“Dear Jane”:
An examination of female combat warriors, the communication styles used during war vs. the communication used in the home

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ABSTRACT

War has been happening for centuries. Women have been in the United States Armed Forces since the War of Independence in 1775, with very little research done on how war affects these women once on the home front. The purpose of my research is to evaluate the role of communication because of being a female in a combat zone at a time of war, and how it has affected the female’s life back home once returned. Specifically, I used Relational Dialectic Theory and Expectancy Violations Theory as a basis of ethnographic research and one on one interviews to research the questions: After returning from combat, how has your communication strategies used while in combat affected your communication once home from war? How has the role of being a female in a combat zone affected their interpersonal life? Overall, the results showed that communication acquired while being in several intercultural relationships for these women warriors did have a negative effect on their personal lives once home. The open-closedness dialectic was affected by these deployments, as well as the autonomy-connection that is needed for a relationship to survive was affected negatively by these deployments.

KEY WORDS: Military, communication, gender, combat
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Chapter One Introduction: The problem, and definition of terms used

Female Combat Veterans and why this study is so important

From the amazons of Greek mythology to Joan of Arc to women warriors trained by the Soviet Union and Israel, women have long served in combat, just not in the United States. For more than 200 years, women have worn a U.S. uniform in times of war as nurses, soldiers, and spies. In World War I, 30,000 women who could not vote took a step forward and served in support roles to help aid in war. A major turning point for women in the military came during Pearl Harbor, when Army and Navy nurses worked side by side the men tending to more than 2,000 wounded servicemen. In 1991, in many ways, the Gulf War marked a significant time in history for U.S. Military women. More than 40,000 went to war, four times the number who served in Vietnam, where only one died from enemy fire. In the first Gulf War, eleven women were killed in action; two were taken prisoners of war (Olmsted, xix).

According to Olmsted (2007):

It was not until after the first Gulf War that major policy changes for military women took place. President Clinton signed the military bill ending combat exclusion for women on warships. In 1993, despite the recommendations of the Presidential Commission the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, Defense Secretary Les Aspin ordered all branches of the services to open combat aviation to women. Today, about 80 percent of the jobs and more than 90 percent of the career fields in the military are available to the most qualified person, not based on gender. In today’s war, women are serving right alongside their male
counterparts in many situations, with the exception of being able to drive tanks or serve in the infantry. (p. #)

Also, according to Enloe (1983), The US Military itself has made a concerted effort to portray its female troops as still sufficiently “feminine” in an effort to reap the benefits of greater (wo)manpower without upsetting its male forces or societal sensibilities (Enloe 1983, p. 119). Just as women within the military remain subject to the expectations of conventional gender norms due to growing up in American society, Cynthia Cockburn (2001) states that from a societal and communication perspective, that women’s participation in war has not led to greater equality for women in general, nor has women’s presence “feminized” the military. Communication styles for women in the military are expected to be the same as men in the military, with one focus in mind: to get the mission finished with as few casualties as possible.

Statement of the problem

Since September 11th, 2001, deployments for female combat veterans have become more frequent. According to the Department of Defense, United States military families are experiencing more wartime deployments than ever before (2005). Although this time apart is difficult, the time after the deployment can prove even more difficult when trying to communicate to their families for these female combat vets. With the continued U.S. military presence throughout the world at this time of war, it is extremely important to understand the struggles of these women warriors once home with their loved ones communicatively.

Communication within intercultural romantic relationships has not been looked at in great depth, especially with the focus of relational dialectics. Being in the military is being part of a very unique culture, a culture that is unlike any other culture in the world. Being a woman
inside this military culture which has always been male dominated makes communication even harder not only on the battlefield, but once home as well as they try to mesh their military culture and their feminine, American, civilian culture together all at once. To make this research even more interesting, the person being interviewed in this intercultural relationship is the United States female combat veteran, who is part of an ever rarer culture within the United States Military. This thesis describes the literature relevant to the research purposes of this thesis, organized into sections describing EVT Theory and how it affects this intercultural relationship, and Baxter’s Relational Dialectics Theory.

Definitions of Terms Used

1. Combat- Any time spent in a war zone, for the purpose of this study, Iraq or Afghanistan.

2. PTSD-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is a type of anxiety disorder that can be caused by a traumatic event, such as being in combat.

3. EVT- Expectancy Violations Theory. Research conducted by Burgoon starting in 1976. EVT is used to explain and predict attitudes and behaviors in a wide variety of communication situations, including personal distance in different relationships that people have.

4. Cultural norms- The rules that a culture uses for appropriate and inappropriate actions in society.

5. Discrepancies- When focusing on EVT, discrepancies are when the cultural expectations and behaviors for women in American society are disrupted, such as when a woman signs up to go to war.

6. Communicator valence- represents a net assessment of how favorably regarded the other person is in the relationship at that point in time.
7. **Reward valence**- Both interactants in the relationship are assumed to arrive at some sort of net assessment of the other. This is called reward valence.

8. **Relationship Maintenance**- Trying to restore a relationship to what it used to be.

9. **Openness-closedness**- dialectical tension that refers to the desire to disclose and be open with the relational partner and the desire to be discreet at the same time.

10. **Autonomy-connection**- The autonomy-connection dialectical tension refers to the degree of interdependence in the relationship, specifically the contradiction between the desire for the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent (Rawlins, 1983).

11. **Culture**- Ideas and beliefs shared by a group of people, such as a military culture or the American culture.

**Organization of the remaining Chapters**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides the theoretical basis that forms the framework for this study, reviews the literature on this topic, and puts forth the research questions. Chapter three describes the scope of the study and explains the methodology used for data collection. Chapter four presents the results of the study, shows how the results relate the previous research, and discusses the implications of findings in relationship to the research questions. Chapter five discusses the limitations and weaknesses of the study, and suggests further areas of research. It also summarizes the study.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter looks at the ethical assumptions of gendered transformational Leadership, and uses Aristotle’s view of bravery and courage to look at a certain characteristic of mankind, especially that of the warrior. Burgoon’s Expectancy Violation Theory used while being married and deployed is going to be used as a theoretical standpoint in this research, along with Baxter’s Relational Dialectic Perspective, which assumes that relationships are experienced and defined through the negotiation of contradictions.

Ethical Assumptions of Gendered Transformational Leadership

With the change of structure within the U.S. Armed Services to now include women in almost any leadership role as their male counterparts, Transformational leadership is occurring on a daily basis not only in the United States, but everywhere in the world that the U.S. Military is functioning. Moss (Whitford, T., & Moss, S. (2009) talk about transformational leadership in the workplace. According to his article, “Transformational leaders strive to change, elevate, and unify the goals of followers as well as inspire them to pursue challenging and shared objectives” (see also Yukl, 1999, 2002). According to Rafferty and Griffin (2004), transformational leaders demonstrate five clusters of behavior. First, transformational leaders promote intellectual stimulation in which they encourage followers to challenge the conventional assumptions and processes of the organization and to explore creative solutions to entrenched problems (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Second, transformational leaders supplant traditional practices with a more inspiring, buoyant, and unifying vision of the future—a vision that governs their own behavior and attributes (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004).
Third, transformational leaders afford the necessary support, encouragement, coaching, and advice to accommodate the unique needs and concerns of each follower. In being supportive, they enable subordinates to pursue the vision (see also Sarros, Gray, & Densten, 2002). Female leaders in the military have to do all of the above in order to be successful to, and even equal to, their male counterparts. This communication research is so important on so many levels because awareness needs to be brought up on the fact that these women—who are transformational leaders interculturally—may have issues from being in this leadership role once out of a combat zone communicatively.

In 2003, Mandell and Pherwani’s study on the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style based on gender found that there was a significant score in the transformational leadership styles of men and women, and how it affected their emotional intelligence. In fact, these researchers also wanted to look at gender differences in the emotional intelligent scores and transformational leadership styles of managers. Since the researcher will be looking at female leaders in the military, this study has practical and useful significance to today’s needs for this rare culture that will be studied. This study found that there was a significant relationship between transformational leadership, emotional intelligence and communication styles between men and women, and looks at how these communication differences affects these women’s personal lives once home.

Several theories can be used to explain how strong communication needed to survive in the military does not necessarily survive in relationships with loved ones once home. These theories include cross cultural and Intercultural Applications of Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), and Relational Dialectics Theory.
Philosophical Background

To the philosopher Aristotle, the best life to live is that of a happy life. This is a life that is lived with excellence (Aristotle, 1999, pg.13). If you live beautifully and well, then your life will be worthwhile and living. There were many types of virtues, and they came in many forms. Aristotle viewed virtue as the habit of the soul. He was careful in his analysis of mankind and all the basic components that would make up us as humans. Virtue was also the sign that meant the man and his soul was one, happy with each other, and this was the ultimate goal of life (Aristotle, 1999, pg.16). Though he carefully examined many virtues, one of the more interesting to me in his studies was his perception on the virtue of courage.

As a soldier myself, Aristotle’s view of bravery and courage is unique because it looks at a certain characteristic off all mankind, and he makes bravery to be a characteristic that is very situational and personal. Each warrior throughout their career has their own interpretation of how to be brave and how to overcome their own fears, whether it is naturalistically feared or at least logically defended. There is no defense for fears that have no real threat or act of bravery to overcome. So the first point of understanding Aristotle’s stance in the matter of bravery is to know that to him, there is a wrong definition for being brave, and this meant that there is no true act of bravery for the mortal man to overcome. Also, there was a right definition for being brave, where it is a natural and/or logical or spiritual fear that is understood and overcome by the individual soldier. Once one can recognize the specifics of Aristotle’s assessments, they can aim at the requirements to become brave, and to unify their soul and body.

The brave man is a wise man, according to Aristotle (Aristotle, 1999, pg.41). For even in being brave and courageous, a person would still have fears. It is a part of being human to
understand and acknowledge these fears, and it is almost in a way like a humble, though in some cases not so evidently humble, manner of recognizing your own mortality and imperfection in life in the bigger scheme of things. If a person did not have fear or fears, then you could not overcome them and truly never achieve greater peace or self-accomplishment in life. And it is required to not only have the fear, but also to be able to recognize the fear. The individual must be able to know what it is that he fears before he can overcome it. So there is some intellect and self-awareness necessity in being brave. Once the person can admit to their own being that they do indeed fear like all humans and that they can identify what it is to fear, they can proceed in the steps to overcome their fear.

The problem with this is that it there is a fine line between the instinctive sense of courage and the intellectual sense of courage. Aristotle looks down on those who rush in to overcome their courage and do not fully assess what it is that they should be brave against and for. It is not in their wisdom that they do such acts and therefore do not understand that they are truly being brave. On the other hand, though one may act almost fool-heartedly when put in a situation requiring bravery, it does not necessarily mean that the person has a vice of excess in the virtue, which is what on even grounds Aristotle's work seems to express. The problem arrives that does the man truly need to consciously recognize the act of bravery or can instinctively his mind and body realizes this without making it consciously aware? If so, then he destroys any other factors in his decision to be courageous and is not being manipulated or influenced by any forces other than his own conscious. This gives expression that there is also a vice of over-thinking.
As stated, Aristotle clearly expresses an act of intellectualism and reason being a part of bravery (Aristotle, 1999, pg.42). To what extent this goes is what splits his definition of the virtue into paths of interpretation. Man requires reason to exist as man. This part is clear in all forms and analyses, but that reason can be an innate feature at times, acting as an instinctive part of man’s being. By looking at it in this way, courage would require mainly just being able to overcome the fear and a certain amount of analysis of it. Lack of analysis on a person’s part would mean improper reason and recognition of reality, while over analysis would inevitably bring in other elements and components other than the pure act of overcoming a fear and being brave. So courage relies on a means between two vices of reason. This is very true in the case of warfare. One would fail at truly gaining the virtue of courage if they were to be fool-hearted and not fully understand what it means to be courageous, which is how I feel most Americans are today, and also one would fail at being brave if they were over-analytical and let the influence of other elements besides their own judgment and conscious persuade their acts and being during their lifetime.

Aristotle uses the example of a professional soldier to back up his analysis of fear and being brave. On page 42, he states “In wartime professional soldiers have it; for there seem to be many groundless alarms in war, and the professionals are the most familiar with these. Hence they appear brave, since others do not know that the alarms are groundless. Moreover, their experience makes them most capable in attack and defense, since they are skilled in the use of their weapons, and have the best weapons for attack and defense. The result is that in fighting nonprofessionals they are like armed troops against unarmed, or trained athletes against ordinary people; for in these contests also the best fighters are the strongest and physically fittest, not the bravest.” (Aristotle, 1999, pg.42).
So we can gather this from the end analysis: the virtue of courage is an act of understanding man’s own mortal fears, both natural and logical, and the ability to keep the act of overcoming fear, of being courageous, between two vices of reason where one is the lack of judgment and intellect while the other is the excess of judgment and analyzing. This leaves Aristotle’s view on courage in an unlikely path. Though he deeply expresses the power of reason, it is this same reason that creates a vice if used too much. There seems to be some way that reason is a force that is innate to man and so in saying so one does not need to overexert themselves to use it. Thus, reason is the understanding of life, mortality, and virtue, and is the creation of all things expressed in a balanced form within a person’s life.

In the end, Aristotle’s view on courage seems to leave one important fact: it is not by our own choice that we have it. Not to say that man does not recognize his fear and overcome it, but in definition we say that we have the conscious power not to express the virtue rather than the conscious power to express it. In other words, it is natural for man to achieve his virtue of courage, but to not achieve it is by his own actions and determinations throughout his life. This is in a sense a contradiction to his teachings of choice and freedom of action. I personally have seen this in soldiers in Iraq, where situations of bravery come up. It is when these times arise, that a person will choose to be brave, or as Homer said, “put strength in his spirit” (Aristotle, 1999, pg.43), and risk their life for their country, or take another route, which weakens their spirit. This is this instinctive essence to courage that Aristotle emphasizes throughout this book. It comes from the very definition of man being a reasonable, analytical and intelligent creature.

Though being human, one must make some efforts to be able to properly use the powers of reason, and humans can be defined as the only creatures to have reason, and therefore it is the
power within them that is interconnected and not an outside force to rely on. The virtue of courage, then, requires the power to recognize that we possess it, and not the power to reach its goal. Sustaining the means between the vices of deficiency and excess in reason is the endeavor that mankind endures to reach a virtue. It is the function of the human being to reason.

To Aristotle, everything aims at a greater Good. This Good is not some unseen God(s) to worship and follow, or the goal to change the world and make it a “better place” without any clear, unbiased view on what would be indeed better. It is simply to reach the state of Happiness. And to do so, man needs the virtues to fully understand his place in the world. The virtue of courage is no different. It is the way for one to overcome the difficulties and suffering of life. Without it, man would not be so vibrant in life. It is the virtues, this balance of the soul between deficiency and excess, from reason that allow man to be what it is. Aristotle clearly understood this in his wisdom and was kind enough to share it with the world.

Theoretical Basis

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT)

Being in the military is being part of a very unique culture, a culture that is unlike any other culture in the world. Being a woman inside this military culture which has always been male dominated makes communication even harder not only on the battlefield, but once home as well as they try to mesh their military culture and their feminine civilian culture together all at once. According to Planap, 1985; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Taylor and Crocker, 1981; every culture has guidelines for human conduct that carry associated anticipations for how others will behave. Those guidelines and anticipations will manifest in interactions between people. Intercultural communications then involves the communicators adjusting and influencing the
behaviors of each other, partly through the lens of expectations (Planap, 1985; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Taylor and Crocker, 1981). The question then, is whether greater understanding of human relations in and between different cultures (communication of women in the military during a time of war vs. communication of the same woman in a time of peace with her significant other and family members) can be achieved by examining the patterns of adaptation that happen in their interactions and the effects that their loved ones have from those interactions.

The foundation of this research involves a communication theory that answers this question is Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT). EVT is used to explain and predict attitudes and behaviors in a wide variety of communication situations, including personal distance in different relationships that people have. Personal distances between women soldiers in combat zones are virtually nonexistent. These women shower at the same time, sleep at the same time, wake up at the same time, eat at the same time, and do missions together trusting each other with their lives. They do not live to the American “cultural norms” of personal space. In order to survive, they need to get rid of any cultural norms engrained into their minds of personal space and focus on the mission at hand. Non verbal communication is also key to survival in this war time situation. These women train together and are one in a unit together; they can also read non verbal communication between each other as needed and when ordered. It is because of this one of a kind unique culture that these women are involved in, that Relational Dialectics and EVT will be used as a focus in this study.

Marriage, EVT, and Deployment

Much literature has been done on the effects of deployments on marriages in the military. According to some research done by Weins and Boss, 2006, Deployments, the time of separation
are “defining experiences for military service members and their families…they are one of the most widely recognized and documented stressors for military families... they also impact the military mission and influence service member retention” (Weins and Boss, 2006, pg 12).

Although this separation is extremely difficult, research has shown (Sahlstein, E., Maguire, K.C., and Timmerman, L. (2009), that the time before and after deployments can be hard on the families as well.

In the pre deployment stage, both partners are preparing for the upcoming separation, which brings up varied emotions, concerns, and communications. How the partners communication with each other at this pre deployment stage is going to be completely different than after the combat veteran comes home, with no fault to either one of them. Adding to the partner’s stress about the impeding deployment is the amount of time the service member is spending with their unit preparing for the deployment (Castro and Adler, 2005). Wiens and Boss (2006) characterize this stage as a time when the service member is physically present but psychologically absent. As the deployment gets closer and closer, the partner at home have reported wanting the deployment to just begin (Wood, Scarville, and Gravino, 1995), possibly so that they can get out of being together yet already falling apart.

Research has shown that during deployment, partners left behind experience a wide range of emotions from anger, loss, loneliness, and feelings of abandonment; which in turn, turn into relief, excitement and feelings of independence (Norwoodet al., 1996). According to Cozza, Chun, and Polo, 2005; Knox and Price, 1999, these partners also experience fear from coping with the possibility of physical or emotional injury, capture and imprisonment, or the thought of death of their partner. As couples start to anticipate their reunion, new issues then emerge. These
emotions include excitement and worry, regarding spending time with each other once again (Norwood et al., 1996).

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) was originally aimed to explain effects of proxemic violations (Burgoon, 1978, 1983; Burgoon and Jones, 1976). After this initial research, the theory was then expanded to include other kinds of non verbal and verbal communication violations. EVT begins with the assumption that people have numerous deeply ingrained expectations about the ways others communicate. Communication expectancies are “cognitions about the anticipated communication behavior of specific others, as embedded within and shaped by social norms for the contemporaneous roles, relationships, and context” (Burgoon and Walther, 1990, pg. 236). These social expectations are learned and reinforced within one’s culture starting at birth, and operate outside conscious awareness. These social expectations produce habituated, automated behavior patterns. This includes women in American society. These social expectations for American women are turned upside down when they decide to join the military, and choose to fight a war which has long been thought to be part of a man’s social expectation and role within society.

In Titunik’s (2008) research, she writes that the everyday public debate about women fighting in combat zones while serving in the United States military is mis-guided. She says that although feminists and men of the military culture don’t agree on whether or not women should be in combat, which they both share, and have reciprocally reinforced, a view of the military rooted in the traditions and practices of aggressive masculinity. This includes, but is not limited to - camaraderie, discipline, and service. All these qualities are instilled in all soldiers, no matter what their gender may be. These qualities foster military effectiveness and also counterbalance a sexist tendency, which in turn produces a complex institutional culture which
helps women in significant respects. The questions that are going to be asked during my in depth interviews are going to support Titunik’s ideas, and bring up the fact that this camaraderie, discipline, service, and cultural communication that is instilled so much into women in the military, does in fact affect their communication with significant others once home.

When these cultural expectations and behaviors for women in American society are disrupted, such as when a woman signs up to go to war, EVT labels this difference between the expected behavior and non expected behavior discrepancies. EVT then goes on to state that this intentional shift of behavior heightens attention to sender and message characteristics. According to EVT, both interactants in the relationship are inherently inclined to make evaluations of one another. These evaluations of one another include assessing the costs and rewards associated with interacting with one another. Communicator valence represents a net assessment of how favorably regarded the other is at that point in time. Both interactants are assumed to arrive at some sort of net assessment of the other that defines the other’s reward valence for a particular interaction. This is called reward valence. When violations occur during this interaction, they trigger a dual interpretation-evaluation process. The recipient of the violation within the relationship are then said to attempt to interpret the violation act towards them and evaluate its desirability (Burgoon, 1978, 1983; Burgoon and Jones, 1976). This appraisal process is important because it acknowledges that violations during communicative interaction may carry symbolic or relational meaning.

The receiver of this violation in the relationship may then try to determine what the act means, and at the same time a judgment is being made as to whether or not the act is desirable or not. The result of this interpretation-evaluation process, as well as the valence attached to the source of the violation, will determine whether or not the communication violation is positively
or negatively balanced. Negative violations are going to produce more unfavorable communication patterns, and outcomes and positive violations are going to produce more favorable ones (Burgoon, 1978, 1983; Burgoon and Jones, 1976).

The reunion between partners is usually a homecoming event planned by the military when the combat partner returns home. According to Drummet, Coleman and Cable, 2003, p. 282, this is a “highly anticipated and romanticized event”. After the honeymoon stage is over with, the couples begin the process of renegotiating the relationship and social roles that each partner is supposed to have. This period can be one of the most challenging times in the relationship, even more than the separation, because these couples must learn how to communicate with each other once again and must learn how to renegotiate their lives together again.

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) has been used to explain and predict attitudes and behaviors from people from a wide variety of cultures and communication styles. These theories studied verbal and non verbal communications, and lead the woman warrior to think that when they cannot interpret their family’s reactions to their far out behavior engrained into their lives because they just came home from combat, to just let their overall attitude towards them dictate how you should communicate with them, verbally and non verbally. This can be extremely hard for the woman warrior because she has been living in and dealing with another culture for the past year, as well as belonging to the military culture at the same time, and balancing how to handle her American social roles and expectations that are assumed of her once she is back from war.
EVT states that if one or more partners expects a strained relationship, and past research has proven that homecomings for these warriors and their families are more of a strain than the actual separation anxiety of the deployment itself, then you should control your deviant tendencies that are engrained in us as humans and do your best to conform to the expectations that are needed from each partner in order to try and make the relationship work once home. The problem with this is that expectations for women combat veterans once home are unclear. The communication styles that they used in their military units do not work with their husbands and children. These women warriors are “scary” to their loved ones. Their loved ones do not understand the reasons why their mother, wife or girlfriend is not the carefree woman she used to be… why she cannot sleep at night, or has trouble caring about issues that mean so much to them, or cannot communicate as well as she used to. This can lead to unhealthy relationships within the home, and relationship maintenance is then needed.

Past Research of Wartime Relational Dialectics and deployments

According to Wiens and Boss (2006), much of the wartime deployment research has focused on particular outcomes such as how to increase family “resiliency” or decrease rates of depression, divorce, stress, or suicide in military families (McCubbin, 1979). While these things are important, research has already been done on this topic. New research needs to be attained based off of the forefront problems facing this rare culture, the female combat veteran. This new research needs to explore how the communication strategies learned while living in a foreign culture and being part of the male dominated military culture has affected their communication with their spouses and children once home in the American culture. The researcher wants to understand how these two extremes are connected in the experiences of the combat female veterans using the theory of Dialectics.
Relational Dialectic Perspective- A relational dialectics perspective assumes that relationships are experienced and defined through the negotiation of contradictions (opposing yet unified needs, desires or forces within a relationship) (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Contradictions are theoretically most obvious during a pivotal time in a relationship; for example, a deployment, and can take many forms across the lifespan of a relationship (Rawlings, 1992). Several contradictions can repeatedly emerge across different relationship types. For example, one of the main contradictions noted by Baxter and Erbert (1999) reported that autonomy-connection was the most important contradiction connected to the pivotal events of physical separation and reunion (deployment). Openness-closedness (struggling with what to communicate and when with your significant other) and inclusion-seclusion (the couples need and want to spend time with others, or to spend time alone with each other) were also reported during this time deployment (separation and reunion) (1999).

Relational partners negotiate contradictions through praxis patterns (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Several praxis patterns have been identified in relational dialects during long term relationship research. These include denial, balance and segmentation. “Denial” represents an effort to subvert, obscure, or deny the presence of a contradiction by legitimating only one dialectical force to the exclusion of countervailing ones. (Baxter and Montgomery, 1998, p.162).

When a couple meets and compromises between two needs, they are using balance. Segmentation represents a pattern of alternating between opposing forces based on the context. As if this isn’t confusing enough, praxis patterns emerge then as either antagonistic or nonantagonistic struggles between the couple. Antagonistic struggles are reflected in patterns where the partners disagree on how to negotiate a contradiction. Couples who agree on how to
negotiate a contradiction reflect nonantagonistic struggles. Relational Dialectics will provide the framework for the research that is needed in order to understand the extremely challenging experiences of the problems associated with communication due to deployments to these military couples and between the military mother and her children.

While looking at Relational Dialectics in intercultural relationships, Gaines and Brennan’s study from 2001 emphasize the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that are most likely to foster long-term satisfaction and stability in intercultural relationships. They claim that during the formation of intercultural relationships, satisfaction is promoted to the extent that partners genuinely appreciate rather than simply tolerate the differences in their respective personalities.

For example, individuals in intercultural relationships initially feel that the novelty that comes along with learning about their spouse’s different experiences as a source of great satisfaction. However, they also argue that those same individuals at the same time may feel that this difference is a source of great stress (Gaines & Brennan 2001, p. 244). This stress can be significantly higher for these female veterans when mixed with the stress of coming home from war and trying to fit the gender norms placed on women in America. Recent studies show that approximately 1.25 million children from infants to teenagers have parents on active duty in the U.S. Military (Ender, 2006). It is extremely important to know these numbers and to understand the communication problems and experiences faced of military families, as their problems now can impact the future success of deployments for our country in the future. For a female combat veteran, forming a relationship with her husband or boyfriend before getting deployed is usually rather easy. Once deployed and back again, the female veteran is now part of another culture which is whole heartedly different than the one she belonged to when she left for war- the
military culture and the war culture, instead of being part of the American culture that was socially engrained into her head since the time she was born. Problem with Relational Dialectics

Where relational dialectics have been used extensively to examine varied family dynamics (Baxter, Braithwaite, Nicholson, 1999; Sabourin, 2003; Schrodt, Baxter, McBride, Braithwaite and Fine, 2006), scholars haven’t used these theories to examine the communication in military families, which would include warrior to significant other and warrior to children. This is because this communication has been recognized as a “roller coaster ride” (Hill, 1949). Baxter and Montgomery (Griffen, 2009, pg.153) are uneasy with the term “relationship maintenance” because that term implies that the goal is to restore their relationships back to the original conditions that they once were. This is pretty much impossible for the women veterans who have now seen war and are struggling for proper communication techniques to use on their children and/or significant others.

This “tug of war” (2009) they see between feeling separated and being connected mean that liking and positive words are only one side of the tug. The other side of the tug, or the pull towards openness, is counter balanced by the oppositional tug of privacy. Most of the time, these female veterans do not speak openly about the things that they saw and encountered in combat, and need their privacy about these matters. Their loved ones do not understand this or understand why, and the privacy that is needed for these women is misconstrued as poor communication. This tension between predictability and spontaneity makes commitment an issue and no guarantee of a future together (2009).

It is time to look at this “tug of war”, and to try and research how communication strategies learned and obtained while on a deployment in a combat zone, especially for women veterans, affects their communication strategies in their families once back in the American
culture. In trying to find an answer to the main question of intercultural couple’s communication problems, the following research questions will guide the study:

**RQ 1: After returning from combat, how have your communication strategies used while in combat affected your communication once home from war?**

The openness-closedness dialectical is central to the maintenance and development of romantic relationships. The openness-closedness dialectical tension refers to the desire to disclose and be open with the relational partner and the desire to be discreet at the same time. Although this contradiction also appears to be a main component in married couples, once the couple is married their premarital expectations seem to be replaced by more realistic ideas about openness-closedness that are based not just on conjugal living (Bochner, 1984). It is because of this, that the relationship redefinition and reinterpretation of both openness-closedness and autonomy-connection issues in these intercultural couples need to be looked at.

**RQ 2: How does the warrior perceive the autonomy-connection and the openness-closedness dialectics in their relationship after their deployment(s)?**

The warrior and her partner after a deployment are constantly adjusting to the fluctuations between contradictory relational forces (Montgomery, 1993). The autonomy-connection dialectical tension refers to the degree of interdependence in the relationship, specifically the contradiction between the desire for the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent (Rawlins, 1983). The dialectic refers to contradictory pulls between maintaining one’s own individuality and establishing connectedness with their relational partner (Rawlins, 1983).
RQ 3: What is the impact of American culture, military culture, and war culture on communication in these interpersonal relationships? How has the role of being a female in a combat zone affected their interpersonal life?

Scholars of interpersonal relationships are increasing interested in using dialectical theory to examine ways a relationship system changes in response to the tensions between contradictory relational dynamics (Baxter, 1988; Montgomery and Baxter, 1998). The dialectical perspective has provided a very important means for understanding the complex processes of relational tensions and turning points (Baxter, 1990) and to explaining various relational phenomena such as friendship and romantic premarital relationships (Altman, Vinsel and Brown, 1989, VanLear, 1991). Much less research has focused on the role of communication is managing marital dialectics, although a few studies do exist (e.g., Cissna, Cox and Bochner, 1990: Sabourin and Stamp, 1995; Stamp and Banski, 1992). This study will look at intercultural communication in a military relationship and how it affects communication once home.
CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

SCOPE

In order to understand the importance of the need of performing in depth interviews with female combat veterans about communication styles used while in combat and how those styles affected their communication once home with their families, it is important to know just how many people this affects on a daily basis. In 2005, almost three million Americans were serving in the military, including 1.4 million on active duty, 1.1 million Reservists and National Guard members (Department of Defense, 2005). Recent studies indicate that there are approximately 1.25 million children from infants to teenagers that have parents on active duty in the US Military (Ender, 2006). Out of these statistics and as of 2010, 230,000 Women have served in a combat zone in Iraq or Afghanistan, making up eleven percent of the total deployed population, according to the Pentagon.

http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2011/03/ap-female-gis-struggle-with-higher-divorce-rate-030811/, Female warriors struggle with a higher rate of divorce:

About 220,000 women have served in Afghanistan and Iraq in roles ranging from helicopter pilots to police officers. Last year, 7.8 percent of women in the military got a divorce, compared with 3 percent of military men, according to Pentagon statistics. Among the military’s enlisted corps, nearly 9 percent of women saw their marriages end, compared with a little more than 3 percent of the men. It has an effect, too, on military kids. The military has more single moms than dads, and an estimated 30,000 of them have deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. About half of all married women in the military are married to a fellow service
member, compared with less than 10 percent of military men. While it can be an advantage to be married to someone who understands military life, balancing two military careers poses challenges.

**Methodology**

This research design entailed an exploration and assessment through one on one interviews talking about communication problems that arise after combat for these females, based on their cross cultural lives lived. The interviewees had been informed that the interview would cover their military experiences and relationship issues due to communication problems beforehand and had verbally agreed to the interview. The participant’s interviews were audio taped and written down, both with the participant’s permission.

These semi-structured, hour long interviews included closed ended questions to attain demographics on the participants, and open-ended questions which gave qualitative information regarding how intercultural combat communication attained while in a combat zone has changed their communication lives since coming home from war. The researcher personally administered the one on one interview, and informed the participants about the anonymousness of the interview. The introductions were kept to a minimum, minimizing explanation and interpretation of questions.

Qualitative research is contextual research. It is also research that, in the feminist tradition, can “attend specifically to the role of affect in the production of knowledge” (Fonow and Cook, 1991, p.9). This design is qualitative because it deals with personal issues of the subjects’ lives through in depth observations of the participants which the researcher will observe and take down recorded notes during the one on one interview for validity. Since the
researcher is also a nine year Army female combat veteran that has experienced everything first hand that is am going to be asked during the interviews, the ethnographic research needed to fit into this rare culture has already been finished. All of the ten females that were interviewed trust the researcher, either because they have served with the researcher in Iraq or know the researchers background and have taken the time to get to know the researcher personally over the past nine years. This research is so unique because there will not be any walls of intimacy to break through.

The method used in this research project involved ethnographic writing. This qualitative research design centered on a very specific, rare clientele which consisted of female Iraqi and Afghanistan combat veterans. Ethnographic research involves a good cultural representative, and is not necessarily interested in numbers as much as immersing oneself in that group and obtaining observations of the participant’s everyday life and everyday behavior. Naturalistic Observations and research are commonly known to include open-ended questionnaires, in depth-interviews, ethnographic studies, and participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989; Merton, Fishke and Kendall, 1990; Spradley, 1980; Adlerand Adler, 1987, 1994).

According to Spradley (1979), ethnographic research is “the work of describing a culture” (pg.3). Also, according to Spradley (1979), the goal of ethnographic research is “to understand another way of life from a point of view” (pg.3). Even though this research approach is commonly used by Anthropologists to study exotic cultures and primitive societies, Spradley (1979), suggests that this type of research is a useful tool for “understanding how other people see their own experiences (pg.iv). Spradley (1979) goes on to state that “rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people” (pg.3). This research is going to include learning from this rare culture, the female combat veteran, and having their voices heard.
Two methodological limitations of some previous studies on dialectical tensions in marital relationship have been studied in the past; these were civilian couples and were not part of the military culture. The majority of these studies (e.g. Cissna et al., 1990; Rawlins, 1992; Sabourin and Stamp, 1995; Stamp and Banski, 1992; Vangelisti and Huston, 1994), collect data from only one partner, which I will also be doing.

Interviewees

Initial contact with the interviewees was made through Facebook to each female combat veteran’s wall that the researcher knew had served in Iraq or Afghanistan personally. The interview invitation was sent out to some (within Washington State and California) Vet Centers, as well as through some employees that worked for a Veterans Service Organization, so that they could forward the invite to any female combat veterans that served in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Since the sample size of this group is only going to be ten female combat veterans, which is a minority culture in America, the research used was non-probability sampling. These participants were selected from the population in some nonrandom manner. For the sake of this research, the non-random manner was through social media outlets, such as the researchers Facebook contacts, and through emails sent out to the local Vet Centers throughout California and Washington State. Since this group is so small and very inclusive, the goal should not be to obtain a representative sample of the entire veteran population (males and females). The researcher then handpicked who would be able to take the survey, based on their combat experience, so Purposive Sampling was also used in order to achieve this research on this group of participants.
In order to qualify to participate in the interview, these female combat veterans had to have spent at least one tour in Iraq or Afghanistan, and all ended up being part of the Marines, Army, or Navy. They were either still active duty, honorably discharged from the military, or medically retired for a physical disability or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury caused while in combat. These women have earned the same combat badges and awards as their male counterparts. These interviewees found out that this research was being accomplished and volunteered to do the interview, in order for their voices to hopefully be heard.

Procedures

These one on one interviews took place over a period of a week, and the participants were given two choices, either a one on one phone discussion, or they could fill out the questionnaire anonymously and email it back to the researcher. Both ways of interviewing were set up and conducted as a dialog between the participant and the researcher. The researcher used ethnographic research as the form of research for this thesis, and it worked well because she knew all of the participants and was able to get trustful communication out of the participants.

In this study, the interviewer first asked the participant several demographic questions (see appendix A) to loosen up the conversation and to measure combat experience and relationship status before and after their deployment(s). The interviewer then asked more open ended questions, and asked them to describe or tell stories of their experiences while in country, of their communication strategies, and their interpersonal relationships once home from war. During these open ended questions the researcher made sure that the participants were alright emotionally as these topics are of a sensitive subject. The participant’s recollections of these questions and issues allowed the researcher to gain extremely in-depth answers to the questions,
which provided the basis for the overall answers to the research questions based off of the communication theories used in the research. All of these participants remain completely anonymous.

Ethical Concerns

According to the Belmont Report (1979) which includes ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects on research, three ethical concerns need to be covered when researching people. The first ethical concern is respect for the participants. While respecting these people, two things need to be assured. The first is that individuals should be treated as autonomous subjects, and that these people are entitled to protection. In order to respect the participant’s autonomy, the researcher will be respecting all voices and opinions of the participant and will not change or obstruct their opinions. The participants are also entitled to protection. These participants will know beforehand, and will consent before the interview even begins, that all of their opinions and answers to these questions will remain completely anonymous. These participants will enter into this interview on a volunteer basis and on their own free will, and are free to stop the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable with information on where to get professional help if needed, based on the intensity of these questions.

The second ethical consideration, according to the Belmont report that is needed for the participants is Beneficence, or obligation. The participants are not only respected and kept anonymous; but they are kept from any harm that may be caused by this interview and the interviewer will make every effort for their well being during the duration of the research taking place. This ethical consideration will be taken extremely seriously during the duration of the
interview, based on the fact that the topics being discussed could possibly bring back flashbacks and may be a trigger for the warriors that have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from being a combat veteran.

The third ethical consideration is justice. Justice, in relation to ethical considerations during a research study, means that the interviewer needs to treat all participants equally. In this study, no matter what military branch that these women served under, or how long their combat tour was, the interviewer will ask the same questions and treat every subject equally.

Analysis

According to Matthews (2005), much is written on how to analyze qualitative data. Most researchers agree that the qualitative interview process requires a lot of time with the data reading and rereading, coding and recoding, writing memos and notes, and making connections between all of the questions, until the conclusion emerges that is grounded in the data. The proof of the quality of the analysis is in the results section of the paper, and this thesis has plenty of results based off of the participant’s interviews. The approach that the researcher used to do these interviews followed the analytic induction model, where she was guided by a general hypothesis before collecting her data (Manning, 1991). That hypothesis was then revised as the data emerged in the interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The results of this qualitative study contribute to the new understanding of this rare culture of the female combat veteran, and the communication issues that arises from being part of this culture.

Informant

This ethnographic research design used an informant. The informant used in this research design is a Director of Combat Stress at a large Veterans Service Organization based on
the East Coast. They have been in this position for three years, and have their Master’s Degree in psychology from an Ivy League University. The informant is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to veteran related issues once home from war, and specifically gender related issues of these veterans. Once the researcher attained the interviews, the informant then reviewed the interviews and found the face validity in the research.
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

Introduction

This research design entailed an exploration and assessment through one on one interviews talking about communication problems that arise after combat for Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans, based on their cross cultural lives lived. The interviewees had been informed that the interview would cover their military experiences and relationship issues due to communication problems beforehand and had verbally agreed to the interview. The participant’s interviews were conducted and written down, both with the participant’s permission. The total number of female combat veteran participants was ten, speaking in great detail about their experiences pertaining to the research questions. This chapter represents the results of the study and of how female combat veterans are affected by communication attained while in another culture, belonging to two cultures at once (the military and American culture) and discusses the communication problems associated once home from war.

Data Analysis

These semi-structured, hour long interviews included closed ended questions to attain demographics on the participants, and open-ended questions which gave qualitative information regarding how intercultural combat communication attained while in a combat zone has changed their communication lives since coming home from war. The data collected for this study was fairly simple. There were a total number of twenty one questions, and all of the participants were able to understand each question, answered accordingly, and knew that they did not have to answer the question if they felt uncomfortable in any way.
Results of the Study

Out of the ten participants, six were Army Combat Veterans, two were Marines, and two were Navy. These women had a plethora of jobs while in a combat zone, and these included Unit Supply Specialist, Mortician, Civil Affairs Operations Non Commissioned Officer, who’s job duties included serving “as primary point of contact between Brigade and higher headquarter in all matters dealing with deployment updates: Collected, prepared, and disseminated unit status reports which included information dealing with training, personnel, security clearances, logistics, etc.”

As one participant said, “During my last deployment (in Afghanistan) I served as the Air Operations NCO: I scheduled flights (inter and intra-theater) for all personnel assigned/attached to my headquarters; I attended air meetings where final decision was made, by supporting unit, whether flights would take place. Flights consisted of military air travel, civilian, fixed and rotor wing. In addition I served as the J3 NCOIC responsible to brief command staff, on a daily basis”, Automated Logistics Specialist, Network Administrator, Administrative Specialist (but never actually did that job once), Civil Affairs Sergeant, Administrative Chief, Surface Warfare Officer, and Embark/Logistics, 38B Civil Affairs Sergeant – rebuilding the infrastructure of a country during wartime, natural disasters, assisting displaced persons and refugees.”

Also, many ranks were interviewed in this research, from Private E-2, E-3, E-4(3), E-5(2), E-7, E-8, 0-2. The participants spent their tour(s) in The Persian Gulf, Iraq or Afghanistan. One participant explained “I invaded Iraq with 3rd ID on March 19th, 2003 we traveled from objective to objective. In late April my unit was transferred to the 101st airborne division around early May we settled in Mosul, Iraq. That is where we stayed until leaving in late February”.

In regards to what kind of unit the participants were in while in a combat zone, the participant’s answers varied as much as their ranks. Answers included “I was in 40th transportation company, a support company of truck drivers who drove gasoline trucks to fuel tanks and aircraft.” Other units included Medical, Forward Support Battalion – in support of Tank, Scout and Infantry Units, and Combined Joint Task Force-Consequence Management (CJTF-CM), 91st Combat Engineers, 1st Cavalry Division, and they spent from eight to eighteen months in country doing combat, and some even longer stateside training to go overseas.

Themes

Several themes were brought up from these one on one interviews. These themes included equally long and stressful days as their male counterparts, their relationship status’ that changed based on their deployments; communication used while in country was not always the best because of their gender, and that those communication strategies learned to survive in a combat zone did not transfer well back at home with their interpersonal relationships.

Equally Long and stressful days as their male counterparts

Participant comments ranged from one spectrum to the other in terms of a “typical” day while in Iraq or Afghanistan, but with one thing in common: long hours and the same exact job as their male counterparts. These comments ranged from “Receiving and processing remains of fallen soldiers/sailors and Marines”, to another voicing her story as:

“Well, there was nothing typical about it, it was at hell and they didn’t serve ice water. I woke up at 0 dark thirty and did flights welcomed the new guys into our hell and said good bye to the guys leaving our hell. Then pack them up bring them to their new exciting hotel called “Tent City” and then reported to my NCOIC. I usually then packed
some gear and did deliveries but while doing my job always had time to chat up the locals and scare them into supplying me with goods that our own government could not supply such as…Gatorade, Porn, alcohol, and other things I could get my hands on. You see Iraq is a funny place...There is no value of money everything works on the barter system. It could be quite lucrative and could make time a little easier there”.

In another branch of the military, this female soldier spoke of her typical days fighting this war.

“I woke at between 0430 to 0530 daily, conducted PT and showered, ate breakfast by 0730. At 0730 I had to submit several reports via satellite/digital technology and thus began my daily duties of picking up shipments/supplies, rerouting supplies to proper area, checking on the status of orders, maintaining records, issuing driver’s licenses for missions, collecting repairable parts, conducting inventory of supplies/parts received and ordering parts/supplies electronically. Additional duties of guard tower duty and TC or driver for missions as required, often daily. I would sometimes not eat lunch and often ate dinner at my desk if someone brought it to me. I would shower at between 1830 and 1930 and either do more work, workout or go to bed, especially if I had night guard duty of which we often were scheduled daily of two hours to avoid four hour shifts.”

Even though their jobs were the same as their male counterparts, being a female in the military and being a female in Iraq or Afghanistan immersed in another culture was a completely different thing. As one participant said,

“There is a big difference between all three: 1) as a woman, we (Americans) have more rights than many other women in the world. We can drive freely throughout our country,
we can vote, we have the same choices men have whereas women from Afghanistan were seldom seen on the streets but if they were out there, they wore burkas, they were not allowed to sit and eat with the men, they did not allow strangers to take pictures of them (only some smiled and looked at my camera when I took photos), most would cover their faces when they saw me with my camera. 2) As a soldier, my superiors (commander and CSM) did not have much faith in the competence of women (in our unit.) The Cdr and CSM decided to place most females in the “green zone” and males in civil affairs teams (which were out throughout different bases in Afghanistan. I personally heard them have that discussion. As an example, an E-6/SSG. was designated as the 1SG for our command versus selecting the female First Sergeant from our Brigade (who also deployed with us.) I was ostracized by speaking up on behalf of other women who were sexually harassed and for others who experienced gender discrimination (just like I did)."

Another participant painted this vivid image: “Not only was I treated or regarded differently as a female soldier but being a small Asian female made it even more difficult. I was seen as more of a novelty and more often times than not, Iraqi men would call me a “China Doll”. When it came to pulling security or having to point my gun at someone, it seemed I wasn’t taken seriously. In turn, I would have to “prove” myself and my seriousness with action, such as resorting to use my asp or using my rifle as a crowd control stick”.

One participant told a story about how her communication as a leader, she felt, wasn’t taken seriously because of the fact that she was a female. “I had a junior enlisted sailor get into some trouble because he was stupid, it was really irritating that I had to deal with what I felt was juvenile bull shit with everything going on at the time. So in anger I decided to rip into him and yell and kick a chair across the room. It only served to make him “tune me out” and I doubt it
was very effective. I am just not a yeller and it doesn’t seem to have the same effect as a big man yelling. So I never used that style again, I prefer the more authoritative and eerily calm approach.”

One participant told her story of the politics behind treated different in all three of these different cultures:

“Obviously there were the big things like some of the nationals wouldn’t talk to me in the beginning, or they took offense to things because I’m a female. I think people expect us to go over there and not be able to keep up with males or need help or struggle because we are females. And unfortunately there are some females that give us bad names by playing off their gender for special treatment. But then you have some really great females that are excellent leaders that set the standard. People see a female on a convoy and it’s an issue. The female isn’t the issue, the person with the issue is. For example, when _____ died, (the only female in our unit to die a combat death) in my opinion, the men had a harder time with it than the females did because they felt it should’ve been them or they should’ve done more to protect her. Then they didn’t want any of us going back out on convoys. While I appreciate their concern, that is punishing women that want to go out and do a good job and make a difference. We know what we signed up for”.

Even though these women were treated differently on many levels, they discussed their communication styles with their male counterparts in great length. Some of the participants responses included “The best communication style that I can think of that worked was that I talked like one of the guys, profanity and joking seemed to be effective with them”, another said
that “The best communication style was to “Holding your own” What I mean by this, is there was NO time to decide to make a decision, just had to make the decision and go with it. Definitely no girly talk, I communicated with confidence and determination. I did not ask to get things done; I told the troops what I needed to get things done. Now, there was a difference with the Brits and Czech’s though, they were a bit kinder and gentler to the women”. Another reoccurring theme that was said was “I had to be “one of the boys” With my team, I felt like myself, another dedicated soldier. But with the rest of the 91st Combat Engineers, I had to be extra firm and all business all the time. That’s not to say that there weren’t still many active duty men who paid a lot of unnecessary and unwanted attention to me. It made my job difficult at times and I had to keep my distance from most of them unless I worked directly with them”.

“Soon after being in country, I was promoted to Corporal. I was recognized as a leader and at being very capable to hold my own. I had no problem at any point with my communication style especially when it came to my job. However, there was one time when I went to an internet café and was IM’ing some friends back home. Apparently I had forgotten to log off and a few days later, the Commander called me into his office saying that friends back home had contacted the Red Cross regarding my safety. Somebody had posed as me on my IM account and was recounting to them horrific stories about things I had to endure during my missions in Iraq. Everything they told my friends were false and since they thought it was actually me they were talking to, they called the Red Cross as an emergency situation. At that point, I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere by myself. I felt I was being punished for the wrong doings of another soldier, presumably a male soldier. I usually wasn’t one to be at a loss of words nor do I take things lightly especially when it came to my independence or integrity. This time, I felt
powerless and unable to truly communicate what I was feeling. Being in a male dominated work environment, I really felt silenced”.

Relationship status change

The second theme, the negative relationship status’s since being home from their combat service, was predominant. Out of these ten women, three are still single and voiced it was because of the many attributes of being a female in the military, including “I didn’t have a significant other at the time of my deployment because I have found that men have insecurities or issues with me being a female in the military... their loss”. Another stated, “I was engaged before Iraq and had the distinct pleasure of getting my “Dear Jane” letter while in Iraq and joined the crew of many members like me. We were the “Dear J” crew”. Another, who is now divorced, shares a timeline of her last marriage, due to being in the military and because of her deployment.

“In August 2004- I retired after 20 ½ yrs of active duty in the Army (and 2 ½ in the Reserves)...In August 2004 – Soon after retirement I moved to Riverview, FL to follow my spouse who was reassigned to McDill AFB, Tampa, FL. In October 2005 – I divorced my spouse and moved to an apartment in Tampa, FL. In August 2006 – I returned to Texas and moved in (6 months) with my parents. The reason why I annotated the time frame is to show the turmoil that experienced after returning from deployment. I divorced my spouse approximately one year after returning from Afghanistan”.

Another participant stated “I divorced the husband I had when I was in Iraq, and remarried in 2006, but have since filed for divorce. My relationship with my current husband is strained and at an end”. Another was divorced before their deployment, and another stated that “I met my significant other during the deployment and subsequently married him; however, we
both love each other but CONSTANTLY battle. My kids, however, are now 24 and 26, at the
time of my deployment both were in high school and I was so close to them, naturally, and now
although I love them to death that emotional connection I used to have with them does not seem
to be there anymore.” Another veteran has acquired a significant other and is engaged since
coming home from her deployment.

Interpersonal Communication Changes

Another reoccurring theme was interpersonal communication changes. These
participants were asked how the communication has changed before and after their deployment
in their personal relationship (and with your children, if applicable), and their responses were all
similar, and that their family and relationships definitely suffered from the lack of
communication that was happening based on the communication acquired by these women to
survive in a war zone. Their answers included “The military has affected all aspects of my
ability to communicate. From the terminology I use to the non-verbal body language exhibited,
what was readily understood in the military culture is virtually misunderstood in civilian life”,
“My communication with others has changed drastically over the years since returning. I ha
ded no problems prior to deployment but after, I kept to myself, always angry, and in turn, my anger
was taken out on myself as well as others around me. I was so numbed out that emotions were
not a part of my everyday existence. So my feelings were never communicated in a healthy
way”.

Another participant stated that “Communication...I do not talk about Iraq to my family
and friends that is in my past and where it should stay. It is a struggle every day. For the first 3
years there was NO communication. Then I slowly started to open a little to my family but they
still walked on eggshells while around me. We learned that some things are better left unsaid”.
Another quoted “I think I have a lot less patience and maybe I can be a little harsh because of it. I feel that as a woman in the military you have to be harsher than you normally would or you don’t get taken as serious. If I spoke the way I do in my personal like while in the military I think it would give the impression that I am a pushover. So, I think that I do snap a little bit quicker and say things I wouldn’t have before”.

Interpersonal communication problems not only affected women in relationships, but the single participants as well with all of their family and friends. As one participant said, “Since I was not in a relationship I can only think of what family and friends said when I got back from country. I know the first thing they told me was the use of profanity had increased, civilian friends from high school told me “I had changed” that “I wasn’t fun anymore” so I lost a lot of friends from high school following the year I got back.” These communications learned while in country do not fit in an intercultural lifestyle, and as one participant quoted, this communication attained “Tends to be hurtful because I am very to the point, I bark out orders because I feel there is no room for error, and therefore I don’t want a discussion.”

Children were also affected by their mom’s deployment. Out of the ten participants, 5 did not have children, and 5 did. Of the five participants that were mothers, they all had the same story, that the lack of communication between themselves and their children was extremely evident once home. As one participant quoted, “Apparently this “ESP style” of communication does not work well in the family unit. I have had to work on my communication with my family and work past the anger that they just don’t get it”. Another said, “I think that the way you communicate in country isn’t necessarily the way you should try to communicate at home. Like I said, I didn’t change who I was the whole time but at home is a different story. You can’t come home and try to have a relationship and talk to your significant other the way you do with your
fellow Soldiers. I feel that I NEED to be a little more disciplined and strict when communicating in the military to be taken seriously but can risk being more loving and affectionate while at home. It’s just two different worlds”. Lastly, a participant stated “I have been working on becoming the kinder softer mama, even though my kids are grown, I now have a step-son, and barking out orders is just not the way to go. Honestly, sometimes I have to just bite my tongue and not say anything at all, because I am in fear I am going to bark out an order rather than ask for something to be done. My tolerance level is literally at ZERO”.

Discussion

Overall, it appears that communication acquired while being in several intercultural relationships for these women warriors did have a negative effect on their personal lives once home. The communication styles attained, such as being assertive, did not work so well for them with their children and husbands once home. Out of the ten participants, four of these women are still single because they have found it hard to be in a relationship with either a civilian man or another male combat veteran, two are married but both voiced concern about communication in their current marriages, one is engaged after being home for six years, and voiced that it took that long, and counseling to get to where her relationship is at today, and three are divorced. Two of those divorces voiced that they felt it was because of the deployment that they are divorced, and the third voiced that it was because of infidelity from being away so much in the military that caused the divorce, not necessarily the actual deployment.

RQ 1: After returning from combat, how has your communication strategies used while in combat affected your communication once home from war?
The openness-closedness dialectic is central to the maintenance and development of romantic relationships. The openness-closedness dialectical tension refers to the desire to disclose and be open with the relational partner and the desire to be discreet at the same time. Although this contradiction also appears to be a main component in married couples, once the couple is married their premarital expectations seem to be replaced by more realistic ideas about openness-closedness that are based not just on conjugal living (Bocher, 1984). It is because of this, that the relationship redefinition and reinterpretation of both openness-closedness and autonomy-connection issues in these intercultural couples were looked at.

This form of dialectical tension is felt throughout this entire research, and is strong. A great quote to back up this tension from one of the participant’s states: “Because I had been isolated for so long I had a very hard time communicating anything with my family. I was not even allowed to go home at first and could not begin to help my children as I had been used to being alone. I shut down and acted as an absolute authority initially. My battle buddies were the only ones I really spoke to unless asked a direct question or given a direct command or order. So it worked well in keeping me isolated, but also kept the healing process from occurring with my children and it did not help that I ended up getting sent to the field twice (for my unit field rotations were frequent and lasted up to three months at a time) upon return to Germany. It was not a time of communication of any kind for me or them”. This open-closedness dialectical conversation did not happen with this female once returning from war, and was shown that this is extremely common throughout the ten participants that participated in this survey.

**RQ 2: How does the warrior perceive the autonomy-connection and the openness-closedness dialectics in their relationship after their deployment(s)?**
The warrior and her partner after a deployment are constantly adjusting to the fluctuations between contradictory relational forces (Montgomery, 1993). The autonomy-connection dialectical tension refers to the degree of interdependence in the relationship, specifically the contradiction between the desire for the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent (Rawlins, 1983). The dialectic refers to contradictory pulls between maintaining one’s own individuality and establishing connectedness with their relational partner (Rawlins, 1983).

Many participants answers showed their frustration with the constant adjustment of the desire of freedom to be independent (not in the military or in a war zone anymore), and the degree of interdependence in their current relationships. As one participant stated, “I think that the way you communicate in country isn’t necessarily the way you should try to communicate at home. Like I said, I didn’t change who I was the whole time but at home, that is a different story. You can’t come home and try to have a relationship and talk to your significant other the way you do with your fellow Soldiers. I feel that I NEED to be a little more disciplined and strict when communicating in the military to be taken seriously but can risk being more loving and affectionate while at home. It’s just two different worlds”. This pull of contradictory relational forces is a daily struggle for these women warriors, and the autonomy-connection dialectical tension is a balance that these women try to find at home after being in combat, in order to just communicate effectively with their loved ones.

**RQ 3: What is the impact of American culture, military culture, and war culture on communication in these interpersonal relationships? How has the role of being a female in a combat zone affected their interpersonal life?**
Scholars of interpersonal relationships are increasing interested in using dialectical theory to examine ways a relationship system changes in response to the tensions between contradictory relational dynamics (Baxter, 1988; Montgomery and Baxter, 1998). The dialectical perspective has provided a very important means for understanding the complex processes of relational tensions and turning points (Baxter, 1990) and to explaining various relational phenomena such as friendship and romantic premarital relationships (Altman, Vinsel and Brown, 1989, VanLear, 1991). Much less research has focused on the role of communication is managing marital dialectics, although a few studies do exist (e.g., Cissna, Cox and Bochner, 1990; Sabourin and Stamp, 1995; Stamp and Banskì, 1992). This study looked at intercultural communication in a military relationship and how it affects communication once home, and found interesting results.

These participants voiced their stories during this research on being a female in Iraq or Afghanistan. One stated, “Obviously there were the big things like some of the nationals wouldn’t talk to me in the beginning, or they took offense to things because I’m a female. I think people expect us to go over there and not be able to keep up with males or need help or struggle because we are females. And unfortunately there are some females that give us bad names by playing off their gender for special treatment. But then you have some really great females that are excellent leaders that set the standard. People see a female on a convoy and it’s an issue. The female isn’t the issue, the person with the issue is. For example, when ____ died, (the only female in our unit to die a combat death) in my opinion, the men had a harder time with it than the females did because they felt it should’ve been them or they should’ve done more to protect her. Then they didn’t want any of us going back out on convoys. While I appreciate their concern, that is punishing women that want to go out and do a good job and make a difference. We know what we signed up for”.
These contradictory relational dynamics with their peers and another culture while in a combat zone overflow into their interpersonal relationships once home. As a participant said, “Apparently this “ESP style” of communication does not work well in the family unit. I have had to work on my communication with my family and work past the anger that they just don’t get it”. All theories suggested earlier in this research, EVT theory, Baxter’s relational dialectic theory with an emphasis on intercultural relationships, prove to be correct and in tune with the results of this research.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

In regards to the reliability of this research design, a perceived weakness might be defining “combat experience.” By this, is to mean, to what extent is their actual combat experience? Not every single combat veteran comes from the same background and has the same combat experience. This can vary by them being in different branches of the military, different lengths of deployment, number of times they were deployed, what their rank was: Officer vs. enlisted and job, and where they were deployed to. Additionally, how are the different levels of combat experience to be quantified? With the information that the researcher has based on personal experience, and knowing what branches served where during this war and for how long, she knows which deployments would have been “harder” than others based on their branch of service and length of time in country.

For example, Marines were in Fallujah at the beginning of the Iraqi War, and a Marine’s deployment is 7 months long, compared to the Army’s 12-18 month tours. Air Force is only deployed 3-4 months at a time. By asking the questions “What branch were you in and where were you deployed and what years, it will be easier to evaluate how much their deployment has affected their personal life once home. Since the research design is reliable, the validity, or “The extent to which a measure reflects only the desired construct without contamination from other systematically varying constructs,” of my research design is also high. Also, the construct validity, “The degree to which both the independent and dependent variables accurately reflect or measure the constructs of interest,” of this design is also very strong (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002, p. 32). The researcher also used time in service as a measurement of likelihood to experience more traumas in country, which in turn could lead to a harder transition once home.
Further Study Recommendations

According to the anonymous informant (2011):

“Renee Peloquin’s Master’s thesis addresses a critical issue within the current generation of warrior, and no doubt, resonates with previous generations of women whose service was not recognized. Clinical studies have devoted limited research to female combat veterans and the implications of combat and operational stress on various factors of their life. Most research is limited to basic statistics and personal blogs about issues related to females serving within the military. More than 212,000 women service members have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan representing 11 percent of the deployed force (VA Healthcare Report). Of that, 137 service women have died in the Global War on Terror as of February 1, 2011 (VA Healthcare Report).

From reading the qualitative interviews, much of the above observations are supported by the participants in this study. More research is needed in this field to further identify specific risk factors for female warriors and how the readjustment process as it relates to relationships can be improved. As the role of female service members continues to expand, the impact of their service will further affect society. This research only scratches the surface of communication issues that arise from female combat veterans fighting for our freedoms at a time of war in another culture, and further research needs to be done with extra variables such as how Military Sexual Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can effect trust issues with their interpersonal communication and relationships once home. Also, studies should also be conducted finding out whether or not female veterans married to male veterans have the same communication issues as these participants, or if they are married to civilian males what different communication issues may arise.
Conclusion

In conclusion, studies have shown that just over half (51.4 percent) of male combat veterans believed the women in their units performed as well as the men, with only 23.6 percent believing that men performed better. Nevertheless, 47.1 percent of the male veterans believed that women should not be allowed in direct combat units, while 39.9 percent believed women should be allowed to volunteer for those roles within the military (Zeigler and Gunderson, 2005). With the results of this study, according to these women, they do the same exact job as their male counterparts. It does not matter what your official job title is, but at the end of the day every combat veteran, regardless of gender, wears the same uniform, and is fighting for the same American freedoms that they are reminded of when dealing with a middle eastern culture.

It is with this kind of research, and with new organizations such as Wounded Warrior Project, that will make a difference in the future for these women combat veterans. Their invisible voices need to be heard. Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) was originally aimed to explain effects of proxemic violations (Burgoon, 1978, 1983; Burgoon and Jones, 1976). After this initial research, the theory was then expanded to include other kinds of non verbal and verbal communication violations. EVT begins with the assumption that people have numerous deeply ingrained expectations about the ways others communicate. Communication expectancies are "cognitions about the anticipated communication behavior of specific others, as embedded within and shaped by social norms for the contemporaneous roles, relationships, and context" (Burgoon and Walther, 1990, pg. 236). These social expectations are learned and reinforced within one’s culture starting at birth, and operate outside conscious awareness. These social expectations produce habituated, automated behavior patterns. This includes women in American society. These social expectations for American women are turned upside down when
they decide to join the military, and choose to fight a war which has long been thought to be part of a man’s social expectation and role within society.

These communication expectancies explained by EVT were brought up throughout the interviews and the mixture of cultures, social expectations, and gender roles in the military did indeed affect these participants communication with their significant others and children. The Openness-closedness- dialectical tension, the desire to disclose and be open with their relational partner, and the balance and desire to be discreet at the same time definitely shined through these interviews, and affects these participants on a daily basis. The results of the interviews show that it is not only the female combat veteran that suffers from her time away from her family due to the deployment, but the lack of communication due to living in three different cultures at once for these women is extremely prevalent and is a side effect from these deployments.

The autonomy-connection dialectical tension was also shown throughout the interviews. The contradiction between the desire for the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent for these women with their significant others is shown through all of the stories of communication problems in their marriages, which cause a lot of these women to get divorced or stay single and not get married.

The strength of female warriors, the dual roles played down range and in civilian life, and the level of influence in our national mission for safety, is critical to preserve and maintain. Female combat veterans serve along their male counterparts and encounter most of the same combat experiences as their peers. However, there tends to be a perception that service women play a less integral role within the combat experience. Often, women serve without having other service women to relate to on a daily basis. While there are similarities and universal reactions to trauma, female communicative reactions to trauma are often different than their male counterparts,
given the obvious biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that compound with military gender cultural norms. This research has mixed communication theory with current communication problems associated with these intercultural, gender issues that women and their families face in the military today.
References


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Hoyle, Harris, & Judd (2002,). Research Methods in Social Relations. (pp. 32).


Appendix A Interview Guide

Because of the nature of these questions, if at any time you feel uneasy or do not want to continue, please let the interviewer know and you can stop at any time. All answers to these questions will remain completely anonymous, so please be as honest as possible during your interview. This study is going to overview how communication strategies needed in order to survive while in Iraq or Afghanistan have affected your communication strategies once home in your personal relationships. Please be aware of these resources available to you at no cost, should these questions bring up any concerns. For Active Duty Service members, Military One Source is available for free counseling services at 1-800-342-9647. For all other service members and veterans, The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 at 1-800-273-8255.

1. What branch of the military did you serve in?
2. What was your MOS? (job description)
3. What was your rank while in country?
4. Where did you spend your tour(s)?
5. What kind of unit were you with? (i.e. Infantry, support etc)
6. How long did you spend in country?
7. What year(s) were you in country?
8. Describe for me a typical day while you were in Iraq or Afghanistan.
9. How long have you been home?
10. Since you have been home, how has your relationship status changed-Still with significant other, separated, divorced?
11. Are you retired or still in the military?
12. Marital status while deployed?

13. Marital status now? If divorced, do you feel the deployment contributed to this?

14. If someone were to ask you how the communication has changed before to after your deployment in your personal relationship (and with your children, if applicable), what would you say?

15. Do you have any children? If so, how many? Ages?

16. If you have children, how did the deployment affect them?

17. How were you treated differently culturally as a female in Iraq or Afghanistan?
   Can you explain some examples of some cultural differences between being an American woman, an American Soldier, and living in a Middle Eastern Country?

18. What communication styles did you feel worked best between you and your male counterpart while in country?

19. I’d like you to tell me a story about an event that you feel best describes the good or the bad communication used while in country in your unit.

20. Did these communication strategies used while in country work once home with your significant other and/or kids? Why or why not?

21. Describe the best or most positive forms of communication with your significant other (and/or children). Now describe the most challenging or difficult aspects of your communication with them once home. Has your combat experiences affected these forms of communication?
Appendix B

Verbal Consent for one on one interview

Hello, my name is Renee Peloquin and I am in Gonzaga’s Communication and Leadership graduate program. I am an eight year Army Veteran, with a 14 month tour in Iraq from 2004-2005. I am seeking your assistance with a research project that I am completing for one of my courses. This interview should take less than an hour, and your participation is completely voluntary, but by answering the questions I ask you, you are implying that you willingly consent to these interviews. I anticipate no risks or inconveniences in completing this instrument. However, if you feel threatened or hurt by responding, please do not feel that you have to finish the interview. Just let me know that you are not comfortable and we will quit at any time. Your responses are completely confidential, so be as frank as possible. This is not a test -- your honest responses are the only correct answers.

For concerns regarding the content of this interview, and the results of the associated study, contact Renee Peloquin at rpeloquin@zagmail.gonzaga.edu. Thank you.