TIME APART: EXPLORING THE USE OF
VIDEO CALLING BY MILITARY FAMILIES

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomena of video calling (e.g. FaceTime or Skype) and investigate whether or not it has changed the way military families and friends communicate interpersonally. The reason this study is important is because of the rise in people of all ages using video calling for conversations with family members and friends when distance is an issue and they cannot meet face to face. This study will look at why military families are using video calling instead of the traditional voice phone calls or writing letters and e-mails, as well as how relationships have been impacted by the simple act of seeing a loved one's face as they talk about everyday issues and special topics while apart. The goal of this study is to investigate if video calling is preferred by military families, why it is preferred, and when it is utilized the most.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, video calling, military families

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The traditional audio call has been available on cellular phones for decades, with the arrival of cellular phones in 1983. Today, 30% of households in the United States use only cellular phones, with the price and advancements in technology boosting the amount of users in the last two decades (Thacker & Wilson, 2015.) Video calling was introduced through Skype in 2003, and has since been developed into many applications. The premise of video calling is characterized by a two-way video being displayed between two different users, allowing consumers to see each other while they communicate in real time. While people use video calling applications every day, it is not always clear why we choose to use certain computer and mobile applications over others. With cellular phones making it easy to stay in touch with family and friends, all an individual has to do is reach into his or her pocket, pull out a phone, and call. Now, with the option of video calling, many have the option of seeing someone's face on the screen of a phone, portable mobile device or computer when they decide to call them. Even with an ocean between callers, they are still able to see the smile, frown, or look of excitement as they deliver news to loved ones. There is evidence that video calling can bring others closer together both in distance and in relationships (Aguila, 2011; Licoppe & Morel, 2012). Whether or not customers choose to use the applications or not is up to them, as some video calling

applications come pre-loaded on most modern phones, portable mobile devices and computers. Most families and friends who use these video calling applications are generally apart over great distances, and cannot just visit whenever they want.

One group that video calling has important implications for regarding interpersonal communication is military families. Members of the Marine Corp, Navy, Air Force, Army and Coast Guard who have to be away from their families for significant periods of time have implored these video calling devices to stay in touch with their loved ones. While telephone calls and writing letters are still used as forms of communication between family members, military families are adopting video calling for reasons such as validation that family members are healthy, that they feel included in their the lives of their family, or that the "catch up" time is not as long as required previously, all of which this study explores.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to explore how communication practices used by military families who use video calling applications have changed with the addition of video feeds to calls. Since there are different elements of communication when observing others speak words versus just hearing their voice, such as non-verbal communication, it is anticipated that video calling will change the topics discussed during calls, as well as change what people pay attention to while communicating. Video conference calls have been around for a while, but video calling is relatively new and is growing in popularity because most cellular phones and portable mobile devices are pre-loaded with a video calling application. It is all the more surprising to know that there

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are very few studies about video calling, making it important to the field of communication that more research is done.

Military families are a unique population when it comes to restrictions on communication, and the availability of communication mediums ideal for their communication needs and purposes. This study focuses on the reasons why video calling is used by military families, and why this population chooses video calling over other types of communication. According to the Department of Defense in 2015, there are "over 1.3 million men and women on active duty, and … another 826 thousand serve in the National Guard and Reserve forces." With such a large group of people and their families, it is important to discover and understand any changes that have occurred in interpersonal communication between these families.

This study examines changes in interpersonal communication that come with the visual element in video calling when military families communicate. By studying changes in communication, we will be able to better understand how video calling is already used in the daily lives of military families, as well as what changes take place when a telephone call becomes a video call.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

For many years there has been an interest in a system that would display a two-way video call, and for a while this invention was only seen in science fiction. The first videophone was introduced in 1930 by AT&T, and has evolved since then into what we recognize today as video calling (Borth, 2014). Video calling is relatively new, specifically in the format in which it is used today. Video calling includes formats such as FaceTiming on iPhones or Skype, Viber, Tango, ooVoo, and Facebook Messenger from a tablet or other portable mobile devices. Getting its start in 2003 in Luxembourg, Belgium, Skype was the first of its kind to feature two-way video calling, and was made more accessible/affordable by media giant Microsoft in 2011 (Skype, 2015). When Apple started pre-loading the iPhone with FaceTime for the iPhone 4 in 2010 (Diggler, 2010), the company ushered in the more modern notion of what we now know as video calling.

Interpersonal Communication and Technology

Interpersonal communication has been studied in many different forms, but the most recent form is technology. Duck (2014) explains, "one reason why the study of interpersonal communication has a bright future is not that we are constantly addressing the same problems…it is the fact that the very subject matter of our investigations is inherently innovative" (p. 463). Though the relationship between mediated

communication (communication mediated through technology) and interpersonal communication has been brief, many theories are developing through the relationship (Ledbetter, 2014). As technologies like video calling develop, processes of communicating with others via technology must be explored.

Technology in various ways has created more channels for individuals to communicate, from simply using a telephone to call someone, to contemporary means such as texting and social media activities. Several of these methods are known as computer-mediated messages. "Computer-mediated communication (CMC) systems…have become integral to the initiation, development, and maintenance of interpersonal relationships" (Walther, 2011, p. 443). Walther (1996) found that although computer-mediated communication is slower, it is no less personal. Countless relationships grow because of the many mediums of communication that are available through technology, such as texting throughout the day to get to know a new boyfriend, or e-mailing an old friend about her newly announced pregnancy. One method of CMC that is the subject of little research is the portrayal of video, specifically through video calling. Walther (2011) explains that because individuals are able to think through each message sent out, they are able to candidly create their message to show them in the best light, as well as alter messages with new information on a communication partner's opinions. Though this is true with most CMC, video calling is real time, so although individuals can call with a purpose and a plan for what they are going to say in order to show themselves in the best light, they are not able to go back and change their message like they could with an e-mail, which can be proofed and edited before sending.

Various studies have focused on CMC, however majority of them explored communication through the medium of either voice or text. Walther, Deandrea and Tong (2010) alluded to the fact that "some CMC research posit that the medium's lack of nonverbal cues constrains it's ability to support interpersonal communication" (p. 366). This suggests a possible reason for the lack of empathy when writing responses on a Facebook post, since you are not able to see the person that your words may harm.

The effectiveness of interactivity, or the ability to respond efficiently and in the right context of a conversation, is also a topic up for debate in the world of CMC. Ramirez and Burgoon (2004) explain that initial interactions are smoother through face-to-face (FtF) interaction, but over the long-term CMC is equally effective in maintaining a relationship. On the other hand, there are also studies about modality switching that have mixed results on the switch from FtF communication to CMC and vice versa. Ramirez and Zhang (2007) found that timing is important when switching from CMC to FtF, because the longer participants communicate through CMC, the less likely they were to appreciate their FtF meeting. They explain that "remaining online, and not switching communication modalities, heightened evaluation of relational communication and other qualities of the interaction" (Ramirez & Zhang, 2007, p. 302). This particular comment demonstrates that relationships that are mainly or even strictly CMC can still be as intimate, and just as enjoyable as FtF interactions. CMC interactions can be especially useful in long-distance relationships, because FtF communication was previously the norm in those relationships. In his research on CMC and its effects on long distance relationships, Brody (2013) explains "frequency of CMC use had a stronger, positive effect on both satisfaction and commitment for individuals who had not recently

communicated face-to-face with their long-distance friend, compared to individuals who had seen each other relatively recently" (p. 331). Brody (2013) had participants return an online survey regarding the amount of CMC couples or friends used, as well as frequency and satisfaction. His results showed that participants who frequently used CMC to stay in touch had higher satisfaction with their friendships. Not only do studies indicate that CMC is a suitable substitute for FtF interaction, but they indicate that it can strengthen relationships because of the focused time dedicated to that communication.

Burgoon et al. (2002) found that although FtF communication is supposedly the richest form of communication, those who participate in CMC will find methods to make up for the loss of nonverbal communication in different ways, like voice inflection. The study suggests that the task at hand is important in choosing which medium of communication should be selected for use, such as audio calling, text only, or video conferencing (Burgoon et al., 2002). Because of task-oriented choice, video conferencing was chosen as the least effective, as many participants chose audio calling as most preferable because they did not need a visual to get a task done, and that nonverbal communication in this setting could be reinforcing a power struggle. Burgoon et al. (2002) also argue that video conferencing was chosen more often than FtF interaction in this study because it created a more focused environment on the task at hand. Finally, Burgoon et al. (2002) predicted, "as technologies evolve and new media become increasingly available, people's comfort and familiarity with them will improve, bringing rising expectations for richer and more instantaneous means of communicating" (p. 671). This comfort level with video calling has improved immensely since this 2002 study, but there is a deficiency in the field of communication when it comes to how video

calling has changed the way that individuals communicate with their loved ones. Video calling has opened up a door for families to see each other across great distances, and that is something that needs to be explored more.

Problems with Technology

Technological issues are unavoidable, and can come at unexpected times. Technology can be used as a stress relief in certain situations, such as the instantaneous use of e-mail or video calling, but with any technology, problems can occur. There may be locations where deployed family members go to where internet consistently fails to function, which puts limitations on the mediums through which families can communicate. If there is poor connection or no connection, there will be no communication through phones, which can cause the elevation of stress for those concerned. In their study about how military families communicate and cope, Maguire and Sahlstein Parcell (2015) reported that the stress of dropping a call with a loved one actually caused problems instead of alleviate rising stress due to issues at home or the loneliness of deployment. It is likely that family members are using these communications to manage their relationship with a deployed loved one or family members at home, so the stress described is believable and understandable (Maguire & Sahlstein Parcell, 2015). In contrast, Hinojosa, Hinojosa, and Högnäs (2012) reported that soldiers may call home less because they run out of things to talk about. Military members would either be restricted by what they could tell their family members, or they would flesh out all of the topics that they could discuss, so they would "rather spend their down time relaxing" (Hinojosa, Hinojosa, Högnäs, 2012, p. 195).

While finding topics to discuss is an issue, there is also the issue of the cost of

communication on military bases. While some bases have adequate access to mediums

of communication with the outside world, many bases have limited to no technology

available to them. In her study about military members' communication experiences

while deployed, Durham (2015) found that many bases with communication outlets only

had few phones or computers, and military members had to pay to use them, and if they

did not have phones, service members had to go out and buy pre-paid phones to use.

Durham (2015) also stated that when military members got an opportunity to use the

phone or computer to video call, "the lack of privacy in the call centers affected the depth

of their conversations with loved ones" (p. 292). Another problem Durham (2015)

encountered in her study is "blackout", a situation in which the communication is cut for

a base when another member has been KIA (killed in action). It blocks all

communication from the base and can result in worry due to no response, or frustration

and anger when it seems a family member does not care to get in touch with loved ones

back home. Although there are problems with communication using different mediums

of technology, Durham (2015) discovered that 21st century communication mediums

(modern technology) were rewarding, because the service members appreciated the FtF

interaction that came with it.

Video Calling

Video calling is easily accessible on most cellular devices and portable mobile

devices , irrespective of whether or not devices come pre-loaded or allow a free

application to be downloaded in minutes. In their study about family communication

through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Rudi, Dworkin, Walker

and Doty (2015) studied how families use technology to communicate, and at what ages

each of the four popular technologies were used (e-mail, texting, social networking, and videoconferencing). This study was inspired by developments in technology, the necessity of knowing what types of technologies were popular among age groups, and discovering how to best serve older generations, since they use technology mainly to keep in touch with family (Rudi, Dworkin, Walker, & Doty, 2015). The results indicated that texting and e-mail were more popular among adolescents and adults, because they were easier to follow in synchronization. Although videoconferencing applications were not as popular, the authors indicated that they were used when most family members wanted to participate in the communication. Rudi, Dworkin, Walker and Doty (2015) also noted that "high speed Internet and data streaming capabilities newly available on smart phones allow communication that can mimic face-to-face interactions and may provide a richer form of online interaction and exchange of social and emotional support than a text message" (p. 88). It is clear that families are using video calling, but it is being used in specific situations when rich communication is needed.

According to Kennedy, Smith, Wells, and Wellman (2008), the majority of technology users feel technology and cell phones have impacted the type and amount of communication that they have with family members and friends. In her article about Skype, Aguila (2011) describes in detail several experiences (typical and non-typical) of family members communicating through Skype. In the beginning of her article, she describes technicalities of video calling, such as problems with the programs available (quality) and need for communication with family that participants felt when they finally adjusted and got Skype accounts. The features available helped the applications grow in popularity as well as the program's affordability. Several individuals Aguila (2001)

interviewed described their experience of receiving a video call as a visit from a houseguest, except that the homes were merged because both ends of the call were in their own element. According to Aguila (2011) "as host, one may feel obliged to actively make the other feel 'at home.' But, on Skype, we seem to be neither host nor guest. We feel both at home in our expanded home on Skype" (p. 307). Aguila gives the reader real examples of video calling interactions, such as an upset daughter needing advice from her father, a wedding being attended by many in different countries, and a mother watching her twins grow up overseas while she works to provide for them. Aguila (2011) explained that some users feel that using video calling makes them realize the distance between them, and when they hang up they feel farther from loved ones than they did before. Another concern found in this study was that many users struggle with the fact that you cannot make direct eye contact with a person and still see his or her face on the screen. Other participants were concerned with their child's misconception of the people on the screen. Finally, Aguila (2011) closed by asking if distance was really an issue of proximity, or could Skype really bring people closer? She added to her point by talking about couples who felt the need to be apart, or a couple that had fallen out of love, and proved the point that if individuals are close, video calling can enhance interpersonal communication by displaying the face of a loved one.

As opposed to its more business like start, the more interpersonal uses for video calling have only recently become easily accessible (Licoppe & Morel, 2012), leading to a lack of literature explaining interpersonal communication in video calling. Screen focus is another important aspect when it comes to the topic of video calling. Licoppe and Morel (2012), while explaining the "talking head" orientation of camera position,

stated that "this orientation makes the headshot format a default mode of interaction for mobile video calls: participants are expected to revert to it whenever there is nothing gaze-worthy or relevant to show, and they are accountable for not doing so" (p. 413). The topic of gaze will be addressed in this study, because it is an important element of non-verbal communication.

Military Family Communication

According to the Department of Defense (2014) there are 5 million Americans who are members of a military family, and 2 million of those are children. Clever and Segal (2013) reported that well over half of military members are married, and that just under half of the population have children. This large community of Americans have and are continually communicating through various mediums to find closeness with those across large distances. Wong and Gerras (2006) have found that family members who are a part of the armed forces have the capability to communicate with their loved ones daily, if desired, and that the age of the deployed family member has an effect on the medium used. According to Wong and Gerras (2006), the younger the deployed family member, the more that member relies on technology as a communication medium.

Through time the methods of correspondence between a member of the armed forces and their families have changed immensely. Writing letters, a form of correspondence is still used today, along with e-mailing, telephone calls, faxing, and mailing recorded visual and audiotapes. Social media and instant messaging have all been implemented as a medium of communication for military families who are separated. In their study about the use of media by deployed peacekeepers, Schumm, Bell, Ender and Rice (2004) revealed that many types of communication were and are still used by

military families to communicate. Although Schumm et al. (2004) studied many different options of communication (e-mail, fax, military radio, and recordings sent by mail) the telephone represents the favorite mode of communication by military families because it is seen as more direct, and better to deal with issues that are difficult or too intense to handle via letter or audio-visual recording. It was found to be a favorite among military families because it is more personable, and helps families feel like there is an interaction between members. Schumm et al. (2004) conclude that "more interactive means of communication would perhaps best help service members maintain as much closeness and intimacy as possible when routinely separated from family members for long periods of time" (p. 661). Telephones, especially cellular phones, have changed immensely over the past 10 years, and the "closeness and intimacy" referred to by Schumm et al. (2004) is accomplishing more for interpersonal communication through video calling.

Although there is research to support the fact that communication via traditional telephone is the preferred medium for military families, there is also research that says the topic of discussion will be a factor in choosing the medium of communication. In their research on the frequency, quality, and emotional components related to military family communication, Houston, Pfefferbaum, Sherman, Melson, & Brand (2013) found that e-mail between children and deployed parents was used more frequently than telephone conversations. Houston et al. also discovered that the quality of communication between a deployed family member and a child or spouse was worse during deployment than post or pre-deployment, although more frequent communication using e-mail or telephone was "related to a better evaluation of the quality of

communication" (2013, p. 113) with family members left at home. Loneliness was found to be a spurring factor in communication between spouses during deployment, but the medium used in this communication depended on what type of message the spouse wanted to get across (Houston et al., 2013).

Although the telephone is among the preferred mediums of communication between military family members, some do not find them helpful. Hinojosa, Hinojosa, and Högnäs (2012) reported that some soldiers did not like using the telephone because just hearing their family member's voice made them more homesick than not speaking to them at all. As a result, some soldiers stopped contacting their families altogether to avoid homesickness (Hinojosa, Hinojosa, & Högnäs, 2012). Cigrang et al. (2014) also found that the telephone was lagging behind in recent time when it comes to mediums preferred by military families. They argued that "service members reported a high frequency of communication with their romantic partners back home, with nearly half reporting daily use of instant messaging, or IM, a third using e-mail daily, and one fourth having daily web-cam meetings with their partner" (Cigrang et al., 2014, p. 338).

Another communication medium that has advanced over the last decade that allows those at a distance to stay connected is social media. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are ways in which families can IM, post notes to each other's "wall" or share life events through online photo albums. In their research on online communication between military family members, Rea, Behnke, Huff and Allen (2015) found that social media helps families maintain relationships and gives them a platform to IM each other. It also gives them ways to share pictures with each other. Rea et al. (2015) reported that a theme they found was that military family members tried to

only stick to positive topics while they communicated through social media, which is unlike what users of video calling or telephone reported.

The voice of a loved one is a very popular topic while discussing the maintenance of long distance relationships. Research by Durham (2015) reported that service members preferred to be able to hear their family's voices and other noises in the background. For example, Durham (2015) found that "participants who gave a communication method preference said that they preferred the telephone, Skype, or FaceTime because they could hear the voices of their family members (p. 287). The study also argued that it was important to hear someone's voice when discussing a difficult topic (Durham 2015). Several of the people that Durham interviewed also said that the phone or video calling helped when dealing with their children and discipline problems (2015). Although phone calls and letters are still used by some, rejection of these more traditional mediums of communication might have to do with the ease of these technological advancements, and is one of the things I hope to explore in this graduate thesis.

Stress may factor into the preferred method of communication by children and spouses of deployed military members as well. In their research on the effects of multiple deployments on adolescents with a parent in the military, Wong and Gerras (2010) found that the amount of stress adolescents felt was related to the amount of time they spoke with their deployed parent. Results showed that the more adolescents spoke with deployed parents, the higher their stress levels were. Also, adolescents who were more stressed noted that it was sometimes easier to write down what they were thinking to their parents in a letter or in an e-mail because hearing the voice of their deployed

parent was a lot to handle at times. Wong and Gerras (2010) stated "similar to the increased frequency of communication, adolescents who have higher stress levels tend to communicate more deeply with their deployed parent in order to resolve issues related to stress" (p. 21). In other words, the relationship between adolescents' stress during deployment and the amount of communication does not necessarily mean that the more an adolescent speaks to their deployed parent, the more that they are stressed, but it is more likely that the more stressed an adolescent was, the more that they reached out for help from the deployed parent.

Topic Avoidance

In times of war, there are things that cannot be disclosed, such as location of deployment, if there has been a soldier killed in action (KIA), or the sensitive nature and complexity of the job that a deployed family member has to do every day. This can lead to military personnel withholding information from family members and vice-versa. Merolla (2010) refers to amplitude, the intensity of emotion brought on by certain events, to describe the dynamic of long distance relationships between military families. Topic avoidance is understandable when such high intensity situations are presented on a daily basis to families with loved ones in the armed forces. On both sides of the situation, family members have increased stress, because they are out of their element. Deployed and based family members are training, fighting, or experiencing loss on the battlefront. Family members who must remain at home are experiencing everyday issues alone, such as buying a home, being pregnant, or facing the wrath of a child who is missing a deployed parent. While studying connections while deployed, Durham (2010) reported that communication itself can become a stressor to those living in a combat environment,

because soldiers have a hard time trying to decipher what they are allowed to share. Avoidance of sharing emotions or situations to spare family members at home from worrying about them led deployed family members to undergo more stress due to concealment (Durham, 2010). Durham (2010) found that this stress in some cases steered deployed family members that did not feel the obligation to communicate with their family every day to grow distant from their families because they saw this stress as a distraction. Others continued to push through communicating with their families at home to continue feeling a connection with them, but just avoided topics that might bring about more stress in the conversation (Durham, 2010).

Topic avoidance is understandable in many situations where information might be sensitive or stressful, and recent research discussed that some families have a system for what is discussed and what is not. Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese and Roberts (2015) studied the privacy management between military families during deployment and found similar results pertaining to withholding information between family members. They found several themes, or in their words, "macrorules", that families with a deployed parent live by, the first being that the family agrees that they must keep information from a deployed family member to keep them from distractions, additional stress, and from missing home (Owlett, Richards, Wilson, DeFreese & Roberts, 2015). Another macrorule they established is that adolescents use caution about what they talk to their deployed parent about, and finally that the parent at home must use discretion when they have sensitive information about a deployed parent, to avoid worry the children any more than they have to (Owlett et al., 2015). In other cases, Owelett et al. (2015) found that some children and adolescents kept nothing from either parent and displayed

transparency, including instances when adolescents had relationship types that were more of a close friend with the deployed parent.

Although family members in the studies presented above believe that talking to their deployed family members about certain topics will make them homesick or less focused on the mission, other research suggests otherwise. In their article about communication frequency between intimate partners and combat effectiveness, Cigrang et al. (2014) found that "the majority of Airmen reported no occurrence of adverse impact" (p. 337) due to relationship concerns. In other words, the majority of Airmen had no problems with performance because of difficulties in communication with an intimate partner at home. Only about a third of interviewees said that they lost focus on their job while experiencing relationship distress (Cigrang et al., 2014).

Theory of Electronic Propinquity

Technology can be a key element in maintaining relationships and bringing people closer, which is explained in this paper through the lens of the theory of electronic propinquity. The theory of electronic propinquity was developed in 1978 by Felipe Korzenny as a way to describe closeness through electronics. Korzenny (1978) said "electronic propinquity refers then to electronic proximity, or electronic nearness, or electronic presence" (p.7). The theory was created before the Internet, but has many applicable elements to modern technology and communication. According to Korzenny (1978), there are elements that increase and decrease propinquity. Factors that increase propinquity include bandwidth, mutual directionality, and communication skills, while factors that decrease propinquity are the complexity of topic, communication medium, and the channels of communication that you have to choose from (Korzenny 1978). A

special topic within the theory is the adaptive nature of communicators. Walther (2008)

explains that when there are no choices in bandwidth, such as the ability to interpret non-

verbal communication through video or voice inflection during voice calls, propinquity

will adjust to whatever medium is available. For example, if a mother is trying to get in

contact with her son who is away at college to tell him that she got a new dog, the likely

medium for giving her son this news would be to FaceTime and show him the puppy. If

she knows that the camera is not working on his phone, she will use the next best thing

and send him a videotext of the puppy. Videotext becomes the most viable form of

propinquity then, because it is the best medium available.

The theory also indicates that "communication skills appear to help

communicators address the challenges of lower bandwidth and of *relative* [no emphasis

added] bandwidth deprivation" (Walther, 2008, p. 640). Video calling is something that

allows its users to simulate FtF interaction, giving them the feeling of not only emotional

closeness, but also closeness in proximity. Therefore, with audio cues, as well as

nonverbal cues, video calling is a prime bandwidth communication medium that needs to

be studied in more depth in regards to interpersonal communication.

The Theory of Electronic Propinquity highlights the feeling of nearness that

someone gets by communicating through varying mediums. Nearness, depending on the

medium of communication, can differ in form, depending on the adaptive practice of the

user. Applying the theory of electronic propinquity to their 2009 study, Blau, Mor, and

Neuthab found that blog users were more likely to comment on a blog if they felt like

they could associate with the topic, and if the author was more accessible or "near" to

them. In other words, if the readers of a certain blog felt like the composer would read

their comments and reply to some of them, they felt closer to them and were more likely to comment on the blog. Pertaining to interpersonal communication, Ramirez, Dimmick, Feaster, and Shu-Fang (2008) utilized the theory of electronic propinquity to discover whether instant messaging had superiority to e-mail, landline phone, or cellular phone. The results indicated that each type of communication had attributes that were pleasing for different tasks, but overall participants preferred the cellular phone because it fulfilled more of the users' needs. More importantly, the cellular phone was a favorite because it was the only method of communication that had the element of projecting voice, which made participants feel more effect towards those they spoke to (Ramirez, Dimmick, Feaster, & Shu-Fang, 2008). According to the theory of electronic propinquity, use of communication mediums will depend on the satisfaction of options available, and the medium that will make them feel closer to the person they wish to communicate with.

The theory's growing validity (Walther, 2008) coupled with the rising popularity and accessibility of video calling is the reason why this study is worthwhile. With technology in an ever-changing state, it can be expected that video calling will continue to be used and developed further. This study as a result seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What impact, if any, has video calling had on interpersonal communication between individuals in military families?

RQ2: Under what circumstances is the use of video calling by individuals in military families more useful than other types of communication?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants identified for this study ranged between the ages of 18 and 61, and are representative of people who subscribe to video calling during their deployment or the deployment of a loved one. It was important to identify and include participants from this age range because the information being sought is familial in nature, and calls for a multi-generation approach to data collection. Participants had to be 18 years or older and reside in the United States with most participants between the ages of 22 to 61. The total number of participants interviewed for this thesis was 16. Participants were recruited using Facebook and through word of mouth and were selected based on their experiences with VC. Within the 16 participants there were three couples, five are currently members of the military, and one of the five was deployed when the interview took place. The participants who were members of the Armed Forces spoke to their girlfriend, wives, children, parents and siblings during their deployment. Four of the five participants who used VC while deployed were male and one was female. Out of the 16 total participants, five participants were male and 11 were female.   Six participants were wives of military personnel who communicated with their deployed husbands through VC, along with one girlfriend. Three of the 16 participants were parents who communicated with their son or

daughter who were deployed, and one participant used VC to communicate with a deployed sibling.

Procedures

A phenomenological study was the method of choice for this topic of VC and how it has changed interpersonal relationships from a distance. Qualitative research is the process of finding an answer or solution to a problem by gathering data on the subject "in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patters or themes" (Creswell, 2013). Research done qualitatively is more reflexive, considers the individual's input, and is done in a more natural setting versus the more sterile environment of a quantitative study (Creswell, 2013). The data gathered in a qualitative study is more specialized to the individual's opinions and experiences, therefore a fitting choice for the topic of VC for this thesis.

Since this group of participants was diverse in location, age, and experience with video calling, interviews were conducted in the way that each participant deemed appropriate for their schedule. Two participants were e-mailed questions to answer because of scheduling issues, because one was on active duty, but the other 14 were interviewed through voice call as a result of significant distances between primary researcher and participants. If interviewed through voice call, the interviews ranged anywhere from 10 minutes to 56 minutes, depending on the amount of time participants felt comfortable telling their stories. Participants were asked questions pertaining to their experience with video calling applications, such as Skype or FaceTime. Data was collected through recordings. All participants gave their signed consent before being

interviewed. The interviews will be kept on a password-protected computer to ensure

confidentiality promised to participants in the consent form associated with this study.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants involved in this

research due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed. Their identities will

be protected with pseudonyms and generic titles. Interviews will be transcribed and kept

on a password-protected computer for the duration of the study and destroyed after the

study is complete.

Data Analysis

After data was gathered, the coding process began, and themes were developed.

As Creswell (2015) explains, "writers present their studies in stages…multiple themes

that can be combined into larger themes or perspective" (p. 54). Regarding the coding

for this thesis, Owens (1984) provides a coding scheme with which I created themes for

personal relationships. The coding scheme developed themes through recurrence,

repetition, and forcefulness (Owens, 1984). Participant's interviews were assessed

against these three qualifiers and then coded. I printed out each interview and used

colored pencils to identify phrases that were alike, and then developed five themes using

the 25 categories I acknowledged. Each theme was then used to describe phenomena that

pertain to research questions. Once I identified all themes, I explained the themes and

gave examples of actual situations so that readers can get a full understanding of the

changes in interpersonal communication when video calling is used between military

members and their families. Then I apply the Theory of Electronic Propinquity to my

findings and draw conclusions on how interpersonal communication between military

families has changed with video calling.

Validation

        To increase validity within this study, I enforced several validation methods. The first step taken was to find a topic that is relevant to the field of communication with limited studies already completed in the field of interpersonal communication. I then researched the background on CMC, video calling, and military family communication to identify a gap in the field for this study. I also checked with multiple colleagues in the field of communication to ensure that there was truly a gap in research that needed to be filled with a new study on video calling and interpersonal communication, and that this was a phenomenon that needed to be studied (Creswell, 2013). Member checking will be employed at the end of the study so that the research conducted can be reviewed and supported as valid. Seven of the 16 participants were sent explanations of themes and asked for input as to how the themes matched up with their experiences.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

After the collection of data, the interviews of participants were coded, as explained in the previous chapter. The following results are answers to the research questions posed in chapter two, and will be reported in this chapter of the thesis.

After evaluating participant interviews and previous research, several themes emerged. The two research questions sought information on the impact that VC has made on interpersonal communication between military families and members who have been deployed. These themes included connectedness, inclusion, compromise and sacrifice, familiarity, assurance and clarity. The following themes provide information on their experiences.

RQ1: What impact, if any, has video calling had on interpersonal communication between individuals in military families?

Connectedness

This theme was mentioned in every participant interview, connectedness is revealed through the use of phrases such as "when I am VC, I am literally home," "I don't think you feel as separated," or "it felt normal." While coding the interviews, the categories that went into "connectedness" were closeness, feeling of being "at home," normalcy, relationship strength, and connectedness itself. This theme of connectedness through VC is best explained by FELICITY, who previously served in the Air Force,

along with her husband who she currently lives with on an Air Force Base in South Korea. She states that:

> I mean, there's lots of different things that people use to help families stay
> connected. But um, you know when it really comes down to it I think that
> being able to VC is hands down one of the best ways to help your family
> really just thrive through the deployment instead of just survive.

According to these participants, surviving the experience of being away from a loved one for long and short durations of time is much easier with the technology that we have today. But it is clear that staying close and connected is considered "thriving," and participants get that from VC compared to other mediums of communication.

While explaining her relationship to her daughter who is based in Germany, 61 year old SARA, explains that VC "has helped keep it strong, and kept it real…it is more like having a real conversation, because things might get quiet for a minute. Just like if she was sitting next to me." She goes on to explain that her experience with her husband's deployment during the Gulf War was much different, in that you had to say everything very quickly and still might not have enough time to get across what you wanted to. This ability to freely talk to a child through VC has helped SARA stay close to her daughter, and although she only talks to her daughter bi-weekly (as opposed to many participants who VC daily), she remarks on how VC "has helped me to watch her still grow… I felt more a part of what she is doing, where she is, and uh, more a part of her life." SARA stated that this was much different than the time that she had to put her relationship on hold with her husband, and that she prefers VC to anything she had to communicate with him during his deployment, although she still likes to read his letters.

Members of the military were more prone to use phrases related to "home." In fact, out of the five participants who used VC to communicate with their families while deployed, four of them shared this feeling of VC making them feel like they were home. BARRY, 44, a former Air Force and Marine Corp member (and is now a member of the Texas National Guard), stated that VC "makes life a lot better, a lot better…more bearable over there. Not that we had it bad, but it made it feel more like home." BARRY spoke to his girlfriend, IRIS, 50, while deployed in 2013, and she too notes that VC helped maintain their relationship and the feeling of him being at home. IRIS stated, "I missed him like crazy but it helped because I did get to see his face everyday, you know? It was more like, even though I know he was there, it was more like he was still here, you know?" Family members tended to use language that was similar, the image of "home" was more profound with active members and those previously deployed. CARTER, a 22-year-old husband and father of two boys noted that with their jobs, military members could be gone for a while, but that "using VC can take us back home in an instant." With VC, technology is allowing those relationships to be better maintained and allows for more connectedness between family members at home and overseas compared to other types of communication.

Compromise and Sacrifice

Compromise and sacrifice are the two words that capture the true essence of the participants in this study. Each participant was completely committed to staying in touch with their loved one no matter what continent they were on. The second impact that VC has made on interpersonal communication is that it has allowed families the opportunity to go out of their way to see their family members. The five coding categories that made

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up the theme of "compromise and sacrifice" were time difference, technology problems, the "take what you can get" attitude, family going out of their way to make contact or do something nice, and improvements in technology.

Technology Problems.

Out of the 16 participants, 11 of them mentioned technology issues regarding VC. Most participants also pointed out that it was not the fault of VC providers, but the location and signal of Wi-Fi. JOE, 60, a father to a son in the Air Force, comments "there is always problems with technology. You know, it freezes up or locks up but it is not a constant issue." The ways in which technology problems affected participants varied, but AMANDA, a 24 year old Air Force veteran who was deployed to the Middle East for seven months, described her experience like this:

> It hurts when you are talking to your family and you kind of start talking
>
> to them and then you're winding down and opening up the service gets
>
> disconnected and you can't make any calls because of the internet. And it
>
> could be stressful and more so upsetting…it is almost like you get a piece
>
> of candy and you have never tried it or a soda or ice cream and it gets
>
> dropped to the sand…It is like you get a taste of it and then it is taken
>
> away. So that is…the best way I can explain it…the frustration.

AMANDA'S experience with this frustration is not unusual, but the range of technology problems is not limited only with the technology itself, as user error was a problem for some participants. Consequently a couple of participants interjected that the technology was the reason why they couldn't VC certain family members, simply because they did not know how to use it. Although this was an issue for very few participants, BARRY

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notes that "I don't think…my family is too tech savvy. And I'm not either, so you know for me to do it is uh…so I think a lot of it for me to do something like that!" Though technology problems were brought up in most of the interviews, the negative comments about technology were greatly outnumbered by the positive comments about it. Appreciation for new technology will be expounded on later in this section.

Time Difference/Family Going Out of Their Way.

The technology was too much for a small number of the family members of participants, but for others it was a way to show how much they cared by going out of their way to learn how to use the technology. AMANDA shared that she even persuaded her grandparents to use VC, stating, "when I called and it was 2:00 a.m. at home they answered, and it felt good that they made an effort to answer." The time difference affected participants in diverse ways, and several set up schedules for VC correspondence through Facebook and e-mail. JOE, who was e-mailed a weekly VC schedule, noted "[I would] usually have to set my alarm and catch him when he was at…a point where he [his son] could talk." Similarly, LYLA, 33, who communicated with her sister via VC during her last deployment to the present one, talked about her schedule that she arranged with her sister, and how it was important to her that she was respectful of her sister's time. She stated, "sometimes it was maybe one or two or maybe three o'clock in the morning, and I would *be there*. I felt that my role was to…be there for my sister, to be her supporter virtually and physically." Because the time difference was such a difficulty, it could have easily been grouped with the category of "going out of the way to make contact or do something nice." Other instances of family going out of their way for deployed members include situations like FELICITY's, who would make an extra effort

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on her appearance when she knew she was going to VC her husband. She explains, "I

would like to do my hair or my make-up, because I wanted to look good for him, but

sometimes that would be the only time during the week that my hair wasn't in a

ponytail." FELICITY also disclosed that she and her husband would have date nights

after she had gotten the kids to sleep. She described the situation as: "he would be having

breakfast, and I would have a late dinner … that was our time to like have a conversation

with our rule to not talk about kids." LYLA also mentioned that she made an effort to be

aware of her surroundings and present luxuries like McDonald's while VC with her

sister. These niceties were just some of the many examples of families going out of their

way to make VC a good experience for their deployed family members.

You Take What You Can Get.

Appropriate to the theme of compromise and sacrifice, "you take what you can

get" was agreed upon by most participants, although it was RAY, a 37 year old husband

and father to two, who was not often able to VC during his deployment in the Navy, due

to the challenges of being stationed on a boat. His VC experience during his deployment

aboard the U.S. Ronald Reagan was limited, as the Wi-Fi connectivity was sparse, but

RAY explains that "it would have been a lot more if available, but we had to wait on the

ship and pretty much… e-mails is the way we had to communicate." This attitude was

conveyed not only by RAY, but by CAITLYN, a 28 year-old mother, and wife to an Air

Force pilot. She explains that his busy schedule sometimes combats their plans to use

their preferred method of communication, VC, so they have to use e-mail or send letters,

"or really whatever he can get his hands on over there." In a similar situation, 50 year-

old MOIRA, mother to an Army Police Officer, discusses that it would have been

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preferable to VC more often, but simply states "you know… you take what you can get." MOIRA's husband was a pilot in the Air Force many years ago, so she has seen the vast improvement of technology from his deployment to her daughter's. This improvement in technology could appropriately fit in any theme, but is included in "compromise and sacrifice" because of the comparison it makes to the problems with VC technology, and the connection with the attitude of "you take what you can get."

Improvements to Technology.

The two participants, SARA and MOIRA, previously had spouses in the military, and currently have daughters serving overseas. Between the two of them, the correspondence with deployed loved ones ranged between written letters, sending cassette tapes, and voice calling, to VC today. With each development in technology, the assortment of ways to communicate interpersonally flourish. As mentioned before, SARA felt more connectedness with her daughter who she regularly video calls with more than she ever did through other modes of expensive and slow communication with her husband during his deployment. SARA expands on the topic, saying "when JOHN was in the Gulf War we kind of put our relationship on hold and then we had to pick back up when we got home."

Familiarity will be discussed later in this chapter, but the purpose of alluding to it now is because of the opportunity new technology has brought to families such as SARA's. Her relationship with her daughter was never put on hold thanks to the availability of VC, and interpersonal communication happened more often because it is instantaneous. MOIRA noted that she rarely got to speak with her husband during his deployment, and that it is "wonderful" for her to get to see and hear from her daughter

much more often. Other participants experienced the shifts in technology development between loved ones' deployments, such as the switch from traditional calls and e-mail to instant messenger and social media, and now VC. Another reaction to VC technology is from 31 year-old JESSE, whose husband is an active duty member of the Marine Corp. She revealed that when her husband is deciding on deployments, a critical factor in his decision is whether or not VC will be available. JESSE states: "my first question when he comes home with 'hey, I'm going to do a deployment' is are you going to have Wi-Fi? Just because it is such a difficult time without it." Technology was described by three different participants as "good and evil," but in all of those cases, VC was considered one of the best uses for technology to date.

Inclusion

The theme "inclusion" contained two different coding categories, discipline of children and inclusion in life events. The mention of discipline for children was minimal, so it will be integrated with life events. The addition of video to a phone call allows for the opportunity to impact interpersonal communication through experience of a live feed to real-time life events. Out of the 16 participants, 13 described situations in which they were able to witness a life event or special occasion. The events ranged from saying good-bye to a pet to the birth of a child.

Life events witnessed and displayed by participants did not have to be big events to make deployed family members feel included. The act of disciplining a child was hard to do before VC, but with the visual and audio feed, parents were able to pick up naughty behavior at a distance. CARTER, father of two boys, states that:

I think that VC has strongly impacted how family members (my kids)

behave. I could be VC my wife and if I hear CISCO misbehaving in the

background (sic) I'll tell my wife to call him so I can talk to him and as

soon as he sees me he starts calming down…. Just because I'm not around

doesn't give him the right to take advantage and give my wife a hard

time…. I'm beginning to think CISCO is understanding what's going on.

This experience was not an abnormality, because two other parents shared similar

experiences. Related to this ordinary occurrence of disciplining children, child

development was frequently mentioned. 24 year-old KENDRA, CARTER's wife,

explained that her husband can "see new things the kids have learned especially since our

11 month old is learning how to roll, crawl, stand and taking small steps." CAITLYN got

to share her pregnancy journey with her husband and VC about Dr.'s appointments.

Many participants expressed the appreciation that they felt for VC, because it allowed

their loved ones to see soccer games, bath time, and milestones.

Holidays and birthdays were a popular topic as well, with all except two

participants mentioning that they celebrated at least one holiday with a loved one

overseas. LYLA recalled sending her sister candy for Valentine's Day, and then got to

witness her share the candy with her colleagues. LYLA explains "I was able to show her

what I was doing here, through VC, but then she was also allowing me to get a chance to

see through a window into her life." Life changing events were also shared through VC.

FELICITY and LAUREL (OLIVER'S wife) actually gave birth to a live audience, as

their husbands were both able to witness the birth process of their children through VC.

With each story emotional, FELICITY explained:

When my second daughter was born…we Skyped the entire delivery. As

soon as I went into labor I went to the hospital, I carried my computer with

me, and we had already pre-arranged it with the facility and with the Dr.

so that they would be completely supportive of us during this process….

my husband was able to be there….I have this amazing photo of my friend

holding up the laptop, with him on Skype looking at her while she was on

the scale….it is a true testament to the situation of our family at the time.

OLIVER and LAUREL had a comparable experience, with OLIVER watching their child

being weighed and measured through VC. LAUREL said the experience was very

emotional for her, and that "OLIVER even go to be a littler pep talker because I could see

him and he could tell me "you're doing good, you're doing good!"" Another emotional

testimony, OLIVER recants that their other son was "in the background saying… 'that's

my daddy!' you know, talking to me and I got to see him hold the baby and I got to see

his facial expressions." Without VC, the experience of spouses being virtually "present"

in real time for the birth of their children would not be possible.

The life events shared through VC were not always joyous, such as JESSE's

experience with VC from the emergency room visit for her daughter. Another example

comes from THEA, who shared the touching story about her family's experience with

losing their dog while they were living overseas on an Air Force base. THEA explained

that they had just gotten to their apartment after a difficult move when her father-in-law

contacted them about their dog they recently found out had been diagnosed with cancer.

She went on to say:

We were able to FaceTime with her and *see* how she was doing and *see*

like, 'no, that is clearly labored breathing' and um she really is just not

wanting to like, open her eyes. She could hear us, I could see her ear

twitch, she just like barely opened her eyes…. It was so nice to have that

to um… get to see her one more time (starts crying again)… it was really

nice to…for, to be able to give MARTIN our blessing…. um being able to

visually verify that and like, have that peace about it…

Although each situation of inclusion was not exactly pleasant, participants celebrated the

fact that they were able to virtually experience them. Too many examples of inclusion

were recorded to list, overall participants agreed that if FtF communication was not

available, participants appreciated VC being available as a stand-in.

Research Question Two

RQ2: Under what circumstances is the use of video calling by individuals in

military families more useful than other types of communication?

With many options of communication available, this research sought to find the

uses for each option. The more business type communication was preferred to be sent

through e-mail, since there was a written set of instructions or information that could be

accessed repeatedly. For short conversations and less complicated interpersonal

communication, participants normally preferred text and Facebook. This also allowed for

asynchronous communication, which was helpful because of the time difference for

parties involved who were usually located in different time zones. VC had uses that

could not be replicated with any previous technology, such as familiarity, assurance and

clarity, which will be discussed in this section.

Familiarity

Familiarity is a concept that was unattainable before VC, because there had not

been a way to display video and voice in real-time. There were options like sending tapes, which were beneficial but paled in comparison. Letters, phone calls, and electronic messages gave the verbal or written message, but were not fully sustainable in building a relationship, but were viable in keeping up an already existing one. The two coding categories for this theme of "familiarity" were recognition and smooth transition. However, because recognition and smooth transition go hand in hand, they will be analyzed together.

Recognition and Smooth Transition.

With many parents deployed or families living on a military base overseas, there are people missing out on their children/grandchildren growing up, as mentioned before with the "inclusion" theme. Familiarity, however, was considered it's own theme because its span is more encompassing than inclusion in life events. THEA explains why it is so important for this familiarity to occur, saying "when you realized that your parents or your loved ones aren't getting to see them and your kiddos aren't getting to see their grandparents…it really…pulls at your heartstrings." She also states that her children do recognize their grandparents because of VC, and the two to three times they have met, they recognize them and have a bond with them because of it.

Several participants noted that they were nervous because they had heard and were trained when their spouses left that their children would have behavioral issues while they were gone, and quite possibly when they got back. JESSE describes this experience with her daughter growing up knowing her deployed father through VC, and noting that:

I have heard the horror stories about kids being scared when their parent

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returns and they were a stranger to them, and that wasn't the case…I think

he went to Afghanistan for close to 300 days. And when he came

back…she wasn't hesitant at all. She wasn't scared, she ran right up to

him and I don't think that would have been the case at all had it not been

for FaceTime, because I think it might have been more of a shock for her.

Previously the experience for children with a parent gone for months with only their picture to look at and a phone call every few days did not end so well. With the use of VC, children hear the voice and see the face of a parent or loved one from a distance and actually recognize them as a person who interacts with them daily. JESSE also shared that her daughter would get excited when she heard the ringtone for FaceTime, and she would think all day about what she was going to show her father. JESSE stated:

I would give her the phone and she would run around and show daddy

stuff like her kitchen or our dog, and my husband, poor thing I am sure he

was like sea sick….but she loved it. You could tell that he was a big part

of her day because of that visual she would get through FaceTime.

Nine participants disclosed that they either interacted with their children through VC, or were on the opposite end of the conversation, helping them see their parent or other loved one. Each one of these participants mentioned something that was coded as recognition. OLIVER and LAUREL spoke about their VC experience with recognition and transition in quite a favorable tone. For example, OLIVER stated that "even me calling once every two weeks sometimes, [his son] still got to see his dad….just…telling him "goodnight" or "I love you." So the adjustment period, when I stepped off the plane, it was like I never left." Children who had seen their parent before they left were not the only ones to be

impacted by VC. FELICITY had their second of three children while her husband was

deployed, so their relationship for the first eight months of her life was through VC. She

revealed:

> I know that she knew he was important… because he would make her
>
> giggle, and she would giggle…he would have dinner with us, or read a
>
> book with us, and when he came home at the end of that deployment and
>
> she saw him in person for the first time, it absolutely solidified their
>
> relationship. I mean, she wasn't afraid of him, there wasn't stranger
>
> danger, I mean, she knew that this guy was important and now there he
>
> was in real life.

FELICITY maintains that if VC did not exist, her children would not know their

grandparents who live back in the states, either. She and another participant, RAY, both

used the word "awkward" to describe the feeling that is absent with VC when around

family again. RAY said, "it is just the difference between real life and the screen on the

iPad, and I think that really connects them and those in-person visits…definitely a lot less

potentially awkward."

This "awkward" encounter did not only pertain to children, as VC also affected

transitions for adults. LYLA, who spoke with her sister during her second deployment,

professed that her sister "said that having that digital connectedness really made the

transition much easier the second time. It was almost like there was not a transition to go

back to. She was like, 'Hey, I'm here!" unlike the first time.'" This feeling of little to no

transition was seconded by several participants, and AMANDA even noted that she

thought it would have been more emotional had she not had VC to see her family

sporadically. Familiarity was a specific reason that military families use VC, because it has helped numerous families stay connected, meet each other, and create a smooth transition for deployed loved ones' return.

Assurance/Clarity

The theme "assurance and clarity" represents four different coding schemes, including facial expression/non-verbal communication, absence of misunderstanding, setting, and assurance. The dangerous nature of the occupations of military personnel are more than enough reason for families to worry. This theme explores the assurance and clarity that family members receive through VC.

Facial Expression and Non-Verbal Communication.

The ability for an individual to see someone's face while talking to them on the phone was non-existent before VC. Every participant mentioned something about facial expression or seeing someone's face in his or her interviews. AMANDA actually preferred VC for the specific reason of the visual of the face. She revealed "There is a huge difference in talking to someone and actually getting to see their emotions, their reactions, and expressions, versus just getting to listen to them on the phone." Others also spoke about how the facial expressions and other types of non-verbal communication helped them direct the conversation to what seemed appropriate for the message they were receiving. CAITLYN explains:

> My husband just has this certain thing that he does when he is stressed or
> when he is tired. It is nice because I don't have to ask because I know him
> well enough to see that he is rubbing his neck or pulling his hair and that
> he is stressed or tired. And so that takes a lot out of the conversation

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because I see that I know he is not feeling well so I try to avoid things that well make him more stressed.

Not only is the ability to see facial expressions and non-verbal communication helpful for family members back home, but deployed members as well. As discussed earlier, OLIVER confessed that he would rather not communicate home if he could not have that video feed, because it makes him more homesick for his family. OLIVER had a similar response to CAITLYN, stating "when you see facial expressions you know…she's telling me everything's okay, but I can see in her face she is drained…. That would set the tone for the conversation." Facial expression and non-verbal communication are a large part of the other three coded categories for this section.

Absence of Misunderstanding.

Participants were very appreciative of the fact that there were less misunderstanding with VC, because facial expression played a large part in clarifying messages received. THEA reported that other types of communication are "much more easily disregarded or like, 'whatever, you are being silly' like than…seeing someone's face and hearing their tone…. the amazing thing is that VC allows you…all of that, assuming you have good internet and convey it pretty darn spotlessly." With VC users get the "complete package," minus the ability to touch or smell the person they are communicating with. BARRY appreciates VC because:

> You can look at somebody's face and have a face-to-face conversation
> with them, several thousands of miles away, nothing gets misunderstood
> like it might have been in a text or an e-mail, and… you probably never
> realize it until you are away like that.

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It is easy for a message to be distorted when sent in text form, because voice inflection, facial expression, and non-verbal communication can completely change the meaning. SARA stated that "with LINDA it has allowed me to still have honest conversations with her without worrying about how words sound on a page." This concern about a message being misconstrued is one less thing military families have to worry about, because the video portion of the call takes care of that.

Setting.

Another concern that participants found to be manageable with the addition of video feed to calls is the setting that their deployed loved ones are in. FELICITY, who was previously active duty, recalled:

> I know what it is like to live in a tent…not to shower for days….I can see
> the room that he lives in or if he had to be, for one deployment he had to
> Skype me from an open…like a community area and so I could see the
> people he was around, and I just felt like it kept us more connected.

Several spouses and parents shared similar stories, feeling comforted by being able to see their loved ones' living conditions, or even just the weather where they were located. SARA reported that her daughter had moved four times since she went to Germany, so she got a tour of each of her new houses. IRIS explained that "seeing their face, see[ing] their expression and seeing their smile. Not just that person, but…the environment that they are in, and their surroundings, it helps you share the experience better." She also talked about how she would be out and was able to share her surroundings with BARRY, just like he shared his surroundings with her and it brought them closer together.

Being able to see what the living situation is like for families left at home is comforting, but deployed family members found it to be equally satisfying. RAY describes seeing his home through VC as "comforting," and confesses "you see a glimpse back at normalcy and you know…just a few more weeks of hard work and that awaits you on the backside. It is kind of cool I think!" The comfort RAY discussed receiving is exactly what OLIVER wanted to give to his family by showing them his surroundings. He confessed that situations that might be dangerous he would let LAUREL know through body language, and insisted on VC when the operation was over. OLIVER said VC "let them see the amenities in the background was okay, let them see that where I live was okay. And everything was fine." Being able to provide proof that deployed loved ones are truly okay is the connection between the four coding categories within the theme of assurance and clarity, because the situations soldiers are sent to handle are not always safe. Assurance that the setting a deployed family member is in is suitable and safe is important, but assurance from bodily harm is imperative.

Assurance.

When it came to the safety of a loved one overseas, the military family participants were worried, but through VC had an assurance that others did not. They were actually able to see if their family member was okay through VC, and nine out of the sixteen participants were thankful for the ability to check on them, or allow family members back home to know they were okay. JESSE disclosed, "it gives me more peace of mind just being able to see him. A voice is one thing, but being able to see his face is very comforting." Others echoed this "peace of mind", and for CAITLYN it helped improve the state of her relationship while her husband was deployed. She explained

Usually we would fight because I would worry and stress and he was

worried and stressed. And now we can see each other and we can see that

we are okay and I really, and I know this sounds cheesy, but I think that it

has made our relationship stronger to be able to see each other and to see

that we are both okay and he can see that his son is okay when he is gone.

I think that it has made a huge difference for us personally.

For FELICITY, she got relief just by seeing that her husband "was in one piece."

LAUREL said that seeing that her husband was safe helped her "sleep better at night."

The danger that loomed during deployments felt ever present to family members back

home, but VC helped relieve the stress by providing visual proof that deployed members

were okay. Across the board the three participants who had children overseas spoke

about assurance, with JOE stating "it made me feel way better to see his [son's] face….

There is just so much tension involved when your loved ones are fighting, and it was just

comforting." The experience of having a husband deploy and a daughter deploy is a

common thread between SARA and MOIRA, but the need for assurance is another thing

they shared. SARA spoke about how she broke down once when her husband was

deployed, because she wasn't expecting communication from him for a while, but when

she got it she wasn't prepared for it. She believed:

If I had had the chance to VC with him like they do now, see I would

never have had to get into that place in my head. I would know that "I'm

going to get to talk to him at some point this week and see his face…"

SARA got relief by seeing her daughter's face, and considered herself blessed to be able

to use VC to see her daughter. MOIRA got the same assurance, but had to wait a while

for it because of the connectivity problems. Her daughter was injured while overseas, and she explained that she got an e-mail message saying that she was injured, "but I'm okay Mom, I'll be fine." MOIRA articulated that she wasn't sure about the situation, and:

> Until I actually got to see her face and see that she really was okay and see
> her expression that she really was okay-something about seeing it written
> down it didn't mean a whole lot to me, it didn't give me any comfort until
> I was actually able to see her, you know? And hear her voice and know
> that she really was okay as far as physically goes… that was kind of scary
> for a mom and to hear it, the first time I heard it was in an e-mail message.
> And then you are like, "oh no, what happened?" You know, so when I
> finally got to see her I was able to sleep!

Injuries and loss of life can happen anywhere, but when a family member's profession is to defend a country, that can cause unrest for family members back home. With VC, the danger is not gone, but families can be re-assured by seeing the face of their loved ones they are worried about, whether overseas or at home.

While more traditional types of communication, such as phone calls and handwritten letters, were still appreciated and used, social media and VC have taken over as the preferred method of communication by most participants. The assurance and clarity that VC gives families helps cut down on fighting, and adds to the sleep that family members get while individuals are deployed. They appreciated the easy transition it set up for families, as well as the relationships it helped bring to being. Although VC comes with technology and user complications, it helps connect and include family

members like no other medium of communication before it. The advantages of VC far

outweigh the negatives, and it is making a difference in the lives of military families.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study seek to answer the two research questions as follows:

RQ1: What impact, if any, has video calling had on interpersonal communication between individuals in military families?

RQ2: Under what circumstances is the use of video calling by individuals in military families more useful compared to other forms of communication?

This chapter includes discussion of the results from the previous chapter, as well as limitations to the study, and recommendation for further research.

The first research question explores notions that VC impacts interpersonal communication between military families. The results indicate that there are impacts on interpersonal communication through VC, namely notions of connectedness, compromise and sacrifice and inclusion.

In unison with Schumm et al. (2004), the statements made about VC taking deployed family members "home," validates the idea that instead of more "common" occupations causing employees to use technology to keep in touch with their co-workers, the military, because of long trainings and deployments, requires the use of technology that would help military personnel keep up with their family and vice versa. VC gives them the feeling of going "home" at the end of a workday, as would be considered the

norm for most occupations. Like Aguila (2011) notes, the family members left at home

make the deployed family member feel welcome and home, and the deployed family

member helps the family member at home to feel like they are a part of their everyday

routine, as we saw through the many examples articulated by study participants. Fixing

up, sacrificing the time and effort to VC, and sitting in a place that models their normal

routine helps families stay connected, and feel included in each other's day. Interviews

show that, families were connected enough to "thrive," which resonated with all

participants and connects with Korzenny's (1978) Electronic Propinquity Theory. The

"closeness" that families felt is what Korzenny (1978) explains with "electronic

nearness" (p. 7), stating that military personnel could feel closer to a family member

because of the connection that they had through VC. Families were allowed the chance to

be "close" to a loved one from a distance, because they were able to see the birth of a

child they would not meet for months, or be able to see the look on a child's face when

they were disciplined then reaffirmed, as with Durham (2015). Adversely, topic

avoidance, as discussed by Owelett et al. (2015) and Durham (2015), was not discussed

in any of the interviews concerning to VC. Although several participants disclosed that it

was much harder to hide stress because the person they were talking to could see their

face, which made them steer clear of adding more stress to the conversation.

The age of the participant did have an impact. Older participants used VC less,

supporting what Wong and Gerras (2006) stated about age and technology. Even though

the use of VC by older participants was more sparse, in accordance with Schumm et al.

(2004), they still preferred VC because it gave them "a more interactive mean" (p.661) of

communicating with their deployed loved ones, allowing them to stay more connected

and close. Since the technology is user friendly according to many participants, the adaptability was not a major issue. Participants identified issues with connectivity, which lead to stress or use of other modes of communication, displaying the "take what you can get" attitude that goes along with the adjustment to available medium that Walther (2008) discusses. After participants used VC, they had higher expectations for communication mediums as well the maintenance of their relationships with loved ones whiles deployed. Since VC technology exposed this higher quality of interpersonal communication, new frustrations arose with connectivity problems. The added stress of trying to connect (Maguire and Sahlstein Parcell, 2015) was more of an inconvenience to most participants, because they would just adjust and go to the next option on the list of available communication mediums, such as videotext or phone call. Although adjusting was fine with some, for others not being able to connect through VC was a major issue. Research by Hinojosa, Hinojosa and Högnäs (2012) upheld OLIVER's sentiment that it was easier to avoid contact back home than to communicate without the video feed that VC offers, because it made him more homesick. Although VC does come with occasional technological problems, in agreement with Durham (2015), participants found FtF interaction to be worth it, and as multiple participants mentioned, they would try it a few times before they switched to something else.

The second research question sought to explore whether there were situations in which VC was more useful to military families. Participants discussed that familiarity, assurance and clarity were reasons why they found VC to be more useful compared to other types of communication.

Along with Burgoon et al. (2002) and Houston et al. (2013), participants determined what type of communication they were going to use based on the reasons for initiating communication. Several participants described the uses for other types of communication, such as e-mail being a more business-oriented way to communicate, or texting being quick and private. Overall, most participants preferred VC when they wanted to make sure their family member was okay in every way, and when they wanted to have a "FtF" conversation with them for various reasons. One of the most important reasons military families used VC was to see that their loved ones were okay, because their occupations made worrying about them easy. Being able to see a loved one's setting while deployed, or vice-versa, was very comforting to participants. Not only because they could see the living conditions of deployed members, but also deployed members could get a glimpse of home and "normalcy." Participants wanted proof that their loved ones were okay, and VC gave that to them.

Not only were participants comforted by the setting displayed in VC, but also by the absence of misunderstanding, because facial expression and other non-verbal communication were available. As discussed by Licoppe and Morel (2012), participants mentioned that they had to pay attention to where their gaze was, and that they were conscious about their settings and what they looked like during VC. With facial expression and body language available, participants were also not as worried about messages getting misinterpreted, relieving some of the stress from a conversation.

Parents believed that VC was especially important for young children, because they were able to recognize and have a relationship with the parent who was deployed. Unlike the research by Wong and Gerras (2010), participants in this study did not find

their children to be more stressed by the voice of a parent, possibly because the visual of their parent was available through VC. Problems with children lashing out after a parent deployed or "horror stories," as JESSE and several other participants referred to, were not the case for participants in this study. In fact, the smooth transition for children was very important to parents, and several participants attributed the smoothness of the transition to VC. FELICITY discussed the absence of "stranger danger" when her eight-month-old daughter and husband met in person for the first time, and how she knew he was important even though they had only ever seen each other through VC. This relationship development and smooth transition relate seamlessly with Ramirez and Burgoon's (2004) research. They argue that relationships with children (and some adults) started and maintained through VC showed no gap in relationships when the people involved were united or reunited, which support SARA's experiences before and after VC. The lack of fear or awkward encounters is important, but the recognition of parents and a relationship developed and maintained is crucial to families.

Conclusion

The importance of children developing and thriving in a relationship with a parent from a distance is immeasurable. The stress that it relieves from both parents and the children involved is imperative to healthier relationships and family lives in general. The developments to technology have already benefited families who have to be apart, but VC has been crucial in the lives of children with a deployed parent, and as the applications continue to evolve, so will the quality of communication.

The connectedness that many participants talked about was supported by the theory of electronic propinquity, and like we saw through previous research (Korzenny,

1978; Walther, 2008), participants will use whatever they believe fits their needs and will adapt if need be in order to communicate. Being able to see the face *and* hear the voice of a loved one is certainly the highest-quality of bandwidth, and VC is doing a great job of keeping families closer than they were able to with other mediums of communication.

Overall, VC was seen as a helpful tool for military families to get through a difficult time in their lives, and to relieve stress associated with the well being of a loved one. VC proved to be a useful tool in the lives of every participant identified for this study, particularly in the lives of young children, because they were able to continue life with two parents instead of one. Parents of small children appreciated VC because they were able to see their children grow, and were provided normalcy through co-parenting and smooth transitions at home. Parents of deployed children praised the technology changes and the opportunity to see that their children were all right from thousands of miles away. Spouses were able to sleep at night knowing that they could talk to their partners soon, and that they didn't have to go through the experience of deployment alone. Ultimately, every participant knew that if they needed to feel a connection to their loved one, they were just a click away.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The most significant limitation to the study was the disproportionate number of relationships to deployed family members. Eleven of the 16 participants were significant others to someone who was deployed, or someone who had or was deployed themselves. It would have benefited the study to have more parents and siblings participate, to get a more even perspective of VC use and impact. The study would have benefited from the addition of the child's perspective,

because they would have provided a more in depth look at the familiarity theme, as well as give a different outlook on other themes.

Another limitation was the diversity of military personnel participants or their loved ones. Each military branch is unique, and the time constraints, bandwidth connection, and preferences would differ with each military branch. Participants with a variety of military backgrounds could have exposed additional themes and experiences and potentially enhance the findings of this study.

Finally, the average age of participants was 35, making them a considerably young group of participants, so age was a limitation as well. Had there been more participants older than 50 (probably parents of deployed children), the results of the study could possibly be influenced consequently.

Future Research

This study explored the impact that VC has on interpersonal communication between military families, and explored reasons they use it. In the future it would be useful to study relationship groups individually, to explore new themes. To fully flesh out the relationship development and maintenance between children and deployed parents, it would be most beneficial to study just the children in this situation. The children's perspective was left out of this study completely, however results gathered from such a study, would be helpful to other families who are going through similar situations.

Additionally, another study that I believe would be helpful would be to compare families who use VC versus those who do not. It would allow readers to see the impact

that VC has on families, and allow for the examination of other types of communication that serve families in different situations.

Finally, I believe a study about VC from the perspective of those who are deployed would be beneficial to the field of interpersonal communication. Although it may be difficult for military personnel to find time to interview, the information that they share could be beneficial for those who struggle with opening up with their families back home. The perspective of a soldier on VC could help families, and lead to smooth transitions for more military members.

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Appendix

IRB Consent Form for Time Together and Apart

Thank you for your participation in this study about video calling and it's effects on interpersonal communication and relationships. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this study.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses will remain completely confidential, and they will only be analyzed in an aggregate for academic research purposes.

In continuing this survey, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and wish to participate in this study conducted by primary researcher Candice Copelin. In this study you will be asked a series of questions about how you use video calling to communicate with family and friends and your opinion of the application and it's uses.

You understand that you can end your participation at any time. If you choose not to participate, you may opt out of this survey by checking "No" below. You understand that you could be at risk for uncomfortable feelings due to the process of responding to questions about your views about video calling programs; however, these are no greater than the risks of everyday life.

All information collected during this research will remain confidential. If your answers are quoted in this study, your identity will be hidden using a pseudonym.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have any concerns about this study or your rights, you can contact the dean of the graduate school and research at 806.651.2730 or the researcher, Candice Copelin at (806)454-0222.

Candice Copelin, West Texas A&M University

I have read the above statement and agree with the terms listed herein.

    ○ YES, I agree to participate in this study.

    ○ NO, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Signature:_____

Date:_____