

**Accepting Influence in Military Couples: Implications for Couple- and Family-Level Outcomes**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science

Auburn, Alabama  
August 3, 2019

Keywords: accepting influence, military couples, couple satisfaction, communication, family satisfaction, power

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## Abstract

Accepting influence is a salient couple-level phenomenon, first observed by Coan, Gottman, and colleagues (1997), that is well-known to impact outcomes amongst couples. While accepting influence has been discussed as vital for couple satisfaction and stability, to date, no studies have actually examined the beneficial effects of *accepting* influence on couple relationships. Rather, the literature has focused on the detrimental effects of *refusing* influence leading to adverse couple-level outcomes. Using a dyadic sample of military couples ( $n = 244$ ), a population for which accepting influence may be particularly helpful, this study uses an actor-partner interdependence model with data from each partner to investigate the relationship between accepting influence and positive outcomes for both couples and families. Specifically, this study adds to the literature by examining accepting influence as it is related to service members' and civilian spouses' reported couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family, using systems theory and spillover hypothesis as a theoretical foundation. Actor effects for both service members and civilian spouses show that accepting influence is related to both couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family; civilian spouses' reports of accepting influence were also related to their service member partners' outcomes. Implications for clinical practice and future directions for measurement and research of accepting influence are discussed.

*Keywords:* accepting influence; communication satisfaction; family satisfaction; actor-partner interdependence model; systems theory; spillover hypothesis

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Mallory Lucier-Greer. You have invested so much time and effort in my learning and I cannot begin to express my gratitude for your continued patience, teaching, encouragement, and support. You have taught me so much about writing and research, academic life and regular life, and you have always made me feel like I am capable of working hard at work that is hard. My work in the REACH Lab and my work with you on my thesis was what motivated me to apply for PhD programs, and it goes without saying that I could not have done it without you.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Tommy Smith and Dr. Lauren Ruhlmann. Tommy, you have helped permanently shaped the way I see therapy and academia, and taught me so much about both therapy and life. In my future career, I hope to channel you so that I can both work hard at work worth doing, but to also stop, relax, and appreciate the fun in work and in life. Lauren, you have gone out of your way to support me. Your supervision and teaching has helped me begin to discover my identity as both a therapist and as an academic. Thank you for inspiring me to see not only the science in therapy and in research, but to also appreciate the art of it. Additionally, while he did not serve on my committee, I would like to thank Dr. Jay Mancini for allowing me to use data from the military family life project (USDA/NIFA award No. 2009-48680-06069).

A special thank you to my parents, Jim and Gabrielle. The consistent checking on me and the excessive amounts of care packages have truly kept me going throughout this program. More than that, your constant interest in my work, your excitement over the smallest of

accomplishments, and celebration of each milestone has given me the motivation I needed to keep going and has truly made me believe in myself. I would also like to thank my sister, Amanda. You walked this path before me and have always been a source of guidance, support, and understanding. You have been a great role model to me, more than you know, and an even better sister/best friend.

A big thank you to my cohort members, Caroline Elliot, Natasha Voigt, Miranda Newman, Sabrina D'Agostino, and Claire Herren. You all have helped keep me sane these past few years, and have made me feel normal the times I have felt insane. I cannot imagine what this program would have been like without your consistent support, smiles, and jokes.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Accepting influence within couple relationships is a concept and couple-level process that was first observed and introduced to the scientific literature by Gottman and colleagues (Coan, Gottman, Babcock, & Jacobson, 1997; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). It is when one or both partners in a relationship allow themselves to be influenced by their significant other. Accepting influence refers to both the *action* of allowing one's partner to influence in-the-moment actions and decisions, as well as the *approach* of being open to one's partner's perspectives and opinions (Gottman, 1999). In Gottman and colleagues' observational research of couples in conflict conversations, a refusal to accept influence was related to adverse couple-level outcomes such as more extreme forms of intimate partner violence and divorce (Coan, Gottman, Babcock, & Jacobson, 1997; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). In contrast, later observational research of couples in conflict conversations has demonstrated that accepting influence is related to positive couple-level outcomes, such as improved communication skills, decreased aggression, and decreased intensity of arguments (Babcock, Graham, Canady, & Ross, 2011). In addition to this, at least one study demonstrated that accepting influence is a skill that can be taught to couples in order to decrease aggressiveness in conflict (Babcock et al., 2011). Taken together, accepting influence appears to be a salient, potentially malleable couple-level process with the potential to be associated with positive couple-level outcomes (e.g., Babcock et al., 2011). Additionally, the research indicates that if partners in a couple relationship are refusing influence from one another, there may be significant detrimental effects on the relationship (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998).

The existing research on accepting influence demonstrates its importance as a couple-level phenomenon and its potential to be used as an intervention, a skill that can be taught to couples (Babcock et al., 2011). However, to date, most of the research on Gottman's identified construct of accepting influence has focused on the *detrimental* results of couples *refusing* to accept influence from each other, rather than the *beneficial* results of couples *accepting* influence from each other. This may stem from Gottman's operationalization of accepting influence via observational research. When observing couples, Gottman and colleagues termed this concept after witnessing what they felt was actually the *opposite* of accepting influence; Gottman and colleagues observed partners in a couple relationship *refuse* each other's influence in conflict conversations when they escalated negativity in response to their partner's positive or neutral affect (Coan et al., 1997). This observation formulated the baseline for researching accepting influence by demonstrating what refusing influence looks like and how it may be linked with adverse couple outcomes and by creating a method for conceptualizing, observing, and measuring refusal to accept influence in couples.

More recently, scholars have continued to investigate accepting influence by observing couples *refuse* influence via escalations in negativity (Gottman et al., 1998; Babcock et al., 2011). Research from this vantage point limits scholarly conclusions about accepting influence. In other words, because research has predominantly focused on the *adverse* effects of individuals' and couples' *refusal* to accept influence, less is known about whether *accepting* influence actually has *beneficial* effects on couples and families. This study fills this gap in the literature by utilizing dyadic data from a sample of military couples and an actor-partner interdependence model approach to examine the relationship between *accepting* influence in one's couple relationship and important couple-level outcomes, specifically couple

communication satisfaction. I also extend this area of study by determining whether accepting influence in one's couple relationship may also be associated with better perceptions of family-level outcomes, specifically satisfaction with the family, based on theoretical suppositions from family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence, and how accepting influence impacts the couple relationship (Gottman, 1999), parallels theoretical assumptions of family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis. Family systems theory maintains that individuals, subsystems, and families as a whole influence the emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and interactional patterns of other individuals and subsystems within the family as well as the family as a whole (Bowen, 1966; Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013). This indicates that people are a product of their environments, and that environments are created by the people within them. Two key tenets of family systems theory are interdependence and mutual influence. Interdependence describes that individuals and subsystems within a family are dependent on each other; mutual influence describes that individuals and subsystems within a family both influence and are influenced by each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). Interdependence and mutual influence together imply that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in one subsystem will influence thoughts, feelings, behaviors in another subsystem. The tenets of interdependence and mutual influence in systems theory provide theoretical underpinnings for the concept of accepting influence. The action and approach of accepting influence in a couple relationship stems from individuals influencing other individuals with whom they share close relationships.

Spillover hypothesis is also relevant when discussing accepting influence. Spillover hypothesis describes that dynamics, emotions, and behaviors in one subsystem can “spillover” into other parts of the family, transferring into a different subsystem in a different context and influencing individuals within that different subsystem (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Nelson, O'Brien, Blankson, Calkins, & Keane, 2009; Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). The spillover hypothesis is often used to explain how emotions and behaviors in the couple subsystem may spillover into emotions in the parental subsystem (Almeida et al., 1999; Kouros, Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2014). For example, if a couple gets into an argument over a couple-relevant topic and following this, the couple then gets into an argument over their child's bed time, a parenting topic, a spillover of negative affect and argumentative behaviors has occurred. Spillover hypothesis helps explain why accepting influence in couples may be related to couple-level outcomes, such as communication satisfaction. It also lays the foundation for examining whether accepting influence may be positively associated with healthy outcomes in other subsystems of the family and the family as a whole.

To the author's knowledge, there is no study to date that examines accepting influence, a couple-level phenomenon, as it relates to a family-level outcome. This study, grounded in systems theory and spillover hypothesis, investigated accepting influence in couples as it relates to satisfaction with the family, filling this gap in the literature.

### **Current Study**

Using the theoretical frameworks of systems theory and spillover hypothesis, this study examines the relationship between accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction, addressing the gap of positively valenced results of accepting influence in couples in the literature. This study also examines the relationship between accepting influence and satisfaction

with the family, addressing the gap of family-level variables in the literature. In addition to addressing these gaps in the literature, this study investigates accepting influence in a population in which the ability to accept influence may be critically important: military families.

Nearly five million people in the United States are living in military families (Department of Defense, 2018). Due to the nature of military service, military personnel and their families must undergo frequent transition periods due to deployments, temporary duty assignments, and permanent changes of stations (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Lucier-Greer, O’Neal, Arnold, Mancini, & Wickrama, 2014). These transitions are both physical, characterized by the actual physical moves and separations of family members, and emotional, the process of moving away from friends and family as well as the stress of the service member leaving their family to deploy to a potentially dangerous area. These transitions can leave couples and families stressed and disconnected from each other and from support systems (Segal, 1986; O’Neal, Lucier-Greer, Duncan, Mallette, Arnold, & Mancini, 2018). The literature has previously demonstrated that strong couple relationships have a positive impact on military families, despite the frequent physical and emotion transitions (Lewis, Lamson, & Leseuer, 2012; O’Neal, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ferraro, & Ross, 2016). To my knowledge, accepting influence in couple relationships has not been examined as a potential protective factor for military couples and families. However, the action and approach of accepting influence may be particularly beneficial for military couples and military families who must undergo these repeated risky transitions. To address this gap in the literature, this study examines accepting influence in a sample of military families.

This study examines the relationship between accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction, and the relationship between accepting influence and satisfaction

with the family in a dyadic study of military couples. An actor-partner interdependence framework is used to address these specific research questions:

**RQ1a.** When a service member perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *couple communication satisfaction* for both partners?

**RQ1b.** When a civilian spouse perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *couple communication satisfaction* for both partners?

**RQ2a.** When a service member perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *satisfaction with the family* for both partners?

**RQ2b.** When a civilian spouse perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *satisfaction with the family* for both partners?

This study controlled for certain military-related variables, number of months deployed and rank, along with length of marriage and gender. This study draws from Gottman's previous research on accepting influence, empirical research on similar constructs, and theoretical underpinnings provided by systems theory and the spillover hypothesis. This study used a sample of military families, a population in which the ability to accept influence may be salient.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Accepting influence in couple relationships is both the *action* of letting one's partner influence opinions and decisions and the *approach* of considering one's partner in an open and accepting manner (Gottman, 1999). Accepting influence has been linked to positive outcomes in couples, such as happiness and marital stability (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), and healthier behaviors within the couple relationship, including better communication skills, reductions in aggressive feelings, and the ability to decrease the intensity of an argument and facilitate compromise (Babcock, Graham, Canady, & Ross, 2011; Gottman, 1999). Accordingly, this type of research has direct application to educational and therapeutic interventions with couples (e.g., Babcock et al., 2011). Based on a nine-year study of abusive relationships, John Gottman and colleagues have gone so far to express that couple relationships will only work to the extent that both partners, but particularly men, share power and accept influence from their partners (Coan, Gottman, Babcock, & Jacobson, 1997; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). This finding was corroborated in a three-year study of non-abusive newlywed couples, which found that accepting influence was a key factor in couples staying together; in this study, 80% of the marriages in which the partners, particularly the men, did not accept influence ended in divorce (Gottman et al., 1998).

Gottman's research establishes a link between accepting influence and couple-level outcomes. However, more research is needed to confirm this link and to investigate its importance within specific populations, such as military families. Additionally, the effect of

accepting influence in couple relationships as it influences family-level outcomes is an underdeveloped area of research that has both theoretical underpinnings and practical applications. Given the well-established link between stable and happy couple relationships and healthy family dynamics, such as family satisfaction (Gottman, 1999; Verbrugge, 1979; Curran & Yoshimura, 2016), and reduced family conflict (Wheeler, 2012), this study extends this area of research by replicating research on accepting influence as it is associated with couple-level outcomes and examining if accepting influence within the couple relationship has family-level implications. More recent work has shown accepting influence to be a malleable and teachable concept (Babcock et al., 2011). This indicates accepting influence is a potential source of intervention for couple relationships that may improve couple-level outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction, as well as family-level outcomes, such as family well-being and family adjustments. This could be an important point of intervention for supporting families, particularly those families who may encounter higher levels of family stress and regularly encounter family transitions, such as military families.

In the United States (US) military, there are currently nearly 2.4 million service members. Nearly half (1,038,649) of these service members are married (Department of Defense, 2018). Including service members, their partners, and their children, there are over 4.8 million people living in military families. Living in a military couple or military family means living with certain unavoidable stressors. Military couples and families must undergo multiple physical and emotional transitions, brought about by frequent relocations, deployments, and temporary duty assignments (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Lucier-Greer, O'Neal, Arnold, Mancini, & Wickrama, 2014). These transitions can leave couples and families disconnected from extended family and friends and can leave at-home partners stressed, managing the needs of their



family alone while the service member is gone (Segal, 1986; O'Neal, Lucier-Greer, Duncan, Mallette, Arnold, & Mancini, 2018). Additionally, service members have rigid schedules, limiting the already restricted time service members have with their partners and families (Segal, 1986).

Research has demonstrated that strong couple relationships in military families have a positive impact on the health and well-being of the service member and their partner (Lewis, Lamson, & Leseuer, 2012; O'Neal, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ferraro, & Ross, 2016), but based on my review of the literature, accepting influence has not been explored as a central construct of research and application among military couples. However, the *actions* and *approach* of accepting influence within the couple relationship may be especially beneficial for military couples given the context of stress and transition and the potential to be positively associated with family outcomes. To address these gaps in the literature, this study examines accepting influence in military couples as it relates to overall couple and family satisfaction.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence, and how accepting influence impacts the couple relationship (Gottman, 1999), parallels theoretical assumptions of family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis. These two theories also shed light as to why accepting influence, a couple-level process, may influence both couple- and family-level outcomes, such as satisfaction, and why this may be particularly pertinent for military families.

**Family systems theory.** Family systems theory is a broad conceptual framework for understanding families and family-level processes (Bowen, 1966; Nichols, 2013). Broadly, family systems theory describes that individuals and subsystems (i.e., smaller units within the family, such as the marital/couple, parental, and sibling relationships) influence other

individuals, subsystems, and the organizational and interactional patterns of the family and vice versa (Bowen, 1966; Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013). Family systems theory accounts for how people and subsystems in families change or remain the same as a result of other individuals and/or subsystems changing or remaining the same. In essence, how people think, feel, and behave influences how others and the family as a whole think, feel, and behave. Family systems theory indicates that people are a product of their environments, and environments are a product of the people in them. For example, stressful family dynamics can create anxious individuals, and anxious individuals can create or maintain stressful family dynamics. In this way, individuals feed into the system and the system feeds into individuals, creating a cyclical effect (Bowen, 1966; Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013).

Family systems theory is composed of several foundational tenets. In Bowen's original conceptualization, important processes of family systems theory included: differentiation of oneself from one's family of origin, triangulation (i.e., diffusion of conflict between one two-person subsystem by bringing a third person into the conflict), and the multigenerational transmission process (i.e., a process through which children are influenced by their parents and go on to influence the future families they create) (Bowen, 1966; Knauth, 2003). In more contemporary iterations of the theory, key tenets include interdependence and mutual influence, hierarchy, and boundaries. The tenets of interdependence and mutual influence go hand-in-hand. Interdependence describes that individuals and subsystems within a family are dependent on each other; mutual influence describes that individuals and subsystems within a family both influence and are influenced by each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). Considering the subsystems are held together within the system as a whole, the tenets of interdependence and mutual influence espouse that

behaviors and actions within subsystems influence what occurs in other subsystems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013). Hierarchy within families is the idea that subsystems are organized in a ranking order, based on power and structure. Hierarchy indicates that some subsystems more significant than others, allowing them to exert a greater influence on the family and other subsystems. For example, the parental subsystem exhibits a larger influence on the children's subsystem (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009). Boundaries define who is in the system and subsystems, and the rules for interaction between the various subsystems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009). Typically, boundaries are described in one of three ways, as: *rigid* (indicating a hard-to-break boundary that does not allow for the passage of people and information from subsystem to subsystem), *normal* (indicating an appropriate degree of permeability, allowing for some passage of people and information from subsystem to subsystem), or *diffuse* (indicating an almost non-existent boundary, allowing for extremely easy passage of people and information from subsystem to subsystem) (Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013).

The concepts of interdependence and mutual influence, hierarchy, and boundaries were applied in this study. Specifically, the action of and ability to accept influence stems directly from two people in a couple relationship being dependent on one another (interdependence) and sharing influence on each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (mutual influence). The way in which accepting influence, a couple-level process, influences each individual within a couple relationship, and then their perception of couple- and family-level outcomes demonstrates permeability of boundaries and hierarchy among individuals and subsystems within a family.

**Spillover hypothesis.** The spillover hypothesis describes a method through which dynamics of one subsystem in a given context can “spillover” and influence members of another

subsystem in a different context. The spillover hypothesis posits that emotions and interactions, both positive and negative, in one subsystem have the potential to transfer to another subsystem (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Nelson, O'Brien, Blankson, Calkins, & Keane, 2009; Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). Spillover has occurred if there is a direct transfer of emotions or actions from one context to another. The spillover hypothesis has commonly been used to describe work-related stressors in one partner adversely influencing the couple relationship (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2013), thus, a spillover of emotions from the work context to the family context has occurred.

The spillover hypothesis also can be applied to the ways in which different subsystems within a family influence each other. In particular, the spillover hypothesis has been used to explain the relationship between marital tension and tension in parent-child relationships, as well as the relationship between marital quality and parent-child relationship quality (Almeida et al., 1999; Kouros, Papp, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2014). For example, if tension in the marital relationship, characterized by shouted arguments between the two partners, is followed by tension in the parent-child relationship, also characterized by one parent shouting at their child, spillover of both emotions and actions has occurred. The spillover hypothesis also explains positive spillovers of emotions and actions from couple relationships to parent-child relationships (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016; Xie, Ma, Tang, & Jiang, 2017). For example, if affection in the couple relationship, displayed by words of affirmation, is followed by affection in the parent-child relationship, demonstrated by physical touch (i.e., a hug), a spillover of emotions has also occurred.

The spillover hypothesis has direct application to this study and the rationale behind why couple-level processes have implications for family-level outcomes. It has been established that

both couple tension and couple quality spills over into parent-child relationships dynamics (Almeida et al., 1999; Kouros et al., 2014). It follows that accepting influence at the couple-level may influence family-level outcomes, such as satisfaction with the family.

### **Accepting Influence: Applying and Expanding Gottman's Conceptualization**

This section defines and expands the concept of accepting influence as a means of deconstructing this couple-level phenomenon. Then, a discussion of terminology is presented noting divergences between conceptual and operational definitions of accepting influence in the literature and instances of when research examines accepting influence, albeit while utilizing a different term, thus, highlighting the jingle-jangle fallacy that exists surrounding the construct of accepting influence.

**Accepting influence defined.** The concept of accepting influence in couple relationships was identified by John Gottman and colleagues (1997). Accepting influence is the inclination to and the ability of each partner in a couple relationship to share in decision making, share power, compromise, and respect each other's opinions and preferences (Gottman, Gottman, & Silver, 2015). Accepting influence is the *action* of directing every day decisions and more serious conflicts towards a suitable compromise between oneself and one's partner. It is also the *approach* of viewing one's partner as someone worthy of listening to. It is allowing one's partner to influence one's self (Gottman et al., 2015; Gottman, 1999).

**Components of accepting influence.** In his book, Gottman lists observable examples of behaviors and actions that occur when two people accept influence – sharing in decisions making, sharing power, compromising, and respecting each other (Gottman et al., 2015). In defining accepting influence in this manner, he highlights two key phenomena in couple

relationships, that when conceptualized together, result in accepting influence: power and mutuality.

Gottman and colleagues asserted that couple relationships will work to the extent that men share power and accept influence from their female partners (Coan et al., 1997; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Power is an integral part of accepting influence. Power within couple relationships is defined as one individual having the capacity to influence the decisions and outcomes of their partner (Blair, Nelson, & Coleman, 2001). In relationships in which there is unequal power, typically one partner withholds access to certain resources such as affection, approval, support, and/or money (Simpson, Farrell, Oriña, & Rothman, 2015). This results in adjustments made by the other partner to receive these desired resources, which might include withholding emotional states and true thoughts from their partner or conceding to their partner's demands (Walt, Hunter, Salina, & Jason, 2014). The more powerful partner is likely to be less receptive to the less powerful partner's needs (Walt et al., 2014). Power within the context of accepting influence indicates that both partners are receptive to each other's needs, do not withhold relationship resources, and welcome mutually shared influence, as opposed to using influence to exercise one's will.

Another key element of accepting influence is mutuality. While Gottman never used the term "mutuality" in describing the concept of accepting influence, it certainly applies. Davila and colleagues (2017) define mutuality as both partners within a relationship considering their own needs as well as the needs of their partner and behaving in a way to best satisfy both partners' needs. Mutuality corresponds well with the power aspect of accepting influence. In other words, if relationships are mutual, both partners share power. When partners are equals and act in the interest of the couple as a whole, these partners tend to compromise, and act with respect and

consideration for each other (Davila et al., 2017). It is possible for partners to be receptive to their partner's needs without forsaking their own (Davila et al., 2017). Subsequently, the literature has demonstrated that when partners aim for equality within their relationship, relationship satisfaction is higher compared to partners in relationships in which the power is perceived as imbalanced (Worley & Samp, 2016). When couples share in power and operate with mutuality, they accept influence.

**Jingle-jangle fallacy and accepting influence.** To locate accepting influence within the larger family science literature, it is necessary to explore the research more broadly because not all studies share the same conceptual and operational definitions of accepting influence. Rather, there is variability across studies regarding the use of terms; this phenomenon is more generally referred to as the jingle-jangle fallacy. The jingle-jangle fallacy combines two incorrect assumptions in one phenomenon. The first (the jingle fallacy) is assuming that two concepts are the same thing just because they have the same name; the second (the jangle fallacy) is assuming that two identical or extremely similar concepts are different because they do not bear the same name (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006). For example, earlier I referenced power as the capacity to influence the decisions of outcomes of others (Blair et al., 2001), yet the word power can also refer to electrical energy; thus, it would be a mistake to assume every time you saw the word “power” it was referring to power within couple relationships. As mentioned above, Gottman did not utilize the term “mutuality” when discussing accepting influence. Nonetheless, mutuality and accepting influence overlap in definitions, and as such, is an example of the jangle fallacy.

Relatedly, in this review of the literature, I encountered several other constructs that resembled accepting influence but did not represent the same construct. Galliher and colleagues (2004) used the term “accepting influence” in a study investigating adolescent relationships,

interactions, and relationship quality. In this study, however, the authors conceptualized accepting influence as one individual being persuaded in response to their partner's efforts to persuade them (Galliher, Welsh, Rostosky, & Kawaguchi, 2004). The authors noted this definition did not account for power within a couple relationship, but that it does reflect Gottman and colleagues' (1998) conceptualization of sharing power within couple relationships (Galliher et al., 2004). While this definition does reflect some aspects of couples sharing power, it does not wholly represent the construct of accepting influence as an action and approach involving both sharing power and mutually beneficial decisions, exemplifying the jingle fallacy.

Additionally, I also encountered instances of the jangle fallacy; in other words, I encountered constructs that were similar to accepting influence, but utilized a different term. Slotter and colleagues (2014) utilized the construct "partner influence" investigating acceptance or rejection of characteristics developed within a relationship after the termination of the relationship. In this study, partner influence is the characteristics, thoughts, and behaviors that an individual possesses resulting from being in a relationship with their partner (Slotter et al., 2014). The natural adoption of characteristics resulting from being in a relationship with a specific person reflects accepting influence. While partner influence does not share the exact same definition as accepting influence, it reflects mutuality and is a possible outcome of accepting influence, indicating similarity between the terms. Another study investigates "convergence" between two partner's emotions and personalities as it relates to relationship satisfaction (Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007). This study defines convergence as the proclivity for two partners to become more alike over time (Gonzaga et al., 2007). Similar to partner influence, convergence does not share the same exact definition of accepting influence, but it reflects the key component of mutuality and is a possible outcome of two partners accepting influence.



While these studies do not utilize the term accepting influence, they are examining constructs that are very similar to, if not overlapping with, accepting influence.

These are just a few examples of constructs that reflect the components of and have definitions similar to accepting influence. While there is little research using the term accepting influence, there is a plethora of research on related constructs. This research has linked related constructs, such as partner influence or convergence, to outcomes such as substance use behaviors (Bartel et al., 2017; Leonard, & Mudar, 2004), health behaviors (Markey, Markey, & Gray, 2007), personality characteristics (Gonzaga et al., 2007; Slotter et al., 2014), and self-esteem (Schafer & Keith, 1992) in couples. This demonstrates that two individuals in a couple relationship exert some influence over each other. These studies inform our knowledge and provide insight into the concept of accepting influence, as well as potential outcomes. However, using a clear definition of accepting influence allows us to better understand the processes we are studying. For this reason, much of the background research for this study is based in Gottman's work, using Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence, but this review also branches out to include some relevant, related constructs.

Additionally, it is this conceptualization in which the measure of accepting influence is based off of for the current study. Traditionally, accepting influence has been measured utilizing the Specific Affect Coding System. This involves the observation and recording of couple conversations (typically arguments) and the systemic coding of each individual's affect in this conversation (Coan et al., 1997). Using this system, a refusal to accept influence is conceptualized by one individual's escalation in negative affect in response to their partner's less negative affect (Coan et al., 1997). Less consistency exists when measuring accepting influence via survey methodology; to my knowledge, there is no direct self-report measure of accepting

influence. In this study, specific survey items representing the key elements of accepting influence, sharing power and mutuality, are used to assess each partner's accepting influence. A more comprehensive review of the measurement of accepting influence is provided later in this chapter.

### **Accepting Influence and Couple Relationships**

Gottman's research has demonstrated accepting influence to be an important approach and ability in couple relationships. In this section, a review of the literature on the construct of accepting influence, its emergence in the literature, and its connection to couple-level outcomes is provided, highlighting studies that explicitly use the term accepting influence and those that tap into the construct of accepting influence but use a different term to describe it.

**Construct emergence within the study of domestic violence.** The construct of accepting influence was identified by Gottman and colleagues in their research on couples, specifically in the context of domestic violence. In this research, husbands' refusal to accept influence from their wives was linked to more severe forms of domestic violence (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman, 1999). Coan, Gottman, and colleagues' study (1997) was the first to conceptualize accepting influence in terms of negative affect among couples. Their study utilized a sample of 33 distressed and 61 violent couples, all of which were heterosexual and the man was the abuser. Different types of abusers were examined: Type 1 abusers, whose heart rates decreased when they are violent, and Type 2 abusers, whose heart rates remained the same or increased during violence (Coan et al., 1997). Couples were asked to discuss a problem in their relationship while researchers observed and recorded their conversations, using the Specific Affect Coding System. When couples in which the husband was a Type 1 abuser were asked to discuss a problem in their relationship, the husbands tended to use hostility, defensiveness,

and/or contempt in response to their wives' statements – whether the statement was a small complaint or an attempted solution. Coan, Gottman, and colleagues (1997) conceptualized this increased intensity of negative affect in response to their wives' lower levels of negativity as the abusers' refusal to accept influence from their wives. Type 1 abusers were systematically found to reject influence from their wives (Coan et al., 1997), and Type 1 abusers were also found to be more abusive than Type 2 abusers and more likely to threaten their wives with weapons (Gottman, 1999). Two key findings emerged from this study: first, a refusal to accept influence can be measured through observational research; and second, a refusal to accept influence, specifically the male partner's refusing influence, was linked to adverse couple-level outcomes (i.e., more severe forms of domestic violence).

**Construct development in studies of couple separation and divorce.** Following this study, Gottman and colleagues sought to replicate these findings in non-violent couples. Having learned that a refusal to accept influence could be observed in couple's negative affect during conflict discussions, Gottman and colleagues (1998) utilized this method to examine accepting influence in a three-year study of 130 heterosexual newlywed couples to predict happiness, stability, and divorce. This study demonstrated that a refusal to accept influence was associated with divorce in non-distressed and non-violent couples. However, this finding was gender specific. Gottman and colleagues observed that almost every wife accepted influence from her husband. However, wives' capacity for accepting their husband's influence was not related to happiness or divorce in Gottman's studies (Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman, 1999). In contrast, a husband's refusal to accept his wife's influence was shown to be a key factor in predicting couple outcomes. Approximately four-fifths of marriages in which the husband refused his wife's influence ended in divorce (Gottman, 1999). These findings led to Gottman's

proclamation that marriages will be happy and stable to the extent male partners accept influence from their female partners (Gottman, 1999).

It is important to highlight here again that in Gottman's studies, these findings were gender specific; that is, female partner's accepting influence was not related to the outcomes of either study while male partner's refusing influence was related to adverse outcomes – more severe forms of domestic violence and divorce (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998). It is also important to highlight that both studies were longitudinal, following the couples for several years (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998). Refusing influence was an impactful phenomenon for both couples with domestic violence who were together for at least nine years, and for newlyweds in their first three years of marriage. This suggests that refusing influence may be an important construct for couples at various relationship stages and lengths. In prior research, length of relationship, particularly longer-lasting relationships, have been shown to be a protective factor, relating to positive outcomes for couples such as increased stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Given that refusing influence is impactful on couples of various relationship lengths, it is possible that the action and approach of couples accepting influence may be influenced by length of the couple's relationship.

These two studies linking a refusal to accept influence to domestic violence and divorce are the foundation for research into accepting influence. However, to our knowledge, no additional research studies corroborate these findings. Gottman and colleagues discuss the importance of accepting influence in their later books (Gottman, 1999; Gottman et al., 2015); however, it appears there are few, if any, studies replicating these findings, verifying the importance of accepting influence within couple relationships. This study adds to the literature by examining accepting influence in a more recent sample of military couples, a unique

population with distinct risks and sources of resilience, establishing the contemporary importance of accepting influence in couple relationships.

**Accepting influence as an intervention.** Accepting influence may be an important couple-level phenomenon to leverage in educational and clinical settings given its relationship to couple outcomes (e.g., relational stability) and its potential to be taught to couples as a malleable skill. To our knowledge, only one study exists that demonstrates accepting influence is a skill that can be taught, leading to positive couple-level outcomes (Babcock et al., 2011).

Babcock and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that accepting influence can be taught to couples experiencing intimate partner violence as a communication skill, leading to positive couple-level outcomes. In this study, a refusal to accept influence was operationally defined in terms of responding to neutral or positive affective messages with an increase in negativity (Babcock et al., 2011), as is consistent with Gottman's literature on abusive relationships (Coan et al., 1997). Babcock and colleagues (2011) expanded on Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence by regarding it as a communication strategy, something that individuals in a couple relationship can utilize when in conflictual conversations (Babcock et al., 2011). This study tested an accepting influence intervention against a control condition and an additional intervention designed to decrease negative expression (Babcock et al., 2011). The sample was comprised of 100 heterosexual couples experiencing intimate partner violence in which the man was the abuser. These couples were observed and recorded arguing for seven minutes, similar to the technique Coan and Gottman use in their studies (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998). Following the seven-minute argument, the male partner was given a brief intervention facilitated by a research assistant. In this intervention, male participants were guided on how to speak to their partner if they accepted influence. The male partner listened to recorded conflict-laden

conversations between other couples, which provided examples of statements portraying accepting influence. These recorded conflict conversations had strategic pauses, allowing the male partners time to practice formulating responses that accept influence. Following the intervention, the couple re-engaged in their argument for another seven minutes (Babcock et al., 2011). The Specific Affect Coding System was utilized to assess both partners' affect and to determine the male partner's ability to accept influence post-intervention. The male partners who received the accepting influence intervention displayed less aggressive affect compared to the male abusive partners that received the control or intervention designed to decrease negative expression. Additionally, for those couples in which the male partner received the accepting influence intervention, both the male and female partners reported believing the male partner was acting less aggressive in the subsequent argument (Babcock et al., 2011). This study demonstrates that accepting influence may be a potential source of intervention for couples with intimate partner violence.

Research has demonstrated the potential importance of accepting influence in couple relationships as it is related to adverse couple-level outcomes (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998) and the potential for accepting influence to be utilized as an intervention (Babcock et al., 2011). To my knowledge, these are the only studies that utilize Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence and consider couple-level outcomes. However, when broadening my search to incorporate the components of accepting influence, power and mutuality, the relationship between accepting influence and couple-level outcomes is apparent.

**Literature of related terms – power and mutuality.** Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence and the term accepting influence is used only sparingly in the literature, yet

the key components of accepting influence, power and mutuality, have been more frequently used and studied in relation to couple-level outcomes.

Neff and Harter (2002) investigated the role of shared power and mutuality and the relationship between these constructs and psychological outcomes, including validation in relationships, voice in relationships, and individual self-esteem and depressed affect. In their study, they identified three different relationship styles: *self-focused autonomy*, relationships high in self-power, emphasizing autonomy over connection; *mutuality*, relationships in which partners regard each other as equals and share power, balancing autonomy and connection; and *other-focused connection*, relationships high in partner-power, placing connection before autonomy (Neff & Harter, 2002). This study included 251 heterosexual couples and was cross-sectional in nature. In order to assess relationship style and power, participants were provided with descriptions of the relationship styles and a visual prompt demonstrating relationships ranging from high self-power to mutual power to high partner-power. Participants were instructed to identify the type of relationship and power dynamic that most closely represented their own romantic relationship. Mutuality and equal power in relationships was related to higher levels of relationship validation and feelings of having a voice in the relationship as well as higher self-esteem and lower levels of depressed affect. This demonstrates that mutuality and sharing power, key components of accepting influence, are related to positive individual-level and couple-level outcomes.

Building on the previous study, Worley and Samp (2016) utilized the construct of power, examining the relationship between decision-making power, topic avoidance, and relational satisfaction. This cross-sectional study included 146 heterosexual couples, 292 participants total. Online self-report surveys were used to assess power dynamics within relationships as well as

relationship satisfaction. For this study, power was conceptualized in terms of decision making and was defined as the ability to influence decisions within one's relationship (Worley & Samp, 2016). Using the same visual prompt Neff and Harter (2002) utilized, which has a range from high self-power to mutual power to high partner-power, participants designated the power split they perceived within their relationship. The results demonstrated a curvilinear relationship, indicating that participants with a relationship that was mutually powerful, and therefore more equally balanced in ability to influence decisions within the relationship, had higher relationship satisfaction (Worley & Samp, 2016). This indicates that couples that share power may have better couple-level outcomes. Assuming that sharing power is a key component of accepting influence, this adds to the literature supporting a relationship between accepting influence and positive couple-level outcomes.

Another study by Davila and colleagues (2017) investigates the construct of relationship competence, which upon closer inspection, shares similar key components with accepting influence. Relationship competence includes three primary components: insight, mutuality, and emotion regulation (Davila et al., 2017); it is defined as the ability to think about relationships while balancing the needs of the self and the needs of the partner, approaching relationship decisions with an effort choose the most suitable option for both partners, and the ability to regulate emotions. In this study, 102 women completed semi-structured interviews designed to assess their relationship competence along with the couple-level outcomes of relationship satisfaction, relationship security, and relationship decision making (Davila et al., 2017). The study found significant small to moderate associations between relationship competence and satisfaction, security, and decision making (Davila et al., 2017). The constructs of relationship competence and accepting influence share similar definitions, both including mutuality. As such,



this study adds to the literature supporting that notion that accepting influence is likely related to positive couple-level outcomes.

**Importance of reviewing couple satisfaction.** Gottman's research identified relationships between a refusal to accept influence and couple outcomes such as divorce and domestic violence (Gottman et al., 1998; Coan et al., 1997). From these relationships, Gottman inferred that accepting influence is a key component of couple relationships promoting both couple satisfaction and stability (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998), although his research actually studied a refusal to accept influence. Supplemental research into the components of accepting influence and constructs similar to accepting influence demonstrate links between accepting influence and positive couple-level outcomes. However, to our knowledge, a direct link between Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence and variables representing couple satisfaction has not yet been found. Gottman's background research, along with the research into mutuality and shared power within couples, gives reason to believe a positive relationship between accepting influence and variables related to couple satisfaction exists. Additionally, family systems theory provides theoretical underpinnings for this relationship (i.e., accepting influence is a couple-level process that may potentially influence each individual partner's relationship outcomes). This study adds to the literature by re-examining the relationship between accepting influence and couple-level outcomes, specifically looking into the relationship between accepting influence (as opposed to one's refusal to accept influence) and couple communication satisfaction. This study also adds to the literature by examining some key control variables relevant in Gottman's previous research: gender and length of relationship.

## Accepting Influence and Family Relationships

Research into accepting influence and related terms along with family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis give reason for examining the relationship between accepting influence and couple-level outcomes. Family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis also provide theoretical rationale for examining accepting influence as it relates to family-level outcomes, a previously underexamined area of research.

Systems theory posits that individuals and subsystems within a family system can influence each other via various processes and interactions (Bowen, 1966; Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009; Nichols, 2013). The spillover hypothesis more specifically demonstrates that affect in subsystems can transfer over to different subsystems (Almeida et al., 1999; Nelson et al., 2009). Using this, it follows that the *action* and *approach* of accepting influence, a couple-level process, may influence various processes, interactions, and affect within the couple relationship, which may then influence outcomes at the family-level. Further supporting this relationship, there is research demonstrating that couple-level variables, such as couple satisfaction and communication, influence family-level variables, such as family functioning and family satisfaction.

One such study examines affectionate communication with fathers as it relates to both mother's and child's family satisfaction (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). In this study, families were comprised of a father, mother, and one child. Mothers and children completed self-report surveys assessing their perception on the affectionate communication in their relationship with the father, along with measures of family satisfaction (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). For both mothers and children, affectionate communication with the father was related to assessments of higher levels of family satisfaction as reported by both the mothers and children (Curran &

Yoshimura, 2016). This result indicates that affection in the mother's relationship with the father, as well as affection in the child's relationship with the father, spilled over from the smaller subsystem into the larger family unit and influenced the mother and child's family satisfaction. Accepting influence, a couple-level process, may yield similar positive results for satisfaction with the family.

Another study by O'Neal and colleagues (2018) using a sample of military families demonstrated some of the principle tenets of these theories. This study investigated family communication during deployment as it related to service member, civilian spouse, and adolescent children's experiences of reintegration post-deployment, and how this related to family functioning as reported by service member, civilian spouse, and adolescent children (O'Neal et al., 2018). This study found that service member, civilian spouse, and adolescent experiences of reintegration were related to their own report of family functioning (O'Neal et al., 2018). Additionally, service member, civilian spouse, and adolescents' experiences of reintegration were related to different family members' reports of family functioning, demonstrating the spillover effect (O'Neal et al., 2018). Specifically, negative experiences of reintegration reported by the civilian spouse were related to the adolescent's and the service member's reported family functioning; the service member's negative experiences of reintegration were related to the civilian spouse's reported family functioning; and the adolescent's reported position experiences of reintegration were related to the civilian spouse's family functioning (O'Neal et al., 2018). This study demonstrates support for the spillover hypothesis within samples of military families, and, as such, parents' processes, interactions, and affect may influence children's outcomes and that children's processes, interactions, and affect may influence parent's outcomes.

Using the theoretical underpinnings of systems theory and spillover hypothesis, this study expands the literature by investigating accepting influence, a couple-level variable, as it relates to outcomes at the family-level, specifically satisfaction with the family. This study defines satisfaction with the family as the extent to which individual family members are satisfied with their family's closeness, their family's caring and concern for each other, and their family's ability to come together to resolve conflict.

### **Measurement of Accepting Influence**

Studies that investigate accepting influence as Gottman conceptualizes it tend to use the same method: observations of couples in conflictual conversations, namely discussing problem areas in their relationship. Their observational method, the Specific Affect Coding System, observations provides a systemic way of coding affect through the observation of couple interactions and conflict conversations (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman, McCoy, Coan, & Collier, 1996, Krokoff, Gottman, & Hass, 1989). Trained researchers observe the affect of each individual in the couple relationship by examining facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and the spoken content of the conversation; physiological measures, such as heart rate, are taken in conjunction with these observations as well (Coan et al., 1997).

This affective expression is then coded as positive, neutral, or negative, and further coded into categories, such as belligerence or humor. An example of positive affect may be humor represented by one partner telling a joke or making an amusing facial expression, or affection displayed by one individual reaching out to hold their partner's hand. Negative affect may be contempt exhibited by a cruel joke at one partner's expense, or hostility heard in one partner's tone of voice (Coan et al., 1997). Using this instrument, Coan and colleagues (1997) conceptualized a refusal to accept influence as one partner escalating negativity in response to

the other partner's lower levels of negativity (Coan et al., 1997). For example, if one individual is affectively neutral, but their partner responds to them using a hostile tone, this would be considered an increase in negative affect. This conceptualization indicates a refusal to accept influence as the partner escalating the negativity is refusing to be influenced by their partner's positive or neutral affect (Gottman et al., 1998). It is worth repeating that this measure and method captures individuals' *refusal* to accept influence from their partner; this is not the same as measuring accepting influence. In fact, Gottman and colleagues (2000) directly state they are measuring a refusal to accept influence, not accepting influence, in a response to a critique on their measurement and findings. The action and approach of *accepting* influence may be able to be measured using the Specific Affect Coding System. However, to my knowledge, *accepting* influence has not yet been conceptualized using the Specific Affect Coding System. As such, where the current literature stands, *refusing* to accept influence is the construct that has been conceptualized and measured.

This conceptualization and measure of accepting influence has many benefits including direct observation, reliability, and expert evaluation of affect supported by physiological measures (Gottman et al., 2000). However, some have argued that this method more accurately reflects an inability to regulate emotion rather than a refusal to accept influence (Stanley, Bradbury, & Markman, 2000). Gottman and colleagues have responded to these concerns citing their study on domestic violence (Coan et al., 1997) and the study on newlyweds (Gottman et al., 1998), both of which found that when men increased negativity in response to their wives' calmer statements, their heart rates decreased. Gottman and colleagues suggested this indicates that the escalation in negativity did not result from an inability to regulate emotion and was actually an attempt to control their wives, demonstrating a refusal to accept influence (Gottman

et al., 2000). In sum, benefits of the Specific Affect Coding System include observational, affective, and physiological data, yet challenges and limitations of this measure also exist.

I argue that the study of accepting influence may benefit from considering new methods and measures of accepting influence. Regarding measurement, our field may benefit from having a tool that directly measures accepting influence rather than measuring a refusal to accept influence. Regarding methods, a self-report measure of accepting influence may be beneficial by allowing researchers and practitioners easier access to information on the couple's ability to accept influence. To our knowledge, a self-report measure of Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence does not yet exist. This study adds to the literature by utilizing questions from an existing survey to create a measure for accepting influence. I would like to emphasize here that this study and this measurement were designed within the context of secondary data analysis. Items that represent the key aspects of accepting influence, such as partners sharing power, operating with mutuality, respecting each other's opinions and preferences, and viewing each other with openness and acceptance, were included. This is by no means a comprehensive measure of accepting influence. However, as there are no self-report measures of accepting influence available nor measures that directly assess *accepting* influence, this preliminary measure of accepting influence expands the literature in novel and meaningful ways.

### **The Current Study**

The current study investigates accepting influence as it relates to couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family, using a survey-based approach to assessing accepting influence with a sample of military families. Military couples are a unique population who experience normative stressors related to typical family life and situational stressors related to the transitional nature of military life. These couples also face certain unavoidable stressors of

military life, such as multiple physical and emotional transitions and separations (Drummet et al., 2003; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014). These transitions involve the family becoming disconnected from one another and then reuniting time and time again (Paley et al., 2013). This cycle can create stress in all members of the family, including the service member, the at-home partner, and the children (Segal, 1986; O'Neal et al., 2018), but the transitions in and out of the family home may be particularly salient for the service member. Extended time down range, away from one's home garrison has been associated to adverse individual, couple-, and family-level outcomes for service members. Members of military families are also at risk for the development of mental health disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, or anxiety (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013), and some military families are at greater risk than others. Notably, families of enlisted service members report elevated rates of mental health disorders. These mental health disorders then put families at further risk because the symptoms can adversely influence couple- and family-level interactions and phenomenon, such as negatively effecting parenting, which can then adversely impact other members of the family (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013).

While military families are susceptible to multiple risk factors, there are several protective factors that may help mitigate the risk of these stressors. Military installations offer various programs to support both service members and their families in an effort to mitigate the known stressors of living in a military family. Additionally, military families are also protected by various family-level interactions and phenomenon. For example, a strong couple relationship has been shown to positively impact physical health and emotional well-being of both service members and their partners (Lewis et al., 2012; O'Neal et al., 2016), as is the case for the majority of families. Military families also must be considered with normative family factors,

such as length of couple relationship, which can serve as a protective factor in the majority of families (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Due to this, accepting influence may be an important protective factor within these families although it has not yet been examined in a sample of military families. As previously discussed, accepting influence involves the ability to share power and mutuality. The ability to share power and have mutuality in relationships has been linked to positive couple-level outcomes in civilian populations (Neff & Harter, 2002; Worley & Samp, 2016, Davlia et al., 2017). Military couples and families may benefit from the couple's ability to share power, operate with mutuality, and accept influence. In fact, accepting influence may be particularly important for military couples and families considering the numerous physical and emotional transitions these couples must undergo, and the multiple stressors these families are exposed to. This study addressed these gaps in the literature.

As noted earlier, much of the research into accepting influence is Gottman's work, using Gottman's conceptualization of accepting influence as the *action* of allowing one's partner to influence them and the *approach* of being open to one's partner's needs and preferences (Gottman, 1999). This conceptualization addresses the power dynamics and mutuality within a couple relationship. Gottman and colleagues proclaim the importance of accepting influence, citing it as a key factor in couple relationships (Gottman et al., 1998); however, limited research exists confirming this assertion. Research into power and mutuality demonstrates that accepting influence may be related to positive couple-level outcomes (Neff & Harter, 2002; Worley & Samp, 2016, Davlia et al., 2017). Given the potential for accepting influence to serve as an intervention for couples, this is an important construct to study. Additionally, considering the historical concerns with how accepting influence has been measured, it is also important to



evaluate a potentially new method for measuring accepting influence. The current study aimed to fill these gaps by investigating accepting influence as it relates to couple communication satisfaction (see Research Questions 1a and 1b) and satisfaction with the family (see Research Questions 2a and 2b), utilizing a dyadic sample of military couples, a unique population in which accepting influence may be a salient intervention point. More specifically, in this study, actor-partner interdependence models are used to address the following research questions:

**RQ1a.** When a service member perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *couple communication satisfaction* for both partners?

**RQ1b.** When a civilian spouse perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *couple communication satisfaction* for both partners?

**RQ2a.** When a service member perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *satisfaction with the family* for both partners?

**RQ2b.** When a civilian spouse perceives that their partner accepts influence, will this be related to higher levels of *satisfaction with the family* for both partners?

This theoretically-informed study also expands the literature on accepting influence by piloting a new measure that utilizes questions which assess the mutuality and power dynamics, vital components of the construct of accepting influence. Contextual military variables, including total number of months deployed and rank, were accounted for in these models based on previous research (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). Other control variables for which the literature gives reason for examining, specifically gender and length of relationship, were also included.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Participants

This study utilized a sample of military couples from a larger existing study entitled the military family life project (USDA/NIFA award No. 2009-48680-06069; Jay Mancini, Principal Investigator). From this larger study, data were collected from one Army installation in the continental United States. Families were eligible to participate in the study if they contained at least one parent that was an active duty service member and one adolescent between the ages of 11 and 18. If it was a two-parent home, inclusion criteria maintained that both parents had to participate in the study. This resulted in a total of 273 participating families.

To address the research questions for the current study, the analytic sample included dyadic data from families with two parents who are in a couple relationship. Accordingly, single parent families were removed ( $n = 29$ ). The analytic sample for the current study used dyadic data and is comprised of 244 military couples, with one service member and one civilian spouse. A large majority of service members were male (94.3%,  $n = 230$ ), only 13 service members were female; data for one participant was missing. A majority of both service members and civilian spouses in the analytic sample were between the ages 31 to 40 (67.9% service members, 71.8% civilian spouses). The average length of couples' current romantic relationship was 12.6 years ( $SD = 5.71$ ). Of the service members included in the sample, 89% ( $n = 214$ ) of service members were enlisted and 11% ( $n = 27$ ) of service members were officers; data for three participants was missing. The average number of months deployed among the service members was almost 30 months ( $M = 29.86$ ,  $SD = 15.16$ ). The majority of both service members and civilian spouses had

at least some college education (83.5% service members, 76.5% civilian spouses had at least some college).

## **Procedure**

The current study is a secondary data analysis designed to address my specific research questions. For the original data collection process, researchers collected family data at three locations on a single military installation in the continental United States. Participation was voluntary. Military families were recruited via radio and print advertisements, i.e., signs and flyers posted at local stores, restaurants, and community centers on post. All members of participating families gave consent, and for those adolescents under the age of 18, consent was given by a parent. All family members completed online surveys at the same time using computers at the community centers located on the military installation. Parents and adolescents from each family completed the surveys on different computers so that they would not discuss responses or influence the response choices of other family members.

## **Measures**

**Partner accepts influence.** The measure includes five items adapted from the Quality of Parental Relationships Inventory (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). The original measure included items to assess parental warmth and parental hostility in parent-child relationships. The measure in this study included five questions to assess the frequency of ones' partner doing certain behaviors that represent sharing power and mutuality. As such, the measure was named "Partner accepts influence" reflecting that it is assessing the perception of whether ones' partner displays behaviors that reflect accepting influence.

The stem question for all items in the measure was "When you and (partner) spent time talking or doing things together, how often did he/she..." and the included items are "...Help

you do something that was important to you;” “... Listen carefully to your point of view;” “... Act supportive and understanding towards you;” “... Let you know they appreciate you, your ideas, or the things you do;” “... Understand the way you felt about things.” For the items, the responses ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (always); this is a continuous variable. For service members,  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ,  $\alpha = .879$ ; for spouses,  $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ,  $\alpha = .893$ . A copy of this measure can be found in Appendix A.

This measure includes items that map onto different portions of the construct of accepting influence, including the *action* of directing everyday decision making towards a suitable compromise, the *approach* of viewing one’s partner in an open and accepting manner, and the components of accepting influence, sharing of power and mutuality, acting in a way to meet both partners’ needs. For example, when one’s partner helped them do something that was important to them, this partner is acting in a way to meet both partner’s needs; when one’s partner listens carefully to their point of view, this partner is demonstrating they view their partner in an open and accepting manner. One partner acting in a supportive manner and demonstrating understanding displays respect for opinions and preferences and the sharing of power; one partner saying they appreciate the other for what they do again shows respect and mutuality; one partner understanding the way their partner felt about something also shows openness and mutuality.

This measure had good reliability for service members and spouses, showing the items are related to each other. Additionally, this measure offers face validity, meaning it appears to measure accepting influence as the statements map onto various portions of the greater accepting influence construct (Nevo, 1985).

It is important to note here again that this study was secondary data analysis, utilizing data collected in the military family life project (Jay Mancini, Principal Investigator). The items included in this study are the items that most closely represented the construct of accepting influence from the questions available in the dataset. These five items do not fully encompass the dynamic construct of accepting influence. However, these five items offer an initial starting point for assessing accepting influence, within a new modality of measurement, specifically survey items. To my knowledge, there is no self-report measure of accepting influence. Additionally, there is no direct measure of *accepting* influence. While the partner accepts influence measure is by no means a complete measure of accepting influence, it is the first self-report measure assessing the *acceptance* of influence available in the literature.

**Couple communication satisfaction.** This measure, Couple communication satisfaction, was measured using eight items adapted from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The specific questions assessed the extent to which partners were satisfied with their communication on various relationship domains. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); this is a continuous variable. The question stem for all items in the measure was “I am satisfied with how we talk ...” and some sample items are “to each other overall” or “about our child-rearing.” Mean scores, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients are in Table 1.

**Satisfaction with the family.** This measure, satisfaction with the family, was measured using ten items from FACES IV (Olson, Gorall, & Tiesel, 2006). These items assessed the extent to which partners are satisfied with their family’s closeness, concern, and coming together in times of conflict. Responses ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied); this is a continuous variable. The question stem for all items in the measure was “How satisfied are you with...” and some sample items are “the degree of closeness between family members” or “your

family's ability to share positive experiences." Mean scores, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients for are also in Table 1.

**Control variables.** Based on existing literature, two military-related control variables were accounted for in this study, specifically total number of months deployed and rank. Number of months deployed was measured by a single item asking the service member to total the number of months they had been deployed since 2001; thus, it is a continuous variable. Rank was measured by a single item asking service members to indicate their rank as junior enlisted (E1-E4), senior enlisted (E5-E9), junior officer (O1-O4), or senior officer (O5-O9). For this study, this item was recoded and dichotomized, such that 0 indicated enlisted service members and 1 indicates officers.

Additionally, relationship-specific and demographic control variables were accounted for, specifically length of relationship and gender. Length of relationship was a continuous variable measured by a single item asking both service members and civilian spouses to report the length of their current relationship in years and months. Gender was measured by one question asking service members and civilian partners to report their identified gender, male or female. Gender was dichotomized, such that 0 indicated male and 1 indicated female.

### **Analytic approach**

To answer the research questions, I began by creating the measure of partner accepting influence using SPSS. Five questions adapted from the Quality of Parental Relationships Inventory (Conger et al., 1994) that assess the sharing of power and mutuality, key components of accepting influence, within the couple's relationship were used to create this scale. A composite score was created for each participant using the means of their scores across these five items. This composite score was, then, used in further analyses. Mean composite scores for

couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family were also created using all items from these scales. These composite scores were used in further analyses.

Partner accepts influence was be the predictor variable. The outcome variables in this study were couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. For all variables, descriptive statistics were examined in SPSS. For all variables mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were examined. I examined skewness to determine the nature of the distribution of the variables. Normal distribution was determined if the skewness statistic is lying within the range of normality (skewness: -2 to 2) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). No variables were outside the range of normality so no transformations were conducted. I examined kurtosis to understand the peakedness of the variable. This provided insight into the distribution of responses. The range of normality for kurtosis is typically -7 to 7 (Ryu, 2011). If my variables had fallen outside this range of normality, this would have been good information to have. However, as the kurtosis values for all variables were normal and kurtosis does not typically impact the results of further statistical analysis (Barrett, Morgan, Leech, & Gloeckner, 2012), no transformations were conducted. I also examined the reliability of each scale by checking the Cronbach's alpha values to determine if they were higher than 0.7; values higher than 0.7 are considered to be acceptable (DeVellis, 2016).

To understand the bivariate relationship of the variables, I examined the correlations between the variables in SPSS. Multicollinearity was assessed by examining if the variables have high correlation values (e.g., > 0.8). The military contextual variables (number of months deployed and rank), demographic variables (gender), and relationship variables (length of marriage), were significantly correlated with certain study variables, and as such were included in the path models with paths to the variables they were correlated with.

To address both the research questions, two path models were fit using an actor-partner interdependence framework (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Actor-partner interdependence models use dyadic data. This is a benefit because data on both partners' behaviors and outcomes in a couple relationship can be analyzed simultaneously. For my specific study, this means that service members' partner accepts influence were related to both service members' and spouses' outcomes (couple communication satisfaction or satisfaction with the family), and that spouses' partner accepts influence were related to both service members' and spouses' outcomes (couple communication satisfaction or satisfaction with the family), all within the same model.

For RQ1 assessing the relationship between partner accepts influence and couple communication satisfaction, an actor-partner interdependence framework was utilized to investigate both actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on couple communication satisfaction. This model was fit in AMOS so that both actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on couple communication satisfaction were examined within one model. The model fit statistics CFI and RMSEA were examined to determine if the model fit the data. A CFI value  $> 0.9$  and  $RMSEA < 0.08$ , were the standards used to determine if the model had acceptable fit. The relationships between the variables were examined if the model had acceptable fit. The individual regression statistics of each pathway were examined to determine the relationship of partner accepts influence on couple communication satisfaction. Specifically, the actor and partner effects of accepting influence on couple communication satisfaction were examined. See the conceptual model in Appendix B.

For RQ2 assessing the relationship between partner accepts influence and satisfaction with the family, the same process was used. An actor-partner interdependence framework was utilized to investigate both actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on satisfaction



with the family. This model investigated actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on satisfaction with the family. This model was fit in AMOS so that both actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on satisfaction with the family were examined within one model. The model fit statistics CFI and RMSEA were examined to determine if the model fit the data. If the model had acceptable fit, the relationships between the variables were examined. The individual regression statistics of each pathway were examined to determine the relationship of accepting influence on satisfaction with the family. Specifically, the actor and partner effects of partner accepts influence on satisfaction with the family were examined. See the conceptual model in Appendix C.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Univariate Analysis

To understand the nature of the variables, descriptive statistics were examined. Specifically, the means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and reliabilities of each variable were examined. Partner accepts influence appeared to be normally distributed, evidenced by the descriptive statistics (for service members:  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ , skew =  $-0.262$ , kurtosis =  $-0.673$ ; for spouses:  $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ , skew =  $-0.238$ , kurtosis =  $-0.661$ ). Couple communication satisfaction appeared to be normally distributed, evidenced by the descriptive and skewness statistics (for service members:  $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ , skew =  $-1.425$ , kurtosis =  $3.314$ ; for spouses:  $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ , skew =  $-1.107$ , kurtosis =  $1.434$ ) lying within the range of normality. Satisfaction with the family also appeared to be normally distributed, evidenced by the descriptive and skewness statistics (for service members:  $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ , skew =  $-0.921$ , kurtosis =  $1.790$ ; for spouses:  $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ , skew =  $-0.615$ , kurtosis =  $0.875$ ) lying within the range of normality.

The partner accepts influence variable demonstrated good reliability (service members:  $\alpha = 0.879$ ; spouses:  $\alpha = 0.893$ ). The couple communication satisfaction variable demonstrated good reliability (service members:  $\alpha = 0.895$ ; spouses:  $\alpha = 0.915$ ). The satisfaction with the family variable also demonstrated good reliability (service members:  $\alpha = 0.944$ ; spouses:  $\alpha = 0.936$ ).

For service members, the average number of months deployed was 29.86 ( $SD = 15.07$  months). The majority of service members were enlisted ( $n = 214$ , 89% enlisted;  $n = 27$ , 11% officers; data were missing for three participants). Of the 244 participating service members, the

majority were male service members ( $n = 230$  male;  $n = 13$  female;  $n = 1$  unreported). The average length of marriage was 12.65 years ( $SD = 5.67$  years).

### **Bivariate Analysis**

To understand the nature of the relationships between the variables, I examined the correlations between all variables; analyses were conducted in SPSS. See Table 1 for full details. First, I assessed for any indicators of multicollinearity; no two variables were correlated at a level higher than  $r = 0.8$ , thus, none of the variables appeared to exhibit multicollinearity. The relationship between service members' partner accepts influence and service members' couple communication satisfaction exhibited the correlational value with the largest magnitude ( $r = .536, p < .001$ ).

Partner accepts influence for both service members and spouses was significantly positively correlated with couple communication satisfaction for both service members and spouses, such that higher levels of partner accepts influence was related to higher levels of couple communication satisfaction within individuals and between partners. More specifically, service members' and spouses' reports of partner accepts influence were both highly correlated with their own report of couple communication satisfaction (service member,  $r = .536, p < .001$ ; spouse,  $r = .528, p < .001$ ), indicating possible actor affects (within individual). Service members' partner accepts influence was significantly correlated with spouses' couple communication satisfaction at a small effect size ( $r = .178, p = .006$ ). Spouses' partner accepts influence was significantly and moderately correlated with service members' couple communication satisfaction ( $r = .329, p < .001$ ). These correlations indicated possible partner effects (between partners).

Partner accepts influence for both service members and spouses was significantly correlated with satisfaction with the family for both service members and spouses. More specifically, service members' and spouses' reports of partner accepts influence were both highly correlated with their own report of satisfaction with the family (respectively,  $r = .480, p < .001$ ;  $r = .456, p < .001$ ), indicating possible actor effects. Service members' partner accepts influence was significantly correlated with spouses' satisfaction with the family at a moderate effect size ( $r = .260, p < .001$ ). Spouses' partner accepts influence was significantly and moderately correlated with service members' satisfaction with the family ( $r = .282, p < .001$ ). These correlations indicated possible partner effects.

The control variables (i.e., number of months deployed, rank, length of marriage, and gender) were examined in relation to the partner accepts influence variables, the couple communication satisfaction variables, and the satisfaction with the family variables. Number of months deployed was negatively correlated with service members' report of partner accepts influence at a level that was approaching significance ( $r = -0.105, p = .122$ ). Rank (0 = Enlisted; 1 = Officer) was significantly positively correlated with spouses' couple communication satisfaction ( $r = .146, p = .024$ ), such that spouses of enlisted personnel tended to report lower levels of couple communication satisfaction. Length of current relationship was significantly positively correlated with spouses' report of satisfaction with the family ( $r = .135, p = .037$ ). These control variables were included in the model for further exploration. Length of marriage was not correlated with partner accepts influence or with couple communication satisfaction for either partner. Gender was not correlated with partner accepts influence, couple communication satisfaction, or satisfaction with the family. Significant correlations were accounted for in each model. Additionally, there was a significant positive correlation between service members' and

spouses' partner accepts influence variables ( $r = .346, p < .001$ ); to account for this relationship, these variables were covaried in the model.

### **Accepting Influence and Couple Communication Satisfaction**

This model examined the actor and partner effects of service members' and civilian spouses' report of partner accepts influence on couple communication satisfaction, as reported by both partners, accounting for number of months deployed and rank. The model fit the data, CFI = 0.963, RMSEA = .062, meeting the requirements for acceptable model fit.

Two actor effects and one partner effect were identified as significant in this model (See Figure 1). Service members' report that their partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of their own couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.418, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Service members' report that their partner accepts influence was not significantly related to their civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction ( $B = -0.001, p = 0.986$ ). Civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of their own couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.458, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence was also significantly related to higher levels of service members' couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.141, p = 0.003$ ), a partner effect. This model explained approximately 31% of the variance in service members' couple communication satisfaction and approximately 29% of the variance in civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction.

With regard to the control variables, service members' number of months deployed was marginally associated with their own report of partner accepts influence ( $B = -0.004, p = 0.09$ ), such that more cumulative months away on deployment was marginally associated with lower levels of partner accepts influence. Rank was significantly related to spouses' couple

communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.227, p = 0.026$ ), such that spouses of enlisted service members tended to report lower levels of couple communication satisfaction and spouses of officers tended to report higher levels of couple communication satisfaction. Length of marriage and gender were not significantly correlated with partner accepts influence or with couple communication satisfaction in the initial descriptive statistics; as such, these variables were not included in this model.

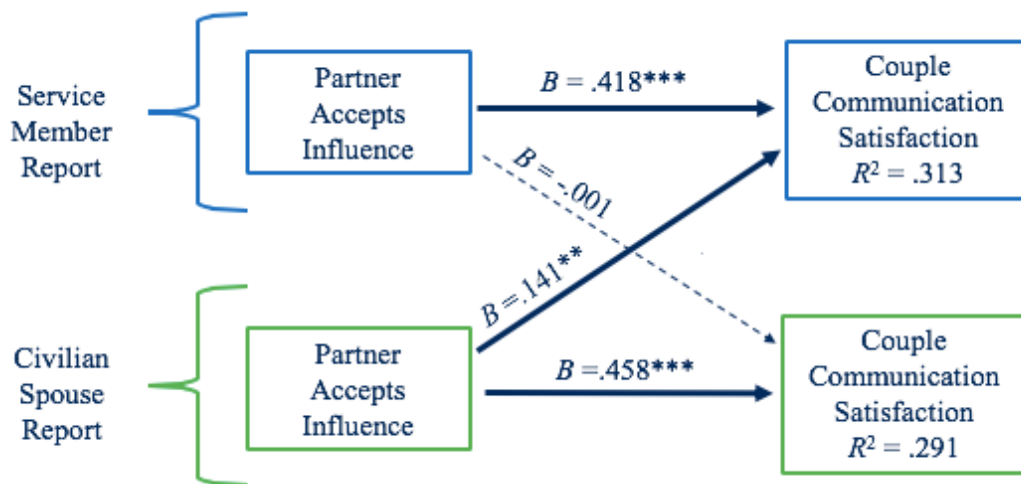


Figure 1. Partner Accepts Influence and Couple Communication Satisfaction ( $N = 244$  couples).

Note:  $* = p < .05$ ,  $** = p < .01$ ,  $*** = p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.963, RMSEA = .062. Control variables rank and number of months deployed, and the relationship between both partner accepts influence variables were accounted for in this model. Unstandardized betas ( $B$ ) were reported.

### Accepting Influence and Satisfaction with the Family

This model examined the actor and partner effects of service members' and civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence on satisfaction with the family, as reported by both partners, accounting for number of months deployed and length of marriage. The model fit the data, CFI = 0.986, RMSEA = .033, meeting the requirements for acceptable model fit.

Two actor effects and one partner effect were identified as significant in this model (See Figure 2). Service members' report that their partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of their own satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.458, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Service members' report that their partner accepts influence was marginally related to higher levels of civilian spouses' satisfaction with the family ( $B = .105, p = 0.095$ ), at a small effect size that was approaching significance. Civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of their own satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.426, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence was also significantly related to higher levels of service members' satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.153, p = 0.011$ ), a partner effect. This model explained approximately 25% of the variance in both service members' satisfaction with the family ( $R^2 = 0.251$ ) and in civilian spouses' ( $R^2 = 0.247$ ) satisfaction with the family.

With regard to the control variables, service members' number of months deployed was marginally related to their own report of partner accepts influence ( $B = -0.005, p = 0.088$ ), such that more cumulative months away on deployment was associated with lower levels of partner accepts influence. Length of marriage was significantly and positively related to the civilian spouses' report of satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.015, p = 0.027$ ), such that longer marriages were associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the family. Rank and gender were not significantly correlated with partner accepts influence or with satisfaction with the family in the initial review of descriptive statistics; as such, these variables were not included in this model.

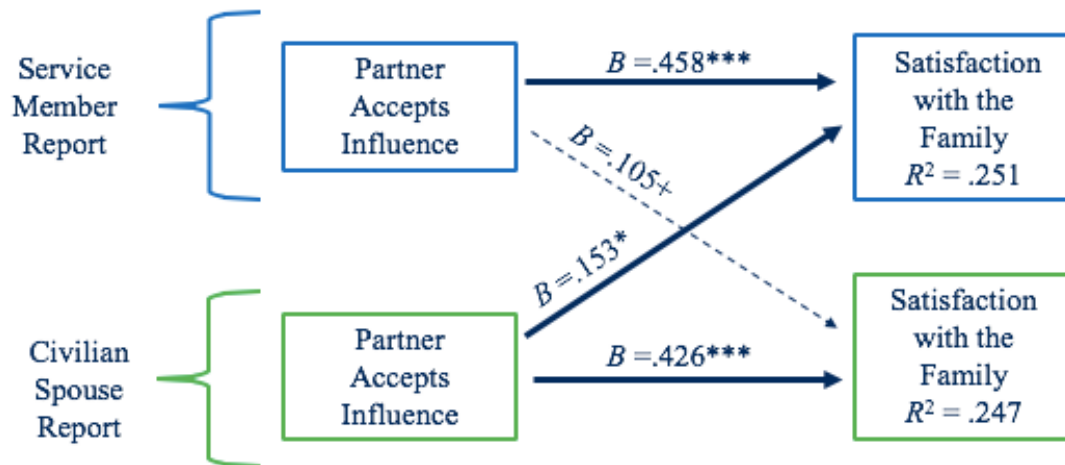


Figure 2. Partner Accepts Influence and Satisfaction with the Family ( $N = 244$  couples).

Note:  $* = p < .05$ ,  $** = p < .01$ ,  $*** = p < .001$ ; CFI = 0.986. RMSEA = 0.033. Control variables number of months deployed and length of marriage, and the relationship between both partner accepts influence variables were accounted for in this model. Unstandardized betas ( $B$ ) were reported.

### Post hoc Analysis

In the bivariate analysis, gender was not significantly related to service members' or spouses' partner accepts influence, couple communication satisfaction, or satisfaction with the family variables. However, according to Gottman's findings, the gender of partners may be particularly important to the processes related to accepting influence. To reiterate, in Gottman's study of newlywed couples, he found that the male partner's refusing their female partner's influence was related to divorce, and that the majority of females in the heterosexual relationships he observed were not refusing influence (thus, considered to be accepting influence), but this had no effect on relationship satisfaction or dissolution (Gottman et al., 1998). Given this, in order to better understand the potential influence of gender on the study variables, a post hoc analysis was conducted. In this, both study models were fit again using a



subset of couples from our original sample in which service members were male and civilian spouses were female ( $n = 230$  couples) to see whether differences in the results emerged.

**Accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction.** This model examined the actor and partner effects of male service members' and female civilian spouses' reports that their partner accepts influence on couple communication satisfaction, as reported by both partners ( $n = 230$ ). The model fit the data,  $CFI = 0.962$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.063$ , meeting the requirements for acceptable model fit. In this model, similar to model with all 244 couples, number of months deployed and rank were controlled for.

Similar to the original model, two actor effects and one partner effect were identified as significant. Male service members' reports of partner accepts influence were significantly related to higher levels of their own couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.397, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Male service members' reports of partner accepts influence were not significantly related to their female civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction ( $B = -0.007, p = 0.904$ ). Civilian spouses' report that her partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of her own couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.468, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Civilian spouses' report that her partner accepts influence was also significantly related to higher levels of the male service members' couple communication satisfaction ( $B = 0.156, p < 0.01$ ), a partner effect. This model explained approximately 30% of the variance in male service members' couple communication satisfaction and approximately 29% of the variance in female civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction.

The control variables rank and number of months deployed were included in this model. In contrast to the model with all 244 participants, rank was only marginally related to spouses' couple communication satisfaction, ( $B = 0.185, p = 0.09$ ). However, the effect size and direction

of the effect remained similar to that of the first model. Almost identical to the first model, service members' number of months deployed was marginally associated with their own report of partner accepts influence ( $B = -0.005, p = 0.07$ ), such that more cumulative months away on deployment was marginally associated with lower levels of partner accepts influence. The directionality, magnitude, and significance of all pathways in the model were very similar to those of the model with all 244 couples.

**Accepting influence and satisfaction with the family.** This model examined the actor and partner effects of male service members' and female civilian spouses' report that their partner accepts influence on satisfaction with the family, as reported by both partners ( $n = 230$ ). The model fit the data, CFI = 0.992. RMSEA = 0.020, meeting the requirements for acceptable model fit. In this model, similar to model with all 244 couples, number of months deployed and length of marriage were controlled for.

Similar to the original model, two actor effects and one partner effect were identified as significant. Service members' report that his partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of his own satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.453, p < 0.001$ ), an actor effect. Service members' report that his partner accepts influence was related to higher levels of their female civilian spouses' satisfaction with the family at a level that approached significance ( $B = .125, p = 0.06$ ). Civilian spouses' report that her partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of her own satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.411, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.205$ ), an actor effect. Civilian spouses' report that her partner accepts influence was also significantly related to higher levels of the male service members' satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.172, p < 0.01; R^2 = 0.214$ ), a partner effect. This model explained approximately 21% of the

variance in both service members' satisfaction with the family and in civilian spouses' satisfaction with the family.

With regard to the control variables, service members' number of months deployed was marginally related to their own report of partner accepts influence ( $B = -0.005, p = 0.07$ ), such that more cumulative months away on deployment was associated with lower levels of partner accepts influence. This was nearly the same effect in regards to effect size, direction of effect, and statistical significance seen in the first model. Length of marriage was significantly and positively related to the civilian spouses' report of satisfaction with the family ( $B = 0.015, p = 0.04$ ), such that longer marriages were associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the family. This too was almost identical to the effect seen in the model with all 244 participants. The directionality, magnitude, and significance of all pathways in the model were very similar to those of the model with all 244 couples.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### General Findings

This study utilized a systems approach to examine how accepting influence within the couple relationship was associated with salient couple- and family-level dynamics, specifically couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family using a dyadic study of military couples. This study found support for the positive relationship between partners *accepting* influence and *beneficial* couple-level outcomes. This relationship was expected to exist based on Gottman's prior findings relating refusing influence to adverse couple-level outcomes. This study also found support for the relationship between *accepting* influence and *healthier* family-level outcomes, such that those who reported that their romantic partner tended to accept influence also reported higher levels of satisfaction with the family system as a whole, suggesting a spillover effect. These findings make a unique contribution to the scholarly literature in both advancing our understanding of accepting influence as a positive, behavioral action and approach within the couple relationship and expanding our methodological assessment of this construct. Each of these study findings are explored further in this discussion within the context of theory and the broader research literature. Implications for couples, particularly military couples, are also presented along with implications for researchers with regard to the measurement of accepting influence.

Accepting influence is a salient couple-level phenomenon first identified in Gottman's research with couples in the late 1990's, specifically within samples experiencing domestic violence and others who were newlywed couples (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998). This

research demonstrated the adverse outcomes of male partners refusing influence from their female partners, as couples in which the male partners refused influence had higher levels of more severe forms of domestic violence and were more likely to divorce. This research led to Gottman's proclamation that marriages will work to the extent that men share power and accept influence from their wives (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). In other words, research focused on the behavior of refusing to accept influence and its detrimental impact on the couple relationship.

Although no research specifically on accepting influence was identified, research on key components of accepting influence, *shared power* and *mutuality*, is available and supports the notion that accepting influence is associated with positive couple-level outcomes, such as validation in relationships and relationship satisfaction (Neff & Harter, 2002; Worley & Samp, 2016; Davila et al., 2017). Family systems theory (Bowen, 1966; Whitchurch & Constantine, 2009) and the spillover hypothesis (Almeida et al., 1999; Nelson et al., 2009) provided theoretical underpinnings for this relationship.

Findings from the current study complement the work of previous empirical research and support the theoretically based notion that accepting influence within the couple relationship is posited to have a systemic impact on the couple relationship and family system. Specific to this study, service members' and civilian spouses' perceptions that their partner accepts influence were related to higher levels of their own couple communication satisfaction, actor effects. This may indicate that when one feels that their influence is being accepted by their partner, this facilitates communication and improves satisfaction.

Additionally, civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence was related to higher levels of their service member partners' couple communication satisfaction, a partner

effect. In contrast, service members' perception that their partner accepts influence was not related to civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction. This is may be related to the concept that in military families civilian spouses' psychological well-being or psychological distress can be conceptualized as a barometer for family health. Research has linked civilian spouses' psychological distress, anxiety, and depression to higher levels of family conflict and lower levels of family cohesion support (Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013). The unidirectional partner effects may indicate that it is more important for service members to accept influence – or, at the very least, for civilian spouses to perceive their service member is accepting their influence.

The unidirectional partner effects could also potentially relate to the influence the military has on couples. The military exerts numerous direct demands on service members including deployments, temporary duty assignments, and permanent changes of stations (Drummet et al., 2003; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014), as well as a variety of indirect demands and expectations on military families, including moving with service members, assuming different roles and responsibilities while the service member is away, and the expectation to participate in military culture (Segal, 1986). These expectations can be conceptualized in terms of power within a relationship; the military is an outside entity holding the majority of resources for the family, and is capable of influencing the outcomes and decisions of not only the service member, but all members of the family (Segal, 1986). The demands may interfere with civilian spouses' capacity to maintain a consistent career trajectory, live where they would like to live, and to have full autonomy over their social lives (Segal, 1986). As such, the ability for service members to accept influence may be particularly important for civilian spouses' outcomes and satisfaction, including couple communication satisfaction. It may be particularly important for civilian

spouses to feel heard, supported, respected, and generally to feel that their influence is accepted given that there are many instances in military life in which they do not have a lot of “say.”

Additionally, considering most service members in our sample were male, this may reflect the gendered effect of accepting influence found in Gottman’s research. Gottman found that women commonly accepted their male partners’ influence, and this was unrelated to relationship stability. In contrast, nearly 80% of marriages in which the male partner did not accept his female partner’s influence ended in divorce (Gottman et al., 1998). When the *mostly female civilian spouses* felt their partner accepted their influence, this was related to higher levels of *couple communication satisfaction for both partners*; when the *mostly male service members* felt their partner accepted their influence, this was *only related to their own couple communication satisfaction*. The same pattern of partner effects was also found in my post hoc analysis in which all service members were male and all civilian spouses were female. This could indicate that male partners accepting influence (or at least, female partners believing their male partner accepts their influence) is more indicative of couple outcomes than female partners accepting influence. This may also indicate that more women are already accepting influence, as Gottman (1998) found, and that more women are *expected to* accept influence; this possibly indicates that when men accept influence, it is more impactful because it is less expected.

Overall, the results indicate that there is a positive relationship between accepting influence and couple communication. This supports Gottman’s research and statement that accepting influence is an important phenomenon for healthy couple-level outcomes (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

Results from the current study also demonstrate a meaningful and salient relationship between accepting influence and satisfaction with the family, as reported by service members

and civilian spouses. Similar to the model with couple communication satisfaction, two actor effects were found: Service members' and civilian spouses' perceptions that their partner accepts influence were related to higher levels of their own satisfaction with the family. This indicates that accepting influence may lead to higher levels of satisfaction with the whole family for both partners in a couple relationship. It is possible that the action of collaborating and compromising on decision making or the approach of viewing one's partner in an open an accepting manner spills over, resulting in similar behaviors and attitudes being present within the interactions of all family members, enhancing satisfaction with the overall family. This reflects the recent research that has demonstrated how certain couple-level and parental dynamics, such as affectionate communication or communication during deployment, are related to family-level outcomes, such as family satisfaction or family functioning (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016; O'Neal et al., 2018); these studies also utilized family systems theory and the spillover hypothesis to frame their work.

A similar pattern in regards to partner effects was discerned in this model as well. Civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence was significantly related to higher levels of their service member partners' satisfaction with the family. Service members' perception that their partner accepts influence was only marginally related to higher levels of civilian spouses' satisfaction with the family. The difference in the partner effects may be related the link between civilian spouses' psychological well-being or distress and family support and conflict (Green, Nurius, & Lester, 2013). This relationship suggests that civilian spouses' psychological well-being or distress is particularly impactful on the family as a whole. For this study, this suggests that civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts their influence may have a larger impact on the family as a whole and on service members' satisfaction with the family, than service members' partner accepts influence does. As previously mentioned, the



unidirectional partner effect may also be related to the influence of the military on couple relationships (Segal, 1986). That is, it may be more important for civilian spouses to perceive the service member partner accepts influence than for the service member to feel their civilian partner accepts influence. This could also reflect the gendered findings of Gottman's research (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Gottman (1998) found that generally women are already accepting influence, but this is not related to couple outcomes. Rather, when men refuse to accept their female partners' influence, it is related to adverse outcomes. In this study, when the mostly female civilian spouses perceived the mostly male service members accepted their influence, this was related to both partners' outcomes, paralleling Gottman's research that male partners' accepting or refusing influence is more impactful on couple-level and family-level outcomes.

However, it is important to note here that when the outcome was satisfaction with the family, the pathway between service member's partner accepts influence to the civilian spouses' outcome (again, in this case, satisfaction with the family) approached significance. Comparatively, the pathway between service members' partner accepts influence and civilian spouses' couple communication satisfaction was not significant. This indicates that the influence of gender or military status (that is, if one partner is a service member or civilian spouse) may be less impactful when considering family-level outcomes. Perhaps when considering satisfaction with the family, both partners accepting influence has an impact, males and females, service members and civilians alike.

Overall, the results indicate a positive relationship between accepting influence and satisfaction with the family. This novel contribution to the literature underlies the importance of accepting influence, a couple-level process, on the family system.

Results from the current study did not suggest that gender was significantly related to any study variables. This was unexpected given the large and significant effect gender has had on accepting influence in Gottman's research (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). While the unidirectionality of the partner effects may hint at gender having an influence on the findings, the sample did not have a large enough portion of female service members and male civilian spouses to truly tease apart the potential influence of gender and military status on the partner accepts influence variable, or upon couple communication satisfaction or satisfaction with the family.

The results indicate that there is a relationship between service members' and civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence and their own couple communication satisfaction and their own satisfaction with the family. Civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence was also related to service members' couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. However, service members' perception that their partner accepts their influence was not related with their civilian spouses' outcomes. The results generally support a positive relationship between accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. More research needs to be done in order to discern the possible effect gender or military status may have on couples' ability to accept influence.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study, along with Gottman's work indicate that accepting influence is an important construct that can be linked to positive outcomes amongst couples and families. It follows that if partners can learn to improve their ability to accept influence, their couple and family relationships may benefit. As previously discussed, one study has already demonstrated that accepting influence can be taught to couples to improve different aspects of couple relationships. Babcock and colleagues (2011) designed an accepting influence intervention to

teach accepting influence to couples experiencing intimate partner violence. In this study, couples engaged in an argument and then, seven minutes into the conflict, were asked to pause. The male partners (who were the perpetrators of the abuse) listened to examples of accepting influence and practiced accepting influence in simulated conversations; the female partners were not coached in accepting influence and instead during this time listened to calming music. Following this, the male partners exhibited less aggression after resuming the argument with their partner (Babcock et al., 2011). Accepting influence may be able to be taught as a communication skill in a similar fashion to nonviolent couples, which may lead to outcomes such as higher levels of couple communication satisfaction as this study examined or other beneficial outcomes for couples.

While Babcock and colleagues (2011) display accepting influence can be taught as a communication skill leading to positive results in couples, there has still not been a comprehensive intervention or program designed to help couples hone their accepting influence skills. Again, accepting influence is a dynamic construct. It is both an action and an approach encompassing behaviors that display acceptance, sharing in power and decision making, viewing one's partner with openness and respect, compromising, operating with mutuality, etc. (Gottman et al, 2015). While there is not an intervention designed to address the full construct of accepting influence, there are interventions aimed at addressing the components of accepting influence and/or related constructs. Research into these interventions may serve as a blueprint for a comprehensive accepting influence intervention. Considering that accepting influence is both an action and an approach, reviewing interventions aimed at both active behaviors (actions) and perceptions of one's partner (approach) may be helpful.

**Accepting influence actions.** Accepting influence involves taking actions that display one is sharing power, sharing decision making, compromising, and operating with mutuality (Gottman et al, 2015). Babcock and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that accepting influence interventions based in communication may be effective. Teaching people what accepting influence sounds like may enhance people's ability to share power, share in decision making, and compromise; at the very least, it can reduce aggression in the conversation (Babcock et al, 2011). A focus on communicating accepting influence may also be effective in different ways. For example, communication skills such as softened start-ups and repair attempts have been shown to improve conflict in relationships (Gottman, 1999). Softened start-ups are initiating conflict conversations in a non-aggressive manner, and they involve taking into consideration what one partner may be doing, feeling, or needing in that moment (Gottman, 1999). Softened start-ups are actions in conflict situations that show mutuality, a key component of accepting influence. Repair attempts are actions a partner takes to decrease conflict, lessen tension, show they care about their partner, or show that they are open to their partner's opinions (Gottman, 1999). Intentionally using repair attempts to demonstrate that one wants to compromise, share in decision making, and compromise may be another action that shows one is accepting influence. Additionally, simply taking the time to express that one cares about their partner's opinions and preferences or asking to hear their partner's point of view may promote accepting influence in couples.

**Accepting influence approach.** Accepting influence involves respecting one's partner and viewing one's partner in an open and accepting manner, perceiving one's partner as a person worthy of accepting influence from and sharing power with (Gottman et al, 2015). While interventions focused on altering a person's perceptions may be difficult, this may be related to

Gottman's idea of positive sentiment override. Positive sentiment override refers to the overall level of affection and positive feelings in a couple relationship (Gottman, 1999). When a person in a relationship with positive sentiment hears their partner express something negative, their "overriding" sense is typically to perceive the statement as neutral or less negative than someone else observing the conversation may have. The positive feelings in the relationship as a whole shape a person's perception of their partner and then permeate different interactions, allowing the overall affectionate nature of the relationship to "override" the negativity that may characterize one interaction. Positive sentiment override does not blossom in large defining moments within relationships; rather, it is cultivated within simple day-to-day interactions and small but routine positive moments (Gottman, 1999). It is possible that accepting influence may work in a similar manner; partners can work to display respect and show their openness and acceptance to their partner's ideas and preferences in brief day-to-day actions in everyday life. This may enhance feelings of acceptance and lead to positive results among couples.

Additionally, the approach portion of accepting influence may be improved by interventions aimed at sharing power and leveling the hierarchy amongst couples. Therapy approaches, such as structural family therapy (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), that place an emphasis on partners in a couple relationship sharing in power may facilitate partners' ability to accept influence from each other.

**Relationship education.** Psychoeducation and relationship education programs also have potential to improve couple's action and approach of accepting influence. The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model (NERMEM) is a relationship education model that both directly and indirectly addresses accepting influence within the couple relationship and how couples can hone skills to promote healthy relationship functioning.

NERMEM provides a model for couples relationship education (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013). The model highlights seven key components to include in relationship education programs. Here, the components of “care” and “manage” are discussed. These components most directly relate to the construct of accepting influence.

One of these components is “care” which involves being open to, listening to, and accepting one’s partner, valuing their differences, and displaying warmth and affection via caring actions (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013). This maps on to both the action and approach portions of accepting influence – that is, the caring, open, and accepting perception a person has towards their partner is both cultivated and shown in the small affectionate actions. Relatedly, Gottman (1994) recommends that people actively take part in shaping their thoughts about their partner – taking time to remember positive moments, creating lists of what you love about your partner, focusing on the fun you have and happiness you feel when with your partner (as cited by Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013, p. 51). These actions promote a perspective of openness and willingness to accept one’s partner’s influence.

The “manage” component also provides direction for accepting influence interventions. This component refers to managing conflict and negativity within the relationship in a way that is constructive and without harm (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013). This component explicitly encourages couples to learn to accept influence. In doing this, the authors recommend people lean into their empathy for their partner and use this as a foundation for approaching conflict with both partner’s interests in mind, that is, with mutuality (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013). In this fashion, partners approach differences with the intention of sharing power and sharing in decision making, so both partners are satisfied with the way the conflict is handled.

The information addressed in NERMEM that addresses accepting influence may serve as an intervention within itself. If couples learn some of the research behind the care and manage components, couples may be able to improve their ability to accept influence independently. Additionally, care and manage highlight some simple and practical actions couples can take to improve their ability to accept influence, such as intentionally focusing on the positives in the relationship or using their empathy to steer conflict resolution. Communicating that one wants to accept their partner's influence, or using softened start-ups or repair attempts may also improve one's ability to accept influence as well.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the potential implications from this research, study limitations must be considered when interpreting the findings. The measure of accepting influence was derived from items adapted from the Quality of Parental Relationships Inventory (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994) within an existing dataset of military families. The five-item measure provides a glimpse at partners accepting influence particularly the components of mutuality and sharing power, but does not offer a comprehensive view of accepting influence, a dynamic construct conceptualized as an action and approach including sharing in power, operating with mutuality, sharing in decision making, compromising, and respect. In the future, researchers could amend or expand this measure to create an instrument that more comprehensively captures the entirety of accepting influence. The observational method of assessing refusing influence, the specific affect coding system (Gottman et al, 1996, Krokoff et al, 1989; Gottman et al., 2000), could also be adapted to specifically measure accepting influence. This could even be used in conjunction with a self-report measure to enhance the validity of a self-report measure and to unearth potential discrepancies between what people feel they do or perceive in a relationship and what

is actually observed. Further research into this may also examine if rejecting influence and accepting influence exist at opposite ends of the same continuum or if they are separate constructs.

Correspondingly, in this study, each partner reported their perception that *their partner* accepts their influence, meaning one partner was reporting on the *other partners'* behaviors. In the future, it may be beneficial to have both partners report on their own ability to accept influence, as well as their partners', in order to have a clearer picture on what accepting influence looks like and how it is perceived by both partners. Additionally, this would help discern any bias that may exist. Examining the difference between an individual's perceptions of their own behaviors compared to their partner's perception of their behaviors may also be an important next step in this area of study as levels of congruence may also be an important predictor of couple quality and functioning. In regards to family-level outcomes, it would also be beneficial to include data on family satisfaction from other family members. This study utilized only the couples' perception of satisfaction with the family. Including data on family-level outcomes from different family members, such as children within the family, is important to confirm that the spillover from the couple subsystem to the larger family system is occurring. O'Neal and colleagues (2018) found that negative experiences of reintegration after deployment as reported by service members, civilian spouses, and adolescent children were related to both their own report of family functioning, and the reported family functioning of other family members. Future research including additional family members would enhance our understanding of spillover in relation to accepting influence.

This study utilized cross-sectional data. Regarding the direction of effects, we would expect that accepting influence "predicts" higher levels of couple communication satisfaction



and satisfaction with the family given that this study was grounded in theory and extant literature. Yet, because there was no time delay in measurement of accepting influence and these outcomes, causality cannot be inferred. Longitudinal and experimental data may help researchers assess causality in the future.

Additionally, there were some characteristics of the sample worth reiterating. A majority of the service members ( $n = 230$ ) were male. Gottman's research shows that gender has an effect on a person's likelihood of accepting influence, which moderates couple outcomes (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). However, the sample did not include enough female service members to truly discern whether gender itself had an outright effect or if the difference in partner effects was related to something else, namely military status. In the future, more inclusive samples with larger proportions of female service members may be beneficial in order to determine the effect gender has on contemporary couples' action and approach of accepting influence. As discussed earlier, the military is an institution outside the couple relationship that exerts influence on the couple (Segal, 1986) and may have implications for power dynamics within military couples. Including more female service members in future research would also allow for the exploration of *if* and *how* being a service member or a civilian spouse has an effect on one's ability to accept influence and/or whether it moderates outcomes. Additionally, more research into power dynamics within military couples may also shed light on their ability to accept influence.

In the primary data collection procedure, researchers were not allowed to ask or record information on participants' race or ethnicity. This was done in order to protect participants' privacy (i.e., participants from the military installation would have an easier time being identified if racial and ethnic information was provided); however, this prevented exploration into the possible influence race, ethnicity, and cultural differences may have had on the results. Research

into norms and interactional patterns among families of different races and ethnicities has found that power dynamics vary both among and between different racial groups (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). For example, it is common for Arab American families to practice patriarchal traditions in which men maintain more power in relationships and are positioned as the head of the family. Other families of other ethnicities and cultures, such as European Americans, may aim to be more egalitarian (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). While power dynamics and gender roles are always shifting within families and within cultures (McGoldrick et al, 2005), it is still common for power dynamics to vary between families of different races, ethnicities, and cultures. Considering the importance of sharing power in relation to accepting influence (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Gottman et al., 2015) and the tendency for power structures among families to differ along racial and ethnic lines, it follows that race and ethnicity may be related to accepting influence. In the future, collecting information on race and ethnicity (while still protecting and ensuring anonymity) would allow for exploration in how accepting influence may vary with different cultures. This may also provide insight into cultural considerations with regard to accepting influence interventions as interventions aimed at improving accepting influence may not be appropriate for all people in all cultures (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013).

This study found a positive relationship between accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family; the results and implications, however, must be considered with these limitations in mind. Additionally, it is important to note that this study used a specific sample of heterosexual military couples from one specific military installation. As such, all results and implications are only likely to generalize to other heterosexual military couples with one service member partner and one civilian spouse.

## Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between service members' and civilian spouses' ability to accept influence and two salient outcomes, couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. An actor-partner interdependence framework (Cook & Kenny, 2005) was used to analyze the dyadic data from military couples and to determine the impact of service members' and civilian spouses' perceptions that their partner accepts their influence on their own outcomes and each other's outcomes. The results showed support for a positive relationship between accepting influence and both couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. However, the relationships found were primarily actor effects. Service members' perception that their partner accepts influence was related to their own couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family; civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence was related to their own couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. The same partner effect was found in both models: civilian spouses' perception that their partner accepts influence was related to service members' couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family. Overall, the results support a relationship between accepting influence and couple communication satisfaction and satisfaction with the family.

This research must be considered within the context of its limitations; however, some strengths of this study should be noted. First, this study confirms the importance of *accepting* influence in relation to positive couple-level outcomes. Gottman's research demonstrated that this relationship was no doubt important, yet this study is the first to directly affirm a relationship between *accepting* influence and *beneficial* couple-level outcomes. Secondly, this study also expands the literature base by relating accepting influence to family-level outcomes. The

theoretical frameworks of family systems theory and spillover hypothesis provided support for this relationship, and this study helps to confirm the potential importance and implications of accepting influence at the couple-level relating to family-level outcomes. Third, the majority of the previous literature examines refusing influence via observational methods (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998); this study presents an initial look at conceptualizing accepting influence via survey methods. While the measure of accepting influence is preliminary and needs further validation and perhaps a more comprehensive scope, it remains the first actual measure of *accepting* influence in the literature. It is also the first self-report conceptualization of accepting influence. Considering this, this measure is a starting point for future research in accepting influence; this partner accepts influence measure can now be utilized, adapted, and expanded upon by future researchers. Fourth, this study examines accepting influence in military couples. Military couples have numerous strengths and support systems (Lewis et al., 2012; O’Neal et al., 2016); however, they are undeniably at risk given the repeated transitions and unavoidable stressors these families endure (Drummet et al., 2003; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014). Military couples are a population in which the action and approach of accepting influence may be particularly beneficial in navigating the multiple transitions and stressors related to military life. Finally, this study utilized an actor-partner interdependence framework to examine dyadic data. This allowed for both partners’ accepting influence behaviors and outcomes to be examined within the same model, meaning both partner’s behaviors in relation to their own outcomes as well as the outcomes of their partners were examined.

Accepting influence is a significant and dynamic couple phenomenon. Accepting influence may lead to positive couple-level and family-level outcomes; refusing influence may lead to adverse couple-level outcomes (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman et al., 1998). Perhaps most

paramount is that accepting influence is both a teachable and malleable construct. Couples can practice and improve their ability to accept influence from each other. This study supports that accepting influence is related to positive outcomes for couples and families and offers suggestions on how couples and practitioners may go about improving accepting influence. Future research may further benefit couples and families by testing the intervention suggestions described here, or others that may be relevant to accepting influence.

**Table 1.**Correlation Matrix for All Study Variables ( $n = 244$  military couples)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Partner Accepts Influence (Service member)	-									
2. Partner Accepts Influence (Civilian spouse)	.346***	-								
3. Couple Communication Satisfaction (Service member)	.536***	.329***	-							
4. Couple Communication Satisfaction (Civilian spouse)	.178**	.528***	.316***	-						
5. Satisfaction with the Family (Service member)	.480***	.282***	.472***	.222***	-					
6. Satisfaction with the Family (Civilian spouse)	.260***	.456***	.323***	.408***	.320***	-				
7. Number of Months Deployed (Service member)	-.105	.004	-.033	-.069	-.065	-.012	-			
8. Rank (Service member)	-.013	.044	.059	.146*	.081	.032	-.111	-		
9. Length of Marriage (years)	-.027	.033	.029	.014	.053	.135*	-.035	-.026	-	
10. Gender (Service member)	.040	.093	.048	.069	.036	.054	-.056	.090	-.036	-
Scale Range	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-5	1-5	2-72	N/A	0-29	N/A
$\alpha$	.879	.893	.895	.915	.944	.936	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mean	3.03	2.99	3.34	3.35	3.86	3.90	29.86	.112	12.69	0.05
Standard Deviation	.64	.67	.56	.60	.70	.68	15.16	N/A	5.63	N/A

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . The following variables are dichotomous variables: rank (0 = Enlisted and 1 = Officer) and gender (0 = Male and 1 = Female).

## Appendix A

### **Partner accepts influence.**

My proposed measure of accepting influence includes five questions to assess the frequency of one's partner doing certain behaviors that represent sharing power and mutuality, key components of accepting influence. As such, the proposed name of the measure is "Partner accepts influence" reflecting that it is the perception of one's partner's accepting influence behaviors that are being measured.

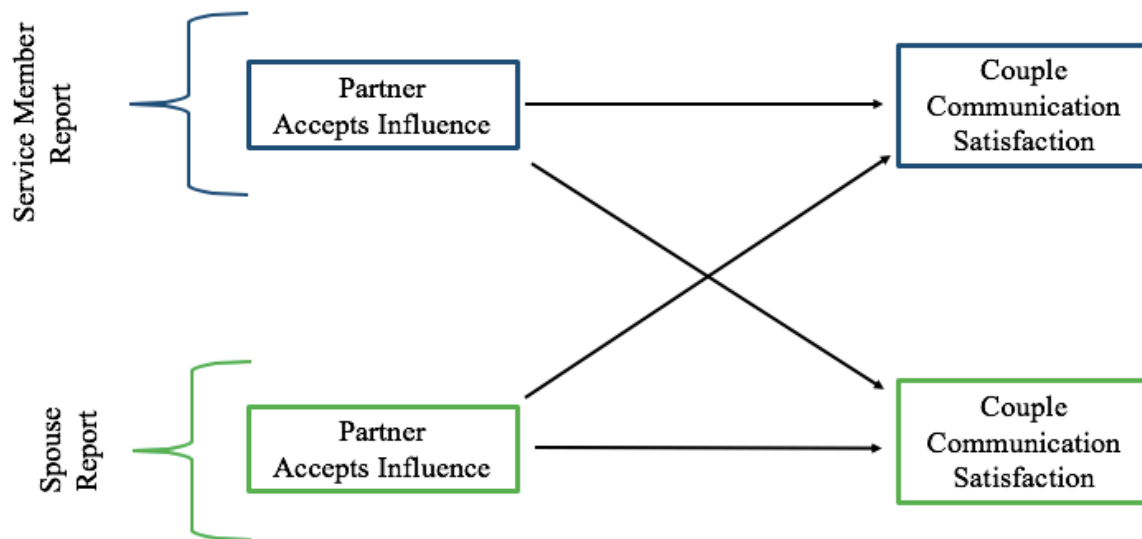
"When you and (partner) spent time talking or doing things together, how often did he/she..."

- (1) ... Help you do something that was important to you
- (2) ... Listen carefully to your point of view
- (3) ... Act supportive and understanding towards you
- (4) ... Let you know they appreciate you, your ideas, or the things you do
- (5) ... Understand the way you felt about things

For the items, the responses ranged from 1 (never) to 4 (always).

## Appendix B

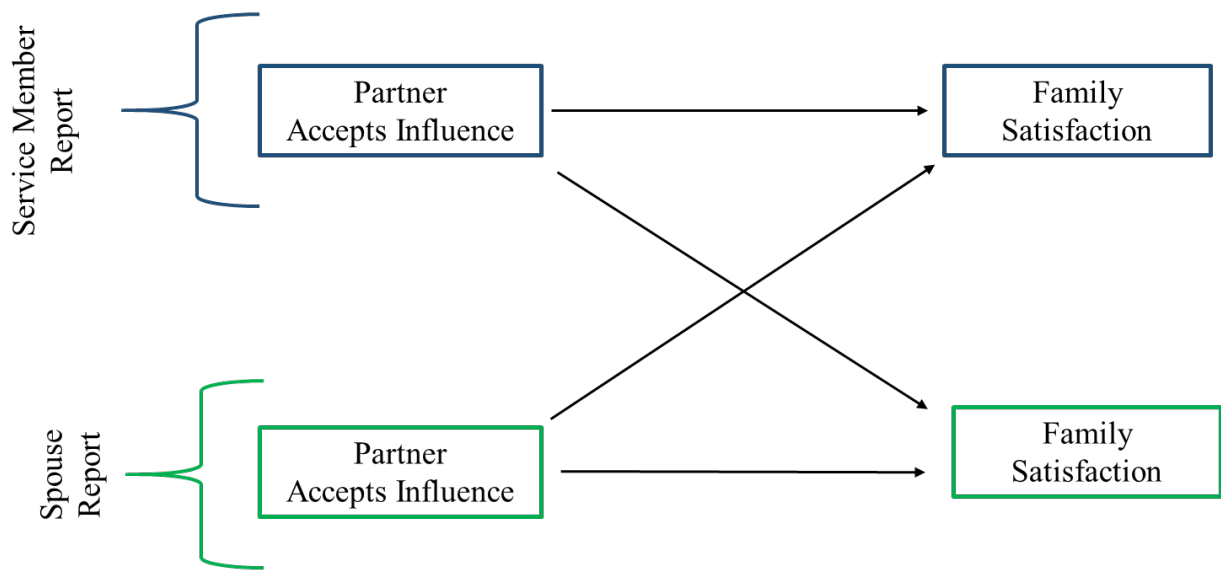
### Conceptual Model the Research Question 1a and 1b Depicting the Relationship between Partner Accepts Influence and Couple Communication Satisfaction in a Dyadic Sample of Military Couple





## Appendix C

### Conceptual Model the Research Question 2a and 2b Depicting the Relationship between Partner Accepts Influence and Satisfaction with the family in a Dyadic Sample of Military Couples



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doi:10.3724/SP.J.1041.2017.00359