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An Examination of the Relationship Between Community Engagement and Military Spouse Marital Satisfaction

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND
MILITARY SPOUSE MARITAL SATISFACTION

by

ALEXANDRA GILBERT

(Under the Direction of Janice Steirn)

ABSTRACT

The goal of this research study is to assist in filling the gap in research on military spouses, beyond deployment and employment issues. Marital satisfaction is a known factor in service member retention and job performance, however very little research on what aspects may be related to military spouse marital satisfaction has been conducted. Military communities have been shown to be an important source of social support for military spouses, however few studies have considered spouses' involvement in their larger communities. This study's hypothesis states that a relationship between military spouses' marital satisfaction and their community engagement off-base exists. The participants were 93 female Army spouses, mostly stationed at either Ft. Stewart or Ft. Benning, GA. These spouses responded to a survey which included measures on marital satisfaction, social support, stress, personality, in-group identity, demographics, and community engagement. The main form of analysis was a two-tailed Pearson's correlation. Analysis did not find a significant relationship between the spouses' marital satisfaction and their community engagement off-base. However, social support, stress, and the personality factors of extraversion and openness to experience were both significantly related to marital satisfaction. Community engagement was significantly related to base location, living location, and the number of times the spouses' moved due to military orders. Limitations to this study included issues with the measures, survey demand characteristics, and the necessity of some researcher coding. Even so, both the nonsignificant and significant results can be used to broaden researchers' understanding of military spouses and their needs.

INDEX WORDS: Military spouse, Marital satisfaction, Community engagement, Off-Base

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B.A., Columbia College, 2018

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my grandfather, Frank E. Gilbert, and my husband, Dillon J. Schaaf. My grandfather was a veteran of World War II and is the reason I began researching military related subjects as early as middle school. I may not have known him, but his service and stories have impacted my life in more ways than he will ever know. Today my husband serves in the United States Army and has introduced me to many amazing people through his military career. I wouldn't have my passion for military research without the influence and support from these men and I hope to serve our military members and their families throughout my own career.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to firstly acknowledge the military spouses that participated in this study. This project would not have been possible without these women who took the time to respond simply because they wished to make a difference in their life and the lives of other military spouses. I would also like to acknowledge my professors and committee members at Georgia Southern who helped me turn my research idea into a reality, especially my advisor, Janice Steirn, who let me follow my passion and conduct a study that was out of her realm of expertise.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the recent wars involving the United States, service members, veterans, and their families have drawn attention from the media and researchers. Only within recent decades has the military begun to understand the importance of supporting military spouses and families, in addition to the service members themselves. Many factors, such as marital satisfaction, are under-researched in the military spouse population. However, this information is very important considering the relationship between spouses' satisfaction, the service members' job proficiency, and the military's retention rates. The goal of this study is to further the understanding of factors, including social support through community engagement, that may be related to military spouse marital satisfaction in order to better inform those serving these men and women.

Theoretical Basis

The main hypothesized relationship between military spouses' community engagement off-base and marital satisfaction finds its theoretical basis in Adler's theory on the need to belong and the Ecological Systems Theory. Adler theorized that humans, above all, are social beings that exhibit a desire to feel a sense of belonging (Ferguson, 1989). According to Adler, humans' fundamental motivations are simply to be a part of society and to feel that they worthwhile, both of which come from their bonds within their communities. Essentially, humans were not only created to be a part of communities, but to also contribute socially (Ferguson, 1989). The sense of belonging is how humans survive and being social is how people exemplify what it truly means to be human (Ferguson, 1989). Adlerian theory suggests that the importance of connectedness is represented by the notion of social interest. For a married individual, their social interest is represented through their concern for their spouse and cooperation to achieve higher marital satisfaction, on top of their need for community belonging. (Legget, Toberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012). Overall Adler's theory supports the hypothesis that there would be a relationship between military spouses' marital satisfaction and their community engagement given the importance of belonging to a community for humans in general.

The ecological systems theory also supports the possibility of a relationship between community and marital satisfaction for these spouses. This theory encompasses the connections between the various ‘systems’ involved in one’s life: microsystems, mesosystems, and macrosystems (Voydanoff, 2001). Family and community are both considered microsystems and their interactions create a mesosystem. This theory upholds that families, including married couples, are meant to interact with and function within a larger community (Voydanoff, 2001). The macrosystem is thought of as a broader layer including the belief systems, cultural influences, and institutions that influence each of the other systems and how they interact. This theory supports that spouses’ involvement in their community would be significantly related to their marital satisfaction since the interaction between couples and their communities are inevitable (Voydanoff, 2001).

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it is relevant to consider a theory that could explain why there would not be a significant relationship between community engagement and marital satisfaction. In a broad sense, the socioemotional selectivity theory states that as people age, they will spend more time focusing on their close and intimate relationships rather than bettering themselves through wide spread community engagement (Penningroth & Scott, 2012). In other words, they are participating in social selection, which can be identified by spending more time with a select group of people versus seeking out new communities (Penningroth & Scott, 2012). With regard to this study’s population, everyone included is married and, although they may not be considered old by age standards, they have taken on this adulthood role. This theory would support that as these spouses age and have families they may focus more on those families and close friends rather than joining new communities each time they move due to their service members’ military careers.

Military Demographics

Currently about 2.4 million men and women serve the United States military and about 1.3 million of these members are considered active duty (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2017). According to Sheppard, Malatras, & Israel (2010) a service member refers to one serving in either the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines. However, the Coast Guard is also generally considered

part of the United States Armed Forces. Of the specific branches of the military, the Army has the largest total number of active duty members, making up 36.5% of the United States' total military force. Over half of these active duty soldiers are married (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2017). Although society has historically recognized the service of men and women serving in the military, the past two decades have seen a rise in the focus placed on the spouses' and families' service.

According to recent demographic statistics reported by the Department of Defense (DOD) (2018), about 624,000 military spouses are married to active duty service members. Many of these military spouses are relatively young, with the average age of active duty spouses reported to be 31.5 years of age. Even still, 50% of spouses are under the age of 30. In the Army, 93% of military spouses are women. In regard to children, 74% of active duty spouses have children at home, and almost half of these spouses' children are between zero and five years of age (DOD, 2018). Additionally, 88% of Army active duty spouses have at least some college education, 26% have a four-year degree, and 14% have an advanced degree. In recent years, the DOD has highlighted the difficulties faced by military spouses in the workforce. About 53% of this population are reported to be either employed or seeking employment, and active duty military spouses have a 24% unemployment rate (DOD, 2018). This rate is significantly higher than the 2018 national rate calculated at 3.9% (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2018). Even when these spouses are employed, the DOD reports that they are paid about 25% less than civilians in similar positions. Most military spouses work in the healthcare sector, information technology, education, or business management (DOD, 2018). These fields generally allow the spouses to transfer their jobs easily, an important factor for military families that frequently relocate.

Military Spouse Stressors

Due to the military lifestyle, military spouses and families experience many stressors that are unique from their civilian counterparts. Military families face frequent geographic changes and separations due to overseas deployments and stateside trainings. These experiences lead to drastic revisions of their social support systems and the spouses' employment status (Wang, Hyutu, Tran, & Spears, 2015). According to a study conducted on military lifestyle and satisfaction, spouses reported

experiencing, on average, 3.5 separations at the time of the study (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006). Military families move approximately every two to three years, usually to different areas of the country and world, which is about 14% more than civilian families (DOD, 2018). Constantly moving is one of the main reasons why military spouses struggle to find employment and ways to adequately continue their education. In recent years, the issues faced by military spouses seeking employment and higher education have become apparent as the amount of research focusing on these topics has increased (e.g. Castandeda & Harrell, 2008; Friedman, Miller, & Evans, 2015; Meadows, Griffen, Karney, & Pollak, 2016). Other unique experiences that influence military families' livelihoods are the pressure to represent one's service member well and to attend all of the obligatory events, such as military balls or banquets. Some spouses noted that living in a male-dominated culture can also act as a stressor (Ender, 2006, as cited in Sheppard et al., 2010). The potential for injury or death to the service member during training or deployments also serves as a serious stressor (Sheppard et al., 2010). These unique situations are known to significantly impact military spouses and their families.

After the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003, studies began to emerge on the effects of lengthy, and oftentimes dangerous, deployments on spouses and children left behind. According to the study conducted by Baptist et al. (2011), military marriages were significantly affected by OIF/OEF deployments. The reasons for these effects include the impact of deployments on communication/connectedness, issues of intimacy, the stress of constant changes, and constantly experiencing temporary lifestyles (Baptist et al., 2011). These deployments initiate a drastic lifestyle change as the spouses adjust to temporarily losing their partner. Although today many deployments are not as combat-intensive as during OIF and OEF, they will still impact how the spouses run their households, their parenting styles (if children are involved), and their sense of identity. Even so, by the end of a deployment, the military spouses have likely adapted to their new and additional roles (Verdeli et al., 2011). However, this adjustment can then lead to stressful situations once their partner has returned. During the "reunion" phase of deployment, the spouses may continue to feel isolated and lonely as they learn how to reconfigure their household once again (Verdeli et al., 2011). These

separations are generally unlike anything that civilian spouses experience, whether they are training-related and only for a month or two, or deployments that may last nine months or longer. When a sample of Army wives were asked what they believed their most stressful military experience was, 85% listed deployment and 11% stated relocation (Dimiceli, Steinhardt, & Smith, 2010). Considering the life-changing effects of deployment, it is not a surprise that a majority of the research conducted on military families has focused on the effects of deployment on children and spouses.

Military Spouse Identity

Although the literature on military spouses has grown in recent decades, the research conducted on this unique population still has many gaps. As important as researching the effects of deployment and military spouses' employment/education issues are, other factors should still be considered when researching this portion of the military population. As previously mentioned, the spouses take on a variety of roles that may include parenting, solely running a household, and their own careers, all made more difficult because of the demands of the military (Eubanks, 2013). Fortunately, many times spouses are found to be very resilient, and they perform these roles because they feel it is their duty as a military spouse. They live in a mission-first culture that typically demands one to do his/her job at any cost, even though this may lead spouses to push aside their own needs for their family (Mailey, Mershon, Joyce, & Irwin, 2018). Military spouses have been found to experience the stressful effects of the stigma surrounding military wives - the stigma that says they have to be consistently strong and take on all the responsibilities while their partners are serving their country (Eubanks, 2013; Mailey et al., 2018). Taking on this role can lead to feeling as though one's own identity has been lost within all of the responsibilities stemming from being a "military spouse." When these spouses consistently identify themselves solely as a military spouse, their personal identities can seem buried under that persona (Eubanks, 2013). Focusing on this role can also lead to spouses defining their own achievements by that of their service members' achievements and/or rank (Shores & Scott, 2005). These issues of identity can manifest themselves in how military spouses engage with their community.

Military Spouses' and the Community

Military spouses' community engagement can be affected by many of the unique factors associated with the military lifestyle. Spouses report increased parenting demands, a lack of time, and diminished motivation as the main barriers to health-improving behaviors, such as physical activity and social connection (Mailey et al., 2018). Similarly, many spouses note they have no time for activities that they would personally enjoy, affecting both their mental and physical health (Mailey et al., 2018). Army spouses have reported that, because of work, family, time constraints, and a lack of information, they were not able to participate in the recreation and leisure activities offered. The constraints listed by spouses also significantly differ depending on the education and income levels of the spouses, such that those with less education and lower incomes report more barriers (Shores & Scott, 2005). Notably, a large gap exists in the research on the community involvement of military spouses and families outside of military associated resources. Recognizing the serious lack of research in this area, Hoshmand and Hoshmand (2007) called for community psychologists to increase the amount of research on military families and the community. Due to frequent relocations, the spouses can find it difficult to collect information on activities in the community. Sometimes after moving so many times, the spouses do not feel it is even worth it to invest themselves into their new community (Borah & Fina, 2017; Shores & Scott, 2005). These obstacles, the spouses' many taxing roles, and the separation between the military and civilian communities should be considered a community issue (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007). The lack of community involvement and research on this subject is unfortunate because research shows that having a social support network and a sense of community can help boost the psychological well-being of military spouses (Wang et al., 2015).

Regression research indicates that social support can positively predict health behaviors and help to reduce stress in military spouses (Padden et al., 2013). For example, one study found that strong social support helped increase spouses' chances of a positive adjustment to deployment by 24% (Ornther & Rose, 2006, as cited in Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013). Similarly, Green et al. (2013) found the spouses struggling with their psychological health were also more likely to have lower social support. Another

study conducted found a positive relationship between perceived social support and a sense of community and the spouses' psychological well-being (Wang et al., 2015). While this study shows the positive effects of community, it is only based on the military community and not the spouses' larger local communities, which is one of the main gaps in this line of research (Wang et al., 2015). According to Borah and Fina (2017), spouses recognize how important social support is and rely on it during relocations or other difficult times, such as a deployment. The social support from friends and other military spouses can be necessary when familial support is only provided over long distances. When comparing the support provided from friends and family, research suggests that only the support provided by friends is a significant predictor of spouses' psychological well-being (Wang et al., 2015). Some spouses state that the most beneficial support was from other spouses who understand the demands of the military lifestyle. Conversely, others report their reliance on support received from people they meet through off-base communities such as work, school, similar hobbies, or exercising (Borah & Fina, 2017). Mailey et al. (2018) point future research towards exploring which sources of support military spouses prefer and state that the military should be providing resources to help the spouses connect to their community.

Military Marriages

Although a great deal of literature is on the importance of social support in the military spouse population, very few studies have focused on the relationship between stress (non-deployment related), support, and military marriage outcomes. Overall, a serious lack of studies have been conducted using marriage quality as a dependent factor or the criterion (Karney & Crown, 2007). Besides the previously mentioned deployment factors that can lead to marital strain, there are relatively few studies with a focus on marital satisfaction in military spouses. Of the possible factors that may have a relationship with marital satisfaction, community satisfaction and involvement are also under-researched in both civilian and military populations. While much of the research regarding marriage and community is dated, research does support the idea that community engagement and satisfaction are positively related to marital and family satisfaction in the general population (Holman, 1981; Toth, Brown, & Xu, 2002).

Studies have shown marital satisfaction increases with being a part of a community because the community can then provide necessary resources. These resources can then help families cope with stressful times, as well as boost resiliency and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Benefits such as these could be very beneficial in the chaotic lifestyle of the military (Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000 & Smapson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999, as cited in Minnotte, Mannon, Stevens, & Kiger, 2008). Considering the large gap in research on factors affecting marital satisfaction in military spouses, the role of community in marriage, and the key role social support plays in spouses' lives, the purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of a relationship between military spouses' non-military associated community engagement and marital satisfaction. Researching the factors related to marital satisfaction in military marriages is crucial due to the relationship between marital satisfaction and the retention and performance of military service members (Karney & Crown, 2007).

According to previous studies, members of the military believe in a positive relationship between their work performance and marital satisfaction (Karney & Crown, 2007). Moreover, research has established that service members whose spouses are content with their military life have a higher chance of continuing their service (Karney & Crown, 2007; Kelley et al., 2002; Rosen & Durand, 2000). The effects of marital satisfaction may also have clinical implications due to service members' reliance on their spouses as primary sources of social support, especially when struggling with post-war diagnoses, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or other war-related injuries (Cederbaum et al., 2017; Wilcox, 2010). Distress within intimate relationships can possibly exacerbate PTSD symptoms, specifically avoidance symptoms (Monson, Taft, & Fredman, 2009). Due to the relationship between social/community support and military spouses' well-being and the importance of marital satisfaction in the military, it is imperative to continue researching factors related to marital satisfaction, such as the community involvement of military spouses.

Purpose

Previous research indicates that social support and a sense of community can have a positive mediating effect on military spouses' well-being (Wang et al., 2015). Research also reports that military

spouses face many challenges with being involved in their communities due to the demands of their lifestyle (Borah & Fina, 2017; Mailey et al., 2018; Shores & Scott, 2005). However, previous research has not considered for how being involved in their community, outside of the military, may be related to military spouses' marital satisfaction. Given that research shows how a sense of military community has a positive mediating effect on the spouses' psychological well-being, it is possible that if the spouses are engaged in their larger community, it will be related to their well-being and, by extension, their marital satisfaction. This possibility is supported by Adlerian theory on the need to belong and the ecological systems theory. As such the main goal of this study is to explore the relationship between community engagement and military spouses' marital satisfaction. Based on the research, which suggests that social and community support are related to military spouses' overall well-being, it is predicted that community engagement, beyond military-associated events, will be significantly related to marital satisfaction in military spouses. This study also included measures for social support, stress, personality, and in-group identification in order to provide a more well-rounded understanding of the military spouse lifestyle. Given the lack of research on military spouses in general, and their marriages, a secondary goal of this study is to provide data on military spouses' overall well-being and other factors that may be related to their marital satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Operational Definitions

For the purposes of this study community engagement is defined as being involved in an activity that would offer the opportunity to feel a sense of social support for the spouses. However, this study is focusing on off-base and non-military affiliated community activities. For example, this may include going to classes at the local YMCA, being involved with a volunteer group, or attending a local church. Community engagement will be determined based on the reported number of ways that the military spouses are actively involved in their off-base, non-military affiliated communities.

Marital satisfaction, as defined by the Encyclopedia of Social Psychology, is a mental state indicating the status of the balance between costs and benefits in one's marriage (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). The costs would be characterized as negative and benefits as positive, such that the more benefits one experiences the higher ones' satisfaction with their marriage and their spouse, and correspondingly if costs are higher then marital satisfaction would be lower (Stone & Shackelford, 2007). This is a broad definition of marital satisfaction and it is important to note that for this study marital satisfaction is operationalized using the results of the two marital satisfaction measures. Marital Satisfaction is considered to occur on a continuum, although it can be methodically separated into satisfied and dissatisfied (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). However, the results of these measures were analyzed on the continuum of scores provided by the measures.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a 111-question survey posted to spousal Facebook support groups. These groups include Army Wives of Fort Benning, GA (4,691 members), Fort Benning Officers' Spouses (836 members), Fort Stewart Army Spouses (5,344 members), and Fort Stewart Wives (4,648 members). The original recruitment Facebook post can be found in Appendix B. The IRB approved variations to the original post four times, which were posted between June and November, 2019. Comments thanking participants and encouraging continued participation were also posted in order to

“bump” the post and allow for greater visibility on the Facebook pages to increase participation. The survey was closed on December 4, 2019 when the number of participants surpassed amount required for adequate power.

In order to try and control for demand characteristics, the participants were provided information through the informed consent on the research topic, but not the hypothesis. The survey was completely anonymous. The incentive to participate in this study was solely that taking the survey was an opportunity for the military spouses’ voices to be heard and to increase the research on the military spouse population, which was addressed in the recruitment Facebook post. There were no additional monetary or material incentives. The survey also included multiple measures so that the spouses’ attention would not just be focused on marital satisfaction and community engagement. Additionally, two bogus questions were included in the survey to identify participants who were not thoughtfully responding to the measures. With regards to randomization, the spouses were recruited from Facebook, and as such the researcher had no control over who chose to take the survey or not.

Measures

The survey was created using Qualtrics software and included an informed consent, measures for marital satisfaction, social support, stress, personality, in-group identity, demographics, and their amount of community engagement. The informed consent can be found in Appendix A.

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

In order to measure marital satisfaction, the spouses completed the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS). The RDAS is a widely used 14-item scale. Although it has not been used in a study on military spouses before, it has been used in community samples that may have included military spouses (Busby, Christensen, Crane & Larson, 1995). The RDAS is scored by finding the sum of the 14 items. The items are scored on either a four or five-point Likert scale. Scores can range between 0-69 and the cut-off score for distressed versus non-distressed scores is 48. Scores of 47 and below indicate a degree of marital distress (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). The RDAS has also been shown to have a Cronbach’s alpha of .9 (Crane et al., 2000). In order to calculate the RDAS’s Cronbach alpha for this study items 7

through 10 were recoded and this measure produced a value of .56. These specific items were recoded in order to follow the Likert scale pattern of the other items in the measure. Notably, this analysis produced an alpha below the threshold of .7 for adequate reliability.

Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

In addition, to the RDAS the spouses also completed the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS). The KMSS is a three-item scale that has been validated in a study conducted on active duty Army personnel, in which their spouses completed the measure as well (Schumm et al., 2008). This measure is more direct in measuring marital satisfaction as it asks very pointed questions including “How satisfied are you with your marriage?”. The KMSS utilizes a seven-point Likert scale for all three items on the scale. Scores can range from 3 to 21 with a cut off score of 17, such that scores of 17 and above indicate a non-distressed marriage and 16 and under points to some level of distress (Crane et al., 2000). This scale has been found to have a Cronbach’s alpha of .84 (Schumm et al., 1986). For this study, reliability analysis provided .98 as the KMSS’s Cronbach’s alpha. Both the RDAS and the KMSS show criterion-related validity in their ability to discriminate between distressed and non-distressed couples.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) is a 12-item scale used to measure perceived social support based on the factors of family, friends, and significant others (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). This scale has been utilized in the military population in a study conducted on active duty service members, including their spouses (Balderrama-Durbin et al., 2013). This scale has been validated through its comparison to other similar scales, such as the Social Support Behaviors Scale (SS-B) (Kazarian & McCabe, 1991). To find the total score, the scores from all 12 items are combined and then divided by 12. Low support is defined as scores ranging from 1.0 to 2.9, moderate support is 3.0 to 5.0, and high support is 5.1 to 7.0. The subscale for significant other can be scored by finding the mean of items 1, 2, 5, and 10. To find the family subscale, the mean of items 3, 4, 8, and 11 is taken, and the friend scale is calculated as the mean of items 6, 7, 9, and 12. The scores are based on a seven-point Likert scale. This scale has been found to have an overall Cronbach’s alpha of .88, and the

subscales are as follows: friends (.85), family (.87), and significant other (.91) (Zimit et al., 1988).

Current reliability analysis produced an overall Cronbach alpha of .94.

Short Stress Overload Scale

Stress was measured using the Short Stress Overload Scale (SOS-S) which is the shortened, but valid, version of the Stress Overload Scale (Amirkhan, 2018). This scale consists of ten items that ask the participants questions pertaining to the stress felt in their life over the past week. This scale has been used in community samples and correlates strongly with the Perceived Stress Scale and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-15) (Amirkhan, 2018). This measure can be combined into a total score by adding all the scores together, which will range from 10-50. The scores are based on a five-point Likert scale. This scale has previously been found to have a Cronbach's alpha of .94 (Amirkhan, 2018). As for this study, the Cronbach's alpha was measured to be .91.

Ten Item Personality Inventory

In order to gauge the participants' personalities, the Ten Item Personality Inventory was included in the survey. This scale consists of ten total items, of which two pertain to each of the big five personality traits (Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability) (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr., 2003). This scale has been used in community populations and is generally utilized when personality is not the main focus of the study, hence the limited number of items. However, this scale still produces scores similar to participants' scores on several other personality measures, including the Mini IPIP. The participants respond using a seven-point Likert scale. Items 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are all reversed scored. Due to the fact that only two items correspond to each personality trait, the Cronbach alpha levels are typically low. While this can be a limitation of using this scale, it is due to its length and is also why it is used when the study's focus is not on personality (Gosling et al., 2003). The reliability analyses conducted for this study produced Cronbach's alphas of .74, .41, .42, .56, and .32 for Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience. Again, this measures reliability was expected to be low due to the limited number of questions per trait.

In-Group Identification Scale

Two separate measures were used to gauge the spouse's level of in-group identification with other military spouses. The first is the In-Group Identification Scale: a 14-item scale that allows researchers to input their population of choice (Leach et al., 2008). In this case, "military spouses" was substituted as the in-group population. The questions are based on measuring the participants' solidarity, satisfaction, centrality, individual self-stereotyping, and their in-group homogeneity with other military spouses (Leach et al., 2008). A seven-point Likert scale was used and an individual's score is found by taking the average of their responses to the 14 items. This scale has been shown to have convergent validity as its findings correlate with other in-group identity measures including the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, the Group Attachment scale, and the Collective Self-Esteem measure (Leach et al., 2008). Reliability analyses conducted for the purpose of this study yielded a Cronbach's alpha .91.

Single-Item Social Identification

The second identification measure used was the single-item social identification measure (SISI) (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2012). The measure was designed so that the researcher can enter in the study's target group. For this study, the item read, "I identify with military spouses." The participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale (Postmes et al., 2012). This measure was shown to have good convergent validity through a strong correlation with a 10-item self-investment scale. Self-investment is highly correlated with in group identification, as it relates to how central/important the group is to oneself (Postmes et al., 2012). The SISI was also shown to have divergent validity as it predicted intergroup distinctiveness well. Through the three studies used to develop this measure, it was found to have good test-retest reliability (Postmes et al., 2012). Overall, even though this is a single-item measure, the SISI is useful when needing a reliable and short measure of social identification.

Demographic Questionnaire

In order to assess demographics specific to the military spouse population, a demographic questionnaire was created for the purpose of this study. Overall, there were 17 demographic questions which included questions on age, length of marriage, number of children, employment status, spouses'

military rank, deployment information, children's ages, base location, and if they live on or off base. This allowed for a more comprehensive picture of the spouses' livelihood to be observed. The survey also asked if, in their opinion, the Army provides adequate information about opportunities to get involved in the community off-base. These questions can be found in Appendix C.

Community Engagement

The measure for spouses' community involvement began with a question in which they were asked to select ways that they are involved in their community. The types of communities listed included gyms, religious communities, support groups, hobby-based groups, community service or volunteer-based groups, other local organizations, and a space to write in other communities if theirs did not fit in the given categories. Based on these responses, they were then asked how many of each type of community they are involved in and, subsequently, how many of those communities are not associated with the military. This total number of communities in which they actively participate, that are not associated with the military, was used for final analysis. This section of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

Data Cleaning

Initially 159 spouses initially responded to the survey. Out of those participants, 31 of them left either one or more of the marital satisfaction, social support, stress, personality, or in-group identity measures completely blank. From the remaining 128, six participants had missing portions of data from those measures, and were also removed for the purpose of analysis. Next, one participant entered noticeable misinformation (their answer should have been either a one or zero based on a previous response and 13 was entered), and one participant answered a bogus question incorrectly. Out of the remaining 120 participants, 27 did not complete the community engagement measure. As this measure was essential for the purposes of this study, their data were not included in the final sample for analysis. After cleaning the data following the procedures above, 93 participants' data remained for final analysis. According to the power analysis based on a two-tailed correlation with an effect size of 0.3 and a power value of 0.8, the necessary sample size was 82. With 93 remaining participants, this sample size is large enough to provide adequate power. All of the remaining data included all necessary measures and the

participants completed the survey in more than 222 seconds. This number is based on the expectation that it will take at minimum 2 seconds for a participant to thoughtfully respond to a question. Because there were 111 questions, our completion time cut off was a minimum of 222 seconds.

Participant Demographics

The participants of this study were specifically spouses of active duty Army service members and all 93 of the spouses who responded to the survey were women. The maximum age was 63 and the minimum was 20, with a mean of 32.02 years and a standard deviation of 7.79. The sample represented a variety of races/ethnicities including: African American or Black ($n = 6$), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 3$), Asian or Asian American ($n = 4$), Hispanic or Latino ($n = 7$), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 1$), White or European American ($n = 75$), and three who preferred not to report their race/ethnicity. On average, the spouses had been married for 8.23 years ($SD = 6.77$), with a maximum of 40 years and minimum of one year. The average number of children was 1.61 ($SD = 1.24$). Although a majority of the participants listed their sexual orientation as heterosexual, five participants reported their sexual orientation as homosexual, five reported bisexual, one reported pansexual, one reported 'other' and entered "omnisexual", and three participants preferred not to respond. Even so, all participants reported that their service members were male.

As for location, 38 spouses were stationed at Ft. Stewart, GA, 21 were posted at Ft. Benning, GA, and the remaining 34 listed their location as "other". Although the survey was only posted in Ft. Stewart and Ft. Benning Facebook groups, the spouses were encouraged to share the survey with other Army spouses, accounting for the "other" responses. With regard to living location relative to the base, 41 of the spouses reported living on-base and 52 reported living off-base. As for the number of times the spouses have moved due to the military (or experienced a permanent change of station, PCS), 21 spouses said that their current post was their first one, 16 spouses have moved once, 10 reported twice, 16 reported three times, 13 reported four times, and 17 reported that they have moved five or more times. The participants also answered a question regarding their current employment status. The employment status reported with

the highest percentage was working full time (26.9%), followed closely by unemployed and not currently looking for work (20.4%). See Appendix D for the complete demographic frequencies.

Several of the questions were regarding the spouses' service member in order to help understand more of their military lifestyle. The average time spent in the military, for the participants' spouses, was 9.83 years ($SD = 6.5$). A majority of the service members were at their normal on-base job (68.8%), versus being deployed for example. See Appendix D for the complete frequencies of the service members' work status. The participants also responded to a question on their service member's rank in order to have a better understanding of their finances, and a majority of the responses stated that they were E4-E6 (50.5%). This is an enlisted rank. See Appendix D for the full listing of ranks by frequency.

Additionally, the spouses responded to a question regarding how adequate they viewed the information provided by the Army on how to be involved in the greater community. Many of the spouses felt that the information was "not particularly" adequate. However, the responses were relatively dispersed. See Table 1 for the full breakdown of response frequencies.

Analyses

Before any cleaning of the data began, Little's Missing Completely at Random analysis was completed to analyze the missing data for any possible patterns (Little, 1988). However, the CMAR test proved to be non-significant ($X^2(2942, N = 159) = 2844.02, p = .90$). Since after cleaning the data there were enough participants remaining to have sufficient power, data replacement methods were deemed unnecessary. Reliability analyses were subsequently conducted to find the measures' Cronbach's alpha values. This study was conducted using a correlational design. As such, the main analyses were two-tailed Pearson's correlations between the spouses' amount of community engagement, based on the number of groups listed that are not associated with the military, and the results of the various measures. A two-tailed analysis was used due to the exploratory nature of this research. In order to assess correlations between categorical variables (such as base location) and continuous variables, point-biserial correlations were utilized. Because there were no significant correlations between the measures and the community engagement results, further analyses were not warranted for the purposes of this study.

*Table 1**Army's Provision of Community Information*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely yes	7	7.6
Probably yes	20	21.7
Might or might not	15	16.3
Not particularly	32	34.8
Definitely not	18	19.6

Note: (N = 93) Participants responded to: "Do you feel that the Army provided you/your family with adequate information on how to become involved in the community, outside of military associated events?"

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Community Engagement

The average number of off-base community engagement methods reported by the spouses was 1.33 ($SD = 1.36$). The minimum amount was zero with a maximum amount of six. Some spouses used the ‘enter text’ option, and the responses included “None” (x5), “None of these”, “Realtor”, “Work friends”, “homeschool co-op”, “FRG” (Family Readiness Group), “Bowling League”, “Counseling”, “I don’t really”, “Work”, “Financial donor to charity”, “Don’t go out much”, and “I used to participate in many of these but over the last year have dedicated my time to family and close friends”. The total number of each type of off-base community that the spouses reported being involved in can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Totals for Community Engagement Methods

Method	Total
Gym	33
Religious	34
Support Groups	0
Hobby-Based Groups	12
Volunteer Groups	26
Local Groups	12
Other	7

Note. $N = 93$

Measures

The average score on the RDAS was 46.96 ($SD = 3.71$). The cut-off score for this measure is 48 such that this score indicates that, on average, the spouses are experiencing some degree of distress in their marriages. For a complete listing of the measures’ means and SDs see Table 3. However, the average score, on the KMSS was 17.94 ($SD = 4.19$). The cut-off score for the KMSS is 17, with 17 and above indicating a non-distressed marriage. The scores of the MSPSS averaged 5.27, indicating a high level of support. The average of the significant other subscale of the MSPSS was 5.70, also signifying a high level of support from their spouse. On the SOS-S the participants averaged 28.47, with possible scores ranging from 10 to 50, indicating a relatively mid-level of stress. The TIPI provides scores for the five big

personality traits: Extraversion ($M = 3.76$), Agreeableness ($M = 5.21$), Conscientiousness ($M = 5.91$), Emotional Stability ($M = 4.41$), and Openness to Experience ($M = 5.38$). The possible scores range from one to seven. These data indicate that the spouses were higher in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience than extraversion and emotional stability. The In-Group identification scale's average score was 3.79 with a possible range of one to seven. The spouses' average indicates that they were answering with slightly more disagreement to the statements about their identification with other military spouses. The average on the SISI was 4.45, which is slightly over the midpoint of the Likert scale, leaning towards agreeing with the "I identify with military spouses" statement.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Measure Scores

Measure	Mean	Std. Deviation
RDAS	46.96	3.71
KMSS	17.93	4.19
MSPSS	5.28	1.38
MSPSS-SO	5.69	1.52
SOS-S	28.47	10.61
TIPI-Extraversion	3.76	1.59
TIPI-Agreeableness	5.21	1.15
TIPI-Conscientious	5.91	.93
TIPI-Openness	5.37	1.03
TIPI-Emotional Stability	4.41	1.25
I-G	3.79	1.26
SISI	4.45	1.89

Note. The RDAS and KMSS are scored using the sum of their items. The MSPSS, SOS-S, TIPI, and

I-G scores are the averages of their items. The SISI is a single-item measure.

KMSS: Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, MSPSS: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, SOS-S: Short Stress Overload Scale, TIPI: Ten Item Personality Inventory (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience), SISI: Single Item Social Identification, CE: Community Engagement

Correlations

The initial correlation run was between the two marital satisfaction measures, the RDAS and the KMSS. The correlation results revealed a significant positive correlation, $r(93) = .26, p = .011$, indicating that both measures of marital satisfaction were providing similar indices of marital satisfaction. Due to the more direct nature of the KMSS questions (e.g. “How satisfied are you with your husband, or wife, as a spouse?”), the KMSS was used for the main correlational analyses. Similarly, there was a significant positive correlation between the In-Group identity measure and the SISI measure, $r(93) = .56, p < .001$. The SISI is also a more direct measure of the spouses’ identification with other military spouses and was therefore used in the main analyses.

With regard to the main analysis of the relationship between community engagement off base and marital satisfaction in Army spouses there was not a significant correlation. However, there were other correlations worthy of exploration. The KMSS results and MSPSS results are positively correlated, $r(93) = .48, p < .001$, indicating that marital satisfaction and social support rise and fall together. The KMSS measure and the Significant Other portion of the MSPSS (MSPSS-SO) are also positively correlated $r(93) = .59, p < .001$, indicating that marital satisfaction and spousal support increase and decrease with each other as well. The SOS-S results are negatively correlated, $r(93) = -.42, p < .001$, with the KMSS, revealing that marital satisfaction and stress are inversely related. The KMSS is also negatively, correlated with the personality factors of extraversion, $r(93) = -.23, p = .024$, and openness to experience, $r(93) = -.25, p = .014$. These results indicate that there is an inverse relationship between levels of extraversion, openness, and marital satisfaction. See Table 4 for a full correlation matrix.

Additionally, there were correlations between several of the demographic questions and the community engagement levels. The spouses’ total community engagement off-base has a positive correlation with if the spouses live on or off base, $r(93) = .23, p = .024$. An examination of the data show that the spouses’ living off base, $M = 1.62, SD = 1.29$, have a slightly higher average amount of community engagement than those living on base, $M = .98, SD = 1.39$. Similarly, there is a significant positive correlation between total community engagement and the spouses’ permanent location, $r(93) =$

.39, $p < .001$. The data show that Ft. Benning spouses, $M = 1.33$, $SD = 1.11$, also reported being slightly more involved in their local community than the Ft. Stewart spouses, $M = .76$, $SD = .94$. However, those that reported “other” as their permanent location had higher average than either listed base location, $M = 1.97$, $SD = 1.62$. Lastly, community engagement and the number of times their family has moved are related by a positive and significant correlation, $r(93) = .28$, $p = .006$. This correlation suggests that the more a military spouse has moved due to the Army’s orders, the more they are engaged in their community off-base. See Table 5 for the correlation matrix containing these data.

Beyond the scope of marital satisfaction and community engagement correlations, there were several significant correlations between the various measures. The MSPSS, $r(93) = -.30$, $p = .004$, and the MSPSS-SO portion, $r(93) = -.30$, $p = .004$, are negatively correlated with the SOS-S. These results imply that social support and military spouses’ stress have an inverse relationship. The MSPSS Significant Other segment is also positively correlated, $r(93) = .23$, $p = .029$, with the SISI, indicating that spousal social support rises and falls with the strength of their military spouse identity. With regard to the personality factors amongst themselves, the personality factors of Extraversion and Agreeableness are negatively correlated, $r(93) = -.27$, $p = .009$, implying a negative relationship. Meanwhile, emotional stability is positively correlated with Agreeableness, $r(93) = .24$, $p = .024$, Conscientiousness, $r(93) = .38$, $p < .001$, and Openness to Experience, $r(93) = .27$, $p = .008$. These correlations reveal that Emotional Stability has a direct relationship with the other three personality traits. With regard to personality and the other measures, both the MSPSS, $r(93) = .33$, $p = .001$ and the MSPSS-SO portion, $r(93) = .35$, $p < .001$ are positively correlated with the personality trait of Emotional Stability. These correlations reveal that social support and Emotional Stability have a direct relationship. The personality factor of Emotional Stability has a negative correlation with the SOS-S results, $r(93) = -.29$, $p = .005$, which describes an inverse relationship between these two factors. Lastly, the SISI was significantly, positively correlated with both Conscientiousness, $r(93) = .28$, $p = .007$, and Emotional Stability, $r(93) = .37$, $p < .001$. This indicates that in-group identity is stronger with greater Conscientiousness and Emotional stability. Refer to Table 4 for the correlation matrix involving these variables.

Table 4

Community Engagement and Measures Correlation Matrix

	KMSS	MSPSS	MSPSS-SO	SOS-S	TIPI-E	TIPI-A	TIPI-C	TIPI-ES	TIPI-OE	SISI	CE
KMSS	1										
MSPSS	.48**	1									
MSPSS-SO	.59**	.86**	1								
SOS-S	-.42**	-.30**	-.30**	1							
TIPI-E	-.23**	.03	-.11	-.10	1						
TIPI-A	.15	.17	.14	-.02	-.27**	1					
TIPI-C	.13	.20	.16	-.16	-.05	.08	1				
TIPI-ES	.17	.33**	.35**	-.29**	.09	.24	.38**	1			
TIPI-OE	-.25*	-.03	-.06	.03	.18	.20	.03	.27**	1		
SISI	.08	.19	.23*	-.19	.16	.20	.28**	.37**	.19	1	
CE	.18	.12	.15	.01	.07	.08	.01	.06	-.16	-.09	1

** indicates significance at the .01 level * indicates significance at the .05 level

Note. KMSS: Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, MSPSS: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, SOS-S: Short Stress Overload Scale, TIPI: Ten Item Personality Inventory (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience), SISI: Single Item Social Identification, CE: Community Engagement

Although these correlations are not within the scope of the hypothesis, there were significant correlations between many of the demographic variables. As a factor of time, age is positively correlated with marriage length, $r(93) = .85, p < .001$, the service members' time spent in the military, $r(93) = .77, p < .001$, number of children, $r(93) = .53, p < .001$, the service members' rank, $r(93) = .36, p < .001$, and the number of times their family has moved for military orders, $r(93) = .65, p < .001$. Age is also positively correlated with their post location, $r(93) = .31, p = .004$. Since marriage length is likewise a measure of time it is also positively correlated with length of service ($r(93) = .76, p < .001$), number of children, $r(93) = .45, p < .001$, the service member's rank, $r(93) = .41, p < .001$, and the number of permanent change of station (PCS) moves experienced, $r(93) = .67, p < .001$. Length of marriage and their current post are also positively correlated, $r(93) = .33, p = .002$. Another time related demographic is the service members' time in the military, which positively correlates with number of children, $r(93) = .44, p < .001$, rank, $r(93) = .61, p < .001$, and number of PCSs, $r(93) = .76, p < .001$. Their current permanent post and length of service are also positively correlated, $r(93) = .27, p = .011$. The number of children also positively correlated with the number of PCSs, $r(93) = .45, p < .001$, and their current post, $r(93) = .27, p = .011$. The number of PCSs experienced positively correlates with the service members' rank, $r(93) = .57, p < .001$, and their current post, $r(93) = .34, p = .001$. Between the demographics and the measures, the SOS-S and number of children were found to be positively correlated, $r(93) = .25, p = .019$, signifying that stress levels rise with the number of children in a family. See Table 5 for the full matrix.

Table 5

Demographics, Community Engagement, and Marital Satisfaction Correlation Matrix

	CE	KMSS	Age	Marriage Length	Service Length	Children Amt	Rank	Perman. Station	Work Status	On vs. Off B.	Length of Stay	PCS Amt
CE	1											
KMSS	.18	1										
Age	.19	-.05	1									
Marriage Length	.17	-.09	.85**	1								
Service Length	.16	-.08	.77**	.76**	1							
Children Amt	.15	-.21	.53**	.44**	.44**	1						
Rank	.11	-.13	.36**	.41**	.61**	.14	1					
Perman. Station	.39**	.22*	.31**	.33**	.27*	.21*	.14	1				
Work Status	-.01	-.14	.02	.10	.09	.12	-.09	-.03	1			
On vs. Off Base	.23*	.01	.05	.06	.07	.11	.03	.20	-.11	1		
Length of Stay	.07	.02	.20	.26*	.29**	.20	-.01	.04	.04	-.00	1	
PCS Amt	.28**	-.05	.65**	.67**	.76**	.44**	.60**	.34**	.15	.05	.11	1

** indicates significance at the .01 level * indicates significance at the .05 level

Note: CE: Community Engagement, KMSS: Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, PCS: Permanent Change of Station

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Based on the lack of research regarding military spouses' marital satisfaction and their involvement in the larger community, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between these factors. Military spouses face many difficulties connected to their lifestyle and research has previously focused on military-related factors, such as deployments. However, very little research has been conducted on this populations' marital satisfaction and other aspects of their lives that are not directly associated with the military. With literature pointing to the importance of social support and community in military spouses' lives it was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between their community engagement off-base and their marital satisfaction.

Included in the survey were two measures of marital satisfaction to ensure that the main variable for this study would be measured well. After finding the two sets of results to be significantly correlated, the KMSS was chosen over the RDAS to be used for the final analysis. While the RDAS is a 14-item measure and asks participants in depth questions about relationships, it is not specifically focused on "marriages" and does not directly ask the participants about their satisfaction. However, the KMSS asks very pointed questions to get right to the heart of the participants' marital satisfaction. For this reason, the KMSS was used when measuring factors' correlations with marital satisfaction. For the same reasons, the SISI was chosen over the In-Group Identification measure of military spouse identity. Once the two measures were shown to correlate, the SISI was used in the final analyses due to its very direct nature in measuring how much the participants feel they identify with other military spouses.

Overall, there were no significant results supporting this study's hypothesis that there would be a relationship between military spouses' off-base community engagement and their marital satisfaction. However, there were several other factors that were significantly related to marital satisfaction and community engagement separately. Social support and stress were both associated with marital satisfaction, as well as the personality factors of extraversion and openness to experience. As for community engagement, there were significant relationships with the spouses' base location, whether they

live on or off base, and the number of times they have moved due to military factors. Beyond marital satisfaction and community engagement, many of the measures were associated with each other. While these relationships are not directly related to this study's hypothesis, they are important to discuss given the exploratory nature of this study and the gap in research on factors affecting military spouses.

Factors associated with marital satisfaction are important to consider in research because of the distinct lack of studies using military spouses' marital satisfaction as an outcome (Karney & Crown, 2007). While the significant relationship between social support, spousal social support, and marital satisfaction may seem like common sense, it can be an important factor to consider because of the importance of social support to military spouses in general (Borah & Fina, 2017; Green et al., 2013). Military spouses live very difficult and transitional lives, and so it is logical that social support would play a role in their marital satisfaction, especially, considering how often they are separated from their spouses. The negative association between stress and marital satisfaction, although a slightly weak relationship, is supported by previous research on the negative impact of stress on close relationships in the general population (Randall, & Bodenmann, 2008). This association may also be related to the many stressful factors of being a military family, for example, the deployments and separations during OIF and OEF that were shown to significantly impact military marriages (Baptist et al., 2011). With regard to personality factors, extraversion and openness to experience both had significant negative associations with marital satisfaction, which slightly differs from previous research. According to Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, and Rooke (2009) lower emotional stability, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness, and higher extraversion were related to higher satisfaction, where emotional stability had the largest effect size. However, this study's results showed no significant correlation between emotional stability and marital satisfaction and inverse relationships for the two significant personality factors. Notably, these are weak relationships, and without previous research on this topic in the military spouse population, inferring more than the fact that there is a relationship is not advisable.

The significant correlations between community engagement and other factors are similarly very exploratory given the extreme lack of information on off-base community engagement in the military

spouse population. Previous research on military spouses' investment in their communities reported that because they move so frequently, they may not feel like putting in the effort to engage in new communities (Borah & Fina, 2017; Shores & Scott, 2005). However, this study produced a significant negative relationship between the number of PCSs (Permanent Change of Station) and the spouses' amount of community engagement off-base. Again, it is important to point out this relationship, albeit significant, has a weak correlation. The significant relationships between community engagement and their permanent location, as well as if they live on or off base, may be due to the location of their base and the resources available there. However, with the limited number of participants from Ft. Stewart and Ft. Benning and the high number of participants that listed "other", it is difficult to infer the specifics of these relationships. The analysis of base location was affected by the snowball methodology in which the participants were encouraged to share the survey with other spouses. This resulted in responses from spouses who were not stationed at either Ft. Stewart or Ft. Benning, which is one limitation of this study. However, a significant relationship was still detected between the locations. Speculating much about this relationship would be inappropriate given the weak relationship and unknown location factors, however there is something to be said for the various locations of military bases and what they offer. Future research should consider studying how post location may be related to factors affecting military spouses.

Throughout the course of this study many other relationships were analyzed outside the scope of the main hypothesis. The associations found through analysis between the measures and the military spouse demographics, while not directly tied to this study's main goal, are important to consider in this understudied population. Future research on military spouses should look to expand on the importance of social support and understanding military spouse specific stressors. This research could provide valuable information on the type of support that military spouses desire and the stressors that are specifically affecting military marriages. The role personality traits play may also be an important avenue for future research when considering how spouses handle the military lifestyle and cope with the population-specific stressors, such as moving frequently and spending long stretches of time apart. Researchers could consider the possibility that certain personalities migrate towards the military lifestyle.

Although the results tied to this study's hypothesis proved to be statistically nonsignificant, they are still useful in expanding the research on the military spouse population. There is a serious lack of research on military spouses in the larger community, their marital satisfaction, and their livelihood outside of publicized issues with employment and deployments. The descriptive statistics for marital satisfaction show that the average participant was hovering right around the scores which indicate a level of distress in the marriage. While this may not have a significant association with how much they are involved in their community outside of the military, it does show that military marriages are struggling to some degree. Future research should consider looking into the many other factors affecting these spouses and study possible methods for supporting military marriages. This is especially important given the volunteer status of the United States military and the effects that the marital satisfaction of spouses have on service member retention and job performance. Considering the significant relationship between marital satisfaction and social support, and the lack of a significant relationship with community engagement, it could be speculated that the spouses' engagement in their military communities is a larger factor in their lives. This would be in line with the previous research in which military spouses have highlighted the importance of having a sense of community within the military (Wang et al., 2015).

Limitations

One set of limitations in this study revolves around the self-report nature of the survey. Community engagement can be challenging to measure in general, and it is difficult to accurately gauge how active the participants are in their listed methods of engagement. Demand characteristics are also inherently a risk when measuring marital satisfaction since it may have been difficult for spouses to admit their true attitudes towards their marriages. The scales used also have limitations of their own. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale's Likert scale options are not very clear, and the Ten-Item Personality Index does not have very high reliability values because of its shortened length (Busby et al., 1995; Gosling et al., 2003). There were also a couple of responses from participants in which they were confused on a question or disagreed with the Likert scale option. One participant wished for a "satisfied" option since "Somewhat satisfied" and "very" did not seem to be an accurate reflection of their feelings.

This is most likely in regard to the KMSS. There were also obvious issues with the format and instructions for the demographic question regarding the age of the participants' children. Due to some of these complications, these data were unusable. Additional limitations are focused on the analysis of the community engagement responses. Some participants included written responses that were then coded by the researcher. In one response the participant that listed contributing financially to a charity as their "other" way of actively engaging in their community. However, from the perspective of this study that would not be included as a method of engagement because there is no sense of engaging with other people as there would be in all the other listed methods.

Conclusion

Overall, while the hypothesized relationship between military spouses' community engagement off-base and their marital satisfaction was unsupported, this study still yielded important results. Factors associated with marital satisfaction and community engagement were identified and should be attended to in future research. Research regarding military spouses is sorely lacking, and therefore, even nonsignificant results still help to shed light on this population. This information, coupled with more in-depth research on military community resources could help the Army, and the broader military, focus their resources on the support that spouses actually want and need. Ideally, looking at the significant and nonsignificant relationships discovered during the process of this study will be used to continue researching military spouses and their livelihoods in order to better serve this admirable population.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
“Military Spouses’ Community Engagement”

1. The primary researcher is Alexandra Gilbert, a first-year Masters of Experimental Psychology student at Georgia Southern University.
2. The purpose of this research is to understand more about how military spouses are engaging in their community.
3. Participation in this research will include the completion of a survey.
4. This study does not pose any risks beyond stressors that may occur in daily life. If you feel uncomfortable at any time and do not wish to complete the survey, then you can quit without penalty.
5. Participants will benefit helping to expand the limited amount of research that has been conducted on military spouses.
6. The survey will take approximately 8-15 minutes and the participant can quit and return at any time within two weeks of beginning the survey.
7. All data collected will be anonymous. The data will be collected using Qualtrics software. Any data that will be made available to other scientists for validation will be deidentified. In this case the demographic information will be removed so that the data will not be able to be connected back to a specific participant. As the head researcher, I will work with the Compliance officer to ensure that the data will be deidentified appropriately.
8. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. Questions should be directed at the researchers named above. Information on how to reach the primary researcher can be found below. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board at 912-478-5465 or at irb@georgiasouthern.edu.
9. Note that you do not have to participate in this study and that you may end your participation at any time by not submitting the survey.
10. Participants must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number XXXXX.

Title of Project: “Military Spouses’ Community Engagement”

Principal Investigator: Alexandra Gilbert, ag20212@georgiasouthern.edu

Do you agree to participate in this study?

-I agree -I do not agree

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT TOOL

This is the recruitment message that will be posted along with the survey on the spouse Facebook pages.

Hello everyone! My fiancé just PCS'd to Ft. Stewart from Ft. Benning and I am currently in school at Georgia Southern for my masters. I am researching military spouses and would love to give everyone here a chance to participate and have their voice heard! Military spouses are a very under researched population and this needs to change. The research I am conducting focuses on the relationship between engaging in your community, beyond the military base, and various aspects of your lives. Below you will find a link to a survey which will take around 20 minutes. However, it does not have to be completed in one sitting. Before you begin the survey an informed consent form will be available to you explaining more about the goals of this research. I truly believe that this is a chance for you to have your experience acknowledged and this study could prove to be helpful for understanding the military spouse population and possible assistance that could be provided in the future. I am currently pursuing my masters in Experimental Psychology and I chose to conduct this research as my thesis. Please feel free to share this survey with other {Fort Stewart/Fort Benning} military spouses that you think will want to participate.

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SECTIONS OF
SURVEY

D1 What is your age?

D2 What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other _____

Prefer not to say

D3 What is your spouse's gender?

Male

Female

Other _____

Prefer not to say

D4 What is your race/ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- African American or Black
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White or European American
- Other
- Prefer not to say

D5 What is your sexual orientation?

- Homosexual
- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Demisexual
- Heterosexual
- Other _____
- Prefer not to say

D6 What is your current employment status?

- Full-time (40+ hours a week)
- Part-time (Less than 40 hours a week)
- Unemployed (currently looking for work)
- Unemployed (not currently looking for work)
- Student
- Self-employed
- Retired
- Unable to work
- Not listed

D7 How many years have you been married?

D8 How many years has your spouse been in the military?

D9 What is your spouse's rank in the Army?

- E1-E3
- E4-E6
- E7-E9; O1-O3
- O4 or greater
- W1-W5
- Prefer not to say

D10 Where is your spouse permanently stationed?

- Ft. Stewart
- Ft. Benning
- Other

D11 What is the current work status of your spouse?

- At a training school
- At their normal job
- Preparing for deployment
- Deployed
- Recently returned from deployment (last 3 months?)

D12 Do you currently live on-base or off-base?

- On-base
- Off-base

D13 How long have you lived in this area?

- 6 months or less
- 7 months - 1 year
- 1-1/2 years
- 2 years
- 3 or more years

D14 How many times have you PCS'd since your spouse began serving in the Army?

This does not include moving before you and your spouse were married and/or they were in the Army.

This is your first post

1

2

3

4

5 or more

B1 How many letters are in the first word of this sentence?

0

1

2

3

4

D15 How many children do you have?

C1 How do you actively participate in your community? *Please check all that apply and list any other ways you participate that are not listed.*

- A gym (e.g. YMCA, a recreation center, a yoga studio, CrossFit, etc.)
- A religious community (e.g. a local church, synagogue, mosque, etc.)
- A support group
- A hobby-based group (e.g. book club, running/walking group, supper club, garden club, etc.)
- Community service or volunteer-based organizations
- Other local organizations
- Other _____

DI *Please enter a number value for the following questions.*

C2 How many gym communities are you actively apart of?

C3 How many of these gym communities are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C4 How many religious communities are you actively a part of?

C5 How many of these religious communities are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C6 How many support groups are you a part of?

C7 How many of these support groups are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C8 How many hobby based groups are you actively a part of?

C9 How many of these hobby based groups are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C10 How many community service or volunteer based organizations do you actively participate in?

C11 How many of these community service or volunteer based organizations are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C12 How many other local organizations do you actively participate in?

C13 How many of these local organizations are not associated with the military and not located on base?

C14 How many other ways are you actively engaging in your community?

C15 How many of these other ways are not associated with the military and not located on base?

D17 Do you feel that the Army provided you/your family with adequate information on how to become involved in the community, outside of military associated events?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Not particularly
- Definitely not

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHICS TABLE

Summary of Demographic Characteristics

Item	Mean	Range	SD
Age (years)	32.02	20-63	7.79
Number of Children	1.61	0-5	1.24
Time in Army (years)	9.83	1-24	6.5
Length of Marriage (years)	8.23	0.5-40	6.77
Item	Frequency (N=93)	Percent	
Race/Ethnicity			
African American or Black	6	6.5	
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	3.2	
Asian or Asian American	4	4.3	
Hispanic or Latino	7	7.5	
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	1.1	
White or European American	75	80.6	
Prefer not to say	3	3.2	
Participants' Spouses' Rank			
E1-E3 (Enlisted)	3	3.2	
E4-E6 (Enlisted)	47	50.5	
E7-E9; O1-O3 (NCO or Officer)	31	33.3	
O4 or greater (Officer)	10	10.8	
W1-W5 (Warrant Officer)	1	1.1	
Prefer not to say	1	1.1	
Participants' Employment Status			
Full-time (40+ hours a week)	25	26.9	
Part-time (<40 hours a week)	11	11.8	
Unemployed (looking for work)	12	12.9	
Unemployed (not looking for work)	19	20.4	
Student	9	9.7	
Self-employed	9	8.3	
Retired	1	1.1	
Unable to work	2	2.2	
Participants' Spouses' Work Status			
At a training school	11	11.8	
At their normal job	64	68.8	
Preparing for deployment	10	10.8	
Deployed	5	5.4	
Recently returned from deployment	3	3.2	
Length of Stay at Current Post			
6 months or less	30	32.3	
7 months-1 year	12	12.9	
1-1/2 years	14	15.1	
2 years	16	17.2	
3 or more years	21	22.6	