grow. They were asked about the good aspects of being a military family, and what made them proud. They were also asked about whether there were any experiences or lessons that they had learned that had helped them, which children who were not part of a military family may not learn.

### **Last Day of Children’s Camp**

As the camp comes to a close, the counselor models “goodbye” for the children. S(he) might say,

Today is our last day of camp. So I want to tell you how I feel about you and my thoughts about all of you. Today is another loss, a goodbye for all of you. I am sad to say goodbye, but I am so happy I got the chance to meet all of you. It hurts to say goodbye but if I never met you, then I would have missed meeting so many great people, having fun with all of you over these weeks, and sharing my life with you and being part of your life. I think it is worth the pain of goodbye to having had the opportunity to be with you.

Each camper’s name was put into a hat, and each camper chose another person’s name and said something special about that person.

### **Military Family Week**

The family week was the last week of the three-week camp. Military children and their parents attend this one-week session. The camp started at 3:00PM and ended at 7:30PM, to accommodate working parents on base. Working and riding the horses took place from 3:00PM until 6:00PM, and then everyone had dinner together. After dinner, the adults went to a group meeting with licensed mental health professionals to have time together to discuss coping as a military family. There existed a mixture of seasoned military parents and parents with a newly deployed spouse.

The military parents identified the same situations in their communities as their children—being invisible as military and—too often—misunderstood. A phrase repeated by many military mothers was that other women would comment that they could not leave their children, implying the military mother must not be a dedicated mother. Another often repeated comment when people saw a female Veteran’s license plate with VETERAN on it, often said “Oh, your husband is in the military.” The deployed parents volunteered that when they first returned home, it was difficult in two different dimensions: One is that things had changed, and they had expected things to remain unchanged; another is that when they first returned home, they needed time alone to adjust—they were overjoyed to be back with their families, but the adjustment was difficult, even down to as seemingly minor an item as seeing green grass, or noticing that the trash can had been moved to a different location in the kitchen.

Adjusting to the pace of life after deployment was another concern; reunification takes time and is a process. When deployed, service people did very important things that made a difference in people's lives, such as building bridges, administering medical care to the sick, and working side by side with their colleagues, 24 hours a day, seven days a week; naturally, returning home requires adjustments in one's daily routines. The adult meetings after dinner gave the parents time to connect and share with peers who truly could understand the adjustments required around deploying, as well as life after deploying.

While the parents were in a separate meeting, the children spent time with a master's-level graduate student in mental health. They did arts and crafts, played games, and engaged in other activities. The graduate student employed the activities as a vehicle for discussion of issues they were grappling with as children of the military. Many of these children had attended one of the two weeks specifically for the military children. Given the prior week of equine camp, many of the children had a well-established relationship with the counselors and horses. Humphreys and Zesiger (2016) have written that military families are unique, and that understanding the culture is imperative.

The approach of bringing the children and parents together after the parents had spent a week with the horses allowed many of the children to be in the unique position of being the "expert" regarding the horses with their parents. The children were able to take the role of helping their parents navigate the stable and horses. They were able to assist and teach their parents equine protocol. A renewed sense of self-esteem and confidence emerged in many of the children as a result of this guidance they were able to provide for their parents. Conversely, parents also were in many instances seen in a very different light: competent National Guard, Reservists, and active military personnel often found themselves in unfamiliar equine territory. The children were, therefore, able to see their parents experience similar emotions as they had experienced, such as anxiety, trepidation, and vulnerability. A half-ton, six-foot-high animal (at the withers) can be intimidating, even to a warrior. EAA has been examined with combat Veterans to ascertain if it would improve quality of life. Lanning and Krenek's (2013) study results indicated an increase in sociability and trust of others with a decrease in isolation as a result of the equine interactions. The families worked together to brush the horses, tack them, and lead them into the riding area. These activities required the families to problem solve, negotiate roles, and work collaboratively to accomplish a common goal. The families rode the horses together, and often a child instructed his/her parents in equestrian skills and procedures: for example, a child may instruct his/her parent in the correct manner of holding the reins or turning the horse.

The manner in which the family works together and with the horses can be reflective of the family functioning style and dynamics. The attitudes and behaviors displayed while working with the horses may be indicative of the manner in which the family as a unit relates to each other. The behavior demonstrated by the parent serves as a model for the child (Mueller, Fine, & O' Haire, 2015). The manner in which the family members describe the horse's thoughts, feelings, and relationship to the family and other horses is a projection of their own feelings and thoughts. Mueller et al. (2015) write this is a more comfortable vehicle for indirectly sharing this personal information. Skeath, Fine, and Berger (2010) believe that the family's treatment of the animal and how it is related to provides important information of the family dynamic. Our

thoughts, feelings, and stereotypes of particular animals can expose a glimpse behind our defense mechanisms to see the underlying family and or individual's issues.

The military families had the opportunity to come together and help each other with suggestions regarding navigating the military system, coping with phases of deployment, unique childcare issues germane to being a military family, and adjusting to moves. Some of the families had recently moved, and the children were not in school yet; as it was summer, they did not yet know any other children. In such instances, the camp served as a transition into their new community, and some children were able to meet new classmates and friends in advance of the coming school year.

Reserve and National Guard families live in civilian neighborhoods, and as such are not easily recognized as being part of the military. They are such a small segment of the population that their unique needs are usually not acknowledged, and subsequently, they do not receive the benefits afforded to other minorities. The children of military families move six to nine times during their K–12 school years (Mary Keller, personal communication, November 11, 2016). Moving and changing schools requires adjustment and challenges other children do not face (Mary Keller, personal communication, November 11, 2016). Many military parents return home with combat-related injuries, and their families must bear the burden of changing family dynamics and stressors (Mary Keller, personal communication, November 11, 2016). The camp for military families provided a special opportunity for the families in this minority culture to come together, learn, and share.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There has not been much rigorous research on EAC and EAP to date. Most of the information has been anecdotal or has very small sample sizes and lacks controls. The research has focused on children/people with disabilities, psychological problems, and or medical issues. Topic areas of research have predominantly been the following; autism, anxiety and distress, dementia, depression, trauma, developmental disorders children with emotional and behavioral problems, nursing home residents, substance users, and psychiatric patients. A meta-analysis by Nimer and Lundahl (2007) reviewed 250 studies and excluded those that reported on AAA versus AAT. The above analysis found a lack of solid research methodology. This paper focused on children who were children of the military and not identified as having one of the above issues. These families were identified and chosen to attend camp secondary to their membership in the military. That is not to say that children of the military are bereft of these issues but none were identified as such in the camp, nor was it an objective of the camp to serve such a population.

Bachi reviewed research in this area and wrote “most of the research suffers from methodological problems that compromise its rigor” (2012, p. 364). He suggested the research use theory to develop the foundation for the proposed improvements seen in the child-horse interaction. Kendal et al. (2015) in a review of the literature wrote the findings with children/adolescences are promising but highlighted methodological inadequacies such as lack of randomized trials. Green (2012) advocated for more rigorous empirical research that demonstrated efficacy of the human/animal relationship. He goes on to advocate for applied

research. Fine (2015) sees the need for research which is more specific in measurement, and quantification of variables such as the following; frequency of specific elements of procedures and dosage of AAI that demonstrate efficacy. Additionally, the specific populations for which AAI has been applied are varied and unique. Latella and Abrams (2015) wrote that “there is limited evidence in support of the benefits of therapeutic riding due to the lack of rigor (observation verses standardized methods), small sample sizes, and a lack of homogeneous populations” (p. 118 as cited in Fine, 2015). They present a summary of 26 studies delineating the methodology, EAA/T method, sample and findings (in Table 10.3, pp. 119–20 as cited in Fine, 2015). Only two address children/youth that are not members of the above state special populations with specific limitations. It appears there is consensus that, if the various forms of animal assisted programs are going to gain acceptance and validity in the scientific community, much work is to be done with increasing the rigor of the empirical studies in this field.

### **Conclusion**

The equine camp for military children and their families provided a haven for this minority, who have a shared culture, to come together and experience a sense of community and oneness. They were able to discuss the unique obstacles and challenges they face as family members of the National Guard, the Reserve, and active military. There existed a shared unspoken understanding of values, nomenclature, beliefs, traditions, and experiences among the group. The equine summer day camp consisted of two weeks for the children, ages 8–14 (who were predominantly from National Guard and Reservist families), and one week for the families. The plethora of definitions for the animal and equine activities were defined and differentiated. Children performed complete care of horses in addition to learning riding skills.

Most, or many, animal programs are focused on assisting children with developmental, cognitive, and behavioral challenges, but this camp was created for the children of the military facing the unique challenges of military membership. Horses were employed as vehicles for the children’s cognitive, behavioral, and emotional growth. Problem-solving experiences and opportunistic situations were orchestrated and utilized to facilitate the use of projection, metaphors, and similes. Specifically, the horses’ histories and present behaviors, along with the children’s projected emotions onto the horses, were used to facilitate discussions. Examples of the topic areas are anxiety, self-care, behavior regulation, bullying, illness, identification and projection, learning, altruism, problem-solving, cooperation, and termination issues. The children were asked to surmise the reasons for the horses’ behaviors and feelings in relationship to the horses’ interactions with them and with other horses in the stable. The children were asked to contemplate the effects that their behaviors had on the horses’ reactions and then to extrapolate those to their own interactions with others.

The family week provided opportunities for the families to engage in recreation, relaxation, and time spent together. Children who had attended the children’s week were then able to take on the “teacher” role and teach their parents about the care of and correct ways of interacting with the horses. The children sometimes observed anxiety and uncertainty in their parents as their parents interacted with the horses, and had the opportunity to see how their parents handled these emotions and overcame them. The families were presented with equine problem-solving activities that required each family to work together to master. The parents and

children ended the day in separate group experiences, which gave both the children and parents an opportunity to process, share, and discuss the challenges of being a military family.

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## **Using Facebook to Communicate with Husbands While Deployed: A Qualitative Study of Army Wives' Experiences**

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### **Abstract**

*Military deployments are often difficult for military family members. The combination of long separation and dangerous combat missions increase stress at home and family members experience the turmoil generated by deployments. Following the 9-11 terrorist's attacks, combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have ranged from nine months to a year for Army Soldiers. Considering the impact that deployments have on military families, research has adequately explored and studied what military wives have experienced. However, what effect communication between deployed service members and family members has been researched less and the use of social media for communicating during deployment lacks research. Therefore, this study was undertaken to learn what Army wives experience when using Facebook to communicate with their deployed husband. The study used a generic qualitative design with a theoretical foundation in social constructionism. Results illustrated how Facebook use is perceived by the wives as they encounter deployment stress.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Army wives, Facebook, deployment*

Long overseas deployments are often a way of life for military service members and their family members. Deployments can range in duration, location, and the type of mission can also vary significantly. Not all deployments involve combat operations; however, deployments of any type can result in long family separation. Considering the difficulty caused by long military deployments, especially for the spouse at home, the idea rises that newer methods of communication, such as those offered by social media, might alter what family members now experience. Since the development of the internet, social media has been the primary source of communication between wives and their deployed husband (Borden et al., 2015). Therefore, this qualitative research project was undertaken to explore if modern types of communication between deployed service members and family members have helped reduce or ease difficulty at home. In other words, does using social media to remain in contact during deployment improve the separation experience for family members?

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A review of the literature regarding the impact that military deployments have had on families, to include marriages, provided meaningful information on deployment difficulty (Barker & Berry, 2009; Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2010). The literature also provided information regarding communication between deployed military members and family members and how communicating during deployment affected what family members experienced. However, the information lacking in the literature was the use of social media as a means of communication between military members and their family members. Therefore, the premise of this study and the basis for the research question became what do military wives who remained home experience when using social media to communicate with their deployed husband.

For this project, Army wives were selected as the studied population and Facebook use was chosen as the social media source for communication. Literature was reviewed regarding Army deployments, primarily since 2003, which is when military combat deployments began to increase following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center Towers (9-11). Therefore, this article provides background information on military deployments and the impact deployments have had on military families. It also presents the purpose of the study as well as the methodology and findings, which help to answer the research question - How is using Facebook to communicate with their deployed husband experienced by Army wives?

### **Military Deployments**

Over the past 16 years, 2.6 million military members have been deployed to combat operations in the Middle East (Anderson, 2018). In fact, since 2001, the United States military has engaged in more combat operations than any time since the Vietnam War (Boettcher & Cobb, 2006; Geiling, Rosen, & Edwards, 2012; Gilbert, 2009). As a response to 9-11, by 2012 the United States military had deployed 2.3 million troops to Afghanistan in of support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and to Iraq in of support Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Betthausen, Bahraini, Kregel, & Brenner, 2012). The average length of deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan has been nine months (Wojcik, Akhtar, & Hassell, 2009), although many Soldiers have deployed for up to a year or more. Since 2003, about a third (38%) of all troops sent to OIF or OEF deployed at least twice and approximately 10% deployed three or more times (Kline et al., 2010). Consequently, multiple overseas deployments since 9-11 have resulted in significant family separation and contributed to increased stress, primarily because of additional responsibilities being placed on family members (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013).

When deployments exceeded 11 months, mental health problems among military wives often developed or intensified making the home life experience more stressful (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2011). For military couples with children, stress and tension experienced by the spouse at home often negatively impacted their children (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011). In addition, the spouse at home assumed the role as single parent, which often caused additional stress that exasperated problems (Clever & Segal, 2013; Larsen, Clauss-Ehlers, & Cosden, 2015; Mansfield et al., 2010). The impact of stress and other problems associated with long-term deployments was particularly relevant to the significance of this study. Also pertinent was how changing methods of communication might be influencing the overall deployment experience. The idea that living through long and stressful deployments could be better managed

through a change of routine such as using social media also helped form the research question. What was hypothesized was that Facebook interaction between an Army wife and her deployed husband might improve her deployment experience and possibly increase her overall sense of well-being.

Military spouses who did not adjust well to long periods of separation often found day-to-day activities to be more overwhelming and stressful. One of the more common stressors experienced by the military spouse who remained home during deployment was a genuine sense of loneliness, which over time, led to a deeper sense of anger and depression (SteelFisher, Zaslavsky, & Blendon, 2008). Therefore, advancements in the ability to communicate instantly through a variety of technological methods have appeared to improve mental health, morale, and occupational effectiveness. On the other hand, a lack of communication seemed to increase stress as well as other stress-related problems that reduced an overall sense of well-being (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenberg, 2010).

### **Family Communication During Deployments**

Over the past century, images of war have been brought home to family members using media such as pictures during World War I (Creel, 2012; Haste, 1977; Messinger, 1992), radio and pictures during World War II (Blum, 1976; Bredhoff, 1994; Casdorff, 1989), and television during the Vietnam War (Hallin, 1989; Hammond, 1998; McAdam & Yang, 2002). Each medium provided family members with a more immediate description of what service members experienced in combat. Subsequently, prior to media, family members relied primarily on personal letters. As the ability to communicate more frequently advanced during the twenty-first century, mental health, morale, and occupational effectiveness also improved for some service members during deployments (Greene et al., 2010).

### **Social Media**

Prior to social media, Army wives communicated with their deployed husband primarily by writing letters and making long distant phone calls. However, over the past 10 to 15 years, social media has significantly changed the method of communication for family members and their deployed service members (Durham, 2010; Pfeiffer et al., 2012). Over recent years, military wives have relied more on social media communication during deployments. Wives communicated with their deployed spouse “an average of 6.34 times per day using multiple modes, such as e-mail, phone calls, Skype, text messaging, or writing letters” (Oblea, Badger, & Hopkins-Chadwick, 2016, p. 49). Likewise, online communication, to include e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging was more likely to be used by women primarily because women more often seek to strengthen family ties and deepen friendships through communication (Baron & Campbell, 2012).

Younger adults, primarily those in their 20s and early 30s, rely much more on social media for developing and maintaining relationships than did older adults (Dainton, 2013; Yang & Brown, 2013). That information was relevant to this study because of the large number of younger service members. The benefit of laptop computers, tablets, and smartphones

have added to the convenience of social media use for younger adults (Birnbaum, 2013; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Yang & Brown, 2013).

Over recent years, social media options have widely expanded in functionality. Facebook, for example, allows users to share photos, videos, and messages as well as use Face-Time, which is a live video option similar to Skype. It offers individual text messaging as well as allows multiple users to engage in group postings and group text messaging. Facebook is essentially an all-in-one communication option and is preferred by 67% of social media users (Amon et al., 2016). In response to what has been learned over the past several years regarding social media communication between deployed military members and their family members, the Department of Defense specifically encourages online interaction and communication during deployment (Borden et al., 2015). The Department of Defense understands that social media is here to stay and is going to be used during deployments.

### **Army Wives**

Army wives, like wives of the other military services, represent a heterogeneous group from diverse backgrounds who reside in locations around the country and other parts of the world (Borden et al., 2015). Exposure to military life for Army wives varies depending on how long they have been married to an active-duty Soldier and the Soldier's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS; type of duty). According to a 2014 report published by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy), there were approximately 210,400 Army wives within the enlisted ranks alone (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2014). That was about 50% of the enlisted population (Larsen et al., 2015; Paley et al., 2013; Pittman, Kerpelman, & McFadyen, 2004). However, as a part of the overall Army population, there are currently no statistics indicating what percentage of Army wives also serve on active-duty. Although this study was based on Facebook communication between an Army wife and her deployed husband, also understanding the overall experience of an Army wife during deployment was important in determining if Facebook use altered her experience.

### **Evaluation Design and Methods**

A generic qualitative method was chosen for this study. A generic research design is eclectic, and when it is selected as the preferred methodology, it is important to distinguish how other research approaches do not apply (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). Thus, narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study methods were evaluated and determined to be less appropriate for answering the research question. Generic qualitative research is an investigative or exploratory approach that does not rely on any one qualitative method and is not based on a philosophical assumption (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). This generic study exemplifies the essence of qualitative research. However, it does not limit the study to focusing on culture as with ethnography or result in the building of a theory as with grounded theory.

Social constructionism was selected as the theoretical framework for this study because it provided a guide into the qualitative research process and served as the foundation of the research question. Much like the closely related social constructivism, which involves how a

person perceives and understands an experience (Werhane et al., 2011), social constructionism results in developing a sense of social understanding and a conscious development of social phenomena. In other words, social constructionism involves people, as a group, developing an understanding of perceived reality and includes how they respond and participate in accordance with a collective meaning (Rudes & Guterman, 2007). What made social constructionism relevant to this study was that the sample population, as a group, represented Army wives.

## **Participants**

Only Army wives were selected for the study. That decision was not meant to exclude other groups such as husbands or same sex couples but rather to limit variables. The study was initially designed as a quantitative design. However, the methodology was changed when it was determined that examining what was experienced provided data preferred over comparing a relationship between Facebook use and psychological well-being. However, quantitative data could also be valuable and is recommended for further research later in this article. No other branch of service was selected for the same reason. However, further research exploring what other sources from other services is also recommended in this article.

Twelve Army wives participated in the study and provided data. The average age of the participants was 28 and 10 were Caucasian with one Hispanic and one African-American. The average length of marriage was nearly five years and the average number of deployments as a spouse was between one and two. The rank of each husband was Private 1st Class (E-3), Specialist (E-4) or Sergeant (E-5); however, one husband was a Major (O-4). The location where each wife resided based on her husband's duty station ranged across the Eastern, Central, and Mountain Time zones. Seven out of 12 wives had children in the home and seven out of 12 were not employed outside of the home. Each wife is identified by a number throughout the study and her relevant demographics are illustrated in Table 1.

## **Recruitment**

To be eligible for the study, each participant had to be between age 18 and 65, the legal wife of a deployed male Soldier during the time of the data collection interview, and use Facebook to communicate with the deployed Soldier. There were several necessary steps required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) during the process of recruiting the participants. The initial step was to seek approval from the U.S. Army Research Institute in order to gain military personnel assistance with recruiting.

One Army post was selected as the primary location for recruiting participants and permission to coordinate with the base Family Readiness Group (FRG) was sought through the Public Affairs Officer (PAO). Coordination through FRG also required the selected post's Garrison Commander's consent, which was granted after review of the study by that post's legal office. The proposal submitted to the post PAO included a letter to the wives and a Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) announcement flyer. The flyer provided a brief description of the study and asked wives interested in participation to respond either by telephone or email.

An effort was also made to reach beyond the selected Army post by posting the JPEG flyer on several Army Facebook sites that were open to the public and that allowed public posting on the Visitor Post section of the page. Facebook sites used to post the flyer included the U.S. Army site and various spouse and Morale Welfare and Recreation (MWR) sites. The flyer was posted on Facebook with several hashtags that made it available to people seeking those trending topics such as #army, #armywives, #armyspouses, #armyfamily, and #armydeployment and other similar topics. The flyer was also posted on Twitter and Instagram using the same hashtags. In addition to social media postings, classified advertisements were purchased in local newspapers near large Army bases in several states.

*Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants*

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Length of Marriage	Husband's Duty Station Time Zone	Number of Deployments as a Spouse	Husband's Rank	Children in the Home	Employed Outside of the Home
Wife 1	22	White	1 year	Mountain	1	Sergeant (E-5)	No	No
Wife 2	21	White	1 year	Mountain	1	Private 1st Class (E-3)	No	Yes
Wife 3	45	White	6 years	Central	3	Sergeant (E-5)	Yes	No
Wife 4	33	White	5 years	Eastern	1	Specialist (E-4)	Yes	Yes
Wife 5	23	White	18 months	Eastern	2	Private 1st Class (E-3)	Yes	No
Wife 6	27	White	2.5 years	Mountain	1	Specialist (E-4)	No	Yes
Wife 7	22	White	3 months	Central	1	Sergeant (E-5)	No	Yes
Wife 8	40	White	15.5 years	Mountain	2	Major (O-4)	Yes	No
Wife 9	22	Black	4 years	Eastern	2	Specialist (E-4)	Yes	Yes
Wife 10	26	Hispanic	3 years	Mountain	2	Sergeant (E-5)	Yes	Yes
Wife 11	32	White	8 years	Eastern	3	Sergeant (E-5)	Yes	No
Wife 12	24	White	10 months	Eastern	1	Specialist (E-4)	No	No

### **Study Development and Implementation**

A data collection instrument that consisted of 11 interrogatives grounded in literature was developed and field tested specifically for this study. The instrument was presented to the participants using an interview protocol that allowed for consistency without variation. Maintaining protocol during each of the 12 interviews was considered essential to gathering accurate data. The interrogatives were organized so that they ranged from less intrusive to more intrusive, which allowed each participant to build on her previous response.

The interrogatives were divided into three sections, which were contextual, experience, and reflection. The contextual interrogatives were intended to learn more about each wife's overall view of social media, primarily Facebook. In the experience section, each wife was asked to expand on her use of Facebook when communicating with her deployed husband. She was asked to provide insight on how Facebook interaction affected her as well as how it possibly

impacted her relationship with her husband. This section also was designed to explore how the wife believed Facebook use affected her husband. The reflection part allowed each wife to express her assessment of her overall experience as well as provide insight as to what could be offered to other military spouses who also use Facebook to communicate during deployment.

### **Protection of Participants**

Each interview was recorded on a portable audio recorder in accordance with an informed consent and at no time were the participants video recorded. Audio recording of qualitative interviews has been demonstrated by several studies as an effective and ethical method for gathering data accurately (Kirkland, Fortuna, Kelson, & Phinney, 2014; Lindenfelser, Grocke, & McFerran, 2008; O'Hagan, Coutu, Thomas, & Mertens, 2012). The participants were not asked to provide their social security number or date of birth, nor were that information obtained by other means.

The participants agreed to participate of their own free will with no coercion or undue pressure. Eleven wives participated online using Skype and one participated over the telephone because internet access was not available to her at the time of the interview. Prior to scheduling the interview, each participant was provided a fill-able portable document format (PDF) informed consent by email, which was electronically signed and returned by email prior to the interview. The participants also received the same verbal explanation of the interview process to ensure that they fully understood the procedures. The researcher's responsibilities as well as the wife's right to withdrawal, limits of confidentiality, and what do if a participant became emotionally overwhelmed was also explained prior to each interview.

### **Data Collection**

Data collected online using Skype and one telephone interview allowed for participation far beyond the researcher's location. It also provided convenience and safety for each participant. Data analysis involved transcribing the recorded interviews into a Microsoft Word document that allowed each participant an opportunity to review her comments for accuracy. The text was then uploaded into a HyperResearch 3.7.3 software program for coding and analyzing. HyperResearch provided the benefit of coding without suggesting interpretations and also offered the ability to make conclusions about the data based on a content analysis. On average, each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

Once the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed into Microsoft Word, which was then organized in a Word document in accordance with each interrogative. The data was separated by participant so that each wife had a document containing the interrogatives and only her responses. That document was returned to her by email for her review. She was asked to add or remove any part of her responses that she believed was not accurate or did not represent what she meant to say. That process of member checking resulted in each wife reporting by email that she was satisfied with her answers as they were originally transcribed. The transcriptions were then ready for coding using the computer software program, HyperResearch.

**Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using the process of coding, which for this study involved going through the data text and identifying specific words or short phase of words that shared a similar theme or category (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Sivesind, 1999). Those words or phrases where then grouped in codes with a label that represented what the words or phrases indicated. For example, one of the codes was labeled Benefit using Facebook. A total of 15 codes were established from date provided by the 12 participants. A list of the 15 codes and the number of corresponding phrases, concepts, or words is illustrated in Table 2. One of the primary functions of coding is to not only categorize words and phrases similar to the words and phrases reported by the wives, but to also make data easily retrievable for further analysis (Olswang, Svensson, Coggins, Beilinson, & Donaldson, 2006).

Table 2. *Codes and Number of Corresponding Phrases, Concepts, or Words*

Benefit using Facebook	29	Facebook’s effect on relationship	23	Social Media Use	23
Benefit using Facebook with Husband	66	Frequency of Facebook use with husband	17	Wife's Recommendations to Counselors	27
Difficult Deployment Experience	41	Nature of Communication	25	Wife's Summary of Facebook Use	10
Disadvantage using Facebook	35	Positive Deployment Experience	13	Wife's Understanding of Husband's View of Facebook Use	26
Disadvantage using Facebook with Husband	19	Reason for Facebook use	30	Wife's View of Facebook Use	22

Thematic synthesis was also used for analyzing the data. There are three stages when using this method for synthesizing qualitative research, which are coding the text, developing descriptive themes, and generating analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Thematic synthesis allows for theoretical freedom and offers a flexible and useful research option that can lead to meaningful and rich data analysis. However, data analyzed using thematic synthesis can also be detailed and even complex (La Fontaine & Oyebode, 2014). Nevertheless, the process using thematic synthesis allows a researcher to guide an examination of themes throughout the data by organizing descriptions of what was provided by participants. On the other hand, thematic synthesis can also be a rather simple method for analyzing data as long as biases are identified and addressed (Boyatzis, 1998).

Thematic analysis, which is an inductive approach, was also used for establishing codes and categorized the codes into common patterns. The process of thematic analysis is necessary for identifying common patterns or concepts throughout the data as they relate to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is considered to be a valuable methodology when used to explore studies with different designs because it is able to capture common themes

regardless of the nature of the study (Dahan-oliel, Shikako-Thomas, & Majnemer, 2012). In other words, when using thematic analysis, the data is investigated more systematically so that there is not too much emphasis placed on a particular category or series of phrases (Pérez, Crick, & Lawrence, 2015). If that occurred, the content of the research could be skewed or considered to be misleading. Therefore, thematic analysis helped add credibility and validity to data.

There are six phases involved with thematic analysis that begin with becoming familiar with collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From there, creating or generating initial codes was next followed by looking for themes among codes. The next step was to review the established themes and then define and label them. This process was valuable for data analysis that provided findings necessary for answering the research question.

For this study, bias was accounted for throughout data collection and analyzed primarily through the process of radical validation. What makes the validation radical is that it gets to the “root of who a person is, which is his or her lived meaning, through bracketing, horizontalization, and descriptive clarification” (Dubose, 2015, p. 27). Part of the process involving radical validation is to consider the ontological paradigm to be virtually invisible when analyzing data (Dubose, 2015).

### **Researcher Bias**

As for preconceptions, pre-understandings, and biases about the research topic, the researcher did not intend to have a predetermined notion of the research results and was willing to accept findings as they occurred. However, biases and preconceived notions can arise and influence the findings (Maritz & Jooste, 2011). Therefore, the researcher had to be aware of his assumption that Facebook use would likely be beneficial for Army wives during deployment. To address the researcher’s potential bias, the process of bracketing was applied during the development and throughout the study. In addition, the researcher journaled after each interview and documented his perception of the responses as well as how the wives presented themselves. Each journal entry was forwarded to a Capella University faculty mentor for review upon completion of the interview. By addressing biases before and during data collection and analysis, the researcher intended to move beyond a personal assumption and learn more about what the wives experienced as they used Facebook as described for this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study received approval from the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences and was reviewed by the Public Affairs Office at a large Army installation that included a thorough examination by their legal office. Based on that review, the Army installation base Commander provided a letter to the researcher authorizing recruitment of Army wives at his Army post. Those steps were taken prior to submitting the research plan to Capella University’s IRB for review and approval. Therefore, prior to seeking participants, this study was reviewed several times and met all ethical requirements necessary for authorization.

## **Storage and Protection of Data**

The data collected to include the audio recording was stored on a password protected computer as well as a portable hard drive, which was also password protected. All data and other identifying information such as the participant's name for informed consent and email address or cellular phone number will be maintained for seven years, the duration required by IRB, and then deleted from the portable hard drive. The information on the researcher's computer would not be saved beyond the duration of this study because there is no anticipation of keeping the computer for seven years. The portable hard drive does not contain any additional information and will be stored in secure location until data can be deleted.

## **Study Limitations**

Limitations to this study were considered based on the development, application, and assessment of the data. A primary limitation was the size of the sample. Although each of the 12 participants provided a significant quantity of meaningful information during data collection, 12 wives represented only 0.000058% of the approximately 210,000 Army wives within the enlisted ranks (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2014). Therefore, further studies should consider larger samples.

Another limitation was the demographics. The participants represented a large geographic area based on the several locations where each wife resided during the interview. However, there was not a wide age difference since the majority of the women were in their 20s. Out of the 12 wives who participated in this study, eight of them were in their 20s with an average age of 23.3 years old. Two of the wives were 32 and 33, and two were 40 and 45 years old. Therefore, the average age for all 12 wives was 28 years old. Ten of the wives were Caucasian, one was African-American, and one was Hispanic. A study using an Army wife sample population reported by Padden et al. (2011) consisted of 80% Caucasians, 9.5% African Americans, and 8.6% Hispanics. Likewise, according to a study reported by Allen et al. (2011) that had an Army wife population, the sample consisted of 72% White non-Hispanic, 11% Hispanic, and 9% African American. Therefore, the ethnicity of the group for this study was fairly consistent with two other recent studies, but a larger sample would present a better opportunity to seek ethnic presentation.

The other limitation regarding demographics was the number of deployments reported. Fifty percent of the sample were experiencing their first deployment when interviewed. Four of the wives were experiencing their second deployment and the rest were experiencing their third. That was considered to be a limitation that should be consideration for further research because wives who experience more deployments could possibly report more significant coping skills.

Gender was a limitation to also consider. This study exclusively examined the experiences of wives based on the rationale previously discussed. However, further research should consider including husbands as well as same-sex marriages in order to get a more encompassing view of Facebook use as described for this study. Women are being assigned to more combat roles; therefore, husbands remaining at home may likely share similar experiences with wives (Southwell & Wadsworth, 2016).

The study selected Facebook as the social media option for communication in order to maintain consistency throughout the interviews. However, there are other forms of social media available for communication during deployment, as expressed by a few of the wives during their interview. Nevertheless, with the wider range of posting options that Facebook offers, studying its use exclusively possibly provided the best understanding of how social media is viewed by military wives.

Lastly, the study only interviewed Army wives whose husbands were deployed at the time of the interview. While recruiting for this study, only about one out of every five wives who volunteered to participate were eligible primarily because the husband had to be deployed at the time of the interview. Many of the women who wanted to participate reported that they used Facebook a lot while their husband was deployed and that they had much to say about using Facebook during deployment. However, their husband had returned from deployment, although in a few cases very recently to the time they contacted the researcher. Nevertheless, for this study they were not eligible once their husband returned home. As a result of that requirement, it is possible that meaningful information may have been missed. Therefore, future research regarding social media use should also consider participants who want to report on recently deployed experiences.

## **Results**

This study was developed based on interest in what was experienced by Army wives who used Facebook as a means of communicating with their deployed husband. The study was unique in the fact that no study has looked at what wives who remained at home during deployment experienced using Facebook as described for this study. What was learned from the literature as well as from data collected during this study was that military wives gained more from their experience using Facebook as described for this study than not. Data was reviewed from an interpretive generic qualitative approach using social constructionism as a theoretical lens and suggested that Facebook use between a deployed husband and his wife who remained home should be considered as a positive option that provides more benefits than problems. The findings were consistent with previous literature to include demographics.

The results of this study were expected to also be consistent with what wives from other branches of the service experience when using Facebook in the same manner. Considering the versatility of Facebook and how the wives perceived their husband's opinions to be, the results of this study were also expected to be consistent with what husbands at home with deployed wives and same-sex couples would experience. In other words, the research findings must be reliable enough to be applied outside the boundaries of the actual study and content obtained from one study must be relevant to similar situations and circumstances (Gliner, 1994; Hellström, 2008).

## **Discussion**

The study results indicated that Army wives were making the best out of an undesirable situation by using Facebook to remain connected with their deployed husband. Considering the unpleasant conditions of deployment for the Soldiers as well as the demanding responsibilities

and duties of the wife at home (Chapin, 2009; Kaplow, Layne, Saltzman, Cozza, & Pynoos, 2013), having to communicate by occasional telephone call or by writing letters would be appreciated by spouses (Greene et al., 2010), but would not provide the significant communication options offered by Facebook. Therefore, modern technology has improved communication for an event that remains as difficult for spouses today as it was 100 years ago during WWI (Messinger, 1992).

As previously stated, wives reported that they looked forward to daily “Facebooking” with their husband, which included posting pictures and short videos. One of the other popular options when internet connection was strong enough was being able to “Face-Time” with the husband. That allowed the husband and wife to actually see each other through their computers or phones. Face-Time also allowed the Soldiers to see their children which were reported by the wives as a positive experience. However, the wives also reported certain disadvantages to Facebook. The more common reported disadvantages included having their posted comments on Facebook taken out of content by their husband. Becoming impatient with responses or other forms of communication from their husband was also reported as a disadvantage. Several of the wives expected quicker responses, as did their husband on occasions. However, in that case, wives also warned that occasionally their husband posted too much information and, in a few cases, posted information that was considered to be sensitive to security. Being security conscious was reported as a disadvantage of Facebook use by several of the wives.

Considering a cost and benefits analysis, wives reported that the benefits of using Facebook as described for this study significantly outweighed the costs. Although continued research is recommended, and limitations have been pointed, the initial findings of this study suggest that social media offers methods for communication that can be beneficial to those seeking to increase contact during long separations. Not only would this type of communication be an advantage for counseling military family members, but could also be offered in cases of other separations such as merchant marines, off shore oil riggers, and military civilian employees who deploy overseas for periods of time.

What this study ultimately concluded based on the data provided by the 12 participants was the importance of remaining in communication with someone they each loved. Army deployments usually last between nine and 12 months, and some, up to 15 months (Wojcik et al., 2009) and most of the participants for this study were experiencing their initial or second deployment. Therefore, long separations were new to their marriage, and having the ability to communicate online allowed the wives to feel more connected to their spouse.

### **Stakeholders**

The intended stakeholders for this study are professional counselors to include Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) and counselor educators. An objective of this research was to bring what Army wives experienced using Facebook to light for practicing counselors and counselor educators. As previously discussed, literature regarding military couples communicating by social media during deployment is lacking. Therefore, this study offers counselors and counselor educators a new look at an option to use during deployment that might reduce past problems and help military couples cope better over the course of a long deployment.

As a result of the study, counselors could recommend Facebook or other social media communication when counseling military spouses either during deployment or while to deployment is pending. Counselors could consider the results of the study so that military spouses could be informed of potential pros and cons of using social media during deployment. Likewise, counselor educators could use findings from this study when teaching related courses or when developing curriculum. Based on the findings, information could benefit classroom discussion as well as course material. Therefore, the results of this study as well as further research results could provide counselor educators with data necessary for counseling lesson plans to be offered in both graduate and doctorate education programs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

What remains unknown, based on the literature, and what this study did not conclude is whether there is or is not a correlation between Facebook use, as described for this study, and the overall well-being of the spouse at home during deployment. In other words, are spouses who remain home during deployment psychologically and emotionally affected by Facebook use either positively or negatively? Therefore, recommended is a quantitative study that explores the relationship between the degree to which a spouse who remains home during deployment uses Facebook to communicate with a deployed spouse and her overall psychological well-being. For that type of study, the independent variable would be Facebook use and the dependent variable would be psychological well-being and the null hypothesis would be rejected if there was shown to be a difference between Facebook communication with deployed husbands and overall well-being.

Further qualitative research is also recommended. The methodology used for this research could be applied to studies that examine what husbands of deployed wives experience when using Facebook, or similar social media options. Likewise, a similar study that examines what same-sex spouses experience is recommended. Each qualitative research option could offer new insight into whether gender as well as sexual preference provides different results or not from what was learned from wives.

### **Conclusion**

This study was developed and undertaken to gain a better understanding of the role social media has played regarding communication between spouses during military deployments. What was learned from the study results analyzed from the data provided by 12 Army wives whose husbands were deployed during data collection was that Facebook use has offered the participants a more convenient and beneficial method for remaining connected with their deployed husband.

Although the wives offered areas of concern when using this social medium and provided specific examples of problems they encountered, each wife also indicated that the benefit significantly outweighed the problems. Collectively, the wives reported that Facebook use as described for this study was helpful and each would recommend using it during deployment to other spouses. In addition, each wife recommended that the study stakeholders, counselors and

counselor educators, consider Facebook communication as a viable option for easing the discomfort often experienced during long military deployments.

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## **A Wellness Approach to Investigating Student Veterans' Career Goals**

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### **Abstract**

*A qualitative methodology was utilized to assess the wellness factors student Veterans (N = 10) perceived as influential to their decision to separate from the military and choice of intended career path. Participants included prior enlisted student Veterans pursuing undergraduate degrees at a mid-sized Midwestern university. Interview transcripts were coded according to the Indivisible Self Model of Wellness (IS-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2004) and analyzed phenomenologically. Participants referenced Control and Self-Worth as motivators for separation from military service; Work and Thinking were the main themes regarding choice of future profession. Additional themes emerged in reference to how Veterans' priorities changed during their time in service. The IS-Wel serves as an innovative approach for facilitating student Veteran career development.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Career counseling, student Veterans, wellness*

Military service, which is a long-term career choice for some, involves much more than traditional work activities. On active duty, service members are considered Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, or Airmen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis,

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2011). Much more than a job, military service members are held to strict standards set forth in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (1950) at all times. As a result of the all-encompassing nature of military involvement, many service members have chosen to leave active duty for reasons not directly related to their primary work responsibilities (Stewart & Moser, 2005). Most Veterans have left the service prior to retirement age for various reasons including long work hours, low pay, long and/or frequent deployments, unpredictable schedules, foreign assignments, and dissatisfaction with the military lifestyle (Stewart & Moser, 2005; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [DVA], 2010). Approximately half of all enlisted separations from active duty were voluntary, and most occurred after one or two enlistment terms (i.e., 4-12 years of service; U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2015). Many Veterans have been able to transfer the skills developed in their military careers directly to civilian jobs (e.g., information technology specialists or medical technicians, etc.). However, other Veterans enter higher education in pursuit of a new post-military career.

### **Student Veterans**

With the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Veterans are increasingly choosing to attend college before starting a new career, with more than one million military students receiving education benefits each year (DVA, 2015). Traditional non-military undergraduate college students tend to choose their academic majors largely due to intrinsic interest, anticipated income, contributions to society, prestige, and influence from parents (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Workman, 2015). Furthermore, student Veterans are a unique population due to their life experiences and military identity and are more likely than non-veteran students to be older, first generation, transfer students, distance learners, have a disability, and attend school part-time (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). Therefore, factors that influence the major selections of non-military students may not generalize to undergraduate student Veterans and student Veterans' career decision-making values and priorities are not well-understood (Ghosh & Fouad 2016). As such, college career counselors and academic advisors may not be prepared to help undergraduate Veterans pursue a career they will find satisfying.

### **Wellness-based Career Counseling**

Wellness, defined as practices and interventions that promote well-being and optimal functioning (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005), has gained popularity in various settings, including the military, over the last several decades. Both the Army and Air Force have adopted comprehensive fitness programs to improve warfighting readiness and resilience throughout those forces (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Fowler, 2011). Comprehensive Soldier Fitness and Comprehensive Airman Fitness were based on wellness principles, encompassing several "domains" (e.g., *Mental/Emotional, Spiritual, Social, and Physical*) adapted from the Penn Resiliency Program (Gilham, Jaycox, Reivich, & Seligman, 1990). Due to a limited research base for these adaptations, their effectiveness has been called into question (Bastounis, Callaghan, Banerjee, & Michail, 2016). Nevertheless, wellness has been conceptualized as an important paradigm for strengths-based assessment and interventions across counseling settings, with the wellness research base steadily growing (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Due to the holistic nature of the wellness paradigm, it is uniquely suited to conceptualize the

motivations of service members for separating from active military duty given the all-encompassing nature of military involvement.

Career counseling that emphasizes a holistic approach provides clients with the tools to plan their lives in conjunction with their careers (Smith, Myers, & Hensley, 2002). Wellness-based career counseling has been demonstrated to promote overall wellness (Berríos-Allison, 2011), and to help individuals understand environmental and work factors related to professional quality of life and career burnout (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Wellness-based career counseling may help Veterans and service members understand which wellness-related factors may be missing from their military lifestyle so that they can be effectively integrated into a new career path (Rouse, Riley, & Barnes, 2016).

### **The IS-Wel**

The Indivisible Self Model of Wellness (IS-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2004) is supported by a multitude of existing research (Foster, Steen, O’Ryan, & Nelson, 2016; Heath, 2014; Myers & Sweeney, 2008). In accordance with the IS-Wel model, wellness is conceptualized as: one first-order overall wellness factor, five second-order wellness factors (i.e., *Coping Self*, *Social Self*, *Essential Self*, *Physical Self*, and *Creative Self*), and 17 third-order factors which occur within local, institutional, global, and chronometrical contexts (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). Each of the third-order factors is organized within one of the second-order factors, and they are grouped according to the closeness of relationships among the third-order factors (Myers & Sweeney, 2004).

Within the *Coping Self* (*Leisure, Self-Worth, Realistic Beliefs, Stress Management*), the focus is on the ability to cope with life events and to overcome challenges (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The *Social Self* (*Love, Friendship*) involves interpersonal relationships that can enhance quality of life (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The *Essential Self* (*Spirituality, Self-Care, Cultural Identity, Gender Identity*) is useful in helping individuals make meaning of their views of self and others (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). Within the *Physical Self* (*Nutrition, Exercise*), the importance of an appropriate combination of exercise and nutrition to overall health and well-being are emphasized (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). Finally, the *Creative Self* (*Emotions, Control, Work, Humor, Thinking*) encompasses emotional experiences and their relation to thoughts and actions (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The IS-Wel has been used as a conceptual framework to inform university wellness initiatives promoting student wellness in a variety of domains (Wolf, Thompson, & Smith-Adcock, 2012).

There is little research surrounding the factors leading Veterans to separate from active service and relation to their choice of academic major in college. In the present study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What wellness factors lead Veterans to separate from the military and choose new careers?
2. What are Veterans’ primary considerations when determining a new career path?
3. How does military service influence Veterans’ perceptions of important career factors?

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were student Veterans ( $N = 10$ ) at a mid-sized metropolitan Midwestern university ranging in age from 23-39 years (see Table 1). The study was approved by an institutional review board (IRB).

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

<b>Total Participants</b>	<b><i>n</i>=10</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
Female	5
Male	5
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
White	5
Latino	2
Black or African American	1
Asian	1
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
<b>Age</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
23-29 years	8
30-39 years	2
<b>Year in College</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
Senior	4
Junior	4
Sophomore	1
First-year	1
<b>Branch</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
Air Force	5
Army	3
Navy	1
Marine Corps	1
<b>Years in Service</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
4-8 years	6
9-14 years	3
15-19 years	1
<b>Deployments Served</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
0	5
1	3
2-5	2
<b>VA Benefit Eligibility</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
GI Bill	9
VA Disability Compensation	4
<b>Military Career Field</b>	<b><i>n</i>=</b>
Combat	2
Information Technology	2
Intelligence	3
Logistics	1
Medical	2

## **Recruitment**

The lead researcher consulted with the university's Office of Military and Veteran Services (OMVS) to determine optimal methods for reaching the largest number of student Veterans. The OMVS is an organization that military students may utilize for a variety of services (e.g., GI Bill information and certification, academic and career development services, student Veteran organization support) and has the primary function of keeping student Veterans engaged with the university. The OMVS also maintains a listserv of all military students currently enrolled at the university that is used for outreach and engagement.

The lead investigator emailed a demographic and eligibility questionnaire to all currently enrolled student Veterans on the university's OMVS listserv ( $N = 440$ ). The results of the questionnaires were stored in the university's Qualtrics software suite (Version 3.17, 2017) and maintained on a secure server. Of the student Veterans who participated in the questionnaire ( $n = 46$ ), 38 indicated they would be willing to participate in an interview. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to capture participant perspectives that represented diverse academic majors, branches of service, races/ethnicities, and equal representation of women and men. Criteria for participation included (a) status as non-retired Veterans of the U.S. military and (b) enrollment in undergraduate coursework as a degree-seeking student from the university where the study took place. The first author contacted 25 participants who met all criteria and best fit the sampling strategy via email to schedule the interview, offering a \$10 gift card as incentive. A total of 10 student Veterans who indicated they were willing to participate met the qualifications and completed interviews.

## **Instruments**

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire was comprised of 27 items concerning demographics, specific information about military service and separation (e.g., branch, component, years served, number of deployments, etc.), and academic information (e.g., major, expected graduation year, etc.). Three items were open-ended questions about the decision to separate from active service, reasons for choice of academic major, and intended career field. Questionnaire results were used to identify interested and eligible participants for the interview, and to describe the participants who completed the study.

**Interview protocol.** The interview protocol, developed by the first and second authors, contained eight questions with four follow-up questions based largely on the constructs of wellness outlined in the IS-Wel model (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). Interview questions were designed to obtain information about individual wellness factors influencing separation from active service and choice of new career paths and academic majors. Questions pertained to career goals before and after military service, reasons for separating from the military and attending college, and expected satisfaction from anticipated career path. Follow-up questions asked participants to elaborate on previous answers (e.g., What were your career goals before you joined the military? Follow-up: What attracted you to these goals?) Alternately, these additional probes rephrased a question to facilitate participants in recalling relevant information (e.g., How did your military service affect your career goals? Follow-up: Regarding your career, what is important to you now that was not important before you joined the military?). Follow-up

questions were asked only if participants' initial responses did not adequately address the question.

### **Participant Interviews**

Eligible participants who completed the initial emailed questionnaire were contacted via email by the lead investigator to schedule the semi-structured interview. All interviews took place in the in-house counseling clinic in the Department of Counseling, which was the home department of the first, second, and third authors. Prior to the interview, participants were provided verbal information regarding the study, as well as a written consent form. Participation was voluntary, and participant identity was kept confidential by the use of numerical identifiers. Participants were reminded that they could discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes. Participants received a \$10 gift card after participation.

### **Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed verbatim in F5 Transcription Pro (Version 3.2; dr. dresing & pehl GmbH, 2016) software and uploaded into NVivo for Mac (Version 10; QSR International, 2014). A phenomenological approach (Kvale, 1983) was used to qualitatively analyze participant responses to questions from the semi-structured interview protocol developed by the first and second authors. The first two interview transcripts were independently coded by the first and second authors using the process of *horizontalization*, in which important quotes were identified in order to gain an understanding of student Veterans' experiences. Groupings of similar comments were created, which eventually formed overall themes (Moustakas, 1994).

The first and second investigators used the IS-Wel model as a theoretical framework for coding, specifically the operational definitions for each of the 17 third-order factors as defined by Myers and Sweeney (2008). Multiple coding and an audit trail enabled the authors to discuss and debate differences in coding procedure, and to develop consensus among multiple perspectives (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Sweeney, Greenwood, Williams, Wykes, & Rose, 2012).

## **Results**

The primary themes emerging from the data were grouped related to the 17 third-order factors of the IS-Wel Model (Myers & Sweeney, 2004), and organized relative to the research questions. Select participant quotes will be used to support each theme.

### **Research question #1: What wellness factors lead Veterans to separate from the military and choose new careers?**

**Control.** The most common factor cited as a reason why participants separated from the military was Control, which was defined as "belief that one can usually achieve the goals one sets for oneself; having a sense of planfulness in life; being able to be assertive in expressing one's needs" (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). The type of control that participants referenced

differed among individuals. For example, 30% of participants cited a lack of control over their work duties as the primary reason they separated from active duty. As one participant explained:

I was working as a paramedic in an urgent care... and I got moved up to education and training, and I was very unhappy with that. It was taking me out of a patient care setting, which is what I love and what I had been doing with my life. Obviously, I had no say in it.

Forty percent of participants referenced lack of control over assignment locations. Among those, 75% indicated leaving active service to prevent separation from family, with one participant citing a lack of deployment opportunities as a source of regret. This participant noted:

I wanted to be one of those guys that, you know, does that cool stuff, you know? But I never got my opportunity to do that... I wouldn't stop asking if there were any deployments... Like once a month I had a standing appointment the first of every month like, "Hey Staff Sergeant, you got any hot fills I can fill?" "No! Get out of my office!" ...But I was trying. It just never worked.

Another 20% of participants reported that they would have preferred to remain in the service for 20 years, but were forced to separate after a medical evaluation board determined they were no longer medically fit to serve. An additional 20% of participants indicated that they separated due to inability to complete school on active duty (i.e., they lacked sufficient control over their duty schedules).

**Self-Worth.** Self-Worth was defined as, "accepting who and what one is, positive qualities along with imperfections; valuing oneself as a unique individual" (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). Thirty percent of participants indicated that their self-efficacy had increased as a result of military service, and one reason they separated was to accomplish other goals. It should be noted that another 40% of participants mentioned developing their self-worth in the military, but did not reference it as reason for separating. As one participant explained:

I think it helped me realize that I was capable of doing something that challenged me, and being successful at it, and doing something technical, too. But with all that said, I'm an electrical engineering major and I'm applying to medical school... That is one desire that pushes me towards medicine is: what's harder than electrical engineering? Medicine.

Another student Veteran explained how multicultural experiences changed his expectations for himself as:

It's affected it (career goals) in a positive way in the fact that I came back, I was more - not at first - but I was more confident [from] just being around every other culture you can think of. Obviously, being stationed all around in Iraq, Kuwait, and Korea, you kind of get to see a whole different world in a whole different spectrum. Um, then it gave me like a boost of like, "Hey, when you go back to school-" it didn't happen at first, but eventually it kind of clicked like, "You can either go back to that life, or else you can work your ass off in school and hopefully that will turn into a better future for yourself."

**Research question #2: What are veterans' primary considerations when determining a new career path?**

**Work.** Work, defined as, "being satisfied with one's work; having adequate financial security; feeling that one's skills are used appropriately; the ability to cope with workplace stress" (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485), was the most frequently referenced theme in regard to the second research question. "Being satisfied with one's work" and "having adequate financial security" emerged as most relevant to participants in this study. All participants cited future job satisfaction as a motivating factor for choosing an academic major, and 40% of participants also referenced adequate financial security in an intended occupation after graduation as a motivating factor. One student Veteran explained the ways owning a comic book store would be satisfying:

You get to see people's faces light up when they find that one book or that one superhero that makes sense to them, like the Unbeatable Squirrel Girl. She's super weird but she's super cool. And helping somebody find that for the first time... That type of stuff makes it all worthwhile.

Another participant described how financial security would help him manage stress in his future occupation:

Going back to college, I knew [an engineering degree] was either going to help me get into the industry that I wanted to or it was going to pay well enough where I could just kind of get into the industry on my own money. You know? Just kind of make it a hobby instead of a profession.

**Thinking.** Thinking was defined as, "being mentally active, open-minded; having the ability to be creative and experimental; having a sense of curiosity, a need to know and to learn; the ability to solve problems" (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). Seventy percent of respondents referenced Thinking as a motivating factor for their choice of academic major. Most respondents described a desire for a challenge in their future careers as motivation to succeed and overcome challenges. One student Veteran described his desire to overcome obstacles:

I thought stocks kind of looked fun. They just - something about it looked intense, fun, competition - you know, trying to be the alpha in there. Very competitive.

Another participant described his desire to change gears completely from his military occupation and seek something entirely new:

Not that I got tired of the military; I miss it all the time. Um, but I was like, "I want to try something different," kind of thing. It wasn't like I was mad or hated what I was doing; I loved what I was doing, even with all of the stress. I just, you know, it was the gamble, like I want to try something else.

**Research question #3: How does military service influence veterans' perceptions of important career factors?**

**Leisure.** Leisure was mentioned by 70% of participants as currently important, and/or as an important aspect of their future. Leisure was defined as, "activities done in one's free time; satisfaction with one's leisure activities; having at least one activity in which 'I lose myself and

time stands still” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). One participant described how leisure is different after separating from the service:

Leisure activities - I can do more things without worrying about consequences - not saying that I'm going to do anything bad, but you know. You kind of have to be more mindful of what you're doing at all times in the military.

Another student Veteran described how his leisure priorities have changed since separating:

I gotta find out some ways to decompress, blow off some steam. Be it going to the gym, going shooting, going fishing, just spending time with family. Some way to just kind of shut your mind down for a bit... I mean school's real - it's hard but it's intellectually hard. I miss just physical labor where you can shut your mind off and listen to some music and lift heavy things and put them down. I enjoyed that quite a bit. So that was a big part of it, and mainly I was just looking for things where I could stop thinking. And having found those, that's helped tremendously.

**Stress Management.** Stress Management was referenced by 50% of participants as being currently important, while it was not important to them before they joined the military. Stress Management was defined as a “general perception of one’s own self-management or self-regulation; seeing change as an opportunity for growth; ongoing self-monitoring and assessment of one’s coping resources” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). As one participant described:

Being able to have a healthy lifestyle, a healthy balanced lifestyle. Not just the six-pack abs, but the whole deal, and being able to enjoy it.

Another participant described how her military responsibilities changed her perspective on stress management:

[At] my last assignment I was pretty overwhelmed with lots of responsibilities and additional duties, and I was kind of getting real stressed out. And, you know, I decided - I spent a lot of time- not to make it sound selfish, but I spent a lot of time putting a lot of other people and things before me, and I decided I wanted to do something for me.

**Cultural Identity.** Sixty percent of participants referenced Cultural Identity, defined as “satisfaction with one’s cultural identity; feeling supported in one’s cultural identity; transcendence of one’s cultural identity” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485) as becoming important to them through their military service. Most participants referenced how military culture fostered a public service mindset, so the authors included “public servant” as a culture that fit the operational definition for this concept. One participant described his developed sense of cultural identity in the military:

As a supervisor in the military, I had a lot of direct impact on the people that work for me, but you know, working in the community here, especially working with offenders, you know, those are people that really need some help and guidance and, you know, I feel like I could have a direct impact on their lives... So, serving my community that I grew up in and helping people that really, really need it.

**Friendship.** Seventy percent of participants reported that friendship had become an increasingly important career factor since before they joined the military. According to the IS-Wel model, Friendship is defined as, “social relationships that involve a connection with others individually or in a community, but that do not have a marital, sexual, or familial commitment; having friends in whom one can trust and who can provide emotional, material, or informational support when needed” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p. 485). Sixty percent of participants indicated that developing friendships became more difficult after leaving the military. Related to the factor cultural identity in reference to serving others, participants were hopeful to develop meaningful community in their future workplaces, though they acknowledged how difficult it will likely be. One participant described the transition from military to civilian work life relative to friendship:

There’s no brotherhood or family aspect to it. You know if you got done with work in the military, “Hey what are you guys doing for dinner?” “All right, we’ll go grab some food and beers and we’ll hang out.” “Oh, hey, come on over, my wife is making food.” Um, whatever it may be. Saturdays you spend with the guys because, you know, half of us are probably single too... Camaraderie was probably the biggest one and it probably still is for me.

### **Other Important Findings**

The only other significant themes that were not explicitly discussed in this section were Love and Emotions, referenced by 90% and 80% of participants, respectively. With the exception of the 30% who mentioned family reasons as motivation to separate from the military, all other references to both Love and Emotions indicated that strong family connections and the ability to perceive and express one’s own emotions were support factors during this time of transition and, therefore, did not address any of the research questions.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to identify which wellness factors, from a Veteran’s perspective, led to the decision to leave the military, and whether Veterans’ intended future career decisions were informed by those factors. Of the 17 third-order factors included in the IS-Wel model, 15 were mentioned at least once. Nutrition and Gender Identity were not mentioned. Additionally, Exercise, Positive Humor, Realistic Beliefs, Self-Care, and Spirituality were mentioned only by one or two individuals, and were not dominant in participant responses.

Second-order factors associated with the physical self were not significant, and only one second-order factor, Cultural Identity, emerged as salient under the Essential Self. One possible explanation is that since participants were specifically questioned about military service and future careers, they may not have considered factors associated with the Physical Self or Essential Self to be related to the topic. Future research could investigate the perceived significance of individual wellness factors on student Veterans’ lives.

Overall, Veterans separated from active military service because of perceived lack of control in their lives, as well as a perception that leaving the service would allow for increased autonomy to pursue new vocational opportunities. Veterans in this sample seemed to choose their

new career paths based on a desire to engage in work activities they would find meaningful, as well as a general desire to try something new. Veterans also reported that both leisure activities and community service became important to them because of their military service. These factors are related to one another and can be used to inform academic and career counseling practices for individuals who intend to separate from the military and student Veterans. Interventions for these populations could focus on these wellness factors to increase engagement, involvement, and success in academic and career transitions.

Participants in this sample largely left the service because they were unable to exert Control in certain areas of their lives. Several participants indicated that they did not have an intended post-military career path at the time of their separation, indicating that Control was a driving factor. This factor appeared to be developmental for these participants; compromising control upon joining the military was not perceived as problematic, but reclaiming this control in post-military work seemed to be prioritized.

The other themes surrounding separation from the military were developmental as well. Several participants reportedly separated from service due to a desire to remain with their families and indicated that they had married a partner and/or had children while in the service. This developmental stage likely led to Love emerging as an important factor for participants in this sample. Similarly, when Self-Worth was referenced as a factor leading to separation from the military, participants mentioned that they felt capable of handling more responsibility because of what they had already accomplished in the military. This supports the notion that the military environment exerts profound effects on Veterans, leading to changing life priorities (Rausch, 2014).

Work and Thinking are organized under the same second-order factor, the Creative Self, which may indicate that as Veterans start new careers, they hope to exert creativity through their work. Similar to the findings of Duffy and Sedlacek (2007), the participants' reports of finding satisfying work and financial security are similar to non-military students' reports of valuing intrinsic interest and high salary. Notably, several participants reported not having an intrinsic interest in the field of their majors before they served in the military, with work values developing over the course of their military service.

Work and Thinking are related to the participants' responses regarding the first research question (Control and Self-Worth) in several ways. First, Control is also part of the Creative Self, indicating that factors leading to separation from the military are related to factors driving choice of post-military career. From a wellness perspective, the negative effects of low wellness scores in one area can be mitigated by wellness gains in other related areas (Myers & Sweeney, 2008), indicating that Veterans may be using their choice of a new intended career path to address wellness-related concerns they had while serving in the military. Second, Thinking (Creative Self) is related to Self-Worth (Coping Self) in that participants indicated that they were curious to find out how much more they would be able to accomplish in their new careers having successfully completed several formidable accomplishments while serving in the military.

Friendship, Leisure, and Stress-Management emerged as coping mechanisms for difficult situations. Most participants mentioned that their military jobs were stressful, but having served,

they perceive themselves to be more capable of dealing with life and workplace stress. Generally, participants prioritized healthy coping behaviors to maintain future job satisfaction, which they were not able to do while in the military. This is related to the concept of career-sustaining behaviors and professional quality of life, both of which have been shown to be positively correlated with high levels of wellness (Lawson & Myers, 2011).

With Cultural Identity, participants seemed to develop a desire for public service due to military service. Service members develop an identity as military members and may find themselves in an “identity crisis” as they transition to civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). In academia, emphasizing public service may help Veterans manage their own expectations of success relative to military cultural identity (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

### **Practical Application**

The data from this study may be useful for university Veteran’s offices and student Veteran organizations as they develop programming to engage and retain student Veterans at the university. It may also be useful to campus career counselors as they facilitate student Veterans in identifying potential career fields they may find fulfilling, particularly related to public or human service. In a military setting, career counselors could use wellness information to explore career options that will address some of the holistic concerns that contributed to the decision to separate from service. Academic advisors and career counselors could also integrate wellness data into existing academic and career counseling assessment data to address student Veteran transitions holistically to improve counseling effectiveness.

The data from this study could also be useful to military policymakers as they face ongoing difficulty retaining qualified military members in critically-manned occupations (Weiss, 2017). As an institution, the U.S. Military is known to dictate much of its service members lives, including occupation, work duties, duty station assignments, deployment schedules, and so forth (Stewart & Moser, 2005). Though the military continues to use enlistment bonuses to incentivize active duty retention (Weiss, 2017), participants did not mention low pay as a reason for separating. Military leaders at all levels could use wellness data to better inform interventions aimed at addressing retention and morale in individual military units.

The IS-Wel is an appropriate paradigm from which a clinical counselor can conceptualize a student Veteran’s holistic needs. As such, the Five-Factor Wellness Inventory, (5F-Wel; Myers & Sweeney, 2005), which is the formal assessment based on the IS-Wel, may provide useful/additional data for clinical counselors concerning wellness in military members. In the university setting, a wellness model may assist clinical counselors in conceptualizing and addressing the transition difficulties experienced by many student Veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). For example, a student Veteran whose assessment results indicate she or he is struggling with Cultural Identity may benefit from becoming active in a student Veteran organization, spending more time volunteering, or finding a new major that helps develop a strong sense of identity.

## **Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings are not easily generalizable, especially with a small sample size ( $N = 10$ ). However, in phenomenological inquiry, saturation can be achieved in as few as 6-12 interviews, especially with a relatively homogenous population (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Additionally, the location of the university where the research took place may have been a factor in the data obtained. A large military base near the university with a substantial military intelligence mission may have contributed to an overrepresentation of student Veterans from certain military career fields. It should be noted, however, that the university where this study took place was ranked as a top four-year institution for Veterans by the *Military Times* (Altman, 2016), and several participants indicated that they moved to the area and attended the university because of that ranking. Future research could investigate whether certain military specialties are more likely to pursue college degrees after separation from active military service.

Finally, the first author of this study is a prior enlisted student Veteran who served six years on active duty and completed one combat deployment in the U.S. Air Force. The meaning and themes extracted from interview transcripts may have been interpreted in ways that non-veterans would not. This potential conflict was partially mitigated by using the second author, who has no record of military service, for independent coding of transcripts. Any discrepancies between coded transcripts were discussed until a consensus was reached between authors, and the first author then reviewed previous coding to ensure all transcripts were coded consistently throughout the study. The purposive sampling strategy also partially addressed this potential conflict by intentionally seeking diverse perspectives that did not closely reflect the first author's experiences.

## **Directions for Future Research**

Future research might utilize the 5F-Wel to compare Veterans' wellness scores pre- and post-separation to assess the degree to which Veterans are able to address their wellness concerns by changing careers. Additionally, future researchers may determine whether the 5F-Wel can be used to predict and support retention rates in select military career fields. Other investigators may also focus on whether wellness interventions are effective in ameliorating some of the difficulties that student Veterans have during the transition from military to student life. Lastly, since the participants did not significantly address the *Physical Self* or the *Essential Self*, future research could investigate whether student Veterans' wellness scores reflect a general lack of attention to those factors.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the findings from this study indicate that a wellness paradigm offered an innovative approach to evaluate the career development of student Veterans. In the present study, the IS-Wel effectively captured the variety of work and personal needs of the student Veterans which were not being met during their military service. Using a wellness paradigm to address academic and career counseling concerns is one way to capture a depth of information that

traditional career counseling models may not address. Current military career counseling leaves some Veterans wanting, though some are not aware of exactly how their needs are not being met (Morgan, 2017). As knowledge and awareness of evidence-based wellness models spread, holistic career counseling will become more ubiquitous, and one hopes that more Veterans will feel successful as they transition to civilian careers.

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