

**It Takes Three: Relational Boundary Work, Resilience, and Commitment Among Navy
Couples**

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Abstract

Although scholars generally focus on how *individuals* manage their work and home demands, employees, outsiders and organizations co-construct work/non-work boundaries. Using interviews with couples from the U.S. Navy, an organizational context that encourages a mix of segmentation and integration behaviors, we develop the construct of relational boundary work to describe the *joint* behaviors of multiple parties in a relational system. Drawing on family systems theory, we delineate two dimensions describing how couples promote togetherness or separateness (cohesion) and how couples balance stability and change in the enactment of joint roles (adjustability). We delineate five couple configurations. We find that extreme adjustability (very high or very low) is problematic for couple resilience; this describes both chaotic (low cohesion, high adjustability) and rigid couples (low cohesion, low adjustability). Extreme cohesion (very high or very low), in contrast, can undermine organizational commitment; this describes enmeshed (high cohesion, moderate adjustability), chaotic and rigid couples. Balanced couples (moderate cohesion, moderate adjustability) are both resilient and committed in this organization. Examining relational boundary work demonstrates that understanding employees' behaviors alone may not illuminate outcomes, and it underscores the importance of conceptualizing boundaries as co-created by employees, outsiders and organizations within a relational system.

The modern workplace is filled with stories of work overtaking personal lives – from conference calls on the soccer field, to texts from co-workers at the dinner table (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015; Klass, 2014). While individuals can and do spend time working from home well beyond typical business hours (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Eurofund and the International Labour Office, 2017), it is also true that employees spend time addressing home needs while at work. In fact, surveys report a full 89% of managers engaging in personal tasks while at work (Deal, 2013). However, much less is known about the nature and impact of this attention to non-work activities while at work.

To understand how personal activities are managed in the workplace, and in particular personal relationships, we turn to research on boundary work. This literature explores how individuals manage and construct boundaries between work and home (Allen, Cho, & Meier, 2014; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) and differentiates between integration and segmentation preferences and behaviors. Integration captures the desire to (and behaviors that) bring work and non-work together, and segmentation describes a preference for (and behaviors that) keep the two spheres separate (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Golden & Geisler, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Research has found that segmentation behaviors reduce work-family conflict and facilitate managing work responsibilities, while integration behaviors aid workplace identification and relationships (Allen et al., 2014; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Further, organizational policies and expectations interact with individual integration and segmentation preferences and behaviors to shape outcomes (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005).

Typically, boundary work involves managing an individual's experience of the boundary, such as changing out of work clothes before going home or keeping separate work and non-work

calendars. While boundary work is inherently relational in that it has the potential to impact other people and often occurs via interactions with others, research rarely considers how boundary work is embedded in relationships. Trefalt (2013) offers a notable exception and focuses on how workplace relationships (e.g., new or established relationships) shape the types of boundary work that employees engage in. With this as a starting point, it follows that when home life bleeds into the workplace it is paramount to consider the nature of employees' personal relationships to understand boundary work. Certainly these outside relationships are influential: community members and family members shape how individuals feel about the organization (Bartel, 2001; Ferguson, Carlson, Boswell, Whitten, Butts, & Kacmar, 2016; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Yet these outside relationships may be more than the backdrop upon which individual boundary work occurs; the boundary work of multiple parties may be critical to the construction of the boundary.

We examined the types of boundary work used by individuals and those they communicate with outside the organization. We develop the construct of relational boundary work, defined as the *joint* behaviors of multiple parties to co-construct the work/non-work boundary. We conducted in-depth interviews with both employees and their spouses in the extreme setting of the U.S. Navy, where physical boundaries separate work from home for long periods of time. During this work-enforced separation, Navy policies and immediate supervisors explicitly instruct employees in how to engage with those at home, encouraging a flexible mix of individual integration and segmentation behaviors. Thus the organization, employee and spouse are all critical to the co-creation of the work/non-work boundary.

We draw on family systems theory (Olson, 2000) to develop the construct of relational boundary work. Individuals operate as members of social groups, such as families, teams or organizations. These groups are relational systems, and the relationships that underlie a unit

shape what occurs in them and the boundaries between them (Kahn, Barton & Fellows, 2013; Minuchin, 1974). We demonstrate how individual integration and segmentation behaviors are component to couple-level behaviors across the work/non-work boundary. We use two dimensions of couple-level behavior, cohesion and adjustability, to describe relational boundary work, and which have been associated with the long-term sustainability and resilience of a relational system (Conger & Conger, 2002; Olson, 2000). The dimension of cohesion arrays couples according to how separate (low cohesion) or together (high cohesion) they act. The dimension of adjustability explains how couples balance stability and change when enacting their joint roles (e.g., parent, spouse), from minimally reactive (low adjustability) to very unpredictable (high adjustability). Using these dimensions, we theorize nine configurations of relational boundary work and observe five distinct configurations within our data. Overall, the construct of relational boundary work highlights how the joint behavior of multiple parties (e.g., the employee, partner, and organization) co-constructs the boundary and, necessarily, raises the level of analysis to the relational system.

If we measured boundary work solely on individual actions, we would miss not only the joint and interrelated nature of the behaviors through which the work/non-work boundary is constructed, but also the multiple outcomes shaped by relational boundary work. We focus on two key outcomes: resilience and organizational commitment. Family systems theory suggests couple-level behaviors enable them to function effectively as circumstances change, and this maps well onto the construct of resilience - a positive adaptation to adverse circumstances (Carr & Kellas, 2018; Olson, 2000). In addition, and of long-standing interest to organizational scholars (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974), organizational commitment is influenced by the connections with and behaviors of those outside the organization (Ferguson et al., 2016; Pratt

& Rosa, 2003). We find that problems with resilience occur when couples are extreme on adjustability (minimally reactive or unpredictable) while problems with organizational commitment occur when couples are extreme on cohesion (highly separate or highly connected). Mirroring this organization's expectations for a flexible mix of individual integrating and segmenting behaviors, couples who are *both* resilient and committed are those that have patterns of relational boundary work with moderate levels of adjustability and cohesion.

By focusing on the relational nature of boundary work we make three key contributions. First, a relational perspective on boundary work acknowledges those outside as well as those inside the organization and raises the level of analysis to the relational system. In addition to the employee, the organization and the spouse each play an important role. We develop the construct of relational boundary work to describe how the joint behaviors of multiple parties in a relational system co-construct the work/non-work boundary. Second, we unpack relational boundary work by examining two dimensions drawn from family systems literature: how couples work to create closeness with one another (cohesion) and how couples change or react to each other in their enactment of shared roles (adjustability). Individual boundary work behaviors alone are not sufficient to understand the relational system (and their associated couple and organizational outcomes) because individuals' integrating and segmenting behaviors *jointly* establish cohesion and adjustability in the relational system. We use these dimensions of relational boundary work across the work/non-work boundary to describe nine possible and five observed boundary configurations. Finally, we develop a process model to theorize how problems of adjustability and cohesion in relational boundary work are attendant to couples' resilience and organizational commitment. Importantly, our findings show that *both* adjustability and cohesion are critical to understand outcomes. Our model demonstrates that the relational system has positive couple and

organizational outcomes only when we observe moderation in a couples' relational boundary work.

BOUNDARY WORK OF MULTIPLE ACTORS

Boundaries are a socially constructed means of understanding and simplifying the world, and boundaries order our understanding of everything from countries, to inequality, to physical objects, to roles (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Boundary Theory focuses attention on the micro transitions between roles as an important type of boundary crossing, and it suggests the process of micro-transitions is influenced by the permeability and flexibility of the role boundary (Ashforth et al., 2000). Border Theory similarly considers how individuals actively shape boundaries, although the focus is more narrowly on balancing work and family roles (Clark, 2000). We focus in particular on boundary work across the work/non-work interface, which begins with an examination of “how *individuals* engage in the effort of constructing, dismantling, and maintaining the work-home border” (Kreiner et al., 2009: 707, emphasis added). We use the term non-work to incorporate personal interactions inside and outside the home; our understanding is consistent with others who describe this as the personal-professional boundary (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

In her seminal study, Nippert-Eng (1996) used boundary theory to examine micro transitions between work and home. She focused attention on how individual integration and segmentation behaviors shaped the permeability of the boundary between work and non-work. Boundary permeability captures the extent to which one is able to physically be in one role domain (i.e., work) and psychologically or behaviorally be engaged in another (i.e., home). Integration, where boundaries between personal and work are blurred and domains overlap, supports higher levels of boundary permeability. Integration behaviors might include bringing

family members to company events or informal workplace gatherings (Dumas, Phillips & Rothbard, 2013). In contrast, segmentation, where boundaries between personal and work are emphasized and activities are separated, creates lower levels of boundary permeability. Segmentation behaviors might include dedicating blocks of time during the week for family activities that are thus explicitly and intentionally protected from the demands of work (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kreiner et al., 2009). Simple everyday practices reinforce integration or segmentation. For example, separate calendars for home and for work keep the boundaries between these two domains mentally distinct, whereas a joint to-do list or keychain encourages mental movement across the work/non-work boundaries.

Organizations play an important role in shaping and interacting with individual boundary work preferences and behaviors (Rothbard et al., 2005; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), yet this highly relevant contextual piece is often missing in work-family literature (Allen & Martin, 2017). There is a long history of organizational attempts to keep work and non-work separate (Kanter, 1977; Sanchez-Burks, 2005). For example, Kellogg (2011) found that doctors were discouraged from referencing their non-medical roles. In other instances, organizational policies cultivate integration to improve workplace identity and commitment (Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Employees may be invited to bring their families to events, have access to onsite childcare, and integration may create close workplace bonds (Dumas et al., 2013; Rothbard et al., 2005). Organizational policies and expectations can encourage employee integration or segmentation and thus the organization's desired work/non-work boundary (Perlow, 1998; Pratt & Rosa, 2003; Stanko & Beckman, 2015). The organizational choice to encourage integration and/or segmentation is theorized to be that which best supports employee attention to and focus on work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Boundary work research has followed two general approaches to using the constructs of integration and segmentation. One approach focuses on individual *preferences* for integration or segmentation (Rothbard et al., 2005) or on boundary management styles or profiles where people are arrayed across the integration-segmentation continuum (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). A second approach focuses on individual integration or segmentation *behaviors*, without suggesting that bundles of behaviors should co-occur within the integration or segmentation categories (Kreiner et al., 2009). In fact, Dumas and Sanchez-Burks (2015) suggest that integration facilitates organizational identity and work relationships at the same time as segmentation behaviors facilitate meeting work role responsibilities. Thus we focus on behaviors and examine both integration and segmentation behaviors simultaneously.

Although researchers occasionally acknowledge the role of others in boundary work they rarely include them as agentic participants. Clark (2000) calls these individuals “boundary keepers” (761). For example, spouses acted on behalf of clergy members by answering the phone and acting as gatekeepers during personal time (Kreiner et al., 2009). Trefalt (2013) theorizes that boundaries are negotiated with others (e.g., supervisors, colleagues, and spouses), but she interviewed only the focal employee. In Trefalt’s work, different types of work relationships (e.g. established vs. new) acted as a backdrop that shaped an individual’s boundary work and thus could explain whether a boundary work episode was successful. This research importantly highlights the relational nature of boundary work, but how other actors *participate* in and *negotiate* the work/non-work boundary has not been explored. The focus has been on individual boundary work. A notable exception is Perlow (1998) who characterized spouses at home as acceptors or resisters of intense work demands, and employee responses to these demands by managers were not independent of their spouse’s reactions. Yet Perlow did not examine how

couples managed or negotiated these demands. As changes in the nature of work and technology increase pressures toward the integration of work and non-work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), outsiders may play an increasingly important role in boundary construction. Thus how these boundaries are co-constructed is important to understand.

A RELATIONAL APPROACH: FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Given the importance of outsiders, such as spouses, and the inherently co-constructed nature of boundary work, we draw on family systems theory to theorize the relational dynamics involved in creating the work/non-work boundary. Scholars have called for management research to acknowledge and harness the rich body of work on families that has been conducted across multiple fields (Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, & Kacmar, 2017). Existing studies that apply family systems theory to better understand work-family topics show that this approach holds promise (e.g., Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Ferguson, et al., 2016).

Family systems theory draws attention to the relational system in which people operate. Kahn et al. (2013) draw on this work to build theory around how organizations respond to crises, and they suggest we should see similar patterns across relational systems (interpersonal, group, family, organization). The relational systems approach allows us to move up a level of analysis from the individual-level behaviors of integration and segmentation that existing boundary work literature emphasizes, to couple-level behaviors. In particular, we use Olson's (2000) Circumplex Model of couple dynamics, which maps the cohesion and adjustability of couples' relationships to the long-term health and resilience of the relationship (Olson & Gorall, 2003).¹ Importantly,

¹ The Circumplex Model describes three dimensions: cohesion, flexibility and communication. We use the term adjustability rather than flexibility in order to minimize confusion with the term flexibility found in boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000). Cohesion and adjustability are the two constructs primarily examined in the family systems

this approach takes into account the perspective of multiple parties since members of a family relational system often disagree with each other in describing their system (Olson, Russell & Sprenkle, 1989; Olson, 2000). Raising the analysis to the couple-level points to the importance of examining paired individual integration and segmentation efforts. For example, if one member of the couple integrates while the other segments, the cohesion of the couple will necessarily be lower than if both parties integrate. Classifying an individual as an “integrator” or a “separator” will not capture how the work/non-work boundary is experienced in a relational system.

In the Circumplex Model, assessments of cohesion range from very low to very high, that is complete separateness to complete togetherness. In the boundary work literature, this parallels individual separators who “try to keep their work and personal lives from blurring together”, and integrators, who “continually blend work and nonwork activities during the day” (Kossek & Lausch, 2007: 55, 20). Considered at the relational level, cohesion focuses on how couples balance separateness or togetherness, their emotional closeness, and the extent to which they engage in activities or make decisions together (De Vries & Carlock, 2010; Kouneski, 2000). Couples with high cohesion will engage in joint decision making and create emotional closeness across the work/non-work boundary; whereas couples with low cohesion will remain independent and separate while one partner is at home and another at work.

Adjustability is the second key dimension in the Circumplex Model. This describes how couples modify their shared roles and how they balance the need for both stability and change in role relationships (De Vries & Carlock, 2010). Olson & Gorall (2003) use the analogy of a skier to capture the idea of adjustability. If one observes a professional skier, one sees an upright upper body but a fluid lower body that moves from side to side, with her legs going up and down as she

literature and we follow this precedent. The communication dimension facilitates cohesion and flexibility and refers to how couples speak, listen, and self-disclose. This is captured in the boundary work behaviors we examine.

absorbs moguls on the hill. The skier balances stability (in the upper body) and change (in the lower body) to navigate the mountain. In contrast, a novice skier is often observed to be too inflexible, with not enough movement in the lower body to absorb the shocks. Or she may flail about, creating instability with too much movement in the upper body. Similarly, low adjustability couples are inelastic in their roles and do not change how they parent or engage as a partner despite change in circumstance. With high adjustability, couples are extremely unpredictable and even erratic in how they express their roles, changing direction from one moment to the next. Adjustability describes how couples change (or not) how they enact shared roles (e.g., spouse or parent) depending on the circumstance. If an individual alternates between integration and segmentation, for example, this may influence a couples' adjustability.

OUTCOMES OF BOUNDARY WORK

Cohesion and adjustability will have implications for outcomes in a relational system. Although there is no single best level of cohesion and adjustability, couples operating at the extreme ends of either dimension for too long will have problems; these dimensions shape how families respond to stress and are associated with resilience (Lavee & Olson, 1991; Olson, 2000). Resilience can be understood as a “successful adaptation to adversity”; resilience is not an individual attribute but arises from interpersonal interactions (Carr & Kellas, 2018, p. 68).² Within a relational system, the balance between cohesion and adjustability enables entities to be resilient (and, in turn, resilience can support or undermine cohesion and adjustability; Kahn et al., 2013; Lavee & Olson, 1991). The construct of resilience has broad importance, both because employee resilience is an important organizational outcome and because the underpinnings of

² There is some debate about whether resilience is a process or an outcome (Williams et al., 2017). We focus on resilience as an outcome and examine how relational boundary work helps support or undermine resilience.

resilience are applicable across broader systems (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd & Zhao, 2017; Van Der Vegt, Essens, Wahlström, & George, 2015).

Another key outcome likely associated with relational boundary work is organizational commitment. For example, a clergy member whose spouse seeks complete segmentation would face great tension given the role expectations and occupational demands of the clergy, and they may not remain in the career. Both the organizational context and family members play a role in employee outcomes. Furthermore, crossover effects suggest that one person's attitudes will influence the other's attitudes (Westman, 2001; Wilson, Baumann, Matta, Ilies, & Kossek, 2018). Indeed, the spouse's commitment to their partner's organization plays a role in the employee's own commitment (Ferguson et al., 2016). This suggests organizational commitment as a relevant and useful outcome to explore.

Taken together, research on individual boundary work and family systems theory suggest the need for a deeper understanding of how employees, outsiders, and organizations co-create the work/non-work boundary. We ask how those inside *and* outside the organization engage in boundary work and we use a relational systems approach to examine couple-level behaviors in the context of organizational policies and expectations. We identify key relational boundary work dimensions of adjustability and cohesion. By developing a better understanding of the relational nature inherent in crafting the work/non-work boundary, we can begin to recognize how couples' resilience and organizational commitment are associated with that work.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

Research Setting

Following the call for more studies of work-family boundary dynamics in settings of extreme integration or extreme segmentation (Allen et al., 2014), we explored our research

question in the United States Navy. One of the largest employers in the United States (1.3 million active; over 800,000 reserves; Office of the Under Secretary of the Defense), over half of military personnel are married and thus face particular challenges with managing the work-home boundary (Karney, Loughran & Pollard, 2012; Mather & Lavery, 2010; Moskos, 2000; Negrusa, Negrusa & Hosek, 2014; Paul, 2018; Segal & Segal, 2004). At the time of our study, organizational members were deployed for up to 12 to 14 months at a time, with sailors typically residing on vessels such as aircraft carriers or cruisers. Such extreme physical separation required efforts to maintain relationships with dependent family members such as spouses and children while “at work.” While boundary work has been explored in extremely integrated settings, such as clergy living only a few yards from their workplace (Kreiner, et al., 2009), fewer studies have examined boundary work in extremely segmented physical settings.

The Navy has clear expectations for how employees and spouses should communicate across the work/non-work boundary. Organizational attention to the family relationship is not unusual in the military (Segal, 1986) or even in organizations writ large. Ford Motor Company opened a “sociological department” in 1914 that conducted home visits as an experiment in welfare capitalism (Meyer, 1980). Many corporations provide spouses of corporate executives with special perks and travel to company retreats (Lublin, 2007). These perks encourage spouses to support organizational goals and the long hours required of employees (away from families). Organizations, such as call centers and network marketing companies, have encouraged employees to integrate their home life into work (Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Pratt, 2000; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Thus organizational policies and expectations are an important consideration when observing the co-construction and negotiation of the work/non-work boundary.

Data Collection

Our data collection was sponsored by the Office of Force Transformation in the Department of Defense (an office no longer in operation). After a focus group to gain insight into the details of Navy life and the specialized terminology that Navy members use, we created two separate interview protocols – one for Navy members and one for the Navy member’s spouse (see Appendix A for sample questions). Focusing on couples allowed us to explore the boundary work engaged in by both parties as well as how each experienced the others’ boundary work (see Mazmanian et al., 2013; Perlow, 1998; and Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2018, for a similar approach of interviewing couples). Interviewees were asked how they communicated with family members, made household decisions, managed family conflicts, and maintained relationships with family during deployment. As the protocol evolved, we asked how individuals were able to enact their shared roles (or not) while separated. Each couple was asked to recount several of the same events or decisions in order to reduce retrospective bias and check the reliability and consistency of recollections. Capturing both sides of these experiences was important because in some cases individuals were differentially impacted by the boundary work and sometimes couples were misaligned in their boundary work behaviors (e.g., one sought to share intimate details, while the other preferred to talk less personally).

We present data from 58 interviews (29 couples) conducted by five female interviewers with Navy members and their spouses in 2003, 2004 and 2010. To provide additional context and the organizational perspective, we conducted an additional 14 interviews with high-level officers and IT professionals in the Navy in 2013 (for a total of 72 interviews).³ Participants were recruited through a retired Navy Commander, Facebook ads, and other Navy contacts if they were in a significant relationship and recently returned from deployment. Individual interviews were 60-90 minutes each.

³ Stanko and Beckman (2015) used the same interviews but also included interviews with single sailors.

The vast majority of the Navy personnel interviewed had returned from a deployment in the past year, with 50% having returned in the past three months. All of our interviewees had at least some access to email,⁴ and they sent on average 13 emails home a week (with a range of zero to 12 a day). The average age of sailors was 32, ranging from 18-54, with an average tenure of 10 years. We interviewed six female sailors (two from dual-Navy couples). Status and hierarchy play a prominent role in the Navy so we interviewed both officers (10) and enlisted (19) sailors. Few of the enlisted sailors had completed college, whereas almost half of the officers had graduate degrees. Our interviewees were slightly older with longer tenure than the general Navy population (as we only interviewed people returned from at least one deployment) but our enlisted/officer breakdown is roughly representative of the Navy population (although we slightly over sample officers and women; Population Representation in the Military Services, 2005). We found widely varying access to technology (e.g., email, instant messaging, skype) both within and across time. We pooled the data based on the common themes around boundary management across time periods and types of ships.

In addition to the interview data, we gathered primary and secondary archival data on Navy policies and guidelines. For example, we collected Navy-wide newsletters and examined websites used to prepare Navy sailors and spouses for deployment. This archival material allowed an in-depth understanding of Navy policies and expectations around how sailors and spouses were expected to craft their work/non-work boundary. Interviews with high-level officers and IT professionals also informed this understanding.

Data Analysis

⁴ By 2005, 90% of sailors had access to the Internet while deployed according to a survey of 7500 sailors in a 2005 Navy Communications Quick Poll.

We used an iterative qualitative approach to analyze the interview data, circling between data and concepts (Charmaz, 2014; Locke, 2002; Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). All interviews were taped, transcribed and imported into NVivo. We focused on the most frequently mentioned communication tools: email, social media, and other Internet portals (e.g., video calling and computer-to-phone texting). Both authors conducted five rounds of coding either face-to-face or through technology-mediated discussions of the emerging codes (Locke et al., 2008). The first two rounds focused on open coding with no predetermined frameworks or concepts in mind (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The third round involved reviewing nodes and, when appropriate, incorporating them into broader categories. For example, “creating intimacy,” “dream making,” and “emotional support” were existing nodes relevant for the larger category of “emotional work.” We then conducted selective coding to see relationships between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this step we iterated between the literature and our data, and the data, categories, and nodes were re-examined and clustered into types of boundary work, such as “segmenting behaviors” and “integrating behaviors.” In the fourth round of coding, both authors analyzed paired couple interviews to look for shared and discrepant stories of boundary work and responses to life events. It was in this step that it became clear that looking at individual tactics or preferences in isolation was insufficient. While engaging reviewer comments and with colleagues, we were drawn to the family systems literature and the Circumplex Model in particular (Olson, 2000).⁵ This model describes how families create and maintain a relational system, aligning with what we were describing as relational boundary work.

Therefore, in a fifth round of focused coding (Locke, 2002), we independently and then jointly analyzed the couple data, using the Circumplex Model as an inspiration. The Circumplex Model uses clinical scales and self-reports to determine the cohesion and adjustability at the

⁵ A special thanks to Michelle Barton for introducing us to this work.

couple or family level. We coded for three levels for each dimension (low, moderate, high), which created 9 possible combinations.⁶ For cohesion, low cohesion couples are disengaged and “individuals often do their own thing,” whereas high cohesion couples are enmeshed and “very dependent on one another” (Olson, 2000: 147). With moderate cohesion, couples are described as having some emotional closeness and some joint decision making, and they are able to be “independent from and connected to” each other (Olson, 2000: 145). We found that individual integrating and segmenting boundary work behaviors coded in the earlier rounds, specifically around joint decision making and emotional integration/segmentation, were helpful to understand the cohesion (togetherness v. separateness) enacted in couples’ boundary work.

We also coded for low, moderate and high levels of adjustability. Low adjustability couples did not find new ways to engage in their family roles; thus, the physical separation meant they felt unable to engage in parent or spousal roles. High adjustability couples were erratic and unpredictable in how they enacted their family roles (with little stability); for example, involving the other in decisions at some points and excluding them at others. Moderate adjustability reflects “the ability to change when appropriate” (Olson, 2000: 149). In addition to re-examining our role-related integration and segmentation nodes to code adjustability of boundary work (e.g., “active parenting”), we also examined our “secondary adjustment” node from open coding. The node “secondary adjustment” described how couples worked around their physical separation to fulfill their joint roles.

When individual patterns of boundary work differed across the couple this impacted our couple-level coding. For example, if both sailor and spouse reported they created an emotional bond via email and made joint decisions, they were coded as moderate or high cohesion.

⁶ Clinicians consider four levels of each dimension, creating 16 combinations. However, the middle two categories are associated with similar outcomes. Given that, and our number of interviewees, we simplified the model by collapsing the original two middle categories to create a “moderate” level.

However, if a sailor emailed home a great deal and tried to engage in decision-making, but the spouse wasn't responsive (or vice versa), we coded this couple as low cohesion. The *couple* operated separately despite one person's integration across the work/non-work boundary. If only the individual level had been considered, the sailor in this latter example would be considered an integrator. By taking a non-responsive spouse at home into account, however, the couple is coded as low cohesion (e.g., more separate). Couples were coded as moderate or high adjustability when at least one person changed how they enacted their role during deployment.

In this last coding step we also coded for couple resilience and organizational commitment. In the family literature, resilience is defined as "successful adaptation to adversity" (Carr & Kellas, 2018, p. 68). In our data, couples discussed how they communicated during deployment (a difficult and stressful situation). By examining open coding nodes such as "then vs. now" and "transition home" we classified couples as high or low resilience. High resilience couples were those that had positively adapted; low resilience couples were those where one or both parties feel their boundary work efforts were not working. For organizational commitment, we examined open coding nodes such as "intent to remain" and "attitude to Navy" (from questions asked of both the sailor and spouse). For all but one couple, the couple agreed whether the sailor was likely to remain in the Navy for the 20 years necessary to be eligible for retirement. Such intention was coded as high commitment. Intention to exit the Navy after their current obligation or a negative attitude was coded as low commitment (sailors enlist for a set number of years and choose whether to re-enlist at regular intervals).

Independent of the coding of the couple interviews, we examined the archival data and interviews with Navy supervisors to assess organizational expectations. We focused on explicit policies and instructions about when and how couples should communicate while deployed.

FINDINGS

Organizational Policies and Expectations

The Navy actively worked to shape how sailors and their spouses communicate across the work/non-work boundary. Morale and identity concerns motivated the organization to encourage engagement with spouses off the ship (e.g., integration behaviors). Supervisors asked if sailors had emailed home that day and understood that when email was down “the stress level just went up.” The Navy had expectations not just about how much communication happened but what was communicated. Explicit instructions were given to Navy members and their families on topics such as sharing the minutiae of daily life as well as sharing feelings: “Write...about your daily existence, your plans for the future, and your thoughts and feelings to help maintain your emotional connection...” (U.S. Navy, 2010: 28). This involvement of families was expected to “improve retention” (Chief of Naval Operations, 2010: 11), and online trainings inspired spouses to identify with the organization, “you (the spouse) are important to the success of this command!” (Naval Fleet and Naval Support Center website). These interactions across the work/non-work boundary helped with workplace identity (as both sailors and spouses were encouraged to prioritize and identify with the Navy) and were critical for morale. As one sailor explained, “it’s a cold day in hell if I can’t use email.”

On the other hand, the Navy counseled both sailors and spouses on what not to share. Productivity and security concerns prompted organizational guidelines around segmentation and censorship. Supervisors observed that with too much communication from home “they can’t perform or they’re distracted.” Sailors were told to “think carefully” about what they share. For spouses, guidelines suggested: “Never draft and send an emotional message” (U.S. Navy, 2007) and “try to limit venting your frustrations so your sailor looks forward to his/her

communications” (U.S. Navy, 2010: 33). These suggestions for spouses were explicitly tied to organizational needs: “You don’t want to hinder your service member’s ability to focus on the job, so think carefully before you write about problems at home” (Sather, 2000).

Thus, the Navy encouraged a mix of integration *and* segmentation behaviors for both parties: integrating behaviors to improve workplace morale and organizational identity, and segmenting behaviors to increase productivity and ensure operational security. In addition, by providing “constant reminders” and using situational controls, the Navy regularly asked sailors to modify how they would normally interact with one another (see Stanko & Beckman, 2015, for an analysis of how the Navy exerted boundary control over sailors’ communications off the ship). The Navy encouraged couples to increase or decrease their work/non-work interactions depending on the circumstance. When work was busy, or security tight, supervisors discouraged an email home. The Navy thus expected, and policies reinforced, flexibility; as Allison explained, a Navy wife needs to be “flexible and you have to be easy going and you have to take things as they are, [because]...if you are not flexible you are not going to be able to survive.” Too much integration might be counter-productive for the organization, but too much segmentation might reduce morale. Individual boundary work behaviors were thus filtered through these organizational expectations and directives. The Navy encouraged relational boundary work among couples that was both moderately cohesive and moderately flexible.

Couples’ Relational Boundary Work: Cohesion and Adjustability

We next examined the boundary work engaged in by employee and spouse as the individual components to couple-level cohesion and adjustability. The integration and segmentation boundary work engaged in by individuals reflected many of the same tactics seen in earlier work (e.g., Kreiner, et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Some sailors kept their email up

on their work computer to immediately receive and respond to any email from home. Other sailors were largely disconnected, not involved with decisions at home and more passively or irregularly receiving emails from home. Individuals were constantly making decisions about the extent to which they tried to integrate or segment across the work/non-work boundary. Looking at couples' paired boundary work behaviors, we coded for cohesion and adjustability.

Cohesion. We first coded for the separateness or togetherness of couples across the work/non-work boundary (see Table 1). Couples that expressed high levels of emotional closeness and made most decisions jointly were coded as high cohesion. Jessica (a sailor) described her close emotional connection with her spouse at home, Dean, "You know Dean and I email each other so much...I don't know how we ever managed before each other." Dean described, "No topic is off limits, everything is discussed via email." Jessica continues, "He doesn't make any decision that I don't make." Their intense communication facilitated their cohesion. High cohesion couples lacked separateness and used their technological capabilities to maximize their togetherness despite physical separation.

At the other extreme, some couples displayed low cohesion. These couples made independent decisions. Maggie managed the home front while Aaron, her husband, was overseas, "I had to be mom and dad, and parent both ways... and I did all the bills." Maureen described her situation similarly, "It's like we do things individually and then it's like we just make up for what the other one doesn't cover...I don't like to get his permission." These couples either "hide" their feelings or are so focused on work, like Dante, that they "didn't even have a chance to feel that [love/missing] genuinely." As Dante explained, he remained detached from home, "if I had a rough, rough day, I don't want to hear about her rough day or whatever." Couples with low cohesion functioned largely separately.

Other couples operated with moderate cohesion – consistently sharing some decisions or feelings, but withholding others. As Bruce described, he and his wife Lori remained emotionally close but she made most of the decisions: “we connected on a personal level heart to heart it wasn't so difficult...[but] she makes all the [household] decisions...stuff like that she takes care of.” The moderation served to protect their spouse from worrying; as Phil explained, “So it’s just self-censoring on a consideration level. Just saying ‘I’m thinking about them and I’m going to write an email,’ rather than dumping everything into it.” Spouses were concerned about hurting or distracting the other, as Taniqua explained,

It gets overwhelming doing everything, no spouse...It kind of eats away at you, so I’d try to shield that depression or that sadness. I didn’t want him to see that. I didn’t want to create a bad home vibe when we talked; I always wanted to be upbeat or looking forward to when we see each other or what have you. I tried not to make it sad.

Moderately cohesive couples allowed the “at work” spouse to maintain some emotional closeness and be involved in major decision-making. Nicole and Kevin’s daughter going to college was “a big decision... those were some things we discussed and researched.” These couples jointly balanced togetherness and separateness across the work/non-work boundary.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Adjustability. The second dimension of relational boundary work was adjustability (see Table 2). Couples with high adjustability were unpredictable in how they enacted their shared roles, often acting in erratic ways and engaging with each other in an impulsive manner. As Jana recounted, “Depending upon the day, like if I’m trying to get a new pet from it, I’ll be very nice... There are [other] times when I just tell him, ‘you know what, I’m packing up. You keep your job.’” The unpredictability made it difficult for couples to anticipate and coordinate their interactions. Sean described some frustration with how his wife, Molly, would flip flop on how

much involvement she wanted from him, “She would give me a list of things she wanted to do, but a lot of them I wasn’t able to do... She likes it that way [not involving me]. She’s kind of a control freak.” Sean never knew what to expect. Sometimes his wife wanted him involved (giving him a list); other times he was excluded (which he attributed to her being a control freak). Other couples first engaged jointly in problem-solving then reversed course and one of them acted independently (see Table 2, 1st quote for High Adjustability).

At the other extreme were couples with low adjustability who failed to modify their shared roles across the work/non-work boundary and were thus only minimally reactive. These sailors metaphorically threw up their hands, like Maureen, and said, “there’s not much you can do.” Dante felt “like my hands were tied” when the car broke down. Yasmine complained that her husband at home, Johnny, “really sucks” at picking up the slack and sending gifts to her or family members on special occasions while she is away.

The couples with moderate adjustability were judiciously reactive and responsive in how they enacted their shared roles, and they were more fluid and reflexive. As Vanessa explained, she and her husband created a rule for communicating,

We came up with like a little rule... If you hadn’t written in three days, the cutoff was three days and then you had to write and even if was just one sentence to let the other person know ‘Hey, um, doing okay. Just really busy and too tired. You know, so everything is fine, don’t worry about me, I will write more as soon as I find a minute.’

Couples with moderate adjustability were able to modify how they engaged in their roles from afar. Teresa asked her husband, Dylan, to step in when she “was having problems with the kids,” and Dylan engaged with his son over email “just like a conversation we would have face to face.” Similarly, Taniqua explained how she involved her husband, Shane,

We kind of figured it through, but we tried to keep him involved in that way [with math homework]... We can figure out how to fix the toilet; we can figure out how to fix the car, or we can figure other stuff out, but we’ve got to figure that out [keeping him involved].

Couples adjusted how they worked together in their joint roles by one or both parties reflexively modifying a shared role expectation in order to meet the needs of the other.

Relational Boundary Work Outcomes: Couple Resilience and Organizational Commitment

We explored how patterns of cohesion and adjustability were associated with two outcomes: couple resilience and organizational commitment (see Table 3).

High resilience couples successfully adapted to the challenges of relational boundary work across the work/non-work boundary despite their long separation. Jimmy stated, “We learn to appreciate each other more [each deployment]... I try to make it feel that I'm there with her and that she's there with me. We kind of try to make it feel like that.” As sailor Alex described,

...after a while you just learn what works best or what the person on the other side of the phone needs... she needed me to just be [me]. She didn't need me to be Petty Officer Alex, she didn't need the supervisor, she didn't need this guy. She just needs her husband there. Knowing that that's what she needed and feeling pretty confident that that is who I was.” [Alex/Sarah]

Couples with low resilience either did not adapt to the challenges of navigating the work/non-work boundary or adapted in a negative way. Jana described how her decisions upset her husband Rick: “I wouldn't tell him [about household purchases]...He said, ‘Why didn't you talk to me about this?’” Rick, in turn, described how they struggled to engage in their spousal roles: “[Jana would say] ‘Are you mad at me?’ That type of thing. ‘I need your help why aren't you helping me?’ A part of the reason why we had our troubles.” Their negative adaptation to deployment involved frustration and anger, thus they were coded as low resilience.

We also examined organizational commitment. Couples with high organizational commitment generally had positive attitudes and were planning to re-enlist. Max's plans were “pretty much 100%” to stay in the Navy. His wife Janelle, who had chaired the homecoming celebration for her husband's ship, eagerly said, “We are kind of excited...everybody's on board

[with her husband's next work assignment].” In contrast, couples with low organizational commitment expressed doubt about staying in the Navy. Julie, a spouse at home, explained, “I’m ready for him to be done [with the Navy].” Her husband Adam agreed, “I’m pretty sure [I won’t be re-enlisting].”

 Insert Table 3 and Figure 1 about here

Relational Boundary Work Configurations

In Figure 1 we mapped couples by their cohesion and adjustability (low, moderate or high), observing five out of nine possible theoretical combinations. We theorize about the non-observed combinations in the discussion. When couples were coded as high resilience, we represented them with O’s in Figure 1; when coded as low resilience, we represented them with X’s. With moderate adjustability and moderate cohesion, we locate *Balanced Couples* in the center of Figure 1 (Cell 5). At the extremes of the figure, we observe boundary configurations with low cohesion and either high adjustability (*Chaotic Couples* in Cell 1) or low adjustability (*Rigid Couples* in Cell 7). We observed two patterns with couples extreme on one dimension and moderate on the other dimension: *Enmeshed Couples* with high cohesion and moderate adjustability (Cell 6), and *Insecure Couples* with moderate cohesion and high adjustability (Cell 2). Overall, couples exhibiting moderate adjustability were resilient across levels of cohesion (seen in the O’s across the middle row of Figure 1). This mirrors the organizational expectations supporting moderate adjustability.

Figure 1 also displays organizational commitment expressed by couples for the different boundary configurations (shading of the boxes represents high, low or mixed commitment).

Couples with moderate cohesion have the highest organizational commitment (seen in the light gray middle column of Figure 1), consistent with organizational expectations.

For each of the five observed boundary configurations in Figure 1, we highlight one couple in-depth and include quotes from a variety of other couples in Table 4.

 Insert Table 4 about here

Balanced Couples. Balanced couples represent 12 couples in our data (Figure 1, Cell 5). We described these couples as balanced because they worked together to create a work/non-work boundary that had moderate levels of cohesion and adjustability. These couples made a point of connecting and sharing with each other, but they did not share everything. Gabriel, an enlisted sailor with 13 years of tenure, made a point to send an email at the end of a long and draining shift, ““Hey, I’m tired and I just wanted to let you know that I’m still alive.’ That’s the whole E-mail, you know?” Gabriel made sure to express his appreciation and connect emotionally even though this was not his normal communication style (adjusting his behavior). As he said, “I found myself trying harder to express how I feel.” For her part, his wife Vanessa of 7.5 years was comfortable paying the bills and handling the financial decisions, but for bigger decisions she would say, “Hey, is this going to be okay with you, or do you want me to wait?” She also adjusted how she engaged her spouse while he was away by withholding information that she thought might upset him. For example, the dog required surgery, and she did not share the details until everything was resolved. She explained,

Because I know how precious this dog is to him, and so I didn’t want to make him nervous or anything, because I knew he was the lead petty officer and he was really, really working a lot...it felt like it’s something that important to him would just unnecessarily worry him and disturb his peace, peace of mind.

Vanessa and Gabriel were balanced; they shared some but not all decisions and emotions (moderate cohesion), and they modified how they engaged in the spousal role to fit the situation (moderate adjustability).

All of the balanced couples with this pattern of relational boundary work were resilient and their joint relational boundary work helped manage the challenges of a long-term separation. Reflecting on how they adapted to their situation (and positive adaptation is the essence of resilience), Vanessa stated, “I think he did pretty well, and he, what he did [during deployment] I actually liked it...I would say he was talking more...and helping, he was more emotionally engaged... in daily life than being here at home.” She highlights their emotional closeness (cohesion) and ability to modify behavior (adjustability) as benefits that increased their resilience. Balanced couples also had a long-term commitment to the organization. Most anticipated serving the full 20 years of service required to be eligible for military retirement benefits. As Gabriel stated, “My job situation is pretty awesome...I’m pretty respected. I probably will be up for advancement.” Thus balanced couples had resilience in their relationship and a commitment to the organization.

Chaotic Couples. In contrast, chaotic couples engaged in relational boundary work characterized by low cohesion and high adjustability (Figure 1, Cell 1). These three couples were disengaged from each other and erratic in how they fulfilled joint roles. Tacy and Oscar, married for 5.5 years, engaged in very little joint decision making across the work/non-work boundary. Oscar complained that she made decisions without his input: “She figures it’s her home and it’s her decision...she usually goes I’m home and you’re not... she usually takes care of it the most expensive way and then emails me about it.” Yet, he continued, “I usually email and say what to do, but she usually doesn’t listen to it.” Separate decision-making resulted in low cohesion.

We observed high adjustability in how they engaged each other while deployed. Oscar vacillated in his response to her: “[How would you deal with problems at home?] Try to discuss it. If not, to hell with it.” For her part, sometimes Tacy withheld information in order to avoid conflict. For example, Tacy recalled, “I wanted to go see my mom and I had to tell him that mom was paying for the ticket [which wasn’t true] so that he wouldn’t holler at me about it.” Rather than withholding information to preserve closeness or protect the spouse (as with the *Balanced Couples*), Tacy’s withholding was to avoid conflict. Yet other times she shared information that created conflict. She recounted their heated arguments when she revealed an online affair,

This last deployment I had gotten kind of involved with someone and I cared about them a lot and he found out and that’s the situation we had to discuss...It was a wake up call for him. There was heated discussion...

Tacy also went to great lengths to adjust her schedule to communicate with Oscar: “I have a notifier that notifies me when he emails me. So if it’s 2 or 3 in the morning I have my speakers turned on and I jump up and get online.” Yet the unpredictability in how they engaged with each other often meant that their adjustments (like getting up at 2am) were not appreciated.

Chaotic couples had low resilience and noted dissatisfaction with their relational boundary work. Oscar expressed his dissatisfaction with Tacy’s boundary work: “Most of the time it’s just bullsh**...it’s almost like deception.” Oscar grumbled that she “emails that a car broke down or something. It’s not exactly stuff you want to really hear about.” Tacy complained, “I was getting very upset at him...[for] not listening.” Oscar and Tacy withheld information from each other and engaged in independent decision making, which highlighted their separateness. Being unpredictable and erratic in how they engaged in their roles also contributed to low resilience for the couple.

Chaotic couples had mixed levels of commitment to the organization. Only three years in, Oscar already planned to serve a full 20 years: “It’s a one of a kind job. It’s a dirty job and someone has to do it...The wife knows my goals and she doesn’t exactly like it, but she respects it.” However, another sailor in this configuration, Sean, stated, “I probably won’t stay in the Navy...there’s very little incentive.” Sean offers separation from his children and their activities as an explanation for why he is unlikely to re-enlist (suggesting a linkage between low cohesion and low organizational commitment). Overall, these couples had low levels of resilience and mixed levels of commitment to the organization.

Rigid Couples. Rigid couples engaged in relational boundary work characterized by low cohesion and low adjustability (Figure 1, Cell 7). Relatively inexperienced in marriage, they largely lived independent lives, making their own decisions and not relying on each other for frequent or deep emotional support. These five couples found it easier to put their relationships on hold while the sailor was at sea. Dante and Allison, who had been married for 2 years, had a low level of cohesion. Dante, an enlisted sailor, often disengaged emotionally during deployment so that he could focus on work: “I’m more cold, less receptive during deployment, because I’m more concerned with doing the job at hand.” He continued: “There were the times I felt like I don’t really want to deal with this right now or whatever...I don’t want to hear about her rough day or whatever. I want to go off and bitch, turn on the TV, and then go to sleep.” Like most rigid couples, Allison, the spouse at home, made most decisions. Happy with this division of labor, Dante would object when she did involve him, saying, “honey, just take care of it.” Although Allison desired emotional closeness, Dante’s response made it difficult to be cohesive.

Dante and Allison also demonstrated low adjustability. Allison wanted help from her husband when problems occurred at home, but Dante felt powerless and was unable to adjust and

help in a meaningful way. In one example, the car wouldn't start. Allison described how she, "...didn't know what to do...I asked Dante a lot about what I can do or should do..." and Dante responded, "well, figure it out; find a mechanic, talk to your friends, something. I felt super helpless. Normally I'd go and make those calls and try to figure it out." Couples with moderate adjustability (like *Balanced Couples*) would email, talk on the phone, or brainstorm solutions with each other when the spouse experienced car trouble. This couple was unable to change how they engaged as spouses across the work/non-work boundary.

Overall, low levels of both adjustability and cohesion were offered as explanations for their inability to adapt to deployment. Dante wasn't able to engage in joint roles in a meaningful way: "I don't think I was very part of a relationship or many of the decisions that she made...I had my own life, she had her own." Allison sought emotional support and intimacy, but didn't receive it: "The way that I was looking for help...is more emotional help...that is a really important part the intimacy but you can't – the way it is you cannot really show that." For these couples, low resilience occurred alongside problems of adjustability and cohesion.

These couples were mixed in their commitment to the organization. Dante explained, "I really don't want to...[but] more than likely this is probably the best bet, just to go ahead and stay in and continue getting the benefits." Allison hoped he would leave given their lack of cohesion, "I value time together a lot...when it comes to [extended separation] it is just too much."

Enmeshed Couples. Enmeshed couples were characterized by moderate adjustability and high cohesion. Enmeshed Couples talked about any and all topics of conversation. In direct contrast to the similarly inexperienced (in marriage) *Rigid Couples*, however, the togetherness of our *Enmeshed Couples* was intense. Jimmy and Ariane, with 4 years tenure and 2 years married, were one of the three couples in this configuration. Jimmy, an enlisted sailor, said,

I tell my wife pretty much every single thing... I tell her the best of what I can think of, of how much I love her... And all my feelings about different people. Like if they make me angry, or if they're doing something stupid. Stuff like that. And then Ariane does the same. She e-mails me pretty much about--every single thing that I just told you, she does back.

Ariane agreed, "We openly communicate that way because it's the only way we have," and "...the caring and the compassion definitely can shine through in [emails to Jimmy]." These couples thus maintained and expected high closeness across the work/non-work boundary.

These couples also demonstrated moderate adjustability in their shared roles. Ariane adjusted what she expected from her spouse by going into "independent" mode for household duties when Jimmy deployed even though they had a "very equal relationship" generally:

Basically, as soon as I drop him off to go under way, that day, it's like something changes in me. I go to independent mode. I have to change something, otherwise I miss him too bad and it doesn't work. I go from having him around and being able to rely and depend on him for things, to, 'K. Now I have to do everything myself.' If something breaks at the house, it's on me to do it.

These couples displayed high resilience; they positively adapted and had a very close connection across the work/non-work boundary. As Ariane explained, the adjustments worked:

He always makes it very clear how much he loves me, and how much he misses me, and how much he cares about me. And that in itself is fulfilling a role. As far as husbandly duties like fixing stuff around the house and whatever, obviously he can't do that... [but] he always makes it very clear how much he cares...and that in itself is enough for me.

Despite their resilience, Enmeshed couples expressed low organizational commitment. Jimmy was quite blunt: "I really don't like my job all that much...I would rather be doing something else." Ariane agreed, "As far as his work situation goes, you know, I hate it...We have [good benefits], but it's almost not worth it because I hate being away from him." They describe their desires for high cohesion as problematic for their organizational commitment.

Insecure Couples. Insecure couples exhibited high adjustability paired with moderate cohesion (Cell 2). Matt, enlisted for 11 years, had been married to Tracy for 7 years. Like the other five couples in this configuration, they were moderately cohesive and engaged in joint decision-making. Matt said, “Conversating [via email] about what we were going to do [whether to sell car] because there were more payments and that kind of stuff. Just being able to really communicate. I got—I need to know A B C D. I need to know all the steps and processes, and she would write it out and talk about it.” Tracy also worked to generate emotional closeness:

A book that I was reading. The Love Languages... for a couple months, that’s all we did on this one string was just questions and activities from that. It was really nice. We kind of got to talk about stuff that we haven’t talked about in years, and reminisce, and also find out new things that we never really asked about.

Matt and Tracy also had high adjustability. Tracy often dramatically changed how she enacted her roles as parent and spouse and this changed how Matt could fulfill his joint roles. In some cases Tracy accommodated Matt’s parenting preferences,

I wanted to take the kids to my mother in-law’s house for the weekend. And he was like, ‘no I don’t want you to do that. I want you to keep them there with you.’ And I was like, ‘I need a break’. He was like, ‘I don’t want my kids going over there. I want them to be with you as much as possible.’... So I kept them with me that weekend...We did it his way.

But in other instances she did not. Matt told Tracy he wanted to be a part of planning their son’s birthday celebration, “I would’ve liked to [help plan]. She was here doing it. When she gets the ball rolling on that kind of stuff she just goes. If I’m not here, I’m not...” Tracy agreed, saying,

I did a big birthday party for my son. That was an ordeal because he [Matt] felt that I shouldn’t have invited as many kids. We did it at Chuck E. Cheese...he wanted me to just get the simple package. [But] I went all out. Got the deluxe...

And in still other instances, Tracy would involve Matt in the conversation but then make a decision on her own. Tracy says, “We were able to bounce numbers back and forth between us and then with the [car] dealership and with the bank.” After extensive “back and forth,” which

created cohesion in the moment, Tracy explains, “we still ended up not getting it because I didn’t want to get it. I went through all that drama just to satisfy his desire.”

Matt and Tracy’s problems with adjustability (very high) showed up in a lack of resilience. Tracy was erratic in how she engaged him in decisions, and Matt was unsatisfied with his involvement. He relayed, “I feel like that part of my life [being a dad and a husband] gets cut off...and not being able to do it is frustrating.” Tracy recognized his struggle but she was frustrated by his desire to be involved in so many things,

I was trying to get him to understand. ‘I know you’re impatient. I know you want to know everything that’s going on; you have to understand where you are. You’re not going to get E-mail and be able to talk on the phone like you want to so get over it.’ But he wasn’t getting over it.

Matt and Tracy were moderately cohesive, and they communicated frequently, but decision-making was erratic and unpredictable, and this high adjustability prevented them having a positive adaptation to the circumstances – they were both frustrated by how they made decisions (or didn’t). Despite this lack of resilience, these couples had high levels of organizational commitment. As Matt stated, “[this deployment was] ...a real productive assignment, productive tour. I’ve gotten a lot and I’ve learned a lot from it.”

Insert Figure 2 about here

Across these observed boundary configurations, we observed clear patterns between relational boundary work (levels of cohesion and adjustability) and our key outcomes (couple resilience and organizational commitment). Although we do not have longitudinal data to test this association, we theorize in Figure 2 the set of relationships suggested by our data. We first theorize that organizational expectations and policies shape individual boundary work (and vice versa; see Stanko & Beckman, 2015, for an analysis of the interplay between the Navy’s efforts

to exert boundary control and how individuals respond). The Navy encouraged a flexible mix of integration and segmentation behaviors and this was an important backdrop to relational boundary work. Individual boundary work behaviors are also component to the couples' relational boundary work. For example, integration by both parties creates cohesion, and unpredictable integration and segmentation by one of the partners can create extreme adjustability.

Our data suggested that moderate adjustability benefits couple resilience (see also Conger & Conger, 2002). Couples described how they were able to positively adapt to their situation by deliberately and fluidly changing how they engaged as a parent or spouse across the work/non-work boundary. Both low and high adjustability, in contrast, created problems for couple resilience. Here we heard from couples frustrated because a spouse did not adjust enough (e.g., the spouse felt helpless or threw up their hands) or because their partner was erratic and unpredictable (e.g., changing what they shared or asked for). With respect to cohesion, we theorize that when couples are able to maintain some togetherness across the work/non-work boundary, this facilitates their commitment to the organization. In contrast, we expect low or high cohesion to create problems for organizational commitment. Couples that felt too separated and distant from activities at home expressed low commitment, as did couples that were enmeshed and talked about everything with their partner. These patterns were consistent with this organizational context, where Navy expectations and policies did not support total integration or total segmentation.

Finally, although we cannot assess this with our cross-sectional data, we expect resiliency to provide a positive feedback loop (Williams et al., 2017) to shape subsequent boundary work. In addition, organizational commitment will feed back into the policies and expectations of the

organization. As the bottom reciprocal arrow indicates, the organization also benefits from couple resilience as resilience increases organizational commitment (as well as vice versa; see also Caligiuri et al., 1998; Ferguson et al., 2016). Figure 2 presents this initial model.

DISCUSSION

We make three core contributions to understanding how employees manage the work/non-work boundary. First, we take a relational approach to examining boundary work and thus move from an individual level of analysis to a relational system. In doing so, we define the construct of relational boundary work to include the joint behaviors engaged in by multiple parties to co-construct the work/non-work boundary. Second, we identify cohesion and adjustability as two key dimensions of relational boundary work. Cohesion captures the amount of togetherness or separateness in the relational system, and adjustability describes the amount of change in how joint roles are enacted. The importance of cohesion and adjustability demonstrate that individual integration and segmentation behaviors alone are not sufficient to understand a relational system. Finally, we demonstrate the consequences of different patterns of relational boundary work (e.g., couple resilience and organizational commitment). We develop a process model based on the data, and we argue that problems with adjustability (when couples have very frequent or very infrequent changes in their shared roles) reduce couple resilience such that couples are unable to positively adapt to adverse situations. Organizational commitment, on the other hand, benefits from moderate levels of cohesion in relational boundary work. Couples who exhibit moderate cohesion and moderate adjustability across the work/non-work boundary are the most resilient and committed to this organization. We discuss each of these contributions in more depth and identify fruitful areas for future research.

Developing a Relational Approach to Boundary Work

Our work underscores and extends the importance of examining boundary work using a relational perspective. Trefalt (2013) first articulated the relational nature of boundary work. For example, when a clergy member's spouse answers the home phone, they draw on a relationship to manage the work/non-work boundary (Kreiner et al., 2009). Yet this work does not incorporate the perspective, needs or actions of the other (e.g., supervisor or family member) despite recognizing that the boundary is co-constructed and negotiated between multiple parties. We explicitly build theory around how the boundary is co-constructed through relational boundary work. We consider the actions and behaviors of multiple parties responsible for the work/non-work boundary.

Our research suggests high levels of individual segmentation or integration behaviors may not be effective in a relational system because these behaviors are likely to push the system to extreme levels (e.g., very low or very high cohesion). This challenges work on boundary management styles (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kossek et al., 2012). For example, Kossek and colleagues describe "Work Firsters" (individuals prioritizing work) as a sustainable boundary management style. The comparable boundary configuration in our context, *Rigid Couples*, also focused intently on work. These couples, however, often had the spouse wanting more from their partner. The couples didn't adapt to the situation or adapted in a negative manner that created frustration and distress. This lack of resilience suggests problems sustaining this pattern of behavior. Among *Balanced Couples*, who were resilient, some sailors would have liked to focus more on work (and be more like "Work Firsters"). But they adjusted to the needs of their spouse in order to maintain relationships at home (e.g., spending time emailing home despite the fact that they were exhausted). These findings shift our understanding of boundary work; while pure individual boundary styles (integrating, segmenting) have pros and cons, resilient couples engage

in boundary work behaviors that include *both* integrating and segmenting and shift based on the circumstances of the moment or needs of their partner.

Our focus on the joint boundary work of couples is consistent with work-conflict literature that takes into account both parties in a couple. In fact, alignment of the couples' experiences may be more important than the behavior itself (Wilson et al., 2018). The work-family literature has studied the positive and negative spillover effects from one domain to another (Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), and this includes how the actions of one spouse influence the satisfaction of the other (Ferguson et al., 2016; Russo, Ollier-Malaterre, Kossek & Ohana, 2018). But our research suggests another pathway. One partner may help the other build resilience and thus commitment in difficult organizational circumstances (see Petriglieri & Obodaru, 2018, for evidence a partner helps the other develop their professional identity). This is theorized in Figure 2: couple resilience positively impacts organizational commitment (and vice versa). When one member of the couple is extremely dissatisfied with the work/non-work boundary, creating low resilience for the couple, this too may bleed to creating lower commitment to the organization itself.

Relational Boundary Work Configurations and Outcomes

We draw on family systems theory to develop two dimensions of relational boundary work: cohesion and adjustability. Individual boundary work behaviors, taken together, establish the cohesion and adjustability of the couple. But integration and segmentation behaviors describe more than the *frequency* of communication across the work/non-work boundary; they also help us understand *what* crosses the boundary and what does not. Frequent communication does not necessarily suggest cohesion. What types of decisions do they make together? What do they do to establish emotional closeness? Future research needs to examine specific boundary work

behaviors to understand their impact on the overall relational system. Some types of integration may create distress among couples or be incompatible with the organization. Individual boundary work preferences and behaviors are insufficient to understand couple resilience or organizational commitment; cohesion and adjustability shed more light.

We observe five boundary configurations across these two dimensions, but we allow for and theorize about nine possible configurations of relational boundary work (displayed in Figure 1). The couples expected to be the most resilient and functional (Olson & Gorall, 2003) sit in the center of Figure 1 (Cell 5). This was the most prevalent category in our data, *Balanced Couples*, with moderate cohesion and moderate adjustability. It is perhaps not surprising that these couples were the most experienced in marriage and in the organization. Operating in alignment with organizational expectations, we found these couples were both resilient and committed to the organization. Moderation in relational boundary work created a relational system in balance – a system with positive couple and organizational outcomes.

In contrast, unbalanced couples are extreme on both dimensions (Olson, 2000). We observed two of these four possible configurations (Figure 1: Cells 1, 3, 7, 9): *Rigid Couples* (low cohesion, low adjustability) and *Chaotic Couples* (low cohesion, high adjustability). Rigid couples were disengaged and resisted changing how they enacted their roles across the work/non-work boundary (Cell 7). Chaotic couples were also disengaged but they were erratic and unpredictable in how they enacted their roles (Cell 1). These couples showed low resilience as couples – expressing frustration with the patterns of relational boundary work across the work/non-work boundary. They experienced mixed commitment to the organization. Yet even when organizational commitment was high, the lack of resilience among couples suggests a

relational system out of balance and the potential for negative long-term effects. This points to the importance of a broader perspective that incorporates multiple actors.

Theoretically, the other two extreme configurations occur with high cohesion and either high or low adjustability (Cells 3, 9). Couples with high cohesion (complete togetherness) and high adjustability would be overly interdependent and such a connection may be difficult to sustain. The erratic adjustability of one person, along with high cohesion, suggests a couple intensely reactive and co-dependent. In contrast, couples with high cohesion and low adjustability would need to a work/non-work boundary with enough permeability that they had no need to adjust their joint role expectations. With minimal adjustment in their shared roles, they need a highly stable organizational and relational environment because the couple is ill-prepared for change (e.g., the loss of a job, an illness, a change in organizational demands). The Navy organizational context is not conducive to either of these types of relational boundary work among couples (high cohesion or extreme adjustability). Such configurations may be possible in other settings. Yet theoretically we expect all four configurations that are extreme on both dimensions to lack resilience (these are the four corners in Figure 1; Olson & Gorall, 2003), and this was observed for the two configurations where we have data.

We also theorize about four configurations where couples are high on one dimension and moderate on the other (Figure 1: Cells 2, 4, 6, 8). Olson (2000) suggests the couples in these cells can manage in the short-run but will need to move toward moderation on whatever dimension they are extreme. We first discuss the two configurations extreme on cohesion and moderate on adjustability (Cells 4, 6). The couples we observed with high cohesion and moderate adjustability (classified as *Enmeshed Couples*, Cell 6) were able to adjust their behavior to have very high levels of togetherness in their joint roles. In family systems research,

and consistent with our data, these couples tend to be in young relationships where high cohesion is more likely (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Yet the enmeshed couples' resilience undermines organizational commitment because they want to maintain high togetherness. The Navy career makes it difficult for them to be as cohesive in their family interactions as they would like. For enmeshed couples, it is theorized they will have better long-term resilience if they create some separateness (Olson & Gorall, 2003), but it may be possible to sustain in another organizational context. At the other end of the spectrum are couples with low cohesion and moderate adjustability (Cell 4). Conceptually, these couples adjust to their situation but fail to maintain togetherness. We observed one couple in this category, and this couple experienced significant difficulties as they re-adjusted to post-deployment life. Their low cohesion across the work/non-work boundary created challenges when they were physically together. Their adjustments had allowed them to enact their joint roles (e.g., an open Skype call Christmas morning; finding a predictable daily time to talk despite work shifts and changing time zones) but not they did not develop any substantive togetherness and felt completely independent. They were organizationally committed but not resilient. Theoretically, we expect these couples would benefit from more cohesion, moving them toward the center of Figure 1 (Olson & Gorall, 2003).

The final two configurations had couples high on one dimension (adjustability) and moderate on the other dimension (cohesion; Figure 1: Cells 2, 8). *Insecure Couples*, with moderate cohesion but high adjustability, were erratic in how they engaged their spousal role (e.g., sometimes involving their partner; sometimes ignoring them; Cell 2). This high adjustability created friction for the couples and they exhibited low resilience. Yet their lack of resilience did not undermine organizational commitment (perhaps their moderate cohesion was helpful). The relational system is not balanced, however, suggesting long-term concern. We did

not observe any couples in the final possible configuration (moderate cohesion, low adjustability; Cell 8). In an organizational setting with near continuous opportunities for work/non-work interactions (e.g., texting home any time of day), it may be possible to have moderate cohesion without requiring adjustability across the work/non-work boundary, but this is not the case in our context. The difficulty for couple resilience would come if, when facing difficult circumstances, they were still unable to adjust their roles. For all configurations, longitudinal data would help parse causality and untangle what are co-occurring relationships in our data. This would allow us to broadly test whether problems of adjustability are systematically associated with low resilience and problems of cohesion with low commitment.

Although we focus on cohesion and adjustability, there may be other possible dimensions to relational boundary work. Approach and avoidance boundary work have a relational component (Trefalt, 2013) and could usefully be examined in the context of a relational system. In addition, boundary work may have important emotional and instrumental elements that are more clearly revealed when a relational system is considered. This would align with the instrumental and affective paths described in the work-family literature (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Exploring other dimensions of relational boundary work may further illuminate the co-construction of the boundary. This would serve to reinforce the broader point: individual-level integration and segmentation behaviors do not explain what happens in a relational system. We need to examine the underlying factors, such as cohesion, adjustability, affect, or avoidance, because how relational boundary work manifests itself explains critical couple and organizational outcomes.

For family systems research, our work suggests the importance of extending beyond family outcomes. There are couples that are resilient but have low organizational commitment

(Enmeshed Couples; Figure 1: Cell 6). This suggests a narrower set of behaviors for positive relational *and* organizational outcomes than what a pure family systems approach would suggest. In addition, some couples without moderate levels of cohesion and adjustability may be resilient because of how their relational boundary work is supported within their organization.

Finally, although we look at couples, the co-construction of boundaries occurs in any relational system (Kahn et al., 2013), and these constructs may be usefully applied within an organizational system. For example, Kellogg (2012) examines how residents and doctors in two hospitals respond to regulations reducing the work week for residents to 80 hours. Cohesion and adjustability across different organizational roles may help explain how the organizational system responds. Resiliency is an emerging focus of organizational research, and these dimensions with a relational approach offer a fruitful direction forward (Kahn, Barton, Fisher, Heaphy, Reid, & Rouse, 2018; Williams et al., 2017; Van Der Vegt et al., 2015). In addition, we expect relational boundary work to be dynamic and to shift over time and based on circumstance. Examining movement within the relational system over time is also a worthwhile endeavor for future research (Kahn et al., 2013).

Organizational Expectations and Policies

This leads us to theorize about how relational boundary work may differ across organizational contexts, with different organizational policies and expectations. We observed moderate adjustability to be essential for couple resilience and moderate cohesion to be critical for organizational commitment. This may be a function of the organizational expectations and policies for a flexible mix of integration and segmentation. Couples needed to adjust their roles to be successful in this context (moderate adjustability), and the organization encourages some

blurring of the work/non-work boundary (and thus moderate cohesion). In the Navy setting it would be very difficult to create cohesion without some adjustability of shared roles.

In understanding the role of organizational context on relational boundary work, permeability and flexibility are two characteristics of organizational boundaries to consider (Ashforth et al., 2000). Low flexibility describes roles that allow infrequent role transitions (e.g., security guards cannot work from home) and high flexibility describes roles with pliable role transitions (e.g., professionals working from home on and off throughout an evening). When one partner's work role is less flexible, the partner with more flexibility may adjust their joint roles (e.g., spouse or parent) to accommodate the other's lack of work role flexibility. Permeability, the ability of individuals to move from one domain to another either physically or psychologically, is also important to consider. In addition to technology increasing permeability, organizational policies that increase or decrease boundary permeability and flexibility, such as telecommuting and onsite childcare, may also be important for relational boundary work (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013; Rousseau, 2015). Thus it would be useful to study relational boundary work across work contexts with varying levels of flexibility and permeability.

When there is low boundary permeability and low flexibility, organizations might advocate for much more segmentation. Retail and service organizations can restrict Facebook and Gmail on work computers, not allow personal devices on the floor, or even check in cellphones at the start of the workday. Complete attention may be demanded in a twelve-hour shift in an emergency room, or on a manufacturing floor. For many shift workers, organizations may find it best to have complete separateness while at work. For shorter periods, when there is not travel or longer-term separation, temporary boundaries that are quite rigid may be sustainable for the relationship (and the organization may be able to enforce that separation). This would

suggest a context where low cohesion and adjustability across the work/non-work boundary would be tenable – because the work boundary exists for eight hours at a time rather than eight months. This is an empirical question, however, because it also depends on the needs of the couple. The resilience of a relational system requires an ability to adapt under adverse circumstances. There are many situations for which eight hours of strict separation may be quite difficult. Illness, elder care, new babies -- all are examples of situations to which couples and their organizations may need to adapt. An investigation of other organizational contexts and individual circumstances would be beneficial.

At the other end of the spectrum are organizations that advocate for high levels of integration with high boundary permeability and high boundary flexibility. In such instances, couples may fall higher on the cohesion dimension, with spouses taking an active part in their partner's work life or even being part of the organization themselves (Kreiner et al., 2009; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). Such organizational preferences for integration may improve morale, especially when the work is boring (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Family businesses may be another example, where mother and daughter are supervisor and subordinate. In such contexts, all aspects of ones' lives may be intertwined. However, if supervisors are erratic in when they treat their employees as subordinates or as children (high adjustability), it is easy to imagine the difficulty this would create for both the child and other employees (Distelberg & Blow, 2011). Similarly, very low levels of adjustability would be challenging. In these cases the parent would always (or never) treat their child as an employee, and this may make non-work (or work) situations difficult. High permeability and high flexibility may encourage higher couple cohesion but still require moderate adjustability.

These organizational contexts where high integration is encouraged are also informative for organizations writ large. Technology is increasingly blurring the boundaries between work and non-work, and this is reducing the importance of spatial boundaries (Ollier-Malaterre, Jacobs & Rothbard, forthcoming). This makes relational boundary work more relevant. For example, outsiders such as spouses may be particularly important to organizations when there is more fluid movement between work and home, such as through technology and mobile devices (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013; Russo et al., 2018). This suggests that high levels of cohesion across the work/non-work boundary is becoming more prevalent. Although we did not focus on the fact that these couples were engaged in technologically-enabled boundary work (because we found the patterns similar across communication mediums and across time), all of the boundary work we discuss was enabled by technology. This suggests that the relational boundary work behaviors we observed here, that occurred virtually because of their extreme separation, may have broad resonance and applicability in today's world.

Future Research and Limitations

As noted earlier, one important extension is an examination of other organizational contexts. This would enable the study of the relational boundary work configurations we did not observe, and to observe whether the most balanced patterns of relational boundary work differ by organizational context. Even within our context, however, more research is needed. Enmeshed couples found their high desire for togetherness to be difficult to maintain in the Navy, where long separation was expected. Was this because highly cohesive couples are not likely to choose the military for employment? Because they were newly married? Or did their high levels of cohesion result from their low organizational commitment, as sailors sought engagement elsewhere (with their spouses)? In addition, rigid couples were more inexperienced in the Navy

and in marriage, and their low cohesion and low adjustability occurred alongside many instances of low commitment to the organization. With experience and training these couples might adopt more moderate levels of cohesion and adjustability and move toward a more balanced and sustainable pattern of relational boundary work (for this organization). In a follow up conversation, Dante expressed how much better he and his spouse managed during their second deployment. Longitudinal data is necessary to investigate these possibilities.

We note a few other limitations. Although we theorize about the co-construction of the work/non-work boundary by employees, spouses and organization, we could not directly link organizational policies with each couple's relational boundary work. A real-time examination of the three-way construction including employees, spouses, and supervisors would be useful.

Future research should also explore the role of gender. Although we interviewed female sailors, and they appeared across configurations (Balanced, Enmeshed, Rigid, Insecure), there may be gendered norms built into these configurations. It is also possible that organizational encouragement of both sailors *and* spouses to incorporate a Navy identity made the prioritization of work over home a shared belief (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Leslie, King & Clair, 2018). Spouses who refer to themselves as "Navy wives" may have a particular orientation to relational boundary work (and may help promote the prioritization of work).

Despite these limitations, we gained insights that might be generalizable to employees working in other types of organizations. For example, similar challenges are faced by employees on film sets and oil rigs (Bechky, 2006; Ely & Meyerson, 2010), as well as knowledge workers such as IT professionals and consultants who leave their home and families for most of the workweek (Ahuja, Chudoba, Kacmar, McKnight & George, 2007; Reid, 2015). Even in many high technology companies, intense work norms and long hours can make it difficult to enact and

maintain non-work roles (e.g., Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015; Kunda, 1992; Perlow, 1998). Our insights can be understood as broadly relevant to boundary work.

Conclusion

This leads to our final thought. Many individuals struggle to navigate work and non-work boundaries, juggling demands on multiple fronts. But these individual challenges are embedded in an organizational context and in partner relationships that together shape how one manages and feels about the organization. Although the military context is extreme, with regular separation, intense work demands, and reliance on technology, many of these aspects are increasingly prevalent in organizations. Organizations may be wise to understand the larger relational system in which their employees operate, and to understand the organization as but one actor in that system. What looks like strong organizational commitment may be undermined by couple-level dynamics (whether those be positive or negative dynamics). This is not to suggest organizations should seek to control these relationships but instead to be cognizant of making demands that might undermine the stability of the system. This means relational boundary work is of interest to individuals, couples, and organizations alike.

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TABLE 1: Relational Boundary Work: Cohesion Dimension*

Couple Cohesion	Description	Exemplary Quotations
<i>High</i>	Couples lack separateness.	<p>“We discuss it through email or telephone, we communicate constantly.” [Jessica/Dean] “From buying cars to picking the color... I do not ever recall ever being out of touch with her...” [Jessica/Dean]</p>
<i>Moderate</i>	Couples have some separateness and some togetherness.	<p>“I would say the majority became switched to me and I would just let him know what was going on... we would talk about how we miss each other... I think he shared a lot. He’d tell me what was going on with him, and people at work, and he would talk to me like he was still there.” [Walt/Paula]</p> <p>“But the day-to-day stuff I just do... he missed our middle child’s first communion last year. We’re Catholic, so I sent the pictures of her pretty white dress and then he can write back and tell her how pretty she looked.” [Max/Janelle]</p>
<i>Low</i>	Couples operate separately.	<p>“really our day to day lives were completely independent of each other’s, so we didn’t rely on each other to get through the day, or we weren’t dependent on each other to get through the day.” [Alex/Sarah]</p> <p>“I had my own life, she had her own... I’m more concerned with doing the job at hand... I don’t think I was very part of a relationship or many of the decisions that she made.” [Dante/Allison]</p>

* Quotes are listed with sailor name first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

TABLE 2: Relational Boundary Work: Adjustability Dimension

Couple Adjustability	Description	Exemplary Quotations
<i>High</i>	Couples are <i>unpredictable</i> and erratic in how shared roles are enacted	<p>"He was like, well I don't think it's a good idea [selling car]. I said I think it's a good idea... He just went back and forth with that. I was like you know what? I'm just going to do it... [other times] I'd just try to suck it up ...Or just let him have free reign and try to agree more than disagree with things I could do that with. That was hard." [Matt/Tracy]</p> <p>"There were some times where I would try...to keep my E-mails up beat... but often times...I would argue with him because I would say his E-mails are boring." [Roger/Kathy]</p>
<i>Moderate</i>	Couples are <i>moderately reactive</i> and reflexive in how shared roles are enacted	<p>"That time might be the best time to call you but I'm busy or something came up. It was a constant adjustment. Constantly, you know, adjusting and, "how's this working." [Phil/Brenda]</p> <p>"I made time; you have to make time because it's your lifeline...sometimes I'd come early, and sometimes I'd stay late, sometimes I'd just ignore stuff on my desk." [Kit/Frankie]</p> <p>"Managing bills, help making decisions about things. When you can do that and be gone...you're doing some of the things you need to do for the house." [Max/Janelle]</p>
<i>Low</i>	Couples are <i>minimally reactive</i> and inelastic in how shared roles are enacted	<p>"I send him a one of those E-mail Happy Birthday things, but there's not much you can do." [Maureen/Chip]</p> <p>"...every time an issue came up, I was like, [no]. I remember her...saying, 'well, this is something you're supposed to do'." [Dante/Allison]</p>

* Quotes are listed with sailor name first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

TABLE 3: Relational Boundary Work: Outcomes

Couple Outcomes	Description	Exemplary Quotations
<i>Resilience</i>	High Resilience: <i>positive adaptation</i> to adverse circumstances	<p>“In general, overall I could get help. It was kind of like he would calm me down and would be like, ‘You have to be strong. We’re going to have to do this. It’s part of being in the navy.’”[Valerie/Bobby]</p> <p>“You know, and it’s worked out for us so far... But I’m not doing this [wedding decisions] for a point, I’m doing it because I’m interested, I’m doing it because I’m helping out.” [Phil/Brenda] “And, you know, and that helped...it was really fun to go back and forth with each other with different ideas.” [Phil/Brenda]</p>
	Low Resilience: <i>negative or no adaptation</i> to adverse circumstances	<p>“...a lot of times I did get a little frustrated, because I wanted to hear from her and I didn't." [Matt/Tracy] “...he needs to be in the know of everything, you know? So when he wasn’t he was just oh my God...it’s just frustrating because I don’t feel like he’s looking at my point of view.” [Matt/Tracy]</p> <p>“[Celebrating my birthday] was difficult...He totally missed our anniversary with no contact whatsoever...it was horrid...[the overall experience] definitely wasn’t positive.” [Kurt/Justina]</p>
<i>Commitment</i>	High Commitment	<p>“He wants to stay in for twenty years. That’s kind of a decision he’s made and I think it’s great, you know, and I know he likes what he does...I feel like I understand that this is his career and I respect it...” [Phil/Brenda]</p>
	Low Commitment	<p>"I really don't like my job all that much...I would rather be doing something else." [Jimmy/Ariane] "As far as his work situation goes, you know, I hate it... because I hate being away from him." [Jimmy/Ariane]</p>

* Quotes are listed with sailor name first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

TABLE 4: Couples' Relational Boundary Work Configurations*

Boundary Configuration	Relational Boundary Work		Outcomes	
	Cohesion	Adjustability	Couple Resilience	Organizational Commitment
<p>Balanced Connection: Couples have moderate cohesion and moderate adjustability (12 couples)</p> <p><i>Median Age: 35.5 yrs.</i> <i>Married: 10 yrs.</i> <i>Tenure: 14 yrs.</i></p>	<p><i>Moderate Cohesion:</i> “no more than two minutes, you can shoot a shorter email, let them know you’re doing all right, and see how they’re doing...” [Kevin/Nicole]; “I could keep him posted as to details that were going on at home or how to take care of something that popped that I wasn’t familiar with that he may have taken care of previously.” [Kevin/Nicole]</p>	<p><i>Moderate Adjustability:</i> "She makes those [household] decisions... But one day her car broke down and she actually called me on the ship; we got it taken care of...it was kind of like you were right at home." [Dylan/Teresa] "I was able to email him about what the car is doing and what do I do. He would email me directions on what to do. At one point the brakes went out." [Dylan/Teresa]</p>	<p><i>High Resilience:</i> “I asked her to try to include me in on things even though it might be easier just for her to do it herself.” [Shane/Taniqua]; “It worked for the most part... we tried to keep him involved in that way.” [Shane/Taniqua]</p>	<p><i>High Commitment:</i> "I’ll probably stay another four years [until retirement]... I’m happy with [job situation].” [Kit/Frankie]</p>
<p>Chaotic Connection: Couples have low cohesion and high adjustability (3 couples)</p> <p><i>Median Age: 36 yrs.</i> <i>Married: 8 yrs.</i> <i>Tenure: 9 yrs.</i></p>	<p><i>Low Cohesion:</i> “She...was like, no, I’m going to make the decisions.” [Sean/Molly]; “... I kind of get to do things for myself while he’s away and kind of focus on me... So it’s kind of just nice being selfish a little bit while he’s away.” [Sean/Molly]</p>	<p><i>High Adjustability:</i> “Depending on the situation... she couldn’t figure out how to work it so she sent a bunch of pictures to me of what I had to see and figure out... We kind of worked through the problem there. But another time, similar type of situation [but she didn’t ask for help], and when I got back in port I am going... ‘all you had to do is this.’” [Rick/Jana]</p>	<p><i>Low Resilience:</i> “And it frustrated me because she kind of just...She kind of shut me down.” [Sean/Molly] “A lot of it would be frustration that he’s not following through on certain things that I’ve asked him to take care of.” [Sean/Molly]</p>	<p><i>Mixed Commitment:</i> “I probably won’t stay in the Navy...I don’t want to miss an entire year of events and sports [for the kids].” [Sean/Molly]</p> <p>“He’s already signed up. He’s going to the 20. He’s what we call a lifer...” [Rick/Jana]</p>

* Quotes are listed with sailor first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

TABLE 4: Couples' Relational Boundary Work Configurations * (cont.)

Boundary Configuration	Relational Boundary Work		Outcomes	
	Cohesion	Adjustability	Couple Resilience	Organizational Commitment
<p>Rigid Connection: Couples have low cohesion and low adjustability (5 couples)</p> <p><i>Median Age: 27 yrs. Married: 2 yrs. Tenure: 4 yrs.</i></p>	<p><i>Low Cohesion:</i> “[I don’t email home often] ... you have to stay focused on the job at hand.” [Kurt/Justina]; “Once he got there I really didn’t hear from him much.” [Kurt/Justina]</p>	<p><i>Low Adjustability:</i> “You lose a lot as far as not being there... it’s better than nothing [email]... You can be up to date even though can’t do anything.” [Maureen/Chip]</p>	<p><i>Low Resilience:</i> “The wife would often complain as far as, oh, you don’t call enough or you don’t communicate enough, and I’m like, yes, I’m sorry, I’m working and I can’t distract myself. That was my general response to her.” [Dante]; “I would tell him things like, ‘Can you write a little more than what you write?’” [Allison]</p>	<p><i>Mixed Commitment:</i> “I just don’t think I’m cut out for it [current job in Navy].” [Maureen/Chip]; “she hates it...[and] I hate it. I don’t like it [when she is deployed]. [Maureen/Chip]</p> <p>“I had it good, but I had it rough at the same time. It’s a good thing...I’ll do it again. [Yasmine/Johnny]</p>
<p>Enmeshed Connection: Couples have high cohesion and moderate adjustability (3 couples)</p> <p><i>Median Age: 31 yrs. Married: 3 yrs. Tenure: 9.5 yrs.</i></p>	<p><i>High Cohesion:</i> “We are emailing all of the time...I would pretty much email her whatever was going on.... like if she had a question about a bill or something that was going on or I had a question about work, we would email back and forth.” [Adam/Julie] “We talk about everything. We talk about our days. What we did that day, what’s been going on. We talk about if there’s financial things to be discussed, we talk about our families, we talk about mushy husband and wife stuff.” [Adam/Julie]</p>	<p><i>Moderate Adjustability:</i> He will email me, ‘call home now’. So I call, what is up, ‘your daughter, your son...’ Oh ok, they are my daughter and my son now, ok.” [Jessica/Dean]; “She sent me a digital camera...She purchased it online and it came in the mail...She wanted to see what the new house looked like, so she sent me the ability to do that [with gift of camera].” [Jessica/Dean]</p>	<p><i>High Resilience:</i> “You know, I honestly feel, like my family is here [with her on deployment].” [Jessica Dean]</p> <p>“I think it kind of helped our communication skills just because we were forced to be careful what we said and how we said it.” [Adam/Julie] “When he’s out there, he feels like he has no control or say so over what’s going on. It gives him an input into things and keeps him involved. That connection.” [Adam/Julie]</p>	<p><i>Low Commitment:</i> “[I: Odds you would stay?]: Probably about 0... The main factors ... are not wanting to spend time away from family.” [Adam/Julie]; “As far as his work situation goes, you know, I hate it...I’m ready for him to be done.” [Adam/Julie]</p>

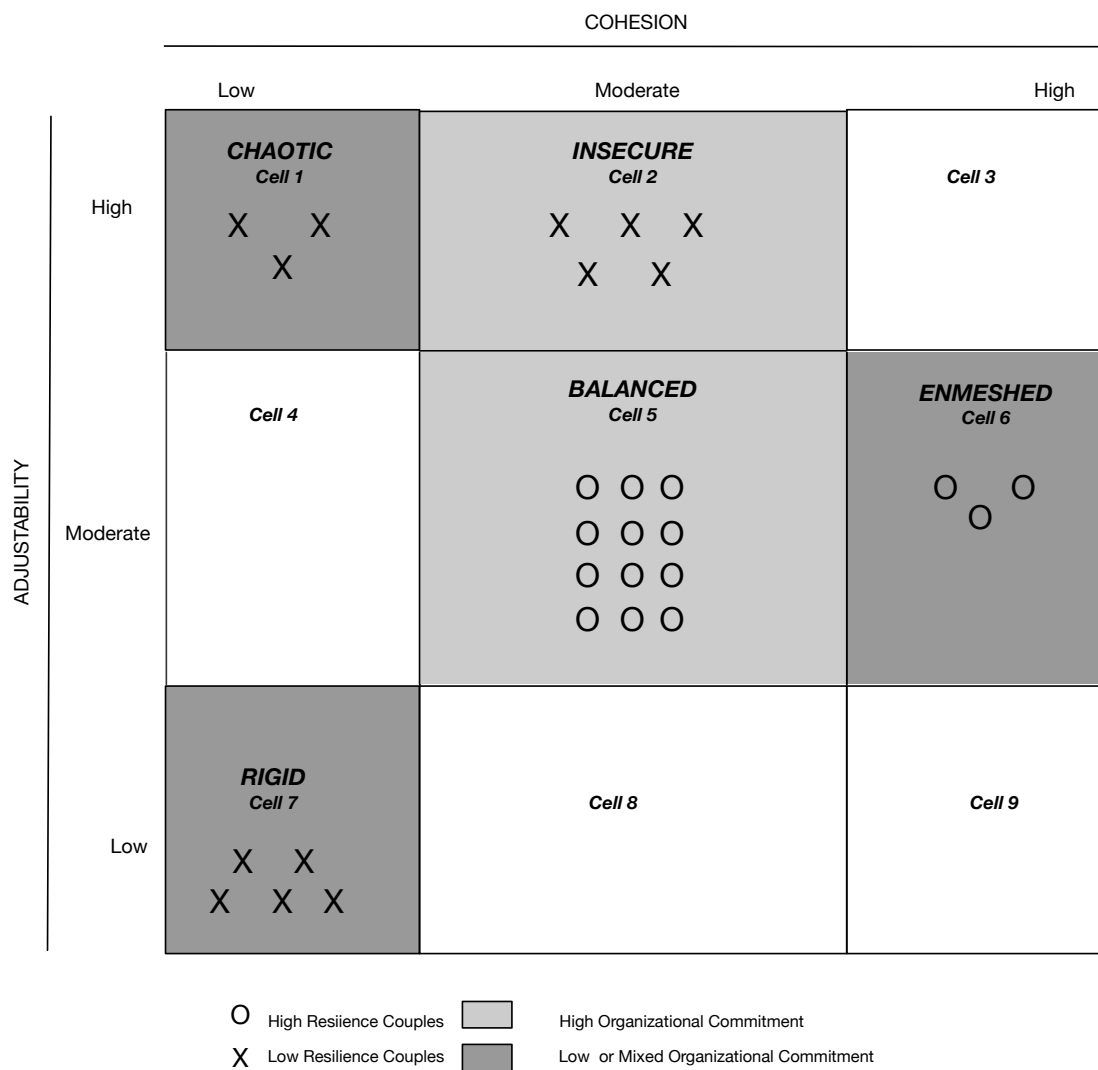
* Quotes are listed with sailor first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

TABLE 4: Couples' Relational Boundary Work Configurations * (cont.)

Boundary Configuration	Relational Boundary Work		Outcomes	
	Cohesion	Adjustability	Couple Resilience	Organizational Commitment
<p><i>Insecure Connection:</i> Couples have moderate cohesion and high adjustability (5 couples)</p> <p><i>Median Age: 28.5 yrs.</i> <i>Married: 8 yrs.</i> <i>Tenure: 11 yrs.</i></p>	<p><i>Moderate Cohesion:</i> “A lot times she’ll confer with me for maybe imposing a sentence or punishment for something, she’ll run it by me. I wouldn’t say it’s more like it’s my decision to make, it’s more like I want to make sure I’m doing the right thing, we’re parents together.” [Carl/Krista]</p>	<p><i>High Adjustability:</i> “He would just get snappy. And it's hard to tell emotions, how things are coming out over e-mail. So sometimes he would type stuff and it would come out kind of rude. And I'm like, ‘I don't know what your issue is, but’—And for him, he's one of those people, if he's hungry, or over tired, or had a bad day, he will pick a fight over the smallest little thing just because he's in a bad mood. [Aaron/Maggie]</p>	<p><i>Low Resilience:</i> “I wish my wife was glued to the computer and would E-mail me a lot more. But that’s just me, I want a pacifier, it doesn’t mean that what she is doing is right or wrong.” [Carl/Krista]</p> <p>“We would get frustrated... Sometimes I would get up and two in the morning [to talk] and be exhausted, and want to go to bed. And he's just getting off work and still amped up, and he wants to talk. And I'm like, "You aren't understanding. Doing this every night is killing me." So then it would cause a fight.” [Aaron/Maggie]</p>	<p><i>High Commitment:</i> “I actually just re-enlisted last year... I like the Navy.” [Aaron/Maggie] “...when your spouse is in the Navy and they deploy...you’re a Navy wife...that becomes a big part of who you are and your life.” [Aaron/Maggie]</p> <p>“I love it [my job]...I probably have at least another six to ten years left right now...I like being in the Navy.” [Kyle/Janet]</p>

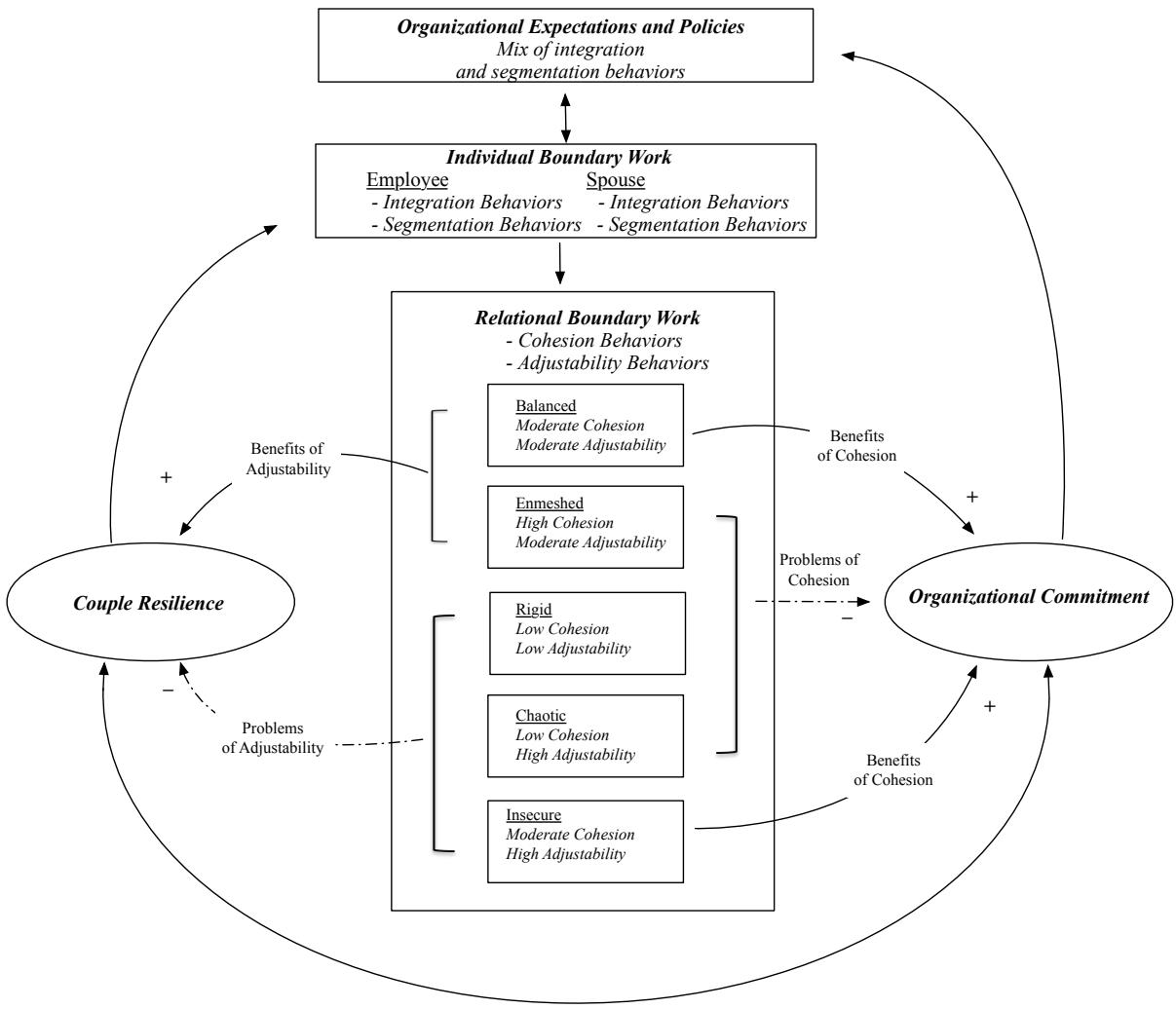
* Quotes are listed with sailor first, then spouse. The name in bold is the speaker.

Figure 1: Couple Relational Boundary Work and Associated Outcomes



Note: Cells 3, 8 and 9 are not observed in this data. We observe only one couple in Cell 4.

Figure 2: Process Model of Relational Boundary Work and Outcomes



APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol (Sample Questions)

Sailor Protocol

1. How long have you been in the Navy? What is your position in the Navy?
2. How do you access the Internet, email, and other technologies? Do you have your own computer? Do you have to wait in a line? How often was access limited?
3. Does the Navy (through your supervisor or through rules or other communication) ever do anything to indicate that they are supportive or not supportive of you using technology to stay in touch with your spouse and children?
4. Now I want to ask you to think about a time when an important event, decision or happening occurred during your deployment (positive or negative: accident, household purchase, something with regard to children, interpersonal conflict). How did you communicate about this event? We'll ask your spouse about the same event. Describe.
5. How much does your spouse share? Are there things s/he doesn't share? Things that you wish *would* be shared? Things you wish s/he wouldn't share?
6. When communicating with family while deployed how much do you self-censor (if at all)? What do you censor? When? How does technology use make you feel about your ability to juggle being a Navy member and also a spouse/parent/friend? (e.g. better/less able, more/less efficient)
7. How do you feel about your current family situation? How do you feel about your current job situation? How satisfied are you with your current job assignments?

Spouse Protocol

1. When your spouse is away, do you and your spouse ever discuss budgeting via email? Do you discuss the household budget in general, or only purchase limits for specific purchases?
2. Is household decision making easier/harder with the email access? Explain. Are you more satisfied with the decisions when your spouse is involved in the process, or does it not really make a difference?
3. When your spouse is away for important family occasions (e.g., anniversaries, birthdays, holidays), what do you do to acknowledge the occasion? What does s/he do? Do you take over the gift-giving duties completely while your spouse is away? If not, what kinds of gifts are likely to be discussed via email?
4. When you communicate with your deployed spouse how much do you self-censor (if at all)? What do you censor? When?
5. Are there topics or types of interactions you would probably not use email to communicate with while at sea? Why not (privacy, some types of messages require face to face interaction)?
6. How does IT access as well as IT limitations make you feel?
7. Do you feel that the ability to communicate via email and the Internet impacted you or your family's re-enlistment decisions?
8. How often do you feel stressed or unhappy when your family member is deployed? How do you feel about your current family situation? Your partner's current work situation?

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