Communicating with Family After Deployment

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at how deployment affects military personnel's communication and disclosure with their families after they return home. Much of the previous research on this topic focused on the families of troops. This research differs as it focused on disclosure with family from the veteran's point of view. There were fourteen participants in this study who had been in either the army or marines and had been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. The data was collected through interviews, and thematic analysis was conducted. The findings of this study include that troops were able to talk about the light, fun topics with their families because they were relatable for them. Often if the men felt comfortable talking about more serious things with their families; they had sought out counseling after their deployment. Also, they did not like talking about combat, injuries, or graphic things because they felt people would not understand or would judge them. The results showed that troops needed to have an outlet for their thoughts and feelings about deployment. Families needed to be prepared to talk about deployment or to make sure troops had someone they could talk to, either in a personal or professional setting.

INTRODUCTION

Due to international conflicts that the U.S. military has been a part of in the last decade, there is an increasing need for research to examine the effects of deployment. Based on research done with families left at home, it has been found that the stress that deployment puts on relationships of military personnel may result in communicative challenges and shifts in disclosure (Newby, McCarroll, Ursano, Zizhong, Shigemura, & Tucker-Harris, 2005). These studies though only looked at the issue from the families point of view and not from the troops who may have a different view on the communication that is going on. The purpose of this study is to understand how recently deployed U.S. veterans describe changes in disclosure with family members as a result of their deployment. It will examine this possibility of change and provide a better understanding of what the results of active duty might mean for the communication habits of those who were and are currently deployed.

There is a need for this research due to the number of troops currently deployed. According to the Department of Defense as of March 31, 2012, there were 1,409,877 military personnel serving in the United States Armed Forces. The Department of Veterans Affairs shows that there are over 17,739,000 wartime veterans still living who served as far back as WWII. This is not a new phenomenon, yet it has not received the attention it deserves. It is necessary to gain a better understanding of the communication problems that may arise from deployment, especially those that could affect family relationships in a negative way. The previous research on this topic has focused mainly on the family members left at home and not the troops themselves (e.g., Faber,Willerton, Claymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Merolla, 2010; Sahlstein, Maguir, & Timmerman, 2009). It tends to focus on the way a soldier’s absence affects the spouse's and children’s communication, and not the soldier's. This research will focus on disclosure between troops and their families, or in other words, how troops decide what to share and who to share it with. Through the use of communication privacy management theory, this study will examine how military personnel manage the tensions between privacy and disclosure with family.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors that must be examined to understand the complex issues that result from deployment. The problems that often arise in a long distance relationship must be examined as well as the topic of self disclosure. To facilitate our understanding of this research, it is also imperative to understand what is meant by deployment.

Families Affected by Deployment

According to Newby et al. (2005), "The number and duration of military deployments by U.S. service members have increased significantly over the past decade" (p. 815). Due to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. has increased the number of men and women who serve in conflict areas. Deployment is considered anything from "brief periods for training exercises to extended periods associated with combat, humanitarian, or peacekeeping missions" (Newby et al., 2005, p. 816). Much of the existing research on deployment has been done from a psychological perspective. For instance, the research conducted by Dolan and Adler (2006) focused on the psychological effects of stressors troops face which cause some troops experience a difficulty reconnecting with their families upon returning home. According to Faber et al. (2008) while troops were deployed, they faced concerns not only for their safety but also about reintegration with the family post-deployment. They did touch on communication issues but only briefly and it was to say they had "become more closed in communicating thoughts and actions" (Faber et al., 2008, p. 228). This study is different from previous research because it focuses on the communication that occurs after deployment, from the troops perspective. The communication aspect has been in the background of previous studies but was often eclipsed and put aside so researchers could focus on the psychology of troops and deployment which overshadowed the communication factors.

In the studies found where the research did look at communication it was often from the point of view of the families left at home. Sahlstein et al. (2009) conducted a study that looked at the communication between couples throughout deployment but it was specifically from the wives' perspective. Researchers seem to avoid talking to the troops themselves which is what this study does. Merolla (2010) who also focused on the wives at home, found that one difficulty was the strain put on relationships by the distance separating them and the inability to communicate on regular basis which reflected in couples communication after deployment. These studies also focused specifically on couples and not all troops are married. This study will look at troops communication with any family members from spouses to siblings and parents.

Long Distance Communication with Family

According to Sahlstein (2004), in long distance relationships couples are allowed more freedom than in a traditional relationship but it also put constraints on the relationship. This results in increased pressure to have memorable experiences during any time they have together. This can be seen when troops get leave to visit their families during deployment and it becomes stressful because everyone is trying to make things perfect. What Sahlstein (2006) found was that couples will often make plans for the time they will have together which can help in some cases, while in others it can lead to unrealistic expectations. Another consequence of unrealistic expectations occurs when the couple is finally together but reality does not meet the idealized version they had imagined resulting in the relationship ending (Stafford & Merolla, 2007).

According to Lee and Pistole (2012) "prizing of togetherness time and the desire to have a good time when together may lead to a focus on activities (e.g., sex, going to movies) that are 'special'" (p. 310) in a long distance relationship. These helped keep the couple close and gave them a feeling of togetherness when they were apart. Even with all of this, one study suggested that in long distance relationships where men had negative feelings about the relationship, the couple was much less likely to stay together for a year. They felt this was caused by the amount of importance that men place on face-to-face communication which is lacking in long distance relationships (Cameron & Ross, 2007). These studies were looking at long distance relationships that did not have the added stress of deployment to deal with. This study will look at how events during deployment factor into communication once troops have returned to their families.

Self-Disclosure in Families

According to Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) "disclosure of intimate information is a necessary but not a sufficient behavior for creating intimacy"(p. 322). It is something couples must do to begin and maintain a healthy relationship which means it plays a role in communication after deployment. In a study conducted on self-disclosure in Vietnam veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Shehan (1987) found that, "the feeling of estrangement and mistrust characteristic of PTSD victims leads the veteran to closely guard or monitor the amount of information about himself that he provides to others" (p. 58). Combat caused these men to change their disclosure habits and become more wary of who they shared information with. The study being conducted looks for this in military personnel of current conflicts and who are not necessarily suffering from PTSD.

Fitzpatrick and Sollie (1999) say that "attachment and prosocial communications are key elements of quality and stability"(p. 348) in relationships. Their study was not specifically about military personnel but if this is the case, then it is essential for family members to be able to share intimate details with each other if the relationship is to retain a level of closeness. In his study, Ayres (1979) found that friends and strangers were likely to ask the

same amount of questions to someone but that a friend's questions often will have a deeper meaning behind them and require evaluation. This leaves a gap as the research was conducted with civilians. In relation to post-deployment communication with family it could mean that family members have the potential to ask questions that are more difficult for the troop to discuss. This is a potential issue for the current study to examine as it looks to find the possible areas that create tension in communication with family during a troop's reintegration.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

According to Petronio, communication privacy management theory, or CPM, is based on five principles that explain "how people regulate the disclosure or concealment of private information" (2007, p. 218). They do this by owning their private information, having a sense of control over it, making decisions about who to share it with, setting up rules about what can be done with the information once it has been shared, and having to manage the situation if the rules are broken and their privacy is breached (Vik, 2006). In its broadest sense it accounts for the dialectical tensions between privacy and disclosure and how people deal with the tensions that immerge surrounding these conflicting needs (Petronio, 2004).

McBride and Bergen's (2008) study on reluctant confidants looked at what could happen when information was shared with someone who did not want it. One of the common situations that they found was disclosures about traumatic events. This is an important piece of information when thinking about who troops are able to confide in upon their return home from active duty as they may have experienced traumatic events. They also examined the effects that the disclosure had on the relationship. Half of the participants said it did not affect their friendship although when asked again later many admitted they felt differently towards the friend. This information is helpful as the current study seeks to understand the effects of disclosing information from time deployed to family upon their return.

Joseph and Afifi (2010) conducted a study that looked for a link between disclosure and marital satisfaction from wives of deployed soldiers. They found that the more wives shared with their husbands during their deployment the happier they were with the marriage. A common theme that arose was that many of wives did not want to burden their husbands with problems at home because they felt their husbands already had enough to deal with. In this study Joseph and Afifi (2010) found that not sharing things due to concern for the husband led to lower marital satisfaction and also had a negative effect on the wives' health. This leaves an opening for research to explore what the husbands feel about disclosing, or not, to the wives. If keeping things about the family and home life to themselves had such a negative effect on the wives, the consequences of what the husbands are concealing may be equal. The research that has been done over the years with communication privacy management theory and deployment has typically been from the perspective of those left at home. There is a gap in the research that leaves out what the troops think about communication. It is important that this be looked at as their view may be very different from their families at home.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to fill in the research by studying troops' perspective on communication with family after deployment and combat, especially their views on disclosure and privacy management. It will take into account their attitudes and feelings towards the communication they experienced before, during, and after deployment. The goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of how communication changes because of deployment and combat. The first research question looks at what sort of information troops disclose to family.

> RQ1: How do troops balance the tensions between privacy and disclosure with their family after deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan?

According to Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) disclosure is important in maintaining relationships which means it would be vital in the reintegration process troops go through upon returning home. The second research question focuses on what allows for disclosure to continue once the service men or women are reunited with their families.

> RQ2: What factors influence troops to disclose openly with their family after deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan?

The final research question looks at what may discourage these disclosures from occurring. In Shehan's (1987) article she discusses the different reasons why troops from the Vietnam era had a hard time talking about their service. There could be differences between the two generations though as the Vietnam War was strongly opposed by the public and this was often taken out on the service men.

> RQ3: What factors prevent troops from disclosing openly with their family after deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan?

RESEARCH METHODS

Method Description

The method used to conduct this research was qualitative interviews. It fit best because it allowed for the capture of a very intricate issue in communication (Keyton, 2011). When looking at things qualitatively one is able to maintain the complexity of the process of interactions with others (Keyton, 2011) which adds to this particular research on how military personnel look at, and feel about, the communication that occurs after deployment. Maxwell (2005) felt one of the goals of qualitative research is "understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in" (p. 22).

Participants

The population studied included males ranging in age from twenty-two to forty-six years old. They were each deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan. Females would have been included but those asked did not meet the criteria. They came from a variety of social backgrounds to allow for a broader understanding of the issues that were studied. The participants were recruited through convenience sampling as well as through snowball sampling. I contacted friends and acquaintances who were in the military or who had contacts with the military. In some cases participants would recommend others they felt met the criteria. The total number of participants was fourteen.

Procedure

Participants agreed to do interviews which covered topics such as if their disclosure with loved ones changed due to deployment, what they feel caused any changes, and how they have dealt with these changes. They were offered counseling references at the beginning of each interview. Interviews lasted twenty to forty-five minutes. Interviews were conducted on the phone or in semi-public locations such as a study room on campus or in an out-of-the-way corner of a coffee shop to avoid encroaching on the personal space of the researcher or the participant. For their comfort the participants were allowed to choose the location of the interview as long as it met the needs of the researcher. The interviews were recorded so the location needed to be relatively quiet and without distractions. The researcher was also prepared to take notes for initial reactions and to highlight important points in the interview. It also allowed notes to be taken on important nonverbal cues that the audio recording could not pick up such as avoiding eye contact or other gestures. These were included in the transcripts to enhance the scripts from the interviews. Participants' confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The list of real names and their corresponding pseudonyms is kept on a computer that is password protected as well as one hard copy that is kept in a locking cabinet.

Analysis

Upon completion of collection data was made subject to thematic analysis (Keyton, 2011). Recurring themes were looked for within participant interviews as they described their various experiences with self-disclosure to their family after deployment. Open coding was used for the process of coding the data. In the open coding all possible codes from the participants' statements were found. Open coding was also used to find themes within the notes taken during the interviews. Finally, axial coding was conducted in which the categories found in the open coding analysis were connected. They were sorted into more compact themes which were broader but focused on similar answers to the research questions (Keyton, 2011).

RESULTS

RQ1: How do troops balance the dialectical tensions between privacy and disclosure with their family after deployment?

The first research question focused on how troops balance the tensions between privacy and disclosure with their families. This was examined through questions about the information they choose to share and that which they kept private from their family.

The Good

In their interviews many of the troops revealed that it was the funny or interesting stories from their time overseas that they felt comfortable sharing with family. They often felt that those stories were more appropriate for non-military audiences and that these were the only parts that their family and other civilians would understand. Tim said that what he shares with his family depends on who he is talking to "I talk to my old man about the farming over there. [...] I told my sister about all the different random things we used to cook. [...] I talk to my brother about the makeshift gyms and how we used to work out." They also try to look for the good moments to remind

themselves that it was not all bad. In an interview with a soldier he shared his favorite story from his deployment which was about getting the chance to bond with a boy in Iraq if only for a moment:

> He knew what was going on, he was an older boy, probably thirteen or fourteen. And ah, I kinda made eye contact with him and he's walking along and he started pointing at objects like doorways and ah, alleyways and stuff like that. He was actually trying to teach me Arabic, and unfortunately I can't remember much anymore. But I mean, he was, he was just pointing at things and telling me and I'd repeat 'em and he'd no,no,no,no,no. He'd re-say it cause I wasn't pronouncing it right. And I mean, to me that was one of the good things.

It was through stories like these that the men were able to express what they do and why they do it. They want people to know that not every aspect of their deployment was difficult and it was not always bad things happening.

The Bad

The stories these men did not feel comfortable talking about showed the smallest glimpse of what they are left to deal with after their deployments. Many of them simply stated that they did not feel comfortable talking about combat missions and left it at that. Some wanted to explain it though. Brad shared a memory of combat:

> Mmmm, I'd say innocent civilians that got injured, or killed. And just destruction and damage to people or property that was just like, collateral damage. And then even to the people that were, you know, the bad guys. You know, how many of them were actually bad guys? You know, the kid who's not really all there. [...] And he comes in from guarding his sheep and he has an AK-47 and all of a sudden there's people in town that point a gun at him and he takes off running and you just tk-tk-tk and just lay him out. And it's just kind of like, you just killed the village idiot.

In some cases they were not involved in combat but they still did not feel that their families would appreciate stories of what they had done while away. A few of the men interviewed had worked with prisoners and prisoner transport and they felt the details of their jobs were more than what some of their family members would want to know, "I didn't really talk about with somebody like my mom when we would you know, put bags over their heads and, not like, like cloth bags over their heads, and blind fold them and shackle them and search them." In this case Robert did not feel that his mother, or women in general, would care to hear details like this because they would think it was inhumane.

Three of the men interviewed had been injured in combat which was something that they did not like to talk about with their families. They would rather leave that in the past and not think about it anymore. They are working on getting better or dealing with the psychological effects of their injuries and they do not enjoy discussing this process unnecessarily. When Josh was asked what he did not feel comfortable telling his family he responded with, "um, well, it would be getting shot, um I don't know, what I did before that, before I got shot. Um, the process of multiple, multiple surgeries and stuff like that. It's kind of, I never want to visit that again."

The Ugly

Something that came up in nearly every interview was that people often ask one question that has the ability to stop a conversation in its tracks. Whether they had or had not, none of the participants appreciated being asked if they had killed anyone. This was something that they were often asked once the conversation of deployment had come up and it is not something they cared to answer. As Lenard said, "that's kind of a personal question you know, because...you come up thinking you know, I don't ever want to have to kill anybody, but you don't know what you're going to do until you've been put in that situation." They do not want other people questioning their actions because they may be questioning them themselves, "whether you have or have not it's never something that, you know, 'cause taking another life is, is something that, um, [...] that person who did it is going to remember that the rest of their life. I mean, that changes everything about somebody" said Robert.

RQ2: What influences troops to disclose openly with their family after deployment?

The second research question looked for what enabled troops to talk about their experience with family after they returned home. Chris stated that "the longer you hold it in the harder it becomes, on you, on your family, on friends." The men interviewed knew that it was important to talk about their experiences and they shared some common thoughts on what allowed for that to happen.

Personal Characteristics of the Listeners

When asked what made it easier for him to talk about his experiences Brad said "it's kind of a tricky question with a tricky answer, It depends on the person, it depends on the time." He also said that he was able to talk to me because we shared similar physical characteristics such as eye and hair color. He wanted to point out just how difficult it could be to find the perfect person to talk to, saying, "You have to have that perfect one. Like the right

age, the right sex, you know the right smile, the right tone of voice, the right comeback." These men need to feel a connection with a person before they are willing to discuss things and if the person they are talking to does not handle the situation correctly they can end up hurting more than they help.

Often times though it took a mother's touch to help these men through a difficult situation. Several men talked about how their mothers were the one they could open up to about emotional things. When asked about difficult topics Pete's response was, "um, the only person that I can think of that I ever really talked to about it was probably my mother. [...] She's a very sweet, kindhearted, Christian woman. And, just talking to her kinda, she helped me through some difficult issues." In some cases the men felt a closeness with their mother because of character traits that allowed them to open up to them.

Many of the men who had family members they could talk to about their deployment said it was because these people were able to listen to them talk even when they did not necessarily understand. As long as they were there to listen, try to understand and be supportive when these men needed to talk it made it so they were able to open up more easily. Another thing that helped them open up was privacy and the knowledge that the person was willing to hear their story. When asked if there was someone he felt more comfortable talking to Tim answered "Yeah, my brother, he uh, my oldest brother. He uh, we've had some deep conversations. And a, probably just cause he asked and we were alone." If someone asked, without forcing the issue, they were opening it up and letting the man know that he could talk to them and that they were willing to share the weight of the information.

They Understand

Every man interviewed explained that the people they were able to talk to the easiest were other military personnel. In some cases they were lucky enough to have family members who were also military, Josh said, "My dad I would say I'm closer to now because he was in Vietnam. So he's also a veteran and it's kind of like we have a mutual understanding when I see him." Pete talked about how his sister and her husband being in the military allowed him to talk to them about his service because they both were able to understand where he was coming from. Two participants had been roommates after their return from deployment and they both said that was very helpful:

> Yeah, well Chris was actually my roommate in college, so we would sit down and kinda talk things out a little bit sometimes too, and that was helpful, living with him was definitely a big, a big benefit because I don't think I could have lived with anybody else.

The biggest thing was that when veterans talked to family they could tell that their family did not understand but when they talked to their military friends they were able to have an open conversation about anything. There was a mutual knowledge in that shared experience.

Getting Help

The biggest thing that many of these men felt had helped them in the process of opening up to their family was getting help. Many of them had reached out to counseling services through the Veterans Association or through their colleges after they got home. Veterans who had received counseling highly recommended it to any other returning veterans or to those who had been home for a while but were still having problems adjusting. Even once the men felt the counseling had started to help they continued to go because they knew that there was still progress to be made. After a few of his fellow veterans told him to look into it, Scott started counseling through the VA:

> To talk about you know, what happened and my feelings and stuff like that. [...] It's a continual thing, I've come a long way with it, still can make improvements but it's, it's, I think it's just going to be a constant thing to talk about for a while yet.

Not only did the men interviewed talk about the importance of getting the help that they needed but also about making sure that the counselor was the right fit. It was pointed out that they needed to be able to communicate openly with the counselor because it made a big difference in the progress they were able to make. It took a few tries for some of the men but they said it was important to them that they found a counselor they clicked with. The men suggested researching counselors and they stated that other veterans cannot be afraid to tell someone that is not working out and that they would like to try a different counselor.

RQ3: What prevents troops from disclosing openly with their family after deployment?

The largest amount of data collected pertained to why troops did not feel comfortable disclosing to their families. There were a multitude of reasons expressed ranging from feelings of uncertainty and judgment to a lack of trust in the people they are confiding in.

Changes in Troops

Several of the men expressed a feeling of being lost without the military after they were out. They had been in that specific mindset for so long that it was difficult to readjust to civilian life. They talked about having trouble with their families, substance abuse, and even just simply talking like a civilian again because they had grown accustomed to the military lifestyle.

Loss of purpose. Many of the men interviewed were no longer serving in the military. They had made the transition from the military to the civilian life and it had not always gone smoothly. Many had realized that they were no longer the same person who had entered the military at the start of their career but their families did not. In his interview Larry said, "that's a whole different ball game coming back from a deployment. That's completely different than signing up for the military you know. It's not the part, you don't sign up thinking, what am I going to come back as?" Dealing with how they had changed and trying to fit back into a family was a big obstacle. In many cases they felt as though the military had not done a proper job of preparing them for their return. The men interviewed talked about the months of training they received which prepared them mentally and physically for their deployment but then they felt as though they had been left of their own for the process of coming home. Brad put it like this:

> I just wonder, you know it's like we send people off to war and we get this training and this equipment, made by the lowest bidder, mind you, and then they bring us back here and it's like ok, yeah, if you've got any problems call us. Go to the VA, go to college, use your money, see you later, out the door. No real training to unfuck my mind so that when I get into here I'm not trying to fuck every college girl I see. I'm not trying to beat everybody's ass. I'm not wanting to yell and scream at everybody. I'm not wanting to walk up to the professor and be like, you shitbag!

These men did not feel the military had done an adequate job of preparing them for the transition back to civilian life because, as Lenard put it, they did not expect them to come home, saying, "We usually send warriors off to die, I mean it's war. People are supposed to die, they're not supposed to come home. And then we come home and it's just kinda like...they were supposed to die there..." This lack of preparation and training upon return affected the way they were able to communicate with their families because they were just not sure how to fit in with them anymore.

Perceptions of family drama. Many of the soldiers had a hard time communicating with their families once they returned home because their deployment had caused them to prioritize things in a different way than their families. Pete sought counseling for various issues, "but a lot of it had to do with anger that I was feeling towards my family. A large part, there used to be so much bickering and complaints and fights over such miniscule stuff and it just frustrated me to no end." Benjamin also felt this way and he put it like this:

> I was pretty on edge for awhile. I mean I didn't really, I didn't talk or anything about the deployment but it's just little things, like you know, would make me really angry because I wasn't used to being around you know a family and their bullshit.

They got home wanting things to be the way they were before they left yet often that was the thing they struggled with. When their families would squabble it would make them angry because the fights were over little things compared to what they had seen and been through.

Relating to civilians. Another hurdle faced by men returning home was a language barrier. The men struggled to talk to their families, Pete said, "It's not so much as like family that I have to think about how I talk to them but honestly more, ah, as a civilian." Joe explained it as, "You're going to change it and it almost seems like you're dumbing it down. You're not trying to, you're not trying to talk over them or around them but to still include them you do kinda dumb it down." If they want people to understand them they have to translate it back to the way civilians speak. They are forced to cut out a lot of swear words that would be fine when talking to military personnel. Tim said "I have to speak differently so that they understand it. Use more, ah, appropriate and American terms so they don't look at me like I'm crazy."

Substance abuse. Another problem that many service men run into is substance abuse. In some cases they used this as a coping mechanism to deal with things they had seen because they were not talking to anyone about what they had experienced while deployed. In other cases it was to relive the high of adrenaline filled situations that they were in while overseas. As in many cases with substance abuse this can cause problems communicating with family. When drugs and alcohol were being used to cope, talking about it with family was the last thing on the minds of the men, Stewart said:

> I don't really talk a whole lot about my experiences when I was in. Um, I don't know how to translate it. I had a hard time after I got out. So, I fell into substance abuse and things like that. So um, I guess I had a hard time communicating with my family afterwards that translated into me not getting out what I needed to get out. I turned to other devices to ah, in order to cope with it I guess.

Alcohol and prescription painkillers were two of the more common substances which caused problems in communication between the service men interviewed and their families. Lenard said, "Drinking was a pretty big one. I think that was another reason I stopped talking to my family." The quest to cope with deployment led some of the interviewees to dark places. Stewart explained it as, "I fell into a trap about getting into that rush when you get shot at. I was just trying to create that for myself and that led to some bad situations that I got myself into."

Isolation Resulting from Deployment

Over the course of the interviews there were some common feelings shared about what stopped communication between troops and their families after deployment. They often felt that their family could not understand the situations they had dealt with, did not want to know, or that they could not trust them to keep their information private. Larry remembered the exact moment where he realized that his communication changed with his family:

> It was probably my first, my first actual combat experience. [...] I was telling the story to my sister on the phone, uh she like stopped and I could hear, it was just a weird silence and I was like, "Oh shit, she doesn't think this is nearly as funny as I do." And I guess that changed my outlook on the way I say things.

These feelings often led them to isolate themselves from their families and to avoid openly disclosing with them.

Lack of understanding. The men often explained that they preferred talking to other military personnel because their families, and civilians in general, could not relate to their experience. Alex said, "I just stopped talking about it after a while, people would ask me and I'd just be like uh, whatever. Cause just, they didn't understand. That's why I just kinda go with the funny stuff cause they get that. They don't get the rest of it." They also felt as though they were being judged by the listener when they did decide to disclose information about their deployment, Lenard said, "The only reason why we shut ourselves is it's not only to protect them from what we've done but it's kind of to protect us from what they may think about us after we tell them." On top of the feelings of judgment and misunderstanding they also talked about an inability to express themselves, Josh said, "It sucks cause, I can't describe how much that country smelled, cause, they can't, they won't know the smell. It's just little stuff like that."

Lack of listeners. Another feeling that was common in these men was that their families did not want to hear about their time deployed. They kept things to themselves because they did not want to burden them. Of the men who were married most said their wives do not ask about their deployments. Pete said, "Honestly one way or another it's something that she doesn't honestly care to talk about." They explained that they did not feel comfortable just going up to a family member and talking about it but that they would discuss it when asked, "but most of the time they won't ask because it disturbs them" Tim said. When they were talking about the more traumatic or disturbing issues the veterans felt that some of the information was not appropriate to share with their moms or sisters. The men felt their families would view it as being inhumane.

Lack of trust. The final piece of this theme was the issue of trust in regards to disclosure. The men had found that there were certain people who they could no longer share with. These people had lost their trust because they had shared private information from personal conversations. This caused them to shut down specifically with those people as well as become less open with others. Often times they resorted to only talking to their military buddies about it because "I know they understand and I know they won't like tell people. So that's another thing, it's a trust issue." The men wanted to know that what they told someone would stay between them. They wanted to maintain control of their private information.

Trauma

Traumatic events related to combat or injuries during deployment often triggered problems disclosing to family members. Tim said he did not share as much "after the first, or the first several times of getting in contact and a, things going down, or people getting hurt or killed and whatnot." Another thing they did not like discussing was actual missions and the violence surrounding them, Lenard said, "It's nothing against, you know, people it's not that we're not proud of what we do, but there are some things we do that we're not proud of." A different type of experience that had a big effect on the communication and disclosure habits of troops was emotional trauma, specifically the event of being cheated on or left by a significant other while they were away. "When my ex-fiancé cheated on me. That's when I noticed that I started to become a little more angry. And I just would not talk to

people, they'd be talking to me and I'd just ignore them because I just didn't want to talk about anything." This betrayal is not something that can be prepared for or fixed from the other side of the world.

Legal Confidentiality

The final reason for non-disclosure has to do with legal confidentiality. In some cases the troops had signed paperwork that bound them from talking about their time deployed, Joe said, "I don't want to say, like, we were top secret or anything but you still were on certain confidential things that, no matter what happened you wouldn't be able to talk about it." They would call their families while they were deployed and not be able to talk about what they did with their days. Pete said, " I couldn't exactly tell them what it was I was doing, what I was watching or, you know, the people that I was watching." In this way it puts an actual block in the information that troops are able to disclose to their families. This inability to be open with family members can cause issues if they feel the veteran is holding back information from them.

DISCUSSION

This research looked at how deployment affected troops disclosure with their families after they returned home. The most important findings of this research included that it is easier for troops to talk to their families about the good times they had on deployment. The men were more open about these things with their families because they are not as emotional of topics as combat or other traumatic experiences. The veterans would talk about more serious things if they were asked, if they were with their military friends, or after getting counseling. The men avoided talking about combat, traumatic events, and violence with their families because they felt their families would not understand, they would be judged for their actions, or because they were not used to civilian life which included being part of a family again. These findings were similar to an article written on military personnel after Vietnam by Shehan.

Although the current research does not focus on PTSD there is still common ground between it and Shehan's (1987) article. It stated that the Vietnam era veteran's problems "may be attributed largely to the failure of their family and friends to facilitate disclosure of painful memories associated with combat" (p. 55). In the current research several of the men interviewed said their families did not bring up their deployment or did not want to talk about it. These results are consistent with Shehan's findings about Vietnam veterans. In the current study many of the men said they did not feel comfortable disclosing to their families because they felt they were being judged for what they had done. This is supported by Shehan's research which found that PTSD victims "fear they will be condemned and rejected by others who become aware of their war deeds" (p. 58). Not all of the participants in the current study had dealt with PTSD but the findings are similar between the two studies. Families do not always reach out and let veterans know they are there to listen and troops feel they will be judged if they do share.

Petronio (2004) writes that people believe that they "own their private information" and that they "feel they have the right to determine what happens to their private information" (p. 202). These thoughts were supported by statements throughout the interviews conducted when the men would say things like, "They don't need to know that. I joined, they didn't. That's my stuff." The men interviewed would use possessive words about the information showing that it was there's to do with as they saw fit. They were the ones making decisions about what people got to know. These statements suggest that troops have a strong attachment to their private information and are very concerned about how it is shared.

Along those same lines was McBride and Bergen's (2008) study on reluctant confidants which looked at what happens when someone shares information that the other person does not want. This factored into the research because many of the men said their families did not want to know. The men did not want to burden their families with information about traumatic events which would in some cases have made their family member into a reluctant confidant. According to McBride and Bergen's study, sharing unwanted information can hurt relationships and change the way the listener feels about the speaker. This supports the feelings of judgment talked about when the men were disclosing to someone who did not ask for the information.

This information is important because many service men and women have a hard time adjusting back to civilian life. According to Kemp and Bossarte's (2012) article for the Department of Veterans Affairs, in 2010, 22.2% of all suicides in this country were veterans. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (2013) says that only 7% of the U.S. population is made up of veterans but they account for 13% of the homeless population. Not all veterans can make the switch back to civilian life without help and they are not getting it. Many of the men interviewed said that the military did a good job of training them to go over but a terrible job bringing them home. The military needs to work on their reintegration training to help smooth this transition. The men interviewed knew how valuable talking about their deployment was but most had to reach out and get counseling for themselves. They said once they had completed counseling it was much easier for them to talk openly with their families about their experience.

If a few counseling sessions were made mandatory upon return from a deployment more problems could be caught and dealt with sooner. Finally families need to be open and supportive while realizing that their loved ones have been through a lot and may have changed.

Limitations

One of the flaws of this research is the lack of diversity in the sample. The participants were predominantly white men who had served in the army or marines. It would have been beneficial to include all branches of the military, some females and more people of other ethnicities and backgrounds. It also would have been useful to get a more longitudinal view by including other service men and women than just those who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan in the post 9/11 conflicts. Finally, because this was a qualitative study it is not something that can be generalized to large populations outside of the group specifically interviewed.

Future Research

In the future researchers should focus on other areas of communication affected by deployment, as well as gathering data from groups that were not talked to for this study such as women, and all branches of the military. Many of the men interviewed said the way they spoke and their vocabularies changed because of their deployments which caused them to have a hard time communicating with civilians. Another communication related topic that should be studied is the interaction between military personnel and civilians. Some of the men interviewed said they did not think about the fact that they were talking to their families so much as that they were talking to civilians. This study could be furthered by including veterans from a longer span of time to observe the effects of deployment throughout troops' lives. Also research should address how effective the military's reintegration training is for the men and women coming home.

This research is necessary because there are so many men and women who experience problems when returning home from deployments. There is not enough information to adequately help them as the suicide rates and homeless population show. This study found that veterans have a hard time talking to their families about difficult and traumatic subjects related to deployment. The men feared being judged, or that the listener would not understand so they kept things to themselves. These are the things they need to talk about though. If families are unable or unwilling to have these discussions then they need to make sure that the veteran does have someone to talk to whether it is a military buddy or a counselor. They were willing to fight for their country, now it is time for their country to fight for them.

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