Military Spouse Communication
and Communicational Intimacy via
Social Networking Sites
during Overseas Deployment:
A Qualitative Study

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to all military spouses and families who support our servicemen and women at home and abroad. I will never truly grasp the depth of strength and sacrifice that our nation's soldiers and families endure to protect the freedom of this nation. Our country is deeply indebted to you.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

During military deployments, spouses are often left to communicate via computer-mediated, text-based communication, including social networking sites. The purpose of this paper is to explore how social media sites are used for communication between military spouses during military deployments and the level of communicational intimacy achieved in this communication as compared to face-to-face communication. Research was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews exploring the individual lived experiences of military spouses and openness achieved through social media sites. This qualitative study provides a better understanding of how social networking sites can be used to maintain intimacy in long-distance relationships and allow military spouses to select the best social media platforms during extended deployments to make them more effective online communicators. This study utilized the framework of social information processing theory applied to the specific relational scenario that relies on CMC and social networking sites, and provide a description of a complex communication scenario that had otherwise been unexplored in modern research concerning social networking sites, intimacy and interpersonal communication via social media.

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Introduction

As social media grows, available channels of interpersonal communication within social media platforms do also. During military deployments, spouses are often left to communicate via computer-mediated, text-based communication, including social networking sites. In order to help military spouses better communicate during times of extended absence, they need to understand how social media sites affect communication intimacy online. Through a qualitative analysis of one-on-one, semi-structured interview data, this study explored the individual lived experiences of military spouses and perceptions of intimacy achieved through social media sites.

This research explored how social media sites are used for communication between military spouses during military deployments and the level of communicative intimacy achieved in this communication as compared to face-to-face communication, in order to help military spouses determine which of these text-based environments allow him or her to maintain intimacy with a spouse during times of extended separation.

This study provides better understanding of how computer-mediated communication and social networking sites can be used to maintain intimacy in long-distance relationships and allow military spouses to select the best social media platforms during extended deployments to make them more effective online communicators. This study helps test the holistic integrity of social information processing theory, a foundational theory in the study of computer-mediated communication, through the framework of a specific relational scenario that relies on computer-mediated communication and social media. Finally, this study provides a description of a complex communication scenario that has otherwise been unexplored in modern research concerning social media sites, intimacy and interpersonal communication via social media sites to guide and enable future hypotheses and research concerning CMC and communication via social networking sites.

Relevant Theory of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Thompson (1995) outlines three types of interactions: (1) face-to-face, (2) mediated, and (3) mediated quasi-interaction. Mediated interaction occurs via a technical medium, resulting in fewer conversational cues (Thompson, 1995). Mediated quasi-interaction involves relationship development via mass communication, where an indefinite number of recipients exist (Thompson, 1995). The distinction between face-to-face and mediated and quasi-mediated communication lies in the separation of time and space (Thompson, 1995). Face-to-face partners share space and time, whereas mediated partners do not, making these interactions a point of interest for the field of communication (Thompson, 1995). Thus, face-to-face communication is that which occurs without time and space separation, where the potential for "a two-way flow of information and communication" (Thompson, 1995, p. 83) is available.

Computer-mediated communication is mediated, electronic communication between sender and receiver, synchronous or asynchronous, in which nonverbal cues are often filtered out (Griffin, 2012; Walther, 1992). Communication theorists have sought to explain the differences and effects of computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication. While much of this theory was developed before the rise of social media, a body of modern research has focused on social networking sites as a component of CMC (Bazarova, 2012; Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2013; Dwyer, 2007; Yang, Brown, & Braun, 2014). Theory surrounding CMC has taken two distinct approaches to describing face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication.

Cues Filtered Out Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication

Some theorists assert that the lack of cues available in CMC is detrimental to the communication process. Social presence theory, media richness theory and lack of social context cues have addressed the lack of nonverbal cues that accompany CMC and how this affects interpersonal communication (Walther, 1992).

Social presence refers to the quality of the communication medium, the channels and codes available within the medium (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). According to the theory, as social presence reduces, communication becomes more impersonal (Short et al., 1976). Computer mediated communication is therefore low in social presence, compared to face-to-face communication, due to its lack of nonverbal cues, facial expression, dress, posture, etc., thus, negatively affecting the communication process (Short et al., 1976).

Media richness theory measures the richness of medium based on its ability to enable shared meaning (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987). Face-to-face is the richest medium, allowing rapid and immediate feedback (Daft et al., 1987). CMC is considered very low in richness, due to lack of nonverbal cues, while videoconferencing and telephone falling slightly higher on the richness scale (Daft et al., 1987). Lack of verbal cues available in CMC is viewed as negatively affecting the communication process.

Sproull and Kiesler (1986) describe variables that contribute to social context: situational, organizational and geographic variables (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). These variables include social norms, sender/receiver relationship, physical location or position within an organization (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). The authors found that lack of social context cues in CMC led to self-absorption and uninhibited communication behavior, such as increased willingness to communicate negative information or bad news and "flaming," or incessant attitude, swearing

about a topic (Sproull & Kiesler, 1987). In accordance with social presence and media richness, lack of social context cues view CMC as an inferior communication process to other forms, such as FtF.

These theories of social presence, media richness, and lack of social context cues assert that nonverbal cues often minimal in CMC have negative impact on the quality of communication. Walther (1992) introduced social information processing theory, which contrasts these cues filtered out approaches to CMC.

Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory

Social information processing theory, and the associated hyperpersonal model, has become a widely-used theory for the study of computer-mediated communication and the differences between text-based and face-to-face communication (Walther, 1992; Walther, 1996; see also Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011; Walther, Loh & Granka, 2005; Antheunis, Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2012). The theory is rooted in the belief that individuals first gain information about each other, then form impressions based on the information gathered (Walther, 2011). SIP theory asserts that computer-mediated communicators are able to achieve the level of relationship development that is achieved in off-line communication, due to communicators' motivation to develop impressions and affinity irrespective of the communication channel (Walther, 2011).

Unlike cues filtered out theorists, social information processing theory asserts that lack of nonverbal cues is *not* detrimental to relational development in CMC (Walther, 1992). The theory contends that users adapt communication when nonverbal cues, available in face-to-face communication, are unavailable (Walther, 2011). Users form impressions based on the language and timing of messages (Walther, 2011). SIP theory also contends CMC occurs at a slower rate

than FtF (Walther, 2011). As a result, impression development and relational definition between CMC partners occur more slowly than FtF interactions (Walther, 2011).

Hyperpersonal Model of Social Information Processing Theory

The hyperpersonal model of CMC describes four parts of communication that lead to heightened impressions and interpersonal relations: receivers, senders, channel, and feedback (Walther, 1996). Under the hyperpersonal model, receivers, first, create idealized perceptions of their counterpart through overdependence on minimal cues caused by the lack of physical exposure to the other person (Walther, 1996). This assertion draws on social identity-deindividuation (SIDE) theory which suggests that a lack of FtF cues creates deindividuation (Spears & Lea, 1992). This circumstance causes receivers to over-attribute similarity, creating conventional impressions of their counterpart without substantiation (Walther, 1996).

Second, senders engage in self-selective presentation, caused by reduced communication cues and/or an asynchronous communication environment (Walther, 1996). CMC allows senders to modify text-based communication to create favorable impressions, while escaping inadvertent nonverbal cues (Walther, 1996). The sender also engages in cognitive reallocation, apportioning more resources to message construction in CMC, since physical backchanneling (smiling, nodding) is unnecessary (Walther, 1996).

Third, CMC offers an asynchronous channel, eliminating the necessity of physical presence during communication (Walther, 1996). Parties may communicate at their convenience, without the constraint of time, allowing focus on deliberate and selective message construction (Walther, 1996).

Lastly, the sender, receiver and channel components are related through feedback, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Walther, 1996; Walther, Slovacek & Tidwell, 2001). When

a partner creates a favorable impression, the partner has a propensity to act favorably toward the partner based on the impression, referred to as behavioral confirmation (Walther et al., 2001; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). The same action may occur for unfavorable interactions, based on anticipated length of relational commitment (Walther et al., 2001). Walther, Slovacek, & Tidwell (2001) assert, "If CMC users anticipate a long-term commitment with their partners, they initiate affiliative behaviors, and as time accrues, these experiences affect communication patterns through the [sender, receiver and channel] processes" (p. 111).

Like social information processing theory, the hyperpersonal model "stakes it claims…on evolving attraction through message exchange processes" (Walther, Gay & Hancock, 2005, p. 644). Additional research has added extensions to the hyperpersonal model. Research revealed that personal questions and disclosures were more prevalent and more intimate in online discussions among strangers than face-to-face discussions (Joinson, 2001; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Jiang, Bazarova and Hancock (2011) proposed a disclosure-intimacy link in computer-mediated communication. The study showed that CMC users experience greater intimacy upon receiving self-disclosures than FtF interactions (Jiang et al, 2011). A 2013 study by Jiang & Hancock also demonstrated that long distance couples experience more intimacy than geographically close couples when studied on an interaction-by-interaction basis (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). The study found that as interactions move from face-to-face to text-based, asynchronous interactions, the need for interpersonal conversation triggers adaptive communication behavior, such a selective self-presentation and uncertainty-reducing strategies (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). The text-based asynchronous environment also led to idealized relational perceptions, like over-attribution (Jiang & Hancock, 2013). The research supported previous findings and Walther's hyperpersonal model (Jiang & Hancock, 2013).

In spite of research supporting and extending the four effects described by the hyperpersonal model (Jiang et al., 2011; Jiang & Hancock, 2013), aspects of the model have been criticized as being under researched, "including the holistic integrity of the subcomponents" (Walther, 2011, p. 460). As Griffin (2012) states, "Good theory should offer a central explanatory mechanism to drive a synthesis of the observed effects" (p. 148) which the hyperpersonal model is criticized for lacking:

> It is not clear at all whether there are any necessary theoretical linkages among and between the four major subcomponents and the more detailed processes that the model specifies. In other words, its constructs and propositions are poorly interrelated, and its status as a robust theory is therefore tenuous (Walther & Parks, 2002, p. 542).

Additionally, little research has been done examining relationships that begin offline and become geographically separated (Tong & Walther, 2011). In 1990, Stafford and Reske determined that higher perception of love and marital adjustment were correlated with higher frequency of couples sending letters to one another (Tong & Walther, 2011). Stafford and Reske (1990) proposed that written communication led to idealization of the partner. This finding has not been explored in a CMC study, however.

The present research attempts to help test the holistic integrity of social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal model by focusing on a specific relational communication scenario that relies on CMC and social media, along with a special focus on offline relationships that move online. The present study will provide a description of a complex scenario to understand the perceived level of communicational intimacy achieved via CMC.

Social Penetration and Relationship Development

During Em Griffin's interview of Joe Walther (n.d.), Walther acknowledged that in romantic love and physical intimacy, computer-mediated communication only reaches a certain point, at which he says, the human species would not go on. Intimacy, he says, is not all equal (Griffin & Walther,). Type of intimacy is central to the present study of social information processing theory and the hyperpersonal model. The present study does not focus on romantic intimacy and physical affection, but rather the conversational, relational intimacy achieved via FtF and CMC. Social penetration theory and explications of social penetration theory provide avenues for examining intimacy for this study (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Altman and Taylor (1973) proposed the social penetration model, describing how intimacy in interpersonal communication develops from non-intimate, superficial levels to intimate, deeper levels, and accordingly, how this intimacy dissolves. The theory asserts that through a process of self-disclosure, depending closeness is developed between communicators (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Altman and Taylor (1973) introduced the notorious onion analogy, comparing the layers of onion to the depth of interpersonal communication intimacy. At the outer layers are biographical data, personal preference in food, clothing, and music, and goals and aspirations (Griffin, 2012). Religious conviction, deeply held fears and fantasies, and concept of self comprise the innermost layers (Griffin, 2012). The inner layers of the onion are more difficult to penetrate (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Greater intimacy in interpersonal communication is achieved by penetrating deeper through the layers (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

In addition to the depth of intimacy, social penetration also refers to breadth, or the number of major topic categories that are made accessible in an interpersonal relationship (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Interactions in an interpersonal relationship involve continued

interactions in established areas as well as new, unexplored areas which expand breadth (Altman & Taylor, 1973). At issue is the present is both the breadth, which the authors also refer to as "richness," and depth of interpersonal interactions (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Social penetration theory also discusses relational costs and rewards, hypothesizing that relationship advancement is highly reliant on the amount and nature of costs and rewards (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This aspect of social penetration theory is not at focus in the present study (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Knapp (1978) further explicated Altman and Taylor's (1973) theory, categorizing ten phases of relational maintenance that describe the coming together and falling apart processes of a relationship. The phases create the relationship escalation model and relationship termination model (Knapp, 1978). The relationship escalation process consists of initiation, experimentation, intensifying, integration, and bonding (Knapp, 1978). The relationship termination process consists of differentiating, circumscribing, stagnation, avoidance, and terminating (Knapp, 1978).

At the start of relational escalation, the initiation stage describes the initial impression development, which can be based on physical appearance (Knapp, 1978). In experimentation, also known as the probing stage, parties seek more information and analyze the other for commonalities to determine if the relationship should continue (Knapp, 1978). The intensifying stage involves relationship nurturing, such as spending time together or gift giving (Knapp, 1978). Integration is marked by a growing level of intimacy and closeness, followed by bonding, in which the couple announces their relationship and makes their commitment recognized legally (Knapp, 1978).

The stages of relationship termination begin with differentiating, in which partners begin thinking as individuals rather than as a couple (Knapp, 1978). Circumscribing describes barriers in conversation, personal space and activities, which is heightened in stagnation (Knapp, 1978). Partners in stagnation may choose not to separate due to children or other reasons (Knapp, 1978). Stagnation is followed by avoidance, in which partners deliberately avoid the other party (Knapp, 1978). The relationship ends with termination, in which partners in a relationship begin separate lives (Knapp, 1978).

Knapp (1978) notes these stages are achieved at varying speeds and time. Stages may be skipped and partners in escalation or termination may regress a stage or stages (Knapp, 1978). Knapp's relationship model, while considered complete in its description of the relational life-cycle, lacks a deductive method for determining the stage in which a couple exists (Avtgis, West & Anderson, 1998). Avtgis, West, and Anderson (1998) created a matrix describing the cognitive, affective and behavioral responses associated with Knapp's stages of coming together and coming apart. For example, in the integrating stage, partners shared intimate feelings, talked about the future and reflected on common experiences (Avtgis et al., 1998). In the differentiating stage, partners argued, apologized, and discussed incompatibility and felt lonely and slightly distant (Avtgis et al., 1998).

Knapp's relational model and social penetration theory provide means for examining intimacy and relational closeness among military spouses communicating via computer-mediated communication and social networking sites during an overseas deployment. The existing body of literature allows investigation into whether the marital relationship is suffering when relying on computer-mediated communication to span the distance between partners.

CMC and Long-Distance Relationships

Long-distance relationships are characterized by geographic separation and a lack of face-to-face interaction (Aylor, 2003). Long-distance partners face unique challenges, such as restricted communication, that lead to higher reliance on mediated communication channels than geographically close couples (Aylor, 2003). Computer-mediated communication has been praised for its ability to span the distance between partners (Stafford, 2005).

CMC provides a valuable medium for relational maintenance (Rabby & Walther, 2003; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009; Tong & Walther, 2011), including for geographically separated couples and/or those who do not see each other face-to-face frequently (Dwyer, 2007). Sending a message allows the relationship to remain existent, and can also be considered an attempt at openness with the partner (Rabby & Walther, 2003). The purpose of each message indicates a specific relational maintenance strategy between partners (Rabby & Walther, 2003). When CMC is the primary medium for relational partners, the way in which partners engage in relational maintenance differs (Rabby & Walther, 2003; Gunn & Gunn, 2000).

Gunn and Gunn (2000) studied the impact of CMC on existing long-distance relationships. The study revealed that partners using CMC for relational maintenance reported more closeness and greater love, along with less insecurity about the relationship than partners who did not use CMC for relational maintenance (Gunn & Gunn, 2000). The researchers supported frequency of contact as a key variable in the findings (Gunn & Gunn, 2000). The research also supported the hyperpersonal model, with CMC partners reporting higher levels of disclosure (Gunn & Gunn, 2000).

Aylor (2003) asserts that more research needs to focus on LDRs, including a focus on communication channel. According to Aylor (2003), some researchers "have argued that the

reasons partners separate (e.g., attending college, starting a new job, enlisting in the military) make certain types of distance relationships qualitatively different (Rohlfing, 1995; Sahlstein, 1999)." (Aylor, 2003, p. 136). Separation for an overseas military deployment is different from attending college or starting a new job in a new location as it relates to interpersonal communication.

A qualitative difference is also present based on the type of relationship being studied. Ramirez and Broneck (2009) found that varying relationship maintenance strategies are employed depending on the nature of the relationship. For example, assurances and positivity were used more with romantic partners in CMC, while network and openness were more present during interactions with best friends (Ramirez & Broneck, 2009).

The present study attempts to explore a specific instant of geographic separation and relationship type in order to investigate social information processing, communicative intimacy and social media, in hopes of providing initial insight into and direction for further research on long-distance relationships, interpersonal communication and computer-mediated communication.

Intimacy and Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites offer a means for relational maintenance, but how social networking sites relate to intimacy in relationships remains debated. Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao and Swafford (2011) studied Facebook communication and offline communication as a predictor of relational closeness. While Facebook communication did lead to relational closeness, offline communication was a much stronger indicator (Ledbetter et al., 2011). Offline communication included face-to-face, telephone and telephone text-messaging communication (Ledbetter et al., 2011).

In the analysis of a qualitative study, participants highlighted the importance of contact that these social networking sites enable, but called this form of communication "informal" (Dwyer, 2007): "It's informal, very informal you can send a message, they get it on their own time so you never have to worry about bothering somebody with it" (Dwyer, 2007). The findings of a qualitative study by Yang, Brown and Braun (2014) parallels the results, suggesting a hierarchy of intimacy through relationship development, beginning with social media for less intimate companions and progressing to offline for more intimate companions.

Bazarova (2012) conveyed a similar hierarchy of appropriateness for self-disclosure via social networking sites. In the study, greater message and relational intimacy was perceived from private disclosure via SNSs than public disclosures (Bazarova, 2012). Public disclosures were also perceived as less appropriate than private disclosures (Bazarova, 2012).

Based on the understanding that Facebook status updates, wall posts and private messages represent distinct levels of directedness and publicness, the Facebook participation structure, Bazarova, Taft, Choi and Cosley (2013) argued that publicness and directedness affects how users expressed emotions when communicating in this medium, due to user concerns of self-presentation and partner familiarity. The authors examined the six most recent status updates, wall posts, and private messages of the participants (Bazarova, et al., 2013). The participants were asked about self-presentational concerns and familiarity level for the target of each post and message (Bazarova, et al., 2013). Posts, statuses and private messages were analyzed for positive and negative emotion words, along with verbal immediacy (Bazarova, et al., 2013). The results indicated user adaptation of language for varying audiences and situation (public, private, direct, indirect within the Facebook medium (Bazarova, et al., 2013).

Bazarova, Taft, Choi and Cosley (2013) revealed that the expression of positive emotions was not different among status updates, wall posts and private messages. Status updates contained fewer negative emotion words than wall posts and private messages (Bazarova, et al., 2013). Increased self-presentational concerns were correlated with increased use of positive emotion words in status updates, compared with wall posts or private messages (Bazarova, et al., 2013). Private messages were found to be more verbally immediate than wall posts (Bazarova, et al., 2013). Verbal immediacy and partner familiarity were not related in private messages; the two were significantly related in wall posts (Bazarova, et al., 2013). These results indicate user adaptation of language for varying audiences and situations within the medium (Bazarova, et al., 2013).

Collectively, prior research (Bazarova, 2012; Bazarova, et al., 2013; Dwyer, 2007; Ledbetter et al., 2011; Yang, et al., 2014) suggests that the most intimate conversations are reserved for and considered most appropriate when conducted via direct, private communication from one party to another.

Relationship Maintenance and Military Deployments

Deployment presents many challenges to military spouses, including the ability to engage in relational maintenance with their spouses. For soldiers and their partners, deployment separations are impactful on military spouses, including on relational closeness and marital satisfaction (Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006; Wood, Scarville, & Gravino, 1995). Military separations can negatively affect the relationship and can result in feelings of loneliness, depression, and intense separation for military spouses (Wood, et al., 1995). Scholars have proposed that deployment stress may be mitigated by relational satisfaction and a sense of connection (Bell & Schumm, 1999).

Deployed soldiers and their non-deployed counterparts engage in relational maintenance activities to build this sense of connection (Kim, Kawamura, Jerny-David, Kim, Raphael, & Lau, 2005; Merolla, 2010). Merolla (2010) found that mediated channels are one of three categories through which spouses engage in relational maintenance during deployment. Military spouses use mediated channels, including phone, letters/care packages, e-mail, digital photos, instant messaging, video messages and webcam. Communication between spouses in the study was characterized by categories including: debriefing talk, topic avoidance, affection and intimacy, creating and keeping communication routines, future planning, openness, reassuring safety, positivity and faith talk (Merolla, 2010). Merolla (2010) also noted factors that influence maintenance, including time and privacy/security concerns. Deployed soldiers are often forced into time restrictions (Merolla, 2010). Public internet or phone areas, along with open or semi-open bays for housing, also generates privacy and security concerns as well (Merolla, 2010). Concerns of time availability and privacy/security were also noted in a 2012 study by Ponder and Aguirre, which reported computer-based communication as the primary mode of spousal communication.

Consistent with the hyperpersonal model, time restrictions play an important role in relational maintenance. In a study of military spouses, Wood, Scarville and Gravino (1995) noted:

> A major theme among the wives at the midpoint of deployment was that separation had, counterintuitively, brought husband and wife closer together. For some couples, communications during this period reached a higher level than when the men were physically home. For example, several women commented that boring duty and little else to occupy their husbands' free time, the men...concentrated more on their families. This

contrasts with the shorter field training separations at home when little telephoning or letter-writing occurs (p. 224).

While prior research both confirms that military spouses engage in relational maintenance during deployment (Kim, et al., 2005; Merolla, 2010) and suggests that communication may even reach a higher level during deployment, the ability of computer-mediated communication and communication via social networking sites to achieve this closeness has yet to be studied by modern researchers. Thus, computer-mediated communication as a means of relational maintenance becomes an important point of study for military spouses, at focus in the present research.

The present study seeks to explore:

RQ1: In the pretext of an established, monogamous relationship, through what computer-mediated, text-based channel(s) do spouses believe they can spouses achieve the highest level of intimacy?

RQ2: Do communicators using CMC for relationship maintenance with a romantic partner perceive a greater level of communicative intimacy via CMC or FtF communication?

RQ3: In the study of established, monogamous relationships, is the holistic integrity of social information processing theory and the notion of greater achieved intimacy supported?

Methodology

Data was collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with military spouses.

Participant Requirements

Participants were legally married and defined as a dependent to his or her spouse by military characterization. Spouses were required to have experienced one or more overseas

deployments while married to his or her spouse, with an approximate duration of 9 months. Spouses with currently deployed service members were considered a vulnerable population and were excluded from the study. Spouses must have used social networking site(s) to communicate with his or her spouse during overseas deployment.

Social Networking Sites

All participants were required to have used social networking site(s) for communication during an overseas deployment, although frequency of communication through this channel or use of specific social networking sites was not specified. Participants determined their own eligibility whether social media sites were used.

Sampling Procedures

The sample represented a homogenous, convenience sample of six spouses recruited through the social network of the researcher. This included on-campus recruitment via e-mail bulletin board announcements along with direct contact and referrals from off-campus participants. Initial interest in participation was received through e-mail. Approximately 70 percent of participants who expressed interest prior reviewing minimum criteria did not meet the requirements for the interview. These participants included those who: (1) had access to but did not use social media sites during deployment, (2) did not have access to social networking site/social media did not exist during the time of deployment, (3) were spouses of currently deployed soldiers, an excluded, vulnerable population per the institutional review board, or (4) have never experienced an overseas deployment. Multiple requests were received requesting interviews via a communication channel other than face-to-face, such as telephone or videoconferencing service, due to the geographic separation of referral participants. Only face-to-face interviews were conducted, as approved by the institutional review board.

Interview Procedures

One-on-one interviews between interviewer and spouse took place at a location convenient to the research participant. All interviews took place in a closed-off room without interruption from family members or passers-by, such as a conference room, office or family home. Interviewer and participant sat face-to-face at the corner of the conference room, office, or coffee table. Interviewer and research participant exchanged introductions and pleasantries before interviews began, and interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants for use for later transcription accuracy. All names or identifiable information were omitted from typed transcripts, as noted by the researcher prior to each interview.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions related to her experience with communication methods and use of social networking sites to communicate with her spouse during overseas deployment. General focuses included the following: frequency of communication via all communication channels; frequency and type of communication via social networking sites; perception of communicational intimacy achieved via social networking sites; relationship maintenance via social networking sites; and, changes in communication throughout overseas deployment. A full list of questions is available in Appendix A.

Participants responded to all questions asked by the interviewer focusing on the topics noted above. Participants shared experiences and thoughts related to her use of computer-mediated communication and social networking sites during an overseas deployment, although no participants discussed topics related to physical intimacy via computer-mediated communication. Interviews took from 27 to 53 minutes to complete for each research participant.

Textual Analysis

Interview transcripts were manually transcribed following completion of all interviews and reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts were analyzed for common themes regarding spouses' experiences with social media, relationship maintenance and intimacy via computer-mediated communication during overseas deployments. The transcript of each interview is included in Appendix B. Demographic questions including gender, age, spousal rank, years of service, and gender answered by each interviewee have been removed from the transcripts to maintain the utmost anonymity and privacy of interviewees per the institutional review board. Results from the questions omitted from the transcripts are summarized in the results section.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Five spouses ranging in age from 20 to 24 stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky completed interviews for the study. All spouses were female. Each spouse had been married to her husband between two and four years. None of the couples had children.

Three of the five spouses knew her husband prior to his service in the U.S. Army. Four spouses' soldiers were junior enlisted soldiers, ranked E-4 Specialist or Corporal. One spouses' soldier was an officer, ranked O-3 Captain. Soldiers have served in the Army ranging from three to six years, experiencing one to two overseas deployments to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Frequency and Forms of Communication

Spouses cited the following as estimations of how often she was able to communicate with her spouse:

- − Two times per week
- − "All the time" when time difference didn't interfere

- Once a day

- Every other day

- Five days per week, 4 hours total per day

Spouses listed Facebook Messenger, Skype, phone, e-mail and Viber as the forms of communication used to maintain contact with her spouse. Four of five spouses cited Facebook Messenger as being the most frequently used form of communication, describing it as "the only way" spouses remained in contact, used "by far the most." The Facebook Messenger application allows messages to be received via smartphone with notification when a new message arrives. One spouse named Viber as the most frequently used form of communication. Like Facebook Messenger, Viber is a text-based application that allows messages to arrive directly to the individuals' smartphone and notifies the receiver when a new message is received.

Three spouses listed Skype as the next most frequently used form of communication, which included the phone and video call feature available on Skype. E-mail and phone were listed as the next most frequently used form of communication.

Social Networking Sites Use

Spouses were not provided a definition of social media sites, but asked to arbitrarily define which social media sites she used. When asked to name social media spouses generally used, the following were named:

- Facebook (5 of 5)

- Pintrest (1 of 5)

- Instagram (1 of 5)

- Online games (1 of 5)

- Skype (1 of 5)

While only one spouse named Skype in a general question of all social media sites used, all spouses later named Skype in response to additional questions about social media sites used during their spouses' overseas deployments.

Discussion and Analysis

Social Networking Sites and Communication during Deployment

In this study, spouses were asked to describe how they used various mediums, including social networking sites to engage in relational maintenance and communication with her spouse during overseas deployment. Facebook Messenger was the most frequently cited and most heavily relied-on form of communication addressed in the interviews. This finding is consistent with the popularity of the social networking site, Facebook. According to the Pew Research Center (2015), over 71 percent of online adults use Facebook. Facebook users represent 87 percent of online adults ages 18-29, 73 percent of online adults ages 30-49, 63 percent of online adults ages 50-64, and 56 percent of users 65 and over (Pew Research Center, 2015). Facebook Messenger is made available by having a Facebook account.

While every spouse cited Facebook Messenger as part of the discussion, none of the spouses emphasized other aspects of Facebook as part of her communication with her spouse, such as wall posts or status updates. One spouse specifically mentioned the public aspects of Facebook, saying, "We didn't do wall posts that much because it's not very private" (Interview C). Thus, the frequency of use of these direct, private messaging applications indicates that, of text-based, computer-mediated channels, military spouses perceive they can achieve the highest level of communicational intimacy with her spouse through direct, private, instant messaging applications (RQ1).

Social Media, Social Networking Sites, and Computer-Mediated Communication

This study sought to explore how social networking sites as a part of CMC are used for communication between military spouses during military deployments and the level of intimacy achieved in this communication as compared with face-to-face communication. Spouses in this study named a social networking site, but only a specific aspect of that site, Facebook Messenger. These findings led to further investigation into social networking and social media as an aspect of computer-mediated communication.

Boyd & Ellison (2007) defined social networking sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (2007, p. 211). Facebook, therefore, is a social networking site by definition.

Carr & Hayes (2015) discuss a necessary clarification between social networking sites and the definition of social media, which have been used interchangeably and cause misattributions in modern research. Carr & Hayes (2015) define social media as, "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (p. 50).

Two of the defining characteristics of this definition are (1) disentrained, persistent channels and (2) masspersonal communication (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Carr & Hayes state, "Although value of real-time interaction via social media is noted (as many social media integrate synchronous or real-time messaging capabilities), we forward a *defining* feature of social media is that the channel is persistently available whether a user is active or not,

facilitating disentrained communication" (p. 50). Unlike face-to-face communication where users must be committed at the same time to facilitate communication, channel disentrainment allows discretionary participation by the communication participants.

Masspersonal communication is another defining criteria: "Rather than being limited to dyadic interpersonal interaction such as text messages or letters, or to limited-feedback mass media channels such as radio or television broadcasts, messages can flow from user to user, user to audience, audience to user, or audience to audience in social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 52)," the multidirectional nature of social media.

Under the definition of social media, Carr & Hayes (2015) define social networking sites, including Facebook, as social media. However, Skype, text/SMS, and e-mail are not classified as social media. They also note that in the fast-changing world of modern communication, it is important that the communicative element, not the medium, guide theory.

Interviewees in this study were provided neither an academic nor popular definition of social media when recruited for participation. Interviewees were asked to have used social media to communicate with a spouse during overseas deployments. In one interview, a spouse drew a comparison between multiple text-based platforms: "Viber was extremely fast -- the text messaging through this app. It's another version of Skype, but without the video chat -- similar to Facebook messenger in the text, not video, instant text messaging" (Interview B). Spouses also cited Facebook Messenger as the most frequent and highly used form of communication. Thus by definition (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Carr & Hayes, 2015), military spouses use a popular social networking site, Facebook, to communicate; they do not, however, use a social medium to communicate with her spouse.

As a result of these findings at issue in this analysis are text-based computer-mediated communication and the ability to engage in relational maintenance through text-based platforms including Facebook Messenger, Skype, and Viber, which are not classified as social media for the purposes of discussion and analysis.

Intimacy via CMC versus FtF

Also at focus in this study was whether communicators using CMC for relational maintenance with a spouse perceive a greater level of communicative intimacy via CMC or FtF communication (RQ2). Based on the interviews, it remains undetermined whether greater intimacy can be achieved through CMC than FtF for couples who begin relationships offline and move online for a period of time.

The majority of spouses indicated that CMC was less open than FtF communication and that spouses reserved certain topics for non-texted based channels. However, spouses also indicated that personal preference for text-based or non-text-based communication could affect the perceived intimacy achieved. Additionally, the association of CMC with separation from a military spouse could affect perceived intimacy achieved. The interviews also revealed a number of factors that interfere with the ability to achieve intimacy via CMC.

Communication Habits and Openness via CMC versus FtF

Social penetration theory measures the intimacy of interpersonal communication through the depth and breadth of communication through a process of self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In the interviews, spouses were asked whether they believed that they were "more open" or "less open" with their spouse through CMC versus FtF. Four of five spouses selected that they were "less open" with their spouses through CMC than FtF.

"Less I guess. It's text. You're not in person. I would say less" (Interview D).

"I'm just going back through everything we talked about. I want to say more open but it was also pretty closed. We were just saying it's easier face-to-face than on there. For some people I do think it would be more open, but we just didn't have the time to be open in that's sense" (Interview A).

Spouses were also asked a series of communication habits via various channels of communication, including what they discussed with their spouse using these channels. The responses revealed that spouses "touch base" with her soldier and discuss shared interests and future plans via text-based CMC, but that topics requiring thorough or in-depth discussion were reserved for non-text-based channels.

Topics Discussed via Text-Based CMC Platforms

Using text-based, CMC channels, namely Facebook Messenger and Viber, spouses most frequently cited the ability to "touch base" with her spouse, talk about shared interests and discuss future plans. Military spouses used text-based communication to discuss day to day activities and happenings occurring in their lives and the lives of their spouses.

"…the main purpose [for Facebook Messenger] would be to -- for that I don't want to sit and talk 'Hey what are you doing? How's your day going?' I like that stuff, but I want to know: Are you leaving somewhere and you can't talk for a couple days or hey a big emergency bill came up but I took care of it. It was kind of like the important information and then if we had free time, it would be 'Let's talk' or a phone call or something like that. So Facebook Messenger was more everything good on your side, everything good on my side" (Interview A).

"I was doing just basically saying that I'm okay, he's okay" (Interview B).

"For Skype it was more just how was your day, more like connecting on a personal level where as business things or home things, information more so Facebook [Messenger]" (Interview C).

"For chatting, that would be for daily updates, quick saying hi and less than engaged conversation unless we happened to both be online at the same time" (Interview E).

Spouses also emphasized the importance of discussing topics in which their spouse could share, distinct from the check-in conversations covering the events and updates on each party in the relationship. A specific facet of shared interests was planning for the future, specifically when the spouse was to return from the overseas deployment.

"Remind him of something of home that he can look forward to. He'd always ask me about my workouts and stuff. Showing interest and keeping those interests together and reminding each other of those interests and talk about those all the time. I think that's what we did a lot. A lot" (Interview B).

"Then for our shared experience, we would talk about plans and goals and things for when we were back together" (Interview E).

"We talked about the future" (Interview A).

"It consisted around mainly making sure things were okay and being the messenger and then there was also things like hey when I get back I want to do this" (Interview A).

Using text-based, CMC channels, namely Facebook Messenger and Viber, spouses most frequently cited the ability to "touch base" with her spouse, talk about shared interests and

discuss future plans. Spouses also noted conversations they chose to reserve for non-text-based platforms.

Topics Reserved for Non-Text-Based CMC Platforms

While military spouses valued the ability to communicate with her spouse during overseas deployments, spouses mentioned there were topics they opted not to discuss via CMC or reserved for a conversation where phone, video calling or a face-to-face option was available.

"…it was just more things that sometimes you feel like you have to talk face-to-face. I don't remember those right now but there was a couple things that I was like wait until you get back and we'll talk" (Interview A).

"There were things that we needed to talk about while he was there, but we still talked about it when he got back because I didn't feel like we had a true understanding until we were face-to-face" (Interview B).

"It was beneficial for that kind of stuff that you have to, need to talk to him now. It's not beneficial when you need to keep moving forward not staying where you're at" (Interview B).

"There were some things about money. I remember he spent a ton of money and I saw his Amazon account. I remember sending him a Facebook message saying that I saw your Amazon account. I'm pissed. We'll talk when you can call me. There were certain things, hot topics or when something really bad happens. Necessity is necessity, but it's not something that can be resolved using messaging" (Interview D).

Spouses felt that decisions, events or topics requiring discussions were not easy to accomplish in text-based communication. Spouses mentioned that words can be confusing via messaging and that resolution and understanding were more difficult to achieve through text.

Thus, while although military spouses discussed day-to-day activities, shared interests and future plans, spouses opted to reserve conversations for non-text-based computer-mediated or non-computer-mediated channels. While military spouses cite the accessibility to messenger applications as the most commonly used platform, the selection of non-text-based channels for specific conversations and discussions to achieve a given resolution between spouses indicates that spouses adjust topic selection based on the channel. These answers indicate that FtF or non-text-based communication channels allow for greater breadth of interpersonal communication topics than CMC channels.

Personal Preferences for Text-Based or Non-Text-Based Communication Channels

Military spouses indicated that personal preferences for communication may affect the ability to achieve intimacy via certain channels of communication, as one spouse or individual may perceive text or talk as more intimate than another.

"For me, I don't know if you know anything about the love languages, but my love language is words. And sometimes I feel more loved because he's forced to write out or say how he feels or things he likes about me or whatever. Now for him his love language is touch. So it would be totally different for him. But I sometimes I feel more loved because I've got it. I've printed out Facebook messages to have so it's tangible" (Interview C).

"My husband is very good with words so texting is an advantage to him. For me, I'm more about face-to-face or letters but I like hearing him say stuff because they can say the sweetest most elaborate things I've ever heard anybody say, but me I can't say it like he can...He is more open through text than he is face-to-face" (Interview B).

While spouses indicated an appreciation for text-based communication and written words sent from her spouse, they also expressed a preference for video communication over text communication. Spouses expressed a preference for both the visual nature of Skype video calling, along with the ability to hear her spouse's voice, which text-based channels do not offer.

"Texting can be almost impersonal. When you do the whole selfies and videos and stuff makes it more personal and more connected than just words. You can say anything and it can mean nothing but they wouldn't know that" (Interview B).

"We're human so most of our communication is nonverbal. I think people don't really realize how different it feels. I mean you may be having a conversation but you don't know what their expression. He's not there so I sometimes I had to ask what he meant. It's just not the same – that's the simplest way to say it" (Interview D).

"I can talk to him about anything but if you have to write it in an e-mail or Facebook messenger it's different because I can't see his smile through a Facebook message. I think it's a lot harder" (Interview D).

"Skype and FaceTime I guess it's the sense of you like seeing pictures and there's nothing wrong with that, but actually being able to see someone you love and care about and actually see that they are okay and see how they are doing" (Interview A).

"So I definitely think the Skype and FaceTime – that's just an Android/iPhone something – just being able to see them kind of lifts your spirits … the wives that were able to do all that weren't as – they felt confident basically – not that I didn't feel confident but they had that communication and the ability" (Interview A).

These responses indicate that personal preferences for communication may affect the ability to achieve intimacy via certain channels of communication, as one spouse or individual may perceive text or talk as more intimate than another.

Being Apart Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

Spouses were asked if they believed they are able to maintain communicational intimacy with her spouse through text-based computer-mediated channels. Spouses acknowledged that the closeness and connection with her spouse can be maintained, specifically more so than no access to CMC, but most spouses believed that FtF creates a stronger closeness.

> "I think it helps to keep the connection, but of course face-to-face is always best but being apart it what keeps the connection, because they are far away you are able to appreciate them more and say all these things that you miss about them more" (Interview B).

> "I think it can be achieved, it's not going to be as strong as face-to-face" (Interview A).

> "I much prefer face-to-face not only will they see my emotions how serious it is. Text is more of an inconvenience than face to face" (Interview A).

> "I think the communication definitely helped and there would be no other way that we could probably do it if we didn't have that but it did feel like there was a little bit of distance, separated because it was – you know- you're not able to touch and see that person or anything and so everybody naturally has that feeling, but if you have a good strategy – no one can really have the best way, but if you have something that works for you guys as a couple then that communication it shouldn't feel like you're completely separated from your husband when he gets back" (Interview A).

"No because we just can't do life together. I would say we maintain our relationship as well as can. I don't think it hurts in the fact that we don't love each other. But we're not as close. Does that make sense? It's not a I'm going to divorce you kind of thing. It's just we won't be as close." (Interview C).

Military spouses also discussed this ability to achieve intimacy within the framework of the separation caused by deployment. This reveals an association of CMC with the specific time frame of separation. Thus, it may be difficult for military spouses to delineate their impressions of using CMC with impressions of deployment and the overall experience of separation.

"When they finally get to text you appreciate it more almost. I mean face-to-face I mean obviously you are with them so you don't see that so I don't know I think they are two totally different levels" (Interview B).

"We always we say between us we like the space and time, obviously deployments we don't want them all the time or anything, but that space and time helps us grow and brings us close together when he gets back and so I think it's the same thing with communication. If you feel like there is some dryness between communications, then there are definitely ways you can improve on that until you are able to physically see each other again" (Interview A).

"I feel like we also have a different connection and we learn how some kind of deeper relationship through a hardship" (Interview C).

"It's not the same it's just not. The only difference is that they are going to away so when they come back a new love happened. Where face-to-face you don't feel that because you're already with them, you already feel that. It takes you to a new level just talking and texting but you kind of are able to just instead of going from to oh I really

know you and then you disappeared and now we got to reconnect. You stay on the same level through deployment because of being able to talk all the time through that" (Interview B).

All five spouses were asked: Thinking about your communication via computer mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart?" In response to this question, all five spouses selected "coming together."

"Coming together I guess. Not everyone is able to go through that experience. When your spouse is gone for so long and adjusting to the whole situation. So I would say coming together" (Interview D).

"Coming together because if we were falling apart we wouldn't be together. It's just being able to work things out together through it" (Interview B).

Military spouses' responses again indicate the association of CMC with the overall experience of separation and the process of helping the relationship survive through the hardship of distance and deployment. As a result, spouses did not discuss communicational characteristics of Knapp's (1978) stages of falling apart. Rather, for the spouses interviewed, an overseas deployment represented a mutual period of relationship survival, marked by even greater efforts to maintain the relationship and communicate effectively to span the distance caused by deployment.

Interferences with Relational Maintenance and Communicational Intimacy via CMC

Military spouses mentioned a number of barriers that interfere with relational maintenance via CMC. These include infrastructure and cost of infrastructure, timing of communication, security concerns, and familiarity with use of CMC for relational maintenance.

Infrastructure

In order for spouses to communicate with her spouse via CMC, the necessary infrastructure must be in place to allow access to the internet and modes of communication that are compatible with those available to the spouse. All spouses noted that their soldiers benefitted from internet access while overseas, but soldiers must pay for this access. A monthly WiFi plan can cost a minimum of 90 dollars a month.

"We did not spend as much money to get the best internet access, so if that went out, we wouldn't be talking for some time. I think there are those glitches and that's with anything, Skype, Facebook, Yahoo whereas with face-to-face you don't need that. Unless you shut the door on somebody, but it's one of those things where there is going to be Wi-Fi issues" (Interview A).

"…if you're the kind of person that needs that stability and everything, to spend a little extra on your internet or like because that means you can get better Skype, better Facebook, something better with the phone or Kindle or whatever source" (Interview A).

Even when paying for a plan, the quality of the infrastructure interferes with spouses' communication. These issues led spouses to choose computer-mediated channels in accordance with quality.

"Skyping, video Skyping, is obviously the best, but the problem with that was we never had good service it would always get cut off" (Interview E).

"We tried Skype. The internet connection just wasn't good at all, so we knocked that out in the beginning. The only way we actually stayed in contact was through Facebook messaging" (Interview A).

Accessibility to sites like Skype and Facebook also require that each party has an account with that site. In addition, mobile operating systems may not be compatible with certain communication tools which further cause spouses to adapt communication based on the available infrastructure.

"He has an iPhone and I have an Android, so we couldn't FaceTime at all like other couples. So yeah just staying to Facebook" (Interview A).

Military spouses must have quality, compatible and accessible internet access to engage in CMC with her spouse. Poor infrastructure interferes with the ability to communicate.

"…I definitely feel like that was a little bit of a downfall for us because we didn't want to spend that extra time or money to try to get the best communication options" (Interview A).

Time

Between the United States and Afghanistan there is an approximate eight and a half hour time difference confronting spouses during the overseas deployment. This difference made synchronous CMC difficult for spouses.

"…because of the different time zones it would be more super early in the morning, like I would have to wake up super early or it would be super late at night for me. It was hard because of that" (Interview B).

"For chatting, that would be for daily updates, quick saying hi and less than engaged conversation unless we happened to both be online at the same time. That would be early mornings and late at night so that our schedules aligned. Messages would be updates, not necessarily expecting a response back" (Interview E).

Spouses also noted that soldiers' work schedules interfered with their ability to engage in relational maintenance during deployment. Facebook Messenger and the ability to communicate asynchronously was noted as being more accessible to soldiers than other communication platforms such as telephone, video calling or synchronous chatting.

"…video Skyping…we had to be in the right place at the right time, and it was just harder to find that time" (Interview E).

"I would say Messenger more because it was quicker responses and he was able to use it more. Phone it had to be like on their downtime" (Interview A).

"And we'd also make dates for chatting, which would be more flexible, where I could be in a meeting, in a waiting room, outside the house doing something but still able to chat" (Interview E).

However, in spite of greater access to and use of asynchronous tools, spouses stressed the importance of real-time, synchronous communication through CMC to successfully maintain the relationship. Reflecting on experiences such as basic training or other combat training where the only form of communication available to the couple was letters, spouses felt the technology allowed them to be on the same "page" in order to remain connected with her spouse.

"What it would look like if you looked at it was me sending five or six long messages in a row and then that night whenever our schedules would overlap and we

were both awake we would have the back and forth messages between us and we would catch up that way" (Interview E).

"But it did make it very stressful I guess at times, because if you didn't have the technology we would be on two different pages completely the whole time. I'd get letters three weeks later when I'm sending it – just totally off pages. We were a little off with the app on certain things but we would get back to a week later but that would be out of his control. I guess we are in a different age and time and I am very grateful that we are in a different age and time" (Interview A).

"It would just be very stressful on both parts not being – it would put a dent in the relationship a little bit, because you would be on two different pages for nine or twelve months" (Interview A).

Security concerns

In addition to infrastructure issues, spouses noted security concerns that interfered with the effective CMC during overseas deployments. Soldiers must be aware of operational security (OPSEC) when communicating abroad. Soldiers and family members are briefed on the potential for technology to negatively impact the security of soldiers, such as geotagging when posting photos to social media sites. These concerns force spouses to adjust communication habits or withhold topics she may want to discuss with her spouse.

"And obviously OPSEC is involved so there are questions I can ask him all I want but he can't really answer. I try not to ask him those. I tried to keep a little list because I knew it was questionable when I mentioned it. Even if there was something he really wanted to share, he can't for whatever reason" (Interview D).

"Well obviously for operational security reasons he withheld a lot of what was going on there. Now that he is getting out of the Army, I'm learning about all of these hazardous situations that he was in. It was interesting because he was supposed to deploy a few months ago, and he said at one point that he wouldn't tell me those things until after her got back. So I would say that any combat-related stories or events waited" (Interview E).

"I think that we I don't know if we discussed it a lot but it was an underlying theme or feeling to all deployments in the disconnect between the awareness of what's going on and how that's difficult" (Interview C).

CMC Familiarity

While access to CMC can benefit communication in long-distance relationships, each party must be familiar with the available platforms and how to communicate in a specific format be it face-to-face or through technology. Four of the five spouses had only experienced one overseas deployment, and none mentioned a prior separation or experience where CMC was relied upon for relational maintenance with a marital partner. Without this experience, military spouses are often blind when trying to approach CMC during deployment, reflecting on the first experience as an opportunity to learn.

"I think for the next deployment we are going to try to figure out a better way to communicate. Because all of that information we want to talk to each other about can't be put on hold" (Interview A).

"I would know next time just to see if we could expand a little bit on our use of technology to communicate with each other because I guess you could say we were just

cheap. But we were just testing trying to figure out what worked and what didn't work" (Interview A).

A lack of experience with this form of communication with her spouse affects spouse communication. Along with infrastructure, time, and security concerns, this unfamiliarity interferes with the ability for spouses to engage in effective relational maintenance during overseas deployments.

Change of Lifestyle and Adjusting to CMC

The use of new modes of communication between military spouses, from face-to-face to computer-mediated, causes a change in communication habits. Spouses indicated that the beginning of deployment brought a time period of adjustment to a new type of relationship with her military spouse. This same adjustment in communication may occur when the soldier returns home from deployment.

"It's kind of a little bit of a roller coaster because you don't know what to expect in the beginning, then you get ahold of things and then it's closer so you get those emotions back so it's just a whole bunch of craziness" (Interview A).

"You're blinded instead, so now you have to hear instead. It goes from being able to watch them, their movements, to watching their words instead. It makes a huge difference. Because of that, I think I talked to him more during deployment than when he was at home. It was fine, it's just a different way of communicating" (Interview B).

"You get to the point where it would be the same as if I was at school that day and we're talking but I just can't see you" (Interview B).

"Social media helps but you get to the point where you get used to them being gone and just talking through that and not being physically with them" (Interview B).

"Before deployment you have a certain way of talking and seeing your husband and not using as much of technology and communication, maybe texting, and then when you're deployed you've got this great strategy that you feel connected, like we did with the app, and so that's how it is and then you get back and it's like well now I don't even know how to talk to you because we just used the app the whole time. And it's a little bit of that transition…I think that's something you may not feel that instant connection but it comes with time" (Interview A).

"When we got back it was awful to communicate for a little bit. I even read something that apparently it takes about 6 months to transition in communicating with your spouse and getting back in the swing of things after deployment" (Interview A).

As part of this adjustment, spouses indicated that they developed a sort of attachment to technology, rearranging life and even their sleep schedules to accommodate communication via this new form of communication. Multiple spouses mentioned the instant dread of a missed call or the need to let her spouse know when she wouldn't be available. This reliance was perceived as being somewhat detrimental to the spouse waiting for communication to be initiated.

"Sometimes I feel like I didn't have a life because of trying to be able to talk to him. I felt like I couldn't move on with my life because I was constantly stuck with my phone waiting for something" (Interview B).

"I think in a sense it would be good because if I didn't have the communication, I would be able to just kind of go about my life better. I think it would have been easier for me. It would be easier to live like a regular civilian and put my head in the sand and not think about it. But at the same time you miss that communication and you have to really ask yourself what's more important and what's more valuable to you" (Interview C).

The need to completely change the way spouses communicate with a spouse can also affect communicational intimacy. The spouses interviewed for this study used face-to-face communication with her spouse prior to the overseas deployed, at which time the spouse was forced to alter in which she maintained her relationship. Combined with a lack of familiarity or education of communicating via computer-mediated communication, may correlate to spouses belief that greater communicational intimacy is achieved via face-to-face than through text-based communication. Interferences in communication and relational maintenance affect the ability for spouses to maintain communicational intimacy with her spouse during overseas deployments.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Social networking sites and computer-mediated communication create an avenue for spouses separated by deployment to maintain their relationship. Spouses specifically name text-based channels including Facebook Messenger and Viber as the most frequently used forms of computer-mediated communication during deployment. The frequency of use of direct messaging indicates that direct, private communication is perceived by spouses to be the most intimate text-based, computer-mediated communication channel. The study was inconclusive in determining if CMC was more intimate then FtF, but did reveal interferences to achieving through CMC. These included infrastructure, time, security concerns, CMC familiarity, and the necessity to change lifestyle to adjust to CMC.

Relationship to the Literature

Bazarova (2012) distinguished between non-directed communication, wall posts, and directed communication, private messages and wall posts in a study of self-disclosure in relation to the directedness of Facebook communication. Directed communication was also labeled as

both private (messages) and public (wall posts) (Bazarova, 2012). The study revealed that respondents perceived higher message and relational intimacy from disclosures made privately (Bazarova, 2012). A second study which expanded the first showed that respondents' perceived publically-shared, intimate disclosures as less appropriate than privately-shared intimate disclosures (Bazarova, 2012). These studies suggest that the most intimate conversations are reserved for and considered most appropriate when conducted via direct, private communication from one party to another. Military spouses utilize this medium in accordance with Bazarova's (2012) findings, communicating through the perceived most intimate form of communication via this SNS to engage in relational maintenance with her spouse.

While military spouses use an application (Facebook Messenger) available through an SNS (Facebook)(Boyd & Ellison, 2007) for communication, they do not by definition use social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015). This designation between the use of Facebook and Facebook Messenger supports Carr & Hayes (2015) assertion (1) social networking sites and social media need to be accurately delineated to guide future research, and (2) social media must be defined by the method of communication, not by the site itself.

The study was inconclusive in determining whether greater intimacy can be achieved through CMC than FtF in relationship maintenance for relationships that begin offline but move online for a period of separation. Accordingly, this study does not offer holistic support for social information processing theory for established, monogamous relationships that begin offline and move online during an overseas deployment. The underlying premises of time and, presumably, infrastructure on which social information processing theory lies are supported by the findings (Walther, 1996).

Limitations of the Study

The sample of interviewees represented a convenience sample that was not representative of the population. All spouses were female in a four-year age range, 20 to 24, and married to her spouse for less than five years. All couples also stayed married throughout and after the deployment, thus the research does not account for couples who have separated and/or divorced as a result of or following a deployment or multiple deployments. None of the couples have children, which could change the dynamic and availability of the stateside spouse to allot time for communication. This could also affect the topics and type of conversation shared between the spouses.

The age of interviewees may be indicative of social media site use available to the current generation of Afghanistan veterans. Social media access has been available on overseas deployments to this generation. As mentioned by one interviewee, soldiers on current deployments to other geographical areas such as Africa do not have access to social media as those deployed to areas where U. S. armed forces have a longer-standing presence.

Military spouses provided description and explanation on topics such as the differences between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication, reflecting on past experiences, while currently engaging in face-to-face communication with their spouses. Spouses of currently deployed soldiers were excluded from the study, identified by the institutional review board as a vulnerable population; however, spouses currently relying on computer-mediated communication could offer a different perspective on theses experiences.

This research was limited to the perspective of the military spouse who remained in the United States while the service member deployed overseas. Interviewing of civilians does not require specific U.S. military permission (Merolla, 2010). The spouse stateside and the service

member abroad may have different perspectives on relational maintenance and intimacy via computer-mediated communication.

Lastly, this research relied on an explanation of experiences using CMC from military spouses. The study did not review specific messages or conversations exchanged between spouses in a computer-mediated or face-to-face environment in order to measure the intimacy achieved in these settings.

Practical Implications and Future Research

This study has offered insight into how military spouses use social networking sites and computer-mediated communication to engage in relational maintenance and through which text-based CMC platforms the greatest level of intimacy can be achieved. While this study was inconclusive in determining whether greater communicational intimacy can be achieved through CMC or FtF, the findings from this study will help guide future research in the field.

Military spouses revealed a lack of experience with CMC. Future research should address factors that may influence exposure to or experience with technology, including educational level and access to internet growing up.

Additionally, military spouses indicated that personal preferences could affect communicational intimacy via text-based or non-text-based platforms. This study did not focus on soldiers, but on the spouses of soldiers. Soldiers overseas could have a differing perspective on use of social networking sites and CMC and the intimacy able to be achieved through this platform. This perspective could offer a more comprehensive understanding of relational communication in offline relationships that move online.

Lastly, the use of the instant messenger application available through a social networking site supports the necessity to define social media and social networking sites based on method of communication. This distinction will better guide future research in the field of social media.

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Appendix A

1. In what branch of the military does your spouse serve?

2. How many years has your spouse been in the military?

3. How long have you and your spouse been married?

4. Do you and your spouse have any children? How many and what are their ages?

5. Did you know your spouse before his/her service in the military?

6. How many overseas deployments has your spouse taken during your marriage?

7. To where did he/she deploy (in support of what military movements, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, etc).?

8. What social media sites do you use? What are your social media habits? (Which sites do you use most often?)

9. How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s)?

10. Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use?

11. Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

12. Which social media sites did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

13. Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

14. Which social media site do you think you used most often?

Appendix A

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12. Which social media sites did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

13. Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

14. Which social media site do you think you used most often?

15. What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

16. Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

17. Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

18. Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

19. Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss or to save for when he/she has returned? (Why?)

20. How do you think the access to social media sites is valuable to maintaining your relationship with your spouse during deployment?

21. How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

22. Do you think that social media will change or affect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

23. Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

24. Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

25. (Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?)

15. What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

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26. During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

27. Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, choose 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

28. Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

29. Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?

30. Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

31. Lastly, I have a few demographic questions to ask. As with all questions, you may opt out of answering if preferred.

32. What military base are you and your husband currently stationed at?

33. What is your gender?

34. What is your age in years? You may provide a range if desired.

35. What is your spouse's military rank (i.e. E-1, O-1, CW-1)?

Appendix B

Interview Transcript A

Q: How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s) would you estimate? However you would be able to quantify it.

A: I wish I was one of those wives who would talk every day. We would get to talk maybe two times a week. Very rare. I don't know if other soldiers and wives, if they have a better connection, or they have more or paid more to do that. We were kind of cheap in that we didn't want to spend too much on internet, so yeah, it was very limited for us.

Q: Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use/what forms did you use?

A: We tried Skype. The internet connection just wasn't good at all, so we knocked that out in the beginning. The only way we actually stayed in contact was through like Facebook messaging. And that's the easiest way to go with it. I could send important files or pictures something through e-mail, but that would take a little bit longer than Facebook messenger. So he used some kind of like a Kindle or something over there, some kind of laptop to get access because his phone obviously wasn't on. So mostly Facebook messaging.

Q: Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

A: Probably just Facebook messenger because that's the one that worked the most. There was like I said Skype didn't work for us at all. He has an iPhone and I have an Android, so we couldn't FaceTime at all like other couples. So yeah just staying to Facebook.

Phone that was once in a while. That was probably like once a month. It was very limited. Now that I speak about it it's really weird to say, because I was around wives who talked to their husbands every day. I was more like, we'll do the once a month thing on the phone, but it kind of worked for us. I think for the next deployment we are going to try to figure out a better way to communicate. Because all of that information we want to talk to each other about can't be put on hold.

Q: Did prefer telephone or Facebook messenger for any reason?

A: I would say messenger more because it was quicker responses and he was able to use it more. Phone it had to be like on their downtime.

Q: Which (are there any other) social media sites you used to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

A: Email. I don't think so. I did do packages and letters, but nothing else social media.

Q: Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

A: Facebook messenger I felt like we used that one – first of all the messenger kind of got pushed on us. That whole thing happened with Facebook messenger is was kind of like download this or otherwise your messages, yeah. When that got pushed on us, the main purpose would be to -- for that I don't want to sit and talk "Hey what are you doing? How's your day going?" I like that stuff, but I want to know: Are you leaving somewhere and you can't talk for a couple days or hey a big emergency bill came up but I took care of it. It was kind of like the important information and then if we had free time, it would be "Let's talk" or a phone call or something like that. So Facebook messenger was more everything good on your side, everything good on my side. Even though I feel like the men aren't really supposed to tell you what's happening over there, I still was like "Did you receive your mom's package?" -- stuff like that that people wanted to know from me as well. I was like the messenger on my messenger.

Q: Which social media site do you think you used most often?

A: Facebook messenger

Q: What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

A: It's funny because I've had this conversation and I feel like between me and my spouse we're quite different where we don't need to be attached and talking all the time. So when I see other wives who are more kind of need that connection. I do understand there does come a time of distance between how long you deploy when that's going to happen. I would recommend and I did recommend that, if you're the kind of person that needs that stability and everything, to spend a little extra on your internet or like because that means you can get better Skype, better Facebook, something better with the phone or Kindle or whatever source. Because you are getting extra money during deployment so you might as well spend a little bit of that just to be able to communicate more. Like I said, that just wasn't us and that's fine. I had known wives that have hung out with other wives or even stayed the night and done a lot of packages and just need constantly that outreach to their husbands and stuff and that's fine, but for us that just wasn't our way of doing it. But I definitely feel like that was a little bit of a downfall for us because we didn't want to spend that extra time or money to try to get the best communication options.

Q: Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

A: A little bit of what I touched on just because we kind of hit the basics like obviously how are you and how's your day going and stuff. Is everything okay at home. Is stuff okay over there? I asked a lot about the other guys, because some of his single friends they were really close with us. I would ask are they getting letters from other people should I send them something. I took care of most of the stuff here obviously. Normally, it was kind of day-to-day, hit the necessities. So I was going to be unavailable or if he was going to be on a mission for a certain number of

days just kind of like a heads up that we wouldn't be able to talk for a couple of days just kind of make sure to cover that do I wouldn't be sitting their wondering what's going on.

Q: Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

A: I felt like in the beginning we talked obviously more, because it was new and everything. As time went on, I would just excited by getting a phone call or some kind of message. I would feel horrible when I would miss the phone call because of those unknown numbers, but I definitely feel like as time went on it got easier and especially for me who didn't talk to him every day I was glad to hear from him and know everything is okay. But it definitely decreased throughout the deployment. It picked up a little toward the end because you're preparing for coming back. It's kind of a little bit of a roller coaster because you don't know what to expect in the beginning, then you get ahold of things and then it's closer so you get those emotions back so it's just a whole bunch of craziness.

We talked about the future, like one of the things was how much we wanted to move when he got back. A couple months in, I was like "Is it okay if I get a cat?" Things like that, so then I got a cat. Those were big decisions for us. We sold his car. Things like that we knew were coming but this would be a good time to do it, so when you come back we can start fresh. It consisted around mainly making sure things were okay and being the messenger and then there was also things like hey when I get back I want to do this. He came home during Christmas time and we go to Chicago where our family is so there was a lot of talk about: what day are we going to leave, how much time do you want to spend with family, start talking more about him coming back.

Q: Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

When we got back it was awful to communicate for a little bit. I even read something that apparently it takes about 6 months to transition in communicating with your spouse and getting back in the swing of things after deployment. We would talk, we would use more just regular phone calls and texting. So we don't really use the app anymore unless I need to send an article or something. Texting and calling was more.

I feel like it's very, very different. We made more of our bigger decisions I want to say during deployment with communication because I know that it would probably be better to do it face-to-face but for us it was kind of like I'm over here taking care of this stuff. It needs to get done, why wait to get back. We did do more when he got back but of course there wasn't much communication over that stuff. I think our communication decreased when he got back from a technology aspect but more of the decisions that we had to discuss was more when he was deployed. A lot of times with the app, it was just I trust you, you can take care of it and not so much a discussion.

Q: Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss, or to save for when he/she has returned? (Why?)

A: I feel like there are certain things that you have an easier time texting to somebody more than face-to-face. So let's say there was a time when a friend came back into my life during deployment and he didn't like it or something else that. So it's kind of like "hey I'm going to message you this just letting you know how it is right now and what's going on," but I'm sure when he got back and we talked face-to-face you know it wasn't the right decision to keep that friend in my life. Something like that so it's very…that was one aspect where we used technology instead of saying it face-to-face. There was a couple things that I would, just little things, like I would just say "Oh we'll just talk when you get back, when it gets closer and stuff." He would just kind of be like, "no, tell me now" and so that's where it would be easier to use the app, but it was just more things that sometimes you feel like you have to talk face-to-face. I don't remember those right now but there was a couple things that I was like wait until you get back and we'll talk.

My biggest thing is sometimes with the military wives, not that I complain but there's just stuff with FRG and some wives that didn't act on their best behavior during deployment, as much as he can see them on Facebook, whether or not he cared or not, I would just let it out all at that time because he doesn't want to sit here and listen to me when we talk face-to-face, so mine was kind of like the venting, just get me on my soapbox to talk about all that. He could be doing something and come back and say "thanks for telling me" and not even be listening or caring.

Q: How do you think the access to social media sites is valuable to maintaining your relationship with your spouse during deployment?

A: Obviously it's much easier to do that in person but for military spouses who are in this relationship sometimes that can actually hurt you and some people, I'm not saying most, but some people don't make it out of deployment. I definitely feel like that maintained our relationship, even if I just got to talk to him for a little, but of time it was still kind of like that acknowledgement you're still there, we're still here, we're together, I know times are hard over there but just saying just a heads up or hi or something like that… you know I didn't feel like or it never crossed my mind that because we're not talking as much we're going to be done when you get back, nothing like that but it was just those little moments that helped our relationship that I was looking forward to as the communication decreased with our app at times and so….

Q: How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

A: Because it has happened when a soldier has to go through basic and you can only do letters and it's very difficult because it's just one of those where…I mean we made it through and I know we'd be fine if we did that again and I know that we are very privileged in this day and age because we have technology to do that where when I talk to his grandparents and my grandparents are like "Oh I remember only getting a letter every month or something like that." But it did make it very stressful I guess at times, because if you didn't have the technology we would be on two different pages completely the whole time. I'd get letters three weeks later when I'm sending it – just totally off pages. We were a little off with the app on certain things but we would get back to a week later but that would be out of his control. I guess we are in a

different age and time and I am very grateful that we are in a different age and time. Even for the women who talk 24/7 and are able to speak with their husband every minute kind of a thing – I definitely think it would be doable but it would be very, very hard. It would be a lot of effort on both parts.

It would just be very stressful on both parts not being – it would put a dent in the relationship a little bit, because you would be on two different pages for 9 or 12 months.

There's those glitches though. We did not spend as much money to get the best internet access, so if that went out, we wouldn't be talking for some time. I think there are those glitches and that's with anything, Skype, Facebook, Yahoo whereas with face-to-face you don't need that. Unless you shut the door on somebody, but it's one of those things where there is going to be Wi-Fi issues.

Q: Do you think that social media will change or affect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

I definitely think that it will change for the better. It always takes the first time to kind of get the hang of things. And so we probably will still use the app but maybe just depending how long it is, see if we can upgrade a little bit so we can have Skype or something else that we can use because we made it through and it was fine without but it was kind of one of those where it would be nice to be able to do a little bit more.

I guess it's just hard because I'm in this world and this different atmosphere where I do see wives using – it didn't get me down all of the time, but there would be times when a friend of mind would step out because her husband called or they have to FaceTime or something. Where I didn't get that chance. And it's not jealously but it's just, we chose to do it that way so I would know next time just to see if we could expand a little bit on our use of technology to communicate with each other because I guess you could say we were just cheap. But we just testing trying to figure out what worked and what didn't work. And so I would want to expand and I think he would want to do that as well.

Skype and FaceTime I guess it's the sense of you like seeing pictures and there's nothing wrong with that, but actually being able to see someone you love and care about and actually see that they are okay and see how they are doing. And what they are doing and so especially if you have children or something like that seeing she just crawled and so I definitely think the Skype and FaceTime – that's just an Android/iPhone something – just being able to see them kind of lifts your spirits and encourages you to push through the rest of deployment the rest of the time and say okay – I see that when we have this deployment the wives that were able to do all that weren't as – they felt confident basically – not that I didn't feel confident but that had that communication and the ability to see their husband every day where they felt comfortable coming back. I was just kind of like okay I haven't been to see you in a while just come home, get this over with, be done. But they had the ability to be more comfortable with that.

Q: Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

A: Sometimes, I think it depends on the topic and I know that he's more inclined to read a text message more than sometimes have us face-to-face look at you conversation where he could be looking at something else. So I know that if I text him his eyes are reading it and drawn to it. I might put something a little more open there, but normally it's going to be face-to-face.

Q: Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

A: I think it can be achieved, it's not going to be as strong as face-to-face but I mean the good and bad part about that is there's so much out there, so it's one of those where you know just with your words or pictures – there's certain things that you can do just between you and your spouse. Even if it's just an emotional text saying how much you love each other. Stuff like that every once in a while. It's not going to be as strong, but it will get you through another day and let you look forward to another one of those or then it makes you stronger when you get back. We always we say between us we like the space and time, obviously deployments we don't want them all the time or anything, but that space and time helps us grow and brings us close together when he gets back and so I think it's the same thing with communication. If you feel like there is some dryness between communications, then there are definitely ways you can improve on that until you are able to physically see each other again.

Q: Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?

A: Something we have difficulty discussing is money. So I would rather have it over the computer, but my husband would say face-to-face. Because he is more responsible for that stuff, so when it came to money and me and deployment I was not the best. I should've saved more, I should've figured out a different strategy. So something like, more of a different topic dealing with our marriage and everything I just know that if it's face-to-face I know that I am going to get in trouble, so I would rather just be like, "hey, I just did this" – where he doesn't really have a way to really do anything about it. Not that I did that a lot but it was just one of those where I would always check in to say, I know you can't take care of this, but it is okay if I do this. Definitely I would choose computer wise and then he would probably be face-to-face.

Q: During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

A: I think it does work for us. I think we are – like I mentioned before, we're not really the couple who try to strive to get that face-to-face all the time, but it definitely worked for us and I would do it again in a heartbeat if we had to.

I'm not going to lie, I feel like there was – I think the communication definitely helped and there would be no other way that we could probably do it if we didn't have that but it did feel like there was a little bit of distance, separated because it was – you know- you're not able to touch and see that person or anything and so everybody naturally has that feeling, but if you have a good strategy – no one can really have the best way, but if you have something that works for

you guys as a couple then that communication it shouldn't feel like you're completely separated from your husband when he gets back. I think you – before deployment you have a certain way of talking and seeing your husband and not using as much of technology and communication, maybe texting and then when you're deployed you've got this great strategy that you feel connected, like we did with the app, and so that's how it is and then you get back and it's like, well now I don't even know how to talk to you because we just used the app the whole time. And it's a little bit of that transition and so if that wasn't there it would be very hard. Overall, I think that's something you may not feel that instant connection but it comes with time.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, what 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

A: Difficult – because this was our first deployment we don't experience stuff when you only have to use one source of communication for 9 months and so that was, like I mentioned before, if the internet is out or you don't have internet, you can't communicate, so it's very difficult was one. All the words that are popping into my head are negative.

Stressful – but that's just because of natural worrying about making sure that their okay. So when you can't hear about them because communication or something is going wrong, which is stressful.

Rewarding – that's a positive one, that's good. Because you have the ability to communicate. That's something that even though I didn't have as many devices and ways to communicate, I did adapt and it was used a lot and so that was helpful with him.

Complicated – I think that's a really good word just for military and deployment just in general because it's very hard explain sometimes to civilians how it works and not that I know everything about it, but going to a person that is with their husband 24/7 or has no separation or anything like that and then separating them from communication it's just a complicated situation but that's why I think couples who have gone through deployments can share those secrets with us so that we can be prepared. I can't think of another one which is awful. I'm sure there's some but there is nothing else that's popping into my head.

Grateful – I know that deployment and grateful are two words you don't use together very often but just because as much as there is negatives there is also positives to it too. I think a lot of times we don't look at that because – and I can only say this because going through it and stuff so I think just having the ability to communicate and I'm grateful that everything worked out okay and nothing too bad is happening and that we were able to learn from this and just know what to do for the next time regarding communication. We are spoiled in this world to have Facebook and the app and stuff like that.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

A: I'm just going back through everything we talked about. I want to say more open but it was also pretty closed. We were just saying it's easier face-to-face than on there. For some people I do think it would be more open, but we just didn't have the time to be open in that's sense. If I did send a long paragraph and maybe not get anything back for a couple of days, stuff like that. So it definitely make me rethink how I'm going to plan around conversations for the next deployment. Or even when he is in the field too. I know that – it's the Army – they don't have as much time as other men and people do so…

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?

A: It brought us closer together once we got over that halfway mark, or right around -- before the halfway mark of deployment. But before that point, you are thinking, is this ever going to end? It's a lot of stress. It's the "are we going to make it" kind of a thing. But I think it's just wives exaggerated and we're the ones here you know with all this and everything like that; so for us, we like that space and distance. It's probably a little bit too much space, but it definitely brought us closer together and our transition wasn't as hard either so that definitely helps to come back together. I know that there's been people that and even that it's horrible when your husband has to tell you that someone else's wife cheated on them or things like, because not everyone is meant to be in the military lifestyle.

Q: Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

A: I can't think of anything.

Interview Transcript B

Q: How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s)?

A: Almost all the time but because of the different time zones it would be more super early in the morning, like I would have to wake up super early or it would be super late at night for me. It was hard because of that.

Q: Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use?

Q: We only talked on the phone twice through the whole deployment, Skype only once but a lot of this was because of his parents and he just never had time. But most of the time he would just text me through an app called Viber. It's free texting through the internet so that's pretty much how we text each other.

Q: Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

A: Preference was Viber -- it was the app -- because it was free calling and free text messaging and all you needed was internet. The only problem was I moved back home and my parents don't have very good internet. When I was able to go out and stay at my cousin's house and stuff, phone call was great; I was able to talk to him as much as I want and they have Wifi boxes that you can take with them. We did Skype. We knew that was what we wanted to do, but he actually got one day off and that's when he used it. Facebook he didn't use as much; that was the only way he could contact his parents but it was super slow. It took too much of the gigabytes to make it worth it. Viber was extremely fast -- the text messaging through this app. It's another version of Skype, but without the video chat -- similar to Facebook messenger in the text, not video, instant text messaging.

Q: Which social media sites did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

A: Viber was the most frequent and then Facebook. We wanted to email but it was way to too slow.

Q: What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

A: One thing is obviously download Viber. Be patient with it. They are there and you can't stress them out. It's not just about social media. It's about hobbies; find things to get you going. Sending care packages made you feel like you could do something for them. Taking pictures all the time and selfies for them, those help a lot so you can see what they are doing. If you have good internet, video will work great but it would take a while to download. It makes them happy

because they get to see what you are doing. As much as you can but don't overbear it. Anything to remind them of home would be great.

Q: Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

A: It was always like I would ask him how his day was. He would tell be about those things and I would tell him about my day about school or whatever I was doing just basically saying that I'm okay, he's okay. Bringing our pets into the conversation, what they did something funny, something good about it I would always bring up too. That helps a lot. He tries to do the same, but he can't really do the same in that aspect. But show at he's okay, in a stable condition. Just mainly "hey, how are you?" "what'd you do today?" Remind him of something of home that he can look forward to. He'd always ask me about my workouts and stuff. Showing interest and keeping those interests together and reminding each other of those interests and talk about those all the time. I think that's what we did a lot. A lot.

Q: Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

A: It changed a lot. His mom tried to sabotage it during deployment. It got rocky a little bit but it got us a lot closer. We got stronger through it. The beginning we were fine and the middle got rocky but by the ending we were talking more we were more ready for him to come back. More relaxed, middle was biggest stressor and then it worked itself in the end.

For me, I got used to it because I went back with my parents. It went from feeling alone to like waiting for that text message. In the beginning you don't when they are going to message you because you don't know about the Wi-Fi. You don't about all these things you can get until a couple months in. I know he's going to this location but when will I hear from him? And then it slowly progressed. You get to the point where it would be the same as if I was at school that day and we're talking but I just can't see you. So it came to more like that and then it slowly got into – oh my gosh it's still going on. In the middle, he was more stressed about still being there where as I was in a more comfortable environment. I was more worried and working on making sure it was okay rather than myself. In the end the last month was the longest month, so it goes by fast until that last month. Even with that it drives on because the military constantly changes when they come home. It was almost hard to believe he was coming home when he came home. I was still in that process that he was gone still. I was still in the feeling that he was gone.
Social media helps but you get to the point where you get used to them being gone and just talking through that and not being physically with them.

Q: Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

A: I definitely talk to him more through texting when he was gone. When you are together, you don't need that communication all the time. When you can see them physically, you know whether they're okay or not. You're blinded instead, so now you have to hear instead. It goes from being able to watch them, their movements, to watching their words instead. It makes a

huge difference. Because of that, I think I talked to him more during deployment than when he was at home. It was fine, it's just a different way of communicating.

There's not really a comparison. Other than I talked to him more during deployment than I do at home.

Q: Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss, or to save for when her/she has returned? (Why?)

A: I know with his mom that was hard to keep back. I just let it be. Sometimes it's good not to say anything but certain things are important to talk about, usually on the phone though because words obviously can get confused easier. If it's something serious and important and you know he has missions, if he about ready to hit that mission, just don't say anything yet because that's all they would be thinking about. If he has time after than a call. If it's not something substantial than it's probably not worth it to even say anything. I mean it is good to communicate so that way you don't feel like they are gone, but I would wait for a phone call. It really depends on the person.

Q: How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

A: I know with Facebook, you can "Like" the battalion Facebook page and they'll post pictures of them, which is really nice to see. During basic, sometimes it would be basic where it would just be letters and a phone call maybe once a week. I feel like it was more personal than just texting every day like a normal thing. Letters were more meaningful, more connecting. Taking time to put thoughts down on paper. That's how they are able to talk to someone. Though basic was a lot more interconnected than through deployment where it was just texting. I wouldn't think that it would have been that big of a deal, because I like letters better anyway. To me it's just another thing you can send them from home. Where they can know that this came from my home.

Q: Do you think that social media will change or affect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

A: For me, I feel like he needs to pay attention more to the job than to the texting. He feels the opposite. I like letters better so that would be something different. He would have to find the post office and take the time to figure it out but I don't care. That would be different for me, I'd rather have that. For him, he probably wouldn't do anything different, because the only thing he cares about is being able to talk to me. Sometimes I feel like I didn't have a life because of trying to be able to talk to him. I felt like I couldn't move on with my life because I was constantly stuck with my phone waiting for something.

When you are having problems, it's really difficult because you have to wait for him to get back to that text message so not only that but you constantly have anxiety and what if's waiting for that, so you are pretty much living on a phone and not living your life until he gets back. Don't forget about him obviously, but…

In letters it's different; you get it and can write back and you are done with it until the next one. Texting you expect it all the time.

Q: Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

A: No I say everything. If I want to say something I'll say it. It's easier to say it in person or on the phone because I hate having to type something out. A long novel so I'd rather do it in person, but I will not hold myself back if I have to say something in text email or whatever. I much prefer face-to-face not only will they see my emotions how serious it is, I'll see them and what they're thinking and stuff and they're about to respond back and I know they'll respond back whereas text message your waiting for a response. You don't mess up your words. Text is more of an inconvenience than face to face.

Q: Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

A: I think it helps to keep the connection, but of course face-to-face is always best but being apart, it is what keeps the connection, because they are far away you are able to appreciate them more and say all these things that you miss about them more. I don't know if it's the fact that you are not around them more or if it's more being able to talk to them and text them. I think it has a lot to tie in with the fact that they are, the fact that you're not seeing, you don't get to see all the things they are doing. When they finally get to text you appreciate it more almost. I mean face-to-face I mean obviously you are with them so you don't see that so I don't know I think they are two totally different levels.

Texting can be almost impersonal. When you do the whole selfies and videos and stuff makes it more personal and more connected than just words. You can say anything and it can mean nothing but they wouldn't know that.

My husband is very good with words so texting is an advantage to him. For me, I'm more about face-to-face or letters but I like hearing him say stuff because they can say sweetest most elaborate things I've ever heard anybody say, but me I can't say it like he can.

Q: Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?

A: The difficult situation with his mom, I didn't talk to him at all about it until he got home. I have no idea what was going on between him and her. But he would delete them so I wouldn't get upset. The only way to get both of us on the same page was with the face-to-face. Save it up and remember it when he gets back. You're more calmed down and able to think about it more. That was something I waited until the end for.

There were things that we needed to talk about while he was there, but we still talked about it when he got back because I didn't feel like we had a true understanding until we were face-to-face.

Q: During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

A: I wouldn't say it works for me, I would say it works for my husband. For me, trying to be able to finish stuff while he was gone didn't work for me. I wanted to text him. You hear it vibrate you want to text him, middle of class whatever. It doesn't help for me or anyone when you are trying to focus on your studies or things you need to get done before they get home things you need to set up or goals for your own future. It was a good advantage because we were able to talk about things that more now than waiting until it's almost too late. It was beneficial for that kind of stuff that you have to, need to talk to him now. It's not beneficial when you need to keep moving forward not staying where you're at.

It's not the same it's just not. The only difference is that they are going to away so when they come back a new love happened. Where face-to-face you don't feel that because you're already with them, you already feel that. It takes you to a new level just talking and texting but you kind of are able to just instead of going from to oh I really know you and then you disappeared and now we got to reconnect. You stay on the same level through deployment because of being able to talk all the time through that.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, what 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

A: Tiring – obviously I felt like I never slept because of it and I would sleep during the day to be on his time schedule

Selfless – the only reason I really wanted to talk to him was to make sure he was okay it wasn't on my own accord it was for him.

Great – obviously I got to or he would be able to send me a video or whatever and we would talk

Fun – it can be fun just depends on the day of course. It can be fun just taking pictures and sending it to him, funny things and things you can joke around with him

Privilege – they're not technically supposed to have Wi-Fi boxes all the time, it was more of a privilege being able to do that. I've heard other girls who were only the same deployment as my husband and they wouldn't hear from their husbands for 2 weeks at a time. Every 2 weeks through email. We know it's not a need, but having that opportunity to have that is nice.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

A: Definitely more open – he is more open through text than he is face-to-face.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?

A: Coming together because if we were falling apart we wouldn't be together. It's just being able to work things out together through it.

Q: Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

A: No.

Interview Transcript C

Q: How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s)?

A: Probably once a day. Well it differed because when the first deployment when he first got there he could only call maybe once a day, maybe every other day for 20 minutes at that time we used Facebook a lot because we would send messages back and forth all the time because we couldn't talk face to face. Facebook primarily at first.

Q: Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use?

A: In general, we would use Facebook for messaging a lot because Skype we would have to set up a specific time because you know you're however many hours apart so well I can do it at this time, you can do it at this time so usually we'd have like 30 minutes a day where we would Skype and then we would Facebook message whatever any other time.

Q: Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

A: Definitely Skype for sure. We could see face-to-face but even over Skype we ended up messaging each other on Skype because people could hear him talking so Skype for sure.

Q: Which social media sites did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

A: Facebook messaging, Skype. Mostly Facebook messaging and Skype that's really. We didn't do wall posts that much because it's not very private.

Q: Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

A: Through Facebook messaging well obviously you're able to start and finished conversation and with Skype we only had a limited amount of time and often times when we were having a passionate discussion and Skype would cut off and then you can't communicate anymore. I felt like if we had more something we need to discuss, like something more serious. For Skype it was more just how was your day, more like connecting on a personal level where as business things or home things, information more so Facebook. Or anything I'd say – Facebook could also be the messaging business but also like private things between us.

The messaging was more private and the cut-off issue with Skype (video) was so frustrating. I had one time where I could hear the rockets hitting their thing and he's like "I gotta go" because I hear rockets hitting their base.

Q: Which social media site do you think you used most often?

A: Probably Skype

Q: What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

A: Based on my experience, probably Facebook initially because sometimes it takes a while for Skype to get up and Skype does cut off and then sometimes depending on where they are they can't use Skype or whatever but they might be able to just have access to a computer. So that's why I say initially until they get their schedules figured out.

Q: Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

A: Everything. I guess I would mostly talk about what was going on over here and just life. Everything that's going on. How I feel how other people are doing maybe. I know one thing my husband has said before some people deactivate their Facebook because they don't want to – it's harder for them to see what's going on and be connected in that way. So I would kind of tell him what's going on even though he did keep his Facebook account and then he couldn't share as much with me because I don't know anything that I'm not supposed to know. I guess it was more for him I guess more like his emotional side because he can't share with me a lot of what he's doing. So it was more like, it was a good day or a bad day or more specific.

Q: Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

A: I think that we I don't know if we discussed it a lot but it was an underlying theme or feeling to all deployments in the disconnect between the awareness of what's going on and how that's difficult.

Q: Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

A: I think in one way it was very good because especially when we had our Skype schedule where we would do that, we would talk for 30 minutes every day. Sometimes you know a lot of couples back home just don't have time to sit down and talk for 30 minutes every day but we specifically made that time to talk for 30 minutes every day.

Q: Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss, or to save for when her/she has returned? (Why?)

A: Well I think I learned throughout not always to tell him when I was struggling because I didn't want him to worry about me. I think I shared what I needed to share but I guess I wouldn't say I was hiding anything but I think at first maybe I was a little too transparent where he would worry a little too much about me or I wanted him to.

Q: How do you think the access to social media sites is valuable to maintaining your relationship with your spouse during deployment?

A: Well you get to communicate. My husband also went to Ranger School. During ranger school I could only contact him through letters like in WWII and if he's in Afghanistan I can talk to him and share more life with him than I can when he is in ranger school in the United States.

It's really important because you can't share anything that's going on really. And now through social media you can say and he can keep up with my life and still feel connected and I can kind of know, have more awareness of what's going on over there.

Q: How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

A: I think in a sense it would be good because if I didn't have the communication, I would be able to just kind of go about my life better. I think it would have been easier for me. It would be easier to live like a regular civilian and put my head in the sand and not think about it. But at the same time you miss that communication and you have to really ask yourself what's more important and what's more valuable to you.

Q: Do you think that social media will change or affect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

A: I don't think so unless he had some kind of issues that he couldn't communicate the same way or whatever.

Q: Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

A: I'd probably say it is more closed over social media because we hadn't been married as long and we didn't know each other as well. I think in the future it would be more open because now we have lived together in the same house for a year. I feel like we know each other a little bit better.

Q: Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

A: For me, I don't know if you know anything about the love languages, but my love language is words. And sometimes I feel more loved because he's forced to write out or say how he feels or things he likes about me or whatever. Now for him his love language is touch. So it would be totally different for him. But I sometimes feel more loved because I've got it. I've printed out Facebook messages to have so it's tangible.

Q: Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?

A: I don't think so. I think it's more just choosing the right time to have it as opposed to not having it, knowing when we have more time to talk about it or discuss it or whatever.

Q: During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

A: No because we just can't do life together. I would say we maintain our relationship as well as can. I don't think it hurts in the fact that we don't love each other. But we're not as close. Does that make sense? It's not a I'm going to divorce you kind of thing. It's just we won't be as close.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, what 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

A: Frustrating – when Skype cuts off when you're having a discussion and there's no way you can talk.

Scary – there have been a few times where I knew that rockets were hitting their base. Well twice I've talked to him and he had small injuries and he didn't tell me why he had them and he didn't tell me so there's not a filter there so I know what's going on in that way.

Fun – even though I said I don't feel like we're as close as when he's home, I feel like we also have a different connection and we learn how some kind of deeper relationship through a hardship.

Perseverance

Loyalty – I don't know if that would be my experience as a whole or just through social media. Maybe I feel even more loyal to him and to our country when I'm talking with him you know that other people aren't going through the same thing.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

A: A little bit less open.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?
A: Coming together.

Q: Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

A: I don't think so.

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Interview Transcript D

Q: How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s)?

A: Depending on if there were any complications I would say every other day probably. Sometimes there's no power anywhere or they have blackouts. But for the most part every other day.

Q: Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use?

A: Facebook was big. We have other e-mails. The messenger part of Facebook was by far the most. Skype but most of the time it didn't work, and on the phone, but the signal wasn't great there either.

I would say there's a lot less … The Skype thing I really tried but like I said their internet was so bad there. You get like two seconds and then it cut off and then you have to wait 5 seconds and then it cut off. As far as the phone goes, not very often because they don't have immediate access to a phone so they either have to go to the MWR station and wait in line and then everyone else is waiting so you try not to stay on the phone too long.

Q: Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

A: Skype when it did work. I think I only actually saw him on the video two times. It's different to be able to see them. Because over messaging they could be laying in a hospital bed and he's telling me everything's fine and I would never know. But over Skype I can actually see him and see him. You're checked by the wife you're all set.

So when Skype worked, being able to see him would be my preference.

Q: Which social media sites to did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

A: Facebook messenger and Skype. Us personally – his Facebook is just full of football stuff so we don't really use – we're not the type of couple to really do wall posts and stuff a lot. There were other wives who would post something funny on their husband's wall and my comment or something but we didn't really do that. I think that there were certain things like sweet sayings that we would maybe share on Facebook but that was really rare.

Q: Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

A: It's really hard being away. I think it's just being able to – I look forward to it and I know he looks forward to it. My husband and I we are best friends. I mean he's over there and I'm here so being able to talk over Facebook was something to look forward to. I would tell him what was

going on. Sometimes there's not a lot happening; I felt like I would try to keep my days exciting and busy so I had something to tell him that was interesting. Instead of "what did you do today?" "nothing." We can't have a conversation about that. It's not necessarily about frequency; that's nice too, but it's a bonus. It's being able to on both sides to know what going on. I wanted to know what was going on with him. I wanted him to tell me as much as he could about what he was doing and how we was doing. I wanted to understand what it was like for him. I felt like I wanted to know more – tell me more – tell me more.

Q: Which social media site do you think you used most often?

A: That was definitely Facebook messenger.

Q: What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

A: I would say it takes a really big combination of things to make it work. Sometimes like I said it's not necessarily the frequency thing. It was nice that we got to talk a lot for short periods of time. In the really wee hours of the morning, I'd get like a have a great day kind of thing. I think there was part of it being able to talk more often, but sometimes I couldn't get all the details I wanted. You know, what are you doing, who are you with, why are you with this person. It would be really hard to explain to someone who hasn't been through it, but sometimes it feels like they aren't coming back. You kind of start to feel like you're not getting everything. It puts this weird reality on it, because all you have is this device connecting you too. That's all there is.

I think for us it was, we didn't have to talk for three hours but we were able to touch base on there's where I'll be today. If he couldn't get a hold of me he wouldn't have to worry that something happened to me. We could connect just for a second.

Sometimes you would talk many days in a row and then there's a day when you don't talk it's hard to not imagine that something bad has happened to them. So it takes patience. I remember there were times communication would be totally blacked out. When that happened I think I sent 3 boxes at one time. I think it's not always relying on the same thing so that way if they don't contact you at that 1:00 there's not like this panic.

If you are going to survive a deployment, you have to rely on not knowing everything. They're not going to tell you, "hey I'm in this place I probably shouldn't be it's really sketchy I'm probably going to get shot." But you definitely want to use multiple modes.

Q: Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

A: Had I ever had a typical conversation in my life? I went home so they entailed a lot of communication between. His family, it was his first deployment and he was an only child so his mom… We had a lot of family stuff going on so a lot of the complications involved in that. He

pretty much just talked to me and his mom the whole time he was there. He talked to very few people. So a lot of family talk about what's going on.
The time difference was obviously big so it would go on really early in the morning. And tell him what I'm going to do and where I'm going to be. Because he would go to the phone and randomly call me and when I had a missed phone call it felt like the entire world was crumbling. The missed phone calls are the absolute worst for me. So telling him what's going on.

A lot of future things. He sent me a lot of dog pictures. He used to send me all these ridiculous pictures because he wanted to get a dog. House planning. He would send me links to these dream houses. I think I had to tell him to stop because it was all these houses we never could afford.

There was a lot of joking around and sending him silly things and songs and trying to get everything happy even though it's not a happy thing.

Q: Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

A: Yes and no I guess. I think the seriousness of some things. At first it's really serious because you're both figuring out the whole thing. And you don't know what the situation will be and they are traveling and getting settled and that takes time. I think most of our initial conversations were pretty serious. I was moving home so he was worrying about me.

The middle was more the mindset that this was never going to end. Towards the end pretty much the only thing we talked about was him coming home and getting to be together. You go back to the – you're happy but you're not. This whole thing is really hard to describe. There were things that happened along the way that may change the habits. For instance, he did have a lot of blackouts there. He's over there so he's changing. Our way of talking to each other doesn't necessarily change, but as people we are changing. Serious stuff does happen so that changes the way we talk to each other.

Q: Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

A: We're human so most of our communication is nonverbal. I think people don't really realize how different it feels. I mean you may be having a conversation but you don't know what their expression. He's not there so I sometimes had to ask what he meant. It's just not the same – that's the simplest way to say it.

I mean it is great and it's great to talk to them but it's different. Command and everyone would say don't talk about certain things so there were times where it was "what do we talk about?" My husband is quiet so trying to get him to say certain things on the phone is different because there were times when I would have to say, "Babe, you need to fill in the lines because you left about a mile gap." When he's in front of me, I can understand a lot based on his expression or what I see. Especially certain things. My family loves to pick on me for my facial expressions, so not having that was different.

When you are together you can sit there and not anything and just be together, but over your laptop that doesn't really work.

Q: Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss, or to save for when her/she has returned? (Why?)

A: There were some things about money. I remember he spent a ton of money and I saw his Amazon account. I remember sending him a Facebook message saying that I saw your Amazon account. I'm pissed. We'll talk when you can call me. There were certain things, hot topics or when something really bad happens. Necessity is necessity, but it's not something that can be resolved using messaging.

Q: How do you think the access to social media sites is valuable to maintaining your relationship with your spouse during deployment?

A: I'm not super technological or anything, but having access…I think it's really nice to be able to help maintain as opposed to not being able to talk at all.

Q: How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

A: I do know the other side of it. My grandfather was in WWI and all they had were letters and there would be weeks between being able to communicate. That's how it was during basic training. I still send packages. Sending packages to him was so exciting. I had all the empty boxes lined up and every day I would come home and have more stuff. I was like wait he's going to have to bring some of this back. I would send him random dollar store stuff like one time I sent a Hawaiian skirt and coconut bra just for the fun of it. But it was exciting. It was different than having to come up with something in a message, because I didn't always have something to say. Or maybe that day you really did do nothing.

Q: Do you think that social media will change or affect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

A: I don't think it will change much with another deployment. I think we would use as many of forms as we could.

Q: Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

A: I am more open with him face-to-face. For me personally usually I have a thought and I have to figure out how to say it to get out of my mouth. It's different than just talking to him because I can talk to him about anything but if you have to write it in an e-mail or Facebook messenger it's different because I can't see his smile through a Facebook message. I think it's a lot harder.

And obviously OPSEC is involved so there are questions I can ask him all I want but he can't really answer. I try not to ask him those. I tried to keep a little list because I knew it was

questionable when I mentioned it. Even if there was something he really wanted to share, he can't for whatever reason.

Q: Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

A: If you're face-to-face if there was something going on we would just talk about the elephant in the room instead of having the elephant in the room, but over there for instance if there was something that I really had to talk to him about and then by the time I talked to him, he hasn't slept in 48 hours or has had a horrendous day, that might not be the time to have that conversation.

As far as everyday things I would say it's not any different. The manner might be different or the time frame might be different but other than that…

Q: Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?

A: No, I would say there are some things like for instance him spending money on Amazon, that's not really something I can resolve while he's over there. There are just some things you know we can figure out until he gets home anyway, so on those types of things we would just wait until later. Sometimes it just needs to be face-to-face there's no other way to do it.

Q: During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

A: By itself, absolutely not. Absolutely not.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, what 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

A: Frustrating – very frustrating, especially when the internet doesn't work.

Difficult - Especially in the case of Facebook messaging they separate it by day and time so if there's something we talked about. I would have to scroll to find it or whatever.

Those are the main ones. I know that's not 5 but that's what I've got. Between technical difficulties and everything…

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

A: Less I guess. It's text. You're not in person. I would say less.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?

A: Coming together I guess. Not everyone is able to go through that experience. When your spouse is gone for so long and adjusting to the whole situation. So I would say coming together.

Q: Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

A: I don't think so.

Interview Transcript E

Q: How frequently would say you were able to communicate with your spouse (via all forms of communication) during the deployment(s)?

A: During all forms of communication, I would say 5 days per week probably about four hours per day in total.

Q: Describe how you remained in contact with your spouse. What channels of communication (i.e. telephone, e-mail, social media) did you use?

A: Facebook messaging mostly. Skype was about every other week. That would be the video feature on Skype. We would mostly chat on Facebook. He would call me maybe once or twice a week, and that could be through the calling feature on Skype.

Q: Is there a specific method of communication that you preferred? Why did you prefer this channel over another?

A: Definitely the calling feature on Skype. It was really good just to hear his voice so like chatting is great but it's not the same. Skyping, video Skyping, is obviously the best but the problem with that was we never had good service it would always get cut off. We had to be in the right place at the right time, so it was just harder to find that time. So definitely the call feature on Skype, which you pay for; it's like three dollars more I think.

Q: Which social media sites did you use to communicate with your spouse during deployment?

A: Facebook and Skype.

Q: Describe how you used these social media sites. What were your purposes for using these platforms?

A: We could have used the function where it went straight to my messages, my text messages. I don't why we didn't do that; we just preferred the Facebook messenger more. That was just what we did. For chatting, that would be for daily updates, quick saying hi and less than engaged conversation unless we happened to both be online at the same time. That would be early mornings and late at night so that our schedules aligned. Messages would be updates, not necessarily expecting a response back. Phone calls would be for convenience purposes, so I could always leave class. He had much more strict of a schedule so that would be more for communicating back and forth, more bonding. And then we would also make dates for Skype, and that would be more for special occasions when we could, when we both had free time. And we'd also make dates for chatting, which would be more flexible, where I could be in a meeting, in a waiting room, outside the house doing something but still able to chat.

Q: Which social media site do you think you used most often?

A: Facebook

Q: What social media sites would you recommend to a spouse about to experience a first deployment to maintain intimacy and closeness with his or her spouse?

A: I would recommend adding the calling feature to Skype; it's really hard for them to be able to get to a phone on the base or the COP [combat outpost] or the FOB [forward operating base] or wherever they are. It's not always possible to use video Skype together, so the calling feature on Skype was a good way to be able to hear each other's voices on a daily or every other day basis. That was convenient for both of us.

Q: Describe a typical conversation with your spouse during deployment (using text-based communication such as social media). What did you talk about?

A: Throughout the day, I would send him really long updates about how I'm doing, what I'm doing. Asking him questions about what he's doing. Telling stories. What it would look like if you looked at it was me sending five or six long messages in a row and then that night whenever our schedules would overlap and we were both awake we would have the back and forth messages between us and we would catch up that way. And then you would probably see while I was asleep and he was awake and he was asleep you would see five or six messages of long update messages to me. Then I would wake up to his messages.

I was in school at the time, working and in school full-time. I would talk about school, tests, how much stress I was under. I worked at a daycare so I would tell him stories about kids. Any family drama, I was living at home so; not that there was a lot of drama but how things were going on with them. Then we would also talk about very limited on the exacts of his patrols or whatever for operational security, but he would give me as much as he could. There was always interesting stories about the culture there. Then for our shared experience, we would talk about plans and goals and things for when we were back together.

Q: Do you think there was consistency of what you talked about through deployment? Did it change at all throughout the deployment?

For the first month, it was mostly a transition period and doing a lot of -- less talking about content and more talking about how we were dealing with the transition, how we were coping with the separation. Then as we kind of got settled, so month three or four, or two to three, we got settled and we developed close relationships to help fill that hole, so things generally got better. From there it was more positive and hopeful and more content about what was going on with us. The last month was really hard because you are so close, but so far away and so it got back into that sort of emotional, how we were coping, how we are getting through the day. That countdown. I tracked my countdown by months, so the last couple months were hard but we talked as much as could to help. Kind of more future conversations.

Q: Describe your communication with your spouse during deployment. How it is the same or different than your communication habits at home?

We have a very positive relationship and we don't fight. We are best friends. We have a really good relationship. I would say that it is very similar. I think the stress of deployment can make it easier to take things personally or get easily offended or things that, but I don't remember making a big difference.

Q: Are there topics or anything you choose not to discuss, or to save for when her/she has returned? (Why?)

A: We shared everything. Well I shared everything while he was there. Well obviously for operational security reasons he withheld a lot of what was going on there. Now that he is getting out of the Army, I'm learning about all of these hazardous situations that he was in. It was interesting because he was supposed to deploy a few months ago, and he said at one point that he wouldn't tell me those things until after her got back. So I would say that any combat-related stories or events waited.

Q: How do you think the access to social media sites is valuable to maintaining your relationship with your spouse during deployment?

A: I think it may a huge difference, just being able to jot him notes and not having to worry about writing it in a letter and it getting there a month later. He gets to see it as it happens. I think that's valuable for staying connecting at the same time.

Q: How do you think your communication would have been different without access to social media sites?

A: We have that during basic training, when we didn't have the technology. So my coping was through letters and I constantly wrote, constantly sent letters and even though I wasn't getting anything back at that moment it was still my way of coping and so I think that obviously during deployment it's better because you are getting something back. But that some process of being able communicate at least one way output is still there.

Q: Do you think that social media will change or effect how you and your spouse are able to communicate if he or she was to deploy again in the future? How?

With the new deployments to Africa there is very little social media contact, so it would be a lot like basic training in that way.

Q: Are you more open with your spouse when using CMC?

A: Than face-to-face? Oh, no.

Q: Do you believe an equal or greater level of intimacy can be achieved through these computer-based forms of communication than face to face communications?

A: I think that it depends on where your heart is; I think that it definitely can if your heart is in it, but it's harder to have your heart in it and be fully invested when you're not around each other

all the time. I think that's where a lot of people lose that intimacy, closeness – when they try to find that in something else or someone else when they just don't have it.

Q: Are there conversations you choose to reserve for a face-to-face encounter? If so, why?

A: Just what I mentioned before; those operational concerns that he would wait to tell me after, if at all.

Q: During deployment, does computer-mediated communication work for you and your spouse? Are you able to maintain the communicational intimacy that you achieve when you are face-to-face?

A: Yes, it takes a lot more effort but yes.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, what 5 words would you use to describe your experience?

A: Frustrating – that's the first word that comes to mind.
Convenient
Connected
Fun
Useful

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you are "more open" or "less open" using CMC?

A: Face to face is more open.

Q: Thinking about your communication via computer-mediated communication channels and social media sites during deployment, would you say you and your spouse are "coming together" or "falling apart"?

A: Coming together.

Q: Based on what we've discussed, is there anything else you would like me to know that you haven't mentioned?

A: No. I don't think so.