



Military REACH's review of COMMUNICATION IN ONLINE FORUMS ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT OF RELATIONAL UNCERTAINTY IN MILITARY LIFE

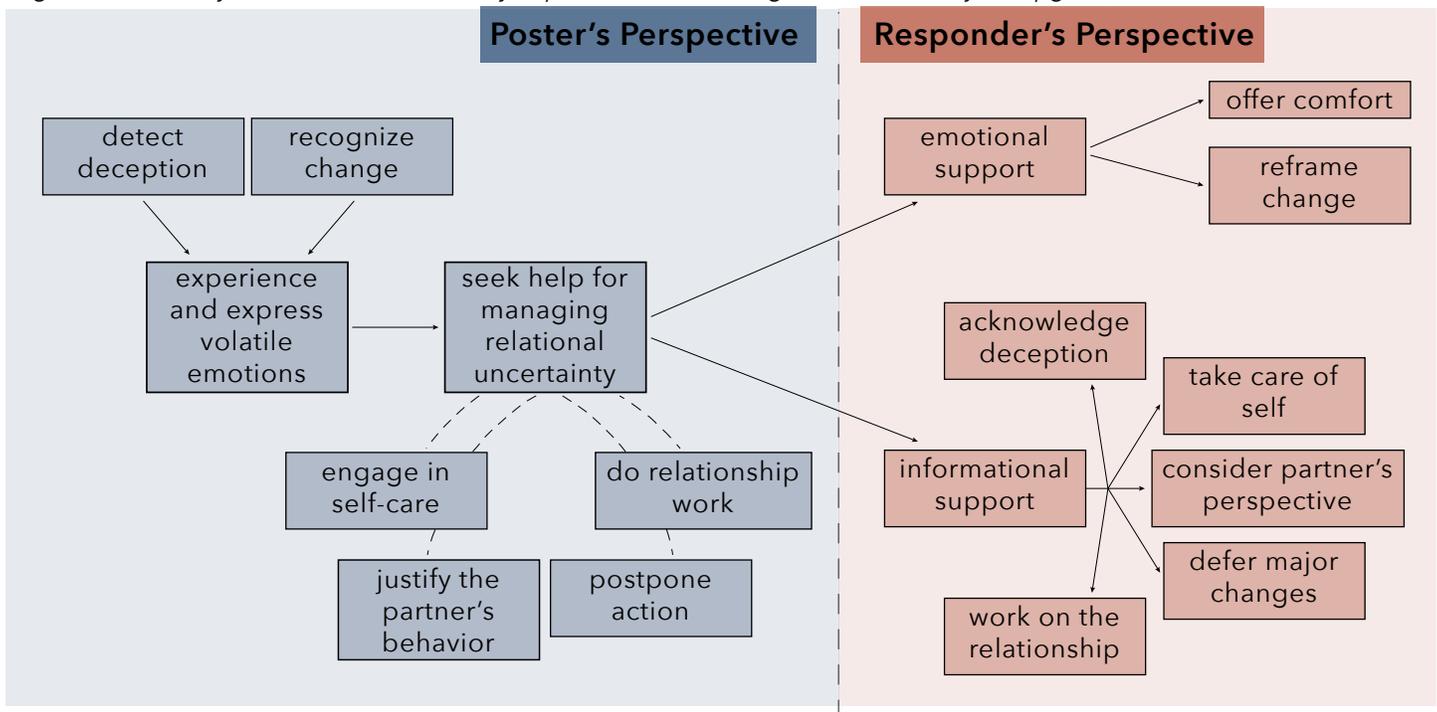
Knobloch, L. K., Basinger, E. D., Abendschein, B., Wehrman, E. C., Monk, J. K., & McAninch, K. G. (2018). Communication in online forums about the experience and management of relational uncertainty in military life. *Journal of Family Communication, 18*, 13-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2017.1373355>

BRIEF SUMMARY: Military couples may experience relational uncertainty (i.e., how sure or unsure individuals are about the nature of their relationship) especially given the challenges of military life (e.g., long separations, highly stressful environments). This study sought to qualitatively explore how military service members and their partners use online forums to discuss their relationship uncertainty and how they are supported by others (i.e., responders) in online settings. Researchers analyzed 1,794 pages of online forums related to relational uncertainty. Themes were identified and a theoretical framework (see below) was developed outlining how relationship uncertainty is managed in the context of military life with regard to seeking help in online forums and receiving support from individuals online.

KEY FINDINGS

- Two themes were identified related to *why posts were made* by military service members or partners in online forums: (1) they discovered their partner had been deceptive, or (2) they noticed a change in themselves, their partner, or their relationship. Those experiences led to intense emotions that needed to be expressed and seeking help to manage the relational uncertainty.
- Four themes were identified *within the posts by posters* related to how relationship uncertainty was currently being managed by the service member or partner: (1) engaging in self-care, (2) justifying their partner's behavior, (3) postponing action, and (4) doing relationship work.
- Next, two themes emerged related to *how responders provided support* to the original poster: (1) emotional support (e.g., offering comfort) and (2) informational support (e.g., advice on acknowledging the deception).
- Themes were found to be qualitatively associated with one another, forming a theoretical framework. More specifically, relationship uncertainty led to seeking help in online forums and receiving feedback from responders, such as informational and emotional support.

A grounded theory of relational uncertainty experience and management in military life (pg. 18)



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ 1,794 double-spaced pages of online posts and threads
- ✓ All pages focused on relational uncertainty of military service members and/or their partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES

- Consider [online forums](#) as a potentially helpful place to meet or connect with others who are in similar situations to foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Suggest specific online forums to clients that allow for interactions with others who are in similar situations, thus normalizing the situation in which clients find themselves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

- Consider expanding [government affiliated online forums](#) being used for other military family situations to address relationship uncertainty and maintenance for military families.

METHODOLOGY

- Online forum data were found through search terms including, “military life and family,” “military and marriage,” “military life and support,” “military family and coping” that resulted in an initial finding of 5,925 pages of information.
- 37 fully open access forums (no account required to read posts) and partially-open access forums (must make a free account to read posts) were included in the data.
- All data examined were posted within the three years prior to data collection.
- To specify the search further, terms such as “uncertain(ty),” “unsure,” “not sure,” “doubt,” “relationship,” “don’t know,” “question,” “don’t understand,” “wonder,” “confus(ion),” “whether,” “no idea,” and “?” were used. Altogether, this resulted in 1,794 pages of online posts.
- For the main analysis, a team of researchers independently coded the data for common themes and worked together to come to an agreement to increase the validity of the findings. They then examined the associations among themes to develop a theoretical framework grounded in illustrating relational uncertainty in military affiliated individual’s communication patterns.

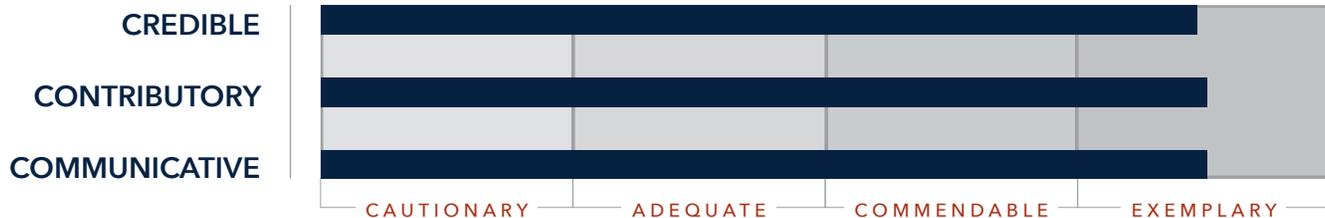
STRENGTHS

- Data were completely anonymous, and thus, the content of the data may be less restricted by social desirability biases.
- The data explored were sizable (1,794 double-spaced pages), increasing the likelihood that saturation of each theme was reached.

LIMITATIONS

- There is no demographic information on the participants who posted or responded in the forums; therefore, researchers and readers do not know how generalizable the findings are or from what perspective (i.e., romantic partner, service member, parent, child, etc.) the posts and responses are being made.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY



DIMENSIONS OF ASSESSMENT

- CREDIBLE: Research that is rigorous, transparent, consistent, and generalizable. This dimension reflects an evaluation of the study’s scientific methodology.
 - CONTRIBUTORY: Research that is original, applicable, and has the potential to enhance the well-being of military families. This dimension examines the impact of the study.
 - COMMUNICATIVE: Research that is coherent, understandable, and readable. This dimension assesses how effectively the authors convey the content of the study.
- * These dimensions are adapted from the work of Mårtensson et al. (2016). For more information on the REACH evaluation framework and rubric visit: MilitaryREACH.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Underlined terms in [red font](#) are linked to the definition in the Military REACH Dictionary. To explore more terms visit: <https://militaryreach.auburn.edu/DictionaryResult>. Terms in [blue font](#) are linked to additional resources.

PARTNERSHIP

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