

Gender Role Reversal:
Civilian Husbands of United States Military Servicewomen
Defining Masculinity as Tied-Migrant Workers

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ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

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ABSTRACT

Employment of male spouses of female service members in the United States military (i.e., civilian husbands of servicewomen) is frequently affected when they geographically relocate due to their wives' military service. Because of persisting societal norms for husbands as primary breadwinners in marriages and the majority of military couples being comprised of male service members married to female civilian spouses, civilian husbands of servicewomen may experience a gender role reversal in their identity as a spouse and as a provider within their relationships and military culture. This qualitative study examined the experiences of civilian husbands of servicewomen in their positions as tied-migrant workers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 civilian husbands who experienced at least one geographic relocation due to their wife's military service. Descriptive phenomenological analysis was used to discover the essence of participants' experiences. Themes around *defining masculinity*, being a *minority in the military*, and being a non-traditional gender provider in a *tied-migrant worker role* emerged. Participants expanded their masculine identities to include performing traditionally feminine tasks as well as placing value on egalitarianism in their spousal relationships when they experience barriers to breadwinning. Limitations (e.g., predominantly White and exclusively heterosexual sample, potential biases in recruitment and analysis, no explicit exploration of how gender role reversal and mental health intersect) and directions for future research to resolve limitations and expand on the current study are presented. Clinical recommendations for

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

psychotherapists are provided with an emphasis on using emotionally focused therapy with couples consisting of civilian husbands and servicewomen.

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Civilian men who are married to women serving in the United States military (i.e., civilian husbands of servicewomen) often have disruptions or challenges with their employment when they move to a new place because of their wives' military service. Because men are often expected to be main financial providers for their families (i.e., breadwinners) and civilian husbands' difficulties with employment, as well as the majority of military marriages being between servicemen and civilian wives, civilian husbands may feel they are in a gender role reversal both in their relationships and military communities. This qualitative study examined the experiences of civilian husbands of female service members by interviewing 22 men who moved at least once due to their wife's military service. Descriptive phenomenological analysis was used to discover themes of *defining masculinity*, being a *minority in the military*, and being in a *tied-migrant worker role*. Participants expanded their masculinity to include traditionally feminine tasks and placing value on being equitable in their marriages when faced with challenges to breadwinning. Study limitations regarding demographics and potential biases in recruitment and analysis are discussed, and directions for future research to resolve limitations and expand on the current study are given. Clinical recommendations for psychotherapists are described, especially recommendations for using emotionally focused therapy with couples of civilian husbands and servicewomen.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION..... 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW..... 4

 Feminism and Performing Gender..... 4

 Masculinity and the Provider Role 4

 Dyads with wives who out-earn husbands.....5

 Stay-at-home fathers.....6

 Masculinity in the Military 6

 Migration in Dual-Earner Couples..... 8

CHAPTER 3: METHOD..... 11

 Design11

 Participants.....11

 Procedures..... 12

 Analysis..... 13

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS..... 15

 Defining Masculinity 15

 Internal shifts..... 15

 Societal shifts.....16

 Minority Experience 17

 Difficulty and importance of connecting with male peers.....19

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Lack of inclusivity in events or resources.....	20
Understanding of minority experiences of others.....	21
Tied-Migrant Worker Role.....	22
Benefits of tied-migrant worker role.....	22
Challenges of tied-migrant worker role.....	24
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	28
Limitations and Future Directions	31
Clinical Implications.....	33
Conclusion	35
References.....	36
Table 1: Participant Demographics.....	47
Table 2: Themes and Thematic Categories.....	54
Appendix A: Recruiting Message to Social Media Group Moderators.....	58
Appendix B: Recruiting Flyer.....	59
Appendix C: Screening Questionnaire.....	60
Appendix D: Research Informed Consent.....	61
Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire.....	64
Appendix F: Interview Guide.....	66
Appendix G: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist.....	67
Appendix H: Informant Feedback Email.....	68

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Appendix I: Preliminary Results Summary.....69

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

United States (U.S.) military service members (i.e., enlisted or officers in the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, or Navy) and their spouses face a unique set of potential problems in addition to the various stressors that all couples may experience. Service members' jobs may include physically intense training, extended time apart from their families to potentially dangerous places, as well as frequent geographic relocation (Plfanz & Sonnek, 2002). Because families are an important source of support for service members, the military has policies that promote marriage (Lundquist & Xu, 2014). Compared to civilian counterparts, service members may be more likely to both marry and divorce at a younger age (Hogan & Seifert, 2010). Although the military divorce rate seems to be lower than the civilian rate (Bushatz, 2017; National Center for Health Statistics, 2017), it is difficult to compare military to civilian divorce rates because of the differences in data (e.g., records from the Department of Defense on service members, demographically matched civilian records from surveys; Pollard, Karney, & Loughran, 2012). However, active duty service members who are female (i.e., servicewomen) are more likely than both civilian women and active duty military personnel who are male (i.e., servicemen) to experience divorce, and have been shown to have about double the divorce rate of the latter (Adler-Baeder, Pittman, & Taylor, 2008; Bushatz, 2017). This higher divorce rate is despite a lower marriage rate: only about 44% of servicewomen compared to about 56% of servicemen are married (Patten & Parker, 2011). The most stable marriages in the military appear to be those between servicemen and civilian women followed by dual-military marriages in which two service members are married; marriages between servicewomen and civilian men are the most susceptible to divorce (Karney & Crown, 2007). Because of the higher divorce rate for servicewomen, the inherent stress of divorce (Amato, 2014), and research

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

indicating marital quality can be a mediating factor for military personnel's mental health outcomes post-deployment (Watkins, Lee, & Zamorski, 2017), there is a need to further understand their relationships. As the most vulnerable marriages appear to be between civilian husbands and servicewomen, an increased understanding of the experiences of civilian husbands may provide some insight into the higher divorce rate among servicewomen.

Spouses of service members face unique stressors compared to spouses in dual civilian marriages. Both male and female military spouses have been considered *tied-migrant workers* (Mincer, 1978) because their employment opportunities are largely contingent upon their partners' work-related migration to another geographic location, referred to as a *permanent change of station* (PCS) in the military (Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Cooney, De Angelis, & Segal, 2011; Hisnanick & Little, 2015). For civilian husbands, a tied-migrant worker arrangement deviates from the typical patriarchal organization of families in which men are the primary financial providers, which is especially salient within military culture (Hale, 2012; Lundquist, 2004). Men may be especially concerned with their abilities to provide for their families, and their perceived inability to do so may be related to relationship issues for couples (Sherman, 2017). Men may even be more likely to leave marriages if they are not employed even if they are happy in the marriage (Sayer, England, Allison, & Kangas, 2011).

The experiences of civilian husbands have not been studied in as great detail as those of civilian women married to servicemen (i.e., civilian wives), which may be because there are significantly fewer civilian husbands. As such, there is a need to further understand the experiences of civilian male spouses of servicewomen (i.e., civilian husbands) in particular because of the unique intersection of their status as tied-migrant workers and current gender role expectations for men as financial providers. The information currently available shows that

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

civilian husbands work and earn less than husbands of civilian women (Hisnanick & Little, 2015) and are less likely to be satisfied with employment opportunities than civilian wives of servicemen (Cooney, De Angelis, & Segal, 2011). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of civilian husbands of servicewomen using a feminist lens, especially the ways they perform masculinity as tied-migrant workers in marriage and in the traditional gender role culture of the military.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist Theory and Performing Gender

Feminist theory is a useful lens through which to examine the experiences of civilian husbands of servicewomen because it provides a framework for understanding gender and power dynamics in families and society. Feminist theory links the private sphere of family to the societal sphere to explain how each is reciprocally influenced by the other and how gender identities are produced and reinforced in both (Ferree, 1990). A key tenet of feminist theory is that gender is a social construct that is created and maintained through interactions with the self, others, and culture rather than inherent and inevitable adherence to biological mechanisms (Risman, 2004). West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) define *doing gender* as performative, in that masculine and feminine gender identity are accomplished through action and interactions with others. In order to understand the experiences of civilian husbands, it is important to understand the pressures from both societies at large and the traditional military culture on men to adhere to a normative performance of masculinity, in which the male partner is expected to be the primary financial provider.

Masculinity and the Provider Role

With limited studies on civilian male spouses of servicewomen, studies of other dual-earner marriages may provide some understanding of the potential effects of income and gender ideology on the psychological well-being of men. People in modern marriages must navigate the potentially conflictual context of increased opportunities for women to work outside the home in a society that values men as primary financial providers. Men still prefer to have higher income relative to their female partners, whereas women seem to more often have no preference over which partner earns more (Sheppard, 2018). Men who experience incongruence in provider role

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

expectations and their perceptions of reality may experience anxiety (Loscocco & Spitze, 2007). When men perceive deficits in their abilities as providers, they may experience lower psychological well-being, lower career satisfaction, a loss of self-esteem, worse health outcomes later in life, as well as embarrassment and a higher likelihood of engaging in infidelity (Deutsch, Roksa, & Meeske, 2003; Munsch, 2015; Ratliff & Oishi, 2013; Rogers & Deboer, 2001; Springer, Lee, & Carr, 2019; Waismel-Manor, Levanon, & Tolbert, 2016), indicative of persisting societal masculine ideals of the male provider. Research indicates some difference in men's reactions to sharing the provider role based on their own gender ideology of traditional or egalitarian male/female roles (Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Coughlin & Wade, 2012), but there is also evidence suggesting men are affected in similar ways regardless of gender ideology (Kramer & Pak, 2018).

Compared to those who married in the 1960s and 1970s, recently married couples seem less likely to divorce because of wives' increased relative and overall earnings, a change which seems to have occurred in the 1990s (Schwartz & Gonalons-Pons, 2016). However, some research indicates that increases in wives' income can have a positive correlation with divorce (Rogers, 2004) and couples in which the wife earns more than the husband may be more likely to divorce (Bertrand, Kamenica, & Pan, 2015). Fluctuations in which spouse earns the most in a couple have been associated with increased marital conflict because of disruptions in gender roles of husbands and wives (Winslow, 2011). These changes in spouses' relative incomes may lead to short-term decreases in family satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Waismel-Manor, Levanon, & Tolbert, 2016).

Dyads with Wives who Out-earn Husbands. For many couples in which the wife is the primary provider, partners view the arrangement as transitory rather than permanent and did not

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

plan for it prior to marriage (Chesley 2017). Some wives who become primary providers seem to be more critical of their husbands who earn less income, likely because of the persisting expectation that husbands should be primary providers (Mendiola, Mull, Archuleta, Klontz, & Torabi, 2017). Women who earn more than their husbands may be less likely to consider themselves the *breadwinner*, downplaying their provider role to preserve their husbands' masculinity. (Chesley, 2017; Tichenor, 2005).

Stay-at-home Fathers. Despite a societal shift towards egalitarianism, the percent of stay at home fathers (fathers who are unemployed and have taken the role of family caregiver as well as those who may be working from home/telecommuting) has barely increased over the last 40 years (from 2% to 4%; Fischer & Anderson, 2012; Kramer & Kramer, 2016). Many men who take on the role of stay-at-home father experience instances in which they feel stigmatized, reporting lower levels of social support (Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010). In one study, the highest rated reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father were the desire to do so and the influence of their partner (Fischer & Anderson, 2012); however, a significant limit of this study was the lack of participants who report distress around or felt pressured to take on this role (for example, because employment options were limited by their partner's military service.) Whereas many civilian husbands of servicewomen are employed outside the home, some choose to be full time caregivers and perceive their relationships with children to be positively impacted as a result of becoming stay at home fathers (& MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016).

Masculinity in the Military

The military, being primarily comprised of male service members at about 83% (Department of Defense, 2016), creates and reinforces norms of masculinity. Even as masculine norms are expanding in the U.S. and gender role ideologies become increasingly egalitarian

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

(Donnelly, Twenge, Clark, Shaikh, Beiler-May, & Carter, 2016), there is a strong presence of specific norms for traditional masculinity that are salient in the military (Kurpius & Lucart, 2000). The military promotes a paradigm of masculinity that requires men to be combat-oriented warriors who dominate others (Dunivin, 1994), and those who do not fit the paradigm are seen as undermining military effectiveness (Van Gilder, 2019). Masculinity in the military is defined by strength and self-reliance, the latter of which is shown through service members' disinclination to seek help; the Department of Defense has taken careful measures to promote mental health care-seeking behavior to service members in ways that do not threaten masculinity (Morin, 2017). Women who serve in the military are likewise expected to conform to ideals of physical strength and power (Weitz, 2015), although they also navigate the masculine culture of the military by emphasizing some feminine characteristics in order to avoid full subversion of gender (Silva, 2008) without appearing feminine in a way that suggests they are not professional or competent leaders (Smith, Rosenstein, Nikolov, & Chaney, 2018). Thus, traditional gender roles tend to be reinforced by military culture, even with increases in numbers of female members (Parker, Cilluffo, & Stepler, 2017).

Endorsement of more masculine traits for male service members has been found to be correlated with fewer psychological symptoms for those currently serving, indicating that these traits are required to adjust to and thrive in the military (Rosen, Weber, & Martin, 2000). However, conformity to masculine traits tends to cause issues for former service members when they transition back to civilian life. For example, transition to college after military service may be more difficult for former servicemen who endorse high conformity to more masculine traits, characterized by lower psychological well-being (Alfred, Hammer, & Good, 2014).

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

In an all-volunteer force, the United States military has an interest in supporting families in order to retain service members (Bourg & Wechsler Segal, 1999) and has institutionalized marriage both directly and indirectly as a result (Lundquist & Xu, 2014). Compared to their civilian counterparts, service members typically have multiple community-specific resources that may encourage them to marry and remain married. Although marriage benefits are available to spouses of service members regardless of gender, support resources for spouses of service members (e.g., family readiness groups who connect spouses to military command information and resources, online support websites and forums, military spouse clubs, etc.) may be subtly and/or inadvertently biased toward civilian wives by using masculine pronouns when referring to service member spouses and feminine pronouns when referring to civilian spouses. The perception of institutional gender bias in family resources is shared by both servicewomen when considering their civilian husbands' needs and by the husbands themselves when trying to access resources (Goodman et al, 2013; Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016). Furthermore, civilian husbands may experience stigma for using resources at all (Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016), consistent with the masculine military ideal of self-reliance. Even before officially beginning active duty, service members construct hierarchies of masculinity that place themselves above civilians in terms of being more self-disciplined, action-oriented, and physically able (Hinojosa, 2010).

Migration in Dual-Earner Couples

Studies on migration patterns of married couples show the influence of gender role ideology and earning potential of spouses in dual-earner couples. As the number of women in the U.S. workforce has increased since 1960, couples have, over time, generally continued to favor careers of husbands over wives in their decisions to migrate and where to reside (Mckinnish,

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

2008; Swain & Garasky, 2006; Tenn, 2010). Husbands appear to have more power than wives for migration decisions, but it is unclear how much of the influence depends on gender ideology or simply living in a society in which men earn more than women for the same work or find themselves in higher-paying jobs (Carnevale, Smith, & Gulish, 2018). Women with higher labor market capital are better able to resist family moves that would negatively impact their earning potential (Shauman, 2010). However, there is evidence that even despite equal earning power, traditional gender roles in heterosexual relationships are reproduced when it comes to migration decisions for employment (Wong, 2017). Even among emerging adults with increasingly egalitarian gender role ideologies, research indicates a persisting standard in the perceived obligation of women to support male partners' careers over their own (Ganong, Jamison, & Chapman, 2016). For civilian husbands of servicewomen, migration usually occurs in support of their wives' careers, with the choice being made for the couple by the military.

Irrespective of gender, migration due to a service member's military service (also called permanent change of station, or PCS) is associated with increased unemployment for spouses, decreased hours worked per week for those spouses who are employed, negative perceptions of the spouse's ability to find work, and an observable impact on spouse employment up to two years following the move (Burke & Miller, 2018; Castaneda & Harrell, 2008; Cooke & Speirs, 2005). Military spouses, regardless of racial identification and economic status, appear to be dissatisfied with employment opportunities overall, but spouses of officers are more likely to be dissatisfied than spouses of enlisted service members, and husbands are more likely to be dissatisfied than wives regardless of the number of relocations they experience (Cooney, De Angelis, & Segal, 2011). Civilian husbands' dissatisfaction with employment opportunities is perhaps surprising given that servicewomen (and therefore, their husbands) tend to experience

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

PCS less often than their servicemen counterparts (Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016), yet perhaps unsurprising given that civilian husbands of servicewomen may earn about 70% of what husbands of civilian women earn on average (Little & Hisnanick, 2007). The stable income and military resources, such as health care and assistance with school tuition, have been found to reduce financial stress in servicewomen's relationships with their civilian husbands (Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016), but there is also evidence that civilian husbands may be more likely to be victims of severe aggression from their service member wives if they are unemployed, which may be attributable to fewer financial resources within the couple or an indication of gender role incongruity conflict in the marriage (Newby et al., 2003). More research is needed to better understand how gender performance influences or is influenced by civilian husbands' experiences of employment as a result of migration due to their wives' military service as well as to better understand how civilian husbands, including those who are former service members, perform gender in their nontraditional roles. Given the continued cultural salience of masculinity in the context of gender roles such as breadwinning, and the masculine-dominated culture of the military, the purpose of this study was to explore how civilian husbands in tied-migrant positions perform gender.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Design

A descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2009) was used to gather a rich description of shared experiences around how civilian men married to women serving active duty in the United States military navigate masculinity as tied-migrant workers both in their marriages and as a minority in military culture. A descriptive phenomenological approach was selected because it provided a framework for understanding the meaning of participants' experiences based on the data, rather than attempting to ascribe meaning through assumptions (Giorgi, 2009). Given the principal investigator's identity as a civilian spouse of a service member and her experiences in the military community, using a descriptive phenomenological approach focused on understanding meaning instead of ascribing meaning and improved result trustworthiness by decreasing interpretation bias. A combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 22 (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989) civilian men who were married to women serving active duty in the U.S. military (Table 1), which was sufficient to achieve saturation. Participants' ranged in age from 25 to 49 years old ($M = 36.91$, $SD = 7.04$). The vast majority of participants self-identified as White (82%), with one participant self-identified as Hispanic, one as Hispanic and White, one as Middle Eastern and White, and one as Native American and White. The majority of participants reported a religious affiliation, with about two thirds (64%) self-identifying as Christians. Marriage duration ranged from 2 to 16 years ($M = 7.20$, $SD = 4.12$) with the majority (77%) being in first marriages. About half of participants reported they had no children (45%), with those who had children ranging between 1

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

and 7 ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.83$) At the time of their interviews, the majority of participants resided in the continental United States (77%). Most participants lived in homes that were outside the parameters of military bases (77%), with the remainder living in base housing.

Participants were predominantly employed (64%); a few were stay-at-home dads (14%), two were fulltime students (10%), two were unemployed (10%), and one was retired (5%). Household income ranged from \$45,000 to \$260,000 ($M = \$122,909$; $SD = \$47,506$), with personal income ranging from \$0 to \$150,000 ($M = \$35,091$; $SD = \$34,984$) and wives' income ranging from \$23,000 to \$185,000 ($M = \$88,955$; $SD = \$39,979$). Almost half of participants had terminal undergraduate college degrees (45%), several had graduate degrees (32%) and some had completed some college (23%). Eight participants had prior military service (36%; six had been enlisted members and two had been officers), and of those, only two had previously been in a dual-military marriage with their wives. Number of PCSs ranged from 1 to 9 ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 2.26$), with over half of participants (55%) reporting at least one PCS outside of the continental United States. Most of the wives' military service began prior to their marriage (82%), and the remaining wives started service during their marriage. About half of the wives were serving in the Navy (45%), several in the Air Force (32%), some in the Army (18%), one in the Coast Guard (5%), and none in the Marine Corps. The majority of wives were commissioned officers (73%), with the minority being enlisted members.

Procedures

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received (Virginia Tech IRB #19-493), participants were recruited by reaching out to social media groups for military spouses (Appendix A) and asking them to post a recruitment flyer (Appendix B) that included the principal investigator's contact information and a link to an online screening questionnaire.

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Potential participants were screened for eligibility (Appendix C) using an online survey; if eligible, participants were asked to share their email address at the end of the survey. Each potential participant was emailed a copy of the informed consent (Appendix D) and asked to schedule an interview. Before each interview, the principal investigator reviewed informed consent and participants provided verbal consent. Participants were given the option to enter in a drawing to win one \$50 gift card, in which the odds of winning were about one in four. A demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) was administered verbally by the principal investigator prior to audio recording. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 24 and 97 minutes, with an average of 46 minutes ($SD = 20.12$).

The semi-structured interview format consisted of two *grand tour* questions (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Moustakas, 1994): Tell me about your experience as a civilian husband of a U.S. military servicewoman? What is your experience around your masculinity as the husband of a military member? Further guiding questions were also asked, with topics such as participants' definitions of masculinity, roles in their households and their marriages, and experiences of military culture and resources (Appendix F). All recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim by either the principal investigator or a professional transcriptionist (Appendix G) and verified for accuracy, with the exception of names and other identifying information, which were changed or omitted in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Analysis

Data analysis followed guidelines set forth by Giorgi (2009) and NVivo 12 software was used. Interview transcripts were read several times to gain a sense of the overall experience, followed by a division of data into *meaning units* (Giorgi, 2009). Meaning units were developed using quotes and significant statements, which were then developed into themes. The themes

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

found in the interview transcripts were used to write a description of the “essence” of the experience of masculinity as tied-migrant spouses of servicewomen.

To establish *trustworthiness* (Creswell, 2013), findings were triangulated with existing research and the principal investigator bracketed her own experiences. Bracketing was especially useful for scrutinizing preconceptions about the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009), given that the principal investigator is the civilian wife of a serviceman who has experienced PCS and therefore a tied-migrant worker. The principal investigator examined her own experiences by journaling throughout every step of recruitment, collecting data, and analyzing data for themes. Each transcript was independently coded by one of two graduate students (both female with no military affiliation); discussions between the principal investigator and graduate students of convergent and divergent coding were used to refine themes and reach consensus regarding divergent coding. Themes were audited by the principal investigator’s thesis advisor (male with no military affiliation) who reviewed coding and theme development. Member checks (Appendix H) were conducted with 21 participants (excluding one participant who declined) by emailing participants a preliminary summary of themes and subthemes (Appendix I) and asking them to provide feedback on whether or not the summary resonated with their experiences. Member check requests yielded a 33% response rate; participant feedback overwhelmingly supported the summary of themes and subthemes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Three major themes emerged during analysis: (a) *defining masculinity*, (b) *minority experience*, and (c) *non-traditional gender provider role* (Table 1). Participants described processes of defining masculinity for themselves based on their current role as the husband of a service member or a tied-migrant worker, which included both internal shifts and societal shifts in concepts of masculinity. In explaining the minority experience, participants reported feeling separate both from other civilian spouses and from male service members. Participants identified both benefits and challenges of their non-traditional gender provider role as tied-migrant workers. With regard to participant representation across selected quotes, the range was from 0% ($n = 3$) to 10% ($n = 4$), with an average of 5% of the quotes ($SD = 3\%$).

Defining Masculinity

Participants explained how they view masculinity and changes in their perception of masculinity as a result of their role as a civilian spouse. Whereas some noted that masculinity involves fixed features such as physical traits, overall, they seemed to go through a process of defining or redefining masculinity for themselves. One participant noted that his experience “around masculinity is a constant battle almost....I think redefining masculinity has been one of the harder challenges.... You can still be a man and be a military spouse and I think that’s true, it’s what you define as masculine.”

Internal shifts. The process of defining masculinity as a spouse seemed to involve internal shifts for participants, including the processes of developing role flexibility and learning to provide emotional support for their families. Men who may have expected their role in marriage would be that of primary wage earner described a process of learning how to become flexible, or “wear many hats,” and take on roles that women are traditionally responsible for in

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

married couples, such as household tasks and a larger role in childcare, in addition to financially providing when possible. Over half of participants described engaging in role flexibility. One participant explained that for him, the process is ongoing. “I grew up with a very clear definition of masculinity from my family.... I’ve been having to figure out what masculinity means when I’m not the breadwinner, and when I’m the one who’s most often staying at home.”

A vast majority of participants shared their process of learning how to be emotionally supportive of their wives. Many explained that the support they provide was key to the success of the family. In some cases, providing emotional support was discussed as a way to be the family leader, by being “selfless” and supportive of their wives in order for the family to succeed. One participant shared how he has “tried to shed the idea of traditional roles” especially the idea that: “women are ‘more emotional’ and should be the supportive ones.” He explained as a civilian husband of a female service member, the stereotypically feminine responsibility to provide emotional support is: “completely opposite. One of my primary roles in our relationship is to be the emotional support....my [emotional support] responsibility is greater in our relationship than it would be between two civilian spouses.”

Societal shifts. In addition to the internal shifts men described as a result of their marriage roles, about a third of participants pointed out that the roles of married men and women are changing on a societal level: “Beyond just the dynamic of...being a male military spouse...there’s a lot of changing cultural dynamics here that come into play, in terms of what is partnership, and who is responsible for what in said partnership.” Another participant explained that whereas the roles in his own marriage and culture at large are changing, the military is somewhat different. “I wouldn’t say it’s just in my marriage. Society in general has started to

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

accept ...women are going to...work, be highly educated...make more money than their male counterparts...But in the military, it's still largely a male population.”

Minority Experience

The experience of being a minority in the military community was expressed by participants in terms of seeing male spouses as a role reversal in the masculine-dominant military culture, in which the majority of civilian spouses are women. They also described both the difficulty and the importance of connecting with male peers who can relate to their experiences as minority group members. About two thirds of participants seemed to express the perception that male spouses are “invisible.” In addition, participants reported a lack of inclusivity in community events and resources that are supposed to function as support for spouses, with some of them feeling ostracized by civilian wives.

Male spouse as role reversal. A vast majority of participants explained their experiences in terms of being a “role reversal.” Some participants seemed to feel comfortable in the role reversal and even joked with their spouse about their being a “proud Navy wife,” whereas others seemed to feel distressed. One participant said, “It makes me feel like I violated an unwritten rule somewhere. In other words, it's like it goes against my sense of belonging in the community.” Another participant explained his discomfort attending events with his wife, not knowing how he fits in both with other spouses who are mostly women and with male service members: “There's still a spouse/wife divide....but also, I'm not a service member. It creates very blurry lines because I'm one of the guys but not one of the *guys*.”

Over 75% of participants described their gender role reversal in terms of the traditional masculine-dominant culture of the military, both in institutional traditions and in family lifestyle. “The military has never shifted [its] culture completely and I suppose it plays into gender and

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

spouses in the sense of there's a lot of traditions for officers that assume that the officer is male." This participant referenced an experience at a military ceremony for his wife where the protocol was to give the spouse a flower, and those in charge did not know what to give him: "Sometimes they have to rewrite the entire [military ceremony] script if they have a male spouse." Another participant shared his thoughts in terms of traditional gender roles in family life in the military community. He explained that reliance on the service member's income can contribute to an unemployed civilian spouse maintaining full responsibility for household labor, which often leads to male service members having: "clear-cut, defined roles when they get home of dinner being on the table, the wife taking care of, for the most part, the kids. I don't mean to say that's bad, because that's kind of just how it is."

About half of participants reported that the role reversal led to having their masculinity questioned at some point, either by others who misgendered them by referring to them as "wives," or they found themselves questioning their own masculinity. "Within military culture, a lot of times I do get called the wife...it used to really bother me...maybe it still does, but I just had to make that choice, okay, am I gonna really let this bother me?" More than half of the participants reported that they did not feel emasculated in their role as civilian spouse. Some rejected the judgements of others, and one pointed out that being a minority at military functions "takes a lot of confidence and courage... It kind of drives [other male spouses] up the wall that...they're looked at differently.... Some people talk to me, some people don't; I don't care. That's their problem, not mine." Almost a third of participants felt judged by service members, either by other male service members, or their wife, or both. Some participants, particularly those who had served in the military themselves, described brushing off judgement. Others seemed to feel the judgement was hurtful. One participant said, "I was brought up understanding

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

that the man is supposed to take charge and be the breadwinner.... Military men kind of look down on me... ‘Look at this punk! I can't believe this guy is riding his wife's coattails!’”

Almost half of the participants described their wives' difficulties as a minority in a male-dominated field. One participant noticed “definite impacts on [his wife's] ability to lead” because of “the way that her actions are perceived by some of her subordinates [and]...some superiors that may have a more traditional or chauvinistic look on women in the military.” Another participant, who was in the same military occupational specialty as his wife when he was a service member, explained his view of the unfairness of his wife's situation: “She had to sort of prove [her competence], whereas I did not, and it just didn't seem right.... She works twice as hard as almost any soldier I've ever seen just to get the same level of respect.”

Difficulty and importance of connecting with male peers. As a minority in military culture, the challenge of developing a sense of community with other civilian husbands was expressed by many participants. Those who could find male peers reported interacting and sharing experiences with other men like them was helpful to their process of understanding their roles. To this point, one participant explained: “It's a necessity to survive.... A fair amount of marriages with female service members and male spouses end in divorce because of these types of issues; when you don't have a community, the things you're struggling with just magnify.” Another participant explained that finding a spouse support network, and male support specifically, has been “the greatest help for me as a male mil spouse.” He encouraged others to find support, if not in person then in online groups.

Many participants described male spouses as “invisible” in the military and civilian communities, spoke about having met very few other male spouses or none at all, or reported that they are often assumed to be the service member rather than their wives. Overall, about 60%

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

discussed male spouse invisibility. One participant explained that when he does meet other male spouses, he tries to tell them “about the spouse club and try to get them to join” but that it is difficult “to find them and engage with them...you’re never really around them...unless you set up a play date right there.” Not only did participants report the perception that male spouses are invisible within the military community, but that they are also relatively unknown in civilian communities: “The general public a lot of the time....I’ve been denied certain things because I’m a male spouse....I’ve had people think my spouse ID [military identification card]s fake because I’m a male spouse.”

Lack of inclusivity in events or resources. A majority of participants described events or resources as being gendered in a way that favors female spouses. Some pointed out that whereas official resources from the Department of Defense are available for all spouses and are “gender neutral,” many community-based or volunteer-led events and resources are not inclusive or “male-friendly.” One participant explained his understanding of the circumstances based on spouse demographics. “If you only have limited resources, target the most people that you can. It makes sense, but sometimes it feels like: Okay, this was definitely not an event that was thought of for male spouses.” More than half of participants reported observing changes in the demographics of service members and their families toward more diverse family composition in terms of gender and sexual orientation. Some expressed a desire for these changes to be recognized by the majority members of the community and reflected in community resources, particularly when it comes to engagement with male spouses. One participant expressed his wish that “military society...would catch up to the times and realize that military couples are all gender combinations, all sexualities.... There can’t be that expectation anymore of: this is going to be a wives’ gathering, talking about our husbands.”

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Almost a third of participants reported that they felt unwelcome or even ostracized by civilian wives at community events. One participant shared his experience of sitting alone at a social event for spouses, and watching women reach out to each other:

The women were not very receptive or very open or welcoming to me. There were a couple of other women that were there that were like, “We’re brand new, we just got married, we just moved here,” and you hear a lot of times like, “Oh honey, I’ve been there; let me take you under my wing. Oh, I’ve been a spouse for 10 years sweetie, it’s gonna be okay. Let me share with you.” Sisterhood – bonding...but I don’t fit that. I’m not gonna have a woman come up to me and say...“You’ll make it; you’ll be fine; let me help you.”

Some participants explained their hesitance to get involved in the community due to the lack of inclusivity, and others shared their belief that for male spouses to become less stigmatized and events to become more inclusive, they must get involved. One participant shared an experience of being told by female spouses at an event that they want more male spouses to attend and get involved, but that he has not seen events change to encourage action: “What they say and what they show are completely different.” Another explained, “The stereotype that guys don’t want to come out is pretty strong and they almost self-reinforce it...I try and combat that stereotype by being the guy that comes out and inviting other men I know.” About half of participants also spoke about a need for outreach in the services that are available and useful, such as mental health and employment resources, or noted that they did not use resources because they were not aware of them or felt the available ones were not meant for them.

Understanding of minority experiences of others. About a third of participants described an understanding of minority experiences of others during their time as a civilian

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

spouse. Some reported an understanding of microaggressions and others explained the awkwardness of feeling different than everyone else around them. One participant shared that he has “become more aware of the struggles of how microaggressions work...or outright examples of sexism – being really aware of things that my wife will talk about. That’s definitely shaped my own view of other men in society.” Another participant expressed the wish that other White men could experience being the civilian husband of a female service member. “It is probably the closest thing in my life that I can relate to being a social minority.... Experiencing that and being able to extrapolate that feeling to society at large is pretty valuable...it’s kind of eye-opening.”

Tied-Migrant Worker Role

Although not all participants made significantly less money than their wives, all participants spoke to both the benefits and the challenges of reliance upon their wives’ income due to the variation in their own employment as a result of PCS. Many participants explained their experiences in terms of their wives as the breadwinners of their families rather than themselves, a role reversal of traditional provider gender roles in the context of both societal and military expectations for spouses. Participants explored the complexity of having their career trajectories being at least somewhat dictated by their wives’ careers.

Benefits of tied-migrant worker role. All participants described benefits that accompany their role as the secondary provider in the marriage, many of which seemed to contribute to how comfortable these men felt or allowed them to successfully adapt to their situations as a tied-migrant worker. Participants highlighted several types of benefits: (a) teamwork and egalitarianism with wives, (b) redefinition of providing, (c) stability in family finances and military benefits, (d) pride in wives’ career accomplishments, (e) acceptance from

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

others, (f) freedom to find a job I like, (g) ability to become a stay-at-home father, and (h) influence of their parents.

The vast majority of participants described their partnership in terms of being egalitarian, or seeing themselves and their wives as equal members of a team. One participant shared, “There’s not a ‘head of our house.’ We both have equal say and equal opinion.” Another participant explained his view on the roles of a husband versus the roles of a wife in a partnership, stating that the couple should base their career decisions not on gender, but on what makes “financial sense” for the family. About a quarter of participants described the influence of their own parents’ relationship on their values for marriage, whether it was noticing their parents running a dual-income household or watching their fathers contribute to household tasks.

A majority of participants described a process of redefining what it means to provide for their families when they were not the primary financial provider. Some discussed providing in terms of becoming the primary provider of care for their children or volunteering in their communities. One participant gave the following advice: “Don’t discount the contribution that you make to whatever it is in the house that makes it go.” Another shared that although he originally struggled with his role when he had difficulty finding employment, he found ways to save the family money, such as by providing routine maintenance on their computer and cars; as a result, he reported feeling “comfortable with the role now...I’m a domestic engineer.”

Over a third of participants described how taking pride in their wives’ accomplishments helped them adjust to earning less money than their wives. One participant explained, “it has nothing to do with me feeling that I’m being slighted...It’s me turning that into she’s earned it, she’s worked hard...she deserves that right...if the roles were reversed, I would hope she would feel the same way.” Support and acceptance from others, particularly from their wives, also

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

seemed important for about a third of participants in accepting their non-traditional gender provider role: “If there was any one thing...that gave me the know-how to accept [giving up my career for hers], it was several long talks with my wife and a lot of reassurance from her that it did not bother her.” The financial stability and military benefits such as healthcare seemed vital for over a third of participants: “My career has been kind of put on the backburner so to speak. And that’s okay – I mean, I’m not worried about it because she’s able to make a lot of money.”

Many participants spoke about the advantages of relying on their wives as the main source of income. About a quarter of participants described enjoying the flexibility around selecting employment based on preference rather than financial gain: “I do jobs I think are fun... I just take jobs I think are interesting more than anything else. It stinks for career and employment, but I’ve had a good time learning.” Similarly, about a quarter described the opportunity to become a stay-at-home father as helping them adjust to their non-traditional gender provider role: “As a stay at home parent...you get to help develop that next generation of amazing people.... Some of that helps me get through because it was an adjustment staying home with kids.”

Challenges of tied-migrant worker role. In addition to the benefits of their wives’ service and her status as the family’s (primary) breadwinner, every participant discussed challenges of their non-traditional gender provider roles as tied-migrant workers or factors that contributed to discomfort in performing their roles. Many of the challenges described were associated with expectations men had for themselves to be the breadwinner, whether it was an expectation they learned in their families of origin, a cultural expectation, or an unmet personal expectation to make a greater financial contribution to the family. Many men seemed to struggle adjusting to prioritizing their wives’ careers over their own and being considered a “dependent”

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

by and within the military. Some participants discussed the negative impacts of challenges in their non-traditional gender provider roles on their mental health.

About three quarters of participants described the impact of uncertainty or loss of control they experienced as a result of prioritization of their wives' military service over their own career or life plans, a role reversal both in gender expectations for men in society at large and in the military. Although a few described the uncertainty as "exciting" or "adventure," the vast majority of participants expressed discomfort with the impact of uncertainty on their ability to develop their own careers due to their loss of control over geographic location when they PCS. Some participants also felt judged by people at work, sometimes by colleagues and sometimes by bosses or potential employers, who discovered that their wives are service members: "They see a spouse and they just see, 'Oh, so you're following your wife... You don't make your own choices. You get told what to do.... You're not gonna be here for very long.'"

About 70% of participants explained their challenges in terms of the societal expectations placed on men to be the family's main source of income. One participant shared he found his situation difficult because of "societal constructs that expect you as the man in the relationship to perform certain duties" and the expectations on him as a military spouse "to achieve what you want to achieve, but also respect the wife's career and make sure she's able to achieve what she wants to achieve." One participant described a process of adjusting to his role:

I felt really guilty about it. I felt like I was being a leech.... [My wife] was totally supportive, saying "No it's okay, we're making this decision together." My wife never made me feel that way...it was an easier thing for her to decide than for me. Again, because of today's society [sic] norms, it's expected that the man is the breadwinner, even though in today's day and age, it's not necessarily.

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

About a third of participants expressed discomfort in their role in terms of expectations about men as breadwinners they internalized from their families of origin. One participant explained he was raised to believe: “the husband was always the breadwinner and the husband ran the household.... I’m not saying that’s the way it should be or necessarily my current values, but in a way, the way you’re raised sticks with you” and that sometimes he feels “a little bit marginalized...I’m like the inferior party here...I should be doing more and contributing more and make more money and I should be the one driving this life, and that’s not the way it is.”

Half of the participants discussed the experience of prioritizing their wives’ career over their own, or putting their careers “on the backburner.” One participant explained that his experience has been “somewhat frustrating...I’ve given up my career to support my wife’s career, and just the constant having to find a new job every three or so years is somewhat wearing, but it’s part of what I signed up for.” Less than a third of participants commented on the difficulty in developing their own careers due to the inflexible demands of their wives’ careers. They shared that because their wives do not have many options to refuse their employer’s orders, they as the spouses must prioritize flexibility in their own careers: “The non-military spouse is the person who has to pick up the slack....They’re in a position where it’s not an order, it’s, ‘I’ll go tell my boss,’ or pay more money at daycare so my child can stay later.”

About a third of participants discussed negative impacts on their mental well-being due to difficulty in finding employment or developing their own careers: “Early on as a male spouse, it’s hard to grapple with the new role.... a lot of conflicting feelings and a lot of feelings of hopelessness. I dealt with them on a regular basis, feeling hopeless for my career.” Close to a third of participants expressed discomfort or distress in their lack of opportunity to make as great of a financial contribution to the family as they would prefer because of PCS. One participant

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

shared that he struggles when he is unable to transition to a new job soon after moving: “What am I contributing to this relationship...? It makes me feel, maybe not inferior, because I love and support my wife, and I love that she is doing something that she absolutely loves to do.”

About a third of participants discussed their discomfort or outright rejection of being labeled the “dependent,” a term that the Department of Defense uses to define spouses and children of service members. One participant expressed distress around being considered “the dependent – just the dependent,” and particular distress that others may see him as someone taking advantage of his marriage for military benefits: “A lot of people just want to latch on to [healthcare and housing benefits], but to me, I could have that with or without the military. I’m with my wife, I’m not with the military.” Another expressed how some people use a derogatory term for military spouses: “People tend to make fun of military spouses. They call them really dumb or *dependapotamuses*...It’s got a really negative connotation. It really kills your self-esteem knowing that somebody is referring to you just as a *dependapotamus*.”

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overall, the participants in this study seemed to perform masculinity through developing gender role flexibility, learning how to be emotionally supportive of their wives, and redefining what it means to *provide* when they experience barriers to being primary breadwinners. Participants also seemed to perform masculinity in their rejection of the dependent label, and through navigating partnerships with their service member wives by placing value on teamwork and equal importance on each partner's role in the marriage. Some framed their minority experiences in terms of their masculinity, and highlighted the importance of connecting with other civilian husbands as a factor in feeling less isolated and more supported in their non-traditional roles.

Many participants spoke in dialectic terms regarding their experiences, in that they discussed discomfort they felt about their own inability to be the primary provider while also highlighting their wives' career achievements. Their ability to see their situation dialectically varied from other research that found husbands who are not primary providers may be more likely to interpret their situation as a negative reflection of their own masculinity rather than a positive reflection of their wives' abilities (Chesley, 2017). These differences could be due in part to the deep appreciation of and value in military service that many civilian spouses feel, or sense of *pride and mission* described in other research on civilian husbands (Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016). Some civilian husbands felt their role was vital to the success of their service member wife, which coincides with a common sentiment within the military that civilian spouses are serving their country through supporting their spouse, often through personal sacrifices ("Do Military Spouses Serve?," 2011); making personal sacrifices to support their wives may have facilitated some resolution of disappointment regarding their own careers. In keeping with

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

related findings (Lufkin, 2017), the vast majority of participants in this study expressed satisfaction in their role of civilian husband despite challenges in employment due to PCS.

Similar to another study that examined benefits and challenges experienced by civilian husbands of servicewomen (Southwell & Macdermid-Wadsworth, 2016), participants described many challenges integrating into military communities and performing non-traditional gender roles. Participants reported feeling separate from both other civilian spouses (a majority of whom are female) and from other men in their communities (a majority of whom are service members), and discussed integration challenges in terms of conceptualizing their own minority status and masculinity. Difficulty integrating is somewhat unsurprising given the continued prevalence of traditional masculine values in military culture and the male majority of service members; yet, feelings of separateness and isolation seemed to be a novel experience, perhaps due to male privilege in other facets of participants' lives. Feelings of isolation from the community were more frequently articulated by those who had no prior military service themselves and by those who had no children. Consequently, participants with no service experience or no children were unable to "talk shop" when mingling with their wives' colleagues or when interacting with civilian wives who had children. Some men in this study extrapolated their experiences to perceived difficulties of other minority group members, and more often extended this understanding to difficulties their wives face as women working in a male-dominated field. Military community resources should strive to be more inclusive of civilian husbands by providing male-specific groups, creating more gender-neutral resources, or training employees and volunteers to exclude gender biased language in their outreach to spouses.

Many of the challenges participants described are likely relevant for women who marry service members as well, such as adjusting to the military lifestyle (i.e., loss of control and

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

increased uncertainty about the future) and with employment due to PCS. However, the discomfort or distress many men in this study experienced due to loss of control and career challenges in their tied-migrant roles are most likely unique to the civilian husband experience because of conflicts between societal and family-of-origin values around breadwinning and performing a non-traditional gender role (Southwell & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2016).

Participants in this study described the many ways in which they address challenges in gender role performance by transforming what it means to be the husband in their own marriage or redefining masculinity for themselves. Experiences of participants in this study seemed to align with Elliot's conceptualization of *caring masculinities* (2016) in that they seemed to embrace a masculine identity that incorporated interdependence and equality, evidenced by participants' emphasis on teamwork when describing their marriage. However, it is worth noting that because participants' wives were not also interviewed, the degree to which egalitarianism is put into practice in their marriages remains uncertain. Further uncertainty exists around whether participants held egalitarian values for relationships before marrying a service member, or embraced egalitarian ideology due to difficulties with employment because of PCS. Existing research indicates there may be reciprocity in gender role ideology and circumstances, in that egalitarian men may be more likely to share the provider role with their partners, and men may be more likely to embrace egalitarian ideology when providing must be shared with partners because of financial circumstances (Zuo, 2004).

For some participants, tension with hegemonic masculinity may have been at work in the ways they discussed redefining providing and distancing themselves from the dependent label that is often associated with women in the military community. Similar to a study of stay at home fathers who engaged in traditionally masculine tasks while caring for their children (Doucet,

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

2004), several participants in this study redefined providing through engagement in masculine activities at home such as fixing cars, as well as the less masculine-stereotyped act of community volunteering. Other research found some stay-at-home fathers may adapt their views of masculinity to include caregiving (Lee & Lee, 2018), which seemed to be the case for some participants in this study who redefined masculinity through role flexibility as they performed traditionally feminine household tasks and caregiving for children.

Given the distinct experience of gender role reversal in terms of their identities as military civilian spouses, participants may have provided emotional support for their service member wives because that is what is expected of them in that role. Similar findings on men who are nurses who described developing their ability to engage emotionally with patients in less stereotypically masculine ways to be more effective as nurses (Cottingham, 2017), perhaps civilian husbands learn to provide emotional support to be more effective partners to servicewomen, whose jobs can be incredibly demanding and require their civilian spouses to “pick up the slack.” A study of low-income fathers found men who are less able to provide financially for their children may highly value other ways in which they provide support, such as emotional support; however, they may also report feeling judged by others for perceived provider role inadequacy (Bryan, 2013). Similarly, participants of this study redefined their masculinity to include providing emotional support to wives and children, and also sometimes felt judged by others around their perceived inadequate financial providing.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study had several limitations that could be addressed in future studies. A major limitation was that the vast majority of participants were White. Future studies should be conducted that focus on the experiences of civilian husbands of color that examine the

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

intersectionality of identities in racial and ethnic minority groups and as civilian spouses. Further exploration of the situational understanding of minority experiences that was expressed by some White civilian husbands could also be conducted focusing on the increased awareness of minority experiences (i.e., microaggressions, disenfranchisement) as a gender minority as a civilian husband and how this may impact their interactions with people who have other minority self-identities. Another limitation of this study was its focus on gender and employment experiences of heterosexual men married to servicewomen; future studies should focus exclusively on sexual minority spouses in the military to understand how they navigate gender and social expectations for financial provision in their marriages.

Although (a) the principal investigator bracketed her experience as a civilian wife of a serviceman in conjunction with conducting the primary analysis of the data, (b) each transcript was independently coded by one of two female graduate students with no military affiliation, and (c) the research advisor who audited themes was male and had no military affiliation, gender bias may have had an impact on what participants chose to disclose during interviews, especially those who have had experiences of feeling ostracized by civilian wives, as well as on the analysis. Possibly due to some selection bias during recruitment, the majority of participants in this study were husbands of officers, who tend to make more money than their enlisted counterparts and who also tend to be educated. Future studies could determine if the results of this study are generalizable to husbands of enlisted service members. Additionally, given changes in societal norms in that women are expected to be both the caregiver and contribute financially, more research is needed to understand the experiences of civilian wives of service members in terms of employment and family life. A future study should use dyadic interviews with civilian husbands and servicewomen to gain further understanding of how they navigate their

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

relationships as minorities in the military. Participants' mental health was not specifically asked about, therefore the degree to which participants' mental health was influenced by their gender role reversal may have been underexplored by the principal investigator or underreported by participants. Future research should examine the intersection of gender identity role reversals and mental health of civilian husbands. Finally, due to the high divorce rate between civilian husbands and servicewomen, future studies should be conducted with civilian men who are no longer married to servicewomen to find if any of the challenges from this study contributed to divorces.

Clinical Implications

Psychotherapists who provide treatment for civilian husbands of servicewomen should be aware of the challenges these husbands may face in their roles as gender minorities in military culture and the role reversal they may experience both in their communities and within their marriages. Psychotherapists should be mindful of the ways in which gender identity can intersect with key roles these men find themselves in (e.g., husband, military spouse, employee, father) and the various systems with which civilian husbands interact as they incorporate their experiences into their concept of masculinity. In addition to assessing for challenges in their key roles, psychotherapists should also assess for strengths both in civilian husbands, their servicewomen wives, and their marital relationship (e.g., role flexibility, valuing teamwork and egalitarianism, the ability to redefine *providing* when faced with barriers to breadwinning).

Because of the importance of emotional support in relationships between civilian husbands and servicewomen, emotionally focused therapy (EFT) for couples is an ideal treatment modality. Based in attachment theory, EFT uses experiential interventions, such as heightening of primary emotions through evocative questioning and responding, validation of

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

client realities and emotions, and empathic reflection and empathic conjecture in order to interrupt problematic interactional patterns and create or restructure secure bonds between partners (Johnson, 2004). With the pressure on civilian husbands to adhere to cultural norms for men as breadwinners (and perhaps on servicewomen as caretakers) and the uncertainty and demands of the military lifestyle for both partners, couples may benefit from being more reliable sources of support for each other. Civilian husbands may struggle if they feel they are not fulfilling the gender roles expected of them in military culture; as minority group members, peer support may not be readily available. Psychotherapists can use EFT to help partners strengthen the bond within their marriage and provide the emotional support the vast majority of participants in this study explained as crucial to their marriage.

Psychotherapists should assess civilian husbands for issues around defining masculinity, minority status in the military, and challenges in performing non-traditional gender provider roles as tied-migrant workers and how these issues may influence the couple's negative interaction cycle. For example, as men are often socialized to minimize their problems and avoid discussing vulnerable emotions, a civilian husband may present as the emotional withdrawer in the cycle. A civilian husband who is the emotional withdrawer may potentially minimize any feelings of depression due to challenges with employment (e.g., unmet personal, family-of-origin, and societal expectations to be the primary provider, deprioritizing his career, and loss of control over his career or life), feeling like an outsider in the military community (e.g., feeling unwelcome or ostracized by civilian wives or judged by servicemembers), and impacts on his concept of his masculinity as a result of gender role reversal. In situations in which civilian husbands perceive they are underperforming as husbands with regard to providing financially, or that they are struggling with feeling alone or isolated in a new community after PCS,

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

psychotherapists can help them share their primary emotions in a vulnerable way and help their servicemember wives to respond with support.

Conclusion

Though maintaining gainful employment is undeniably important for family survival, there is also a clear need for civilian husbands of servicewomen to expand what it means to them to be masculine and, in some ways, develop flexibility in their gender role. As the roles of husbands and wives shift in terms of financial provision in the U. S while traditional norms tend to persist in military culture, civilian husbands may redefine their self-concept of masculinity when faced with difficulties in employment and feeling unwelcome or “invisible” in the military community. There is a need to help civilian husbands connect with social support, especially strengthening emotional support and teamwork with partners at home, as well as help them connect with other men with similar experiences in order to strengthen feelings of belonging in their communities.

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Table 1
Participant Demographics

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Demographic Characteristic	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range	<i>n</i>	%
Age	36.91 (7.04)	25-49 years		
Racial identification				
White			18	82
Hispanic			1	5
Hispanic and White			1	5
Middle Eastern and White			1	5
Native American and White			1	5
Religious affiliation				
No affiliation			5	23
Non-Denominational			3	14
Christian				
Agnostic			2	10
Catholic			2	10
Christian			2	10
Latter Day Saints			2	10
Presbyterian			2	10

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Atheist			1	5
Disciples of Christ, Minister			1	5
Pagan			1	5
Protestant			1	5
Length of partner relationship	9.45 (4.26)	3-17 years		
Length of marriage	7.20 (1.83)	1.5-15.5 years		
First marriage for self			17	77
One previous marriage			4	18
Two previous marriages			1	5
First marriage for wife			19	86
One previous marriage			1	5
Two previous marriages			1	5
Unknown marriages			1	5
Children				
Have children			12	55
Number of children	2.08 (1.83)	1-7		
Have no children			10	45
Reside in continental U.S.			17	77
California			4	18

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Colorado	2	10
Texas	2	10
Virginia	2	10
Georgia	1	5
Illinois	1	5
Louisiana	1	5
North Carolina	1	5
Rhode Island	1	5
Utah	1	5
Washington (state)	1	5
Reside outside continental U.S.	5	23
Japan	2	10
Alaska	1	5
Djibouti	1	5
Germany	1	5
Housing		
Reside in base housing	5	23
Reside in off-base housing	17	77
Highest level of education		
Some college	5	23

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Bachelor's degree			10	45
Graduate or professional degree			7	32
Employment				
Employed			14	64
Unemployed			2	10
Fulltime student			2	10
Retired			1	5
Stay-at-home father			3	14
Annual household income	\$123K (\$48K)	\$45K-\$260K		
Below \$49,999			1	5
Between \$50,000-\$99,999			6	27
Between \$100,000-\$149,999			10	45
Between \$150,000-\$199,999			3	14
Above \$200,000			2	10
Annual personal income	\$35K (\$35K)	\$0-\$150K		
Below \$9,999			5	23
Between \$10,000-\$34,999			6	27

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Between \$35,000-\$59,999			8	36
Between \$60,000-\$89,999			2	10
Above \$90,000			1	5
Annual wife income	\$89K (\$40K)	\$23K-\$185K		
Below \$49,999			3	14
Between \$50,000-\$74,999			6	27
Between \$75,000-\$99,999			2	10
Between \$100,000-			6	27
\$124,999				
Between \$125,000-			4	18
\$149,999				
Above \$150,000			1	5
Military Service (self)				
No prior service			14	64
Prior service			8	36
Years active duty	7.63 (5.32)	4-20		
Last rank achieved (self)				
Enlisted			6	27
E-4			3	14
E-5			2	10

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

E-6		1	5
Officer		2	10
O-2		1	5
O-4		1	5
Branch (self)			
Army		4	18
Marine Corps		2	10
Air Force		1	5
Foreign navy		1	5
Marriage previously dual-military			
Yes		2	10
No		20	91
Start of wife's military service			
Before marriage		18	82
During marriage		4	18
Number of PCS experienced	2.77 (2.26)	1-9	
as a civilian husband			
Lived OCONUS at least once		12	55
as a civilian husband			
Wife's military branch			

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N = 22)

Navy	10	45
Air Force	7	32
Army	4	18
Coast Guard	1	5
Wife's military rank		
Enlisted	6	27
E-3	2	10
E-4	1	5
E-5	2	10
E-7	1	5
Officer	16	22
O-2	1	5
O-3	4	%
O-4	7	%
O-5	3	%
O-6	1	5

Note: O and E with numbers are denotation of military ranks (e.g., E-1, O-2, etc.) with O representing officer ranks and E representing enlisted ranks. Numbers correspond to rank, titles of which vary across military branches, and range from lowest rank 1 up to highest rank 10.

Table 2
Themes and Thematic Categories

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Categories of Civilian Husbands of Servicewomen (N=22)

<i>Themes and Thematic Categories</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Thematic Content</i>
I. Defining Masculinity			
1. Internal shifts	22	100	Participants described internal shifts in their definition of masculinity, including the importance of their ability to give emotional support to their wives and incorporating traditionally feminine tasks into their role as husband.
a. Emotional supporting role	18	82	
b. Developing role flexibility	12	55	
2. Societal shifts	7	32	Participants described societal shifts regarding gender roles in marriage for both men and women, such as increased numbers of women breadwinners and men who are stay-at-home fathers.
aII. Minority Experience			
1. Male spouse as role reversal	18	82	Participants described how their identity as a male civilian spouse is a role reversal from the majority of civilian spouses who are
a. Military as masculine dominant culture	17	77	

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Categories of Civilian Husbands of Servicewomen (N=22)

b.	Service members judge male spouses	6	27	female. Participants noted both judgement of male spouses by service members, their
c.	Wife's difficulties as a woman	9	41	wives' difficulties as a minority in a male dominated field, and how they have
d.	Masculinity questioned	10	45	experienced their own masculinity questioned
e.	Not emasculated	13	59	as a result of the role reversal. Over half stated they did not feel emasculated in their role.
2.	Difficulty and importance of connecting with male peers	15	68	Participants noted the difficulty of connections with other civilian husbands
a.	Male spouse invisibility	14	64	because they are so few, and highlighted the
3.	Lack of inclusivity in events or resources	16	73	importance of these connections in helping them feel part of a community.
a.	Changes in military demographics	13	59	Many community events and resources are created for and run by civilian wives,
b.	Unwelcome by civilian wives	6	27	sometimes leaving civilian husbands feeling ostracized or unwelcome. Participants
c.	Hesitance and need for male involvement	7	32	pointed to changes in demographics and called for events to become more inclusive,
d.	Need for outreach	10	45	as well as their understanding of hesitation

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Categories of Civilian Husbands of Servicewomen (N=22)

	regarding available resources			for men to become involved and the necessity of male involvement to encourage changes in events and resources. They also expressed a lack of knowledge about resources for spouses. Participants noted how they were more aware of the difficulties of being in a minority group, including understanding microaggressions.
4.	Situational understanding of minority experiences	8	36	
 III. Tied-Migrant Role				
1.	Benefits of tied-migrant role	22	100	Participants explained benefits of their positions as secondary providers or being able to rely on their wives to provide the primary source of family income, such as stability in finances, the ability to choose interesting jobs or become stay-at-home fathers. They also explained factors that contributed to their feeling more comfortable in their tied-migrant roles, such as valuing egalitarianism, redefining what it means for themselves to provide, pride in wife's career
	a. Teamwork and egalitarianism in relationship with spouse	19	86	
	b. Redefinition of providing	13	59	
	c. Stability in family finances and military benefits	8	36	
	d. Pride in wife's career accomplishments	8	36	
	e. Acceptance from others	6	27	
	f. Freedom to find a job I like	5	23	

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Categories of Civilian Husbands of Servicewomen (N=22)

g. Ability to become stay-at-home father	5	23	accomplishments, acceptance from others, and the influence of their parents' relationship on their own with their wives.
viii) Influence of parents			
2. Challenges of tied-migrant role	22	100	Participants described difficulties they experienced being in tied-migrant roles, such as the impact of uncertainty about their futures and loss of control over their career trajectories, the decision to prioritize their wives' careers over their own, and the impact on their mental well-being. They also described factors that influenced discomfort they experienced, such as societal and family-of-origin expectations, personal expectations to make financial contributions to the family, and being labeled a dependent by the military and others.
a. Impact of uncertainty and loss of control	16	73	
b. Societal expectations	15	68	
c. Family of origin expectations	7	32	
d. Personal expectation to contribute financially	7	32	
e. Putting my career on backburner	12	55	
f. Impact on well-being	7	32	
g. Rejection of dependent label	7	32	

Appendix A

Recruiting Message to Social Media Group Moderators

Hello,

My name is Emily Dowling. I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech and the spouse of an active duty military member. I am recruiting participants for my thesis research study exploring the experiences of civilian husbands of active duty servicewomen. I am contacting you to ask if you would pass information about my study along to military spouses who may be interested in participating! The purpose of this study is to better understand their unique roles, perspectives, and challenges they may face. I will also be giving \$50 gift cards to randomly chosen participants (between 25-40% of participants will receive a gift card). Participation is voluntary and confidential, in that all identities will be kept anonymous.

Please consider posting the following information on your website so that interested members can participate. I can be contacted at lemilyd@vt.edu for more information. Thank you so much for your help!

To all civilian husbands of United States servicewomen: I am a military spouse and Virginia Tech student and I am conducting a study on your experiences of military life! My hope is that through this study, I will contribute to the understanding of your unique role, perspective, and any challenges you face. Those who participate will be eligible to enter a drawing to win one of four \$50 gift cards (between 25%-40% of participants will win)!

Appendix B

Recruiting Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

Research Study on the Experiences of Civilian Husbands of Servicewomen

The purpose of this study is to better understand the unique roles, perspectives, and challenges you may face as the civilian husband of an active duty servicewoman.

What is involved?

- A brief demographic questionnaire (5-10 minutes)
- A telephone interview lasting about 60-90 minutes, including questions about your experiences of being married to a servicewoman with a focus on employment and marriage. All personally identifying information will be kept confidential.
- The chance to win one of four \$50 gift cards as a thank you for your participation

You may qualify for this study if:

- You are at least 18 years old
- You are the husband of a woman who is currently serving on active duty in the United States military (any branch, enlisted or commissioned officers, not in a Reserve/Guard status)
- You are currently a civilian (those with prior military service still eligible, but not if you are currently serving active duty or in a Reserve/Guard status)
- You have experienced at least one permanent change of station (PCS) as a civilian husband

If you are interested in being a part of this study, please use this link to see if you are eligible:

https://survey.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eS4PA7Oo4DxaKhv

Or – email Emily Dowling at lemilyd@vt.edu



Emily Dowling
lemilyd@vt.edu
(714) 726-8605

This study has been approved by Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program. (540) 231-3732
VT IRB Number: 19-493

Appendix C

Screening Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in this study on what it is like to be married to a woman serving active duty in the United States military. This is a brief screening of six questions to determine your eligibility to participate in this research study. Your responses will only be used to determine your eligibility and will not be included as data. All responses will be destroyed after the recruitment process for this study is completed.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research participant, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

I have read the conditions of this screening questionnaire. By continuing to the questionnaire, I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in this screening questionnaire.

1. Are you 18 years or older? Yes/No
2. Are you currently married to an active duty female member of the United States military? Yes/No
3. Are you currently serving as a member of the United States military? Yes/No
4. Have you experienced at least one relocation or permanent change of station (PCS) during your time as the civilian husband of a female service member? Yes/No
5. Are you comfortable comprehending and speaking proficient English to participate in an approximately 60-minute interview regarding your experience being married to an active duty female member of the United States military? Yes/No
6. How did you find out about this study? _____

If responses 1, 2, 4, 5 are Yes and 3 is No: Congratulations! You meet criteria to participate in this study on experiences of civilian husbands of servicewomen. Continuing with the study will entail a phone interview lasting about an hour, during which you will be asked questions about your experiences. If you would to participate in this study, please provide your email address. I will email you within 48 hours with a copy of the informed consent form, which will provide more detailed information about the study, as well as options to schedule a phone call should you choose to participate in the study. Please feel free to reach out to me at lemilyd@vt.edu if you have any questions.

If any responses except to 3 are No: Unfortunately, you do not meet the criteria to participate in this study on experiences of civilian husbands of servicewomen. We appreciate your time and interest in the study. Please feel free to share the information about this study with anyone who you think may be interested. Thank you!

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

providers to which you are referred shall be your responsibility, and shall not be covered by the researchers, nor Virginia Tech.

IV. Benefits: The answers you provide will help us learn about individual's experience of being married to a female military service member. Talking about your experiences may be rewarding for you; however, no promise or guarantee of benefits can be made as an incentive for your participation.

V. Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep the information you provide strictly confidential. All identifying information provided in the audio-recorded interview will be removed and replaced with aliases in the typed transcript and study report. Individuals with access to the audio recording and original transcript include the Principal Investigator, the Co-Investigator, and professional transcriptionists. The audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed and checked. Any identifiable information will be stored separately and securely from the coded data to protect your confidentiality. Portions of your interview text may be used verbatim in the thesis report and/or in subsequent publications, however, your name and other identifying information will not be disclosed on any reports or publications. Please note the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The HRPP is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human participants involved in research.

Required reporting that might occur as a result of our research includes any suspicion or disclosure of child abuse or neglect, abuse of a vulnerable adult, or abuse of an elderly individual. Additionally, we will be required to report expressed intent to harm oneself or others.

VI. Compensation: You can choose to be entered into a drawing for one \$50 Amazon gift-card for your participation. The odds of receiving a \$50 gift card are approximately 1 in 4, depending on how many people participate. Please indicate if you would like to be entered in the drawing below:

I want to be entered in the raffle.

I **do not** want to be entered in the raffle.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw: It is important for you to know that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty. Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a participant should not continue in the research study. Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will not be entered into the gift card raffle in accordance with the Compensation section of this document. If you decide to leave the research, contact the Co-Investigator in order for any of your data to be destroyed.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include misleading researchers about participant eligibility.

VIII. Questions or Concerns. Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or complaints regarding this research study, or you are unable to reach the research staff, you may contact a person independent of the research team at the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program at 540-231-3732. Questions, concerns or complaints about research can also be registered with the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

IX. Participant's Consent: I have read the Consent Form and the conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered, and I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. I **do/do not** want to be emailed following analysis to review results. I **do/do not** want to be entered into a drawing to win one \$50 Amazon gift card. I **do/do not** consent to be audio recorded.

Participant's name (written by investigator)

Investigator's name

Signature of investigator

Date

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study exploring the experience of being married to an active duty U.S. military servicewoman. The first part of the interview is about your basic background information. Your answers to the demographic questions will not be audio-recorded, but I will be recording your responses. If you are uncomfortable answering any of the following questions, you may choose to not answer those questions.

- 1) Age (in years)
- 2) Race
- 3) Occupation
- 4) Household income
 - a. Personal income
 - b. Spouse's income
- 5) Highest education obtained
- 6) Religious affiliation
- 7) Length of relationship with current spouse (years)
- 8) Length of marriage with current spouse (years)
- 9) Number of children
- 10) In what branch does your wife serve?
 - a. Army
 - b. Navy
 - c. Air Force
 - d. Marine Corps
 - e. Coast Guard
 - f. National Guard
- 11) What is your wife's current rank in the military?
- 12) Do you currently live on or off base?
- 13) What city/state/country do you live?
- 14) Is your current marriage your first?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No: How many other times have you been married?
- 15) Have you ever been enlisted or commissioned as an officer in the military?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes:
 - i. What branch of the military did you serve?
 - a. Army
 - b. Navy
 - c. Air Force
 - d. Marine Corps
 - e. Coast Guard
 - f. National Guard
 - ii. How long were you an active duty member?
 - iii. What was the last rank you achieved?

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

- iv. Was your current marriage ever dual-military? (both spouses serving on active duty at the same time)
- 16) Did your spouse's military service begin before or during marriage?
- 17) Have you experienced relocation/permanent change of station (PCS) as a civilian spouse?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes: How many times have you experienced PCS?
 - i. Have you ever lived outside of the continental United States as a civilian spouse?

Appendix F

Interview Guide

- Grand tour question 1: Tell me about your experience as a civilian husband of a U.S. military servicewoman?
 - Similarly, tell me about your experience in terms of your employment, given the PCS you've experienced due to your wife's active duty status?
 - Have you experienced any challenges or help with your employment because of your wife's military service? If so, can you tell me more about that?
 - What do you believe the roles of a husband are in a marriage? In what way, if any, does the military shape these beliefs?
 - What do you believe the roles of a wife are in a marriage? In what way, if any, does the military shape these beliefs?
 - How do you and your wife go about making decisions in your household?
- Grand tour question 2: What is your experience around your masculinity as the husband of a military member?
 - How would you describe what it means to be "masculine?"
 - Have you noticed any changes in how you view masculinity over the course of your marriage?
 - What has stayed the same in your view of masculinity? How and why?
 - What has changed in your view of masculinity? How and why?
 - What is your experience around masculinity in general within military culture?
 - What have you experienced in terms of military culture?
 - What, if any, stereotypes do you believe exist about civilian husbands of servicewomen?

If there is enough time, the following questions will be asked:

- What is your experience of military resources for spouses?
- What would you change (if anything) about the available resources?
- What advice might you have for other civilian husbands of servicewomen?

Appendix G

Confidentially Agreement for Transcriptionist

The following paragraph contains the policies to which the participants in this study agreed. Please read it carefully as you will be required to help us protect the confidentiality and rights of the study participants.

Every effort will be made to keep the information you provide strictly confidential. All identifying information provided in the audio-recorded interview will be removed and replaced with aliases in the typed transcript and study report. Individuals with access to the audio recording and original transcript include the Principal Investigator, the Co-Investigator, and professional transcriptionists. The audio tapes will be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed and checked. Any identifiable information will be stored separately and securely from the coded data to protect your confidentiality. Portions of your interview text may be used verbatim in the thesis report and/or in subsequent publications, however, your name and other identifying information will not be disclosed on any reports or publications. Please note the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human participants involved in research.

I, (*print name*) _____, understand that through the experience I will have in working on this research study, that I must maintain strict confidentiality as to any identifying information of the study participants; any information as to the participants and/or their families must remain within strictest confidence in order to protect the privacy, rights, sensitivities, and feelings of the participants involved in this study.

Appendix H

Informant Feedback Email

Good afternoon,

I have completed the interview and results process of *Experiences of Civilian Husbands of U.S. Military Servicewomen*. I appreciate your participation in this study, and thank you for your willingness to share your perspectives. Based on your interview and those of other participants, I have identified several themes that are attached to this email. As part of the research process, it would be helpful for me to have you review the results. I would greatly appreciate your feedback, including any recommended changes or additions. If you are willing to provide feedback, please email it to me no later than 3/9/2020.

If participant's name was not drawn: Additionally, as the study has come to an end, I have completed the random drawing for the four gift cards. Unfortunately, your name was not drawn for either of the four gift cards.

If participant's name was drawn: Additionally, as the study has come to an end, I have completed the random drawing for the four gift cards. Your name was drawn for one of the four gift cards. Please confirm your email address and I will send you a link to accept the gift card!

Please let me know if you have any other questions or comments. Thank you again for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

L. Emily Dowling
Virginia Tech Marriage and Family Therapy Masters Candidate
lemilyd@vt.edu

Appendix I

Preliminary Results Summary

Thank you for your participation in this study. We would be extremely grateful if you are willing to provide feedback on the themes researchers found during analysis of all interviews; however, your feedback is not mandatory and there is no penalty for choosing not to respond.

Instructions: Please read the following themes derived from all participant interviews. Please note that some of the themes may not resonate with your experience directly, because they are representative of a summary of participant experiences. Each subtheme includes percentages of participants who described similar experiences. Any feedback you would like to provide can either be typed into this document and returned to the researcher via email, or included in the body of an email. **If you are interested in providing feedback, please do so no later than 3/9/2020.**

The three major themes that emerged from the 22 interviews conducted were: Defining Masculinity, Minority in the Military, and Wife as Primary Provider/"Breadwinner." Each theme includes subthemes as well, which will be outlined below.

In **Defining Masculinity**, many men described changes in their perceptions of themselves and other men over the course of their marriage to a woman serving in the military. One of the changes described by 82% of participants was learning that it was important in their role as husband to **emotionally support** their wife and children (if any), and described leading their family through "being the man they need me to be, even if it means my career takes a backseat." Another change 55% of participants described was developing some **flexibility in their role** in the marriage, by "wearing many hats" that included roles more stereotypically associated with women, such as a domestic role (overseeing and completing various household tasks) and a caregiver role (taking care of caregiving of children) in addition to the financial contributions more traditionally expected of husbands. Finally, about 32% of men noted that many changes in their view of masculinity/men's roles in marriage were not simply a result of their own marriage, but also a reflection of **changing societal expectations** for men and women.

As a **Minority in the Military**, many men reported various challenges. About 82% of men spoke about male spouses as "**role reversals**" due to the majority of service members being male with civilian wives. About 77% of participants discussed the military as a **traditional or male-dominant culture**, in which 41% noticed their wives were discriminated against either by leadership or subordinates, and about 27% felt judged by service members because of their role as a civilian spouse. Close to half of the participants felt as if their own **masculinity was questioned** by others because they are a civilian spouse or that they felt some confusion in how to behave because so many civilian spouses are women. Almost 60% of participants reported that they **do not feel emasculated** in the role as a civilian spouse or that it takes a masculine confidence to be in a minority position. Approximately 70% spoke about the **difficulty and importance of finding male peers** and feeling like part of a community, and approximately 64% noted the "**invisibility**" of male spouses either in the community or the public eye, or both.

ROLE REVERSAL: CIVILIAN HUSBANDS

About 73% reported a **lack of inclusivity** in spouse events or resources that are primarily geared towards civilian wives. Almost 60% of participants spoke about **changing military demographics** (that as more women join the service, there will be more male spouses, or increasing numbers of same-sex couples). About 30% of participants experienced feeling **ostracized by civilian wives** who may have felt awkward having a man present at an event. There seemed to be both a **hesitance for men to get involved and a need for male involvement** in events (32%), in that men are not inclined to participate because of stigma or events that were not inclusive, yet some men felt that male involvement is necessary for organizational change. About half of participants also spoke about a **need for outreach** in the services that are available and useful, such as mental health and employment resources, or noted that they did not use resources because they were not aware of them or felt the available ones were not meant for them. Finally, about a third of participants described a **new understanding of minority experiences** of others during their time as a civilian spouse, such as an understanding of microaggressions or the awkwardness of feeling different than everyone else around them.

Although not all participants made significantly less money than their wives, a major theme that emerged was the **Wife as Primary Provider/Breadwinner**. Subthemes included benefits or factors that contribute to comfort in this role, and challenges or factors that contribute to discomfort in this role. Participants were not grouped into who was comfortable or uncomfortable with having their wife be the primary provider; each situation was seen in its complexity, with many men explaining both challenges *and* benefits and only very few noting one or the other. **Benefits** included having an **equal/egalitarian** relationship with partner (86%), **redefining “providing”** to include contributions to the family in ways that are not solely financial (59%), the **financial stability** and benefits of wife’s career (36%), **pride in wife’s accomplishments** (36%), feeling **support from others** such as family members that allowed acceptance in earning less money (27%), feeling **freedom to find a job I like** that may not have been possible as the primary provider for the family (23%), the **ability to become a stay-at-home dad** (23%), and **the way they saw their parents** handle work in their relationship that shaped their own views on careers and marriage (23%).

Challenges in not being the breadwinner for the family included the following: the **impact of uncertainty/loss of control** that makes a career difficult because of PCS (73%, although many men also described this same uncertainty as “exciting” or “adventure”), **societal expectations** that define husbands as breadwinners and judge them if they are not (68%), the difficulty of **putting their own career on backburner** (55%; about 23% also included in this the importance of flexibility in their lives due to wife’s demanding career that made it difficult to work on an employer’s schedule), a negative **impact on well-being** such as depression from employment challenges (32%), **rejection of “dependent” label** as a male spouse (such as some anger that others may see him as a “kept man”) (32%), being **unable to contribute financially** as much as they would like (32%), and having been **raised by parents to believe that men should be breadwinners** (32%).