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Marital Strength in Canadian Military Couples: A Grounded Theory Approach

by

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Abstract

The concept of “healthy marriage” has been of interest to scholars for quite some time, particularly with regards to how it can be achieved. With respect to marital relationships, an unexplored and complex group worthy of inquiry is the Canadian military population, as there are over 60,000 Canadian Forces (CF) regular members and 66% of them are married (Villeneuve, personal communication, 2006). As marriage and the military are two very demanding institutions and many couples remain committed to both, there is reason to believe that somewhere within these 41,000 marriages are key insights into marital success. Indeed much can be learned from individuals who can maintain healthy marital unions under such circumstances, therefore this study addresses the research question of: What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?

Through purposive sampling, 17 in-depth individual interviews were conducted with military members and their spouses who met specific criteria. The grounded theory method as developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) was used in this study. Themes of duality that emerged include: the notion of spouses being separate and together, the every-changing and yet stable state of healthy marriage, the divided loyalties between family and country that is sometimes experienced by soldiers, and, issues of gender, roles and power as they pertain to strong marriages in this group. The findings led to the development of a model of resilient Canadian military marriages, which suggests that marital strength relies on the combined prominence of intimacy, commitment and respect. This author proposes that the concepts outlined in the model are critical to maintaining marital strength within Canadian military marriages.

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Most importantly, this project was made possible by the generosity of heart demonstrated by all the participants in this study. I thank you for your faith in the project, for your trust in me, and for your willingness to give of yourselves for the good of others. I will always wonder how you managed to make “strong Canadian military marriage” look easy.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the loving memory of my greatest hero, Elsa De Guzman, who I was fortunate enough to call my mother. She taught me the deepest, sincerest reasons for living a good life. I also dedicate this to my father Lino De Guzman, who instilled in me the value of blending discipline, intellect and heart.

This personal achievement is a product of my husband Reagh's undying faith in, and commitment to me, to whom this project is also dedicated. His love for all things sacred, including family and country inspired this research. This work is also for my sons Eric and Adam, to whom I owe the capacity to feel the beauty of all things.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With the growing demands on Canada's military today, social workers will do well to understand the marital lives of those committed to defending our nation. Although the marital literature has significantly evolved over the last few decades, diverse populations such as the Canadian military continue to be underrepresented in this body of knowledge. Scholars eager to cast their inquiring eyes upon an unexplored culture, in which marriages exist and function in a challenging environment should view Canadian military marriages with keen interest.

There are complex dimensions to the coming together of the terms "marriage" and "the military", as both are competing institutions that come with their own uncompromising demands. Indeed, while wedding vows generally declare the goal of lasting marital happiness, the divorce rate of nearly 40% (Statistics Canada, 2005) suggests that this is not easily achieved. In terms of military life in Canada, our soldiers are more distressed than their non-soldier counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2002). It stands to reason therefore that when the concepts of marital union and military membership are jointly considered, somewhere within this group are key insights into marriage. Although this culture and its effects on members (Statistics Canada, 2002; Winslow, 1997) and their families (Dieryck, 2003; Rosebush, 1994; Harrison & Laliberte, 1994; Harrison; 2002; Norris, 2001) have been examined in the past, a study that evaluates strong marriages within this cultural context is long overdue.

The Research Project

This research project investigated the concept of marital strength in Canadian military couples by asking the research question of: “What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?” This inquiry aimed to expand the small body of marital literature that specifically focused on strengths, it set out to draw attention to a Canadian culture that is facing increasing demands, and it generated a model that will be useful to clinical therapists and policy makers. Grounded theory method as espoused by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) was used in this study.

For the purpose of this inquiry, “married couples” were defined as those who met the legal criteria for being married and who self-identified as having a strong marriage, with or without children, wherein at least one partner served the Canadian Forces for ten years or more during their marriage. While it could be argued that self-declared strong marriages may not adequately determine marital strength, no individuals with questionable marital quality volunteered to participate. “Marital strength” was used here to refer to any factor, element, attribute or combination thereof that contributed to the couple maintaining marital integrity in a healthy way.

While exploring uncharted territory is reason enough to pursue this investigation, this research project on marital strength within the Canadian military is also predicated on academic, personal, and professional goals. My own interest in clinical work developed over the last 15 years. It began while I was completing my bachelor of social work education. I was intrigued by the idea of examining various types of close relationships, and subsequent practice experience shed light on the intricate and multi-

layered nature of the marital union. By the time I pursued my master of social work degree six years later I was ready to specialize in the area of couple work, and examining intimate couples wherein violence had occurred further affirmed this goal. This privileged view of intimacy in the context of partner abuse set the tone for the rest of my career, which was thereafter spent acquiring and cultivating expertise in clinical couple work.

The personal component of my interest in this topic stems from the fact that I have become part of the Canadian military community myself. My marriage to an air force member 15 years ago necessitated the immediate assimilation into this world of national defence, a way of life that was as unknown to me as it is to most Canadians today. Within a short period of time I moved from downtown Toronto to a remote military community in northern Alberta. I endured physical separation from the long-standing support of loved ones, experienced job loss, and was immersed into military culture. While I faced these with the benefit of a psychosocial awareness of change, a somewhat accessible distant network and an eagerness to embrace this new lifestyle, acculturation still posed many challenges. I have since come to believe that even when one is blessed with optimal conditions for adapting into this new environment, adjustment difficulties are inescapable.

Professionally, I have approached this cultural group from the perspectives of a children's services worker, a marriage and family counsellor, a non-uniform military social worker and a private practitioner over the span of a decade and a half. From all of these employment vantage points, I have observed that many military couples and

families generally experienced moderate to severe levels of distress. It soon became apparent, however, that while all of the couple relationships within this culture shared similar work conditions and comparable personal circumstances, they cope in remarkably different ways. Where some could readily maintain healthy marital functioning in the face of adversity, others could not. Many marriages had occurrences of infidelity or were on the verge of divorce, and yet others remained remarkably strong. My varied social work duties also allowed glimpses of healthy military marriages that worked flawlessly and without incident, regardless of the stressors placed upon them. These observations aroused my curiosity about the source of dissimilarity in manners of coping, and I wondered whether there were specific characteristics within a strong military marriage that rendered it resilient. When my desire to pursue higher education returned again, this question inevitably provided the impetus for doctoral inquiry.

The Researcher's Perspective

Grounded theory method is regarded as both a method and a methodology that can be used with other theoretical frameworks (Miliken & Schreiber, 2000), therefore additional perspectives pertinent to this project were utilized. For example, the strengths perspective was essential to this research. As outlined by Saleebey (1997), the principles of the strengths perspective encompass the following assumptions: that within every system are strengths; that there are opportunities for growth in painful experiences; that the full capacity for growth is usually unrealized; that within individuals are the answers they seek; and, that every human being's environment has resources. Saleebey believes in empowerment and in the existence of "renewable and expandable resources" that exist

internally and externally. Incorporating these assumptions into healthy marriage research ensured a focus on exploration of both hidden and visible strengths, and careful attention was given to recognizing human capacities and potential in this investigation.

There is growing advocacy for the use of a social constructivist lens when conducting research on strengths (Ungar, 2004; Saleebey, 1994; Lee, 2003). Social constructivism emphasizes that social processes generate knowledge and ideas of reality (Charmaz, 2006). “Strength”, “adaptation” and “coping” are all constructs that have individual and culturally influenced meanings, and any efforts to investigate these from a scientific or quantitative approach may run counter to the purpose of trying to find the true answers, which are true for a given culture.

The Researcher’s Position

My academic, personal and professional experiences influenced my interpretations and interactions throughout this project. I bring my social identity of doctoral student, researcher, military wife, mother of military children, and professional social worker into the inquiry process and these guided the decisions that I made. I acknowledge the critical role that these elements have on shaping aspects of this study and I have reviewed relevant literature to this effect (see Cartwright & Limandri, 1997; Sword, 1999). All the information from this project resulted from what transpired between myself and the participants. As succinctly phrased by Sword (1999):

Locating self in the research endeavour does not lessen the credibility of its products as a representation of the experiences of others. Rather, it makes explicit

how our stories are context bound and strengthens one's integrity as a researcher (p. 277).

Though impossible to capture in their entirety, issues pertaining to matters that arose from where I was situated, particularly with regards to their effects on the project, are discussed in Appendix A, and in the Methods Chapter of this dissertation that addresses the study's trustworthiness.

Overview of the Dissertation

This report has five primary segments. Chapters Two and Three are devoted to exploring what is known about marriages, what healthy marriages generally look like, and how they are theorized to develop. The literature on the Canadian military culture is also presented there, as is the applicability of existing theories to this particular group. Chapter Four is the methodology section, which summarizes the rationale for selecting the grounded theory method, as well as the method's main components. How the method is implemented in the current study is also presented, as are the considerations for ensuring this study's trustworthiness. The Results chapter reveals the details pertaining to the study sample and the information gathered from them, including the words, phrases and statements of the participants. This section also encompasses the interpretation of all information obtained, and outlines how the concepts were defined. The Discussion chapter reveals the research product of a Resilient Canadian Military Marriage Model, and the themes found during the research are also identified. It summarizes the findings in the context of the two literature review chapters and highlights the areas wherein congruencies exist. This section also presents the limitations and strengths of this study,

as well as the implications of the findings to clinical practice and social work policy. Future areas of study are presented, as are my own personal reflections regarding this research journey.

CHAPTER TWO: MARITAL STRENGTH

While the word “marriage” is commonly understood to reflect a formal union between two individuals, this multi-faceted concept presents many avenues for exploration. Although the current marital literature is broad, its relevance and applicability to strong Canadian military marriages has not been established at this time. One must consider the complex dimensions of marriage, the elements that contribute to marital health and the overall impact of culture on this union when inquiring about marital strength in Canadian military couples. With these in mind, this literature review accomplishes the following tasks. First, it presents a general picture of what is known about marriages to date. Secondly, it provides a description of healthy marriages as currently described by scholars, and thirdly, it provides a summary of theories through which healthy marriages have historically been understood. It should be noted that the adjectives of “good”, “healthy” and “strong” as they pertain to marriages are interchangeably used throughout this review.

Healthy Marriage

The complex nature of marriage is reflected in how it has been studied, and a large proportion of this has been through the concepts of marital stability (Previti & Amato, 2003) and marital quality (Proulx, Helms & Buehler, 2007). According to Spanier (1979), marital stability, also referred to as marital longevity, speaks to whether or not the union ends in separation, abandonment, divorce or the natural death of one spouse. Marital quality, on the other hand pertains to how well the relationship works and how well the spouses within the union relate to each other by way of interaction and

functioning (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003). While it is generally believed that a lasting marriage is good and that a good marriage is lasting, investigations into marital quality and marital stability have dissolved these myths. We now know that some good marriages end (Glenn, 1990) and that long-lasting marriages do not necessarily experience marital bliss (Alford-Cooper, 1998; Heaton & Albrecht, 1991; Knoester & Booth, 2000). Further, some ailing marriages can be restored to good health (Christensen & Heavey, 1999), and some good marital practices can be taught (Berger & Hannah, 1999; Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Gottman, 1999). Studying a couple's marital quality and stability together, therefore, is an effective means for assessing their overall marital health (Glenn, 1990; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Story & Bradbury, 2004).

Indeed, marriage is often discussed in the context of its health, and while the literature on healthy marriages has been considered to be scarce by some (Young, 2004), there appears to be a mounting interest in studying this domain (Anderson Moore, Chalk, Scarpa & Vandivere, 2004; Parker, 2000; Bachand & Caron, 2001; Sillman, 2003; Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Wolcott, 1999).

As a starting point, scholars have delineated the differences between healthy and unhealthy marriages. Early on Spanier (1979) claimed that the quality of a marriage is not fixed, and this was later echoed by Anderson Moore et al. (2004) who purport that healthy marriage "is not an either/or thing" because relationships experience varying levels of healthiness over different periods of time. To Baucom, Epstein and LaTaillade (2002), healthy and unhealthy marriages are readily differentiated by their characteristics, wherein maladaptive marriages reflect the inverse components found in healthy

relationships. They believe that a healthy marriage, for example, would have effective communication skills, and its unhealthy counterpart would reveal poor means of communicating. There also appears to be two types of information in the literature that addresses the concept of healthy marriages. The first focuses on descriptive qualities that are already present in strong marital unions, while the second conceptualizes marriage in a broader sense by providing a theoretical understanding of how healthy marriages have come to be. Both will be respectively discussed here.

The Elements in Healthy Marriage

Marital strength has been defined as the elements that positively influence the union during challenging times (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). To Anderson Moore and colleagues (1994), healthy marriage means the presence of several elements, namely commitment, marital satisfaction, and communication, and the absence of others, such as violence and infidelity. Locating further definitions for “healthy marriage” in the current literature is an arduous task, as scholars have typically addressed this by identifying the elements found within it. To this end, the discussion now turns to the constructs primarily believed to exist in strong marital unions: intimacy (Bagarozzi, 1997; Diessner, Frost & Smith, 2004; Hinde, 1978; Kaslow & Hammerschmidt, 1992; Sternberg, 1986), effective communication (Anderson Moore et al., 2004; Eckstein & Goldman, 2001, Giblin, 2004), conflict resolution skills (Heavey, Lane & Christensen, 1993; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler & Stuart 1998), commitment (Doherty, 2003; Parker, 2001) and spirituality (Fennell, 1993; Giblin, 2004; Worthington, Lerner & Sharp, 2005), each of which will now be discussed.

Intimacy

Bagarozzi (1997) identifies intimacy as the cornerstone to healthy marriages. Intimacy was considered a dynamic interactive process that evolves and matures over time. He claims that the presence of intimacy is influenced by a couple's need for it, and by how well they attend to such need. To Bagarozzi, healthy marital relationships are achieved when there is a distinct feeling of trust in the foreground of marital interactions, thus creating a mutually safe environment for intimacy to flourish. Hinde (1978), too, believes that trust is essential to intimacy, claiming that intimacy depends on how many facets of one's personality one is willing to expose.

While Kaslow and Hammerschmidt (1992) do not use the term intimacy, they allude to it by urging that there must be a "deep and abiding love for one another" within marriage, based on integrity, shared values and consideration. These researchers suggest that a good marriage, although achieved between two people, is well rooted in an individual's ability to cautiously venture outward, and towards a partner who is willing and wanting to do the same.

Concerned with the inconsistencies of how the term "intimacy" is used, Moss and Schwebel (1993) attempted to clarify the construct, and they found 61 varying definitions in the clinical literature. After analyzing these for commonalities, they concluded that intimacy has five integral components: commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive intimacy, physical intimacy and mutuality. Moss and Schwebel concluded that closeness is achieved when relationships reflect the intent of permanence, and reciprocal positivity in areas of relating, thinking, and touching are readily apparent. To this effect therefore,

healthy marriages are possible when couple members make good on their intention to stay together, and take the trouble to do this in every possible domain.

Intimacy, along with passion and commitment, are the three elements that comprise the “triangular theory of love”, according to Sternberg (1986). This theory views intimacy as a sense of bonding, wherein close and connected feelings exist. Intimacy deals with the specific emotions that are involved in experiencing tenderness in a loving relationship. In this theory, passion addresses the motivation for romance, physical attraction and sexual involvement, while commitment deals with present and future thinking regarding the intimate bond. Marital health therefore must be viewed in terms of comprising intimacy, passion and commitment, according to Sternberg’s theory. Based on these components, Sternberg has found eight possible types of love. These include: a “liking” type that has intimacy but no passion or commitment; “infatuation”, which involves passion without commitment or intimacy; “romantic love”, which entails intimacy and passion but not commitment; “companionate” love, which has intimacy and commitment but lacks passion; “fatuous love”, which contains both commitment and passion but no intimacy, and “non-love”, wherein all three components of intimacy, passion and commitment are absent.

Communication

Intimacy is nurtured by effective ways of relating to each other, therefore healthy couples must communicate well (Anderson Moore et al., 2004; Eckstein & Goldman, 2001; Giblin, 2004). Communication is considered a facilitator of intimacy and not its component, as honest and effective conversations can be present where intimacy is not

(Gilbert, 1976; Wynne & Wynne, 1986). Good marriages require proper communication as they thrive when there is smooth flow in the sending and receiving messages; this lays the groundwork for a healthy well-established connection between spouses where there is little room for doubt about intentions and meanings. Thoughts, feelings and ideas are properly understood within a marriage when conversations are intentional and deliberate. It is implied therefore that intimacy and effectively relating to each other form the foundation of a good marriage, hand in hand.

Conflict Resolution

Wanting to be close and being adept at communicating does not prevent disagreement between spouses, and problem solving is one of the most complex components of marital relationships. Heavey, Lane and Christensen (1993) discuss the tendency for couples to engage in a “demand/withdraw pattern” wherein one spouse attempts to solve a problem by placing demands on his or her partner, and the other spouse may respond by avoiding or withdrawing. Critical insights into this dynamic are evident when violent and non-violent marriages were compared, as is evident in the works of Holtzworth-Munroe and colleagues (1998). They found that violent husbands tend to demand while wives withdraw, and in distressed non-violent marriages, wives tend to demand while husbands withdraw. If this process becomes more pronounced, the conflict can lead to hostility or isolation (Christensen, 1987; 1988; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Holtzworth-Munroe et al. (1998) noted that the demand and withdraw pattern was least visible in healthy marital relationships. There is evidence that healthy marriages function well through conflictual times (Gottman, 1999), and that such couples accept

that irresolvable matters can “just be let be” (Klagsburn, 1995). Couples that face differences effectively and that can come to an impasse without harbouring ill feelings seem to reflect healthy marital practices.

Commitment and Spirituality

A prominent component of healthy marriages already mentioned is the assumption of permanence, wherein commitment to both the marital process and to each other remains stable. While emotional distance is inevitable from time to time, healthy couples take comfort in the notion that closeness eventually returns (Parker, 2001). Doherty (2003) urges that remaining committed in the “no-matter-what” and not “as-long-as” sense is the premise for staying happily together, wherein couples can conceptualize their joint future, and create a profound sense of unity.

Fennell (1993), Giblin (2004), and Worthington and colleagues (2005) emphasize that despite the presence of many couple strengths, adherence to religious beliefs is essential to good marriages. To these researchers, healthy marriages endure because individual partners believe in a higher being, which keep them accountable on matters of the heart. Worthington et al. (2005) emphasize that Christianity induces forgiveness to the depths required to heal and strengthen emotional bonds. While clinicians may not typically link spirituality and marriage (Giblin, 2004), the literature suggests that acknowledging the potential impact of such a connection is necessary.

A description of healthy marriages as evident in the literature has been presented, shedding light on the characteristics found in such unions. Researchers placed the most emphasis on the presence of intimacy, although its primary facilitator, effective

communication, seemed an essential companion. Conflict resolution was viewed as critical by the few who have specialized in that area, and commitment, although necessary seemed somewhat in the foreground. While the literature on marriage and spirituality appear less developed, there is certainly a sense that research in this field will expand considerably in the years to come.

Theories to Explain Healthy Marriage

While a picture of marital health has been depicted, the existing explanations for healthy marriage formation and maintenance should be of equal concern to marital health researchers. For the purpose of this review, prominent theories and models that explain how strong marriages have come to be will now be discussed. Relevant theories that may have limited applicability will first be presented, and those that appear most applicable to the population under study will be reviewed. These four theories are: 1) social exchange theory; 2) adult attachment theory; 3) Gottman's sound relationship house theory; and, 4) family systems theory with specific focuses on Bowenian family systems theory and family systems models.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is one of the older explanations for why marriages are healthy. The theory claims that success or failure in marriage depends on one's assessment of the rewards for being in the marriage, the barriers to ending it, and the existence of alternatives outside the union (Levinger, 1976). Within this view, a healthy marriage takes place when all aspects of a spouse's own needs are met, and both partners believe that being in the marital union is far better than not being in it.

Social exchange theory's usefulness for understanding strong marriages is supported by the works of Heaton and Albrecht (1991), who discuss elements that rigidly maintain an unhealthy marital union. These elements include: a spouse's interpretation and meaning ascribed to current socio-economic status, prior marital experience, ethno religious membership and pro-marriage values. It is believed that these factors can serve to keep an unhappy marriage intact, since the consequences to dissolving it may seem insurmountable. Heaton and Albrecht further note that the division of household labour, assets, social contact, and gender also influence marriage preservation among the unhappily wed.

Waite and Gallagher (2000) concluded that individuals in healthy committed marriages are better off than unhappily or non-married couples. They evaluated cross-disciplinary scientific studies that explored the effects of marriage on varied demographic groups, and in their compelling book about the merits of marriage they make the following claim:

In matters of the heart, no less than the market, a bigger investment means better returns. The benefits of marriage (but not cohabitation) brings are not small ... marriage for most people is the means to health, happiness, wealth, sex and long life (p. 46).

These authors believe that healthy marital relationships are possible when couples commit to the union in the full-hearted and bravest sense, by closing off exits and directing their energies into keeping the marriage strong.

Critique. In relation to understanding marital health, social exchange theory seems to suggest that the spouses' perceptions of the marriage eventually determine whether or not the marriage is good. When both partners believe that the union addresses the majority of personal marital expectations as dictated by those within it, the union is considered to be sound. Alternatively, this view suggests that an unhealthy marital situation may occur when partners unhappily remain in it because of barriers to separation or divorce. It presents a simplistic way of determining marital health, and, while it implies that a marriage is either healthy or not healthy depending on the spouses' beliefs, this theory does not speak to the elements that move a couple from good to ill marital health. As is the case with many theories, elements of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, and larger societal factors do not appear to be accounted for here.

Adult Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is well equipped to explain marital health, and while it emerged within a few years of social exchange concepts, the adult attachment literature seemed to achieve prominence at a later time. Bowlby's (1969) ground-breaking contributions are evident in his summary of attachment theory's three primary assumptions, in relation to infants. The first is that babies are born with behaviours that function to maintain closeness to others. Proximity to a primary caregiver is crucial for the infant to survive and feel safe while exploring his or her environment. Secondly, maintaining this proximity is influenced by the caregiver's response to this infant's need to attach. How he or she reacts to the closeness sought is critical to the child. The third assumption is that these experiences are internalized to form one's "internal working

model” or attachment style, which is thereafter used in new relationships Bowlby (1969; 1977).

While the discussion thus far has been on newborns, these styles are considered to influence attachment in adulthood, as once established, they are believed to remain relatively consistent over the lifespan (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Achieving a safe emotional connection to a few intimate others is a fundamental need for all humans, and fear of isolation and helplessness accompanies such need (Johnson & Greenman, 2006). Writings that speak to the emotional link pertaining to adult relationships encompass the adult attachment literature, which are the primary focus of the discussion here.

In their study of caregiver responsiveness, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three types of attachment working models in adults: secure, insecure-ambivalent and insecure-avoidant. Individuals with secure working models have solid feelings of self-worth and tend to be socially confident. They usually perceive others as dependable and trustworthy, and secure individuals deal with intimacy and closeness well. In contrast, those with insecure-ambivalent working models possess a strong need to be socially accepted and tend to doubt their own value, thus depending largely on external praise. Such individuals are often unsatisfied in marriages, as a lack of trust frequently occurs (Collins & Read, 1990). Finally, a person who functions with an insecure-avoidant working model sees others as untrustworthy and unreliable. He or she tends to fear or have an aversion to intimacy and closeness.

To Bowlby (1969), an insecure attachment style poses a challenge to relationships, as partners can eventually become incapable of the responsiveness needed

for secure bonding to take place. Holtzworth-Munroe, Stuart and Hutchinson (1997), who studied attachment patterns in healthily and unhealthily relating men, identified mistrust, jealousy, a high need for nurturance from wives, a discomfort with closeness, and anxiousness about abandonment as present in adult relationships of ill health. These authors found similarities between violent and non-violent men with respect to their preoccupations with their romantic partners, their needs for nurturance, and their narrow focus on their wives. A distinction between the two groups was found, however, in their ability to be close, as violent men found closeness more difficult to achieve than their non-violent counterparts. The work of Holtzworth-Munroe and colleagues (1997) suggests that men who trust and who are eager to accept intimacy, while ably reflecting it back, are more likely to experience healthy satisfying marriages.

The relevance of adult attachment theory to marriage health is thoroughly discussed by Johnson and Greenman (2006), who elaborate that marital distress occurs when emotional disconnections between the spouses pose a threat to the sense of safety and security provided by their bond. Under such circumstances one may protest in the form of anger, clinging, and seeking. Johnson and Greenman believe that secure partners respond to such protests by recognizing and accepting them, while insecure spouses will likely not respond at all. Instead, they may demonstrate emotional avoidance through distraction or by becoming absorbed in other activities. The protesting partner's anxiety may then elevate, resulting in a tighter grip on the attachment figure through criticism, in order to elicit a response. To Johnson and Greenman, such emotional responses cause this pattern to continue, and complete unresponsiveness and disengagement may eventually

occur. It should be noted however that while such rigidity in styles can contribute to dysfunction in couples, change can be achieved through new interactional experiences that foster safety and increase trust (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Johnson & Greenberg, 1995).

Critique. Our understanding of marital health is enhanced by adult attachment theory as it provides a thorough presentation of some deep-rooted individual issues that unavoidably come into play in intimate marital relationships. Adult attachment theory seems to suggest that the fulfillment of both partners' needs for intimacy renders the union strong, and a lack of fulfillment in this regard weakens it. While attachment theory provides an in-depth analysis of dyadic interrelations not identified in other theories, it, too, fails to address the significant effects of external influences and, therefore, cannot be used in isolation to explain marital strength. Similar to social exchange theory, it does not account for gender issues, sexual orientation, race and larger societal factors.

Gottman's Sound Relationship House Theory

Significant contributions to explaining marital health are evident in the more recent works of John Gottman (1999), a behaviourist who integrates cognitive, behavioural, and experiential approaches (Knoble, personal communication, 2008). Gottman proposes a comprehensive framework for understanding healthy marriage and asserts that marital actions and individual perceptions are critical to marital success. Gottman's (1999) theory of the "sound relationship house" is a landmark contribution to marital literature, in which the determinants of healthy marriages are narrowed to four characteristics.

Firstly, he proposes that marital friendship is the foundation to any healthy marriage. Actions and behaviours within this friendship reflect emotional and cognitive closeness, thus creating a “positive affect.” The second element is that of positive sentiment override, and this speaks to the couple’s ability to receive feedback from each other without construing it as negative. Conflict regulation is the third factor; healthy marital partners are believed to have the ability to “negotiate the terrain”, when faced with irresolvable issues. Finally, the fourth element of this theory refers to the couple’s ability to create a shared meaning system in the areas of rituals, roles, goals and symbols. Within healthy marriages therefore, couples are gentle and kind towards each other, they initiate discussions of critical issues, and they permit themselves to be influenced by each other.

Gottman (1999) also identified specific characteristics of dysfunctional marriages: criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling, which he labelled the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” of marital behaviour. Of these, contempt was considered a significant predictor of divorce. To Gottman, marriages are unhappy and unstable when there is more negative than positive in the couple’s interactive behaviour, in their perception of each other’s actions, and in their physiological state of arousal as a result of marital issues. He further believes that a marriage in which the couple members cannot “soothe” or comfort themselves, as well as their partners, is unhealthy.

In summary, the sound relationship house theory suggests that healthy couple members start as good friends, mutually accept each other, can surmount the impasses, and establish a common understanding within which the marriage functions. In contrast,

unhealthy marriages contain criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling. The theory reflects the notion that, based on the presence or absence of these elements, marriages are either unhealthy or healthy. In order to move from ill to good marital health, Gottman claims that changes in behaviours and perceptions must occur.

Critique. Gottman's work presents a well-rounded approach to understanding strong marriages as it provides insight into how they are likely carried out in relevant relationship domains. However, with regards to the four dysfunctional qualities that he identified, it is difficult to conceive how these cannot, from time to time, be present in healthy relationships. Similarly, it is unclear whether all of the healthy indicators must be consistently present, and to what degree. It is also noteworthy that, while Gottman's theory is a result of over 30 years of clinical work (Gottman, 1999), there are heated debates between scholars regarding the credibility and generalizability of some of his research (Hafen, & Crane, 2003; Heyman & Hunt, 2007; Hyoun & Capaldi, 2007; Hyoun, Capaldi & Crosby, 2007; Stanley, Bradbury & Markham, 2000). With all these in mind, Gottman's work is still refreshing in that it presents both positive and negative factors that indicate good marital health, or the lack thereof. His concepts as they stand are practical and useful for viewing marital health in Canadian military couples.

Family Systems Theories

Family systems theory addresses the notion that individuals are emotional beings who cannot be understood in isolation, and must be viewed within the context of their families (Bowen, 1985). A number of theorists adapt this view, and it is used varyingly across different therapeutic interventions including structural (Minuchin & Fishman,

1981), psychoanalytic (Ackerman, 1958), experiential (Whitaker & Bumberry, 1988), behavioural (Jacobson & Addis, 1993) and strategic approaches (Haley, 1976; Madanes, 1981), with respect to their particular tenets.

The origins of the family systems approach can be traced back to the 1950's, and contributions from the social work profession are noted in its early development (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). To many family systems theorists, the family “functions in relation to its broader socio-cultural contexts and that evolves over the life cycle” (Walsh, 1985). The family's surrounding environment is usually acknowledged to have influence on it, as does the developmental stage in which a family finds itself. Meyer (1988) emphasizes the interrelatedness of the individual with his or her environment, claiming that “the person is connected to others, as well as to the social institutions, cultural forces, and the physical space” that make up his or her world (p. 276). An individual is believed to have a complex biological, spiritual and psychological system, but is also connected to and influenced by other social systems (Kazemek & Kazemek, 1992).

Ludwig von Bertalanffy is well known for his contributions to general systems theory, which, in turn, influenced the development of family systems theory (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995). The following general systemic principles, as summarized by Cox and Paley (1997) are instrumental to understanding the family as a system: 1) that the whole is considered greater than the sum of its parts; 2) that a hierarchical structure exists within it involving subsystems; 3) that it contains “homeostatic features” that compensate for changing conditions; and, 4) that open living systems have the ability to adapt.

Martin and O'Connor (1989) summarized that an open system is one that evolves through input from outside, thus creating output that result from these transactions. It has permeable boundaries that allow external influence and is able to select and filter incoming information that maintains its vitality. They claim that a closed system, on the other hand, has limited exchange with other systems, which can restrict evolution and growth. Rigid boundaries serve to maintain the system as closed and outside influences are resisted so as to preserve a particular value, identity or status quo.

While the family systems literature has endured steady growth through the years, many family systems models for understanding marriages and families emerged from studying the distressed. Among these are the Regenerative Model (McCubbin & Thompson, 1987), Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model (Patterson, 2002), ABCX Family Crisis Framework (Hill, 1949) and Roller Coaster Model (1958). While these are significant and informative, when engaging in studying the maritally strong, there is merit to focusing more on models that were built on healthily functioning families.

Two such approaches are the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (Epstein, Ryan, Bishop, Miller & Keitner, 2003) and the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning (Beavers & Hampson, 2003). In effort to examine the literature most applicable to this marital health study on Canadian military couples, these will be reviewed. Bowenian family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) and the Circumplex Model (Olson & Gorall, 2003) also appear relevant to this project, will be discussed here as well. Once these have been presented, the overall critiques of family systems approaches will be summarized.

Bowenian Family Systems Theory. As mentioned earlier, Bowen considers the family to be an emotional system, asserting that issues of closeness are not always handled in a healthy manner. Bowen claimed that dysfunctional patterns could manifest through “fusion”, “triangulation” or both. Fusion is the “locking together” of two family members, which Bowen (1978) identified in both parent-child and parent-parent relationships. With regard to marriages, fusion occurs when a less adaptive spouse who has lost self-direction and competence relies heavily on his or her excessively adaptive spouse. Such enmeshed or over-involved relationships result in emotional tensions, and during such times a third family member may be drawn in to form a “triangle”. While such a person “moderates the closeness and distance by being available to one or both partners” through this triangulation, the unhealthiness of enmeshment is maintained (Walsh, 2002).

Bowen (1974) suggests that, from a developmental perspective, “differentiation of self” must occur, wherein one becomes more aware of one’s own thoughts and emotions by recognizing that these are separate from those of others. Differentiation encourages personal problem solving, independent correction of self and the ability to change in a positive manner. Bowen further believes in the “multigenerational transmission process”, wherein one’s family relationship history significantly influences whether or not healthy marital relating transpires. Relevant to marital strength is the notion that, when independence and positive delineation are particularly strong within a marital union, it is more likely to enjoy better health.

The Circumplex Model. A family systems approach is implicit in the Circumplex Model, which has achieved prominence in research and clinical literature over the last three decades (Olson, 2000; Olson & Gorall, 2003; Olson, Russell & Sprenkle, 1989). This model focuses on three critical areas. The first is in family cohesion, which refers to emotional bonding. This occurs between family members and is examined by exploring factors that include the quality of emotional connection, boundaries, coalition, and decision-making. Cohesion is rated as being one of four levels: 1) disengaged, wherein the connection is very low; 2) separate, wherein cohesion is low to moderate; 3) connected, which reveals a moderate to high level of cohesion; and 4) enmeshed, wherein the cohesive link is extremely high. Separate and connected ranges are believed to lead to optimal functioning, as marital and family members are able to achieve a balance between being alone and being together, and in a way that functions well (Olson, 2000).

The second dimension of interest to the Circumplex model is a family's flexibility, particularly with regards to its leadership, roles and relationship rules. Issues of control, discipline and negotiation styles are explored in this domain. How the family balances issues of stability and change is essential to healthy family functioning, and the family's ability to adapt when so required distinguishes it as functional. To Olson (2000), family flexibility is rated as rigid, structured, flexible or chaotic. Achieving balanced flexibility that ranges between structured and flexible is believed the ideal and conducive to healthy family functioning. Communication is viewed as the third realm of focus for the Circumplex model, as it is believed to foster movement in the other two dimensions. A family's communication is evaluated by examining family members' ability to speak

and listen, comfort with self-disclosure, clarity, continuity tracking, respect, and regard for each other (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

In relation to marital strength, the Circumplex model suggests that marital partners who can achieve a balance between being alone and being together, who are adaptive and flexible, and who communicate well are likely in strong marriages. This model stipulates that functioning in extreme patterns of rigidity or chaos is to the detriment of the marriage and family, and it implies that the state of one's marital health can be improved if so required, with appropriate intervention.

The McMaster Model. Based on studies of healthy families, Epstein and his colleagues (2003) devised the McMaster Model of Family Functioning which further highlights the usefulness of a family systems approach. Their work incorporates the following family systems beliefs: 1) that all family parts are interrelated; 2) that one part of the family cannot be understood in isolation; 3) that family functioning cannot be understood without examining its parts; 4) that family organization and structure provide insights into family functioning; and, 5) that the family's transactional process significantly shape the family's behaviours.

Epstein and his colleagues advocate that a family's level of functioning can be examined in the context of six critical dimensions. In the first domain of problem solving, healthy families are believed to be effective at resolving all types of difficulties. In the second realm of communication, healthy families have clear and direct ways of relating to each other, and information between the members flows well. In the third dimension of role functioning, members must have well defined roles that are suitably flexible between

parents and age appropriate for children, and to which members are held accountable.

The fourth area pertains to affective responsiveness, wherein family members are able to display a full range of emotions that fit with the respective circumstances. The fifth domain is that of affective involvement and empathy for fellow family members must be evident here. Behaviour control is the sixth dimension; it is believed that flexibility in this domain reflects healthy family functioning. Epstein and his colleagues espouse that it is necessary to evaluate all these dimensions in order to fully understand the complex family unit.

The McMaster model underscores the relevance of a family systems focus when dealing with marriages and families, as its multi-dimensionality allows one to consider areas that are easily overlooked. The model reveals that having effective means for handling difficulties, clear and direct ways of relating, interchangeable role orientation between spouses, expressiveness, empathy, and flexibility are healthy family components. It further highlights the fact that marital health exists within and is influenced by the family in which it lives, and that strength in marriage plays a key role in achieving sound family wholeness.

Beaver's Systems Model. The merits of family systems theory are evidenced by its well-established practical use. Based on multiple studies that include those conducted on healthy families, the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning was developed by Robert Beavers and John Hampson (2003). This model focuses on the domains of family competence and family style in order to determine a family's state of health. The realm of family competence addresses the family's ability to perform essential and nurturing tasks

by managing and organizing itself. Family competence is therefore viewed within a range of being effective to being severely dysfunctional. In the realm of family style, the Beavers model views a family as ranging between a centripetal style, meaning its members look entirely into the family to have its needs met, and a centrifugal style, which entails an external family focus for need satisfaction.

The Beavers model is critical to understanding couple and family health as it provides a detailed explanation for how such families carry out their lives. Beavers and Hampson have established that optimally functioning families are those that have both effective family competence and a mixed family style. Such family members are believed to assume the following “systems orientation” assumptions: 1) that an individual does best with the support and satisfaction of relationships; 2) that one’s actions affects others and vice versa; 3) that behaviours are a result of many variables as oppose to only one; 4) that human beings are neither absolutely helpless nor absolutely powerful; and 5) that conflict and mixed feelings are inevitable. According to this model, optimal families negotiate and exercise choice, and such families contain warmth, humour and intimacy. Clear, permeable and healthy boundaries are established in these families and its members derive joy and comfort from these relationships. Such families are reported to be spontaneous, adaptable and flexible.

Perhaps these authors’ most noteworthy contributions to healthy family literature are their insights into the interplay between equality, power and intimacy, which they view as critical to optimal family functioning. According to Beavers and Hampson, optimal families maintain a hierarchy of power wherein leadership is at the hands of the

adults, but children's input can influence parental decisions, and children gain more power as they advance in age. Couples within optimal families focus on the concept of "equity" wherein both couple members are equally valued, and they move away from the notion of "sameness" where it is believed that tasks must be equally distributed. They do not rely on outdated traditional gender roles but neither do they rebel from them, as both are intent on addressing the needs of all family members. The parents believe themselves to have equal power, and the children are left with the sense that their voices are respected. Beavers and Hampson purport that intimacy is fostered in a climate that is free of power struggles, and they state:

It is only when power differences are thrown aside that people can experience the sharing of their innermost selves achieved by the dropping of pretence in the presence of trust and the absence of fear (p 560).

The Beavers Systems Model demonstrates the value of having a systems orientation within a family, and gives rise to the elements of flexibility and adaptability that are essential for maintaining healthy functioning. It sheds light on how this approach can build healthy, empowering and intimate relationships, and it emphasizes the value of meticulously examining interactive dynamics whenever a marriage and family unit is assessed.

Family Systems Critique. It is critical to note that the family systems approach received well-founded criticism in the late 1980's, primarily by feminist scholars. Although the concerns applied mainly to family therapy settings, they pertain to anyone employing a family systems view. The negative aspects of this approach have been

focused on three general areas. Firstly, family therapy models have been accused of “mother blaming” (Nichols & Schwartz, 1995), wherein mothers were often viewed as enmeshed and incompetent, and fathers as competent and rational. Family therapists inadvertently employed practices that failed and diminished women.

Secondly, family systems therapists did not recognize the impact of patriarchy (Goldner, 1988), which permeated the work of the therapists themselves, despite their self-declarations of using feminist views. Thirdly and most concerning, therapists promoted family violence by adhering to their ascribed neutral therapeutic stances, as many did not take a stand against the “non-neutrality of power dynamics” that was present in abusive relationships (Meyers Avis, 1992). This awakening phase in family systems history shed light on the potentially damaging effects that uniformed therapists, albeit innocently, can and did make. It further highlighted the need for therapists to reflect on personal, interpersonal and prevailing attitudes at all times. Having discussed the paramount failing of family systems theorists, the discussed approaches will now be reviewed according to their relevance to the current study, and in the context of these critiques.

The Beavers Model. Indeed, power differentials exist between men and women, and achieving a sense of equality in marriage may be entirely unrealistic. Patriarchal and societal roots run deep, and these permeate into every home (Goldner, 1988). With these in mind, however, a model that attempts to establish such mutual footing, however unachievable this may be, is worthy of serious consideration. There are narrower degrees of inequity that a couple could strive for, and efforts to move away from larger gender

disparities should always be made when opportunities to do so exist. The Beavers model also appears to have more flexibility in its application than the Circumplex and McMaster models, therefore, factors of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, and larger societal factors might be easy to incorporate into its use. Due to these merits, this model is considered here to be the most applicable among family systems frameworks in relation to this research project on strong Canadian military couples.

Bowenian Family Systems Theory. When the works of Murray Bowen are examined in the contexts of the outlined critiques, it is not surprising that his use of “fusion” and “multigenerational transmission processes” were faulted for implicating mothers in the development of pathology in children (Luepnitz, 1988). Hare-Mustin (1978) and (Lerner, 1986) also objected to some of Bowen’s words as he strongly emphasizes male-oriented traits liked “autonomous”, “goal directed” and “intellectual” when describing the goal of differentiation; qualities that women have traditionally been socialized for like “seeking approval”, “relatedness” and “being for others” were used to describe the undifferentiated. Despite these failings, the precepts of Bowen’s differentiation are useful for evaluating healthy marriages in the Canadian military, as it is used in feminist literature (Schubert, Protinsky & Viers, 2002) and still endorsed as “profound and flexible” (Mac Kune-Karrer, 1999). Its general ability to map out links that may cause distress in marriages and families remains steadfast. There also appears to be room for issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class and larger societal factors.

The McMaster Model. With more constructs to consider, the McMaster model appears cumbersome and intimidating at the onset, and the fact that there are several elements renders it more complex to utilize. The strength of this model lies in the fact that actual healthy families were used to create it (Epstein et al., 2003), shedding light on notion that the level of healthy family functioning described here, has indeed been achieved by some. It is difficult to determine whether or not this model can account for gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, and larger societal factors therefore it is surpassed by the Beavers and Bowenian approach in this area.

The Circumplex Model. While the model is multi-faceted and concise, some of its concepts such as “disengaged” and “enmeshed” have been of concern to critics and it does not seem to account for the influence of culture, gender inequity, or larger contextual and social issues. Having noted these, however, there are advantages to using the models concepts flexibly as a reference tool, if one takes its shortcomings into consideration.

This chapter has presented literature pertaining to marital strength, including a general description of, and ways for understanding strong marriages. Some prominent writings on healthy marriages have been acknowledged, and the following observations can be made. Firstly, family systems theory and its models appear most applicable to the marital study at hand, as they acknowledge the effects of external influences, while respecting the complexities within the family system itself. Specifically, the Beavers Model was found most relevant to the study population, followed by the works of Bowen, the McMaster Model and the Circumplex Model respectively. The words of the critics are

paramount here, and these approaches can be used with these in mind. Secondly and despite the debates, the recent works of Gottman are still highly regarded by clinicians today, suggesting that it will be very useful for evaluating healthy marriages in varied population groups. The discomfort with the controversies may be somewhat offset by the theory's apparent usefulness, though these should be closely followed by advocates of Gottman's work.

Thirdly, adult attachment theory was also reviewed because the emotional link between marital spouses may be a key determinant of marital health within this culture. While it does not incorporate external factors, its deeper view of the intimate bond is a rather unique and uncommon feature. Finally, social exchange theory, which addresses the balancing of perceived benefits to marriage, may have only some applicability to the study sample, as while the military is a unique population that has many positive factors in its lifestyle, there are significant limitations to this view.

This literature on marital strength had two primary sections. The first presented elements found in healthy marriages such as intimacy, commitment, communication, conflict resolution and spirituality, and the second evaluated theories that explained marital health, which were social exchange theory, attachment theory, Gottman's sound relationship house theory and family systems approaches. This review brought forward valuable knowledge that is critical to studying marital strength within Canadian military couples. As there are many cultural factors pertaining to this particular group, the following chapter will examine these closely, and the information from this present review will then be re-evaluated, in the context of Canadian military marriages.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CANADIAN MILITARY CULTURE

The Canadian military provides protection on land, by air and at sea, through the army, navy and air force elements respectively. Seven land forces bases exist across the country, two naval bases on opposing coasts, and 13 air force wings which are equipped to cover all national borders, including remote and densely populated regions. An additional five establishments exist to provide a variety of services. While there are no Canadian bases overseas, approximately 3,000 members are currently on operational missions in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Haiti, Golan Heights, Sinai, Lebanon, Cyprus, Jerusalem, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Germany (Department of National Defence, 2008). The number of out-of-country members varies at any given time, often dependent on the roles and natures of support pledged by governments currently in power. This chapter discusses Canadian military culture and its specific impact on marriages, thereby illustrating the limitations of applying current marital literature to healthy marriages in this particular group. The rationale for conducting the current research will also be presented.

The Canadian Forces has over 60,000 regular members, 66% of which are married (Villeneuve, personal communication, 2006). There are an additional 30,000 reservists, and their employment contract obligations are more flexible than those of their regular force counterparts (Department of National Defence, 2005). Based on the inimitable nature of their lifestyle, Canadian Forces members and their families aptly fit the definition of culture, which is a “set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize an institution or organization” (Merriam-Webster, 2003). Many military

families come from multiple generations of serving the military and as entrenched meanings are often unconscious to and unspoken by those who assume them, they may be unaware of any other sense of community and belonging (Winslow, 1997).

The Canadian military has caught the attention of researchers over the last ten years. The Department of National Defence commissioned a study to examine suicide trends in the Canadian Forces after an alarming rate of suicide was noted amongst military members: during the period of January 1990 and July 1995, 66 suicides were reported (CMAJ, 1997). One third of the study's victims had peacekeeping experience and, while being a peacekeeper was not deemed to be the cause of the suicides, the report concluded that the "demands of being a soldier exert unique stresses that may contribute to psychiatric illness and suicide in individual cases".

The psychosocial state of Canadian soldiers was the subject of two federal initiatives. The Canadian Forces Health and Lifestyle Information Survey (CFHLIS, as cited by Statistics Canada, 2002) set out to examine the condition of soldiers in 2000, while the Statistics Canada Canadian Forces Mental Health Survey, also published in 2002, served to confirm or expand upon the results. The first study concluded that members were more likely to experience mental distress than other Canadians, and the second indicated that military members were less likely to access various forms of social support.

Although there is general agreement that military life in Canada is challenging, not everyone agrees that this warrants concern. The Department of National Defence launched a third forces-wide survey for the purpose of assessing how Canadian Forces

members and their families' viewed the quality of their lives (Dowden, 2001; 2002). While both the members and their spouses were generally satisfied with their marriages, the spouses believed that the military lifestyle was worse than that experienced by civilians, and Canadian Forces members were unhappy with their military careers. In another research that explored family breakdown in Canada's military, Dunn (2004) questioned over 2600 military personnel. He concluding that while members believed that their career demands interfered with family life, their marriages reportedly did not suffer as a consequence.

In summary, the research suggests that members are stressed, more prone to mental distress, less likely to use supports, dissatisfied with their careers, and that their spouses are dissatisfied with military life. Despite these, both military members and their partners report marital satisfaction. While further studies are needed to clarify what this could mean, marital unions that function well in the midst of such taxing conditions are indeed worthy of examination.

The Uniqueness of Canadian Military Marriages

Being a part of the Canadian military has specific requirements, and the literature outlines four characteristics that distinguish this lifestyle: its mandate to protect the nation, isolation, duty-related separation and patriarchal nature. Military marriages are challenged by these factors that are not common in the civilian world, thereby rendering such marriages unique.

The Military's Mandate

Perhaps the most definitive demarcation between military members and general Canadians is the fact that being a soldier involves the ordered application of violence, wherein members are expected to give their lives if told to do so. Unlike other professional groups in society, military members can be called on to ensure the very survival of Canada and with very little notice (Winslow, 1997). While similarities can be made with law enforcement personnel, military members have the exclusive mandate to maintain the country's security and defend its sovereignty by non-peaceful means. Regardless of the member's trade, rank or element, all regular force members are also considered available for duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Sustaining combat readiness is no easy task, therefore regular human beings must become personnel who can be called to war at any given time (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994).

Military membership is an all-encompassing commitment. Members give up some of the rights afforded to their civilian counterparts, and military leaders are responsible for decisions that may sacrifice the lives of soldiers' under their command. They are subject to additional federal laws of discipline, which may entail public humiliation, incarceration, immediate release from their military positions, or all three. Organizational loyalty and obedience are also instilled in members through hierarchy, tradition, distinctive dress and insignias (Winslow, 1997).

Harrison and Laliberte (1994) provide a comprehensive description of the day-to-day challenges faced by the wives of military personnel. Social situations are strained by the same unspoken rules of tradition and hierarchy and whether or not a spouse is invited

to a social gathering often depends on her husband's rank. In the same vein, she is sometimes expected to be at her husband's side for certain functions. It is widely understood that a spouse's behaviour can affect the service member's career advancement (Albano, 2002, as cited in Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003).

The mindset that comes with living the life of, or being married to a soldier is critical. A member views himself as a soldier at all times wherein all else come second, and regardless of intention, the psychological demands of preparedness may compromise a member's ability to be intimately vulnerable with his own spouse. This concept of dual commitment, wherein a member struggles between his oath to protect his country and his vow to stand by his wife, is difficult to comprehend. Alluding to this and other similar issues, Segal (1986) refers to the military and the family as "greedy institutions". Be it a blessing or a curse, military spouses are confronted with these realities early in their relationship (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994).

Unit cohesion, wherein members can be relied upon to protect each other at all cost, is essential for combat to be effective (Winslow, 1998). Such cohesion may, however, strain core elements of a marriage in the domain of intimacy, commitment and communication. For instance, military members are socialized to safeguard camaraderie and to hold secrets about each other, even from their respective spouses (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994). While seemingly inconsequential, this may strain a marriage when secrecy involves a comrade's infidelity. A fellow member who knows about the affair might believe it his duty to withhold this information from his own wife, and when the affair eventually becomes public, trust and uncertainty about marital commitment may

plague his own non-adulterous marriage. His wife, who learned that her husband was aware of the betrayal, may find cause to question her own husband's honesty and wonder about his marital values. Indeed any form of secrecy can create barriers, especially those that speak to the core of marriage itself.

Isolation

As a result of the relocations dictated by the needs of the military, members and their families experience isolation in different ways. Firstly, they are usually required to move away from traditional supports of heritage and families of origin. Secondly, due to Canada's vast landscape, these locations are often in geographically remote locations to which travel is difficult. Thirdly, military families tend to live in homes that are set apart from the general non-military community.

This physical isolation is compounded by societal factors. With Canada's ever-shifting political climate comes inconsistent support for the military. This population must also contend with fluctuating attitudes about our nation's defence role, and these opinions are often directed at members and their families. Such viewpoints range from blatant accusations of wasting taxpayers' money, to patriotic appreciation for heroic work. Perhaps the most unique quality of military life, therefore, is the perpetual feeling of being separate, physically, psychologically and socially.

Of grave concern is the fact that the social context of military communities has been regarded as conducive to perpetuating domestic assault (Harrison & Laliberte, 2002). It is believed that the soldier's adeptness at using force, the authoritarian nature of the military workplace, financial dependence and extensive alcohol use within the

military culture may foster, perpetuate, or act as barriers to ending abuse. While there is no evidence that domestic violence is more prevalent in the Canadian Forces than in the general population, the transient and “insular lifestyle” is such that violence is easily hidden, intervention is not readily accessed, and traditional family supports are absent (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994, Harrison, 2002).

It is not uncommon for wives to move with their husbands for better employment opportunities, however, the levels of isolation experienced may be such that marital partners have only each other to rely on for quite some time. These moves can be particularly traumatic for newlyweds who must adapt to changes in all aspects of their married life, with the additional stress of military acculturation (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994). Although it can be argued that couples in military communities often have similar experiences, many have also endured multiple moves and are hesitant to make new friends, yet again. As a result, a military marriage can become the only significant relationship for a couple for a prolonged duration.

Duty Related Separation

From a relationship standpoint, another level of isolation exists. Whether a member deploys for approximately six months for operational reasons, or simply fulfills the training requirements of his or her trade, frequent marital separation occurs. It is not uncommon for members to be absent for the usual celebrations of birthdays, anniversaries or even Christmas, depending on current military demands. Separation and stress is magnified for dual member couples when both have mandatory career requirements that must be accommodated.

Other complications from military induced separations are the reported highs of homecoming after the extended absences of a member, the lows of separation, and the feelings of disappointment when reunification does not happen in the much anticipated way (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994). Separation is not only difficult for the spouse who assumes all parental and household responsibilities during the member's absence, but may be equally as difficult for the soldier who is required to leave. He or she is expected to go without the comfort of spousal support, the familiar outlets of spiritual replenishment, and chosen community activities that are avenues for stress relief (Rosebush, 1994).

The over-arching military culture cannot be considered separately from the daily lives of military members and their spouses. In a study of the deployment experience from the perspective of Canadian Forces wives, the women reported feeling pressure to maintain family cohesion when their husbands were away as a result of extensive exposure to military ethos. Family adaptation to a military member's absence has been linked to how the wives cope (Frankel, Snowden & Nelson, 1993; Milgram & Bar, 1993), thereby placing additional pressure on women to function well. When a spouse is independent and autonomous, combat readiness is well protected and the interests of military operations are better maintained (Norris, 2001). Norris claims that:

The military champions the wives who live up to these expectations and upholds the idea that these women possess a unique and particular character imbued with stoicism and strength. Out of this has evolved the image of the self-reliant military

spouse, an image that has assumed ideological significance within the institution (p 59).

The strain felt by spouses can readily change the deployment experiences for both member and spouse, which could result in reciprocal blame. The member can be resented for having gone away, while the wife may be criticized for failing to respect the demands of, or be supportive towards, the military career. Honest communication about underlying feelings is crucial and difficult under such circumstances, especially when distance has already resulted from having been apart. Magnuson and Norem (1999) noted that a relationship tends to suffer when schedules keep couples away from each other for longer than one month. Separate worlds are believed to develop, partners fall out of touch with each other, and the sense of security and stability provided by the relationship is diminished. Van Breda (1999) notes that a flexible marriage in which military wives are able to assume androgynous gender roles contributes to better handling of separation.

The pre- and post-deployment process in Canada is well studied (Department of National Defence, 2004) and is regarded as one of the most stressful events that military couples endure (Frankel et al., 1993). In an American study that compares military and non-military men, a significant difference was found in marital satisfaction as related to maintaining deployment alert status (McLeland & Sutton, 2005). Marriage was particularly affected by having one partner always ready to leave, and when an actual departure is scheduled, considerable emotion is often invested into preparing for the mental and physical separation about to take place.

Patriarchy

The Canadian Forces is a gendered organization in that “the military takes for granted the naturalness of the patriarchal notion of a masculine-feminine polarity” (Harrison & Laliberte, 1997). Such polarity is used to cement the differences between men and women where men are viewed as the ultimate gender for soldierhood, and where women and gays are not readily accepted. While about 50% of the general population’s workforce is comprised of women (Statistics Canada, 2006), the military is only 16% female (Canadian Forces National Report, 2006). The notion of gendered labour (Harrison & Laliberte, 1997) is also part of military life, where there is a standard level of contribution expected of military wives. These include assuming all domestic and childcare responsibilities, sacrificing their career when necessary, and accepting unpaid duties which are associated with their husband’s rank.

Dual member marriages face extra demands as the advancement of one career, usually that of the male, generally takes precedence over that of the military female. Stress is further compounded by the fact that military women have historically had a difficult time being valued in the Canadian Forces, and much resistance to their full integration exists today (Winslow & Dunn, 2002). It can be surmised that the gendered nature of the Canadian military puts additional stress on military marriages. The contribution of military spouses, which begins in the home and extends out through volunteer work by providing support to other spouses, is indeed expected, undervalued and unpaid (Harrison & Laliberte, 1994).

When considering the above, a male military member may find it difficult to maintain an egalitarian marriage. The inequity between women and men that is common in military culture can become so engrained that it permeates into marital dynamics, and challenged are the marriages that strive for balanced power and labour, however well that can be manifested in such a patriarchal world.

Summary. When the literature on Canadian military culture is examined for its effects on marriage, the following themes are apparent. Firstly, being married to an individual who is mandated to protect his nation, entrenched in camaraderie, and bound by hierarchal rules, may pose challenges by impeding the flow of intimacy within a marital relationship. Secondly, geographical, psychological, and social isolation places immense pressure on a marriage, as this union may become the only significant connection in a couple's everyday life for an extended period of time. Thirdly, communication and conflict resolution skills within a military marriage are unduly tested due to the rigid and inescapable pressures of military life. Fourthly, the patriarchal nature of life in the military makes an egalitarian marriage very difficult to achieve, as female military members, military wives, and particularly those who are both, face exceptional challenges. It is critical to note that the areas of marriage affected most, namely intimacy, communication, commitment and conflict resolution, were identified in the previous chapter as necessary for achieving healthy marriages (Bagarozzi, 1997; Giblin, 2004; Doherty, 2003; Gottman, 1999). What this suggests, therefore, is that within the Canadian military marriages that report stability and satisfaction, spouses are likely doing many things right.

Theories to Explain Healthy Canadian Military Marriages

Thus far, the factors that impact on marriages within Canadian military culture have been presented in conjunction with descriptive characteristics of healthy marriages, as detailed in the previous chapter. The culture's influences will now be discussed in the context of extant literature on how marital unions are formed and maintained.

Family systems theory (Walsh, 1985; Meyer, 1988; Kazemek & Kazemek, 1992) provides a thorough overarching framework for evaluating a marriage's internal and external dynamics, by recognizing that both exist. A sense of familiarity sometimes develops within the military community that arises from a having common understanding of each other's plight, so while being away from families of origin can weigh heavily on marriages, having peers who have similar experiences might also reduce the tension. A shortcoming to using a family systems view, however, is that this theory suggests an element of reciprocity. It can be stated that, if the military system can impact so heavily on the marital relationship, then strengthening the marriage may also influence the military system in some manner. While this may be true to a certain degree, a patriarchal and hierarchical structure such as a military organization is rigid and unidirectional.

The family systems models (Beavers & Hampson, 2003; Epstein et al., 2003; Olson, 2000) discussed in the previous chapter seem to best account for the internal workings of families, and they provide a view of healthy marriage within such a unit. Unfortunately, the models primarily focus on overall family competence, cohesion, flexibility, communication, and style, therefore they have limited applicability when used to specifically to investigate marital strength.

Bowen's work seems to suggest that marital health is achieved when spouses are highly differentiated individuals, with thoughts, emotions and goals of their own (Bowen, 1974). While partners may be well differentiated however, an excessive amount of situational stress may still cause marital turmoil. Similarly, flexible and adaptive boundaries may also fail to facilitate coping strategies under more difficult circumstances. Limitations are also evident when applying the works of John Gottman with respect to Canadian military marriages. Undoubtedly both actions and words are critical to establishing healthy ways of being married, but when great value is assigned to observed behaviours within this population, inaccuracies may emerge. For example, a military workplace does not generally encourage expression of feelings and it expects discipline and order. A military member might have difficulty discarding this disposition simply because his workday has ended, and he may erroneously be viewed by his partner as inattentive and distanced from the marriage in some way.

The underlying issues of intimate bonding as described by adult attachment theory may explain the difficulties experienced by some military couples during deployments. Similarly, the mutual satisfaction of intimate needs may be the basis for increased marital stability and quality amongst healthy marriages wherein one's sense of security is unaffected by absence. Although this theory provides valuable insight into the paramount issues of trust and intimacy, limitations also exist to applying this theory to Canadian military marriages. When couples are faced with multiple short or prolonged absences, their internal working models may be extra-ordinarily tested, regardless of how strong and satisfying the marriage may be. Consequently adult attachment theory may not

always depict an accurate view of a couple's intimate bond, as external and contextual factors are exceptionally prominent here. There are many elements outside the marriage here that are unrelated to issues of attachment, but are certain to affect it.

Depending on one's value system, there are social advantages to being married in the Canadian military and as such, social exchange theory is a plausible mechanism for understanding marital unions in this culture. Job security, geographic mobility, and the status of rank are highly regarded factors in this lifestyle, and for those who cherish traditional family gender roles, these are readily maintained within this group. While many find aspects of military life difficult due to multiple moves, deployment, and separation, some may view these as opportunities for adventure, travel, and career advancement in new locations. It may be reasoned that in some respects, the transience of military life encourages military members and their spouses to give way to a higher level of relationship commitment, as they may be faced with such decisions earlier than others.

McInnes Miller and Bermudez (2004) note, however, that social exchange theory does not address marital issues within the context of structural power, imbalanced resources, gender roles and cultural influences. While this theory is useful for evaluating reasons to stay or leave a marriage, it holds little in addressing varying degrees of marital strength. According to social exchange theory, there may be no benefits to staying in a marriage fraught with the uncertainty, instability, and stressful conditions characteristic of Canadian military life.

The theories discussed in this section are well-established and relevant, and can to some degree be used to examine marital strength among Canadian military couples.

However, the shortcomings discussed here re-enforce the notion that more culture specific research is required in this subject area.

Rationale for the Current Study

As mentioned at the onset, the objective of this research project was to investigate the factors that make strong Canadian military marriages strong, and this review was conducted to evaluate the literature relevant to this question. While current writings have identified how marriages have been viewed and provided insight into why some marriages end and others do not, significant gaps have been identified that urge further exploration.

Firstly and as already discussed, there are many nuances to the Canadian military lifestyle that challenge marriages within it, and current literature is ill equipped to take all these into account. Lee (2003) suggests that “culture influences all aspects of human behaviour and experiences, the way a person perceives, experiences, and resolves life problems is likely to be affected by one’s particular cultural context” (p 385). Anderson Moore et al. (2002) caution that, “the role of culture affects family process and relationships in ways that we don’t currently understand or assess well” (p. 6). Entrenched meanings are often unconscious and unspoken by those who assume them, so the process of meaning making is significant to the current research question.

Secondly, while some foreign studies have been conducted that involve military marriages (see Bowen & Neenan, 1988; Bowen & Orthner, 1983; McCubbin & Patterson, 1984; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson & Thompson, 1995; Van Breda, 1999), none of these have investigated Canada’s military. Although these studies have

some relevance to this research inquiry, there are as many variations to military culture as there are nations. The historical, political, social and economical posture of a country significantly influences what it means to be a soldier, and this is determined by the characteristics intrinsic to a specific country. These other studies, therefore, can only provide anecdotal contributions to the study population at hand.

Thirdly, studying marital strength in Canada's military may have important clinical and policy implications. The information gathered could be useful in military mental health clinics, and might somehow be used to assist in alleviating unnecessary marital stress. The demands on members are on the rise and inquiry of this nature is in keeping with domestic violence and mental health initiatives currently underway (see Statistics Canada, 2002).

From the available research we know that despite taxing conditions, many military members and their wives report to be happily married. It would be useful to capture the experiences and perceptions of Canadian soldiers and their spouses in strong unions, as those in solidly empowered and choice-driven marriages within this group have not been heard. There is reason to suspect that within the context of Canadian military culture, some ordinary couples have extraordinary ways of approaching, conceptualizing, and behaving within their marriages. Indeed investigating the factors, elements or attributes that makes strong Canadian military marriages strong is a worthwhile endeavour, as the findings would be of interest to all marriage enthusiasts.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

While the need to study strong Canadian military marriages has been established, how knowledge in this area can be developed requires further attention. In order to obtain credible and relevant information in a usable state, selecting an appropriate method for studying this group's marital health is critical, as it is well understood that the success of formal inquiry depends on a well-suited match between the research question and methodology. When one sets out to explore marital strength within Canadian military couples, two significant challenges become evident. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, examining the concept of marital strength is complex and multi-dimensional. Secondly, as also already discussed, healthily married couples within this culture are a unique and predominantly unstudied group. A method that is well equipped to address these concerns is the qualitative approach of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This chapter discusses the methodological issues pertaining to this study, and the rationale for choosing grounded theory is first presented, along with its philosophical underpinnings and primary components. The implementation of this study is discussed with specific reference to using grounded theory elements. Finally, the means to ensure the trustworthiness of the research project are included.

Rationale for Selecting Grounded Theory

The methodological options considered for this research were determined by the study's overall purpose. With the research question of "What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?" in mind, the immediate consideration here was whether a quantitative or qualitative method was required. According to Kazdin (2003), quantitative

studies are conducted when the research intends to test theories or hypotheses, or when it needs to identify patterns, differences or causal relationships between groups.

Alternatively, he urges that qualitative research is an effective means for seeking out interpretations, new insights, theories, descriptions and explanations.

While the previous review chapter documented descriptions of healthy marriages as well as explanations for how strong marriages emerge, no studies on strong marital unions within Canadian military culture were found. The examination of the existing literature subsequently re-enforced that this field is indeed uncharted, therefore an exploratory course of action made good methodological sense. As there are no established theories to verify or confirm, quantitative methods such as surveys, questionnaires or experimental designs were not considered sound choices at this time. Indeed, Stebbins (2001) cautions researchers to avoid the rush to validate prematurely. Due to the absence of literature on strong marriages in Canada's military, the research question originally posed seemed best answered through qualitative means.

Qualitative Methodology Choices

Having made the determination that a qualitative approach was warranted, prominent classifications within this paradigm were examined for their ability to obtain the type of information sought here. To this end, three established qualitative traditions were considered: ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory. Summaries from the works of Creswell (1998), Kirk (1999) and Rubin and Babbie (2005) were utilized to provide a brief overview of the main tenets of these qualitative methods as they pertain to the study.

Ethnography. Originating from the field of anthropology, ethnography aims to describe and interpret a cultural group by studying its motives, as well as the meanings behind its behaviours and language (Creswell, 1998). This goal is primarily achieved by conducting interviews, examining artefacts and engaging in prolonged observations, wherein the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of its “informants”. To Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Wolcott (1994), an ethnographic study involves careful observation of individuals in their natural setting, where the intention is to find the patterns within which the culture functions. Such a study eventually results in uncovering cultural themes and it provides a detailed description of a particular culture’s behaviour.

While ethnography is a well-established qualitative approach, three concerns regarding its use for the current study became apparent. First, although the military population is a culture worth investigating, this research project focuses primarily on the concept of strong marriage within this context, and not the cultural group itself. Ethnography appears to be invested in examining a population rather than the specific construct of interest. Secondly, due to the complex and intimate nature of marriage, prolonged field involvement to observe a marital union seemed intrusive, unrealistic and likely unachievable. Finally, while an ethnographic study would produce a rich description of strong marriage in the Canadian military, the findings may be difficult to put to use in the domains of clinical practice and social work policy.

Phenomenology. At a glance, phenomenology appears to be a good alternative, as it aims to achieve an understanding of the “lived experiences” of participants in relation

to a specific concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). This tradition has its roots in the philosophical views of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 1998), and it examines the “structures of consciousness” (Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited by Creswell, 1998) that are present in human beings. While there are varied types within this tradition that include hermeneutic phenomenology, existential phenomenology and dialogical phenomenology (Creswell, 1998), a main tenet of phenomenology is the understanding that an “intentionality of consciousness” exists. An over simplified interpretation of this phrase is that one’s consciousness tends to moves towards an object, and the reality of such an object is connected to one’s own consciousness, or awareness, of it. Phenomenologists also believe that a relationship between researcher and participant must be built over time, and they anticipate the use of a chosen few interviewees. The methodology further asserts that the process of “bracketing” is critical, wherein a researcher is expected to suspend all knowledge and judgments of the subject area while conducting parts of the study. The end result of phenomenological inquiry is a rich description of the essence of the experience as reported by participants, with an understanding that “a single unifying meaning of the experience exists” (Creswell, 1998).

While deep examination of experiences seemed related to this study of marital strength in Canada’s military, there were two primary difficulties to using phenomenology. Firstly, this study required an ongoing connection with participants, and the realities of military life are such that the culture is transient and mobile. A method that required prolonged involvement would be more demanding on the participants, may pose time delays, might increase the likelihood of refusals to partake, or may lead to

incomplete participation. Secondly and similar to ethnography, this tradition produces highly descriptive results. While such findings would enhance the existing body of literature, the study must possess concrete, practical and pragmatic qualities if it is to be valued by its intended audience, which include uniform social workers, military leaders and Canadian Forces personnel.

After thorough consideration, grounded theory appeared to be the most fitting method for this inquiry for the following reasons. Firstly, it is well suited to incorporating both the concept of marital strength and the Canadian military culture, as the method is recommended for studying “local interactions and meanings as related to the social context in which they actually occur” (Pidgeon, 1996). This suggests that the impact of embedded values, beliefs and morés imposed by the military lifestyle could be captured and accounted for in this study. Secondly, grounded theory’s primary objective is to develop a theory or theoretical model. Such a model would have significant practical value to social work clinicians and policy makers, as it would be understandable and potentially testable in comparison to highly descriptive findings. Thirdly, this research area is largely unexplored and a study using a qualitative method that is well accepted in both quantitative and qualitative streams may spark interest in further investigation into this field. Grounded theory method presented as best equipped to address the research question of, “What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?”

The History of Grounded Theory

Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, it is relevant that Glaser was trained in quantitative social research methods at Columbia University. This

complemented Strauss' qualitative tradition, which was formed at the University of Chicago where George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionist influence flourished for 30 years (Jeon, 2004). The coming together of these two minds provided the footing for the method's current stature in both quantitative and qualitative fields. Ironically, it is likely the foundational distinction between the authors that led to their eventual parting of ways. Glaser and Strauss's collaborative work transpired at the University of California in the 1960's upon the invitation of the latter, and it was in their extensive inquiry into the concept of dying that grounded theory emerged.

Grounded theory's underpinnings include symbolic interactionism with heavy influences from Blumer (1969) and Mead (1962). This view is guided by the belief that a person is capable of thought that influences how he or she interacts, and such thoughts further influence how he or she self-expresses in relation to others. Blumer claims that an individual's meanings and symbols are subject to his or her ability to interpret these, and the interpretation of those experiences is based on other prior experiences. Society is the context in which interaction takes place, and it develops "as a result of the interwoven patterns of interaction and action" (Crooks, 2001, p. 14).

The concept of "self" is key to Blumer, who believes that interactions with the world contributes to conceptualization and re-conceptualization of one's idea of self. Meanings and symbols therefore result from social interactions, and people modify such meanings and symbols because they have the capacity to introspect and interact. From a philosophical standpoint, grounded theory as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (1967) assumes the ontological view that some but not all aspects of reality can be apprehended

(Annells, 1996). This critical realist position as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) situates it in the post-positivist paradigm of inquiry. To Charmaz (2006), however, the method reflects the positivist tradition as it emphasizes logic, analysis procedures and “assumptions of an external but discernible world”.

As the years progressed, grounded theory developed along divergent lines. Strauss and Corbin (1990) presented a varied grounded theory method two decades after the original release, and the disparity between the original and more recent version is considerable. A review of relevant works reveals fundamental differences in three domains (Annells, 1996; Boychuk Duchscher & Morgan, 2004; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Kendall, 1999; McCann & Clark, 2003; Melia, 1996). Firstly, the research purposes of both versions vary, as where the original method intends to develop theory, the latter leans towards achieving deep conceptual description. Secondly, both address the issue of sampling differently, as the first aims at theory emergence and the second seems aligned with the task of verification. Thirdly, the data analysis procedures of the newer version incorporate additional complex coding steps, and these seem to hinder the natural emergence of theory. After thorough scrutiny of both methods, grounded theory in its original format seemed more centred on the task of theory formulation.

Developments. Since grounded theory’s inception and subsequent divergence, the method was heavily scrutinized, and rightfully so. Recent literature indicates that necessary evolution transpired in two critical areas of using the method. Firstly, the distinct need for an epistemological shift from positivism to constructivism was brought

to light (Charmaz, 2000; 2005; 2006; Clarke, 2003; MacDonald, 2001) as by the 1990's, grounded theory was well known for its positivistic assumptions. Charmaz, who was trained under the guidance of both Glaser and Strauss, carried the heavy influences of both by remaining committed to the method in its original form, yet urging for a return towards Strauss's interpretive schooling. She built on the original method's pragmatic strengths by drawing attention to the deep-seated differences between objectivist and constructivist grounded theory approaches; she highlighted that positivism overlooks the fact that the data obtained and analyzed are a result of interactions between the researcher and participant.

Alternatively, the constructivist grounded theorist believes that the inquiry process creates knowledge through "interpreted constructions dialectically transacted" (Annells, 1996). It was becoming all too clear to many that the researcher's role and contributions to the inquiry process could no longer be ignored. The notion of reflexivity in grounded theory thus established prominence contemporary works (Charmaz, 2005; 2006; McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007; Sword, 1999; Wuest, 1995). Reflexivity has been defined as, "an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process" (Robson, 2002, p. 22, as cited by McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007).

Further developments. Grounded theory literature continues to expand its scope. In relation to feminism, Wuest (1995), Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2001), and MacDonald and Schreiber (2001) examined the congruence between feminist thinking and traditional grounded theory. They found both to be compatible for concurrent use and in areas

wherein vast disparities were found, reflexivity ensured that the precepts of both were well respected (Wuest, 1995). The literature on grounded theory and post-modernism, as well as discussions on their relationship, continue (Clarke, 2005; MacDonald & Schreiber, 2001) and a supplementary framework to grounded theory called “situational analysis” (Clarke, 2005), which builds on the works of Strauss, appears to be widely accepted.

Summary. A researcher endeavouring to conduct a study using grounded theory must make an informed decision regarding the version he or she selects, and traveling through this body of literature is a necessary task. Grounded theory has experienced the growing pains intrinsic to maturation, and two observations can be made in this regard. Firstly, the body of literature now presents a broader array of options for one considering this method, thus revealing a less restrictive climate for its use; and secondly, while scrutiny was indeed necessary for its evolution and continued practicality, this review suggests that grounded theory in its original state remains a sound methodological choice. Despite popular criticisms and the many debates about its epistemological roots, what has come to light is that grounded theory can be “customized” to suit a particular researcher’s perspective in relation to a particular topic. He or she can proceed traditionally or do so with a reflexively constructivist stance, and this is good news. Indeed, the latter was selected for this marital health inquiry into the Canadian military population.

Grounded Theory Method

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), theory is generated through grounded theory’s five basic components. These are theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling,

coding, the constant comparative method, and the use of memos. These will be briefly discussed here, and their application to the study at hand will be presented later in this chapter.

Theoretical Sensitivity and Theoretical Sampling

In the initial process of a research project, Glaser and Strauss (1967) encourage researchers to rely heavily on their “theoretical sensitivity” or current knowledge of the topic. This refers to the researcher’s ability to understand, give meaning to, and conceptualize the data of interest, rendering him or her capable of theoretical insights in a grounded theory study. This ability is influenced by his or her experiences with respect to the subject area. Glaser and Strauss also introduced the idea of theoretical sampling, “whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next, and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, p. 36). Only an individual who can contribute to theory emergence is invited to partake in the study, therefore participant selection is based on one’s potential to provide relevant data that would promote the formulation of theory. Achieving representation of the population being studied is irrelevant, and it is unnecessary to ensure that all variations of the sample are included. The primary goal is theory emergence, and Glaser and Strauss believe that theory applicable to a substantive area will emerge in time, if it is simply allowed.

Interviews in a grounded theory study can be conducted in a loosely guided or semi-structured manner, as using open-ended and non-judgmental questions allow pertinent stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). Soon after an interview is completed, the

researcher theoretically analyzes the data before proceeding to obtain more data.

Interpretation and analysis is therefore ongoing, and the identified gaps in the emerging theory determine what type of participant will be selected next.

Coding

The process of coding and categorizing data is the “defining aspect of analysis” (Jeon, 2004), which provides the connection between raw data and theory, thereby giving it explanatory power (Glaser, 1978). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) coding occurs in two stages: substantive coding and theoretical coding. Substantive coding aims to “conceptualize the empirical substance of the area of research.” This occurs in the beginning phase wherein open coding is conducted, which includes line-by-line analysis in search of descriptive codes that serve as labels for the meaning of ideas (Jeon, 2004). Categories and their properties are identified during this phase, and these must provide a meaningful picture of the people being studied. Selective coding commences once the core category is discovered, entailing further exploration of the areas around such core category. The second stage of theoretical coding intends to “conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other, as hypothesis to be integrated into the theory” (Glaser, 1978). To Glaser, fractured data is later woven back together with the suggested assistance of “coding families”, which may or may not help to link codes and their properties.

Constant Comparative Analysis and Memo Writing

Essential to grounded theory is the constant comparative method as dictated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This systematic process of continually observing all the

collected information together allows for emergence of concepts that are derived from, but are not forced out of the data. Constant comparative analysis is conducted throughout the process of generating categories and their properties, integrating such categories, delineating them, and writing the emerging theory (Dey, 1999). Linking such categories meaningfully and substantially eventually form the theory or theoretical model. Glaser and Strauss (1967) purport that the process of selecting, collecting, analyzing and selecting again continues until “theoretical saturation” is achieved, and this transpires when new concepts cease to surface.

A key methodological technique to grounded theory is the role of memo writing, which Glaser (2001) regards as inseparable from theoretical sampling and an integral part of the constant comparative analysis. Memo writing occurs throughout the process of selecting participants, collecting and analyzing the data, and re-selecting. Strong theory development is not possible without continuous memos, as it is within this stage that theoretical and conceptual thinking often occur. In fact, Jeon (2004) insists that researchers halt the coding process periodically and engage in memo writing.

This brief summary of grounded theory’s main tenets, which include theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, coding, the constant comparative analysis, and memo writing, illustrates the ease with which grounded theory method can be implemented, as presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967). These same components will now be discussed in relation to their use in this study of marital strength in Canadian military couples.

Implementation of the Present Study

With regards to the current research, loosely guided interviews were conducted as this research project intended to examine the construct of marital strength, within the specific context of Canadian military culture. While the guiding questions noted in Appendix D were necessary in order to maintain focus, these were altered as needed. The conversations were audio taped and transcribed by myself. The interviews lasted between 35 to 75 minutes each and due to the vast geographic locations involved and limited financial resources, all interviews were conducted by telephone. The unit of analysis was the individual spouse as the interviewees were interviewed one at a time. Transcripts of a husband and wife who were married to each other were analyzed consecutively, thereby allowing for the opportunity to clarify meanings as they related to that particular marriage. Due to technical difficulties, one conversation could not be recorded but extensive notes were taken, and these were treated as a transcript.

Recruitment

The participants were drawn from different areas as it was hoped that the study would embody strong Canadian military marriages, wherever they resided at the time. Due to the transient nature of this community, an electronic copy of the recruitment notice (See Appendix B) was sent to points of contact in other provinces. When no one responded to the posters, I approached formal leaders in the military social work community for assistance in recruiting participants. Unfortunately, restrictive military guidelines hindered their ability to help. Subsequently, I sent a general electronic message to acquaintances; I also contacted colleagues who were health and religious

professionals in the 4 Wing Cold Lake military community as they were convenient and familiar resources. Word of mouth became the primary method for acquiring participants and all the respondents knew me in some small capacity. A more detailed demographic description is outlined in the following chapter.

Purposive sampling, wherein participants are selected based on their ability to inform the researcher on the topic of focus (Kratwohl, 1998), was used in this study. The sample comprised of Canadian military members and military spouses who were legally married, who believed their marriages were strong, and who had been part of military life during ten years of their marriage. One of the couples that had been married the longest, and who seemed to have a remarkably resilient marriage, was chosen for the first interview as they had rich information to contribute towards the emergence of theory. Subsequent participants were selected according to the gaps in theory that surfaced, as according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) sampling selection cannot be determined in advance.

While considerable effort was exerted to using theoretical sampling in its truest form, participants who met the strict criteria, who were willing to partake in the study, and who were also available proved rare. Four potential participants dropped out of the study while waiting to be interviewed as I attempted to sequence the respondents according to theory development. Such factors as deployments, upcoming moves, and family demands narrowed the timeframe for availability so I had to shift to interviewing participants as soon as they were willing. I was, however, able to transcribe and analyze

individual interviews in an order that respected the gaps in the emerging model.

Theoretical saturation was achieved after 17 participants were interviewed.

As discussed in the first chapter I am familiar with Canadian military culture and have an understanding of it, so these spoke to my theoretical sensitivity to this specific area of study. Indeed, all research-related actions here were influenced and guided by my personal and professional knowledge base, and this played a significant role in participant selection. I could discern that some were more appropriate participants than others. Theoretical sensitivity shaped the coding process, wherein my awareness of marital concepts came into play. This was particularly useful during the interpretation and analysis phase, in which similar concepts that had common and overlapping meanings were categorized together. My clinical experience in couple work played an important part of forming the model, as this required that I pay careful attention to the interplay between the key marital concepts.

Data Analysis

In this study of marital health in Canada's military, the codes that emerged were grouped together based on both their shared meanings and their interrelatedness to each other. The extensive results of open coding are detailed in Appendix C. The coding phase involved the process of observing for categories, and eventually the core category of marital resilience emerged. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) a core category is a concept or code that has prominence over all other categories within a study, and it is a point at which all other categories centered around. Examining the data entailed an

extensive exploration for emerging theory, so caution was exercised to focus only on the concepts that pertained to marital strength.

I utilized the qualitative data analysis program of Atlas/Ti. This was particularly helpful for managing quotes and streamlining large amounts of data. Once the categories and their properties were identified, I developed an integrative hypothesis of the relationships between the categories and their properties, which eventually evolved into a model for understanding the strong Canadian military marriages. Care was taken to ensure that the categories best grounded in the data, which were the codes that had the highest number of references were valued accordingly. The concepts were intermittently shifted around until they were well situated in the form a working theoretical model.

In keeping with constant comparative analysis, all codes and concepts that emerged from the transcripts were reviewed collectively, particularly after new data was obtained. The interviewees sometimes used different words to describe the same concept, and at other times, the same term meant different things. For example, the word “love” was used to describe strong feelings towards a spouse, while others preferred to use the word “intimacy”. Interestingly, others used “intimacy” when referring to the sexual component of their marriages. Managing the congruent terms, clarifying their varied meanings, and finding their commonalities became possible by habitually comparing existing data with those that were newly acquired. The intrinsic value of these findings will be dictated by how well the study was conducted, and the principal considerations to this effect will now be discussed.

Trustworthiness

A key element of qualitative research is trustworthiness, which Heppner and Heppner (2004) refer to as the “techniques for establishing good scholarship”. Readers must have reason to believe that the end result of this marital strength study is worthwhile, and that this should be reflected in the resulting research document. The criteria often associated with a trustworthy qualitative study are: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, validity, and reliability.

Credibility refers to whether or not the study offers reasonable grounds to be believed, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that a study is more likely to be seen as credible when the researcher has engaged in peer debriefing and member checking. Credibility is closely aligned with the quantitative term validity, wherein one must prove that the concept or construct intended for study is in fact of focus (Roberts & Priest, 2006). With regards to this project, I periodically had discussions with a fellow doctoral student who was an experienced grounded theorist, as well as an established qualitative researcher. This allowed me to reflect on the research process and discuss both theoretical and analytical thoughts. Member checking was considered the most important measure for enhancing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and this task too was performed diligently. Care was taken to ask the participants to clarify the context in which they used particular terms, and I regularly reflected back my interpretations of their statements before moving on in the questioning process. The participants were also given the option to be re-contacted should they wish to ensure that their intended meanings were captured, though all declined. As the analysis progressed, the emerging model was also discussed

with latter participants after they answered all the questions in order to determine whether or not they agreed, disagreed or could relate to it. On most occasions the participants agreed, and in the one exception a spouse recommended that an additional concept be incorporated into the model. This prompted re-examination of the data and evidence to support her suggestion was found.

To Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability refers to the extent to which the study's results can be applied or transferred to a group in a varied situational context. To render the results transferable, Lincoln and Guba believe that rich descriptions of the interrelated conditions in which the participants exist must be well illustrated by the researcher. The notion of transferability is similar to that of generalizability, wherein a model or theory generated in one substantive area is assessed for its applicability to another area (Glaser, 2001). In terms of this marital health study, particular effort was exerted to display the intricate nuances of Canadian military culture in the literature review, wherein an entire chapter was devoted to describing it. Characteristics of military life as discussed by the participants have also been included in the analysis and discussion sections, in order to portray the cultural factors involved. Instead of using vague descriptive terms like "some", "most", or "a few", actual numbers of participants and quotations were outlined in the results so as to afford a clearer view of the data collected here. These steps collectively provide a reader with an audit trail wherein the contextual component of this study are visible, and the abundance of details makes it easier for one to properly assess whether or not the model can or should be used with other particular groups.

The dependability of a study is critical to trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). The research findings of a qualitative study are a product of ever-changing interactions between a researcher and participant, and while this variedness reflects successful inquiry, “such changes and shifts need to be both tracked and trackable (publicly inspectable)” (p. 242). Dependability was addressed in this study in a number of ways. Firstly, all the codes identified in the study were clearly defined, and statements from a variety of participants that speak to the code were included wherever possible. This was done to reveal the differences and similarities in the way the construct was used, while displaying its varied dimensions. Care was also taken to explain the connection between a concept and a quotation in instances where the link may not have been readily apparent. Secondly, elaborate descriptions are included in the Results chapter that address the sequential process of developing the model, and these trace the theoretical decisions I made toward model generation. The two detailed lists in Appendix C display both the original codes found and the resulting broken down version, and comparing these portray the interrelationship between the codes and the rationale for grouping some together.

Where dependability is concerned with documenting the changes that occur with respect to the interactions between the researcher and the interviewees, confirmability seems intended for evaluating the presence of researcher bias or distortions.

Confirmability refers to the ease with which a reader or fellow researcher can confirm or corroborate the results of a particular research, should he or she be inclined to do so.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that this is enhanced when the researcher documents the criteria used to check and re-check the data. To address these issues, ample memos

were written throughout this study so that I could reflect upon my interpretive and theorizing steps, and note taking was exceptionally useful for clarifying my own reactions, concerns, and ideas about both the concepts and the emerging theory. Memos were written during discussions with my advisor, peers and committee members, and sometimes during unrelated times when thoughts surfaced unexpectedly. These writings were in the form of diagrams, short scribbles, journal entries, and the structured writing process at the conclusion of interviews and transcriptions. These memos were referred to consistently during the compilation of the final two sections in this dissertation report.

Focusing on the trustworthiness of the procedures and generated data, reliability addresses the extent to which a study's results can be repeated under different conditions (Bryman, 2001). Although reliability is more often considered a quantitative term that has varied levels of importance among qualitative researchers, Roberts, Priest and Traynor (2006) propose five steps towards enhancing it. Firstly, they advocate that when transcripts are analyzed for the purpose of assigning conceptual and descriptive codes, the data is moved towards a state that is easier to revisit and re-examine at a later time. Indeed, as the coding process recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was followed, this study's reliability was readily enhanced. Secondly, Roberts and his colleagues urged that using a computerized data analysis program and applying some of its built-in rules contributes to reliable procedures and information, and the procedures described in Atlas/Ti were followed accordingly. Thirdly, using verbatim examples was encouraged, so actual words mentioned by the participants were used in the model. Fourthly, technical accuracy in recording and transcribing the interviews was viewed as instrumental to

establishing a reliable process, and indeed electronic equipment was appropriately used to this effect.

Several critical issues have been discussed thus far that address the methodological practices of this marital strength examination into Canada's military. The elements that contribute to this study's credibility, validity, transferability, dependability, confirmability and reliability have been presented, and the issue of ethics will now be addressed.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical standards as outlined in the approved application to the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary were followed. The participants were given the recruitment flyer and the study's purpose was explained to them in detail, including the extent of participation expected. Each was informed that there were minimal risks involved to partaking in this study. They were notified that despite masking efforts, their identities might be inadvertently revealed because the military community is rather small. Although the study focused on strengths, there was also the minute possibility that participants would find the interview process upsetting, and they were cautioned of this risk. It was made very clear to the interviewees that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Careful attention was given to ensuring that potential participants did not feel pressured to partake simply because I was known to them. I developed an informal protocol to address this: all participants were first invited to participate by means of electronic mail or telephone, and those who expressed interest were re-contacted within a

week. They were then asked if they were still willing to partake. Three individuals who had initially agreed changed their minds, and they comfortably declined at this point. For those who remained interested, the ethics form was forwarded for their perusal. They were asked to complete the form and to contact myself to schedule an interview. While some took only days to reply and others took weeks, several did not respond at all. These individuals were assumed to have decided against participating and were not contacted again.

Every effort was made to ensure that the participants were relatively unaffected by the interview process. In one isolated case, a spouse contacted me through electronic mail a week after the interview to inform me of some negative effects that arose from having discussed events of long ago. I exercised professional intuition by not rushing to make a referral for counselling, instead opting to carry out an informal electronic conversation to better understand the concerns. This proved a wise move as the participant found it useful to normalize her reactions to recalling some of the marriage's more difficult times. It was soon revealed that the effects were short lived. I inquired into the state of matters weeks later and was assured that the participant was doing well.

All ethical concerns pertaining to this research study on marital health within Canadian military were, therefore, addressed to a satisfactory manner. The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board was apprised of this study's progress and they have since concluded their involvement in this study.

Known Study Limitations and Strengths

A number of limitations and strengths with regards to proceeding with this study on marital health in Canada's military were noted during the planning phase. Four anticipated obstacles to participating in the study were identified prior to commencing this research. Firstly, the outlined criteria, which included ten years of military service concurrent with ten years of marriage while self-identifying as having a strong relationship, could be too restrictive. Secondly, speaking privately to a known social work clinician might cause apprehension to anyone who had a negative perception of mental health professionals, as some may believe that the interviews will involve uncomfortable and intrusive probing. With respect to the interviews themselves, the one-on-one process was also predicted to create uneasiness among those who preferred the impartiality of a group discussion or questionnaire. Thirdly and closely associated with the mentioned ethical risk, participants may fear that their identities will become known. Finally, the Canadian Forces has received negative media attention in the past so some resistance to voluntary participation was expected, as some may worry that they would be misrepresented.

In terms of the known strengths of this study, a number of factors came to mind. As a researcher, I am familiar with both military culture and marital health, and this background knowledge may be helpful in areas of participant recruitment, data collection and theory formulation. As a social work clinician, interviewing skills such as engaging clients in conversation and proceeding in a non-threatening manner was hoped to prove useful in this research project. Whether or not these anticipated obstacles and strengths

manifested in the project, and how they were addressed in the context of this study, are larger issues that will be presented in the discussion chapter.

This chapter has summarized the methodological issues pertaining to this study of marital strength within the Canadian military population. It illustrated the thought processes involved in selecting a method by mapping out the available choices and the rationale for favouring one over the others. Care was taken to demonstrate the appropriate fit between the research question “What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?” and grounded theory methodology; this appropriate fit was further evidenced by the ease with which the method’s components were carried out. The means to evaluating the trustworthiness of this qualitative study was put forward, as were the anticipated weaknesses and strengths of this research project on strong marriages within the Canadian military. This chapter charted the course of action that was necessary to develop a much needed theory or model for understanding marital strength within this culture, and the findings are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

Having discussed the literature and methodology that pertain to studying marital health in the Canada's military, this chapter presents the data analysis component of this research project. This Results section is based on intensive interviews, audiotapes, transcripts, research notes, formal and informal memos, telephone conversations, and electronic messages. A brief demographic description of the participants is provided, and the main concepts as they emerged from the data are presented with supporting quotations from the interviewees.

The Research Participants

A total of 17 individuals agreed to be interviewed for the current study, 11 of them were women and six were men. Ten of these participants were married to each other therefore five marriages are fully represented in the findings. While rich information was gathered when both the husband and wife within the same marriage were interviewed, securing a larger sample that included both partners became unrealistic. Of the remaining seven interviewees, two had spouses who were unwilling to participate and the other five partners were unavailable. At the time of the interviews, the participants were living in various locations across North America including New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the United States.

The military members interviewed for this study were all men who had completed between 15 to 28 years of military services; they were commissioned officers and had achieved the rank of Captain or higher. Only air force and army personnel were used, as naval staff could not be located in time for the study. The women all had a post-

secondary education: six had attended college, four had bachelor degrees and one had a master’s degree. Each woman had maintained a fulfilling career at some point in their lives and had put work or schooling aside to stay home with their children. The men and women were between 35 to 48 years of age, had between one and eight children, and had been married for a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 31 years.

Gender	Female	Male	Military Status of Member	Active Duty	Retired
# of Participants	11	6	# of Participants	10	7

# of Years Married	13-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35
# of Participants	5	4	5	2	1

# of Children	1	2	3	4	8
# of Participants	1	8	5	1	2

Figure 1. Demographic Tables

Interestingly, the participants responded differently along gender lines to many of the interview questions. The women were more comfortable speaking openly about their own experiences while half of the men spoke more often about what they saw in others’ marriages. Two men preferred to speak in generalities, using statements such as “a person should” or “they ought to” instead of “I should” or “she did”. When this occurred I attempted to redirect them to speak in terms of themselves and this was done sparingly as the interviewees’ comfort was critical to the continued flow of information. Gentle

guidance did result in the disclosure of more personal data. This difference in gender responses confirmed that interviewing couple members individually was a sound decision, as they each spoke without the added influence of, or concern with regards to, their spouses. The shared and intended meanings of statements were clarified and confirmed, and these were then coded accordingly. Since this research aimed to capture the words and views of Canadians in strong military marriages, the individuals are directly quoted in this chapter whenever possible.

Codes and Categories

During open and selective coding, a total of 91 codes were identified and grouped together based on their interrelationships (see Appendix C). The core category of “resilient marriage” emerged, and five other categories of structure, content, face, challenges and actions were identified. Based on their groundedness in the data and their relevance to the research topic of marital strength in the Canadian military, the codes pertaining to these categories were broken down into 15 sub-categories: intimacy, respect, commitment, faith, core values, enhanced sense of self, boundaries, maturity, trust, communication, conflicting military values, conflicting societal values, choice, adaptability and resentment. These concepts were organized into a working model for understanding strong marriages within the military culture. The model will be presented in the Discussion chapter, after its properties and dimensions are clarified here.

The Structure of Strong Canadian Military Marriages

After carefully examining the key concepts presented by the participants, intimacy, respect and commitment emerged as the cornerstones to strong Canadian

military marriages. These elements had the highest number of references, indicating that they were very well grounded in the data. Each will now be described in greater detail.

Intimacy

Every participant declared that a strong Canadian military marriage is built on intimacy. For the purposes of this inquiry, intimacy was defined as having a deep and affectionate feeling of closeness towards one's spouse, more commonly described by the participants as "love". Any word, phrase or sentence that reflected this underlying connectedness was coded as such, and a total of 100 quotations to this effect were identified.

The most remarkable disclosure by the interviewees was that they all perceived intimacy as being at the centre of their marital lives. This affectionate and established link was the defining force within their marriages as intimacy generally held couples together. This was particularly noticeable when both marital partners were interviewed (even though each was interviewed separately). One of the men described intimacy as simply "being very much in love", and his wife later affirmed, "We just loved each other so much (tenderly). I really did believe we were supposed to be together forever. I just believed it." She gave accounts of their struggles through the early years, a time when she had forced him into marital counselling when they had reached an impasse. She recognized that, especially back then when they had so little experience, their deep love for each other had motivated them to keep the relationship intact. To one of the other couples, intimacy was and always would be the focal point of their marriage. After 15 years of married life in the military, the wife claimed:

I think I managed because, well, it just comes down to one thing: I love, I love him (whispering) ... and I think I love him so much that I wouldn't want to leave this for anything. I feel that the ups and downs come and go but I just think in my own heart about how much I love him.

In his separate interview, her husband had a more difficult time articulating his feelings.

After circling the issue for quite some time in search of the right words, he finally stated:

When you do find yourself in tough straits, in the day to day domestic front when there's troubles, you have to hang onto that and go, you know what, the reason I feel so upset right now is because I care ... (voice trailing off).

According to the participants, the concept of intimacy was evident in two specific areas in the marriage. These were in the domains of sex and marital friendship.

Sexual relationship. According to ten interviewees, intimacy and a good sexual relationship go hand in hand. Whether or not sex was as important to the remaining seven respondents could not be determined, as they did not initiate conversations in this regard. Although they may have been reserved about discussing their sexual relationships, those who did mention it emphasized its critical role in marital love. Significant gender differences were noted in this area as the men discussed sex in more depth than the women. Four of the women declared that their sex lives were satisfying, however, two did so through embarrassed and nervous laughter. Indeed, the more comprehensive assertions on this subject came from two of the men who broached the subject directly. One stated:

Whether or not we have a responsibility to meet the sexual needs and the intimacy needs of our partners, my answer is, absolutely we do. That's why we get married and we don't sleep around. That intimate relationship, ah, marked by physical intimacy but it's still intimacy, the reason that we don't do that behaviour elsewhere is because the intimacy is happening with our relationship and our partners are interested in meeting those needs. They're actually focused on that as opposed to, "No, only if I feel like it".

The other man believed that his marriage was strong because he and his wife paid close attention to caring for each other in all domains. Referring specifically to sex, he claimed:

Each has to understand the other's needs in that area and make it that they are there for them. I don't know where I heard it, but "It's not what she can be for me but what I can be for her". So if I think about it that way, I look at what her needs are not just sex, everything, but sex included, then I can be who she needs me to be. In the end it comes down to attitude about whether I want to love this person so much that I will be what she wants me to be.

Two plausible reasons could account for the fact that the opinions about sex did not readily surface and that the men were more open to discussing this than the women. Firstly, one could speculate that the women believed that talking about sex was inappropriate or taboo, which hindered the flow of these conversations. Secondly, the popular belief that sex is generally more important to men than to women may have been a factor.

Friendship. Every participant emphasized that his or her intimate marriage was marked by the presence of friendship, which allowed for intimacy to flourish. As stated by three women:

You have to be friends before lovers; you really have to be able to like the person that you live with. I enjoy his company and his friendship.

Marriage is about being friends, good friends who enjoy each other's company.

We're best friends. I don't think some couples are, I think they tolerate each other.

In summary, according to the participants, intimacy is at the heart of strong Canadian military marriages, wherein one's needs in the realms of sex and friendship are fully and contentedly met. While these opinions on the topic of love may not differ from the general population, the reflections of the study participants on the subject of intimacy had a ready and well-considered presentation; this suggests that perhaps they have had much cause to evaluate their reasons for marrying and choosing to remain married, throughout their years of living in the military.

Respect

As identified by the participants, the second structural component of a strong Canadian military marriage is the notion of respect. Respect was defined here as the act of holding one's marital partner in very high regard, along with his or her accompanying thoughts, actions and feelings. Respect was mentioned during every interview and was referred to a total of 90 times. Although the interviewees described various ways in which respect was conveyed, for example some spoke respectfully of their spouse's

attributes while others of the spouse themselves, they commonly showed that their partners were, in some way, valued considerably. A military member who had been married for over 30 years relayed stories of how his wife single-handedly raised their children, and he marvelled at her ability to take life's challenges in stride. He used an admiring tone when speaking of her competence:

If you are an outsider looking into a military marriage, it is *the* member, he or she seems to do all the work therefore, obviously, he's 75 percent of the marriage. Well, holy cow, for a successful marriage that is the furthest thing from the truth! Mum being at home with the kids puts her on exact even footing. As far as I'm concerned she's even got the tougher job. I know that if I had to go tomorrow, my wife would be able to continue on running the home because she does now (laughing)!

According to every interviewee, the needs of both partners' were accommodated in current and future plans and the relationship was treated with reverence. Acts of disrespect in marriage, however unintentional, had detrimental effects according to one of women. To her, respect was reflected in their day-to-day lives, and its absence was readily felt during moments when she and her husband were at odds. She explained:

Respect is my number one priority in our marriage. I found at times it would be about something so insignificant to him but important to me. I'd ask him, "Could you pick up the kids from school?" or "Could you take care of this?" Whatever it is, when he says "Yeah I'll do it" and then forgets about it, that shows me disrespect. It's as if my feelings don't matter.

In a marriage in which respect is paramount, the spouses acknowledge their partner's contributions and give them the credit they deserve. One member, an accomplished military husband who was highly regarded by his peers, believed that his success was a result of having his wife by his side. Another man best conveyed his thoughts on the matter by speaking of the lack of respect he has seen in other marriages. In those situations, he believed that the wives were significantly under-valued:

I've seen where one of the spouses will go on a six-month deployment and, when he comes back, he just automatically thinks he can just move right back into the old role. It doesn't work because during that time period whoever has been left behind has had to assume all those responsibilities. When the soldier comes back and does that, it's almost like he's saying the wife wasn't doing a good enough job (angrily)!

As evidenced in the participants' disclosures, respect was manifested in different forms yet all had the common ground of consistently valuing one's spouse. It was also significant that while they were interviewed separately and had opportunities to discuss the unhappy and dissatisfied elements of their lives, none of them spoke ill of or in derogatory terms towards their non-witnessing partners. The prominence of respect here implies that having an intimate relationship is simply not enough, and that strong lasting marriages are formed because marital partners also hold very high opinions of each other.

Commitment

The ability to wholeheartedly commit to the marital union was discussed by every participant, each of whom declared it the foundation of a strong and lasting marriage.

Commitment here was defined in the context of a spouse's determination to make the marriage work, especially during hard times. A total of 68 quotations were found in this regard. Each participant stated that one way or another, he or she fought hard for the marriage when things were rough. Separation or marital break-up had never been seriously considered, and a member who had been married for nearly 20 years made the following comment about divorce:

It's not on; it's not even on the table. It's part of the value system that we struggle and that we work through this. This won't last forever, this stressful issue; if we work on it we can change it. In other couples, if this isn't working then, "Fine, maybe we'll just end it".

A woman who had been married for 17 years discussed her position on marriage, one that she and her husband had held right from the beginning. She stated:

When we got married, we just got married with the idea that it would be for life, and that we would work through anything. We just decided that love was a decision, that whatever happens we would just work through it.

Another woman urged, "You just can't give up, you don't give up on your marriage just because it gets hard! You keep working at it until you're exhausted from all ends". To yet another wife, commitment was ingrained in everything she and her husband did, and she believed that it entailed a specific thought process:

We have a lot of fun but there's also this other side of us, "You work things out" and it's a rational dimension. That you just say, "I have committed to this relationship, I'm sticking with this".

Although all of the wives admitted that raising small children in the military lifestyle was particularly demanding, nine of the 11 reported that becoming parents had strengthened their marriages by solidifying their commitment to each other. One woman emphasized that the strong mutual love for the kids motivated them to plough through adversity within the marriage. To yet another woman and her husband, it went even deeper:

We've often looked at the children and there's this passage in the bible that says when you get married, "The two shall become one flesh". You see that most ultimately in the kids. It's in those children that the two really do become (paused) ... one. I find for us since the children have been born that that has deepened the connection between the two of us. It's taken our life to a whole new depth.

In essence, the general consensus from the participants was that strong Canadian military marriages are only possible when two people are intentionally and entirely committed to building it. The interviewees suggested that there is nothing coincidental or matter of fact about how their marriages have survived over time, and that these unions are a result of persistently hard work. While love and respect are critical to strong marriages in this culture, so is one's ability to resist the urge to escape its hardships.

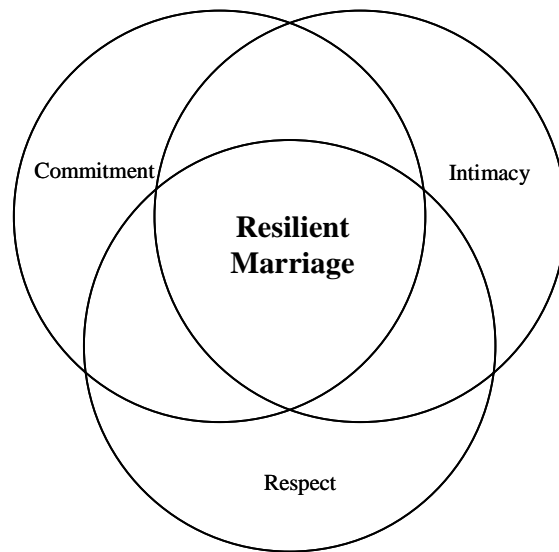


Figure 2. Emerging Image of a Resilient Canadian Military Marriage

The interface between these structural elements as seen in Figure 2 provides the basis for the model found, and while this will be expanded upon in the following chapter, above is a preliminary display of what has been presented thus far. As discussed by the interviewees, the structural elements of intimacy, commitment and respect have individual properties that are enriched by their common yet varied meanings. The interactive nature of these components as identified by the participants was best declared however when collectively positioned together. One male participant explained his understanding of the effects of military life on marriage. I have added comments within the parentheses to clarify the presence of intimacy, commitment and respect:

The differences are constantly pulling the couple apart so you have to work a lot harder to keep yourselves together [sign of *commitment* to the marriage]. You have to work a lot harder at the *intimacy* [declaration that deep affectionate feelings for each other exist] and you have to work a lot harder at knowing where

you're partner is at on an emotional level, checking them out all the time every time you've been away [indication of *respect* for what the partner has endured during his absence]. Really understand that it's your job. I know people have a hard time with this, but it's my belief that the happiness of my partner is my responsibility.

When well established and working in unison, the structural elements of intimacy, commitment and respect seemed to influence the formation of marital strength. Based on the perceptions of the interviewees, it appears that these three must be present at all times for Canadian military marriage to become, and remain, resilient.

The Face of Strong Canadian Military Marriages

In addition to the afore-mentioned structural components, a number of descriptive characteristics also emerged from the interviews that revealed the face of strong Canadian military marriages. According to the interviewees, healthy unions within the context of this culture were mature, communicative and trustful.

Maturity

Maturity was defined here as the display of age appropriate, well thought-out behaviour that indicates an awareness of consequences with respect to marital issues. Of the 17 participants, 14 described their marriages as "mature", with 36 supporting references. Perhaps the most noteworthy display of maturity was shown in the participants' ability to keep a healthy point of view. For one of the wives, it meant gaining a better perspective over time:

They get paid really well and as horrible as I thought their job was and how much they went away, it's really not that bad. I've just grown up a lot, I was just really immature and I think I've finally just grown up.

No evidence was found to suggest the presence of mind games, manipulation or similarly dysfunctional patterns. While it was possible that these were purposefully omitted, it may also be that they were not significant enough for mention, or altogether absent. One of the women showed insight into the self-destructive nature of bitterness:

After having had a few good wing dinger fights about something really stupid, the fight was about who was going to be right and I thought, who cares really, what is this about, is this a power struggle about being right? After a while I thought, I don't need to be right.

The members' ability to keep their careers in perspective further indicated the presence of maturity. They realized that the military was simply a job; they knew when it was time to push their way up the ranks and when it was time to walk away. One man who had recently retired stated:

When, and that includes your kids, when you are laying on your deathbed, it isn't going to be the military standing beside you saying, "Good on you, you had a good life". It will be your wife and kids and they'll be wondering if you weren't around what the heck happened. And you aren't going to be saying, "I should have worked harder" either.

Having realistic expectations of one's mate further marked the existence of maturity in most of these partners, wherein they understood that marriage was simply not perfect. One man commented:

Happiness is an emotion and marriage and happiness do not equal each other. Ah, happiness exists in marriages so does unhappiness. And there will be times when we are unhappy and it may last for months or sporadically over time, but we shouldn't equate a good marriage or bad marriage based on our own personal level of happiness.

Another male participant who had lived in many locations across Canada and completed three long overseas deployments advised:

Have healthy expectations. I mean this isn't Kansas in the military Toto, and it's about being aware of the various things. It is quite within the military system's right to take your husband, and make him go away for long periods of time, and often on short ridiculous notice. Just be healthily aware of what this world is, called the Canadian Forces.

Communication

According to ten participants, strong Canadian military marriages are communicative. They referred to the need for effective communication 35 times, wherein thoughts and feelings flowed well within the marital relationship. Six spoke of having established regular mechanisms to connect during absences, and all ten claimed that they related well on a verbal, spiritual, and intellectual level. They identified calm and reciprocal interactions as the main characteristics of communication. To one man who

had endured many tours of duty away from home, it was critical to be meticulous about staying in touch:

We would talk thoroughly and completely through everything. Even though we weren't in proximity to each other she let me in on what was going on, and she'd say "I need your advice" and she was very open about running the household. She would always consult with me. I often felt very much a part of the ongoing life of the family. We both learned how to be fully attuned to non-verbal and verbal signs of dysfunctionality in this thing called communication. The moment you start saying things like "I don't want to talk about it", that starts building the little walls that begin to grow between a husband and a wife.

One woman noted that good communication is also rational. She found that marital stress was readily alleviated during arguments when she applied logic:

I knew I didn't understand him because he wasn't a bad person. All the evil that I attributed to him was wrong. I thought he was treating me badly but he's not a bad guy and he's not thoughtless. I knew that we mattered to him, that we were really, really important to him.

Seven interviewees described their marriages as able to handle strong emotions such as grief, sadness, fear and anger, rendering their communication intimate. On relating to his wife, one man clarified:

You have to let yourself be vulnerable. That allows for open communication and it's that truthful communication that really allows you to connect on a person-to-person level. You have to be willing to say, "You're right, I was wrong there". Be

willing to consider the other person's position even if it means looking worse in your own eyes. I find the biggest breakthrough was when I could say, "I was wrong".

Trust

According to ten respondents, strong Canadian military marriages can be described as trusting, and they made 18 references that spoke of its complexity. Trust was defined here as having the ability to rely on a partner's overall integrity. Although there are various ways of demonstrating trust, all such actions indicated that partners lived up to their marital vows of fidelity, and that they trusted their spouses to act in the best interest of the marriage and family. The informants identified two general aspects to this issue: the first entailed a tangible trust wherein one handed over all control of household matters, and the second was an emotional trust wherein one handed over control of one's defenceless heart. On tangible trust, a man with highly traditional values commented:

I recognize that after being separated the first time I had to allow my wife to assume all those duties and I never take them back. Even when I am home, she basically runs that part of the household. There has to be, I don't know if that's the right word or not, but you can't be *threatened* (strongly emphasizing the word) by it. You should not feel threatened by your spouse. You have to allow them the opportunity to be independent and not be threatened by that.

The necessity of emotional trust is particularly evident during times of disagreement for one woman, who explained:

A wife should be able to say, “Maybe he isn’t hurting me”. You have to have (struggling for the right word) ... I guess it’s trust. You trust that he’ll *love* you, that he *does* love you, and once you know that, and you know him and he’s not a mean unkind person who on purpose goes out and hurts people, you know for sure that he’s not hurting *you* either.

To summarize, the participants provided a complex description of strong Canadian military marriages. According to them, such marriages are carried out in a mature manner, wherein the partners effectively communicate and trust well. It may be speculated that exceptional strengths in these particular areas re-enforce the structural components of intimacy, respect and commitment. It may be further theorized that both the structure and description of a marriage mutually affect each other, that is, a well-built marital union might influence how the marriage appears, and a healthy looking marriage may also be structurally sound. While little else is known about this proposed link between structure and description, what is clear is that a connection seems to exist between these two constructs.

Maintaining Strong Canadian Military Marriages

While the structure and description of strong marriages are essential to understanding marital strength within this population, so are the tools that are used to preserve such unions. As revealed in their disclosures, Canadian military husbands and wives seemed to rely on faith, an enhanced sense of self on the part of women, and generally appropriate boundaries, to ensure and enjoy continued marital health.

Faith

For the purposes of this exploration, faith was defined as the belief in the existence of a higher being, regardless of active or inactive involvement in organized religion. Among the 17 Canadian military spouses interviewed, 13 stated that their lives were guided by faith and a solid belief in God. The interviewees made a total of 40 references, and they claimed that marital hardships were overcome because they had faith. The faith-based participants reported five primary benefits to a religious conviction. Firstly, they were able to give to God what was beyond their control; secondly, they saw all situations and challenges as opportunities to do good; thirdly, religion held them accountable for actions that were un-witnessed by their spouses; fourthly, faith emphasized the notion that both partners were equal within a marriage; and fifthly, faith gave them individual and combined strength when they needed it most. A religious member stated:

I'm a Christian. I think that allows me to reflect, it helps in many aspects of our lives. You've got to anchor your thought process somewhere and I think for Christians, it gives you a perspective to consider other people as well as yourself. I know I'm always trying to do what's right. Not that I always achieve that but I can accept my errors and I know that as hard as that is sometimes, for instance if I want to hide something because I'm afraid of looking bad, as a Christian I know that that's going to come out anyway.

A distinction was found between religious and non- religious interviewees, as faith-based spouses understood the necessity, eventuality and power of forgiveness.

Another male advocated:

Things will happen in life that are severe. If we are able to go to a deeper level of forgiveness, those people with faith base usually are because it's part of their value systems to forgive. It's a little bit easier for them to get to a point of actually doing that level of forgiveness versus others in a disposable society, where forgiveness is not an option.

Religious beliefs aside, 13 participants claimed that strong military marriages were guided by the two core values of honesty, and having a strong sense of right and wrong, as evident in 32 statements. While some referred to these as faith principles, others claimed that they were a product of traditional or old-fashioned ways of thinking. Regardless of their origin and the means with which they were maintained, the need to be honest was referred to 25 times, while conducting oneself in a principled manner was found in seven quotations.

An Enhanced Sense of Self

High degrees of self-determination, self-assuredness, independence, and self-awareness were noted in the women, and these were combined together into the code of "enhanced sense of self" due to their inter-relatedness. The participants made 62 references to this effect, and the characteristics appeared to be present in all the military wives affected by the study. Self-determination was reflected in the women's ability to make their own choices as noted in 15 quotations from one man and five women. A

mother of two made the following statement on her decision to stay home with their children:

The best thing is I got to raise my kids, I could have done my courses with my kids at that age but staying home was a choice I made. If I did the research I could have found the courses, but I was enjoying being a Mom. I wouldn't have changed that for the world.

How another mother of two functioned within the military lifestyle was always a product of her own doing. She stated:

It's a matter of conscious choice. It comes down to a question of how do I want to live my life? I've become aware that life doesn't go on forever. These are precious years and how do I want to live them, what do I want to do? Do I want to be happy or do I want to be miserable?

The five women who spoke of choice believed that their husbands also exercised self-determination with the marriage and family in mind. One woman reflected:

He does have some choices, they don't have to go away for every exercise, and I know some things they have to sign up for and some they don't. I think where I'm lucky is he doesn't sign up for everything. It's all a matter of priority.

The women described several instances when they had simply had to learn to rely on themselves. Statements reflecting independence and self-assuredness include the following:

I've always been a strong person.

I felt like no matter where I was going to be, I would meet interesting people.

I'm not afraid to try things myself.

In a lot of ways it's probably good that I had these chances to do things even though I hated them. It made me more independent and I don't have to rely on him or a man to take care of things. I can do it on my own.

I wasn't there for very long before I decided if I don't try to get out of this what's enjoyable and what could be a lot of fun, I'm going to waste several years of my life.

With respect to heightened self-awareness, all believed that both husbands and wives exerted considerable effort into staying in tune with how they affected the marriage. On this particular issue, two respondents made the following statements:

When you do have a fight there's that icky feeling and you're walking around the house and you feel terrible. So you just want to lift it.

You start feeling a little bit like your emotional tank so to speak needs a little nurturing with your spouse.

An enhanced sense of self, as demonstrated by self-determination, self-assuredness, independence, and self-awareness, appears to be critical a tool for preserving strong marriage. These characteristics seem to ensure that the personal integrity of individual marital partners are maintained, particularly those of the women, thereby avoiding the build up of anger and resentment.

Boundaries

All of these strong marriages possessed firm boundaries around the marital system, as discussed in 19 quotations by all participants. While other relationships existed

that were beneficial to the marriage, careful protection of the marital and family unit appeared to be enforced. Two individuals found it necessary to set physical boundaries by residing off base and restricting their attendance to work-related gatherings, and they felt that this reduced influence of the military on their day-to-day lives. Each interviewee also reported defining social boundaries, and this was done by choosing networks that supported the marriage and family. For example, instead of trying to make friends with military co-workers, some purposely built friendships with those who had similar beliefs such as fellow churchgoers, parenting groups and hobby-related activities.

Thus far, the structure and face of strong Canadian military marriages have been presented, as have the tools to protect marital health. These collectively provided a beginning understanding of how marital strength is preserved, and they become particularly relevant to couples within this population, as they encounter specific challenges.

The Challenges of Canadian Military Marriages

According to strong Canadian military couples, both military culture and the general society contain opposing values that place additional pressure on their marriages. Although the former are culture specific, their effects seemed magnified by having to face the latter as well.

Conflicting Military Values

With regard to the difficulties faced by military couples, all of the interviewees were concerned about conflicting military values as noted in 17 quotations. They recognized that, at times, the military imposed beliefs upon its population that are

incongruent with marital health, thus threatening the integrity of marriages within this community. The participants stated that the military member was venerated as the dominating force in the family, which posed challenges to couples trying to maintain an atmosphere of equality. A wife spoke of her frustration during those years:

The military caused me a lot of stress. I didn't find it easy. As a partner I often felt that the military didn't give me much voice. It had a lot of expectations of me and I found it very hard. Early in our marriage I came in very bright eyed and I very quickly found out that there were ways I was excluded. Our marriage started on equal footing but the military put a lot of pressure to make us not equal. The husband had to have a strong role and be the person that made decisions. My husband also went into our marriage with the idea that we were equal, and was forced into being the one to make the decisions.

One man reflected on the demands that military life placed on his marriage and on those of others around him. While he had seen many marriages stay healthily intact many did not, and he believed that "if any couple survives, they're doing it in spite of the way the organization needs you to be employed." The participants were unanimous in their disappointment about the careless disregard for the institution of marriage sometimes seen within the Canadian military. All respondents knew of senior officers who had covertly or openly committed adultery. One woman declared:

These people are supposed to be so smart; they're supposed to be leading these guys into war? They can't even keep their home front burning (angrily)! They're screwing around on their wives. That scares me because to me if they can't keep

the home front burning they can't take a squadron to war. I don't care how smart they are.

Conflicting Societal Values

The participants relayed a number of concerns with respect to the societal forces they face, in 11 quotes made by five participants. Firstly, as described by one individual, a “meet my needs” mentality prevails in today's culture, wherein people are encouraged to focus only on themselves; secondly, there is a romanticized idea of couplehood wherein people expect to live happily and effortlessly ever after; and thirdly, today's “throw away society” as referred to by another, reflects a complete disregard for the sanctity of the matrimonial union. One woman claimed that the idea of being “other-centred” was a foreign concept today. A male participant who worried about Canadian military marriages, had this to say to the next generation:

You're not going to be bringing anyone else into the relationship in any way. The marriage has to be protected from all the attacks, and there'll be lots of attacks from society. It will be from the military lifestyle, it will be from the sexual lifestyle, it will be from your in laws, it will be from all kinds of other things and influences. People want to attack your relationship and it will be hard. So unless you're working at this relationship all the time, and putting your spouse first, you're not going to make it.

The Adaptability of Canadian Military Marriages

Well-equipped to confront the opposing cultural and social forces, the participants in this study engaged in a specific action in order to preserve their marriages. The

interviewees revealed that the women played a strong defining role in getting the family through the trials of daily life, by way of adaptation. According to the respondents, one of the most common actions performed by Canadian military wives was to adapt to the changes imposed by the military. Adapting was defined here as employing positive means to cope, that increased functionality, and improved the well being of all those involved. Adaptation was noted in 70 references made by 13 of the participants, including all the women. They generally reported that maintaining a positive attitude was key. In their own words, several stated:

Everywhere I've gone I have been able to find opportunities for my career.

When I think back about all the wonderful things I really wouldn't change a thing. I have been able to learn so many different things. I worked in different cities, different provinces, so for me it's been a good thing.

I can always look at the bright side and I always end up getting very excited, and make the best of it wherever we've gone. I've absolutely loved it and it's been terrible for me to leave.

To the women, establishing supports and using them accordingly was a vital part of coping:

If you don't have a really strong support network you're screwed. It is survival in a way, because the alternative to making new friends again and going through all of that is to not make any, and that's even worse.

Be social, that'll help because when you're husband is away, don't sit at home and cry and wait by the phone. You're friends in the military community become your family.

It's really important to make friends and to meet people and to get out there and find out what's in your community.

Friends were really my rock.

I had a group of people that I worked with and we were friends as well as co-workers. I socialized with that group; I'd go out for dinner with them. I had a place where I belonged and that was really important to have.

Due to the unpredictable nature of military life, flexibility was another essential part of adapting as reported by two of the wives:

I've learned over the years to expect the unexpected (laughing). Be willing to try things, to think outside the box. A couple must plan; they should have other plans in place so they don't get too upset when the military says you can't be there for that important event.

If I were a woman who didn't have a career then I would look for opportunities. I'd ask, "What can I do in this town, what's available, what could I learn from, what courses can I take for free if I didn't have money?"

In summary, this chapter presented the data analysis component of this research, which asked the question, "What makes strong Canadian military marriage strong?" The voices of the participants in this study of marital health among the Canadian military

have been captured, allowing for a rare glimpse into the marital lives of those who serve our nation. Their words and meanings have been incorporated into a working model for understanding marital strength, and this will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Thus far, the individuals in strong Canadian military marriages involved in this research study have been heard. To depict the utility of the findings, this Discussion Chapter has six primary objectives. Firstly, it presents the resilient Canadian military marriage model that emerged from the data as well as its weaknesses and strengths, and secondly, it outlines the additional themes that were unexpectedly found. The third goal here is to link the results of this research with the existing literature on healthy marriages. The implications of these findings in the domains of clinical practice and social work policy encompassed the fourth objective, and the fifth entails an examination of the overall strengths and weakness of this study. Finally, future directions for this subject area are proposed.

The Resilient Canadian Military Marriage Model

The words, views and meanings of Canadian participants with respect to their strong military marriages were organized in a manner that addresses the research question of “What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?” When positioned according to their structure, description, content, actions and challenges, a model for understanding marital strength emerged.

A resilient Canadian military marriage, as illustrated in Figure 3, is a union that is premised on intimacy, commitment and respect, wherein marital partners are intent on keeping these structural components strong. Such a military marriage is described as mature, trustful and communicative. It is held together and re-enforced by the use of faith, an enhanced sense of self and healthy boundaries as represented by the bolded

circle, which overpower the clashing values of military and society. The word “resilient” was selected based on its ability to describe the kind of relationship that develops, when two people come together and carry on healthily.

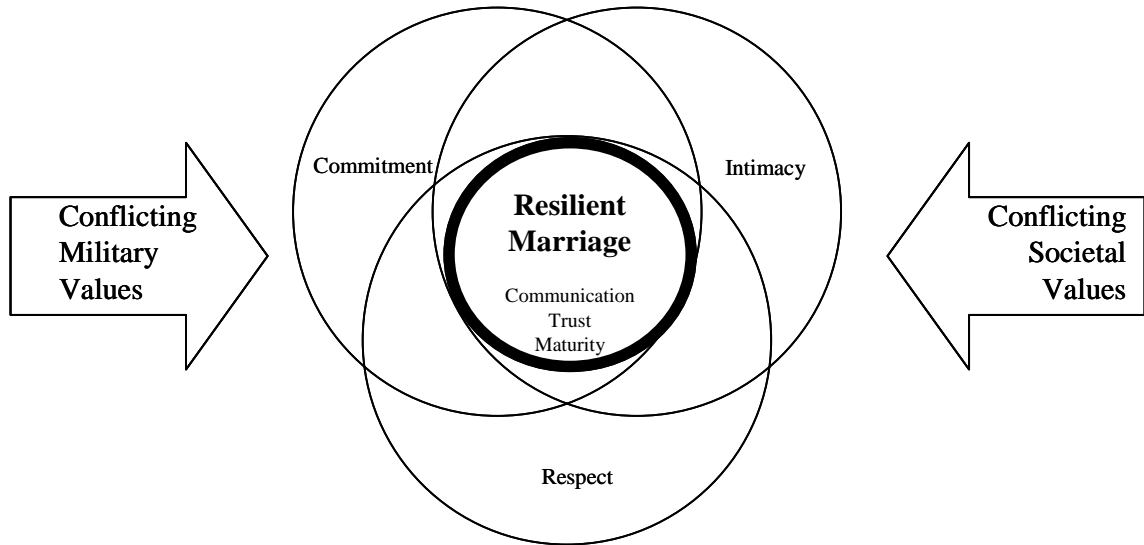


Figure 3. The Resilient Canadian Military Marriage Model

When the concepts as disclosed by the participants are assembled into the resilient Canadian military marriage model, the respondents seem to suggest that a marriage will “weaken” or experience increased distress if the presence of intimacy, commitment or respect is diminished, and will alternatively strengthen when their prominence is firmly set. The marital contents of faith, an enhanced sense of self, and boundaries constantly nurture the foundational core of the marriage. How well the structural elements are established seems to account for the varying degrees of marital strength noted amongst the interviewees of this study. While the interviewees were subjected to similar pressures and demands, some described higher levels of marital distress during difficult times, while others remained consistently calm. This variation in functionality seemed to depend

on whether respect, intimacy and commitment were paramount. Individuals who had doubts about their partner in any of these areas described higher levels of discontent when times were hard. Whether or not both partners felt deeply loved, whether or not their contributions were valued, and whether or not they were devoted to preserving the marital union, seemed to directly affect the level of marital strength achieved.

Strengths of the model. The resilient marriage model provides a systematic way of understanding marital health within Canadian military culture as it identifies critical elements of marital strength. The constructs identified by the participants within this study were not new, and they have, in fact, been of interest to scholars for quite some time. The value and novelty of these results, however, lie in their unique positioning, wherein they are assembled into a usable and practical model for explaining marital health within the Canadian military. The strength of this emergent model is best revealed by its organizing power, wherein any construct likely to be associated with marital relationships can be found within it. Alternatively, the presence or absence of such concepts can also be readily identified so the model is a preliminary guiding map for those interested in marital health within this group.

The structural, descriptive, protective, conflictual, and action levels identified here ensure easy recognition of a particular concept's relevance, wherein its location within the model designates its particular worth. The presence of all structural components, for example, readily suggests that a strong marriage exists, and the absence of any one of them may be cause for immediate and grave concern. There is also the potential for using this model with other cultural groups; slight modifications can be

made regarding the impinging stressors that would be intrinsic to a specific population, and instituting a minor label change does not seem to compromise the integrity of the model.

The model makes a novel contribution to the field of marital strength by the extent to which the participants emphasized the concept of respect. While respect is included in Gottman's (1999) strong relationship house theory, it appears to be more pronounced amongst Canadian military marriages than in general marital literature. Although intimacy, communication, conflict resolution, commitment and spirituality were identified as key marital health descriptors in the literature review, respect was not, and yet it received the second highest number of references in this current study.

The resilient Canadian military marriage model found in this study unearths a pathway for understanding strong marital unions within our defence population. It allows a rare glimpse into the composition of strong marital unions that remain wholesome, in the midst of unwholesome conditions. Some inner workings of healthy marriages have been exposed as they pertain to this study sample, and this has revealed a clearer course towards emulating such unions.

Weaknesses of the model. Although the model is presented in a clear way, it requires a comprehensive understanding of how the concepts are used within it, and strict adherence to how they were intended may prove difficult for some. It is referred to as a working model and rightfully so, as its eclecticism and versatility have not yet been determined. Another limitation of the model is that the definitions used for these terms were subjectively assigned for the purpose of this research. Although these were clarified

with the respondents, there may be cause for disagreement from others who have reason to dispute their meanings.

The model in its current form narrowly represents a small population and excludes the more challenged scenarios of dual-member couples, female members married to non-military males, visible minorities, homosexual relationships, common-law unions, mixed or lower ranking soldiers and naval personnel. While this type of research does not aim to achieve representation, richer dimensions may have been found had a more diverse range of participants been available.

Themes of Duality

A number of terms that appeared contradictory in nature emerged throughout the analysis process, and these warrant discussion at this time. These themes of duality, once examined in the context of the resilient Canadian military marriage model, offer a richer understanding of marital strength within this study population.

Military Couples: Separate and Together

While the concept of a resilient marriage may imply a reduced degree of individuality on the part of a married person, the interview data obtained here suggested the contrary. The discussion on enhanced sense of self, and particularly self-determination revealed that husbands and wives exercised high levels of autonomy over the direction of their own lives, regardless of their physical proximity to each other. The husbands were non-reliant on the marriage when on duty or far away, as were the wives who handled everything else at home. This suggests that men and women within a resilient marriage stand tall with singular integrity when the situation calls for it, but are

also dedicated to marital wholeness when circumstances allowed. They could be physically separate without living separate lives, and could be physically together without losing themselves. As individuals, they maintain personal strength by drawing on faith and core values, by knowing, and believing in themselves, and by recognizing healthy external factors. Jointly, they drew on these same essentials to keep their marriage strong.

Strong Military Marriage: Ever-Changing Yet Stable

The women and men interviewed in the current study had all moved through the developmental cycles of dating, early marriage, having and raising children, and dealing with careers within the confines of military life. Added to the usual stressors were the fluctuations of a transient community and ongoing separation issues. Despite these chaotic conditions, the individuals in resilient marriages seemed to have engaged in a process of evolution while holding its integral core intact. During times of individual, personal and professional growth for each, these marriages maintained an air of stability, seeming to regenerate themselves, time and time again. In the face of unpredictability, they continued to love their mates deeply, to respect them relentlessly, and to fight for the marital union, dedicatedly.

Good Husband versus Good Soldier: A Double-edged Sword

Subjected to different pressures from their wives, the male counterparts in military couplehood faced challenges of their own. In a culture fraught with hierarchal rules that herald the devoted soldier and demand an impersonal disposition, military husbands in resilient marriages seemed compelled at times to devote more time to career than family. Difficult as this may have been, the data suggests that the relationships

sustained this pressure because nothing within the central core of the marriage was violated at any time. The established forces of respect, intimacy and commitment were unharmed by differences of opinion, thereby leaving the marital union cohesively in one piece. The connection between husband and wife may have been such that the wives realized how difficult it was to walk away from the call of duty, to decline a promotion, or to leave the military itself.

Roles and Power: Issues for Women

Without question, the couples were polarized into traditional gender roles of breadwinner husband and domesticated wife, suggesting perhaps that there was a weakened position for women and one of dominance for the men. At a glance, an uninformed observer could surmise that military wives are in disadvantaged positions, coerced into putting their careers on hold, and were powerless over their current and future lives. While this may be true for many military unions, an alternate picture was portrayed by the men and women interviewed for the current study. The concepts discussed by those in strong Canadian military marriages were not consistent with oppression. The core principles of intimacy, respect and commitment did not support a theory of powerlessness on the part of women, who reported choice driven actions in their activities. Husbands and wives seemed to strive to make intentional decisions for the good of marriage and family. Women here demonstrated that they felt good about themselves, that they felt loved and valued by the husbands, who remained devoted to them.

While the emergence of these themes was unanticipated, they reveal key peripheral elements that affect the marital processes of the individuals interviewed here. These findings are as significant as the resilient Canadian military marriage model found, as they shed light on the seemingly less important but equally influential conflicts, which are indeed inescapable in this lifestyle.

The Findings in Relation to Existing Literature

The second and third chapters of this dissertation outlined the body of knowledge pertaining to this study of strong Canadian military marriages, including research on and ways of understanding healthy marital unions, and a summary of research on the Canadian military culture and its effects on marriage in its ranks. With regards to Chapter Three, the interviewees' perspectives confirmed that the lifestyle is demanding. While mandate, isolation, duty related separation and patriarchy were regarded as potentially debilitating to healthy marital process in previous writings, the dissertation results indicated that the influence of these factors varied from what was surmised earlier.

As an example, the participants of this study did not appear particularly disconcerted about isolation and separation; in fact, they seemed to have handled this aspect of military life quite well. However, while they accepted that the mandate to protect was an indisputable element of the lifestyle, the patriarchal means through which this was enforced seemed to weigh heavily on their marriages. The military members and wives in this study seemed to embrace the idea of standing by their nation, but they struggled with the conflicting military values that led to devaluing women and marriage.

To evaluate the results of this Canadian military marriage study in the context of existing literature, the findings will now be discussed in two parts. First they will be examined as they relate to the body of literature on the elements found in healthy marriages, and secondly, they will be compared to the writings on how healthy marriages have been known to form and be maintained.

The Findings in Relation to Healthy Marriages Elements

Critical to the marital resilience model developed in the current study are the structural elements of intimacy, commitment and respect. When viewed within the context of the earlier literature review, a number of similarities are apparent. With respect to describing healthy marriages, the current results are congruent with the existing literature. The concept of intimacy seems as relevant to the military research participants as to marriage scholars. Bagarozzi (1997) believes that intimacy is the cornerstone to a good marriage and the interviewees reiterate this by mentioning this concept most frequently. Bagarozzi further highlights the role that vulnerability plays in achieving closeness, and the need to be vulnerable is also affirmed by the respondents.

Moss and Schwebel (1993) advocate for a multi-dimensional description of intimacy wherein commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive intimacy, physical intimacy, and mutuality are incorporated into their definition. This is supported by the findings of this study on marital health in Canada's military, as according to the participants, intimacy in isolation is not enough. The interviewees implied that healthy marriages depend on the concurrent presence of both commitment and respect and these are consistent with Moss and Schwebel's work. As well, the sub-components of intimacy

discussed by the respondents, entailing being good friends and having a healthy sexual relationship, are in line with the works of Moss and Schwebel.

A further link between the results of this marital health study within Canadian couples and the existing literature is found in Sternberg's (1986) "triangular theory of love". According to Sternberg, intimacy, passion and commitment are present in healthy unions; these parallel the information obtained from the participants of the study, wherein the respondents spoke definitively of intimacy and commitment. Although they did not use the word "passion", the desire to be together and having an active sexual relationship was discussed by many of them.

Congruence between this military marriage study's findings and the current literature is also evidenced by a common use of terminology. For example, effective communication is considered critical to healthy marriage within current writings (Anderson Moore et al., 2004; Eckstein & Goldman, 2001; Giblin, 2004; Gilbert, 1976; Wynne & Wynne, 1986). This is notion supported by the participants as they portray healthy marital unions as communicative, and in a thorough sense wherein they allow themselves to be vulnerable. The concept of commitment is also discussed in depth in the marital health literature (Doherty, 2003; Klagsburn, 1995; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Parker, 2001), and those in healthy Canadian military marriages agree.

The notion of an "enhanced sense of self" among Canadian military wives in strong marriages is noteworthy, as is the fact that it was not identified in the men. While one could speculate that the military members derive a strong sense of identity from their military role and are unable to separate their "selves" from it, their declared emotional

presence in their marriages somewhat contradicts this notion. Perhaps, whether by choice or necessity, the women here have simply had more opportunities to be individually challenged in ways that cause them to find and draw on their personal strength. It could also be theorized that military culture's influence is such that only women who are pre-disposed with, who have achieved, or who are willing to achieve a strong sense of their own being are suited for this lifestyle.

On the topic of spirituality, the obvious consistencies between this marital health study on Canada's military and current marital literature are noteworthy. Fennell (1993), Giblin (2004) and Worthington et al. (2005) assert that, despite marital strengths, having religious beliefs or a sense of a higher being are essential to maintaining a strong marriage. This notion is upheld by the majority of this study's participants, who draw on spirituality as a resource, both as individuals and in conjunction with their spouses.

In summary, the concepts disclosed by the participants in this Canadian military marriage inquiry closely match the constructs in the pre-existing literature in relation to marital strength (Anderson Moore et al., 2004; Eckstein & Goldman, 2001, Giblin, 2004; Fennell, 1993; Worthington, et al., 2005). Despite the different levels of importance that they assign to particular constructs, both the interviewees in this study and current marriages scholars seem to agree on the characteristics, qualities and concepts that make up strong marriages.

The Findings in Relation to Healthy Marriage Theories

As outlined in the review, a body of literature was found that explains how healthy marital unions emerge and are maintained. These theories and models will now

be discussed in the context of the findings from this study of marital health among Canadian military couples, according to their relevance to this group.

The current results are a good fit with the writings of family systems theorists (Beavers & Hampson, 2003; Bowen, 1974; Epstein et al., 2003; Olson, 2000). As discussed in Chapter Two, the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning highlights the value of effective family competence and a mixed family style and views optimal families as adaptable, able to negotiate, and have the capacity to exercise individual choice. Such families also rely on both family relationships (centrifugal) and external resources (centripetal) for needs satisfaction (Beavers & Hampson, 2003). As the Canadian military husbands and wives interviewed for this study held intimacy, commitment and respect in high regard, and readily established and used much needed social supports as needed, there is reason to suspect that the participants here resemble optimally functioning families as defined by Beavers and Hampson.

The Beavers, McMaster and Circumplex models advocate for the presence of clear, permeable, and healthy boundaries, wherein family flexibility and adaptability encourages intimacy and growth, and these constructs were also identified in this current marital health study. There is consensus between the three models on the necessity of having effective communication skills within the family, and this too was noted among the participants here.

When the theme of “gender roles and power” that emerged from this inquiry is examined in conjunction with the work of Beavers and Hampson, their account of the interplay between equality, power and intimacy reinforces the connection between the

current results and family systems literature. Beavers and Hampson emphasize that optimal couples are unconcerned with issues of traditional roles as they are focused on accomplishing required tasks, and both parents are revered as equally powerful. As Beaver and Hampson state that this dynamic fosters intimacy, the concept most discussed by the participants in this study, there is reason to suspect that these participants are functioning optimally in their married lives.

The Circumplex model, with its emphasis on family cohesion, is congruent with the theme of “separate and together” that was found within the relationships of the participants. According to Olson (2000), healthy couples are able to achieve functional balance between being alone and being together and such seems the case with the couples interviewed here. Olson’s model also accounts for the theme of “ever-changing yet stable” in the dimension of family flexibility, as issues of stability and change, namely, having the ability to adapt when required to do so, is indicative of a functional family system.

Applying the basic tenets of family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997; Bowen, 1978; Kazemek & Kazemek, 1992) to the results of the study seems to reveal three unique dimensions of marital strength within strong Canadian military marriages. First of all, when Canadian military culture is viewed as existing within the influence of a large system wherein people live, work and function, the encompassing effects of military culture on the marital union become more visible. When the additional conflicting military and societal values described by the participants are considered, one wonders how such marriages have survive at all.

The second dimension of these strong military marriages highlighted through the lens of family systems theorists is the critical concept of “self”. Bowen (1978) advocated that without differentiation one has fusion or is triangulated. The study participants report that an “enhanced sense of self” is a central feature of military wives in strong Canadian military marriages, even if no information was revealed on this issue pertaining to them. What Bowen suggests, and the interviewees seem to support, is that while the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts, the parts themselves must be in good working condition and well able to function solely on their own when required to do so. As separation is characteristic of the Canadian military lifestyle, military spouses have indeed been required to function independently, and without their marital partners. The inherent value of the “self” or individual system, when viewing couple relationships in general is often overlooked, and family systems theory seems to it give as much significance as that of the larger societal system.

Thirdly, family systems theory furthers our understanding of healthy military marriages by shedding light on an aspect of marital strength that all couples can learn from: adaptability (Beavers & Hampson, 2003; Epstein et al., 2003; Olson, 2000). This concept is also consistent with the assumption that a system has “homeostatic features” that compensate for changing conditions and that such a system has the ability to adapt. Canadian military marriages may well be distinguished by their declared adeptness at adjusting, acclimatizing and responding to the fluctuating demands of the military lifestyle, and in a manner that protects and enhances the marriage and family. As noted in the results, the women reported high levels of adaptability as they readily built the

networks, and acquired the resources necessary to maintain the marriage's and the family's well being.

The work of John Gottman (1999) provides further insight into understanding marital health within this group of Canadian military participants in strong marriages. Gottman identified criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling as the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” for marital behaviour. None of these were noted among the interviewees, although it is noted that this study was primarily focused on marital strengths. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the methodology section, the spouses were given flexibility to direct the discussion and it could be that if these negative qualities were significant, they would have surfaced in the interviews in some way.

Perhaps more importantly, the participants exemplify Gottman's four “sound relationship house” characteristics that are believed critical to marital health. Firstly, Gottman claims that couples must have marital friendship that has a positive effect on spouses, and all of the interviewees in the marital health study report that they enjoy friendship with their partners. The second characteristic is positive sentiment override, which means giving and receiving feedback effectively, and this too is evident as mutual acceptance within the Canadian military marriage interviewees is demonstrated by the prominence of respect.

Thirdly, Gottman stresses the importance of conflict resolution, wherein couples have an appropriate way of managing stalemates; the interviewees within this military marriage study seemed to handle their impasses effectively by being mature, communicative and trusting. The final feature of a sound relationship as dictated by

Gottman, is creating shared meaning in terms of rituals, goals and symbols. Based on the results of this Canadian study, a common understanding within the marital unions of these participants must have been established, as the husbands and wives seemed united in pursuing goals that were in the best interest of the marriage and family. The overall congruence between Gottman's work and the results obtained is important, as it supports the notion that the sample used for this study did indeed represent the targeted group, that of strong Canadian military marriages.

Adult attachment theory, when positioned against the findings of this study, also sheds light on the issue of marital health in Canada's military. This population highly valued intimacy, which is a critical element of the attachment process. As stated in the literature review, marital distress is viewed by adult attachment theory as a result of emotional disconnection between spouses, and this threatens the sense of safety and security derived from their intimate bond (Johnson & Greenman, 2006). Securely attached partners are believed to recognize, accept and respond to pleas for increased closeness, while insecure spouses likely do not respond at all. With respect to the current investigation, the couples routinely handled being apart while remaining solidly and intimately linked. When frequent or prolonged separations occurred as is often required in this culture, marital partners may typically be unavailable to tend to each other's emotional needs. If a spouse relies heavily on his or her mate for emotional comfort, then the marriage would likely be distressed a good part of the time. While the study participants experienced some difficulties with military life, these were not due marital turbulence, but rather as a result of having only one person available to handle all day-to-

day matters. What this implies is that secure attachment styles may be prevalent among the respondents in this study.

One of the theories discussed in the literature review had little applicability to couples within the Canadian military. Social exchange theory, which claims that marital strength depends on a partner's assessment of the rewards for being in the union and the barriers to ending it, was not confirmed in the current research. This theory generally suggests that marital health relies on the individual perception of a spouse regarding whether or not marital expectations are being met, as well as the factors that hinder marital dissolution in situations of unhappy unions. The participants did not comment about evaluating the pros and cons of being married to their partners, although it is possible that conversations about marital benefits and pitfalls rarely occur. What was notable, however, was that the interviewees were clear on their intention to make their marriages work because they loved, honoured and cherished their mate.

In summary, when the results of this Canadian military marriage study are presented in the context of the existing marital literature, consistencies are evident in their descriptions and explanations. The study participants are aligned with the optimally functioning couples discussed in current writings, and they carry out their marital relationships in a similar manner to those who are believed to be healthily married. The clear parallels between the findings of the study and prominent works brings about the notion that even under challenging circumstances like the Canadian military lifestyle, healthy, well-functioning marital relationships are indeed possible.

Implications for Clinical Social Work Practice and Policy

The resilient Canadian military marriage model can be of use to marriage therapists working with other populations, as most practitioners would be familiar with the constructs within it. The congruence between the results and the existing literature should be noted, urging marital therapists to focus on the primary concepts of intimacy, communication and commitment wherein specific commonalities with current writings have been found. The results of this healthy marriage study also endorse the continued use of family systems and adult attachment approaches when dealing with Canadian military culture. It may be hypothesized that these two modalities readily accommodate unique cultural dynamics and collectively they provide a thorough depiction of marital health dynamics.

In terms of specific concepts, spirituality was found to be key in this marital health study with Canadian military couples. This particular finding highlights the multi-dimensionality of addressing marital issues, and it reminds clinicians to enlist the support of other complementary resources. Clinicians practicing within this culture should be encouraged to address spirituality issues in treatment if it is within their comfort level or ability to do so, to work in conjunction with clergy and base chaplains, or they may simply recommend that clients explore and enrich the spiritual aspects of their lives.

The themes of duality revealed in this study, which included spouses being separate and together, marriages being ever-changing yet stable, the conflicting loyalties for men, and gender and power issues for women, are cause for clinical consideration. These suggest that there is much yet to be learned about marriage within the Canadian

military culture, and that more intricate underlying dynamics may exist that are unrecognized by both clients and therapists. Clinicians need to proceed with open-minded awareness regarding such themes, they need to acknowledge that military couples might present with perceived inequities or may have additional internal debates, and they must know that others areas of hidden conflict may exist.

The Canadian military has a mandate to ensure the provision of psychosocial, spiritual, and health services to its members, so distributing the study's findings would broaden the knowledge base of the professionals involved in varied disciplines, including social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, medical staff and base chaplains. Gaining insight into the structural components, the description, the contents, the challenges and the actions, as reflected by the strong Canadian military marriages in this study, can only leave these professionals better equipped to assist this population from their respective fields. On the recruitment and retention level, learning more about marital strength within this group may alleviate fears that prospective soldiers may have, and may bring hope to those already serving. If they are able to understand the elements that lead to marital preservation, soldiers may be better informed when deciding whether or not they will commit to a long-term career in the military or opt for alternate employment.

Indeed the concept of "values" has been established as significant here. Phrases such core values, conflicting military and conflicting societal values were used by the respondents so clinicians should consider how these can be examined and respected in therapy. This study sheds light on the fact that conflicting military values are prominent stressors, thus drawing attention to the importance of reducing their effects on marriages.

It may be useful to acknowledge these influences within a clinical setting by ensuring that education on healthy marriage practices is regularly included in sessions wherein relationship issues are a concern. This client population should be encouraged to maintain its focus on being healthily married despite the opposing elements in which it finds itself enclosed.

This healthy marriage study on our defence culture also has policy implications for Canadian military couples. The Canadian Forces has a mandate to provide staff development services to its members, and these are venues in which the study results can be presented. As this study emphasizes the need to bring marital health to the forefront, a psycho-educational component could be incorporated into the regularly scheduled training days so as to enhance general awareness of marital health. Supporting healthy marriage within this community should be of interest to two-thirds of this population who are married, and increasing access to information on strong marriages may lead some to seek or recommend much needed marital assistance.

On a broader scale, the results of this Canadian marital health study could be of particular use to social work policy makers. The military social work leaders in Canada who coordinate professional development for clinicians may be wise to see wide dissemination of these results among the body it governs. With enough studies of this nature, policies may eventually be formed that mandates marital therapy training for counsellors, and easier access to marital strength initiatives on all local bases.

Limitations and Strengths of the Current Study

Several difficulties were anticipated prior to proceeding with the study in relation to acquiring an adequate sample group, and these will now be addressed. Firstly, the criteria for eligibility seemed restrictive. On this matter, however, eligible participants were located with more ease than suspected as many were from the same hometowns as their spouses, and had married during their post-secondary education years. While finding participants was not as difficult as anticipated, unexpected challenges arose in attempting to schedule interviews, as it soon became apparent that even when a researcher could afford considerable flexibility, military members could not.

A second initial concern, that the individual interview process would prove uncomfortable, was not substantiated. Budgetary issues precluded travel to the participants' various locations and, despite initial apprehension all were relatively at ease during their respective telephone conversations. There were many advantages to interviewing by telephone. A larger geographical area was covered with minimal cost, audio taped telephone conversations produced exceptionally clear data, and speaking into one's own phone was to some degree less threatening to interviewees than face to face. Despite this, visual cues were not available and while the women interviewed well, in-person questioning may have provided a safer environment for the men.

Thirdly, as the military is a small community there was initial concern that participants would fear that their identities could become known. As well, as the Canadian military has received negative publicity in the past, potential participants may have hesitated to take part. The expected obstacles relating to hesitation to partake were

confirmed, but for somewhat different reasons. Those that refused to partake in the study did not report concerns with respect to confidentiality or negative publicity issues. Rather, they were disinterested in the research, entirely too busy or in the midst of significant transitional phases wherein they did not view their marital relationships as strong during that point in time.

With regards to other limitations, it should be noted that there were seven non-participating spouses in this study. Their reasons for abstaining were relayed through the interviewed partners, and while one may only speculate on what this could mean, there exists the slim possibility that only the interviewed marital halves believed their marriages were strong. As well, securing a sample with a larger number of fully represented couples would have further enhanced the study, as deeper meanings of the concepts might have been found. Indeed there were significantly less male respondents than females and a more even representation would have been ideal. Finally, the family systems literature has suggested that marital health may be more accurately viewed within the context of the family, so input from the children would have been useful.

Prior to proceeding with this project, several of the study's strengths were also evident. As mentioned in the methods chapter, my familiarity with both military culture and marital health assisted in recruitment, data collection, analysis, and model development were advantages. With respect to recruitment, there was reason to believe that the quality of the sample obtained was partially influenced by my membership in the military culture. Although participation in the study was completely voluntarily, every interviewee was known to me and I had initially approached each of them. It is possible

that this research moved forward either because interviewees felt comfortable with me, or had a sense that one of their “own” would represent them accurately, or both. Whether the participants would have agreed to be interviewed at all, or whether they would have disclosed as freely and generously had the researcher been external to the military community are points for further consideration.

Future Research Directions

While this emergent theory for understanding marital strength within the Canadian military has been presented, significant confirmatory studies are necessary before the resilient marriage model can be confidently employed. Other demographical representations within Canadian military marriages would provide a deeper understanding of this group, so exploratory investigations addressing the more challenging intimate relationship situations in this context will need to take place.

Indeed, future studies that validate the model’s conceptualization of intimacy, commitment and respects in strong Canadian military marriages would be of particular interest. On the issue of verification, examining and hypothesizing what concepts could be quantified, if any might be a plausible step in the near future. This may involve using cross-sectional surveys wherein the structural components of intimacy, commitment and respect are assessed, and military couples that meet similar criteria to what was set for this study may be used. Additional interview data from social work professionals who regularly deal with marital issues within this population would enrich the clinical understanding of healthy marriages here.

While the duality theme of divided loyalty, wherein military members feel caught between family and national defence, was addressed in American literature, Canadian studies in this area are necessary. Qualitative research that explores the other themes found here would also deepen our comprehension of marital health in Canadian military marriages, and this may have some applicability to other male dominant professions. Investigating whether or not these themes are significant would be a worthwhile endeavour as a number of questions remain. Do military couples agree with the results that military couples seem separate and yet together? Is the observation that strong military marriages are stable but ever changing accurate? What are their ideas on the issues of role and power as experienced by the women within such culture? Do male military members struggle between their roles as husband and soldier, and inversely do the women between soldiering and wives? If so, how do they deal with them?

The issue of gender in the Canadian military and how it impacts on marriages was unexplored in this study, therefore, an inquiry that focuses only on the voices of military wives and military women would be valuable. The findings from such studies would provide a highly anticipated forum for comparing what has been found here. It would be important to include the views of those whose marriages have ended, as this too may provide another facet to this field especially with regards to this untested model, as the presence or absence of concepts may be grounds for dispute. Indeed, should the Canadian military be amenable to allocating research resources, they stand to benefit from building on this study of marital health amongst its population. Military leadership might be urged to delegate more resources towards initiatives that promote marital health, as it will do

well to investigate whether a link between having a healthy marriage and achieving a successful military career exists.

Finally, this research was conducted using specific theoretical frameworks as the strengths perspective and constructivist stance were intentionally assumed. This ensured that the research maintained a focus on coping abilities, that the meanings intended by the participants were captured, and that the role and influence of the researcher was acknowledged. Using these approaches to researching clinical couple work is a refreshing change from long-standing and traditional views to marriage counselling, and more development in this area would allow clinicians a wider variety of literature to draw from. The full versatility of these perspectives are yet to be determined, and as these are closely aligned with the basic premises of the social work profession, more marital studies that incorporate these view are much needed.

Researcher's Reflections

Looking back at the various stages involved in conducting this study on marital strength within Canadian military couples, at many points I was forced to engage in deep reflection. Although this project was successfully completed due to the purposeful match between researcher and area of study, as well as the intentional pairing of research question and methodology, other inherent factors were also at play. As I moved through the inquiry process, it soon became apparent that I was examining the lives of people whose circumstances were remarkably similar to mine. I realized that I was determined to capture the thoughts and opinions of strong Canadian military husbands and wives, simply because they are not generally allowed to have a voice. Indeed, individual

expressiveness of soldiers seems discouraged and both acculturation and military ethos extend these into the home. I was astounded by the realization that in the absence of formal inquiry, many of these stalwart individuals who were engaging in remarkably healthy marriage practices will, in all likelihood, go unnoticed.

Admirable, too, was the humble manner in which these participants seemed to view themselves, as none perceived that there was cause for particular acknowledgement or recognition for what they had accomplished under difficult conditions. Indeed, the social climate of Canadian military culture today is a complex one, wherein mention of military tends to provoke thoughts of federal and international politics, budgetary issues, and domestic violence. The fact that the military is comprised of human beings who have no influence on what they are directed to do is a component often missed. It is remarkable that this group seemed relatively unaffected by the fact that they are often misunderstood, and to the military members and their spouses in this study, they carried out their duties while loving, valuing and remaining true to their marital partners and families, simply because it was the right thing to do.

Conclusion

This study produced a practical model that addresses the research question of “What makes strong Canadian military marriages strong?” In retrospect, the success of this study can also be attributed to proper and thorough preparation. Quantitative and qualitative research courses, discussions with my advisor, professors and peer researchers, as well as thoughtful pauses throughout the project allowed me to consider the complexities of my triple roles of researcher, clinician and community member.

These resources brought me to address these considerations in advance thus instilling confidence to move forward and facilitating a more effective research process.

As a social work professional, this project has expanded my knowledge of both this community and of marital strength in pivotal ways, and the benefits of such are already evident in my current clinical practice. Indeed, much was learned by integrating the existing theories with the results obtained, bringing about a more comprehensive understanding of marital health descriptions and explanations.

While my burning question about strength in Canadian military marriages has been answered, whether or not good marriage can be realistically “taught”, and if so how much it and by whom, and in what manner, are questions that I will continue to ponder for quite some time yet. This study has also elevated my view of fellow Canadian military community members, as I can now see that with every soldier and his or her spouse comes a rather multifaceted story of marital health.

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APPENDIX A: MULTIPLE ROLES AND REFLEXIVITY

The challenge of multiple roles in the qualitative clinician researcher-participant client relationship

Cartwright & Limandri, 1997

Research-Participant Relationships in the home setting:

Stranger-Stranger
Friend-Friend
Clinician-Client
Guest-Host

Researcher vs Friend

What might happen:

- Sufficient interpersonal trust is required
- Must observe "niceties"; socially accountable manner
- Complex nature of field relationships
- Emotionally sensitive topics
- Personal involvement is essential
- Overidentification and overindebtedness

What to do:

- Share professional and selectively personal information
- Small gifts
- Listen when off topic
- Respect sensitive areas
- Fieldnotes and memos
- Use distance periods
- Treat feelings as data
- Maintain stance of openness and minimal direction

Researcher vs Clinician

Potential issues:

- Ethical dilemmas
- Participants may want to use your clinical expertise; and, You may need to use your clinical expertise

What to do:

- Observe practice-related guidelines
- Address clinical issues then resume
- Share professional concerns and give recommendations
- Be aware of issues when dealing with vulnerable populations
- Fieldnotes and memos

Researcher vs Guest

- Awkward observational situations
- Be mindful of these
- Hochschild (1989) suggested strategies for blending in such as pitching in with chores and bringing snacks

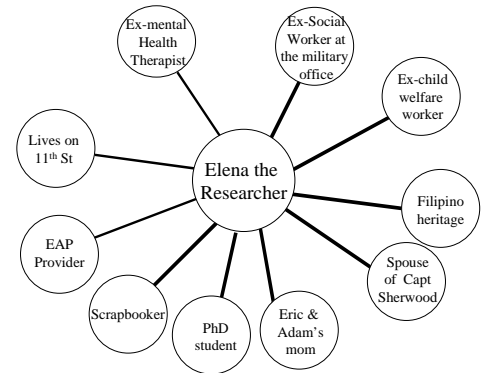
Terminating the Relationship

- Exit phenomena:
 - Engaging in social conversation gradually moving towards the door; the closer to the door, the more social the conversation
 - Likely a way to deformalize
- Budget time for reemergent talk
- Exit phenomena requires further research

How this article helped me:

- Multiple roles warrant serious consideration before research begins; safeguards
- Staying true to methodological recommendations vs what is realistic
- Being very clear in my own mind about where my own boundaries lie
- There are other unintended relationships at play
- Field notes, memo-writing, and discussions with fellow researcher and fellow clinical therapist to maintain my research stance while giving of myself to the research process

Researching Military Couples in Cold Lake, Alberta



Accounting for Presence of Self: Reflections on Doing Qualitative Research – Wendy Sword (1999)

- Acknowledge emerging feelings- let them express
- Notion of Reciprocity – let them control some things
 - Notion of Power – balance, is this possible?
 - Managing role of researcher
 - “Privileged stance” (p. 271)
 - “Insider” and “Outsider”
 - Making meaning of text
 - Meaning brought to data was supported by:
 - Integration of theory
 - Validation by informants
- Comparison of research with other known studies

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT POSTER

Marital Strength in Canadian Military Couples

Are you a military member who has been married for ten years while serving the Canadian Forces (CF)?

OR

Are you married to a CF member who has served the CF for ten years during your marriage?

AND

Do you have a strong marriage?

Share your views on what makes a strong military marriage!

A RESEARCH STUDY:

After 15 years of providing individual and couples counseling in a military community, I am studying the factors that make military marriages strong. Many such marriages end and with good reason, but helpful information can be obtained from those that remain healthily intact.

This research project is in partial completion of a Doctoral Degree at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary.

IF YOU PARTICIPATE:

You and your spouse will be interviewed for 1 to 1 ½ hours to speak about what makes your marriage strong.

If you or someone you know is willing to participate please contact:

Elena Sherwood at (780) 573-6451 or emsherwo@ucalgary.ca

APPENDIX C: CODE LIST

Original 91 codes	
strong connection between them	we talked
anger with military	fun together
survival	education about military life
live off base	a strong sense of right and wrong
aware of consequence	use available resources
humility	accepts partner's influence
belief in military duty	camaraderie
guilt free	separate lives
honour	social demands
strong roots in value	coping
persistence	positive role models
values	compromise
life before/without	acknowledge partner's contribution
early marital format	military family background
balance	conflicting military values
partner's career	conflicting societal values
patience	honesty
non-transience in early life	military pressure
common hobbies	Belief that marriage should be good
resilient	resilient marriage
accommodate partner	supportiveness
Humour	A good sex life
loneliness in being military	set boundaries
contain couple issues within marriage	recognizes partner's contribution
life after the military	social support
common bond	sees positives
Honesty and trust together	selflessness
role flexibility	knowledge of military life
ideas of couplehood	handle emotions
the role of happiness	maturity
vulnerability	understanding military liferementment
self respect	self-awareness
build quality friendships	friendships as a resource
Pride	choice
stability in early marriage	core values
accepts responsibility	difficult lifestyle
duty	be independent
resentment free	trust
perspective	professional help
learned together	adaptability
self-assurance	communication
forgiveness	Faith
appreciate each other's strengths	respect
time together	commitment
realistic mindset	intimacy

After sorting for relevance and grouping accordingly the following 14 codes remained:	
<p>1) Intimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common bond Vulnerability and Humility Strong connection between them A good sex life Handle emotions <p>2) Respect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodate partner Appreciate each other Accepts partner's influence Supportiveness Acknowledge partner's contribution Recognizes partner's strength <p>3) Commitment</p> <p>4) Resilient marriage</p> <p>5) Maturity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aware of consequence Realistic mindset Guilt free Resentment free/resentment Accepts responsibility The role of happiness Belief that marriage should be good Perspective Selflessness Compromise Understand military life <p>6) Communicative</p> <p>7) Trust</p>	<p>8) Boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live off base Contain couple issues within the marriage <p>9) Enhanced Sense of Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self respect Self-assurance Be independent Self-awareness <p>10) Core Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith based values A strong sense of right and wrong Forgiveness Honesty <p>11) Choice</p> <p>12) Adapt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role flexibility Build quality friendships Use available resources Coping Sees positives <p>13) Conflicting societal values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas of couplehood <p>14) Conflicting military values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social demands Military pressure Separate lives Difficult lifestyle Anger with military

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

What makes your marriage strong?

How is your marriage different from military marriages that have fallen apart?

What advice would you give to less experienced military couples?

Is there anything else that you would like to add about what makes your military marriage strong?

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Elena Sherwood, PhD Student, Faculty of Social Work

(780) 573-6451

emsherwo@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Leslie Tutty, Faculty of Social Work

(403) 220-5040

tutty@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project:

Marital Strength in Canadian Military Couples: A Grounded Theory Approach

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

This study intends to find out, directly from military couples, what it is that makes their marriages strong. The purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to generate theory that will be useful to clinical therapists and researchers, 2) to expand the small body of marital literature that specifically focuses on strengths, and 3) to draw attention to a Canadian culture that is facing increasing demands. This research will ask the question of: "What makes Canadian military marriages strong?"

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Your participation is purely voluntary; you and your spouse will be required to meet with an interviewer, one at a time, for approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours each. You will each be asked the same open-ended questions, but are not required to answer any that you do not wish to. The questions simply serve to generate discussion about your marital strength.

Your views of how the information collected from you has been interpreted is important, therefore the researcher would like to discuss these interpretations with you at some point after the interview. However, while your feedback on this matter is valuable you are free to opt out of providing additional comments after the interview, if you so wish. If you agree to be consulted on the interpretations, you will be expected to reply with your comments within two weeks of being re-contacted by the researcher. It will be assumed that you have changed your mind about

providing further feedback if the researcher does not hear from you. This time limit will help avoid delays in the progress of the project.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

No personal identifying information will be collected in this study. All participants shall remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, and years of marriage.

If you decide to take part in this research, please answer the following:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Although highly unlikely, there is minimal risk that you might find the discussions upsetting. Should this be the case, contact information for counselling or other supports will be made available to you immediately. Information you give has the potential to benefit other less experienced military couples in the future that are trying to make their marriage work.

Minimal social risk may exist for some participants. The Canadian military is a small community and this researcher is also a professional social worker in it. Should you disclose involvement in this study to others, you may, by association be perceived as being a professional client who is experiencing psychosocial or mental health difficulties. As well, revealing your participation in this study may draw unnecessary or unwanted attention to you or your marriage that you had not anticipated. There is also a risk that readers of the final product will speculate on your identity. Any information that can be linked directly to you will be left out or masked and this will be discussed with you.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. Any information obtained from a participant who withdraws will be destroyed immediately and be excluded from the research. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questions or the interview tape. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. All information will be kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer disk. It will then be permanently erased, and any hard paper copies will be mechanically destroyed.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this

research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Elena Sherwood,

Faculty of Social Work

(780) 573-6451 or emsherwo@ucalgary.ca and

Dr. Leslie Tutty, Faculty of Social Work, (403) 220-5040 or tutty@ucalgary.ca

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Bonnie Scherrer, Associate Director, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

