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## Empathic Communication: Lifespan Influences and Transgressional Associations in Military Romantic Relationships

Samantha Faith LeVan  
*Old Dominion University*

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**EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION: LIFESPAN INFLUENCES AND  
TRANSGRESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN MILITARY ROMANTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

by

Samantha Faith LeVan  
B.S. May 2010, Old Dominion University

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MASTER OF ARTS

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Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gary Beck (Director)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Erland J. Baesler (Member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas Socha (Member)

## **ABSTRACT**

### **EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION: LIFESPAN INFLUENCES AND TRANSGRESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IN MILITARY ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

Samantha Faith LeVan  
Old Dominion University, 2013  
Director: Dr. Gary Beck

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences and transgressional associations of empathic communication in military romantic relationships. Through varying attachment styles, deployments, and combat experience, soldiers have a unique set of circumstances that impact the use of empathic communication in relationships. Since the effectiveness of empathic communication is also limited by unreliable communicative technologies, infidelity effects were also tested. A 66-item online survey was placed on Survey Monkey with links from social media networking websites, like Facebook and Twitter. Surveys were anonymous and only taken by soldiers who had experienced at least one deployment. The goodness of fit of the path model was found to be significant. Empathy and empathic communication were mediators between reliability of communication technologies on deployment and communicative infidelity. In future studies, the causes of communicative infidelity should be further explored in military relationships.

*Keywords:* empathic communication, empathy, infidelity, path model, mediation, military relationships, combat exposure, PTSD

This thesis is dedicated to the men who served aboard the *USS Taylor* and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom and The War in Afghanistan. In particular, I'd like to dedicate this thesis to one lone helicopter pilot who kept me sane through the writing of this project and many others. While none of these soldiers influenced the results of my project in any way, they inspired the need for this research with their honorable service and struggles thereafter. May there come a time when your services be put to rest peacefully.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marital problems, such as financial concerns and infidelity, stretch across all cultures and subcultures, but unique pressures to marry early may compound those problems in the military population. According the Department of Defense (2010), 53.7% of active duty enlisted soldiers are married. In comparison, 36.8% of active duty officers are married (Department of Defense, 2010). Enlisted active duty members receive a much lower pay grade (roughly \$3200 less a month depending on rank), and it is often a requirement for enlisted members to live on a military base unless they are married. Marital status in the military also comes with a significantly higher Basic Housing Allowance (BAH) with an average of \$400 more a month (Department of Defense, 2010) as well as medical and dental insurance for all dependents (spouse and children). Not surprisingly, the active-duty military branches are also predominantly male at 86.4% (Department of Defense, 2010). While the term “soldier” only encompasses part of the military, it will be a term used throughout this paper to represent all service members of the U.S. military, including sailors and airmen.

Soldiers of the United States military experience a unique set of circumstances that can positively and negatively impact communication behaviors in their romantic relationships. Ultimately, the goal for most long-term romantic relationships is to maintain a high level of satisfaction and commitment, often attained through the use of relational maintenance tools. However, due to deployments, several of these relational maintenance tools, including empathic communication, can be compromised by trauma and unreliable communicative technologies. However, deployment alone does not

explain the unique stressors (e.g., combat exposure) that can negatively affect military romantic relationships. Some soldiers, as children, moved every three years as military dependents. Others, from non-military backgrounds, may never have experienced long-term loss of contact before entering the military, as well as interpersonal communication skills and individual communicative differences.

Military experiences complicate relationships during deployments. For example, most non-military spouses can try but may not fully, nor empathically understand the experiences of wartime circumstances involving combat, killing, or constant threat of death because they have not experienced it themselves. Many soldiers (up to 31%) who undergo these experiences also face a more long-term impact, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Gardner, 2010). Regardless of combat exposure, soldiers spend extended periods of time away from their romantic partners (typically six months to a year) during deployments. Deployments require soldiers and their romantic partners to “get creative” with their relational maintenance behaviors, since their ability to empathically communicate is limited by communicative technology and military regulations (e.g., an inability to talk about job specifics in the military).

Relational maintenance is defined by Stafford, Dainton, and Haas (2000) as “behaviors that individuals report they use to keep their relationship together and the differences in the use of these behaviors by individuals in varying relational types” (p. 306). While most relationships experience typical general relational maintenance behaviors, military relationships experience general relational maintenance behaviors while at home, but undergo different, specific practices while deployed. These practices may include emailing, deployment packages, limited phone calls, and limited video chat

(e.g., Skype) during the temporary geographic separations of deployment (Kim et al., 2005). These temporary separations (most often 7—12 months) differ from other temporary distance work assignments in that the availability and reliability of communicative technology is limited. Empathic communication, or using communication as means to express understanding of another person's situation or feelings, can be used as a self-disclosure relational maintenance tool (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). This relational maintenance tool may help deepen the quality of communication in deployment situations where communication is limited.

Unfortunately, due to less frequent empathic communication on a regular basis, romantic partners may begin to feel disconnected from one another. In other words, they may begin to experience unmet emotional and intimacy needs because of this time apart. While some relational partners may suffer through the loss of connection and remain loyal regardless, others may cope with these unmet needs through various forms of infidelity (e.g., emotional, sexual, communicative). This paper seeks to explore these communication and relational phenomena further, as well as expand the relational maintenance literature by creating a path model for the mediation of empathic communication and empathy between the predictors (i.e., attachment, family background, combat exposure, PTSD, and reliability of communication technologies) and transgressional associations (i.e., emotional, sexual, and communicative infidelity) in military romantic relationships.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical backgrounds for empathy, empathic communication, and attachment are rich, varied, and debated concepts in the communication and psychological literatures. Empathy is the process by which one understands another person's perspective and emotionally reacts to that perspective (Lipps, 1903). Because of this broad definition, empathy researchers pull from the theory of mind, simulation theory, and the theory of moral development to attempt to describe both main components of empathy, and even then, they cannot agree whether empathy is a cognitive, an affective process, or both (Krueger, 2009). Empathic communication, as a series of actions that *sometimes* result from empathy and sometimes occurs due to socially expected actions, is even more conceptually muddled in the literature (Buck, 2002; Buck & Ginsberg, 1997; Buck & Vanlear, 2002). The role of empathic communication as a relational maintenance tool has also yet to be clarified directly in the literature. Attachment theory is ongoing area of study that focuses on both child attachment and adult attachment as a developmental perspective comprised by a myriad of factors that range from basic infant care to long-term abuse (Ainsworth, 1967; Bartholomew, 1990; Bowlby, 1969). Despite these variations on conceptualizations of empathy, empathic communication and attachment, perspectives on these variables provide valuable insight into a model for relationships because they provide cognitive, affective, and action foundations that explain general decision-making processes regarding others.

## Theories of the Psychology of Empathy

The philosopher Theodore Lipps (1903) was arguably one of the first, most important engineers for the concept of empathy. Lipps (1903) conceptualized empathy as a way to first perceive another's mental state and then to emotionally react in response to that mental state. Today, these two components are loosely known as "perspective-taking" and "empathic concern" respectively. The concept of empathy was used to explain a shared emotional phenomenon. For example, when a player becomes injured during an important football game, the spectators are sometimes likely to feel an echo of pain in response to the player's injury. However, this original definition served to be too broad as it also encompassed concepts like "mass hysteria" and even autism. Mass hysteria was described as when emotional contagion spreads across a broad spectatorship (Colligan & Murphy, 2011). Mass hysteria has been used to explain historical events like the Salem Witch Trials, where widespread panic occurred in place of rational thought. On the other hand, the identification of autistic characteristics (i.e., abnormalities in social and communication development) helped separate "sympathy" from "empathy," which are two related concepts that share only an affective component (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).

In order to narrow down this broad conceptualization of empathy, three main theories emerged: theory of mind, simulation theory of empathy, and the moral development theory. The reason for differing theories, according to Joliffe and Farrington (2004), is that there is an ongoing debate between scholars as to whether empathy is a *cognitive* process (i.e., knowing what's going on in another person's mind) or an *affective* process (i.e., sharing feelings with another person) or both. The theory of mind generally

describes a cognitive component of empathy, which describes the ability to understand another person's mental state (Yirmiya, Erel, Shaked, & Solmonica-Levi, 1998). Viewed this way, understanding is a cognitive process because it follows the ability to view and interpret another person's mental state. The theory of mind is most directly associated with Lipps' (1903) original conceptualization of empathy; however, this theory is only similar to one part of the modern definition of empathy: perspective-taking. As discussed later, perspective-taking is the ability to see from another person's point of view (Davis, 1983). While perspective-taking is an important part of understanding empathy, perspective-taking alone is an incomplete assessment of empathic actions, such as comfort or altruism. The theory of mind originated in philosophy, but it is primarily used today in a sub-field known as folk psychology, which describes how we understand and react to the actions of others (Krueger, 2009). However, it should also be noted that while theory of mind is a theoretical model, some key scholars including psychologist Carl Rogers (1961), have used theory of mind to develop practical counseling approaches that focus on "person centered therapy" which uses communication as a core piece of therapy. In addition, Rogers (1961) used person-centered therapy to help patients determine a sense of their own feelings by actively engaging in neutral empathic understanding (i.e., non-judgmental acknowledgement) of the client's concerns or mental disorders. Using a neutral approach in therapy allows for a deeper understanding of the patient's perspective and may encourage the patient to self-disclose more conscious and subconscious thoughts during therapy sessions (Rogers, 1961). .

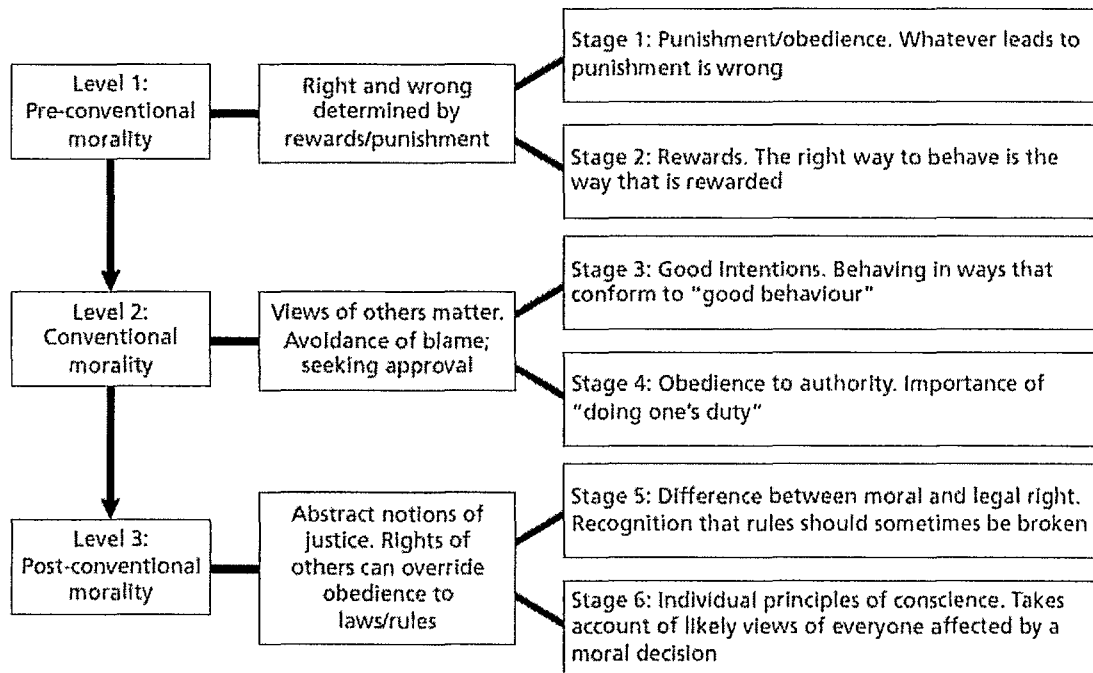
While theory of mind loosely defines the concept of perspective-taking, simulation theory loosely describes a second component of empathy: empathic concern.

According to Krueger (2009), simulation theory suggests that mimicking routines are used to “replicate, not just theorize about, the point of view of another, including another’s cognitive, motivational, and affective states” (p. 679). Simulation theory proposes a mirroring or “mimicking” effect of another person’s emotional and behavioral state. However, this process of mirroring another person’s mental state is a conscious process. Empathic concern is rarely conceptualized as a conscious process. Simulation theory, like the theory mind, is incomplete as a basis for empathy because it only attempts to describe a process similar to empathic concern. Without perspective-taking, empathic concern may describe global feelings, rather than concern for another’s feelings, actions, or circumstances.

A more recent trend in the psychological literature (e.g., see Thompson, 2012 for a review) uses Kohlberg’s (1971) Moral Theory of Development to describe the lifespan development of empathy. The moral theory of development is a lifespan model that pertains to moral values, character, and behavior (1971). This development of empathy occurs in six stages; however, Kohlberg (1971) argues that most people will never reach stages five and six over the course of a lifetime because they involve the concept self-sacrificing for the good of society. As such, this study will focus on the first four stages of development. The stages are depicted in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1

*Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development<sup>1</sup>*

Using this application of moral development, empathy can be described as a developmental process that helps shape one's character and guides interaction with others. During the pre-conventional stage, children understand a black and white concept of morality, where good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is punished. As time passes, this understanding of morality deepens to include more complicated concepts like relational behaviors or that the rules of society are flexible under certain circumstances. According to Thompson (2012), researchers interested in the development of empathy also used the theory of moral development to address how children understand "intention, goals and emotions of people, and the way those mental states are affected by others' actions" (p. 423). Using the theory of moral development for empathy makes the

<sup>1</sup> Dahl, K. (2012). *Kohlberg's Theory*. Retrieved January 29, 2013 from: <http://katedahleedpyblog.blogspot.com/2012/02/kohlbergs-theory.html>.

assumption that empathy is a part of personality development, which is an affective and relational process reliant on social factors like friendships and familial influence.

Thompson (2012)'s contribution, however, was unique in that she conceptualized empathy as having three parts: emotion recognition, emotion replication, and an action component for empathy. These components may be related to perspective-taking, empathic concern, and empathic communication respectively. While the moral development theory provides a stronger application for empathy than theory of mind or simulation theory, the theory of moral development focuses more on the development of morals rather than empathy. In addition, having morals and expressing a socially-accepted construct of morality (or empathy) are different processes.

A theoretical perspective of empathy that has received some recent attention conceptualizes empathy as a variable that has four parts: perspective taking, empathic concern, fantasy and empathic communication (Davis, 1983; Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Hyun, & Sleight, 1988). This theoretical perspective builds upon the other models by acknowledging ability of perspective-taking and a possible communicative component. Perspective-taking is the core of empathy according to the simulation theory of mind (Gordon, 1986), which has been applied in the communication literature to describe the ways people anticipate a response in an argument and react accordingly (de Vignemont & Singer, 2006). Empathic concern involves feelings of compassion for another individual, which has sometimes been used in conjunction with nonverbal messages of sympathy (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Sympathy is often confused with empathy because sympathy is the ability to feel concerned for another without understanding their situation (i.e., a stranger is crying uncontrollably for an unknown reason, but concern is still felt). Fantasy

is the use of empathic ability to transpose oneself into fictional situations, such as using fictional characters or hypothetical situations (Davis, 1983). Finally, empathic communication involves the expression of perspective-taking and empathic concern, and in addition, focuses on the nonverbal and verbal messages sent during an interpersonal exchange (Bylund & Makoul, 2009). However, as noted earlier, empathic communication is not a true sub-component of empathy because empathy and empathic communication can exist independently (Buck, 2002). This paper will proceed under the assumption that both cognitive and affective processes are necessary for empathy to occur, and that empathy without affective processes is a type of false empathy.

A few final details about the current state of empathy research should be mentioned. Changming and Hill (1996) highlighted a decline in empathy research, due to the difficulty in studying empathy as an emotional response, and the need for a return to studying empathy. One reason for this need is the recent decline in empathy as a possible result of social media use (i.e., Twitter) and the prevalent portrayal of violence in the media (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2011). This decline may eventually indicate further problems in concepts that use empathy for sustainment, such as a decline in altruism or commitment in relationships. Both the decline in empathy and empathy research is worrisome because the effects of lower levels of empathy have not fully been researched.

### **Theories of Empathic Communication**

While there is currently some debate in the literature, empathic communication has traditionally been written about as a subset of empathy, which has been shown to be inaccurate (see Buck, 2002). In addition, empathic communication research has been

mostly limited to specific fields, such as health communication and personality development (Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Hyun, & Sleight, 1988). As a reminder, empathic communication is the verbal and nonverbal expression of perspective taking and empathic concern (Bylund & Makoul, 2009). As such, empathic communication does not necessarily occur in conjunction with affective processes. When empathic communication is considered a separate variable from empathy, it opens up many doors of possibility. For example, doctors are trained to not experience empathy for their patients in order to “protect” the doctors deeper feelings of loss when faced with the inevitable death of some of their patients (Spiro, 1993). However, research shows that patients are more satisfied when their doctors show empathic communication for a patient’s ills (Suchman, Markakis, Beckman, & Frankel, 1997). Doctors empathically communicating with patients while not experiencing the deeper repercussions of empathy may increase patient satisfaction while also protecting themselves.

Empathic communication was originally considered a sub-component of empathy and is still used as such today by communication and psychological researchers. As such, theories of empathy are normally still applied to empathic communication despite the fact it is a separate process. However, Meyer, Boster, and Hecht (1988) created one stand-alone theory of empathic communication. Previously, empathy had been defined as a series of internal processes, such as feeling concern for other people, understanding concerns from another person’s perspective, reacting emotionally, and behavioral responses (Davis, 1983; Stiff, et al., 1988). Meyer, Boster, and Hecht’s (1988) model included this previous research, and further defined behavioral responses. The model has five key postulates: humanistic orientation, perspective-taking, empathic concern,

emotional responsiveness, and communicative responsiveness. Emotional responsiveness often prompts communicative responsiveness, as the need to feel for the other person often follows with the need to comfort the other person through verbal and nonverbal actions. Of course, there are exceptions, such as the Bystander Effect, where people may assume others will help a stranger in need (Garcia, Weaver, Moskowitz, & Darley, 2002). Examples of these empathic actions would include hugging, kissing, squeezing of a hand, and using verbal cues to express comfort. Current models of empathic communication typically do not base their research on this model; however, more research has shown that not all of these processes need to occur for empathic communication to take place (Buck, 2002).

Because empathic communication can be independently conceptualized as its own process, further theoretical research is needed. Several perspectives may begin to provide a theoretical framework, but more ground in the literature is needed to determine cognitive and affective processes of empathic communication. Researchers in health communication have shown that empathic communication can be taught (Prose, Brown, Murphy, & Nieves, 2010). This suggests that communicative and social factors may be a stronger contributor to the development of empathic communication than biological factors. Others have argued that empathic communication is simply a part of personality development, which would show indication of some psychological factors present (Ickes, 2006). Despite varied approaches, research on the effects of using empathic communication has primarily been limited to psycho-therapy, medical, and health communication fields. One study suggests that empathic communication can be used to prevent suicide (Kim, Kim, Shin, & Yoon, 2012). Another study suggests that empathic

communication can decrease burnout rates in workers (Snyder, 2012). Finally, health care workers using empathic communication have been shown to increase patient satisfaction (Suchman, Markakis, Beckman, & Frankel, 1997). Clearly, these studies have mostly focused on business and patient-doctor relations. If empathic communication can positively influence these relationships, it may also have a positive impact within other types of interpersonal relationships.

How does empathic communication contribute to the experience of romantic relationships? More specifically, how does empathic communication contribute to relational maintenance and conflict resolution in romantic relationships? During arguments, one of the most difficult things to accomplish is understanding conflict from a romantic partner's perspective. These challenges often come from biasing one's own perspective which is an irrational belief of thinking that one is right in the argument and the romantic partner is wrong. Empathic communication can be used as a positive relational maintenance tool to encourage compromise and openness in the relationship during times of conflict or crisis.

### **Attachment Theory**

Empathy and empathic communication refer to one's ability and willingness to connect with others, a capacity that is often developed (or neglected) across the lifespan. This development can be traced to the relationship with one's primary caregiver, and has been explored extensively through Attachment theory. Mary Ainsworth (1967) and John Bowlby (1989) studied the earliest patterns of attachment, as experienced in infancy and childhood. These early forms of attachment mostly describe a child's need for his/her

parents' attention. Bowlby (1989) noted that children have innate systems of insecurity, where at times, they need other people to feel secure. Ainsworth (1967) was also working to identify three styles of attachment: secure (i.e., balanced attachment to parent), anxious-avoidant (i.e., overly attached to parent) and anxious-ambivalent (i.e., not attached to parent). As shown by later research, these childhood attachment patterns, identified by Ainsworth (1967) and then further classified by Bowlby (1989), have long-term impacts on an adult's attachment patterns in relationships. For example, secure attachment in childhood is most likely to lead to secure, romantic attachment patterns in adulthood, and those who have secure adult attachments tend to have the most satisfaction in their long-term adult relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Adult attachment mostly describes the ability to have intimacy in romantic long-term relationships. According to Kim Bartholomew (1990), there are four attachment patterns in adult relationships, a perspective based on personal perception that will be used in this study. Alternatively, there are studies that use dyadic (both partners') perceptions of attachment in the relationship (for a review, see Bartholomew, 1990), which provide more complete insight to studying attachment than studying one partner alone. Bartholomew (1990) identified secure, preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant and fearful attachment styles during her research on adult attachment and abuse in intimate relationships. Secure attachments have many benefits throughout the lifespan, many of which have been mentioned. Preoccupied attachment in adult relationships expresses the belief of an imbalance of relationship commitment, such as believing a romantic partner is not as emotionally committed to or invested in the relationship as the soldier. Due to the distance and time apart in military relationships, this imbalance may lead to a

dissolution decision or intentional relational transgressions (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). Bartholomew (1990) proposed that another possible insecure attachment is dismissive-avoidant attachment, where one or both parties might feel completely comfortable without constant close intimacy. Dismissive-avoidant attachment may be evidenced in relationships that use a business-like approach, such as couples that marry or live together for financial convenience (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). In the military, enlisted soldiers with a dependent receive extra “Basic Allowance for Housing,” or BAH, which affords soldiers the ability to live in off-base housing (Fauntleroy, 2005). Marrying for these benefits could be seen in securely attached couples, fearfully-attached couples, or dismissive-avoidant attached couples. This could be problematic for the relationship because the relationship may be financially stable, but emotionally unstable. Finally, fearful-avoidant attachment is when a person perceives himself/herself to be unworthy of a relationship.

When viewing these attachment patterns across the lifespan, it is important to note that they are typically developed in infancy (Ainsworth, 1967) and early childhood (Bowlby, 1989), then continued through adulthood (Bartholomew, 1990). However, forms of trauma during critical developmental periods can interrupt the development of secure attachment patterns (Alexander, 2009). Car accidents, displacement from natural disasters, sexual assault, abuse, and brain injuries are types of trauma that may adversely affect developmental processes. Combat exposure is also considered a form of trauma depending on the amount and intensity of combat, and the long-term effects. Thus, combat exposure may ultimately serve as a cause of long-term adult insecure attachment.



In addition, the separation caused by long-term deployments may inflict added strain on familial and relational bonds, in part due to limitations in communication technology.

Attachment perspectives have also been widely used in communication literature to account for satisfaction in relationships, perceived levels of social support, deception in relationships, dissolution decisions and self disclosure (Anders & Tucker, 2005; Bradford, 2003; Feeney, 2006; Feeney, & Campbell, 2002; Jang, Smith, & Levine, 2002). Feeney (2006) is a particularly key communication researcher in applying attachment research to non-traditional family forms. Her research on adoptive families, welfare families, and step families has established a clearer understanding of attachment in non-traditional family forms (Darlington, Heeley, & Feeney, 2010; Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, 2007; Planitz, Feeney, & Peterson, 2009). While a military family may not be a 'new' family form, it can be considered a non-traditional family form, due to frequent geographic separations between a soldier and his family (Kim et al, 2005). This is especially true as more women and mothers are joining the military, which can ultimately lead to short-term mother-child separation during deployment (Department of Defense, 2010). Where Feeney (2006) is one of the lead communication researchers building on family attachment literature, Donovan and colleagues have conducted important research demonstrating attachment as a predictor of communicative responses during relational conflicts over infidelity and divorce (Donovan & Emmers-Sommer, 2012; Donovan & McManus, 2012). Overall, attachment perspectives may help inform this model on the use of empathic communication as a relational maintenance tool, as well as how the lack of using such tools may lead to infidelity patterns.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Empathy and attachment are theoretical frameworks that can help explain the development and expression of empathic communication in relationships. Attachment development begins in infancy, but events during childhood, such as trauma and long-term loss help shape a person's ability to form romantic attachments (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In romantic relationships, depending on attachment style, relational maintenance tools are used to continually sustain a relationship (or keep it at a desired level of functioning). Relational maintenance is often defined as "communication approaches people use to sustain desired relational definitions" (Canary & Stafford, 1994, p. 243). In most face-to-face relationships, typical relational behaviors may include cooking dinner, date nights, and opportunity for deep levels of emotional self-disclosure. In military couples, the enactment of relational maintenance has to account for the separation during deployments. These are seen in such face-to-face relationships by researchers as interruptions rather than switching into long distance relationship phase, due to the set end goal of returning home to the romantic partner (Kim et al, 2005). Given the lack of proximal alternatives, military couples often make due, utilizing relational maintenance behaviors that include surface level self disclosure, sending care packages, and daily emails (Frisby, Byrnes, Mansson, Booth-Butterfield, & Birmingham, 2011; Kim et al, 2005).

Although not directly defined as such in past research, this thesis offers a new conceptualization of empathic communication as a relational maintenance tool for the purpose of creating shared positivity and openness in the relationship. Because of the

unique set of relational maintenance behaviors utilized during deployment, conflict resolution in military relationship is also different from non-military couples. Empathic communication, considered as a specific aspect of conflict management, may be compromised during an extended period of deployment stress on a relationship, as well as added combat exposure and combat training (Grossman, 2009). Military regulations and deployment circumstances create limitations on opportunities for soldiers to empathically communicate with his/her partner during periods of stress in the relationship.

### **Empathy and Empathic Communication**

Psychological operationalizations of empathy attempt to account for one's ability to empathize with another person (Gallagher and Frith, 2003), which may have various implications for romantic relationships. Communication models take empathy a step further by analyzing the expression and interpretation of empathy, as explored through various contexts, including medical practices, interpersonal relationships, and organizational communication (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988; Platt & Keller, 1994; Stiff et al., 1988). These investigations are carried out through the use of surveys, interviews, and observational methods. Empathic communication is practically used to express understanding of another person's point of view (Suchman & Markakis, 1997). Since empathic communication can exist without the cognitive functions of empathy in a state of false pretenses and psychological disorders, empathic communication cannot be measured as simply a subsection of empathy without both perspective-taking and empathic concern (Blair, 1995; Blair et al., 1995). This idea of 'pseudo-empathic communication' is particularly relevant for the military population, where higher rates of

psychological disorders are common for soldiers who have seen high levels of combat (Price, 2007).

Empathic communication has also been measured as the verbal and nonverbal expression of perspective taking (but importantly not empathic concern). Dibacco (2008) argues that facial expressions, touch, and eye contact are all expressions of nonverbal empathic communication. Nonverbally, listening is also an expression of empathetic concern. Active listening requires additional nonverbal behaviors, such as engaged eye contact and verbal feedback from the listener. Dibacco (2008) argues for the need of silence during an empathic exchange to decrease distractions and allow for deeper understanding of another person's perspective. Empathic communication, when used in conjunction with feelings of empathy, may also contribute to a level of trust and comfort between those relational involved. Empathic communication can deepen a connection in a relationship because it allows one partner to express full (or partial) understanding of a conflict and may be used to express willingness to compromise. In other words, a person may be forthcoming if he or she believes a romantic partner will demonstrate willingness to understand the situation, conflict, or feelings. In the case of the military, comfort and trust could be compromised based on combat situations that could lead to a reduction in both perspective taking empathy and communicative empathy (Grossman, 2009).

Empathy and the ability to communicate empathically can be compromised in a variety of ways. According to Konrath, O'Brien, and Hsing (2011), overall empathy in college students has declined in past few decades possibly due to more exposure to violent images, such as violence in the media, video games, and movies. Other reasons for the decline, according to Konrath, O'Brien, and Hsing (2011), may include images on

reality television, increased pressure to succeed individually, and relationships formed and existing primarily through social media. Other sources found that trauma during developmental periods, like child abuse or sexual assault may also cause compromised empathy (Roseby & Gentner, 2005; Thompson & Gullone, 2011). The negative process of empathy being compromised is not irreversible. Thompson & Gullone (2011) found some success in using childhood attachment bonds with animals to increase empathy levels.

How can this apply to military relationships? During extraneous combat situations, including combat training, an individual's empathic abilities may be compromised due to participating in wartime situations. In these wartime situations, the experience of death is often a likely grim reality for soldiers who serve frontline and support operations due to the sheer proximity to the conflict. The ability or willingness to effectively generate empathic communication can be compromised from the necessity to separate emotions from actions, especially when killing and maiming is sometimes the only option for survival in wartime circumstances (Bauer, 2009; Grossman, 2009). Often times, soldiers with PTSD and psychosocial disorders caused by the trauma of war have difficulties leaving the war mentally. This preoccupation can lead to a certain disconnect from the world upon return, ultimately resulting in the transference of this compromised, combat exposure-affected empathy to close interpersonal relationships (Grossman, 2009). Military spouses may have difficulty reconnecting with their partners because they do not experience combat first-hand and have limited ability to empathize with a romantic partner who goes through these experiences.

Stiff, Dillard, Somera, Kim and Sleight (1988) studied the link between empathy, communication and prosocial behavior. According to their research, empathy is made up of four traditional components: perspective taking, emotional contagion (i.e., empathic emotional transference), empathic concern, and fictional involvement (i.e., experiencing emotion as a result of reading someone else's situation). In Stiff and colleagues' (1988) study, empathic concern was necessary for communicative responsiveness and prosocial behavior, such as altruism. It should be noted that students were used in this study, which is a population that sometimes does not coincide with active duty military personnel. Thus, students without trauma are more likely to have normal ranges of empathy than soldiers. Perspective taking, empathic concern, and communicative responsiveness may be lower within the military population, due to extended trauma of combat exposure.

Combat exposure may also lead to more negative relational maintenance behaviors, such as aggression. Peloquin, Lafontaine and Brassard (2011) studied the link between romantic attachment, empathy and psychological partner aggression as an interdisciplinary study between communication and psychology. Psychological partner aggression refers to verbal aggression, emotional abuse, and psychological violence in an attempt to belittle, control, or coerce a romantic partner. Peloquin, Lafontaine and Brassard (2011) found that women use more verbal aggression overall in their relationships; however, previous research showed that men use more physical aggression (Johannessen, 2007). Peloquin, Lafontaine and Brassard (2011) also found that levels of empathy in the relationship negatively correlated with romantic partner verbal aggression. Combined with Johannessen's (2007) study of soldiers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) having higher levels of physical aggression inside the home, and

Grossman's (2009) research that empathy in the military is taught and controlled for combat situations through combat training, the link can be suggested that lower levels of empathy in military soldiers correlates with less prosocial behaviors, specifically empathic communication, at home.

**H1:** Soldiers with lower levels of empathy for a romantic partner will report less expression of empathic communication.

### **Familial Background**

At this point, it should be clearly noted that only adult soldiers will be investigated in this study. The reasons behind varying levels of empathy and empathic communication (e.g., familial background, attachment, combat exposure, PTSD, and reliability of communication technologies) will be explained and measured after a soldier's deployment in a cross-sectional design. While several of the causes of empathy and empathic communication will be examined through studies conducted on children, this review is to highlight how these childhood effects may contribute later on in life to a soldier's baseline empathy as well as empathic communication with a romantic partner. Additionally, like attachment patterns, family background can be examined as part of a developmental process that has multiple contributions to the lives of soldiers such as abuse, separation, divorce, and death.

Family background takes into account that many soldiers join the military from military families. While there are many factors that could be considered important for understanding family background, perhaps the most important for a soldier is if he or she grew up in a military family. Tradition can run strongly in these families, where children grow up with war stories, patriotism, and a sense of duty for family and country.

However, these military families often move every three years on new assignment orders, and that may cause problems for children unable to establish secure attachments (Barker & Berry, 2009). Barker and Berry (2009) also found that young children who experience familial deployments develop insecure attachment and psychological problems, such as psychopathic disorders (i.e., a lack of empathy). In addition, soldiers from military family background have experienced short-term loss of family, which may help prepare them for non-wartime deployment situations. However, despite combat training and a military background, wartime combat experiences are often traumatic events soldiers cannot fully be prepared for due to their extreme psychological and physical impact. Those who developed insecure attachment patterns may be especially vulnerable to the stressors and strains caused by combat training, deployments, and combat exposure (Grossman, 2009; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009).

A child's perception of family background and traumatizing events may have long-term psychological effects. Young, Lennie and Minnis (2011) conducted a study on parental neglect and the effects on child psychopathology (i.e., the manifestation of psychological disorders or illnesses). Their research showed that a child's perception of neglect, not necessarily actual neglect, is a high-risk factor for psychopathic disorders. This research is important to note because a child could perceive a parent on deployment as neglectful, since the parent is absent from home for months at a time. Email is the only consistent form of communication during deployment between soldiers and their families. As a result, the child may perceive the parent's physical absence (and limited asynchronous email communication) as neglect. This separation and diminished connection could lead to compromised empathy within the child. Additionally, a child's



perception of parental neglect can lead to the development of anxiousness, depression, a behavioral disorder or substance abuse (Young, Lennie, & Minnis, 2011). Finally, based on the uninvolved parenting style and the evidence presented by Young, Lennie and Minnis (2011), a child who perceives significant and prolonged neglect from a parent could develop a long-term avoidant attachment style out of fear of a partner leaving.

During a deployment, children may experience regressive empathy. In general, regression is returning to an earlier state of consciousness, reversing a process of development (Slater, 1963). Thus, regressive empathy has been conceptualized as the process of returning to a less developed stage of empathy. According to Flake, Davis, Johnson and Middleton (2009), during the pre-deployment phase, military children often express apathy, regressive behavior and may become emotionally withdrawn. Often, during the deployment phase, the child readjusts his or her attachment pattern to exclude the absent parent from emotional needs. Their study reported highly significant findings on school-aged children having psychosocial difficulties suggesting that 32% were at high risk for psychosocial morbidity (i.e., the stunting of development within a social environment). Psychosocial morbidity is also a developmental stage of sociopathic disorders, suggesting that a reduction in empathy may become more permanent. While there were also differences in the stress-levels of the at-home parent compared to the traditional family, the more shocking results were that the stress levels of the children with a deployed parent were 2.5 times higher than children in a national average. Child dependents were also 39% more likely than non-military children to internalize their stress, and twenty-nine percent more likely to externalize the stress. Because internal stress is often easy for parents to overlook, parents need to be hyper-aware of their

children's internalization during periods of high stress like deployment. When regressive empathy is not addressed (i.e., intervention, therapy), it can lead to long-term apathy in romantic relationships.

To this effect, Aranda, Middleton, Flake and Davis (2011) conducted a psychosocial screening on children with parents who were deployed during a war. According to their research, military children during a wartime deployment are much more likely to suffer psychosocial disorders (e.g., psychosocial morbidity) than the national average (23-23% compared to 8-9%). Mothers reported the difference in stress levels of children with deployed and non-deployed fathers with statistical significance for higher stress levels of children with deployed fathers. In their study, there were no significant findings between psychosocial stress in gender and age differences (4-17). The lack of significance in age differences is important because it may mean the critical stages of child and adolescent development extend into the late teenage years as it pertains to deployment. Psychosocial stress was internalized and externalized by the children, such as trouble focusing in school, a decrease in grades, and an increase in acting out. In general, their research found that during wartime, military children are more likely to have developmental problems during deployments lasting a year or more. These developmental problems, in the form of psychosocial disorders, may lead to long-term attachment problems, since the fear of losing the parent may override a pre-existing secure attachment (Mikulincer & Florian, 1997).

Why is this important? Due to military tradition and conservative values, military dependents (usually male) are often not only encouraged but expected by authoritarian parents to follow the footsteps of the military tradition. Many high schools have Junior

ROTC programs, which begins the military training (e.g., running, pushups, civic service, marksmanship training) early. In addition, when children move frequently, they are often unable to establish long-term friendships or other connections. They may become emotionally detached to peers (in general) as a result (Lincoln, Swift, & Shorteno-Fraser, 2008). The likelihood of psychosocial disorders when growing up in a military family, and in particular, the strong likelihood of developing the absence of empathy has been discussed previously in this paper (Aranda, Middleton, Flake, & Davis, 2011). The effects of these psychosocial disorders may be overlooked, and in that case, their psychosocial disorders become compounded by militant training and combat exposure (Patterson & Hidore, 1997). It should be noted that these effects may be temporary (though not in all cases), and some military children never experience psychosocial disorders or psychological distress due to their military family members at all.

Military recruits are loosely screened with one-page surveys and therapist history. However, it is possible for recruits to pass through a survey screening without the detection of a psychological disorder. Recruits may answer questions in ways that makes them seem “normal” enough to join the military. Eventually, some recruits are caught and “kicked out” of combat training due to extreme psychological distress and the onset of excessive anxiety or depression (Davis, Martin, Williamson, Alfonso, & Ryan, 2006). Notably, the Navy has the highest attrition rate during combat training at 14%, followed by the Army at 13.4% (Department of Defense, 2010). This attrition rate takes into account physical and psychological reasons for leaving. Furthermore, while there has been research on the psychosocial problems of military dependents and long-term

attachment problems in soldiers who have seen combat, this study will cover the missing link between the two.

**H2:** If a soldier grew up in a non-military family, he will most likely use more empathic communication in romantic relationships than soldiers who grew up in military families.

**RQ1:** Are soldiers from military families more likely to join branches of the military where there are likely to see higher levels of combat?

### **Military Experience Variables**

As stated previously, soldiers often have a unique set of life circumstances, which impact their feelings of empathy and expression of empathic communication.

Deployments cause the soldier to be away from dependents, romantic and familial attachments for extended periods of time. In non-military long-distance relationships, couples are still often able to see each other every few weeks or months. They are able to Skype, email, or call each other on the telephone daily. However, communication is often hindered by time differences, limitations in amount of time available for communicating, and technological problems (Kim et al., 2005). In addition, the amount of disclosure between romantic partners is limited by military-imposed restrictions (i.e., soldiers cannot talk about their jobs, partners may not hear from the soldier for several days/weeks due to wartime circumstances) and not wanting to add to the stress of a partner (Joseph & Afifi, 2010). Combat training and combat exposure can add additional hindrances to empathy and empathic communication, due to possible recurrent exposure to injury, death, and torture practices (Bauer, 2009). For people who serve in the branches in the Navy and Airforce, these effects may be minimal or short-term due to limited close combat. For soldiers who serve in the Army and Marine Corps; however,

recurrent exposure to combat often leads to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Shen, Arkes, & Pilgrim, 2009).

The psychological and communicative impacts of combat training must be further examined due to its effects on empathy levels. Lt. Col. Grossman (2009) wrote on the ways the military trains its soldiers to kill. He hypothesized that most psychologically normal human beings are reluctant to kill their own kind. However, this reluctance can be broken down systematically through a rigorous training system that objectifies another human being as a target. Soldiers with psychopathological tendencies often can handle the combat training routine better because they already have compromised empathy. Grossman (2009) explains:

Erich Fromm states that ‘there is good clinical evidence for the assumption that destructive aggression occurs, at least to a large degree, in conjunction with a momentary or chronic emotional withdrawal.’ The situation described above represents a breakdown in the psychological distance that is a key method of removing one’s sense of empathy and achieving this ‘emotional withdrawal.’ (p. 102)

He discerned four postulates that contribute a soldier’s lack of empathy: cultural distance (e.g., differences in culture between soldiers and enemies), moral distance (i.e., moral superiority, or moral inferiority), social distance (i.e., enemies are of a lower social class), and mechanical distance (e.g., allows the soldier to think of enemies as if they were characters in a violent video game). Media effects may also play a desensitizing role due to constant exposure to violent images. Soldiers with psychopathology have a unique set of problems that go beyond traditional forms of compromised empathy because therapy alone may not help these soldiers return to a functioning, non-military life. As not all

soldiers can effectively empathically communicate (affected by limited or compromised empathy), additional problems may arise in dependent relationships that require such communication.

Soldiers experience both emotional and physical disengagement from their families when they transition from life with their family to the life on deployment. This transition may also be exaggerated due to anticipated communication constraints and the ensuing limited ability to empathically communicate and connect. According to Pincus, House, Christenson and Alder (2005), there are five emotional stages of deployment for soldiers and their dependents: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, and post-deployment. The first stage, pre-deployment, involves anticipation of loss, taking care of long-term bills, anticipation of time away, distance, and arguments. Arguments may occur as individuals mentally prepare for emotional conflict and conflict resolution over long distances. Stage two, deployment, occurs during the first month of a soldier being away from home when the soldier and familial dynamic shifts to accommodate for technological delays, emotional and physical distance. In this phase, military spouses may have feelings of numbness, anxiousness or abandonment depending on the communication circumstances and an individual's ability to adjust. Sustainment, the third stage of deployment, lasts until the soldier's eighteenth month away from home. During sustainment, spouses find new avenues of support (e.g., social support groups, new friendships) while the soldier is away from home. However, these new areas of support can sometimes lead to feelings of jealousy on the part of the soldier, particularly when adultery occurs (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Rumors of infidelity can also harm the entire military unit's morale (particularly when two soldiers are interested in one female).

Commanding officers typically address these rumors immediately to keep further stress from occurring during an already stressful situation. A child dependent's emotional response to deployment in this study ranged from listless to apathetic, depending on the age of the child and specific situation. Extensive support from the community in place of the absent parent was recommended for the child's emotional stability in most cases (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Alder, 2005). Re-deployment, the fourth stage of deployment, occurs a month before the soldier returns home. Dependents experience excitement and apprehension occurs in the household as they try to readjust for the return of a family. Unfortunately, this is where the most conflict among the phases of deployment occurs because the balance of power had shifted to the parent left behind, and that parent is sometimes unwilling to step aside and renege on household power (Pincus, House, Christenson & Alder, 2005). In the final stage, post-deployment, that power balance is renegotiated into the household in an attempt at conflict resolution. Dependents may feel despair at the loss of independence if they developed insecure attachment patterns (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012; Pincus, House, Christenson, & Alder, 2005).

Bauer (2009) argues that empathy is a tool used by pro-military media to gain sympathetic support from the public, such as encouraging the public to support the troops. While the American public does push to support its soldiers as individuals, the public does not always support the soldier's job or the political agenda surrounding the use of military force. For example, public support for the most recent War in Afghanistan has sharply decreased in the last year, which follows a history of decreasing public support as the number of casualties increase (Gelpi, Feaver, & Reifler, 2009). However,

too much empathy for local populations can lead to problems for soldiers. Local populations may turn against the soldiers they have grown to know over the past few months. Torture may imply the presence of compromised empathic responses or the overall lack of empathy; conversely, soldiers with lesser degrees of compromised empathy may have adverse reactions, such as psychological distress or an inability to talk about the events. Because the filtering process for empathy of soldiers can become damaged or suppressed during combat, significant measures may need to be taken for psychotherapy during the transition period between military and non-military world (Grossman, 2009).

In *Unmaking War, Remaking Men*, Barry (2011) argues that empathy makes and eventually breaks a soldier. She explains that the military institution sees its soldiers as tools that can be used anytime in combat, not much unlike the machine guns or submarines they use against enemies. Soldiers are trained not to feel for the pure necessity of killing, and they lose a part of themselves in the process. Killing goes against the natural instinct of those within a modern civilized society. She also argues that it is the lack of empathy demonstrated by militant leaders that drives the unmaking of humanity in close-combat soldiers.

There are even individual consequences for soldiers that attempt to resist the military's empathy repression agenda. Barry (2011) argues that military leaders who show empathy and attempt to avoid war may be seen as weak by the general public. In this sense, soldiers who express empathy for an enemy (e.g., allowing an injured enemy to escape, treating a prisoner humanely) would also more likely be considered weak by their command and punished for such actions. Suppressing empathy for an extended



period of time, as a result of demands of the military and corresponding responsibilities of being a soldier, may compromise efforts to re-establish or maintain empathy when transitioning to family life back home.

Wartime deployments can cause additional problems for soldiers who experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), causing additional problems in close relationships and affecting relational maintenance behaviors and satisfaction. Carter and colleagues (2011) conducted an interdisciplinary study on PTSD symptoms and communication between spouses during deployment. They found that the link between PTSD and spousal communication was mediated by marital satisfaction. Carter and colleagues (2011) also found that soldiers were more comfortable writing emails to their spouses, rather than speaking on the phone or participating in other forms of mediated communication because they may be overheard by other soldiers. Excessively emotional exchanges within the vicinity of other soldiers may cause them to be perceived as 'less tough' or 'less manly.' Asynchronous forms of communication, such as emails, letters and care packages, led to a reduction in PTSD symptoms, while instant forms of communication, such as Skype and phone calls did not. Care packages are also physical reminders of home, which may include pictures or connections to current affairs in their spouse's life, such as a son's report card or a daughter's stuffed animal. Pictures and objects express affection through nonverbal communication, which gives the soldier a physical connection to a world outside of war. One reason for this reduction in PTSD symptoms could be because the soldier had something tangible to keep with them that he or she could revisit during stressful moments when phone calls and Skype would not be possible. Marital satisfaction was negatively correlated with overall levels of PTSD,

which could indicate that lower levels of marital satisfaction may correlate with additional stress for deployed spouses. Their study does indicate, however, that print and computer mediated communication is a relevant part of relational maintenance during deployment.

Empathy, empathic communication, and relational maintenance may be affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in addition to the demands of the job.

MacFarlane (2009) conducted a review of the most pressing issue for current military psychology research: Effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder effects in the home. Conflict resolution skills are an immediate need for soldiers returning home with PTSD. Soldiers need to be able to cooperatively handle new challenges at home and in new careers with their partners and other family members. Considering adjustments made at home during the deployment, soldiers and spouses may need to adjust or renegotiate power imbalances. In addition, the spouse may not understand how to be there for a PTSD-disabled partner, particularly if the parent becomes violent out of frustration over his or her condition. During deployment, some emotional detachment is necessary when the spouse's coping mechanisms cannot account for the feelings of complete abandonment. Unfortunately, because of PTSD, emotional attachment may never reestablish on both the part of the spouse or soldier, as the soldier is perceived as coming home "changed" (Ein-Dor, Doron, Solomon, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2010).

**H3:** The more combat exposure a soldier experiences, the less he will express empathic communication with a romantic partner.

**RQ2:** Does Post Traumatic Stress Disorder impact empathic communication?

## **Relational Maintenance**

Relational maintenance behaviors and conflict management in military families provide further insight for the basis of a relational model for this study. Relational maintenance can be defined as a set of behaviors couples maintain to achieve a desired level of relationship satisfaction or stability (Canary & Stafford, 1994). In romantic couples in general, typical relational behaviors may include cooking dinner, date nights, and deep levels of emotional self-disclosure. In military couples, the definition of relational maintenance has to also account for deployments. These are seen by researchers as interruptions in face-to-face relationships, rather than distance relationships due to the set end goal of returning home to the romantic partner (Kim et al, 2005). Relational maintenance strategies for military couples include surface level self disclosure, sending care packages, and daily emails (Frisby et al, 2011; Kim et al, 2005).

Stafford and Canary (1991) were two of the first scholars to operationalize relational maintenance behaviors. Their five maintenance strategies were identified as positivity (cheerful, non-critical), openness (willingness to discuss relationship), assurances (positive reassurance of love), networks (social networks of family and friends), and sharing tasks (household chores, errands). A shared understanding of mutuality, liking, and commitment is central to established relationships. Stafford and Canary (1991) found that spouses who benefit equally in a relationship are more likely to engage in positive relational maintenance behaviors, as opposed to spouses who do not have equal benefit due to external factors (like job loss) or internal factors (imbalanced amounts of relational maintenance behaviors). These relational maintenance behaviors work to keep the relationship at desirable satisfaction or commitment levels. In the case

of imbalanced amounts of relational maintenance behaviors from two partners, emotional dissatisfaction and distress occurs. Stafford and Canary (1991) also found that women, rather than men are more sensitive to problems in the relationship, for which they may receive more social support from their social networks of friends and family. Overall, maintenance strategies were found to be primary predictors of commitment, control mutuality and liking in a relationship. These relational maintenance behaviors have since been extended to include the effects of negative behaviors (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011) and affinity seeking behaviors (Bachman & Zakahi, 2000).

Affinity-seeking behaviors more directly define the positivity relational maintenance definition proposed by Stafford and Canary (1991). Affinity-seeking behaviors are defined as “the active-social communicative process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive towards them” (Bell & Daly, 1984, p. 92). Bachman and Zakahi (2000) studied adult attachment and strategic relational communication patterns as love schemas and affinity-seeking behaviors respectively. Their operational definition of affinity-seeking behaviors included altruism, interpersonal attraction, social effectiveness, life satisfaction, and lack of communication apprehension. This is broader than Stafford and Canary’s (1991) definition of positivity (not criticizing a partner and amount of cheerfulness in relationship). Love schemas, or an alternate measure of attachment, were used to measure closeness in romantic relationships. Secure attachment and fearful insecure attachment patterns were significantly associated with affinity seeking behaviors. Insecure attachment patterns, defined as skittish, casual and uninterested love schemas, were negatively correlated with affinity seeking behaviors. Only the secure love schema was positively correlated with self disclosure as a relational

maintenance strategy. Overall, the more secure the adult, romantic attachment style, the more positive relational maintenance behaviors were used in adult romantic relationships.

Guerrero and Bachman (2006) conducted a related correlational study of relationship maintenance behaviors, attachment style categories, and attachment dimensions. They found that couples with secure attachment styles used a larger amount of relational maintenance behaviors, such as assurances, romantic affection and openness in their relationships when compared to those with insecure attachment styles. Secure couples were also more likely to engage in social networking. Women used social networking in general, but secure men were more likely than insecure men to use social networking. Secure relational partners were also more likely to show comfort and support in their relationships than insecure relational partners. While military romantic partners are unlikely to engage in social networking over a deployment, couples may use more assurances and positivity to make up for lack of disclosure and limited communication.

According to Goodboy and Bolkan (2011), attachment can also be correlated with negative relational maintenance behaviors. Negative relational maintenance behaviors can were defined as, “avoidance and antisocial strategies to maintain a relationship” (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011, p. 328). Negative relational maintenance behaviors were identified as infidelity, avoidance, jealousy induction, spying, destructive conflict, and allowing control in romantic relationships. This research showed that people with dismissive-avoidant and fearful insecure attachment styles were most likely to use jealousy induction, avoidance, and infidelity as negative relational maintenance behaviors. Couples with preoccupied attachment were more likely to engage in spying, destructive conflict, and allowing control. Previous research by Goodboy and Meyers

(2010) also showed that couples with insecure attachments were likely to have less commitment in their relationships, which could lead to negative relational maintenance behaviors, such as stonewalling, jealousy, spying, destructive conflict, and infidelity. Negative relational maintenance behaviors could complicate relational stability and long-term maintenance strategies, such as conflict resolution through empathic communication. These behaviors are likely heightened in military relationships, due to long-term deployments where couples are apart for months to years at a time, and conflict resolution is complicated with nonworking technology and lack of face-to-face mediation (Kim et al, 2005).

Communication during a deployment is limited both by technology and restrictions imposed by the military. Merolla (2010) pointed out that due to safety precautions, soldiers and sailors are not allowed to disclose specifics about missions (which includes day-to-day activities) and current locations unless they are in port, which can limit the range of a soldier's self-disclosure in many cases. This may put strain on relationships due to the imbalance in self-disclosure, as one partner may perceive himself or herself being more open in the relationship than the other. At times the communication technology ceases to work for days (e.g., internet failing, phone calls being restricted due to threats in the area), which may compound stress already in place on the relationship (Merolla, 2010). Key words flagged by the military may also cause the email to bounce back to the sender, due to the communication restrictions. In some cases, code words are sometimes adopted for the purpose of maintaining communication around the restrictions. Within the limitations of email itself, empathy can sometimes be lost by the nonverbal cues established in speech communication and body language in speaker-

listener exchanges. While communication *during* a deployment has been explored (Merolla, 2010; McCarroll et al, 2003; Tollefson, 2008), the long-term *after-effects* of limited communication used throughout deployment which could lead to reduced empathy or other relational conflicts has been overlooked by researchers. These negative relational maintenance behaviors include verbal avoidance, verbal aggression, stonewalling, relational transgressions like sexual and emotional infidelity.

Kim and colleagues (2005) researched communication choices during deployment as a form of relational maintenance. They noted that specific literature on relational maintenance variables during deployment did not exist at the time, even though there is now extensive literature on relationships supplemented by technology. While deployments are scheduled events, the month before a deployment causes tension in the relationship because it requires the soldier to be at work more often than home in preparation for the deployment (Kim et al., 2005). With very little face-to-face time before a deployment, the deployment may feel sudden. This is because while deployment occurs in stages of emotional adjustment, loss of frequent communication is more sudden (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Alder, 2005).

Because deployments are not true long distance relationships (as they have been traditionally conceptualized), communication practices described in the relational maintenance literature may be more relevant to studying military relationships. Relational maintenance during deployments can be classified as strategic (intentional) and routine (subconscious behaviors) (Dindia, 2003). Kim and colleagues (2005) found that small talk is the primary relational maintenance strategy used by deployed couples. The non-deployed spouse is encouraged by military adjustment agencies to not disclose stress

from home due to the enduring stress of the soldier, especially during wartime circumstances. However, limited self-disclosure can keep the romantic partners from maintaining a satisfactory level of trust and commitment within the relationship. Because self-disclosure in the relationship is limited, romantic partners may seek out others (e.g., friends, coworkers, other romantic interests) to meet these emotional needs. In addition, Kim and colleagues (2005) found that nearly 40% of reported relational maintenance behaviors during deployments are so far uncategorized in the literature, which suggests that the unique circumstances of deployment force couples to “get creative” in maintaining their own relationships.

Even though Kim and colleagues (2005) found that non-deployed spouses were encouraged by military officials not to disclose home stress to their deployed romantic partners, Joseph and Afifi (2010) suggest that wives find ways to disclose stress regardless of military regulations (especially when they have children). This may be because romantic relationships in the military face deterioration because household stressors were shared before deployment and separation during the deployment period causes an unequal balance of relational stressors, including raising children (Newbie et al., 2005; Petronio, 2002). Joseph and Afifi (2010) found that wives disclose such stress to their deployed husbands as a primary source of coping. The disclosure resulted in greater marital satisfaction for the wives, but only if their husbands were supportive of the disclosure. Wives also varied their degrees of disclosure of stress depending on the perception of their of husband’s current levels of stress, which was derived from the circumstances of the deployment. Disclosure was also not based on whether the wives had someone else in the military to talk to about their stressful circumstances. Disclosure



tended to be restricted to necessary stressors, such as a change in financial status that would affect the husband while on deployment. Another unique finding of their study was the strong negative correlation between amount of time wives spent talking to their husbands and marital satisfaction, meaning the more time spent talking to their husbands, the less satisfied wives were with their relationship. The negative correlation could be because of restricted communication and unreliability of communication technology (e.g., email, phone, and Skype), resulting in frustration for both the deployed and non-deployed spouses. For example, if a soldier is only able to communicate once a month through phone or Skype, and the connection cuts off repeatedly during the conversation, frustrations could dim the excitement of being able to talk to the romantic partner. A measure of relational satisfaction could be taken in future studies of deployed husbands for comparison.

While reliability of technology is one major factor for relational maintenance in military romantic relationships, military rules and regulations also provide challenges. Frisby and colleagues (2011) studied the limitations of conversation between military couples during deployment, compared to non-military couples. They hypothesized that the topic of conversations within a military couple can predict the amount of stress experienced on the relationship. Non-military couples were significantly more likely than military couples to avoid talking about the current status of their relationships, marriage, and cohabitation. This could be due to continual stress of a deployment requires a military couple to be hyperaware (and likely uncertain) of their partner and relationship status. Cohabitation and marriage may be topics of interest to a military couple because the length of deployment as an interruption of a face-to-face relationship.

Deployment is arguably one of greatest stressors on a military couple due to increased fatality risk, and surviving that strain on the relationship may convince a military couple that they have found “the one” worth marrying. Military couples also reported that everyday talk is an important relational maintenance behavior in their relationship during deployment (Frisby et al., 2011). Everyday talk was operationally defined as catching up, reminiscing about the past, and coping mechanisms. These categories are surface-level elements of self-disclosure (i.e., talking about spouse’s job), and unlike deeper levels of disclosure (i.e., religion, fears, threat of death), may cause less emotional distress during periods of high-stress in a relationship. This could be attributed to the fact that communication in a military relationship could be seen as a commodity, rather than the norm due to deployment circumstances and limited communication. Frisby and colleagues’ (2011) research did not investigate the depth of self-disclosure in relationships, which was found to be significantly lower in military couples in previous research (Kim et al, 2005 & Joseph & Afifi, 2010).

Hinojosa, Hinojosa, and Högnäs (2012) studied relational communication problems during a wartime deployment. While a deployed soldier often cannot talk about high-risk combat situations, his/her spouse can talk about the everyday stressors of non-military life. International phone service was found to be in-operational at times, which led to frustration on the part of both the soldier and the spouse back home. Additionally, many of the soldiers felt an increased disconnect from their family members due to the soldier’s experiences with other cultures and the experiences of war itself, which their family members did not understand (or could not be told about in detail). Hinojosa, Hinojosa, and Högnäs (2012) explained several of these scenarios in detail. In one

example, the researchers learned that a flag was flown over the American base-camp as a reminder of the fight for religious freedom and diversity, in contrast to the Taliban's own desires to destroy anyone not a follower of Muhammad. An army staff sergeant sent the flag back home to his wife as a symbol of pride and reminder of reasons he fights for this freedom. In receiving the flag, his wife did not understand the deep symbolism. Lacking the context and symbolism, she did not understand the larger military culture or the specific experiences her spouse engaged in as part of his job. The resultant miscommunications and subsequent rift between the two strained their relationship almost beyond repair when they found a sudden loss of things to discuss over the phone. In essence, they were unable to connect over the differing frame of reference, an issue that persisted for a lengthy period of time.

In conclusion, this research demonstrated that communication can be severely limited due to technological constraints. This resulted in a disconnect in terms of levels of meaning and interpretation from between soldier and the spouse. Because family members could not truly understand and further empathize with the soldiers, the relationships became strained and often suffered as a result. Some soldiers even admitted that they preferred to have no contact from home because the limited communication contact was more stressful to them than total disconnect. Importantly, this study was limited to participants from the Army and Marine Corps. It should be noted that Navy sailors, who are confined to a ship for the majority of a deployment, and Airforce pilots, who experience shorter deployment assignments (typically 120 days compared to the year-long tours of the Army), may experience such relational strains differently and in varying amounts.

Recent communication research on military relationships focuses on communication during deployment (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010; Carter et al., 2011; Joseph & Afifi, 2010). On top of limitations by military regulations and unreliable communicative technologies, a soldier's ability to communicate with a romantic partner can also be compromised by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other brain trauma (Allen et al., 2010). According to Allen, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2010), communication changes due to PTSD and brain trauma have been vastly understudied. One reason for the lack of research could be due to researchers' focus on "fixing" PTSD, rather than deriving a more complete understanding of the effects on a soldier's relationship. However, relational communication may help alleviate some of the stress caused by PTSD. Relational communication includes disclosing stress while the soldier is on deployment, which the military discourages in order to prevent further stress on the soldier (Jerney-Davis et al., 2005). Obviously, this situation presents the scenario of being "caught between a rock and a hard place." However, there are a few key areas where the non-deployed spouse can still try to alleviate some of this stress. Comfort and support are intentions of verbal and nonverbal empathic communication, as they can show emotional responses to a romantic partner's stress and problems. In military relationships, while openness can be restricted by the nature of deployments, assurances and romantic affection are key pieces of relational maintenance that can be communicated through email and phone conversation. Support is also necessary, since a romantic relationship or family can be the only attachments for a soldier to his home life away from wartime circumstances.

So what happens when deployed soldiers come home? A clear gap in the communication research exists in evaluating communication during the reintegration process after the soldier returns home from deployment. Although communication during deployment is a vital part of relational maintenance in military relationships, communication during the post-deployment reintegration process is a vital part of conflict management within a family. Many problems like PTSD may manifest post-deployment. This gap poses a challenge for researchers to investigate the lives and relationships of returning soldiers transitioning back into a civilian lifestyle and careers outside of the military.

Because of the unique set of relational maintenance behaviors during a deployment, conflict resolution in military relationships is also different from non-military couples. Empathic communication is a specific part of conflict resolution, which due to combat exposure and combat training, can be compromised during extended period of deployment stress on a relationship (Grossman, 2009). The limitations in the expressions of empathic communication in military relationships as both a relational maintenance strategy and a tool for conflict management may help explain more destructive resolution patterns (e.g., further distancing, physical or verbal aggression).

**H4:** Soldiers who experience higher levels of communicative technological issues on deployment will be less likely to express empathic communication than those who experience low levels of communicative technological issues.

**RQ3:** Is attachment style related to familial background, combat exposure, or frustrations with communicative technology issues on deployment?

## Infidelity

Infidelity is a socially constructed concept that differs not only from country to country, but also from culture to culture within different countries (Hirsch, Higgins, Bentley, & Nathanson, 2002). According to Drigostas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999), infidelity can be defined as, “(a) the feeling that one’s partner has violated a relationship norm regarding the nature of the partner’s interactions with someone else and (b) the fact the violation of this relationship norm typically elicits sexual jealousy and rivalry” (p. 509). Based on this definition, *partner perception* of a violation of the set relational rules of monogamy (implicit or explicit) must occur for infidelity to take place. While Drigostas, Safstrom, and Gentilia’s (1999) definition is encompassing all types monogamous violations, this conceptualization can be broken down into three major types of infidelity: emotional, sexual (sometimes called physical), and communicative infidelity.

Emotional infidelity can be defined as a set of extradyadic “dating” behaviors that violate relational rules, such as holding hands, meeting on dates, exchanging intimate phone/text messages, and interacting online in a romantic way (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004). In contrast, sexual infidelity can be defined as a set of extradyadic physical behaviors, such as heavy “making out,” oral sex, or sexual intercourse (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004). The line between emotional and sexual infidelity is often unclear because kissing may fall under either emotional infidelity or sexual infidelity depending on the researcher’s perspective. Notably, emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity do not always occur independently: emotional infidelity can lead to sexual infidelity, and even vice-versa. However, they must be measured independently because one can occur without the other.

For example, sexual infidelity may occur as a “one night stand” with a stranger, where no emotional attachments are formed (or desired). On the other hand, emotional attachments may form in response to a lack of emotional support during a deployment, but may not necessarily lead to sexual infidelity. Emotional and sexual infidelity may also occur *subconsciously* or *consciously* in order to fulfill unmet emotional or sexual needs from a relationship (Bravo & Lumpkin, 2010). This means that sexual and emotional infidelity may be committed unintentionally.

On the other hand, communicative infidelity is a *motivational* type of infidelity. Communicative infidelity is an extradyadic affair committed in order to send a message to a partner, and typically occurs in response to an action committed by a significant other (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). For example, if a romantic partner cheats on his or her spouse, the spouse may cheat on him or her in return. Communicative infidelity is not only intentional, but it is specifically committed in order to emotionally harm a romantic partner. Communicative infidelity may be committed in response to a partner committing infidelity or participating in other violations to relational rules, such as having deep undisclosed financial problems. All three types of infidelity are compared by relevant relational factors in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1

*Types of Infidelity*

Type of Infidelity	Sexual	Emotional	Communicative
Definition	Extradynamic sexual relations committed to fill an unmet sexual need	Extradynamic emotional relations committed to fill an unmet emotional need	Extradynamic relations (typically sexual) committed to send a message to a romantic partner
Examples	Kissing, oral sex, sexual intercourse	Talking romantically/intimately	Sexual intercourse
Intentional?	Not necessarily	Not necessarily	Yes
Physical Involvement?	Yes	No	Yes
Emotional Involvement?	No	Yes	Yes
Insecure Attachments?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Can occur during a deployment?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender most likely to commit:	Male	Female	Female
Empathy:	Compromised	Compromised	Non-existent

**Motivations for Infidelity.** Motivations for committing infidelity differ by type of infidelity. According to Barta and Kiene's (2005) research, motivations for emotional infidelity can be classified as relational inequity behaviors and include anger, neglect, and dissatisfaction, or, in terms of Bravo and Lumpkin (2010), unmet emotional needs. Unmet emotional needs include lack of intimacy or self-disclosure in the relationship, and often leads to subconscious relational dissolution for the discontent partner. Emotional infidelity may also be thought of as a subconscious process as it sometimes occurs unintentionally over a long period of time. Emotional infidelity can go on unacknowledged until sexual infidelity has occurred, which often signals a clear and definite negative shift in the relationship towards emotional disengagement or relational dissolution. Emotional support is key in relational maintenance for keeping an equitable



balance in a relationship, and when relational maintenance becomes imbalanced, additional support outside of the relationship may be necessary. Additionally, dissolving the inequitable relationship may not be possible for financial or religious reasons, so conscious emotional infidelity may be the only alternative source of emotional support for a period of time (Johnson, 2002).

On the other hand, Barta and Kiene (2005) also found that sexual infidelity is motivated by unmet sexual needs, such as a desire for more sexual partners, wanting more frequent sex, and wanting someone with more diverse sexual interests. Females were more likely to engage in emotional infidelity, and males were much more likely to engage in sexual infidelity (Barta & Kiene, 2005). Infidelity (and monogamous relationships) can be considered a socially constructed concept. However, findings of gender differences in committing infidelity support the evolutionary psychology perspectives (Buss, 1987). Males are more likely to seek out multiple sexual partners for mating purposes, while women are likely to seek out single long-term partners (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). It should be noted that Barta and Kiene (2005) used a forced-choice approach to this research to gauge gender differences in emotional and sexual infidelity, and their research does not clearly define the overlap in sexual and emotional infidelity. Overall, however, a partner's motivations for committing infidelity helps define the decision to tell (or not to tell) a romantic partner that infidelity has been committed. For example, a spouse that committed sexual infidelity one time while inebriated to fill an immediate sexual need may be perceived as less of a betrayal to a relationship than a year-long emotional affair that ended in sexual infidelity as a natural progression. The act of one-time sexual infidelity may be disclosed to a partner (and

explained away as an exception or random occurrence), while a year-long emotional infidelity affair may not be disclosed due to perceived levels of a partner's negative feedback.

Revenge is one of the key reasons for communicative infidelity. Tafoya and Spitzberg (2007) studied a relatively newer variable they coined as 'communicative infidelity,' in which infidelity is a form of message or expression sent to a romantic partner. Communicative infidelity is a specific part of sexual infidelity or emotional infidelity in which verbal messages are a key part of a relational transgression. Tafoya and Spitzberg (2007) noted that while sexual infidelity (physical acts that lead to and include sexual behaviors) and emotional infidelity (including sharing time and conversations) are well-studied in the literature, infidelity done specifically to send a message to a partner as an act of revenge, jealousy, or warning has been vastly understudied. For example, a romantic partner committing infidelity may do so as an act of revenge against a partner. Tafoya and Spitzberg (2007) found that while participants generally believed infidelity to be unacceptable under normal circumstances, infidelity was deemed justifiable under certain circumstances, such as a partner committing infidelity first or excessive gambling. Communicative infidelity was significantly associated with jealousy, vengefulness and sociosexuality (i.e., willingness to engage in casual non-committed sexual intercourse). Communicative infidelity, while only occurring during certain circumstances, does open the door on communication behaviors as causes for infidelity.

Dillow, Malachowski, Brann, & Weber (2011) continued this research by examining communicative infidelity motives on relational outcomes in romantic

relationships. Participants in a highly committed relationship were more likely to forgive relational transgressions if the partner who committed the infidelity admitted to the infidelity, showed a willingness to talk about the behavior, and did not downplay their transgressions. Satisfaction was also important to continued relational maintenance as opposed to dissolution. In general, participants were unwilling to grant forgiveness to their partner due to intentionality of communicative infidelity as a revenge or jealous strategy. This study shows the difference in sexual, emotional, and communicative infidelity by highlighting intentionality. For example, sexual infidelity tends to occur during times of high consumption of alcohol. In this scenario, while the infidelity may have been avoidable without inhibitions, it may still be an unintentional relational transgression that can be more forgivable with time. Empathic communication could be used as a pre-transgressional relational maintenance tool that would increase overall relationship satisfaction in case relational traumatic events occur, such as infidelity. On the other hand, some cases of infidelity may be intentionally inflicted on a romantic partner in part for jealousy or revenge, which leads to a high likelihood of dissolution (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). This may indicate that infidelity not committed to intentionally inflict pain on a partner may be more likely to reach a forgiveness resolution.

Motivations for infidelity in the military are similar to the general population; any may arise, mostly during deployment. This is because deployments offer extended opportunities for infidelity to occur, where a couple is separated for six months to over a year. During this time, with no face-to-face time with a romantic partner and limited communication, romantic partners can see long periods of time with unmet emotional and

sexual needs. Romantic partners may seek out others to meet these needs, which could lead to sexual or emotional infidelity. Because infidelity can be career-ending for soldiers in the military, no broad-scale research has been conducted and released to the public.

**Perception of Infidelity.** As addressed above, degrees of infidelity are a matter of perception. Horan (2012) conducted research on the perception of relational transgressions and the affection exchange theory. Relational transgression was defined as an act perceived as a negative behavior by a romantic partner. The range of transgressional behaviors included broken promises, deception, neglect, betrayal, verbal aggression, and infidelity. He found that amount of affection in a relationship was negatively correlated with perceptions of severity, rumination, and feelings of hurt. Horan (2012) argues that such behaviors are types of communicative messages when used in relational conflict situations, as actions during relational conflict speak louder non-verbal messages than verbal messages at times. Additionally, affectionate messages (i.e., messages conveying support and love) can be deceptive based on the perceptions of the receiver and the intent of the message, which could cause further relational transgressions (Horan and Booth-Butterfield, in press). For example, affectionate messages, like empathic communication, can be expressed without empathy. It should be noted that that the severity of transgressional behavior depends on both the perceptions of the couple involved and can be mediated by the language of the couple involved.

Perceptions in relationships can affect both partners. Dillow, Afifi, and Matsunaga (2011) studied whether a participant perceived their partner as meeting fundamental relational needs, as well as perception of their romantic partner's uniqueness (how they measure up to the quality of alternatives) as a prediction of post-transgression

behaviors. Results suggest that perception of the transgression predicted conflict, non-verbal immediacy and desire for relationship termination. Perceived uniqueness also predicted conflict management strategies and relational dissolution decisions. The more unique a romantic partner was perceived to be (i.e., they are “the one”), the less likely dissolution of the relationship was to occur despite severity of transgression. These results show that the partner who does not participate in the relational transgression may judge willingness to stay with the transgressor on whether he or she believes quality alternatives are available. Higher levels of perceived uniqueness following transgressions also predicted increased intimacy of romantic partners and passive conflict management strategies (i.e., accommodative strategies that puts a partner’s needs before one’s own). Dependents may find that military experience gives their romantic partner uniqueness. In response, soldiers may find that spouses who are able to “handle” a deployment have a similarly desired uniqueness. These perceived qualities may reduce the likelihood of dissolution, even in the event of infidelity.

The particular circumstances of infidelity in a military relationship should be addressed based on the opportunities caused by temporary geographic separations. Le, Korn, Crockett, and Loving (2010) studied the link missing a romantic partner, commitment, relational maintenance, and infidelity. They argued that the experience of geographic separations, when utilizing reduced relational maintenance behaviors, can lead to infidelity expectedly. Couples with high levels of commitment are more likely to experience higher levels of missing their partner. Le, Korn, Crockett and Loving (2010) found that with short term geographic distance, commitment mediated how much partners missed one another as well as participant’s use of positivity, openness, and

assurances during separation. For example, a recently formed relationship with very little commitment would be much more likely to dissolve during a deployment than a longer-term commitment. Physical infidelity was also negatively correlated with how often a participant missed their romantic partner, and their commitment level. This means the less a person missed his or her partner, the more likely they were to commit physical infidelity. This study is especially applicable to military research because most long-distance situations for military couples are temporary based on job circumstances like deployments.

**Maintenance and Infidelity.** Further research on relational maintenance during long-distance relationships has been conducted (Stafford, 2005). Although this research could possibly relate to situations where deployments are extended into years for wartime circumstances, these events typically only happen during these special circumstances. Those situations would most likely apply to the Army and Marine Corps, while the United States is openly at war with another country. Members of all branches of the military have the option of signing up for extended tours for higher pay, but it is less likely that soldiers with dependants would volunteer for these tours unless their relationship is already under extreme duress or financial concerns arise. Because of the temporary long-distance circumstances evaluated in Le, Korn, Crockett, and Loving's (2010) study, military families should also be studied for levels of commitment and relational maintenance behaviors on the likelihood of infidelity occurring. To clarify, Table 1.2 on the next page describes the differences in military and long-distance relationships.

The link between empathic communication and infidelity is loosely found within the conflict resolution literature. Although it is not explicitly stated within the literature, empathic communication can be seen as a positive relational maintenance behavior in secure attachment couples that may help work against the negative relational maintenance behaviors of infidelity. In addition, relationships that are not well-maintained may fall into disrepair, leading partners to look for other partner options. Hubbard (2010) argued that conflict does not follow a prescription and depends on the individuals within each situation. She found that more empathic communication was perceived by couples as needed during conflict, as opposed to dominance. The use of empathic communication showed a level of equity during conflict. This was due to the fact empathic communication was used to show a desire to understand and communicate from a romantic partner's perspective. Dating partners expect higher levels of prosocial behavior during conflict towards their partner, such as positivity and low forms of control. Relational responsiveness, however, was not related to relationship satisfaction. Empathic communication, as a relational maintenance behavior, may increase satisfaction in the romantic relationships. Due to the reduced reliability in communicative technology as well as time differences of being apart on deployment, more emphasis on using empathic communicative during meaningful exchanges may help reduce conflict in military relationships.

Table 1.2

*Long Distance Relationships versus Military Relationships<sup>2</sup>*

Type of Relationship	Deployment- (Temporary Geographic Separations)	Extended Deployment (Extended temporary geographic separations)	Long-Distance Relationships
Time Apart	3 months-1 year	1 year+Extension	Negotiated by Couple
Modes of Communication	Email (Primary) Deployment Packages Skype (Once a month) <sup>3</sup> Telephone (Once a month)	Email (Primary) Deployment Packages Skype (Once a month) Telephone (Once a month)	Skype Telephone Email Face-to-Face <sup>4</sup>
Reliability of Modes	Low-Moderate	Low-Moderate	High
Commitment Levels Needed for Satisfaction	High	Extremely High	Moderate-to-High depending on couple
Face-to-Face Communication	Never during deployment	Never during deployment	Varies on couple basis
Open Communication	No	No	Yes
Opportunity for Infidelity	Low (for soldier) High (for significant other)	Low (for soldier) High (for significant other)	High (for both partners)
Likelihood of Dissolution	Varies (Much higher overall for females than males)	Varies (Much higher overall for female soldiers than male soldiers)	Varies

**Attachment and Infidelity.** Infidelity in most relationships is damaging because it violates relational rules of monogamy, but it may also indicate insecurity problems in long-term adult attachment. This insecurity may cause an inability to resolve relationship conflict effectively or lead to other problems such as fewer relational maintenance behaviors. According to Bravo and Lumpkin (2010), infidelity can be

<sup>2</sup> Based on Le, Korn, Crockett & Loving, 2010 and Kim et al. (2005)'s research

<sup>3</sup> Once a month for Naval and some Airforce Operations. Ability to use Skype and telephones varies for Marine Corps and Army abroad.

<sup>4</sup> Face-to-Face time varies on factors, such as distance, time available for travel, and funds available for travel.



primarily traced to early childhood attachment patterns through traumatic childhood experiences, like parental infidelity and divorce. Several other peripheral explanations for infidelity include boredom, unmet emotional needs, opportunity, and cognitive processes (e.g., perception of what?). Each of these factors may appear separately or in combination as they lead to infidelity in relationships. When soldiers are on deployment, their only source of amusement is email, books, movies and games they may choose to bring, as well as their fellow soldiers. Because deployments require couples to spend lengthy times apart, partners may seek alternate forms of emotional support. Emotional support on deployment may include emails, phone calls, and deployment packages. However, unreliability of communicative technologies, time apart, and insecure attachments may lead to unmet emotional needs or sexual needs.

Bogaert and Sadava (2002) showed that adult attachment is also linked to sexual behavior in the communication literature. They argued that humans show variability in sexual behavior, as some couples are monogamous and some are polygamous. While society's rules govern monogamy in marital relationships, partners may have different relational rules outside of society standards. Type of sexual behavior also varies across different couples depending on sexual drive or need, cultural values, or willingness to experiment. Boegart and Sadava (2002) found that securely attached romantic partners were more likely to have only one steady sexual partner. Another interesting finding of their study was that securely attached women were also less likely to have early first intercourse, but there was no significant finding on early first intercourse for secure versus insecure males. Securely attached women were less likely to commit infidelity; however, attachment was not significant for infidelity in males. Why is this? Women

could be socialized in secure attachment relationships not to have sexual intercourse early or outside of relationships because of the social stigma they may receive from peers (Houston & Hwang, 1996). Males, on the other hand, may be praised for sex with multiple partners as adolescents, which may affect long-term views on relationships (Flannery, Rowe, & Gulley, 1993). As males make up the vast majority of the military ranks, and their quality of alternatives are perhaps lower than their dependents, attachment and socialization may be overshadowed in the military by external (constraining) factors like being confined to a ship or a military camp for long periods of time. As attachment type was found to a non-significant correlation for infidelity, these external factors, such as relational maintenance behaviors, may be a stronger indication of infidelity (Boegart & Saldava, 2002). It should also be noted, however, that relational maintenance behaviors and attachment are not necessarily independent factors in analyzing the causes of infidelity. According to more recent literature, attachment styles are a cause of specific relational maintenance behaviors, and infidelity, identified as a negative relational maintenance behavior, has been independently linked to attachment (Dainton, 2007; Guerrero & Bachman, 2008).

Many causes for sexual, emotional, and communicative infidelity currently exist in the extant literature. Insecure attachment has been linked to infidelity in communication, psychology, and counseling literature (Pelusa, 2007; Pincus, House, Chistenson, & Alder, 2005; Platt, Nalbone, Casanova, & Wetchler, 2008). Across the board, infidelity has been linked to insecure attachments with particular emphasis on fearful attachment (fear of a partner leaving). Infidelity has also briefly been linked to civilian Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), though this research may not be useful

to this study due to the fact most civilian PTSD occurs from a singular event and has temporary effects (Dutton, Ginkel, & Landolt, 1996). Due to the violent subject matter of Dutton, Ginkel, and Landolt's (1996) research (violence in the family), infidelity may also have been a cause of the PTSD, rather than the other way around. However, as stated previously, attachment and PTSD alone are not necessarily singular causes of infidelity. Infidelity can also be caused by boredom, falling out of love with a partner, or as an act of revenge (Pelusa, 2007; Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). This study will also examine empathic communication's role in mediating attachment, military experiences, and the three types of infidelity.

**H5:** Soldiers who express lower levels of empathic communication with a romantic partner will be more likely to engage in sexual infidelity than soldiers who express high levels of empathic communication.

**H6:** Soldiers who express lower levels of empathic communication with a romantic partner will be more likely to engage in emotional infidelity than soldiers who express high levels of empathic communication.

**RQ4:** Does Post Traumatic Stress Disorder impact sexual and emotional infidelity?

In conclusion, empathic communication has been vastly understudied as a relational maintenance tool. This study seeks to understand empathic communication's role in military romantic relationships as it relates to family background, military experiences, empathy, and infidelity. Attachment styles, as formed through critical developmental periods, can be compromised by extended and frequent wartime deployments by a parent. When a soldier enters the military, empathy and empathic communication in romantic relationships are further complicated by their own deployments. During these deployments, soldiers may experience trauma caused by

wartime experiences. They also experience limited communication technologies that would enable them to reach out to familial support. Also, because of distance, time away, and emotional adjustment, infidelity can occur on both the part of the soldier and the romantic partner. Sexual and emotional infidelity are relational transgressions which can both lead to relational dissolution. The purpose of this study is to design a predictive model of empathic communication in military romantic relationships, which can later be used for practical application in therapeutic relational counseling for soldiers returning home from deployment.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The participants in this study were consenting adults ( $N = 150$ ), ages eighteen and older (based on the age of consent in joining the military). Participants represented all branches of the military except the Coast Guard, and they each experienced at least one overseas deployment. Notably, the majority served in the Army ( $n = 67$ , 44%), followed by the Navy ( $n = 29$ , 19%), the Marine Corps ( $n = 29$ , 19%), and the Airforce ( $n = 25$ , 14%). The vast majority of the sample were enlisted ( $n = 118$ , 78%), with a minority of officers ( $n = 32$ , 21%). Participants were also currently in a romantic relationship or were recently in a romantic relationship, about which they answered questions pertaining to relational transgressions. The current relationship statuses were noteworthy: 27% were currently in a monogamous relationship ( $n = 41$ ), 38% were married ( $n = 58$ ), 18% were single ( $n = 27$ ), 3% were currently in an open relationship that their romantic partner was aware of ( $n = 5$ ), and 1% ( $n = 2$ ) were currently in an open relationship that their romantic partner was unaware of (i.e., committing some form of infidelity). Roughly 12% indicated other relationship statuses (10% divorced,  $n = 14$ ; 2% involved only in casual relationships,  $n = 4$ ). Seventy-four of the participants were from a military family background (49%) with an additional seventy-six participants from a civilian family background (50%). While some variance was expected between the participants due to the national reach of this study through online research and the mostly unrestricted age range, the number of variables and measures used below are designed to account for this variance.

Because of this unrestricted age range, the mean years of service was higher than expected ( $M= 7.78$ ,  $SD= 8.34$ ). Two soldiers had forty-four military years of experience, and twelve participants total served longer than the twenty-year contract for retirement. These servicemen in particular would make up some of the highest ranking officers, warrant officers, and enlisted chiefs in the country. While all of the participants experienced at least one deployment, only half of the participants experienced direct combat.

## Design

The general design of this study was a cross-sectional survey. The analysis design for this study was a path analysis model. Path analysis is a type of structural equation modeling designed to determine the effects of mediation between three or more variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). According to Edwards and Lambert (2007), “In the language of path analysis (see: Alwin & Hauser, 1975), *mediation* refers to the indirect effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable that passes through a mediator variable (see: Shrout & Bolger, 2002)” (p. 1). Path analysis uses a series of estimates, correlations, and covariances to determine an overall goodness of fit for the model (Kenny, 2012). SPSS with AMOS was used to determine estimates, goodness of fit, and mediation of empathy and empathic communication.

It should be noted that according to Daly, Roberts, and Hampel (2010), relational maintenance behaviors in path models rarely show causation due to the choice of using a cross-sectional design over an experimental design. Instead, relational maintenance behaviors are typically predictors of a certain positive or negative actions in a

relationship. For example, levels of commitment in a relationship may predict how likely romantic partners will engage in infidelity behaviors. Based on the literature review and related hypotheses and research questions, the proposed model is shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

*Proposed Model*

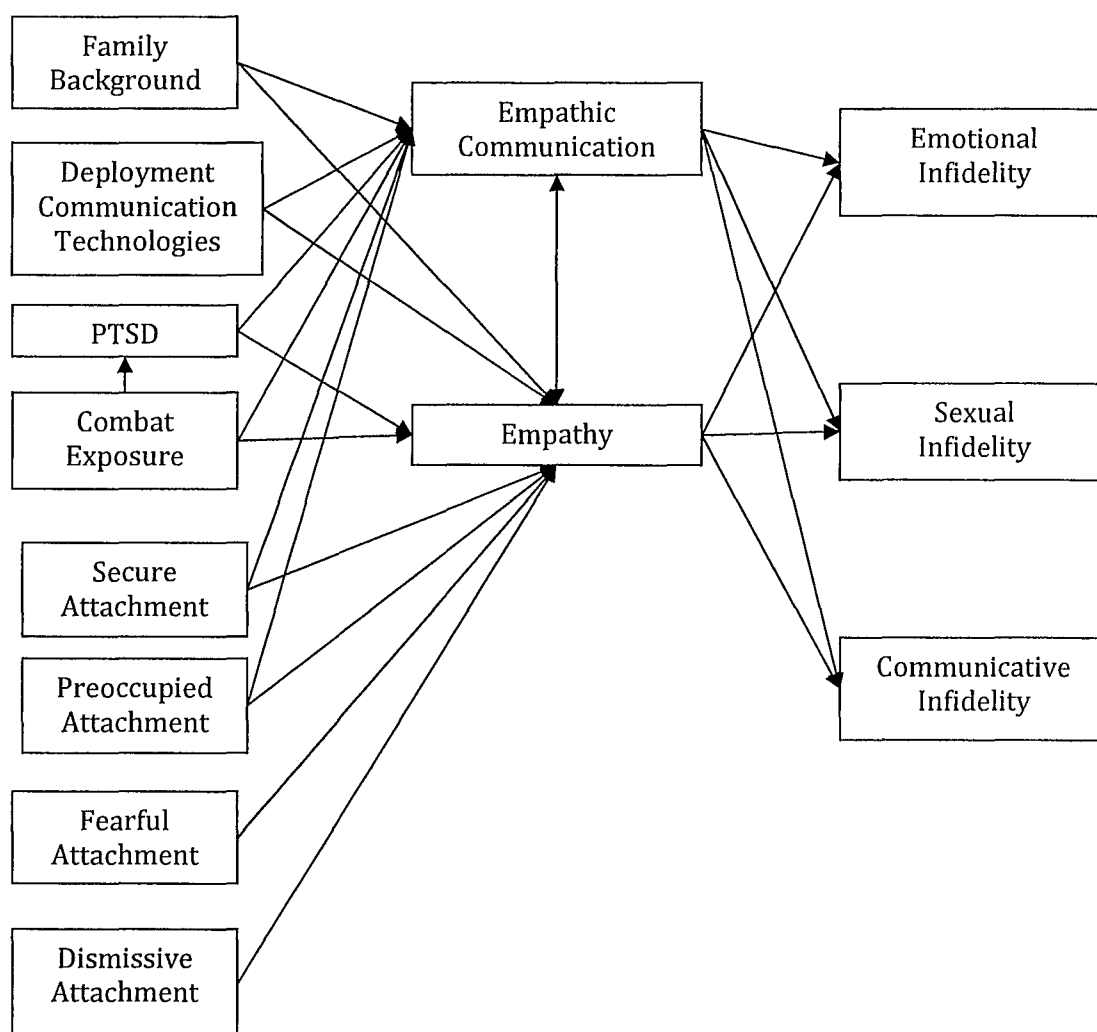


Figure 1.2 supports empathy and empathic communication as full mediators for military experience variables and sexual, emotional, and communicative infidelity. As full mediators, this could mean that military experiences directly contribute to relational transgressions due to compromised levels of empathy and empathic communication for a romantic partner. While other relational maintenance and military experience factors could be taken in account based on the literature (e.g., combat training methods, pre-military psychology evaluations, relational accommodation), they are arguably already included in the assessment of military experiences. The proposed model also suggests that empathy may be a direct contributor to empathic communication. The individual variables and measures will be discussed separately following the procedures.

## **Procedures**

The survey questionnaires were uploaded onto SurveyMonkey.com. Participants were provided with clear, written directions to not add any identifying information onto the form. By not permitting personal information, participants remained anonymous. Participants were recruited online through Facebook.com and other social media websites. In directions presented through the survey link on SurveyMonkey.com, it was requested that in order to be eligible to participate, participants have military experience, have completed one deployment, and to be currently or recently been in a relationship. These criteria were checked by several questions in the study. Additionally, in a letter preceding the survey, participants were given information on the risks of remembering combat experiences brought up through completing the survey, and were reminded that their involvement was voluntary. Participants received counseling information in case of



any psychological discomfort derived from remembering these experiences. Although the survey provides questions about infidelity and relational transgressions, anonymity protects the participants from any risk. The survey, which is shown in Appendix A, consisted of a total of sixty-six questions. According to SurveyMonkey.com statistics, participants completed the survey in an average of twenty-thirty minutes. International Review Board approval was obtained, and the document is attached in Appendix B.

### **Independent Variables**

The independent variables in this study represented the “military experience” variables. These military experience variables included family background, combat exposure, PTSD, and the reliability of communication technologies on deployment. Additionally, attachment was measured as a contributing factor for the military experience variables, empathy, emotional infidelity, and sexual infidelity in the literature (Basham, 2007; Britton & Feundeling, 2005; Bogaert & Sadava, 2002). While covariance was expected between several of the independent variables (combat exposure is the most direct cause of military PTSD), the focus of this paper was on the mediation effects of empathy and empathic communication. The independent variables define the study as representative of the military population, and as such, it was perceived that these variables would have the most impact on a soldier’s empathy levels and ability to empathically communicate.

**Family Background.** The first independent variable for this study is familial background. The traditional definition of family background typically includes familial socioeconomic status, education, race, religion and other factors that directly pertain to

childhood development (Hout & Rosen, 2000). However, in this study, it was hypothesized that childhood development is more closely linked to familial military history as an influence for the child to join the military. As defined within this study, family background is the parental background information (military or civilian) of a soldier during his childhood. Military family background is operationalized as having had one or both parents serving active duty military during childhood. Civilian family background is defined as having experienced childhood with both parents as civilians.

**Combat Exposure.** Combat exposure is a measure of the amount and intensity of stressors placed on soldiers during times of combat (Aldwin, Levenson, & Spiro, 1994). Conceptually, combat exposure mostly occurs during deployment. Combat exposure encompasses firing upon a perceived enemy, being fired upon by a perceived enemy, being injured under combat stressors, seeing injuries, and/or witnessing death of comrades or perceived enemies (Keane, Fairbank, Caddell, Zimering, Taylor, & Mora, 1989). While measures of combat exposure traditionally ask questions of those serving on front lines, its definition has been expanded to include second-lineman, such as medics, who see injury and death perhaps on a greater frequency than even those who serve on the front lines. Combat exposure is a continuous variable that will be modified to include medics and other support soldiers on overseas deployments.

**Reliability of Communication Technologies on Deployment.** Reliability of communication technologies on deployment, as perceived by soldiers using these technologies, is a variable measure of the quality of communication while one romantic partner is deployed. This research will assess the following modes of communication: email, Skype, phone, and mail (deployment packages). It should be addressed that within

this variable, some variance is to be expected based on the type of deployment and amount of time spent deployed. While previous research used a qualitative mode of measuring quality of communication through the use of interviews (Kim et al., 2005), this study will attempt to quantify perceived quality of communication. Quality of communication on deployment is based on a soldier's perception of quality, as well as a soldier's previous history with using these modes of communication. This variance may be stratified by amount of combat exposure, as higher levels of combat exposure typically correlate with longer deployments of the Army and Marine Corps.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a set of abnormal psychological behaviors caused by trauma (Keane et al, 1989). PTSD can be measured as either non-military PTSD (non-combat trauma) or military PTSD (combat trauma). This study will focus on the military version of PTSD. Military PTSD is typically cast as a direct result of combat exposure, although other factors may contribute, such as the general deployment experience. PTSD symptoms include nightmares, sudden memories, and paranoid reactions to everyday events based on experiences in war. The symptoms of military PTSD are generally considered a "reaction" to physically leaving combat while mentally unable to completely leave combat circumstances, though some soldiers show symptoms of PTSD without having combat exposure. The brain responds to the trauma by re-creating these circumstances in order to deal with the culture shock of re-entering civilian life. PTSD can be self-reported, though it is often clinically assessed when soldiers return from deployments where moderate to high levels of combat occurred. To be clear, the self-reported version of a PTSD assessment is a much shorter, less dense version of a clinical scale.

Measurements of PTSD will be used to determine the impact on empathic communication and a soldier's willingness to engage in empathic communication with a romantic partner while having symptoms of PTSD.

**Adult Attachment.** Attachment describes developmental and long-term patterns of human relationships. Attachment can be measured as either child attachment or adult attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1989). This study will focus on Kim Bartholomew's (1990) four stratifications model of adult attachment: secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful. Secure attachment describes patterns of security, where a person is comfortable becoming close to others, depending on others, and having others depend on them. Preoccupied attachment describes a person who desires to become close to others but doubts their own self-worth to others. Fearful attachment describes a desire to become emotionally close to others, but they fear others may hurt them emotionally. Dismissive attachment describes an attachment style where a person is comfortable without close relationships to others, and may view relationships as unimportant (Bartholomew, 1990). This study will specifically focus on these relationships for soldiers in military romantic relationships in how attachment may impact an ability to empathically communicate to a romantic partner. Attachment is also an important key to this study as it may also suggest a secondary underlying cause for negative trends in empathic communication, empathy, sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, and communicative infidelity.

## Mediators

**Empathy.** Empathy can be defined as the process by which one understands another person's perspective or emotional state and emotionally reacts to that perspective (Lipps, 1903). Empathy encompasses perspective taking, fantasy, and empathic concern, although fantasy has been shown to have lower reliability than the other two factors (Davis, 1983). Perspective taking is the ability to look at something (typically a type of conflict) from another's point of view. Empathic concern is the ability to feel concern for another's circumstances or emotional state. Fantasy is the ability to empathize using a fictional scenario (e.g., understanding the perspective of a fictional character). Since the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC) measures actual scenarios rather than fictional ones to create a more realistic measure of empathy, only the components of perspective taking and empathic concern will be used to measure empathy (Péloquin & Lafontaine, 1980). These items range from "I often have tender, concerned feelings when he/she is feeling less fortunate than me," to "I sometimes try to understand my partner better by trying to see things from his/her perspective." As such, this study used empathy to test mediation between the measure of military experiences (family background, combat exposure, communication on deployment) and the three types of infidelity that will be researched in this study (sexual, emotional, and communicative). Though other variations of empathy (e.g., empathy for strangers, empathy for friends) may be impacted by military experiences, this study will focus on empathy for a romantic partner.

**Empathic Communication.** Although empathic communication shares perspective taking and empathic concern with empathy, they must be measured as two separate variables. Empathic communication can exist without empathy or vice versa

(known as false empathic communication or false empathy). Empathic communication is the verbal and nonverbal expression of empathic concern and perspective taking. The nonverbal expression of empathic communication may involve physical comforting (e.g. hugging, holding hands), inflection, or eye contact. Since empathic communication shares components of empathy, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC) was used as a base to create unique items for empathic communication. These items were modified to include verbal and nonverbal elements of empathic communication. While some questions were related, no items were included for both variables. Empathic communication was tested as a mediator between the military experience variables and sexual, emotional, and communicative infidelity.

### **Dependent Variables**

Infidelity is a series of behaviors that violate rules of a romantic partnership involving extradyadic romantic interests. Infidelity can be operationalized as sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, and communicative infidelity. A few important considerations should be noted in the description of these variables. First, there is some debate in the literature over what is considered “emotional” infidelity and what is considered “sexual infidelity” (Goldenberg et al, 2003; Sabini & Green, 2004). As stated previously, sexual and emotional infidelity are also not necessarily completely *conscious* or *intentional* forms of infidelity, as they both can be defined as attempting to fill subconscious physical or emotional unmet needs (Drigotas, Stafstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). On the other hand, communicative infidelity stands apart because it is an intentional, conscious form of infidelity in order send a message to a romantic partner (Tafoya &

Spitzberg, 2007). While there is often overlap between all three variables, they were measured independently as the overlap is not always present between emotional and sexual infidelity.

**Sexual Infidelity.** Sexual infidelity is conceptualized as a result of unmet physical needs within a romantic relationship (Drigostas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). Sexual infidelity can be defined as occurring when a partner physically engages in extradyadic sexual behaviors that is considered a betrayal to his or her romantic partner (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996). Loosely, sexual infidelity can also be defined as the physical behaviors that lead to sexual intercourse such as heavy kissing and oral sexual behavior. These behaviors may occur intentionally or unintentionally depending on other factors, such as sexual jealousy, alcohol, and awareness of unmet needs. Sexual infidelity was measured as the temptation and occurrences of extradyadic sexual activities. Physical behaviors with lesser sexual connotations, such as holding hands, was not measured as sexual infidelity.

**Emotional Infidelity.** Emotional infidelity can be defined as extradyadic behaviors committed as the result of unmet emotional needs (Drigostas, Stafstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). Emotional infidelity occurs when a partner becomes interested in someone other than his or her romantic partner and may engage in “date-like” behaviors, such as flirting and holding hands (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996). Emotional infidelity involves the emotional attraction in an extradyadic affair and can exist independently of sexual infidelity. Sexual infidelity can occur without emotional infidelity. However, while sexual infidelity may only occur once and can be objective, emotional infidelity depends on common implicit rules set forth by the couple. Emotional infidelity is also

seen as a recurring event within (typically) one extradyadic coupling. Emotional infidelity was measured as romantic emotional connections without physical contact between a soldier who is currently in a committed relationship and someone other than his partner.

**Communicative Infidelity.** Unlike sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity, communicative infidelity is an overtly intentional behavior. Communicative infidelity can be defined as emotional or sexual infidelity behaviors committed to deliberately send a message to a partner (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). Communicative infidelity is generally committed in response to a romantic partner's behavior, such as a partner committing sexual infidelity, a partner threatening to leave, or a partner breaking an explicit relational rule (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007). While there can be overlap between all three types of infidelity, sexual infidelity and communicative infidelity may be more correlated than emotional infidelity and communicative infidelity. This is because sexual infidelity sends a more overt, immediate message to a partner and is more clearly seen as a violation of monogamous, relational norms. Communicative infidelity was measured as sexual and emotional infidelity committed to send a message to a partner. These items were measured separately from sexual and emotional infidelity.

## **Measures**

**Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples.** The measures used in this study were all published measures, and were slightly modified to fit the specific needs of this study. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index for Couples (IRIC) was selected to measure empathy and empathic communication (Davis, 1983). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index



for Couples (IRIC) is a fourteen-item likert scale designed to measure the empathetic perspective of a participant for his romantic partner. The Cronbach's inter-item alpha for this scale is  $\alpha = .84$  for empathetic concern in couples (Peloquin & Lafontaine, 2010). Peloquin and Lafontaine (2010) also determined through a series of relationship tests that the IRIC has evidence of convergent, concurrent, discriminant and incremental validity. An example of an item of the IRIC is "I try to look at my partner's side of a disagreement before I make decisions." Several items were added to this scale to include measurement of empathic communication in a romantic relationship, such as "When my romantic partner has problems, I verbally try to comfort him/her" and "I verbally compromise with my partner over issues over than my job." The Cronbach's inter-item alpha for these items is  $\alpha = .78$ .

**The Infidelity Scale.** The Infidelity Scale was selected to measure emotional and sexual infidelity with a romantic partner outside of a current relationship. It is a nine-item likert scale that has been slightly modified for this study. It uses a scenario to ask participants to imagine a time they were attracted to an extradyadic partner and to answer questions about this event, which are arranged in ascending order of degree of relational transgression to encourage honesty. The Cronbach's inter-item alpha for the Infidelity Scale is  $\alpha = .93$  (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). According to Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1991), the Infidelity Scale has convergent, discriminant and incremental validity. An example of an item of the Infidelity Scale is "How much flirting occurred between the two of you (yourself and the extradyadic romantic partner as defined in the instructions)?" This scale uses a scenario for which the participant re-imagines a time where infidelity may have occurred in a relationship. This published measure has been

tested for both reliability and validity by several independent sources and poses no risk to participants. Two items were added to this measure to independently evaluate communicative infidelity.

**Relationship Questionnaire.** Bartholomew's (1990) Relationship Questionnaire for attachment was selected to measure adult attachment. The Relationship Questionnaire is a measure that uses four descriptive paragraphs and asks participants to rank how each scenario describes them. An example of one paragraph is, "It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me." This is a published measure which has been retested for validity and reliability. While the factors for independent reliability are relatively low with Secure ( $\alpha = 0.32$ ), Preoccupied ( $\alpha = 0.46$ ), Fearful ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and Dismissing ( $\alpha = 0.64$ ) (Backstrom & Holmes, 2001), Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) noted that the Relationship Questionnaire is a dimensional measure of at least two aspects (self and others). This means that most people have *degrees* of more than one type of attachment, and the factors cannot be measured independently for reliability. Using this factoring system, a *GFI* (Goodness of Fit Index) score of 0.97 and a *RMSEA* (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) score of 0.079 were obtained (Backstrom and Holmes, 2001). However, in order to keep the survey manageable for participants, this scale was selected over a more comprehensive attachment measure. The Relationship Questionnaire has construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). No items were changed or added to this measure, and no risk is involved in assessing attachment.

**Combat Exposure Scale.** The Combat Exposure Scale was selected to measure combat exposure (Lund, Foy, Sipprelle, & Strachan, 1984). This nine-item likert scale was chosen to measure a soldier's frequent experiences in combat and asks questions regarding combat-related stress, injury, and instances of seeing death. The Combat Exposure Scale, like the Infidelity Scale, has high reliability ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ). It also has construct and criterion-related validity. While combat memories could cause minor psychological discomfort for the participant, it was deemed unlikely that this survey would cause any more discomfort than normal television or other scenes of violence he or she may experience in everyday life. However, in case of discomfort, additional information for Veteran's Affairs counseling services was provided at the beginning of this survey. Also, the risk of asking about combat experiences was stated at the beginning of the survey with indication that the survey is completely voluntary. Two items were added to this measure to test for compromised empathy during combat situations. The two items were, "How often did the sight of a comrade injured or killed bother you?" and "How often did the sight of an enemy injured or killed bother you?"

**PTSD Checklist for Military.** The PTSD Checklist for Military (PCL-M) was selected to measure Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in soldiers post-combat situations (Weathers, Litz, Huska, & Keane, 1991). This seventeen-item scale is a published measure that has been tested and re-tested on soldiers for the purpose of collecting data and diagnostics. While this is not the full clinical scale, it is an indication of PTSD. The PCL-M measures current psychological problems caused by combat experiences, and most, if not all soldiers have taken some form of this measure as part of leaving the military or for medical purposes. The PCL-M has excellent reliability ( $\alpha=0.94$ ) (Weather,

Litz, Hushka, & Keane, 1991). As assessed by Wilkins, Lang, and Norman (2011), the PCL-M also has construct, convergent, and discriminant validity. This measure has been modified for the communication purposes in this study. Several items were added to test for empathic communication with a romantic partner over the topic of PTSD, such as, “Do you talk about these experiences with a romantic partner?” and “Do you talk about these experiences with someone other than a romantic partner?” These items measure self-disclosure and empathic communication in post-traumatic situations. Adding these items did not affect overall reliability.

**Additional Individual Items.** The last items included in this survey measure quality of communication during deployment, family background (military or non-military), and general information such as whether the participants were ever deployed. None of this information could be used as identifying information and poses no risk to the participants involved in taking this survey. Examples of these questions include, “During one of your deployments, were you in a romantic relationship?” and “During your deployment, please rate the following technologies on a scale of 1-7. 1=Did not work. 7=Worked extremely well.” Other demographics such as rank, years of service, and branch were also included for possible confounding factors.

## RESULTS

### Manipulation Check

The manipulation check for family background was successful. Seventy-four participants (49%) responded that they had a military family background with one or both parents in the military, while seventy-six participants (51%) responded that they had a civilian family background with neither parent in the military. A total of thirty participants were needed for each operational definition of family background for a ninety-five percent confidence level, and these numbers were exceeded in both categories. All other variables produced nominal or continuous level data and no other manipulation check was needed for those variables. However, within the path analysis model, it should be noted that the 3:1 (150:54) participant-to-parameter ratio does show low power. While this is somewhat of a limitation, it should be noted that the power can be raised significantly by removing variables with lesser overall significance, such as family background and dismissive attachment.

### Reliability

Table 1.3 shows the Cronbach's inter-item alpha reliability values for all continuous variables. All reliabilities were  $>.70$ , though the military experience variables and communicative infidelity was consistently higher than empathy, empathic communication, sexual infidelity, and communication technologies on deployment. While the alpha for sexual infidelity was acceptable at the  $.70$  standard level ( $\alpha = .72$ ),

one item pertaining to arousal felt for the extradyadic partner was removed to significantly increase the overall reliability of the data (to  $\alpha = .77$ ).

Table 1.3

*Reliabilities for the Data*

Variable	Reliability	# of Items
Combat Exposure	.93	8
PTSD	.93	9
Reliability of Communication Technologies on Deployment	.74	4
Empathy	.86	15
Empathic Communication	.78	7
Emotional Infidelity	.90	6
Sexual Infidelity	.77 <sup>5</sup>	3
Communicative Infidelity	.90	2

## Statistical Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that empathy and empathic communication would be positively correlated. A Pearson's correlation was conducted to test this hypothesis. Empathy and empathic communication were found to significantly positively correlated ( $r = .77$ ,  $df = 148$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $e.s. = .59$ ). This data was partially supported in the model ( $\beta = .74$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for empathic communication as a predictor for empathy levels. The correlation and beta weight were the strongest in the model and provided the first indication of mediation. This hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that soldiers from a civilian family will be more likely to empathically communicate with a significant other than soldiers with a military family background. A t-test was conducted to determine the significance between empathic communication means for each group. There was a significant difference between the

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<sup>5</sup> While the original reliability was acceptable at the .70 level, one item was deleted to significantly increase the overall reliability of the data.

means of soldiers from civilian family backgrounds ( $M = 5.1, SD = .86$ ) and military family backgrounds ( $M = 4.9, SD = 1.1$ );  $t = 2.8, p < .05, e.s. = .10$ . While this hypothesis is independently significant, its association to mediator and dependent variables in the path analysis model were not significant due to covariances, shown in Table 1.4. Overall, this hypothesis was partially supported by the data.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the more combat exposure a soldier experiences, the less he will express empathic communication with a romantic partner. A Pearson's correlation was conducted to determine significance. While this hypothesis was found unsupported by the data, combat exposure was found to be significantly, negatively correlated with empathy ( $r = -.21, df = 148, p < .01, e.s. = .04$ ). Combat exposure and empathic communication were also found to be uncorrelated in the model.

Hypothesis 4 stated that as soldier's perceptions of the reliability of their communication technologies on deployment decreased, the less likely they will be able to empathically communicate with a romantic partner. A Pearson's correlation was conducted to determine significance of Hypothesis 4. Reliability of communication technologies on deployment and levels of expressed empathic communication were found to be significant ( $r = .28, df = 148, p < .01, e.s. = .08$ ). Hypothesis 4 is also supported within the path model at the  $p < .05$  level, showing a moderate directional link between the perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies and empathic communication ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ). This hypothesis is fully supported by individual and model tests.

Hypothesis 5 stated that empathic communication was inversely correlated with sexual infidelity. A Pearson's correlation was used to test this hypothesis. The correlation

between empathic communication and sexual infidelity was found non-significant at the  $p < .05$  level. The correlation between empathic communication and sexual infidelity was also surprisingly found to be non-significant in the model. Thus, hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Hypothesis 6 stated that empathic communication would be inversely correlated with emotional infidelity. A Pearson's correlation was used to conduct this test on the hypothesis. The correlation between empathic communication and emotional infidelity was found non-significant. Empathic communication and emotional infidelity were also found to be non-significant in the model. Thus, hypothesis 6 was unsupported.

Research Question 1 asked if soldiers from military families are more likely to join branches of the military where there are likely to see higher levels of combat. A One-Way ANOVA was used to test this question. Family background was found to be significant for military branch at the  $p < .05$  level ( $F = 2.8$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A post-hoc Turkey Test showed that family background is significant for Army ( $p < .05$ ) and Marine Corps ( $p < .05$ ) branches only. There was also a significant difference between means for combat exposure in family background, military family background ( $M = 2.1$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) and civilian family background ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = .83$ );  $t = 2.3$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Family background and combat exposure were significantly covaried in the model ( $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Research Question 2 asked if Post Traumatic Stress Disorder impacts empathic communication. A Pearson's correlation was used to test this research question. PTSD was found to be non-significantly correlated with empathic communication. PTSD and empathic communication were also found to be non-significantly associated in the model.



Research Question 3 asked if attachment was related to familial background, combat exposure, or frustrations with communicative technology issues on deployment. While attachment was not significantly related to family background or communication on deployment, combat exposure was significantly positively correlated with preoccupied attachment ( $r = .20$ ,  $df = 148$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $e.s. = .04$ ). Combat exposure was also covarianced with preoccupied attachment in the model ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Research Question 4 asked if Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has an impact on sexual and emotional infidelity. A Pearson's correlation was used to initially test this research question. Sexual infidelity and PTSD were found to be significantly correlated ( $r = .16$ ,  $df = 148$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $e.s. = .03$ ). Emotional infidelity and PTSD were also found to be significantly correlated ( $r = .26$ ,  $df = 148$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $e.s. = .07$ ). Within the model, PTSD was not found to be a significant predictor of sexual infidelity due to mediation by empathy; however, it was a significant predictor of emotional infidelity ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 1.4 shows the additional significant r-correlations.

Table 1.4

*Pearson's Correlations*

	Empath. Comm	Emot. Infidelity	Sexual Infidelity	Comm. Infidelity	Combat Exposure	PTSD	Deploy. Comm.
Empathy	.77***	-.19*	-.22**	-.49***	-.21**	-.32***	.20**
Empathic Comm		-.11	-.14^	-.33***	-.09	-.12	.28**
Emotional Infidelity			.82***	.38***	.12	.26**	.09
Sexual Infidelity				.38***	.55***	.17*	-.02
Comm. Infidelity					.38***	.43***	-.07
Combat Exposure						.55***	.18*
PTSD			.				.17*

\*p-value is significant at the .05 level      \*\*p-value is significant at the .01 level

\*\*\*p-value is significant at the .00 level      ^ p-value shows a trend

Finally, participants in this study showed low levels of combat exposure ( $M = 1.91, SD = .83$ ) and PTSD ( $M = 3.01, SD = 1.28$ ), but significant paths were still found with several variables. Participants also had high levels of empathy ( $M = 5.08, SD = .88$ ) and empathic communication ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.00$ ). Levels of sexual infidelity ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.60$ ) and emotional infidelity ( $M = 4.00, SD = 1.50$ ) were average and comparable what would be expected for reports from the general population. Low levels of communicative infidelity ( $M = 2.21, SD = 1.73$ ) were also comparable to an expected mean for the general population.

In general, this sample of the military population *perceives* their perspective-taking and empathic concern empathy skills to be above average according to means scores on the scale ( $M = 5.08$ ). They also perceive their abilities to empathically

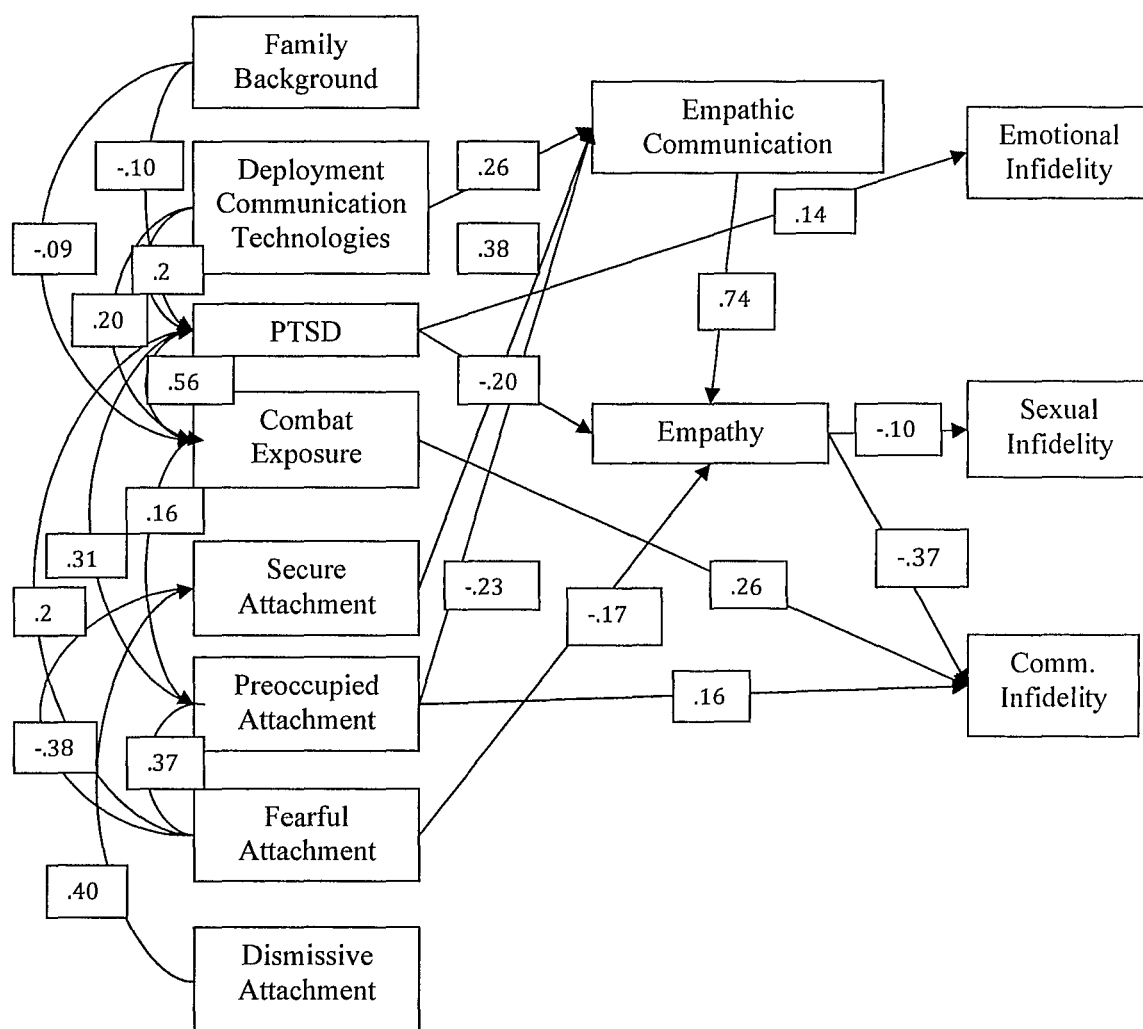
communicate with a significant other to be above average. This particular survey pool has lower levels of combat exposure overall, with just over half of the participants from more combat-heavy branches of the military in the Army and Marine Corps ( $n = 67$  and  $n = 21$  respectively).

The frequency counts for committing emotional, sexual, and communicative infidelity were also high, though due to widely varied percentages in the normal population (20%-78%), it is difficult to compare (Vangelisti & Gersternberger, 2006). According to the frequency counts in this study, roughly 80%-90% of this population committed emotional infidelity, 60% committed sexual infidelity, and 42% committed communicative infidelity.

### **Revised Path Model**

The revised path analysis model is shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3

*Model for Military Romantic Relationships*

Notes: All paths indicated in the figure above indicate standardized beta-weights that are significant at the  $p < .05$  level (or are approaching significance at  $p < .07$ ).

Table 1.5

*Associations*

Variable One	Variable Two	Standardized Regression (Beta) Weight	P-Value
Deployment Communication Technologies	Empathic Communication	.26	***
Secure Attachment	Empathic Communication	.38	***
Preoccupied Attachment	Empathic Communication	-.23	***
Fearful Attachment	Empathy	-.17	***
Empathic Communication	Empathy	.74	***
PTSD	Empathy	-.21	***
PTSD	Emotional Infidelity	.14	.002**
Empathy	Communicative Infidelity	-.37	***
Empathy	Sexual Infidelity	-.10	.031*
Preoccupied	Communicative Infidelity	.16	.016**
Combat Exposure	Communicative Infidelity	.26	***

\*p-value is significant at the  $p \leq .05$

\*\*p-value is significant at the  $p \leq .01$

\*\*\*p-value is highly significant at the  $p \leq .000$

Table 1.6

*Covariances*

Variable One	Variable Two	Standardized Regression (Beta)Weight	P-Value
Fearful Attachment	Preoccupied Attachment	.37	***
Fearful Attachment	Secure Attachment	-.38	.01**
PTSD	Preoccupied Attachment	.31	.01**
PTSD	Deployment Communication Technologies	.25	.068
Fearful Attachment	PTSD	.22	.05*
Combat Exposure	Deployment Communication Technologies	.20	.02**
Combat Exposure	PTSD	.56	***
Combat Exposure	Preoccupied Attachment	.16	.03*
Family Background	Combat Exposure	-.09	.01**
Family Background	PTSD	-.10	.06
Dismissive Attachment	Secure Attachment	-.40	.01**

\*p-value is significant at the  $p \leq .05$  level

\*\*p-value is significant at the  $p \leq .01$  level \*\*\*p-value is highly significant at the  $p \leq .00$  level

The path model in Figure 1.2 above for military romantic relationships demonstrated good significant fit based on non-centrality parameters ( $RMSEA = .043$ ,  $DF = 48$ ,  $CMIN = 72$ ,  $CFI = .97$ ,  $IFI = .98$ ). While some of the relationships between the variables exist only independently, this model gives a more complete path of the perceived traumas and experiences involved in the specific military population. Using the Sobel test, this model also shows two points of full mediation between predictors and criterion (reliability of deployment communication technologies  $\rightarrow$  empathic communication  $\rightarrow$  empathy  $\rightarrow$  communicative infidelity). The Sobel test for mediation requires four stages: significant correlation between the independent variable and the mediator, significant correlation between the mediation and the dependent variable, significant correlation between the independent variable and dependent variable *outside* of the model, and zero correlation between the independent variable and dependent

variable *within* the model. This can also be tested by removing the mediator from the model in order to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). While the covariances are important for the sake of giving a complete background description of military experiences, the focus of this discussion will be on the mediation and the direct associations of infidelity. While most of the military experience covariances already exist in the literature independently, these effects on empathy, empathic communication, and the three types of infidelity add to the literature on military romantic relationships.

Correlations for perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies and empathic communication ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ) and empathy ( $r = .20, p < .00$ ) were found to be significant as Pearson's correlations. Within the model, there is a significant association from perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies to empathic communication ( $\beta = .26, p < .00$ ). This means that according to the sample, as the perceived reliability of communication technologies increases, the higher the perception of empathic communication abilities increases. The Sobel test also shows that empathic communication is a mediator for perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies and empathy ( $\beta = .20, p < .00$ ). This mediation can also be examined by the significantly positive path between empathic communication and empathy ( $\beta = .74, p < .00$ ). As perceived empathic communication rises, perceptions of empathic concern and empathic perspective-taking also rise. Overall, the military population believes that the ability to communicate effectively with their significant others while deployed has a major impact on their ability to empathically communicate with and empathize with their romantic partner during and *after a deployment*.

In addition, secure attachment ( $\beta = .38, p < .00$ ) and preoccupied attachment ( $\beta = -.23, p < .00$ ) were significantly associated with empathic communication. As perceived levels of secure attachment rise, the perceived ability to empathically communicate rises as well. As perceived levels of preoccupied attachment decreases, the perceived ability to empathically communicate increases. These variables are also consistently significant correlations independent of the model.

According to the model, perceptions of empathic communication, PTSD, and fearful attachment are all contributors to perceived empathy levels. Empathic communication has the strongest association to empathy ( $\beta = .74, p < .00$ ). Fearful attachment ( $\beta = -.17, p < .00$ ) and PTSD ( $\beta = -.21, p < .00$ ) have weaker negative (but just as significant) correlations to empathy, which may suggest they are lesser contributors for empathy. While combat exposure is not a direct factor within the model, it does show a strong covariance with PTSD ( $\beta = .54, p < .00$ ), which may suggest an indirect effect for combat exposure with empathy. As perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies ( $r = .20, p < .02$ ) and combat exposure ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ) were both independently significantly correlated with empathy, PTSD may be a mediator for combat exposure and empathy (more about this in “Future Directions”).

Using the Sobel test, empathy was shown as a mediator between perceptions of empathic communication and communicative infidelity ( $\beta = -.30, p < .00$ ). As the perceived ability to empathically communicate with a significant other increases, the likelihood of reporting communicative infidelity also decreases. Due to mediation, there is a direct path drawn from reliability of deployment communication technologies to empathic communication to empathy and to communicative infidelity. This may suggest



that the use of technology itself has an impact (or lays a foundation) on long-term decision making skills within the relationship. Additionally, combat exposure ( $\beta = .26, p < .00$ ) and preoccupied attachment ( $\beta = .16, p < .00$ ) also have significant path coefficients to communicative infidelity.

Emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity show more direct associations than mediation. PTSD is the single direct cause for emotional infidelity ( $\beta = .14, p < .00$ ). Independently, empathy is also a cause for emotional infidelity with PTSD as a correlation for lower levels of empathy ( $r = -.19, p < .05$ ), but its correlation may not have been strong enough to work within the model. Lack of empathy is the singular cause for sexual infidelity ( $\beta = -.10, p < .00$ ). Independently, preoccupied attachment ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ) and PTSD ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ) are also significant correlates of sexual infidelity, though their correlations may also not be strong enough to work within the model.

## DISCUSSION

This research sought to expand knowledge on empathic communication as a possible relational maintenance tool in military romantic relationships. The path analysis shows that not only is empathic communication a mediator for reliability of communicative technologies on deployment and empathy, but that based on the mediation of associations (empathy, infidelity, reliability of communication technology on deployment), there is some indication that empathic communication could be used as a relational maintenance tool. As the reliability of communicative technologies increases, perception of empathy felt towards one's partner increases as mediated by the reported ability to empathically communicate. Previously, empathic communication was considered a sub-component or "action" component of empathy (Changming & Hill, 1996). However, the path model expands on Buck's (2002) research in that not only are empathy and empathic communication separate variables, but that empathic communication can contribute to and mediate levels of empathy in the military population. The separation of empathy and empathic communication is confirmed by differences in associations and effects, as well the directional mediation. The final section will discuss the associations within the model, theoretical implications, limitations, and possible future studies based on these findings.

### **Relationship of Empathic Communication and Empathy**

**Mediation.** The directional link between empathic communication and empathy is especially important to note. It suggests that rather than levels of empathy predicting

the perception of one's use of empathic communication, instead the use of empathic communication with a romantic partner guides the amount of empathy a soldier feels for his romantic partner. This may mean that the soldiers in this study originally had lower levels of empathy due to combat exposure and preoccupied attachment, and to raise those levels of empathy, they empathically communicated with their romantic partners.

However, this assumes that soldiers are self-aware of their empathy levels declining during a deployment, which may be unlikely due to the fact empathy is an unconscious process. A more likely reason is that soldiers who use more quality empathic communication with their significant others maintain higher levels of empathy. Because the questions in the survey did not limit empathy and empathic communication to relationships on deployment, the path model suggests that military experiences may be long-term effects for military romantic relationships.

As such, another reason for the directional link in empathic communication and empathy is the strongly mediated direct path from perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies to empathic communication to empathy to communicative infidelity. In this direct coefficient path, communication technologies are guiding the ability to effectively communicate with a romantic partner on deployment. As shown by previous studies (Kim et al, 2005), these communication technologies may be volatile at best on deployment, due to spotty reception locations or the inability to communicate during high-risk missions. When a soldier can talk, conversation is not permitted to include information about the job or current location, due to high-risk factors within the military. The unreliable nature of these communication technologies and the limited communication can be a large stressor on the relationship between the soldier and his

significant other, which may increase the need to empathically communicate after a deployment. The individual item correlations of willingness to communicate with a spouse ( $r = -.34, p < .00$ ) and others outside of the relationship ( $r = -.35, p < .00$ ) about PTSD and combat exposure post-deployment were also significantly negatively associated with levels of empathy (but not overall levels of empathic communication), which may show a need to protect significant others from these experiences. Because soldiers often cannot, or will not talk about these experiences, they may empathically communicate to overcompensate for the lack of disclosure in the relationship. Soldiers may also empathically communicate to show interest and support to their partner's concerns. This shows that they care about their relationships, but because of the limitations of one relational maintenance tool, the emphasis of another may be used to compensate.

**Associations.** The path model demonstrated that associations of empathic communication were both communicative and psychological. The strongest contributor to empathic communication was perceived reliability of communication technologies on deployment ( $\beta = .26$ ). This coefficient path suggests that unreliability of communicative technologies may continue to cause empathic communication problems later in the relationship. With limited reliability of communication technology, a loved one may perceive the soldier as not giving enough communication (empathic or otherwise), when in reality, they are severely limited in technology by regulation. While secure attachment had a stronger coefficient path ( $\beta = .38$ ) than perceived reliability of deployment communication technologies ( $\beta = .26$ ), both are valid arguments for having an effect on empathic communication. Secure attachment would explain both the security in the

ability to empathically communicate with a partner, and the security within the relationship itself. In general, soldiers with secure attachment reported lower levels of combat exposure and thus did not perceive the same level of trauma. As more fully explored later, empathic communication is a mediating variable between reliability of communication technologies and empathy.

So far, the largest debate in empathy research is whether empathy is an affective or cognitive process (Joliffe & Farrington, 2004). The predictors of empathy in the path model suggest that empathy has contributors from both affective and cognitive processes. By far, the strongest contributor to empathy was empathic communication ( $\beta=.74$ ), which shows that empathy may be influenced by the affective process. This could mean that communication is the strongest factor within the military population in increasing empathy levels, which is theoretically similar to previous research findings on children's empathic communication therapy in response to trauma (Green, Crenshaw, & Kolos, 2010). Empathic communication and empathy may also be so strongly correlated because both sets of items were written to include perspective taking and empathic concern; however, feeling concern and expressing concern are two different processes (as are the processes of perspective taking and expressing perspective taking). Thus, this correlation could mean that as soldiers empathically communicate with their romantic partners, they may feel more empathic concern for a partner's actions, feelings or behavior. However, as previously mentioned, empathic communication can occur without empathy (Buck, 2002). Thus, soldiers may be communicating empathically because they perceive empathic communication as a response the significant other would want to hear.

Additionally, the other contributors to levels of empathy, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ( $\beta = -.20$ ) and fearful attachment ( $\beta = -.17$ ) may suggest more cognitive processes as secondary causes. Empathy's relation to fearful attachment may suggest some form of childhood or adult trauma. While the path model does not show direct correlation between fearful attachment and combat exposure or PTSD, these patterns may be strongly indirectly linked through preoccupied attachment. More research is needed to determine if they may have partially shut off their empathy as a coping mechanism or to feel less hurt by the sudden loss of others close to them, even if there is no immediate danger for the soldiers. The trend between fearful attachment and PTSD would also back this finding in that many of these soldiers cannot escape the memories of the war and bring a type of transference with them into the civilian world. The adaptation process from civilian to military is a necessary and immediate one for survival, but adapting back into civilian world is often the more complex process: There is a large expectation from others to come home the way they left, and fully contribute to the family as a spouse and in many cases parent. Lowering feelings of empathy (by withdrawing or socially disconnecting) may be a way to cope with these problems. Since this model shows that both affective and cognitive processes are contributors for military relationships, the assumption of a combined affective and cognitive conceptualization of empathy may be supported.

**Effects.** From the literature review and these findings, empathic communication contributes through empathy towards relational maintenance goals. According to the literature and this model, there are consequences for the lack of use of relational maintenance tools to sustain relational satisfaction (Drigostas & Barta, 2001). The lack of

use of relational maintenance tools may cause unmet emotional and sexual needs, leading to infidelity (Barta & Kiene, 2005). Because of this definition, it was expected that empathic communication would correlate with both emotional and sexual infidelity. However, the link between empathic communication and emotional infidelity was non-significant, and the link between empathic communication and sexual infidelity only showed a trend. Sexual infidelity was significantly negatively correlated with empathy, which suggests the lack caring and connection to one's spouse or relational partner shows higher likelihood of sexual abandonment with an extra dyadic partner. Because sexual infidelity is association with (lack of) empathy, but only shows a trend from empathic communication, this may again support evidence of empathy and empathic communication occurring due to separate processes. It also suggests the connected feelings of empathy cultivated by empathic communication with one's partner plays an important role in decisions to engage in sexual infidelity.

The single negative path coefficient leading to sexual infidelity is empathy. Theoretically, this would make sense in that the lower the empathy for a romantic partner, the higher the likelihood of sexual infidelity being committed. This especially makes sense with the moderate correlation between sexual infidelity and communicative infidelity ( $r=.38, p<.00$ ), which could mean that some participants in this sample committed infidelity sexually to send a message to a romantic partner. This data also makes sense within the literature, as the military is overwhelmingly comprised of males, and males are more likely to commit sexual infidelity than females (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Department of Defense, 2010). Like communicative infidelity, actions of the significant other should be taken into account because perceived opportunity and quality of

alternatives increases while a spouse is on deployment. As sexual infidelity can be a singular act, the covariance with communicative infidelity takes prevalence in that most likely, some of these acts occurred as a singular event to send a message (e.g., “warning”, “revenge”) to a partner.

### **Communicative Infidelity**

While the link between sexual infidelity and empathy is interesting, perhaps more important is the link between empathic communication, empathy, and communicative infidelity. Empathy is one of the main predictors for communicative infidelity that was tested in this study ( $\beta = -.37$ ), which has shown itself to be a different variable than emotional and sexual infidelity alone. While emotional, sexual, and communicative infidelity are interrelated, communicative is an intentional act of committing infidelity in order to send a message to a partner. As the associations do not all overlap (exception: empathy with sexual and communicative infidelity), these variables must be measured independently. As perceptions of empathy, preoccupied attachment, and combat exposure were all shown as associations of communicative infidelity, communicative infidelity may be a motivational type of infidelity, whereas emotional and sexual infidelity may be behavioral (Spitzberg, personal communication, October 19, 2012). Communicative infidelity is caused by low levels of empathy, and has lesser positive coefficient paths from preoccupied attachment ( $\beta = .16$ ) and combat exposure ( $\beta = .26$ ). The need for studying communicative infidelity does indicate that the partner’s actions should be taken into account in future research as that may also have a significant impact on the correlation between empathy and communicative infidelity. Preoccupied attachment also



explains how some soldiers may begin to feel they need additional attachments to satisfy their security needs, but that they cannot fully invest in any of these romantic attachments. Theoretically, this type of attachment signifies a type of attachment style where a soldier would feel he/she is not good enough for their partner, and may engage in communicative infidelity in order to send a message to his/her romantic partner to find someone else who is worthy of relational commitment. Another reason for the association between preoccupied attachment and communicative infidelity could be that the person with preoccupied attachment wants to “test” his or her romantic partner’s feelings and commitment to the relationship. In response, he or she decides to commit communicative infidelity to gauge the romantic partner’s reaction and willingness to stay in the relationship.

Combat exposure, in its coefficient path to communicative infidelity, may be due to psychological factors. For example, combat exposure breeds the mentality of “getting back at the enemy” for some sort of negative action, such as a bombing, gunfire, injury of comrades, or death of comrades. In resorting to infidelity, the soldiers may be relying on a go-to extreme of getting revenge on a significant other for a particular action. While some soldiers may turn to violent aggression in the home for revenge (particularly when linked with PTSD), communicative infidelity may seem a more appropriate “punishment” to send a message to a partner. For example, if a spouse decided to form other social support bonds outside of her marital relationship while her husband is on deployment, the husband may perceive other-sex emotional attachments as negative relational behaviors and decide to punish his wife by forming other emotional bonds with

others she does not approve of, such as his exes, former wives, or volatile family members.

### **Other Noteworthy Findings**

Outside of empathy and empathic communication, a few other noteworthy findings should be mentioned. Within the path model, emotional infidelity was associated with PTSD. PTSD was very strongly covaried with combat exposure, and without that specific path, the link was more obvious between combat exposure and emotional infidelity. As PTSD is a psychological assessment, it makes sense that it is correlated with a sometimes unconscious behavior of emotional infidelity. PTSD may predict disconnect with family members, which could lead the soldier seeking out additional forms of support. The natural adjustment process of a deployment involves forming outside social bonds with people in closer proximity than the significant other. However, PTSD is a psychological condition that the significant other may not understand if they do not have similar military experience with high levels of combat. Because the partner may not understand these experiences, the soldier may turn to someone else who would understand like military comrades. This could result in forming a deeper bond with someone other than the significant other and be considered a betrayal.

In the initial Pearson r-correlation tests, family background was significantly correlated with perception of empathic communication. Family background described whether a soldier has military or civilian parents. Soldiers with military family backgrounds were significantly more likely to empathically communicate with a significant other. This may be because their own military background has socialized

them to compensate for the absence of a loved one for an extended period of time. Family background's association with empathic communication could be broken down further to latent effects from grandparents in the military to current soldiers, as their parents' upbringing would also be strict depending on branch and time served in the military. It may also mean that children in military families learned their behaviors in current relationships by watching the adjustment process when a parent returned home from a deployment.

Finally, military branch and combat exposure were significantly correlated with family background. This means that soldiers from a military family background are more likely to join a branch of the military (Army, Marine Corps) were they are more likely to experience higher levels of combat. There are two major reasons why this may be the case. If a soldier's parents were in the military, she or he may be encouraged to join the military at an early age, or may be put into Junior ROTC programs by the parents to teach military discipline at an early age. Another reason these may be correlated is that a child may grow up hearing glorified war stories from the parents or grandparents and decide that joining the military would be honoring family values. This involves both communicative and psychological components in that these stories would have to be communicated to the child and this type of communication, over an extended period of time, may become a type of desired reality.

## **Theory and Practice**

**Theory of Moral Development.** Due to the fact empathy could be linked to affective and cognitive processes within the path model, this research supports the idea of

empathy being based on the Kohlberg's (1971) theory of moral development, rather than the theory of mind and theory of simulation. While the theory of mind describes empathy as a perspective-taking process, and the theory of simulation describes empathy as a process of empathic concern, the theory of moral development could be applied to describing empathy holistically. Using Kohlberg's (1971) theory of moral development assumes that empathy is a developmental process that is refined in stages of adulthood. During the first stages of moral development, children understand that there are punishments for negative actions. For example, if a child inflicts pain on another, he/she will be punished. In terms of empathy, a child could learn to care about another because bullying other children will result in punishment. Children could also learn to ignore others because of this phase. In stage two, children learn perspective-taking in making judgments or arguments (Kohlberg, 1971). In this stage, perspective-taking could be compromised due to trauma which has shown long-term effects on interpersonal relationships (Hollingsworth, Glass, & Heisler, 2008). Within the model, family background does not directly affect empathy. However, fearful attachment's link to empathy in the path model may indicate childhood trauma, and further research is needed to determine the causes of fearful attachment as it relates to empathy. Finally, other effects like combat exposure and PTSD may overshadow long-term trauma.

The model shows some theoretical support in the third and fourth stages of moral development. The third stage of moral development focuses on the formation of interpersonal relationships and conformity for societal expectations. Soldiers would be expected to express empathy for their romantic partner, regardless of whether they feel for their romantic partner's situation. Based on the path model, expressing empathic

communication over time may also increase empathy levels to socially acceptable levels in society. For example, if a romantic partner recently lost a relative or close friend, it would be expected for the soldier to feel and express empathy for the partner. Without that support through empathic communication, a partner may perceive the lack of support as not meeting an emotional need.

For military soldiers, the fourth stage of moral development conflicts with the third stage. The fourth stage of moral development involves following the laws and regulations given by a society, and taking those laws under consideration when making decisions (Kohlberg, 1971). Military rules and regulations differ from those of American society by limiting disclosure and holding their soldiers to different moral standards that involve defending American honors at all costs. Because of this limited self-disclosure outside of the military, empathy may also be compromised as soldiers seek for sources of disclosure in other places (such as within their own unit). The model does support a nuanced version of stage four, since soldiers must follow the laws of their command over the laws of society, which can cause conflict with their romantic partners. However, this fourth stage may be imposed upon them by military regulations, rather than them arriving at stage four themselves.

There are some practical applications for the theory of moral development. This model suggests that while traumatic adult experiences may overshadow any childhood traumatic experiences, stages three and four are relevant for how soldiers construct their abilities to have empathy and to empathically communicate. Using this model, it is clear the concept of empathy should be approached from a multi-dimensional perspective, due to affective and cognitive processes. In other words, there are *affective* and *cognitive*

contributors to levels of empathy. Affectively, factors like the development of close interpersonal relationships through empathic communication and mutual self-disclosure may be reasons for higher levels of empathy. Cognitively, factors such as attachment, trauma, and genetics may be responsible for influencing empathy. Researchers interested in childhood trauma, adult trauma, social learning, or interpersonal relationships can expand these findings by using significance in the model that shows affective and cognitive factors as a basis for understanding empathy.

**Theoretical Perspectives for Empathic Communication.** Research on empathic communication has so far been very limited in the health communication and personality psychology fields. According to the literature, there is some debate on whether sociological or biological factors contribute to the ability to empathically communicate (Ickes, 2006; Prose, Brown, Murphy, & Nieves, 2010). According to the path model, there were three main contributors to empathic communication: reliability of communication technologies on deployment, secure attachment, and preoccupied attachment. Attachment is a psychological process influenced by biological and sociological factors. Biologically, genetics can have an impact in the formation of insecure attachments (Dozier, Stovall-McClough, & Albus, 2008). Sociologically, inconsistent or neglectful parenting and traumatic events can also lead to insecure attachments (Ainsworth, 1967; Alexander, 2009). Reliability of communication technologies on deployment is also a sociological (and technological) factor in the ability to empathically communicate. Preoccupied attachment is correlated with combat exposure and PTSD within the model, which indicate strong sociological factors as possible underlying causes, but there are likely other reasons for preoccupied attachment

not included in the model. Additionally, as the soldier may be limited by regulations to talk about the military-related causes of preoccupied attachment, a significant other may not understand the inability to communicate effectively during periods of high stress. As such, empathic communication could be decreased by a disconnect in the relationship, due to military regulations hindering a romantic partner's perspective taking abilities when the soldier is forbidden from talking about his or her job.

In the literature, the effects of using empathic communication have also been studied sparingly. So far empathic communication has been shown utilized in the prevention of suicide, reduction of burnout in the workforce, and for the increase of patient satisfaction when relating to doctors (Kim, Kim, Shin, & Yoon, 2012; Snyder, 2012; Suchman, Markakis, Beckman, & Frankel, 1997). As demonstrated in the model, two major effects of empathic communication help expand this literature: empathy and communicative infidelity. The relation between empathy and empathic communication has been discussed in detail in this paper, and the directional link between empathic communication and empathy supports the idea that affective and sociological factors contribute to levels of empathy for a romantic partner. This evidence also suggests that empathic communication should be tested further as a possible relational maintenance tool in for couples who may experience compromised empathy from one or both partners. Empathic communication's link to communicative infidelity also suggests that more theoretical research is needed in order to determine causes for communicative infidelity as well as the effects of not using empathic communication in a relationship.

Practically, empathic communication has rarely been identified as a relational maintenance tool. This could be because the communication literature's limited focus on

almost solely using empathic communication in describing doctor/patient relations (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Gruber, 2009). In this study, empathic communication is an important mediator between reliability of deployment communication technology and empathy for a significant other, which suggests that empathic communication can be potentially utilized as a relational maintenance tool used to counteract the effects unreliability of some deployment communication technologies on empathy levels. Additionally, this model may also be used to contribute to Roger's (1969) model of person-centered therapy for soldiers returning home with PTSD and similar disorders. Using empathic communication in therapy sessions may raise empathy levels for loved ones or encourage communication to smooth over the disconnect from a significant other caused by deployment factors (i.e., limited technology, limited self-disclosure).

This approach can also be used in conflict management strategies through the use of empathic communication during high periods of stress. By listening and responding to concerns during conflict, empathic communication can be used as a tool to mediate a dispute, rather than allowing it to escalate. As an extension, these findings suggest that practicing empathic communication may also play the role as a prevention tool for communicative infidelity. By applying more listening and feedback during conflicts, matters can potentially be managed rather than spinning off into acts of revenge or jealousy. It also may allow for a measure of self-disclosure to deepen the relationship, rather than harm it further. Outside of conflict management, empathic communication may be used to strengthen relational bonds as it encourages listening and understanding of a significant other's concerns. It is more strongly correlated with secure attachment,



which means that couples that share a secure relationship are most likely to benefit from this relational maintenance tool.

**Attachment Theory.** This study expands the attachment theory literature in several important ways. The link between relational maintenance and attachment has been discussed broadly in the communication literature ranging from self-disclosure to dissolution (Anders & Tucker, 2005; Feeney, 2006). In the model, attachment was highly covaried with combat exposure, PTSD, and military family background. These covariances suggest that not only can insecure attachments form from a military family background, but that combat exposure is an extended trauma that can cause insecure attachments. This research confirms Basham's (2007) study on insecure attachments and PTSD, but it shows that combat exposure is a contributor to the correlation between insecure attachments and PTSD. In terms of a military family background being covaried with insecure attachments, the constant moving from base to base during childhood may be the source of insecure attachment formation, since it interrupts the ability to form long-term close attachments with friends and other loved ones. In conjunction with these covariances, attachment also impacts the ability to empathize with a significant other. While empathy has been studied in relation to violence in military literature (Johanessen, 2007), it has not been studied independently with attachment in a PTSD and combat exposure context. This affirms insecure attachments, as contributed by high levels of combat exposure, also the effect levels of empathy within a relationship. Practically, this link between PTSD and empathy can be used as a tool for therapy to address multiple concerns within romantic relationships of soldiers returning home from war.

Perhaps the most interesting contribution to the attachment literature is the direct link to communicative infidelity. While attachment has been highly studied in its link to emotional and sexual infidelity (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002), communicative infidelity as a relatively newer phenomenon is understudied in the literature. Communicative infidelity, as a motivational type of infidelity, is not a subconscious behavior. This means that preoccupied attachment is a cause of a conscious decision to commit infidelity with intent to send a message to a partner. If this case, attachment should be studied further to determine if a correlation exists between preoccupied attachment and jealousy-induced behaviors. Even though attachment may contribute to decisions to commit communicative infidelity, it is not necessarily a motivation for committing communicative infidelity. Because attachment was also linked to empathy (which has a direct coefficient path to communicative infidelity), this research suggests a link in attachment to conscious and subconscious processes simultaneously. Practically, this research can also be applied to couple's therapy as an infidelity-preventive measure or possibly as a post-infidelity therapy tool. As communicative infidelity is an intentional behavior and shows a higher likelihood of dissolution, therapy may be a last-resort measure to moving past the current relationship and building a stronger foundation for the next relationship (Vangelisti & Gerstenberger, 2004).

## **Limitations**

This study has limitations which should be noted. Due to the strong results for infidelity, the main limitation is that this survey only asks for the perceptions and actions of one person in the survey. Qualitative data would provide a better explanation for the

motivations of committing sexual, emotional, and communicative infidelity. Since only the psychological functions of this study provided direct coefficient paths to these types of infidelity, more in-depth research is needed to discover the reasons for committing infidelity, particularly in the case of communicative infidelity as it is typically only committed in reaction to a significant other's behavior. Also, while it may be more difficult to survey both romantic partners due to the sensitivity of infidelity, it would provide a more complete picture of military romantic relationships.

This study occurred entirely within the military population. This population is still predominantly male, even with the military's attempts to bring in more female soldiers who participate in non-frontline roles, such as medics, airman, and public affairs. This study does not separate gender for this reason, although there may be some significant differences in male and female responses. Males also may be more prone to combat exposure and PTSD because they are permitted jobs on the front lines that are still unavailable to females. Gender differences have also been shown in empathic communication, empathy, sexual infidelity, and emotional infidelity (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Bylund & Makoul, 2002; Mestre, Samper, Frias, & Tur, 2009). Thus, even though the population is predominantly male, gender may have been a confounding factor within the sample.

The survey for this study was conducted online for complete anonymity. However, as the survey is anonymous, there is no way to tell if the participants really participated in military service. However, as the survey was a 66-item survey, it is unlikely that many people lied about being in the military to take this survey. The link was also provided on military-only social networking (such as the Army's page on

Facebook) to prevent this kind of fraud; however, as the data provided is completely anonymous, there is no way to be a hundred percent sure all of the participants were military. Because this survey was taken online, it is also collecting self-reported data. As in the case of most self-reported data, participants sometimes intentionally or unintentionally lie when taking the survey. This is especially the case for sensitive information, such as current relationship status, PTSD, and acts of infidelity.

Another limitation of this study is the one-measure cross-sectional design, which does not measure causation and can only predict behaviors. While it is difficult to study many of these soldiers while they are on deployment due to high-risk factors and military regulations, a more time-expanded study may make these results more accurate. A longitudinal study or a study conducted immediately after a deployment may provide different or more significant results. Also, this study tests current levels of empathy, empathic communication, and used a non-timed constraint measure for infidelity, which suggests these are long-term impacts from military experiences. Surveying a relationship over the course of a deployment (or at least a pre-test, -post-test design) may provide different results, especially in comparison to the communicative adjustment of the significant other.

### **Future Studies**

Future studies are needed to further empathic communication as a relational maintenance tool. This study should be re-tested over the course of a deployment. Measurements of empathic communication should be taken pre-, during, and post-deployment using both romantic partners as participants. To establish patterns of

relational maintenance, variables like satisfaction and commitment can also be tested for couples who use different levels of empathic communication. A control group can be used to measure the impacts of no empathic communication being used in a relationship. In designing this study, age and gender should be taken into account to control for confounding factors.

One future study could apply to the effects of using empathic communication in couple's therapy sessions to gauge how likely empathic communication could be used as a long-term relational maintenance tool. At the beginning and end of each therapy session, the therapist could survey each person individually for empathy levels for the other person to see if empathic communication has an impact on empathy levels over the course of at least three therapy sessions. This relational maintenance tool may be practically applied to all forms of relationships and may not be strictly limited to the military population.

As the directional link between empathic communication and reliability of communication technologies does not exist in current literature, this portion of the study should be retested within the general population. It would be expected that within the general American population, the reliability of communication technology should be more higher than in the military; however, this path coefficient may also vary in long-distance relationships due to distance and time apart. One future study could focus on the relationship of long-distance relationships, empathy, and empathic communication. It may also be that in long-distance relationships, couples are more prone to open relationships or higher cases of emotional, sexual, and communicative infidelity due to the means and opportunity for extended periods of time.

As communicative infidelity is a relatively new construct, further research is suggested for motivations and gender-based responses. Qualitative research can be conducted for typology of these types of motivations, followed by further survey data. Since communicative infidelity is a much smaller sub-section of infidelity than emotional or sexual infidelity, most likely a larger sample size will be needed. Communicative infidelity may also be more prevalent in populations where the means and opportunity rates are much higher than the general population, such as in long distance or military relationships. A comparison of the means of samples within these populations may provide a better estimate of how large a sample size can be used to test this theory.

Another future study could also test the effects of gender, rank, combat training, and relationship type on empathy and empathic communication within the military population. As previously mentioned, gender may have a strong impact on empathy and empathic communication levels, which may change the overall significance of the model. Rank and combat training may also be confounding factors, since they also vary in the amount and level of combat exposure. Relationship type during deployment may also have an impact on this study, as more open types of relationships might create less jealousy and less betrayal in having outside affairs.

Overall, this study sought to re-conceptualize empathic communication in military romantic relationships as part of relational maintenance. Not only did this model achieve its original purpose, it also helped expand the literature on relational maintenance, empathy, empathic communication, and communicative infidelity. Based on the mediation path between reliability of communication technology on deployment and communicative infidelity, empathy and empathic communication are important tools for

relational maintenance. Further research should be used to explore empathy and empathic communication's role in preventing negative relational maintenance behaviors, such as communicative infidelity and relationship dissolution. Additionally, communicative infidelity should be further studied as a negative relational maintenance behavior. Finally, this theoretical model may have practical applications for military relationships post-deployment and should be tested for couples struggling with deployment-issues, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, combat exposure, disconnect from unreliable communication technologies, and infidelity.

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## APPENDIX A

**Hello, participant! You have found the survey for Military and Relationship Research.**

**Directions: This survey is completely voluntary, and there are no right or wrong answers. Do not put any identifying information anywhere on this survey. As this information is completely anonymous, please be completely honest and forthright in your answers. This survey will be used for thesis research.**

**This survey should take twenty-thirty minutes to complete and will ask about your experiences in combat, relationship experiences, and your ability to communicate to your romantic partner during and after deployment. As such, participants will need to have military experience and have experienced at least one deployment to complete this survey.**

**If you experience any psychological discomfort from completing this survey, please contact the Veterans Affairs Medical Services in Hampton, Virginia, at 757-722-9961, or find the nearest VA closest to your location.**

**If you have any questions regarding this survey, you may contact one of the researchers at [sleva001@odu.edu](mailto:sleva001@odu.edu) or [gbeck@odu.edu](mailto:gbeck@odu.edu).**

**Sincerely,  
Samantha LeVan  
Dr. Gary Beck  
Old Dominion University**



11. In my relationship, I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. When I'm upset at my partner, I usually try to "put myself in his/her shoes" for a while. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. Before criticizing my partner, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in his/her place 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. When arguing with my romantic partner, I reasonably disagree with his/her opinion, while looking at his/her side of the argument.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. When my romantic partner has problems, I verbally try to comfort him/her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. When my partner has problems, I physically comfort him/her. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I understand the sacrifices my partner makes for my job.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I verbally compromise with my partner over issues over than my job. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**There are times within romantic relationships when we are attracted to other people. Part of being human is being aware of and attracted to people. Sometimes that attraction is mutual and sometimes it is not. When it is mutual it often leads to certain flirting behaviors. We want you to think of a person that you were most attracted to besides your partner. We do *not* want you to name the other person, but please respond to the following general questions about this other person you were attracted to honestly.**

19) How attractive did you find this person?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Unappealing

Extremely

Attractive

20) How much arousal did you feel in their presence?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Arousal							A Great Deal of Arousal

21) How much time did you spend thinking about this person?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Time							A Great Deal of Time

22) How much flirting occurred between the two of you?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Flirting							A Great Deal of Flirting

23) How often did you and this person do "couple" things together (e.g., spend time together, talk on phone)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Never Very Often

24) How tempted were you to be emotionally intimate (e.g., shared feelings, emotions) with this person?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at All Extremely

25) How emotionally intimate were you with this person?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Emotionally Intimate							Extremely Emotionally Intimate

26) How tempted were you to be physically intimate (e.g., kissing, sexual activity) with this person?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at All Extremely

Tempted

Tempted

27) How physically intimate were you with this person?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all

Extremely

Intimate

Intimate

28.) Have you been emotionally intimate with another person to send a message to your romantic partner?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all

Extremely

Intimate

Intimate

29.) Have you been physically intimate with another person to send a message to your romantic partner?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all

Extremely

Intimate

Intimat

**30.) Please rate each of the following relationship styles according to the extent to which you think each description corresponds to your general relationship style.**

**A.** It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me.

**B.** I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.

**C.** I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them.

**D.** I am comfortable without close emotional relationships, It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.

	Not at all			Somewhat			Very much
Style A.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Style B.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Style C.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Style D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**The following statements inquire about your experience in combat. For each item, indicate how well it describes your personal experience by circling the appropriate number. 1=never. 5=longest amount of time.**

31. Did you ever go on combat patrols or have other very dangerous duty?

1	2	3	4	5
No	1-3X	4-12X	13-50X	51+ times

32. Were you ever under enemy fire?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	< 1 month	1-3 mos	4-6 mos	7 mos or more

33. Were you ever surrounded by the enemy?

1	2	3	4	5
No	1-2X	3-12X	13-25X	26X or more

34. What percentage of the men in your unit were killed (KIA), wounded or missing in action (MIA)?

1	2	3	4	5
None	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76% or more

35. How often did you fire rounds at the enemy?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

36. How often did you see someone hit by incoming or outgoing rounds?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

37. How often were you in danger of being injured or killed (i.e., pinned down, overrun, ambushed, near miss, etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

38. How often were you or someone close to you injured by the enemy?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

39. How often did you see the enemy injured or killed?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

40. How often did the sight of a comrade injured or killed bother you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

41. How often did the sight of an enemy injured or killed bother you?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	1-2X	3-12X	13-50X	51 or more

42.) Did you experience at least one deployment? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

43.) During one of your deployments, were you in a romantic relationship? Yes\_\_\_  
No\_\_\_

44.) If so, did that relationship continue during and immediately after your deployment? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
NA\_\_\_

45.) If you answered yes to the last question, please specify\_\_\_\_\_

46.) During your deployment, please rate the following technologies on a scale of 1-10. 1=Did not work. 7=Worked extremely well.

Email\_\_\_\_\_

Phone\_\_\_\_\_

Skype\_\_\_\_\_

Mail\_\_\_\_\_

**47.)** If you were in a relationship during your deployment, rate how the use of telephone, email, and Skype impacted your relationship.

N/A

Extremely negatively

negatively

somewhat negatively

neutral

somewhat positively

positively

extremely positively

How often do you experience the following?	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Quite a bit</i>	<i>Extremely</i>
<b>48. Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful military experience?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>49. Repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful military experience?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>50. Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful military experience were happening again (as if you were reliving it)?</b>	1	2	3	4	5

<b>51. Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful military experience?</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>52. Having physical reactions (e.g.,</b>	1	2	3	4	5



heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating) when <i>something reminded you of a stressful military experience?</i>					
53. Avoiding <i>thinking about or talking about a stressful military experience or avoiding having feelings</i> related to it?	1	2	3	4	5
54. Avoiding <i>activities or situations</i> because <i>they reminded you of a stressful military experience?</i>	1	2	3	4	5
55. Trouble <i>remembering important parts of a stressful military experience?</i>	1	2	3	4	5
56. Feeling <i>distant or cut off</i> from a romantic partner?	1	2	3	4	5
57. Feeling <i>emotionally numb</i> or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?	1	2	3	4	5
58. Do you talk about these experiences with a romantic partner?	1	2	3	4	5
59. Do you talk about these experiences with	1	2	3	4	5

someone other than a romantic partner?					
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60.) **Family Background: (Please describe branch)**\_\_\_\_\_

My parents are/were both civilians

One or both of my parents were military

61.) **Current Status:** Active Duty   Reserves   Retired   Honorably Discharged  
Dishonorably Discharged   I am no longer serving in the military

62.) **Years of Service:**\_\_\_\_\_

63.) **Highest Rank:**      Enlisted      Officer

64.) **Branch:** Navy   Army   Coast Guard   Marine Corps   Airforce   National Guard

65.) **Current Relationship Status:**

Single

In a committed, monogamous relationship

In an open relationship that my significant other is aware of

In an open relationship that my significant other is unaware of

Married

Divorced once

Divorced twice

Divorced more than twice

I only have casual involvements

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

66.) **Additional comments**\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

No.: 12-133

### OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD RESEARCH PROPOSAL REVIEW NOTIFICATION FORM

TO: Gary Beck  
*Responsible Project Investigator*

DATE: August 31, 2012  
*IRB Decision Date*

Empathic Communication: Causes and Transgressional Effects in Military Romantic Relationships

*Name of Project*

Please be informed that your research protocol has received approval by the Institutional Review Board. Your research protocol is:

☐ Approved  
☐ Tabled/Disapproved  
☒ Approved, (Exempt) contingent on making the changes below\*

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*IRB Chairperson's Signature*

August 31, 2012  
*date*

Contact the IRB for clarification of the terms of your research, or if you wish to make ANY change to your research protocol.

The approval is as an exempt study and therefore you do not need to submit either Progress Report(s) or a Close-out report. You must report adverse events experienced by subjects to the IRB chair in a timely manner (see university policy).

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\* Approval of your research is CONTINGENT upon the satisfactory completion of the following changes and attestation to those changes by the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board. Research may not begin until after this attestation.

**\* In the Application**

- Under 6. 2, add a sentence(s) that describes the intention of the study as well as the method for selecting/recruiting subjects to participate in the study while maintaining anonymity. These sentences may be found in the Purpose and Methods section of the Research Protocol document on page 1. In the first sentence of 6.2 and in the first paragraph of the participant letter, remove the words "and confidential" since the survey is anonymous.

## VITA

Samantha LeVan  
 Department of Communication and Theater Arts  
 300 Batten Arts and Letters  
 Norfolk, VA 23529  
 Email: sleva001@odu.edu

### Education

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 2011-Present | Old Dominion University<br><i>M.A. Lifespan and Digital Communication</i><br>Advisor: Dr. Gary Beck |
| 2008-2010    | Old Dominion University<br><i>B.S. Communication</i>  |
| 2006-2008    | Central Virginia Community College<br><i>A.S. Arts and Sciences</i>                                 |

### Works in Progress

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2013 | <i>Empathic Communication: A Model for Military Romantic Relationships</i><br>[Research Study Conducted] [Complete]  |
| 2012 | <i>Swingers: Breaking Boundaries in Social Identity.</i> [Communication Research Analysis] [Complete]<br><i>A Scandalous Love Affair: A Study of the Effect of Navy Soldiers' Familial Background on Empathy and Infidelity</i> [Study Conducted] [Complete]<br><i>Comedy Central: Reframing Political Satire and Marketing Strategies</i> [Communication Research Analysis] [Complete]<br><i>Boundary Management: Defining Levels of Betrayal on Committing Infidelity</i> [Research Study] [In Progress]<br><i>The Oak Tree</i> [Short Story] [Complete]<br><i>The Blue Dress</i> [Short Story] [Complete] |
| 2011 | <i>Underneath the Mimosa Trees.</i> [Book-Poetry] [Complete]<br><i>Everything's Better with a Chocolate Chip Cookie</i> [Chapbook-Poetry] [Complete]<br><i>The Island of Misfit Children</i> [Book-Children's Literature] [Complete]<br><i>Table Talk: A Religious Communications Study</i> [Study Conducted] [Complete]<br><i>Lifespan Self-Disclosure: A Review of Sexual Abuse Disclosure over a Lifetime</i> [Communications Research Analysis] [Complete]<br><i>Jon Stewart and Fox News: A Critical Study of The Daily Show's Media Criticism</i> [Communications Research Analysis] [Complete]        |