

EXPLORING REACTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS TO
MILITARY-CONNECTED SPOUSE ABUSE DISCLOSURES:
AN ONLINE OBSERVATIONAL APPROACH

by

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THESIS

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DEDICATIONS

In memory of my father, Dr. Joe Clayton Hurd, Chaplain (LTC), U.S. Army (Retired), whose dissertation typing was my childhood lullaby.

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ABSTRACT

Exploring Reactions of Stakeholders to
Military-Connected Spouse Abuse Disclosures:
An Online Observational Approach

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Although considerable research explores family violence within the United States Military, few peer-reviewed studies investigate the experience of civilian spouse survivors. This project seeks to close the research gap by answering the question, “How do military stakeholders respond to disclosure of Military-Connected Spouse Abuse (MCSA) made on YouTube?” Videos featuring MSCA narratives were selected from a series of YouTube searches. Comments made to those videos by Service Members and military spouses were organized according to three predominate response types: disclosures, perceptions, and actions. Disclosures included personal experience with or second-hand knowledge of spousal abuse, interactions with the military response system, and information about military rigor. Service Members and spouses perceived the Military as perpetuating family violence and not responding to it effectively, though some commented positively on the Family Advocacy Program (FAP). Service Members and spouses took action by expressing emotion or addressing violence survivors directly. The project suggested that military culture plays a significant role in the experience of MCSA and

help-seeking. Official helping mechanisms were distrusted by both Service Members and spouses, to include those who did not endorse a history of abuse. FAP services were characterized both positively and negatively. More research is necessary to determine best practices to help survivors of MCSA. The project is undergirded by the conceptual framework of intersectionality.

Keywords: Military-Connected Spouse Abuse, Military Domestic Violence, Military Spouses, YouTube, Intersectionality

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, Congress recognized the pervasive problem of domestic abuse across all Branches of the Military. In response it established the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) to address the problem (National Defense Authorization Action for Fiscal Year 1992, 1991). However, not until 2019 was spousal abuse an enumerated offense in the Uniformed Code of Military Justice, which is set of laws governing all Service Members (John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act 2019, 2018). During the intervening years, the DoD studied the problem (Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence [DTFDV], 2001; DTFDV, 2002; DTFDV, 2003); developed programs and interventions (e.g. England, 2006; Dependents of Members Separated for Dependent Abuse: Transitional Compensation, Commissary, and Exchange Benefits, 2016); and tracked recidivism rates of substantiated abusers (DoD, 2018b). While this progress represents important steps toward reducing the incidents of domestic abuse among military families and assisting those who perpetrate and survive, little is known about the how the intersectional identities of abused military spouses inform their experience of abuse, help seeking, and resilience. This study explored themes raised by stakeholders who responded to disclosures of Military-Connected Spouse Abuse (MCSA) made on YouTube. By listening to the voices of those most impacted by MCSA – Service Members and spouses – Social Work researchers can more effectively design future research endeavors to address concerns and vulnerabilities of stakeholders.

PREVALENCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Both the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration (VA) have published prevalence and demographic data, but their findings differ significantly. Heterogeneity limits

comparison. First, VA's prevalence data are inferential (Gierisch et al., 2013), while the DoD's is descriptive (DoD, 2018b). Additionally, the two agencies report on different data. The VA meta-analysis considered the impact of gender, abuse severity, and cohort, but the DoD evaluated perpetrator paygrade. Finally, Gierisch et al. examined studies from 1999 to 2011; but the DoD compiled annual reports, with each including a limited comparison of the prior decade. The three most recent DoD (2018b, 2017, 2015, respectively) reports publicly available are for FY 2017, FY 2016, and FY 2014.

Prevalence

From 2007 to 2017, the lowest prevalence rate of unique married survivors was 8.7/1000 ($n = 6,283$) in 2008 (DoD, 2018b). It rose to 10.2 in 2010 ($n = 7,698$) and 2012 ($n = 7,462$) (DoD, 2018b). Thereafter, prevalence rates fell annually until they reached less than 1% (9.1/1000; $n = 5,781$) in FY 2017, the most recent year data has been tabulated (DoD, 2018b). The DoD (2018b) asserted that the varying rates of prevalence were statistically insignificant based on the Grubb's test ($z = 1.08, p = .14$).

Unsubstantiated reports were about double substantiated reports. FY 2011 marked the most reports in the decade: 25.6/1000 ($n = 19,277$; DoD, 2018b). In FY 2017, there were just under 4,000 fewer outcries ($n = 15,657$), but the per thousand rate remained similar, 24.5/1000 (DoD, 2018b). The ratio of reports to substantiations has persisted at about 2:1 since 2007 (DoD, 2018b).

The VA meta-analysis utilized six studies of self-reported physical IPV and DV perpetration among active duty personnel (Gierish et al, 2013). The pooled estimates resulted in a point estimate of 22%, with a 95 confidence interval (17% - 27%) but heterogeneity ($I_2 = 100\%$) requires interpretative caution.

Demographics of MCSA Survivors

According to DoD (2015, 2017, 2018b) statistics, survivors are usually female, frequently civilian, and often married to a lower ranking Service Member. In FYs 2014 to 2017, exclusive of 2015 for which there is no available report, females represented between 64% (FY 2017) and 71% (FY 2016) of MCSA survivors (DoD, 2015, 2017, 2018b). Civilians represented nearly half of all MCSA survivors in the Armed Services (43%) in FY 2017. This is a 4% decline from the prior year (DoD, 2017). In FY 2014, the DoD (2015) only reported the military status of the abuser (61% active duty). Due to dual-service couples, in which both partners are active duty, it is impossible to accurately infer the percentage of civilian survivors for that year.

In FY 2017, offenders were primarily Service Members (57%), and most were lower Enlisted (DoD, 2018b). Those in paygrades E1-E3 represented 25% of substantiated abusers (DoD, 2018b). In FY17, E4s alone comprised nearly a third of all substantiated abusers (29%, DoD, 2018b). Although none of the DoD reports (2018b, 2017, 2015) operationalized socio-economic status, Enlisted families are sponsored by personnel with less earning power than Officers (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2018).

MILITARY-CONNECTED SPOUSE ABUSE AS A CULTURALLY-EXPERIENCED PHENOMENON

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2012) requires cultural competence of Social Workers practicing in a military milieu. Cultural competence necessitates a working knowledge of how the DoD impacts military families in general and how their lives are informed by a specific issue (NASW, 2012). Understanding the language, history, values, practices, and barriers to help-seeking specific to domestic violence (DV) in the Military are foundational to cultural competence for those serving military-connected survivors of domestic abuse.

Language

To distinguish between definitions accepted by the general public and those adopted by the Military, this paper introduces acronyms that alert the reader to the DoD's classifications. Domestic Abuse (in this paper, Military-Connected Domestic Abuse [MCDA]) is the umbrella term for violence between romantic partners (DoD, 2018b). MCDA is divided between Spouse Abuse (in this paper, MCSA) and Intimate Partner Abuse (in this paper, MCIPA; DoD, 2018b)

Except for dual-military couples, in which both partners serve, the distinction between MCIPA and MCSA hinges on the civilian partner's legal relationship to the DoD. As military spouses, survivors of MCSA receive Congressionally prescribed benefits that are available to all military dependents (insurance, housing, medical care, access to chaplains, etc.) until such time as their sponsor separates from the Service or a divorce occurs (Identification [ID] Cards, 2015; Dependents of Members Separated for Dependent Abuse: Transitional Compensation, Commissary, and Exchange Benefits, 2016). Although MCIPA survivors have no spousal benefits and no legal relationship to the DoD, they may receive victim services from the Military (DoD, 2018b). Both MCIPA and MCSA survivors may receive help from civilian providers.

The United States government uses particular language to describe an individuals and families who serve in the Military. "Service Member" and "active duty personnel" describe any individual who is currently serving in the Armed Forces (DoD, 2018a). "Veteran" describes those who have served in the past but are no longer serving (DoD, 2018a). "Soldier" is limited to those whose service is through the United States Army (DoD, 2018a). "Sponsor" is used to describe a Service Member's relationship to his or her dependent family members (DoD, 2018a). The spouse and minor children (or in some cases children under 25) of a Service Member are called "dependents" of the Service Member or "beneficiaries" of the government (ID Cards,

2015; DoD, 2018a). Although in civilian literature, both partners within a marriage are regarded as spouses, in the Military, only the civilian partner is referred to as “spouse” (DoD, 2018a). In this study, the term “peer-spouse” describes a non-abused, civilian spouse who provides social support to an abused spouse. This is not a term recognized by the DoD.

History

Until 2006, the primary response to domestic abuse was the responsibility of military commanders. Even after Congress chartered the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) to prevent, identify, treat, and track family neglect and abuse; rehabilitate abusers; and cooperate with local authorities (Assistant Secretary of Defense [FM&P], 1992), all reports of domestic abuse were routed through commanders, who wield considerable power over the life of their subordinates and the families of those subordinates (Clever & Segal, 2013). Commanders have authority to investigate claims of abuse and enforce non-judicial punishments on perpetrators, such as reduction in pay, confinement to barracks, and official reprimand (Commanding Officer’s Non-Judicial Punishment, 2016). While this power equips commanders to maintain order within their units, the Defense Task on Domestic Violence (DTFDV) determined that they were ill-equipped to handle victim needs and frequently put them at risk for more harm (DTFDV, 2001).

Additionally, the threat of losing military benefits kept many survivors from reporting at all (England, 2006).

Thus, the DoD established a system, known as restricted reporting, in which adult survivors could receive medical and mental health care without disclosing abuse to commanders (England, 2006; DTFDV, 2001). Despite this change, survivors are encouraged to interact with commanders through the unrestricted reporting option, explained more fully below in *Practices* (England, 2006; DTFDV, 2001). Kern (2017) reported that MCSA survivors regard the process

of reporting to be counterproductive. Research participants in Kern's study noted that although the chain of command possessed power to curb family violence through non-judicial means, the command teams often favored the Service Member.

Values

Only one of Kern's (2017) 16 participants endorsed a helpful response when reporting abuse to commanders or the FAP. One participant explained that helping professionals within the Military refused to risk her husband's rank or job to support her help-seeking. Another generalized her experience, "The majority of them [units and commanders] will have the [Service Member]'s back. . . You're the outsider" (Kern, 2017, p. 358).

Besides hindering help-seeking, Kern (2017) noted that idealized loyalty to the Military entrapped survivors within violent marriages. Spouses in her study reported that they felt obligated to endure abuse because their sponsors had endured combat hardships for their freedom and lifestyle. One felt pressured not only to suffer silently but to be outwardly thankful for all her husband provided and at what expense. Similarly, others indicated that they dropped charges or falsified legal affidavits to protect their Service Member's career.

Practices

The Military practices a three-phase response to DV: (1) reporting and immediate action, (2) investigation and assessment, and (3) findings and recommendations (Beals & Erwin, 2007). The response is activated when a survivor reports domestic abuse. If the report is made to FAP, the survivor may elect for a restricted report, which allows FAP to provide victim advocacy services and make referrals to mental and health care without engaging command or law enforcement (England, 2006). Unrestricted reports are forwarded to law enforcement and the alleged perpetrator's commander (England, 2006).

Overlapping systems and jurisdictions complicate the process. Each system has a distinct investigation process. As a result, the conclusions of each may differ. For example, FAP's Case Review Committee may substantiate an abuse claim, while Trial Counsel denies charges and does not convene a court martial (DoD, 2017). In such an instance, the case is entered into the Central Registry, which is used to demonstrate trends (McCarroll & Robichaux, 2010; DoD, 2017). However, the substantiated survivor is barred from receiving Transitional Compensation, which is the DoD's program to financially assist survivors leaving the military infrastructure. Transitional Compensation requires a conviction in court martial for dependent abuse and the discharge of the service member for such crimes (Under Secretary of Defense [C], 2018). How survivors experience this bureaucracy is largely unknown.

An additional complication for survivors is that a civilian criminal investigation and/or child protective services investigation may occur during or immediately following the military proceedings (United States Department of the Army [DA], 2011). Outcomes of these investigations hinge on state laws rather than the UCMJ; therefore civilian opinions may contradict military ones. Neither the outcome nor the process of civilian investigations has been studied relative to military spouses.

Unique Barriers to Help Seeking for Military Spouses

Military survivors face systemic barriers to help seeking (England, 2006; Kern, 2017; National Center for Domestic and Sexual Violence, n.d.). Among these are negative implications to the sponsor's career as well as the potential loss of military benefits and social infrastructure. Less obvious barriers include the way in which law enforcement engages Service Members as well as how survivors and abusers apply military values to their marital situation. Specifically, the ethos of loyalty impacts survivors on multiple fronts (Johnson & Tucker, 2010).

The DoD recognized negative career implications as one of the primary reasons survivors opted against reporting DV (England, 2006). The Service Member's career is associated with reliable income and significant benefits. Among these are medical care, housing, schools, day care, houses of worship, tax-free shopping privileges, commissaries, fuel stations, teen programs, family support organizations, recreational opportunities (ID Cards, 2015) as well as a host of community benefits available to Service families (i.e. Military Benefits, 2018).

Additionally, single-income families are a cultural feature of military communities (United States Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2012). In 2012, the GAO prepared a Congressional report indicating that civilian spouses face common barriers to gainful employment: inability to secure professional licenses in a timely manner between military relocations; lack of safe and affordable childcare; spotty job history due to military-related moves; and the frequent absences of the Service Member, during which the spouse is responsible to fulfill roles normally accomplished by the sponsor (GAO, 2012). Although some employment initiatives have been instituted, the GAO report stated that no assessment measures were included, so effectiveness is unknown. Kern (2017) noted the lack of personal assets as a considerable hindrance to escape. Economic dependence combined with the infrastructure the Military provides families is a substantial barrier for survivors to overcome.

Another barrier is the perception that due to the Service Members status, an abuser will not be held accountable by law enforcement. One of Kern's (2017) participants expressed this concern. Additionally, Markowitz and Watson (2015) found that some police officers gave obvious preference to domestically violent Veterans displaying PTSD symptoms. It is unknown whether this bias extends to an accused individual who is currently serving in the Armed Forces.

Markowitz and Watson's (2015) conclusions are consistent with Kern's (2017) findings

that some abusive Service Members appealed to their status as a “war hero” to discredit survivors and avoid consequences. Similarly, some Service Members capitalized on cultural values of loyalty and patriotism to obstruct safety-seeking (Kern, 2017). Spouses have reported that military values precluded them from protesting abuse or reporting DV because to reject a Service Member was perceived as a dereliction of a service wife’s duty (Kern, 2017). Fellow Service Members may avoid reporting one another for DV as an expression of the warrior ethos, which is marked by loyalty, duty and selfless service (Johnson & Tucker, 2010). Little research exists to elucidate the extent to which military values are interwoven into the dynamic of MCSA.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR DATA ANALYSIS

As a conceptual framework, intersectionality accounts for the intricacies of an individual’s identity and social connections (Crenshaw, 1991). It allows Social Workers to examine and describe how the interactions of identity-combinations inform experiences of marginalization as well as privilege (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010). In this study, intersectionality was evaluated based on an individual’s intersection with the DoD as a Service Member, spouse, abuse survivor, and/or abuse perpetrator. Commenters were of many combinations: Service Member who was a perpetrator, Service Member who was a survivor, Service Member who endorsed no personal experience with abuse, spouse who was a survivor, spouse who endorsed no personal experience with abuse. The only set of intersections not represented in the sample was that of a spouse who admitted abuse perpetration against a Service Member.

For the military spouse experiencing domestic abuse, intersectionality extends beyond military connection and survivor identity. It also incorporates socioeconomic status, race, geographic location, age, education, citizenship status, sexual orientation, employment status, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, religious affiliation or spiritual orientation, primary language,

familial identity, and role (Lockhart & Mitchell, 2010). Additionally, military spouses maintain intersecting identities that are unique to the Armed Forces: branch (i.e. Army or Navy) sponsor's rank (i.e. Private or Major), sponsor's position in the unit (i.e. Platoon Sargent or Brigade Commander), living situation (on post or off), volunteer status on post (i.e. Family Readiness Group leader, member of Military Council of Catholic Women), phase of the deployment cycle (pre-deployment, deployment, redeployment, stabilization). These and other social constructs combine to create an irreducible whole that determines how a survivor experiences familial violence, federal policies, Defense programs, and civilian intervention practices. Unfortunately, individual nuances were disclosed by few participants in this study, indicating a need for a more comprehensive qualitative study of MCSA.

This study applied intersectionality during analysis for a deeper understanding of human power dynamics and vulnerabilities. The researcher evaluated YouTube comments not only for content and factual data but also for indications of how power and power systems impacted the experiences of commenters (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). Additionally, comments were examined for insight into how stakeholders perceived their relationship to the powerful military response systems. While published regulations and field manuals may describe the Military's response to domestic abuse, only survivors, perpetrators, and those closest to them can express how they negotiated one of the most powerful systems in the world: the United States government and its Department of Defense.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do military stakeholders respond to disclosure of MCSA made on YouTube?

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

OBSERVATIONAL ONLINE APPROACH

Other than the demographic snapshots taken annually by the Defense Department, little is known about MCSA survivors. Given the relative invisibility of this population in the research, qualitative inquiry is the best method of discovery (Padgett, 2017). Ethnographers have recognized the importance of evaluating social media interactions in accessing difficult to engage populations (Kozinets, 2010), and Social Work researchers have affirmed social media as “both a live and a natural setting in which credible qualitative study can occur” (Floersch, Longhoefer, & Suskewicz, 2014, p.5). Such research is gaining credence within the larger qualitative research community as well (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017; García & Peláez, 2014; Schuman, Lawrence, & Pope, 2019).

DATA COLLECTION

To conduct this study, YouTube comments were collected and analyzed. Criterion sampling was employed to ensure comment relevance to the topic of stakeholder reaction to MCSA disclosure. Criterion sampling is a form of purpose sampling that requires participants to meet a set of norms (Padgett, 2017). Sampling was conducted using an inverted pyramid:

1. Videos populated a YouTube search of one or more terms listed below ($n=414$; Table 1). All the videos that populated each search were included in the initial sample until 10 videos in a row were ads for military divorce attorneys and / or duplications of URLs already included. This signaled that inclusion criteria for that term had been saturated.

Table 1: *Videos Populating Each Search String*

#	Search String	Results	Duplicate	Unique
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A	Domestic Violence in the Military	131	0	131
B	Military Intimate Partner Violence	113	86	27
C	Military Spouse Abuse	82	55	27
D	Military Domestic Abuse	88	80	8
E	Battered Military Spouse	14	12	2
Total		414	221	195

2. Videos met the following format criteria:
 - a. Was a unique URL ($n=195$). The videos themselves could be duplicated if posted by different individuals with unique URLs, thus providing a unique platform for comments.
 - b. Was not a compilation of videos ($n=190$).
 - c. Was not an ad, drama, song, satire, or the like ($n=168$).
3. Videos were primarily on the topic of MCSA ($n=81$). That is, at least 50% of the video's time was dedicated to MCSA-related content (statistics, survivor narrative, policy, etc.). Videos that mentioned MCSA in the context of other military social problems (i.e. sexual assault, child abuse) but did not extensively explore MCSA as a separate issue were excluded.
4. Videos contained an MCSA survivor narrative, whether an interview, VLOG, family member sharing their loved one's MCSA experience or the like ($n=34$).
5. Videos had garnered comments ($n=13$). Table 2 is the database of included videos.

Table 2: *Video Database*

Video	Domestic Violence in the Military	Military Intimate Partner Violence	Military Spouse Abuse	Battered Military Spouse	Military Domestic Abuse	Unique URL	Compilation	Not Ad, Drama, Music	>50% MCSA Content	Survivor Narrative	Total Comments	Relevant Stakeholder Comments	Length
A	5/14/19	5/21/19	5/22/19	5/23/19	5/24/19	Y	N	Y	f	Y	88	28	00:03:24
B	5/9/19	5/21/19	5/22/19	N	5/24/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	10	4	00:03:24
C	5/11/19	5/21/19	5/22/19	N	5/25/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	10	4	00:05:47
D	5/9/19	5/21/19	N	N	5/25/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	3	1	00:05:14
E	5/14/19	5/21/19	5/22/19	N	5/24/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	8	6	00:06:33
F	N	N	5/23/19	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	13	10	00:16:53
G	5/9/19	N	5/22/19	5/23/19	5/25/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	20	3	01:24:45
H	5/20/19	N	5/22/19	N	5/25/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	7	1	00:01:21
I	5/11/19	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	74	22	00:22:28
J	5/9/19	5/21/19	5/22/19	N	5/24/19	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	43	8	00:04:39
K	5/9/19	5/21/19	5/23/19	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	4	1	00:04:30
L	5/9/19	5/21/19	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	10	1	05:47:00
M	5/20/19	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	1	1	00:05:14

Once the constellation of videos was defined, comments were sifted using a similar exclusionary pyramid:

1. All comments from included videos were evaluated ($n=291$).
2. Comment was made by an individual who associated themselves with the Military ($n=100$).

3. The comment contained MCSA-related content ($n=66$).
4. The comment was unique, not repeated verbatim as a comment to another video ($n=64$).
5. Comment was made by an individual who meets the DoD definition of Service Member or spouse ($n=31$). The following were thus excluded:
 - a. Veteran comments ($n=2$).
 - b. Spouses of Veterans ($n=3$).
 - c. Former Spouses ($n=25$).
 - d. Unmarried Romantic Partners ($n=1$).
 - e. Adult Children ($n=3$).
 - f. Undeterminable Relationship ($n=2$).
6. The remaining comments available for analysis were classified as follows:
 - a. Service Members (male, $n=5$; female, $n=1$; undisclosed, $n=2$).
 - i. Service Members who endorsed perpetrating abuse ($n=1$).
 - ii. Service Members who experienced abuse by a civilian spouse ($n=2$).
 - iii. Service Members who did not endorse experience with abuse ($n=5$).
 - b. Military Spouses (male, $n=0$; female, $n=8$; undisclosed, $n=0$).
 - i. Spouses who endorsed perpetrating abuse ($n=0$).
 - ii. Spouses who experienced abuse by a Service Member spouse ($n=6$).
 - iii. Spouses who did not endorse experience with abuse ($n=2$).

SAMPLE

Videos

Of the videos ($n=414$) that populated the four searches, only 13 met qualification criteria (Table 2). These represented a heterogeneous sample. The earliest upload was 2009 and the most recent, 2019. They ranged in length from 1:21 minutes to 22:28 minutes. The number of stakeholder comments for each video ranged from one to 28. Some videos were professionally produced news segments from major American media outlets. Others were VLOGS posted by survivors of MCSA. No video produced by the DoD or its agencies qualified for inclusion because no stakeholders commented on any official military production.

Comments

The comments ($n=23$) that met inclusion criteria were posted by 16 individuals. Eight identified as active duty Service Members, and eight identified as spouses of active duty Service Members. Only two of the spouses did not disclose a personal history of MCSA. All spouses identified as female. One Service Member identified as female. Five identified as male. Two did not disclose gender. One Service Member disclosed his own MCSA perpetration. Two disclosed experiences of abuse by their civilian wives. Five expressed no personal connection to MCSA.

Analysis

Analysis followed an organized process as modified from Padgett's work (2017). First, the included comments were copied and pasted from YouTube into a document. This preserved non-linguistic features of the comments, such as emojis, use of capital letters, etc. It also reduced possibility of transcription errors. Next, rules were set that defined disclosures made by commenters, perceptions of commenters, and actions taken by commenters (See Appendix A). Comments were coded accordingly and clustered into categories. Relationships were identified between and among clusters (Trochim, Donnelly, & Arora, 2016).

Throughout data collection and analysis, the principal researcher maintained a field journal. This journal facilitated the use of bracketing, a technique designed to reduce bias (Padgett, 2017). Additionally, the journal served as the location of the audit trail (Padgett, 2017).

Human Subjects Considerations

No human interaction was required for this project since all data is publicly available. No commenter, video producer, or other related individual was approached regarding the project. However, it remains a critical mandate of the Social Work profession to mitigate risk to any person associated with research. Therefore, no identifying information was disclosed in the final report. This includes YouTube user names, real names, and locations. As an additional layer of protection, the titles and URLs of videos to which individuals commented were withheld, as well as the dates on which comments were posted. The database and codebook (Table 2 and Appendix A, respectively) were also sanitized of identifying information.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Results clustered around three primary response types: disclosures, perceptions, and actions. Disclosures were information presented as fact by the commenter, were taken at face value by the researcher, and were used by the researcher to establish intersectional identities of commenters. Perceptions revealed the commenters' evaluations and opinions regarding the intersectionality of spousal abuse and military service or connection. Actions comprised the commenters' active responses to MCSA disclosures: emotional expression and direct address to an individual disclosing MCSA.

DISCLOSURES

Intersectionality was immediately apparent among commenters. However, individuals differed sharply about whether Service Members or spouses were marginalized as a result of their intersection with the Military and spousal abuse. Opinions were divided based on commenters' identities as Service Members or spouses rather than gender. All spouses were female, so no male spouse perspective was represented. The one female Service Member shared views similar to male Service Members rather than female spouses. Frequently, male Service Members abused by their wives were more closely aligned in perspective to female spouses than other Service Members, regardless of gender.

The addition of "survivor" to the identity of military spouse appeared to impact social categorization among military wives. None were ambiguous about their relationship to MCSA. Six of the eight endorsed ongoing abuse. Their vague disclosures were embedded in messages of solidarity: "Sounds like my marriage," "I've lived this," "I'm going through this now." With scant words and fewer details, they connected to one another as having an experience unique

from those of non-abused spouses and from abused civilians. Unlike non-abused spouses or civilian survivors, MCSA survivors frequently disclosed private family matters to their spouse's powerful employers, who did not regard them with basic human dignity. One wrote, "They [the command team] talk to me like I'm garbage."

The two non-abused spouses also described themselves in relation to MCSA. One presented herself as a concerned helper of survivors and the other as a new military wife who was afraid MCSA would develop as a result of her husband's career choice. Thus, they validated that the layer of abuse survivor intersecting with the identity of military spouse created an experience that is distinct from a military spouse who is non-abused. Both non-abused spouses also indicated by their comments that MCSA was essentially different from civilian spousal abuse. One expressed fear that military service would predispose her husband toward abuse, while the other alluded to the systemic difficulties survivors face when interacting with military bureaucracies.

Intersectionality was also recognizable within the comments of Service Members. Three Service Members endorsed direct relationship with spouse abuse. Two were survivors of abuse perpetrated by civilian spouses, but only one described how intersecting identities impacted his military career. He stated that reporting abuse placed him in a vulnerable position with his commander, who joked about the situation rather than taking protective action. Another Service Member admitted abusing his wife and participating in Family Advocacy Program offender intervention classes. He indicated that his combat service was directly linked to beating his spouse. He did not, however, illuminate how his career or relationship with power structures was impacted as a result.

Service Members who did not claim experience with abuse disclosed their observations of others who had been accused of abuse. Several ($n=3$) noted that military spouses enjoy a position of privilege with commanders such that even a false accusation would result in a ruined career. One asserted, “So many of my friends have loss [sic] their career [sic] because some female decides to cry domestic violence when is not true.”

PERCEPTIONS

Both Service Members and spouses used strong language to demonstrate their oppression by romantic partners and military power structures. As with disclosures, the intersection of spousal abuse and military connection played a more significant role than biological sex. The female Service Member endorsed perceptions more similar to male Service Members than those of female spouses. Similarly, a male Service Member who endorsed abuse by his wife shared perceptions more closely aligned with female survivors than with male Service Members.

The marital dynamic of imbalanced power most frequently endorsed by Service Members ($n=3$) was that of false accusation. The female Service Member stated that she had observed military wives make false accusations as a way to create economic hardship for the sponsor. Another Service Member explained that his unit’s commander had “no mercy” for those accused of domestic abuse such that the commander engendered a fear of wives’ complaints. The third asserted that, “65 to 78% of all women crying abuse is false, that they are trying to game the system” but did not provide a source for his statistic. He did go on to detail his own experience with false abuse accusations made by his wife that were resolved through the civilian judicial system rather than the military one.

Spouses’ comments about power systems illustrated their perceptions that a person’s intersectional identity of MCSA survivor creates unique vulnerabilities not experienced by either

non-abused military spouses or abused civilians. One spouse explained that military connection rendered her more vulnerable to her sponsor's power tactics. They were stationed overseas, so she did not have access to advocacy agencies and social services that are commonly available to American DV survivors. This exacerbated the impact of her sponsor's economic control. Another drew a direct correlation between military training and the aggression level of her sponsor.

Besides informing abusive patterns within marriage, the intersection of spousal abuse and military connection also created conditions favorable for abuse of power by commanders. No commenter expressed dismay that commanders possessed significant power, but of the 12 who expressed an opinion, 11 distrusted military leaders to appropriate this power in an unbiased and effective manner. Spouses described favoritism toward Service Members; while Service Members endorsed opposite experiences.

One spouse wrote of the months she waited before a commander issued a Military Protective Order (MPO). Another was frustrated that even though a commander issued an MPO, it was "a joke." A third asserted, "They [command team] sent him home knowing he was gonna beat me." This distrust was not limited to abused spouses. A non-abused spouse validated the experiences of a survivor: "I do not hesitate one bit to know that they aren't helping you to their fullest extent." Still another spouse used particularly vivid imagery to describe her perceptions: "I feel like the military is now raping me of my rights."

In direct opposition to spouses, Service Members who were not abused perceived the power of commanders to be skewed toward civilians. One military commenter wrote to a spouse, "The [specific Branch] cares more about you than their own [Service Members]." A

female Service Member felt that spouses were endowed with *a priori* credibility: “but hey they are the civilians so most of the time pmo [Provost Marshall’s Office] will believe them.”

The one exception to the Service Member-spouse dichotomy was a Service Member who was abused by his wife. Unlike other Service Members, he did not accuse the command group of favoring his spouse. Instead, he described an interaction that more closely resembled the MCSA survivor’s experience with a commander who talked to her like she was “garbage.” The Service Member survivor wrote, “My ex wife fucked me over mentally so bad and my command or unit didn't give a shit. they just said oh well I guess ur a real [Service Member] now and laughed.”

While most of the commenters were skeptical of the Military’s response to MCSA, two Service Members affirmed its effective use of power to address MCSA. The Service Member who abused his wife described the intervention services he received and was hopeful the classes would help him quell future abuse. Another Service Member said he had witnessed the system assist survivors. Two others attempted to explain the difference in the survivors’ stories and their own observations. One suggested that the Military has changed for the better since the survivor’s YouTube video posted three years prior. Another explained that the gulf between a MCSA survivor’s experience of command apathy and the Service Members’ experience of retribution was a result of individual differences between Branches and command teams. However, multiple spouses from different Branches discredited his assertion that command apathy was isolated to a particular Branch. None of the spouses described the Military’s response as positive, with the exception of one spouse who considered FAP workers to be “great,” but she added that the offender programs were counterproductive.

One area in which spouses and Service Members agreed is that the Military itself bore some responsibility for the spousal abuse that occurs within its ranks. However, there was great variety in what they considered problematic. A single Service Member loosely connected spousal abuse and military service because he viewed many military marriages as merely an escape from the barracks. A spouse wrote that the Military had made her husband, “super aggressive.” The Service Member who perpetrated MCSA correlated his combat experiences and his maltreatment of his wife, “I got back in one piece, but my relationship with my wife deteriorated.” He added, “I hope that no veteran has to harm their families because of any trauma that they've gone thru in any war.” Although the abusive Service Member had expressed positivity about FAP interventions being helpful, an abused spouse pointed to the interventions as contributing to her continued abuse: “It's almost as if the counseling he is going to and the domestic violence classes are giving him more ammunition to use against me!”

An additional complication faced by both perpetrators and survivors is the intersection of their lives not only with the military response system but also a variety of civilian systems. Commenters diverged in their opinions about the outcome of working with these systems. An abused Service Member indicated that while the Military did not intervene in his situation, his former wife was incarcerated by their state for her abusive behaviors. Spouses, on the other hand, did not find success in dealing with civilian systems but commented instead on their isolation from or failure of helping mechanisms. One abused spouse reported that state protection orders were no more effective than ones issued by not enforced by commanders. A spouse stationed overseas wrote, “I have no one to turn to, no one to help me.” A third expressed housing vulnerability but did not mention whether the family lived on post of off.

ACTIONS

Among both Service Members and spouses, commenters used social media as an opportunity to take action related to MCSA. The intersection of identity appeared to impact what emotions commenters expressed as well as which actions they took. Spouses tended to express fear and / or empathy. They reached out to one another requesting or offering support. Service Members, whether abused or not, expressed anger more frequently than any other emotion and aggressively addressed spouses generally and MCSA survivors specifically. The female Service Member chose language similar to her male counterparts. Service Members abused by their wives responded with aggression toward spouses in general and MCSA survivors in particular. The perpetrator of abuse did not address others.

The least common action taken among spouses was addressing survivors. One abused spouse asked help of the poster of the original video, which contained advice on dealing with the bureaucratic elements of MCSA reporting. A non-abused spouse offered her resources and connections to help a MCSA survivor. All other spouses avoided direct contact with survivors.

While Service Members neither sought nor offered help to one another, they did address MCSA survivors directly. Most comments were aggressive in nature. One commenter gave a double message to the VLOG poster. He expressed sorrow for what the VLOGGER experienced, but qualified the message with, "If what happened to you is true," undermining the validity of her experience. Other commenters peppered their comments with epithets about the poster specifically and all military wives in general: "gold diggers," "trash," "idiot," "bitch," and "typical miss piggy military wife." One commenter was particularly vitriolic toward a survivor: "Id [sic] have done far worse than her husband. For starters Id [sic] lock her in a room with a treadmill and diet pills the next time I deployed and the only thing shed have for nutrition for 3 years is frozen juice concentrate."

The most common emotion expressed by spouses was fear. One commenter feared systemic retribution because she was speaking out publicly about military-connected spousal abuse. Another expressed fear related to the loss of benefits and other sequela of rupturing a military union. A non-abused spouse who was new to the Military expressed fear in general terms. Only one Service Member expressed fear, which was related to the potential inappropriate handling of false accusations and the related loss of career and benefits.

Anger at the video or related disclosures was the most common emotion expressed by Service Members. The emotion was expressed vehemently and with vulgarity among those who expressed it. Two commenters directed their anger at the videos: “This is bullshit” and “This video pisses me off.” Another vehemently defended himself and other Service Members, “but just because he was a shitbag doesn't mean we all are!” Only one spouse expressed anger, “It’s so frustrating!” she wrote in relation to the blame shifting she experienced from commanders.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrated that intersectionality is of critical importance in understanding the phenomena of MCSA. Crenshaw (1991) showed that race-neutral models of antiviolence failed to take into account the needs of diverse survivors. Similarly, interventions that do not account for intersectional identities of MCSA survivors are unlikely to provide the comprehensive support necessary for resilient outcomes, regardless of whether these interventions are offered by the Military or surrounding civilian communities.

STAKEHOLDERS' EXPERIENCE OF THE MILITARY'S DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE SYSTEM

Both spouses and Service Members expressed distrust of the official response system. Comparing the experiences of military-connected individuals with general populations is difficult because of the significant differences in the amount of control the Service Member's employer exerts on his or her life as well as that of the family. Examining the experience of individuals who report DV within the context of employment provides a useful contrast. However, it is important to note, that the necessity of a survivor to appeal to and rely on his or her abuser's employer for safety is unique to those at the intersection of military connection and spousal abuse.

According to Kulkarni and Ross (2016), the majority of civilian survivors who reported DV within their own work environment (70%) endorsed a positive response. Tellingly, though, when survivors disclosed DV to only one recipient, none of them chose a supervisor, and only 8% opted to engage their Employment Assistance Program (EAP) alone. When survivors shared with co-workers, their interface with both supervisors (59%) and EAPs (40%) increased

dramatically. The qualitative aspects of Kulkarni and Ross' study indicated that coworkers were valuable listeners and emotional supports, but were unable to meet the more practical needs that could be addressed by supervisors and EAPs.

Similar dynamics may be in play in the Military if service spouses are considered loosely analogous to coworkers, in that they are peers within a larger system and their relationships developed in a professional, rather than familial or purely social, context. The comparison is imperfect because the work environment belongs to the perpetrator rather than to the survivor, and spouses do not see one another daily in a work environment in the same way as coworkers do. However, YouTube comments indicated that spouses provide an essential social support element in a manner similar to Kulkarni and Ross' (2016) coworkers. Thus, like the Kulkarni and Ross study suggested of coworkers, peers may be an overlooked conduit of information, resources, and support for survivors.

Spouse peer support is a dynamic that has been explored related to deployments and other challenges of military life. Bora and Fina (2017) noted that spouses frequently regarded one another as surrogate family, "protecting and taking care" of one another (p. 152). The Army has leveraged this unique social support system to connect spouses with the Military itself through the Army Family Team Building (AFTB) courses (Hirsh, 2019). AFTB equips spouses with a working knowledge of the intricacies of military culture, resilience, and self-reliance (Hirsh, 2019). While no peer-reviewed studies or program evaluations of AFTB were publicly available, a dissertation by Gall (2009) indicated that spouses who participated in AFTB increased in their knowledge and skills in every area measured by Gall. Significant to MCSA, Gall discovered that spouses who participated in AFTB reported less reliance on their Service Member to engage military resources for themselves and others. Such empowerment could

significantly reduce a survivor's dependence on an abusive spouse as well as increase a spouse-peer's ability to assist a survivor through the complex military response process. Inclusion of MCSA-related information into the AFTB program could be a significant way to empower survivors and the spouses who support them.

Like survivors, Service Members who commented to YouTube videos in this study also distrusted the military response system. Law enforcement officers provide a useful comparison population. Like Service Members, they have a strict hierarchal work environment that is wedded to a powerful criminal justice system, though military commanders may wield more unilateral power over a their employee's personal lives than do police captains, underscoring the importance of intersectionality.

Donnelly, Valentine, and Oehme (2015) found that only 1/3 of surveyed officers would engage their EAP for domestic violence; however, their study did not explore the reasons behind this reticence. In contrast, Saunders, Prost, and Oehme (2016) reported that surveyed officers (60-69%, averaged across demographics) were highly likely to recommend EAP to other officers who perpetrated DV. The juxtaposition of these two studies suggest that that opinions about employer-based response systems may be strongly influenced by whether the employee has committed DV or not. Therefore, although the majority of the Service Member YouTube comments about the Military's response systems were skewed negatively, the negativity may be a function of the DV-history of those who view MCSA-related YouTube videos. Future study is necessary to disambiguate perceptions of Service Members about the Military's response to MCSA based on their relationship to the issue.

STAKEHOLDERS' EXPERIENCE OF FAMILY ADVOCACY PROGRAM

The stakeholders in this study responded with both positive and negative evaluations of their experiences with FAP. However the DoD evaluation measures do not explore the experiences of FAP participants. The DoD determines FAP effectiveness based on the ratio of substantiated abusers in any given Fiscal Year compared to the number of those individuals who were substantiated for a different incident the following year (DoD, 2018b). The metric does not account for the number of Service Members who discharged from the Service during that interval, rendering themselves ineligible for subsequent substantiation by the DoD even if they are violent toward their spouses. Divorce or incarceration, both of which were mentioned by Service Members in this study as outcomes, may make subsequent substantiated abuse unlikely, regardless of an individual's participation in FAP services the year before. Therefore, a more in-depth look into perpetrator outcomes is warranted.

The Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force provide Branch-specific ways this may be effectively accomplished. The Navy has instituted evidence-based, standardized intervention programs for offenders (DoD, 2018b). The Marine Corps and Air Force use feedback forms to inform offender program evaluation (DoD, 2018b). Although the findings from these evaluations are scantily reviewed in the annual FAP report, they demonstrate the ability of the DoD to institute large-scale evaluation measures that can provide more robust data about offender interventions than a single ratio.

Only the Army considered survivor experience in their annual summary of FAP (DoD, 2018b). The Army has piloted a Domestic Abuse Victim Advocacy Program that seeks to educate victims about safety and the DV cycle (DoD, 2018b). They reported significant increases in the knowledge base of survivors about their own situations. However, these services are unavailable in all Branches. The DoD (2018b) reported that 64% of survivors were active

duty personnel but only spouses in the present study commented on their experiences with FAP victim services. While the sample is too narrow to generalize, the absence of any Service Member survivor comment on FAP begs the question of whether they interfaced with the agency at all. Additionally, when spouse survivors commented on FAP, they mentioned the emotional support of individual FAP workers in a positive light but blamed offender programming for creating new means for their spouse to abuse them. The DoD (2018b) does not evaluate FAP on any measure that considers survivor experience or outcomes. In order to ensure continued safety and evidence-based based practices in an agency funded with federal dollars, measures that investigate experiences and outcomes of both Service Member and MCSA survivors. The Domestic Violence Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative provided a model of extensive program evaluation that may be applied with modification to the FAP (Thomas et al., 2018).

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE WITHIN THE MILITARY CULTURE

MCSA is a culturally informed phenomena that places survivors in the cross-hairs between the powerful federal government and an abusive spouse. Although there is no study of MCSA that examines how racial or gender identities impact the lived experience of abuse or help-seeking within the military community, the basic premise of intersectionality explained that identity combinations can increase an individual's level of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991). This appeared to be borne out by the comments of spouses and Service Members. Simply sharing an experience of MCSA as a spouse brought a hailstorm of insults from privileged strangers (i.e., military members) about their identity as military wives and their veracity as survivors. Those who commented about their own experiences as survivors exhibited bravery to expose themselves to the barrage. Courage was also evident in non-abused spouses who reached

out to their peers with messages of support and offers of help. Their bravery and support of one another may be important components of resilience within a MCSA-context. Future studies should investigate not only the systemic barriers survivors face in help-seeking, but also the qualities they have that enhance their ability to seek help. Future studies should also explore the impact of military values on the experience of domestic abuse and help-seeking.

STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCE OF CIVILIAN HELPING SYSTEMS

Few commenters ($n=3$) referenced civilian systems at all. One Service Member celebrated the justice he experienced in a civilian court house. Spouses did not fare as well. One lamented her inability to access community resources, and another mentioned that a civilian protective order wasn't enforced. The non-abused spouse who offered resources to a survivor alluded to working within the military system. The lack of positive reference to civilian systems may point to program inaccessibility, lack of outreach to vulnerable spouses within the military community, or services that spouses experience as ineffective. Further study is necessary to determine whether community agencies routinely partner with FAP in order to offer military-connected survivors with a comprehensive approach to their needs. Further, research is required to determine whether these services are designed with respect to intersectional identities of survivors and their resultant needs. Additionally, the complexities of navigating the multifaceted military response while simultaneously interfacing with civilian helping agencies and legal systems likely represent a burden only vaguely alluded to by commenters in this study. This deserves future study from an intersectional perspective.

LIMITATIONS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

The study was limited by sampling concerns and researcher bias. The sampling method did not provide for representation of each Branch: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast

Guard. Nor did commenters routinely identify their affiliation or status as Active or Guard / Reserve. Also, minority commenters (male spouses, female Service Members, LGBTQ, racial, other) were only represented insofar as they posted to the selected videos. Since many commenters did not provide demographic information, it was impossible to determine what subgroups within the Military were represented. An additional sampling concern was the difficulty inherent with self-selection. The views of survivors who post to YouTube videos may not be representative of all MCSA survivors. Similarly, Service Members who take time to watch MCSA-related content on YouTube may not represent the views of the Armed Forces as a whole.

Finally, the lead researcher operated from an emic perspective, although her official affiliation with the Military ended upon her divorce. She understood military acronyms found within comments and was familiar with each of the official organizations mentioned within the comments. However, since she is a MCSA survivor, she risked unintentionally overlaying the comments with her experience, interpreting them based on her preconceived ideas of MCSA, or including a comment made by a poster who was no longer a stakeholder.

To reduce the impact of these limitations, trustworthiness was established through techniques aimed at enhancing rigor. These included triangulation, audit trailing, and bracketing (Padgett, 2017). Padgett recommends triangulation, which is a technique that utilizes more than one source to confirm a conclusion. It was applied to data sources, methods, and theory. Triangulation of data sources was accomplished by including comments made by both Service Members and MCSA survivors. Represented among Service Members were perpetrators and survivors of dual-service abuse. Spouses included those who endorsed a history of MCSA ($n=6$) and those who did not ($n=2$). Triangulation of methods was satisfied by making field notes as

well as collecting data.

An audit trail documented analytic decisions throughout the course of the study (Padgett, 2017). These decisions were reviewed by the thesis committee chair on an ongoing basis. The audit trail was of critical importance, because this is the first study of its kind. Results cannot be automatically extrapolated due to sampling concerns. Thus, similar studies will be necessary to gain an nuanced understanding of the lived experience of MCSA, and an available audit trail will assist in future work (Padgett, 2017).

Finally, to safeguard against bias, the primary researcher employed bracketing. Bracketing is the process by which a researcher identifies and suspends bias throughout the course of a qualitative study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). According to Tufford and Newman, bracketing serves two primary purposes: to protect the research and the researcher. By acknowledging bias through bracketing, the researcher is less likely to taint the data with her own perspective (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing was most useful in determining which comments to include. For instance, in the initial exclusion process, several comments were included because the content resonated with the researcher's personal experience, thus she attributed them to "stakeholders" without careful evaluation. However, once coding commenced, bracketing guided the researcher to set aside her bias and evaluate the commenter's self-identified status, regardless of the comment's content. Thus, an additional exclusionary category was established: each commenter satisfied the DoD's (2018a) definition of Service Member or dependent in order to be included. Others were definitionally not current stakeholders, even if they had been stakeholders prior to a divorce or military separation.

CONCLUSION

This study raised far more questions than it answered. How do stakeholders experience the Military's domestic abuse response system? How might non-abused spouses assist the DoD in preventing or responding to MCSA? How do stakeholders experience FAP? What outcomes do perpetrators experience after participating in FAP's offender interventions? What outcomes do survivors experience after interfacing with FAP? How does military culture inform the experience of MCSA? How does military culture inform help-seeking among survivors? Does the increased burden of interfacing with competing jurisdictions (state and Military) yield an increase in positive outcomes for survivors as opposed to their civilian peers who must only intersect with state law enforcement and courts?

The answers to these questions have distinct implications for Social Work. The NASW (2012) asserts that regardless of practice expertise, most Social Workers will care for clients who have, at one time, served the Nation as Service Members or spouses. Understanding the complexities of MCSA will help Social Workers understand the complexity of military life in general. Additionally, answering those questions through rigorous research may equip Social Workers deliver evidence-based services to military-connected survivors and perpetrators, whether in civilian or military settings. For those Social Workers who practice within FAPs across the world, the answers to these questions may also create tensions when the imperative to care for perpetrators and survivors conflicts with the mission of the Department of Defense to maintain a lethal force. Ultimately, though, as with all Social Work research, the ultimate hope of any project is to contribute to the alleviation of human suffering; and this project in particular hopes to open the door to rigorous studies that will increase positive outcomes for MCSA survivors.

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APPENDIX A

Responses of Stakeholders to Disclosures of MCSA

Code	Description	Example
Disclosure of Spousal Abuse	<p>A Service Member or spouse discloses history of spousal abuse in their current marital relationship. The commenter could be the perpetrator or survivor. The abuse could be any of the DoD recognized types: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect.</p>	<p>SM: "I have beaten her a few times" // Spouse: "It's all verbal. Lots and lots of verbal. He twists things in a way that in the end I'm standing there questioning everything."</p>
Disclosure of Impact of Military Service	<p>A Service Member or spouse discloses specific ways in which military service impacts the lived experience of MCSA.</p>	<p>SM: "I got back [from combat] in one piece, but my relationship with my wife deteriorated." // Spouse: "We are overseas & I get no financial support, no money for food"</p>
Disclosure of Military Response	<p>A Service Member or spouse discloses specific ways in which his /her intersected with the military response system to MCSA. This code is limited to information presented as fact, not the individuals assessment or evaluation of the facts. Service Members could comment as perpetrators or survivors.</p>	<p>SM: "I am now going thru domestic violence classes and parenting." // Spouse: "They sent him home knowing he was gonna beat me."</p>

Code	Description	Example
Disclosure of Spousal Abuse	<p>A Service Member or spouse discloses history of spousal abuse in their current marital relationship. The commenter could be the perpetrator or survivor. The abuse could be any of the DoD recognized types: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect.</p>	<p>SM: "I have beaten her a few times" // Spouse: "It's all verbal. Lots and lots of verbal. He twists things in a way that in the end I'm standing there questioning everything."</p>
Perception of Military Response (+)	<p>A Service Member or spouse evaluates the Military's systemic response to MCSA in a positive or hopeful way.</p>	<p>SM: "If ur abused and trust me ive seen it a couple time they will do something about it." // Spouse: "FAP was helpful."</p>
Perception of Military Response (-)	<p>A Service Member or spouse evaluates the Military's systemic response to MCSA in a negative way.</p>	<p>SM: "my command or unit didn't give a shit. they just said oh well I guess ur a real soldier now and laughed." // Spouse: "I feel like the military is now raping me of my rights."</p>
Perception of Military Causal Relationship	<p>A Service Member or spouse attributes any level of responsibility to the Military for contributing or prolonging spousal abuse.</p>	<p>SM: "I hope that no veteran has to harm their families because of any trauma that they've gone thru in any war." // Spouse: "It's almost as if the counseling he is going to and the domestic violence classes are giving him more ammuniton to use against me!"</p>
Action: Emotional Expression	<p>A Service Member or spouse expresses an emotion about MCSA or the Military's response. The emotion can be expressed directly by naming it or indirectly with words that convey an obviously emotional message.</p>	<p>SM: "This is bullshit!" // Spouse: "This really scares me."</p>

Code	Description	Example
Disclosure of Spousal Abuse	<p>A Service Member or spouse discloses history of spousal abuse in their current marital relationship. The commenter could be the perpetrator or survivor. The abuse could be any of the DoD recognized types: physical, emotional, sexual, neglect.</p>	<p>SM: "I have beaten her a few times" // Spouse: "It's all verbal. Lots and lots of verbal. He twists things in a way that in the end I'm standing there questioning everything."</p>
Action: Direct Address	<p>A Service Member or spouse addresses the poster of the video or another commenter in a direct manner.</p>	<p>SM: "@[YouTube handle] LMAO again you have no idea WHAT YOUR TALKING ABOUT!!! // Spouse: "I do not hesitate one bit to know that they aren't helping you to their fullest extent."</p>

APPENDIX B

Personal Statement

The Military community equipped me, as an Army wife, for combat deployments, single parenting, and navigating complex federal systems; but nothing in my 18 years as a MilSpouse prepared me to disentangle myself from a violent Service Member and, with him, my connection to the Military itself. In fact, I found that sustaining repeated injuries within the Military community was less risky than pursuing safety outside of it. I have since learned that my experience is neither unique nor well-represented in the literature. Therefore, this thesis investigates the lived experience of Military-Connected Spouse Abuse (MCSA) survivors.

The work is informed not only by my experience, which creates bias, but by rigorous academic inquiry, which tempers it. While earning my Masters of Arts in Human Services Counseling, Military Resilience Cognate and Masters of Science in Social Work, I investigated the literature, evidence-based practices, and research gaps related to MCSA. To reduce the impact of my pro-Military bias, I retained the services of both Military and civilian readers to ensure that I neither romanticized military life nor overattributed domestic violence (DV) phenomena to it. Also, I recognized that as a cultural insider, I could unintentionally elicit acquiescence bias or pursue confirmation bias. Therefore, the sample was derived from digital artifacts rather than personally-conducted interviews. My difficulties extricating myself from the Military infrastructure and lack of peer-reviewed studies on the experience of MCSA survivors initiated the research interests, but rigorous methodology protected the work from predetermined conclusions.