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ABSTRACT

The current study examined the renegotiation of and communication about household tasks, and their links to service members' romantic relationships after a military deployment (i.e., reintegration). Results indicate that satisfying communication was salient for relationship closeness.

INTRODUCTION

- Military deployments challenge the allocation of household roles and responsibilities. The months after a deployment (*reintegration*) can be especially challenging because interactions establishing “a new normal” can bring uncertainty, conflicting expectations, strong emotions, psychological changes, and miscommunication.¹⁻³
- Relational maintenance strategies (open, positive communication, and sharing tasks) may be used to maintain and enhance relationships.⁴
- Equity theory posits that perceptions of fairness in the division of labor influence the use of relational maintenance strategies in romantic relationships.⁵

HYPOTHESES

- H1:** Service members' perceptions of fairness in the division of household tasks will be **positively associated** with their feelings of closeness, such that those who perceived the division to be more fair would feel more connected to their partner.
- H2:** The above association will be **mediated** by conversation satisfaction, such that those who are more satisfied in conversations of household issues will feel closer to their partners.

METHODS

PROCEDURES

- Participants completed daily data “bursts” at one time point during a larger longitudinal study. Interviews were conducted 11.33 weeks ($SD = 7.46$) after service members returned home from deployment.
- Participants completed one telephone survey per day over the span of four days
- **Division of labor.** Participants reported time spent completing household tasks and their perceptions of fairness surrounding the division of labor (e.g., ‘*Unfair to my Partner*’, ‘*Equal to Both*’)
- **Conversation satisfaction.** Participants reported their satisfaction level for discussions related to the management of household tasks during the last 24 hours, using scale 1 ‘*Extremely Dissatisfied*’ to 9 ‘*Extremely Satisfied*’
- **Closeness.** Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the statement, “In the last 24 hours, I felt close to my partner,” using scale 1 ‘*Not at all*’ to 7 ‘*Very Much*’

METHOD (cont.)

PARTICIPANTS

- Individual characteristics ($N = 50$)
 - Mostly white (86%) males (90%)
 - Average age: 33 years old ($SD = 9.25$)
- Relationship characteristics
 - Mostly married (82%)
 - Relationship length: 7.67 years ($SD = 5.59$)
- Military characteristics
 - Majority (87%) enlisted
 - Average 10.7 years in military ($SD = 7.75$)



- **Full sample** consisted of **50 National Guard service members** who recently returned from a deployment
- 40 service members (80% of full sample) completed all four days of calls
- The **subset sample** comprised the **36 service members** who reported talking about household tasks *at all* during the four-day period.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVES

Daily averages of time spent completing household tasks ($N = 50$)

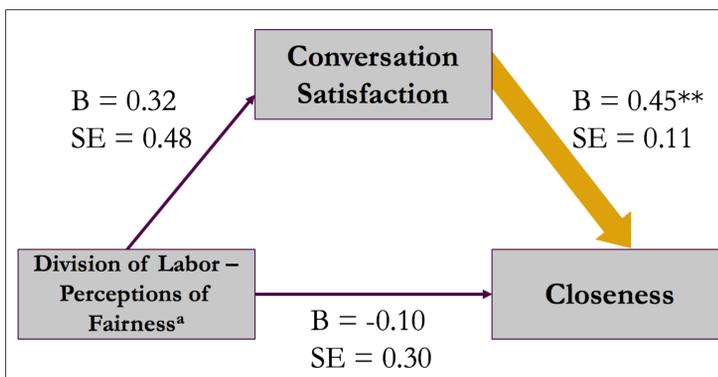
| Household Tasks | Total Minutes on Task | | | Proportion Spent with Partner |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Median</i> | |
| Dishes | 14.08 | 17.81 | 10.25 | 0.30 (0.35) |
| Preparing food | 24.95 | 20.78 | 17.50 | 0.57 (0.33) |
| Cleaning – vacuuming, dusting | 16.04 | 18.32 | 12.50 | 0.41 (0.38) |
| Working outdoors | 29.73 | 78.46 | 5.00 | 0.34 (0.42) |
| Small repairs around the house | 10.51 | 19.85 | 1.88 | 0.25 (0.40) |
| Laundry | 19.82 | 29.20 | 6.25 | 0.30 (0.30) |
| Financial matters | 12.20 | 16.91 | 5.00 | 0.52 (0.46) |
| Grocery shopping | 12.81 | 14.82 | 8.75 | 0.52 (0.47) |
| Running errands | 25.73 | 31.07 | 16.25 | 0.52 (0.41) |

Full sample reported the time spent, in minutes, completing certain household tasks during the previous 24 hours. **Total minutes on tasks** are average across all 4 days for each task. **Proportion spent with partner** is the average of the daily proportion that service members completed tasks with their partners.

RESULTS

- **Prior to analyses**, scores were averaged across all days of participation. Perception of fairness was transformed into a dummy code.
- Multiple regressions tested mediation among the **subset sample**
 - The link between fairness perceptions and closeness was not significant
 - The full model accounted for significant variation ($R^2 = 0.36, F(2, 33) = 9.08, p < 0.01$)
- Post-hoc moderation was tested.
 - The interaction term (Perceptions of Fairness*Conversation Satisfaction) was not significant ($B = 0.30, p = n.s.$)

Summary of mediation regressions ($n = 36$)



^aPerceptions of fairness: 0 = *Unequal to either partner*, 1 = *Equal to both*

DISCUSSION

- Neither hypothesis (H1 & H2) was supported: Perceptions of fairness in the division of labor were not associated with conversation satisfaction or feelings of closeness.
- Service members rarely spoke with their partners about the division of household tasks. When these conversations did occur, service members were highly satisfied with their interactions ($M = 7.72, SD = 1.37$).
- Service members generally regarded the division of labor as fair. When the division was reported as unfair, more service members reported that the division favored them rather than their partner.
- Preliminary descriptives indicated that service members completed 1/3 to 1/2 of their daily tasks with their partners. There was considerable variability in minutes spent completing tasks, however, both individually and as a couple.

LIMITATIONS

- All variables were collected at the same time point
- The small sample size contributed to an underpowered study
- Averaging scores limited our understanding of daily lability in the interactions in and evaluations of household routines
- Reports from only one romantic partner understated the dyadic nature of household renegotiations

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Incorporate daily variation in household task performance, communication strategies, and relational exchanges
- Investigate dyadic interdependence by including responses of significant others and spouses
- Examine alternative pathways through which couples negotiate, distribute, and maintain roles during reintegration
- Include other indicators (e.g., employment, childcare tasks, relationship characteristics) to broaden understanding of family functioning postdeployment

IMPLICATIONS

- Tested anecdotal findings surrounding difficulties in renegotiations of household roles and responsibilities
- Highlighted need for intervention centered around effective communication strategies after a transition

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